

People Impact Assessment

Our People Impact Assessment identifies how HIE's strategies, policies, projects, programmes etc (the proposal being assessed) can help address inequality. Identifying positive impact strengthens the case for approval and identifying potentially negative impact allows HIE to make changes early which will eliminate or mitigate negative effects in delivery. Most importantly this strengthens our ability to influence and deliver inclusive growth, particularly as it affects people.

It guides you through three stages:

- **Screening:** screens out proposals which do not need assessment
- **Assessment:** identifies how your proposal is likely to address inequality
- **Action Plan:** identifies action you will take as a result of the assessment

Proposal being assessed:

Title:	HIE Innovation Service 2026-29
Type of activity:	☐ Policy ☐ Strategy ☐ Partnership activity ☒ HIE Own Hand ☐ Third Party Client
Is your proposal:	☒ New ☐ Existing and being revised ☐ Subject to Procurement
MyHIE Reference (if applicable):	PRG-000106

Screening Section

For detailed guidance hover next to each Guidance heading and click on the blue arrow that will pops up on the left to expand 

Screening Guidance

Screening is a short exercise to determine if a policy is relevant to equality and whether a full People Impact Assessment (PIA) should be carried out. A screening exercise is not an impact assessment, so the results of screening do not need to be published.

Question A1

Will the proposal affect individual service users* or HIE employees, and could these people have different needs and priorities?

☒ Yes ☐ No

*Individual service users are people who will participate as individuals on HIE programmes and/or who use HIE spaces (ie, our land and buildings).

Question A1 Guidance

Question A2

Does the proposal contribute to the following in relation to any of the **protected characteristics** : age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, maternity or pregnancy, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. (please tick all that apply below)

- ☐ eliminating **unlawful discrimination, victimisation or harassment**
- ☒ advancing equality of opportunity:
 - by removing or minimising disadvantage for a group(s) of people e.g., increasing participation in economic activity by women
 - by meeting the needs of particular groups which differ from the needs of others e.g., by taking account of disabled people's impairments.
 - by encouraging participation in public life for a group(s) of people
- ☐ fostering good relations:
 - by tackling prejudice
 - by promoting understanding between groups of people

Question A2 Guidance

If you have ticked Yes to Question 1 and/or any of the options in Question 2, proceed to the Assessment section below

If you have ticked No to question 1 and have **not ticked** any of the options in Question 2, your proposal is not relevant to equality. You should now complete the Screening Sign Off below and place this document on file as outlined below.

Screening Sign Off

You **must** confirm in relevant approval papers that the proposal has been screened for impact in relation to equality and that you consider full assessment is not required

Screening assessment completed by (project officer)	
Date of decision:	
Screening reviewed by (Senior Responsible Officer - SRO)	
Date of decision:	

You must retain this screening document with your strategy, policy, project or programme papers. Screening documentation is subject to the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation effective from May 2018 and Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002

If you have completed the Screening Sign Off and it has been signed off by delegated authority, the assessment of the proposal ends at this stage.

Assessment Section

Requirements to publish impact assessments

Impact assessments must be published, demonstrating that HIE has paid due regard to equality in the development and delivery of our functions. Assessments are subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 and Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002

Question B1 - Purpose of the proposal

What is the purpose of the proposal, who are the main beneficiaries (e.g. employees/service users, equality groups, other stakeholders) and what are the intended outcomes?

The Innovation Programme 2026-29 comprises innovation support for businesses, social enterprises and communities in the Highlands and Islands. It is a programme for new and existing enterprises of all sizes, from all sectors and from all areas of the H&I who are looking for support to innovate. The programme directly engages individuals (business owners, employees, event participants) with varied needs across geography, disability, caring status and digital access.

Activities that will be delivered include one to one advice, grant funding, workshops, events, webinars and learning journeys with delivery a hybrid mix of in-person or online.

This programme will deliver on HIE's priority of building successful, productive and resilient businesses and social enterprises. Key outcomes are growing the numbers of organisations supported to innovate and increase productivity. The programme in some instances will also help enterprises reduce their emissions, tackle some geographic specific challenges such as distance from market, increase levels of R&D investment and capability.

Question B1 Guidance

Question B2 - Evidence of potential impact on people

What does evidence tell you about the likely impact of the proposal on different groups of people? Consider the impact of the proposal on people with **protected characteristics**.

What does the evidence tell you	Source of evidence
Over the last 2 years 111 recipients provided equalities monitoring feedback. 44% of participants who responded were female.	HIE's Innovation Programme Equalities Monitoring Data 2024/25-2025/26
The Highlands and Islands population is split 51% female and 49% male.	National Records for Scotland
Around 9% of participants who provided feedback had an illness or disability.	HIE's Innovation Programme Equalities Monitoring Data 2024/25-2025/26
Around 20% of the regions population lives with a long-term illness or disability.	Scotland's Census 2022
Evidence relating to other groups is limited (less than 1% of responses) and therefore does not allow for robust conclusions to be drawn about the programme's impact on these groups. .	HIE's Innovation Programme Equalities Monitoring Data 2024/25-2025/26

Summary of what the evidence tells you, who may be affected and how:

Data has been analysed from the previous Innovation Programme 2022-25 knowledge exchange activities which enables us to plan a more inclusive approach for the new Innovation Programme 2026-29 in development.

Available data indicates broadly comparable uptake of innovation support across sexes, with female participation marginally below the level anticipated based on the regional population profile.”

The data demonstrates the proportion of participants with disabilities is lower than the regions proportion and so the design and delivery of the programme, including venue choice and accessibility arrangements, should continue to encourage participation of people with disabilities.

While data is currently limited, anecdotal evidence suggests that uptake among businesses led by minority ethnic groups is not fully representative of the wider Scottish business population. This is set against evidence from Scotland's Census 2022, which highlights the increasing diversity of Scotland's population, with minority ethnic communities comprising a growing proportion of the overall population."

Consideration will be given to how the programme is promoted to underrepresented groups in order to encourage broader participation.

Question B2 Guidance

Question B3 - Evidence gaps

Are there are evidence gaps? If so, how will you fill these? For example, are there any experts or stakeholders you should involve/consult now?
Please add N/A in the box below if there are no further evidence gaps.

Evidence relating to some groups, including minority ethnic groups, is limited (representing less than 1% of responses), and therefore does not allow for robust conclusions to be drawn regarding the programme's impact on these groups. To address this, equality monitoring questionnaires will be implemented at both registration and post-event/service evaluation stages across all HIE programmes, to strengthen the collection, quality and completeness of equality data.

Question B3 Guidance

Question B4 - Assessing impact

Include below any positive or adverse impact which may occur as a result of the planned delivery of the proposal - consider employees, clients, service users, and any other relevant groups.

Does your analysis of the evidence indicate any possible adverse impact on a **particular equality group**? In some cases adverse impact may amount to **unlawful discrimination**. For own hand projects where you have a concern that an adverse impact may amount to unlawful discrimination you should refer to HIE legal service for advice. If the project is third party, you should advise the client to seek their own legal advice. Guide for SMEs on unlawful discrimination is available [here](#)

**Hover over each category below for further information	Impact			Please explain the potential impacts
	Positive impact	Negative impact	No/neutral impact	
<u>Age</u>	☒	☐	☐	The programme increases access to innovation support and skills development across age groups. Flexible delivery (including online elements) supports participation.
<u>Disability</u>	☒	☐	☐	<p>Some elements of the service are delivered digitally, including webinars, which may enhance accessibility for individuals with physical disabilities where travel could otherwise present a barrier.</p> <p>Some activities are delivered through in-person formats, such as learning journeys, which may present accessibility challenges for individuals with disabilities.</p> <p>Potential barriers to participation will be mitigated via accessibility requirements embedded in procurement and delivery, reasonable adjustments and online options,</p>
<u>Gender Reassignment</u>	☐	☐	☒	No differential impact identified
<u>Marriage and Civil Partnership</u>	☐	☐	☒	No direct impact identified

Pregnancy and Maternity	☐	☐	☒	Flexible and online delivery supports participation and can help overcome accessibility barriers
Race	☐	☒	☐	Widened access and inclusive design principles
Religion or Belief	☐	☐	☒	No direct impact identified
Sex	☒	☒	☐	The programme includes targeted support, however, activities that require overnight stays may present a barrier for individuals with caring responsibilities, which are more commonly undertaken by women, and may therefore limit participation.
Sexual orientation	☐	☐	☒	No direct impact identified

Question B4 Guidance

Question B5 - Assessing impact - General Equality Duty

Please explain in more detail how the proposal will meet the general equality duties

	Please explain
Eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation <i>We can do this by eliminating less favourable treatment or indirect discrimination</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Innovation Programme is open to all eligible businesses and social enterprises within the HIE region and will be delivered in a way that promotes equality of access and minimises the potential for disproportionate disadvantage to any group. Programme design includes reasonable adjustments (e.g. accessible venues, alternative delivery formats) Inclusive procurement and marketing approaches embedded
Advancing equality of opportunity <i>We can do this by removing or minimising disadvantage, meeting needs which are particular to some groups of people and encouraging participation of under-represented groups, e.g. taking account of disabled people's impairments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Innovation Programme can be accessed through a range of delivery methods, including virtual, face-to-face and group-based formats, to support different needs and preferences. Marketing activity will be designed to be inclusive and to encourage engagement from underrepresented groups.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted support for underrepresented groups and inclusive growth areas • Online delivery reduces geographic and mobility barrier • Place-based delivery ensures island and rural participation
Fostering good relations <i>We can do this by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding amongst our staff and client groups</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The programme improves access to innovation support across rural and island communities and under-represented groups. • It includes targeted activities and inclusive outreach • Networking events enable interaction between diverse participants • Knowledge exchange activities encourage collaboration across sectors and communities • Diverse participation enhances peer learning and shared understanding • HIE staff regularly undertake training and development to build awareness and understanding of the barriers and challenges that may be experienced by underrepresented groups within the HIE region.

Question B5 Guidance

Question B6

Could the proposal be modified to reduce the potential for [unlawful discrimination](#), advance/promote equality, reduce any identified negative impacts and foster good relations? If necessary, consider other ways in which the aims and objectives of the proposal could be met. What can be done now/later?

The programme will continue to be delivered through a combination of accessible in-person and online formats, with reasonable adjustments made where required. Communications will be clear, inclusive and accessible, supported by targeted outreach to underrepresented groups to help reduce barriers to participation and advance equality of opportunity. Equality monitoring will be undertaken throughout delivery to ensure any emerging issues are identified and addressed at an early stage.

Question B6 Guidance

Question B7 - Procurement

Does your proposed activity involve procurement activity in:

Goods/Services £10k and above: ☒ **Yes** ☐ **No**

Works £50k and above: ☒ **Yes** ☐ **No**

If you have answered Yes to one/both of the above, please advise HIE Procurement Team procurement@hient.co.uk for further support on how the potential impacts can be included (as appropriate) into:

1. Your Scope of Requirements for the procurement(s)
2. Evaluation criteria
3. Key Performance Indicators
4. Contract Management process

Question 7 Guidance

Question 8 - Summary of actions and monitoring review arrangements to address inequality

The following summarises actions to be taken as a result of the People Impact Assessment and **should be outlined in the social and people impact assessment section of the appraisal paper.**

A key part of every impact assessment is the actions that HIE will take, and the recommendations made as part of due diligence to enhance or mitigate the impacts identified. Actions and recommendations should be based on evidence available at the time and aim to mitigate negative impacts or enhance positive impacts on any or all of the protected characteristics.

What are the main impacts on equality (if there are no equality impacts to enhance any of the protected characteristics, please enter N/A)?

- Positive impacts have been identified in relation to age, disability and sex, particularly through flexible delivery methods and targeted support for underrepresented groups. Possible geographic barriers for some participants if accessibility and support arrangements are not maintained.

What are the main recommendations to enhance or mitigate the impacts identified? (If there are no mitigations or enhancements to be made, please enter N/A)

The main recommendations that will be taking forward are to continue a combination of in person and online delivery to ensure individual preferences are met. Marketing will be designed to be inclusive, clear and easy to follow. We will continue to ensure venues cater for those with accessibility difficulties. The HIE Innovation Programme will continue to carry out post-event evaluations which will enable us to make future changes should we identify an impact we have not yet considered. We will ensure that any disability was flagged at the registration stage so that we could make necessary adjustments in relation to the delivery of the programme to ensure everyone was able to participate fully. Barriers to in-person participation (disability, caring responsibilities, travel) will be mitigated by programme design which includes reasonable adjustments (e.g. accessible venues, alternative delivery formats).

ACTION PLAN

The actions should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART).

Potential impact to be addressed	Action to be taken	Person responsible for delivery	Timescale for delivery
Inclusion in procurement	Embed equality criteria in all contracts	Programme Lead	At procurement stage
Equality programme monitoring	Online equality monitoring form to be completed by applicant at registration and evaluation stages	Programme manager	Registration and evaluation stage
Individuals with disabilities, caring responsibilities, living in remote locations, may experience barriers in accessing the programme	Deliver the programme through a hybrid model combining online and in-person formats. Reasonable adjustments and accessibility requirements embedded in delivery.	Project Manager and suppliers	Duration of programme delivery
	Include requirements in specification – also to include alternative formats – PDF of materials/slides/handouts	Programme Manager and HIE Procurement	Procurement
People from other minority groups and underrepresented groups not benefiting from the programme	Ensure the marketing content appeals to a wider audience to increase participation. Review participation regularly and adjust delivery as needed.	Project Manager and suppliers	Duration of programme delivery

Monitoring and review of the action plan above should be part of standard project aftercare and monitoring arrangements.

Question 8 Guidance

The full signed assessment is held with proposal papers and published on the [HIE website](#).

[Redacted]	[Redacted]
[Redacted]	[Redacted]
Date of signing off completed assessment:	30 th June 2026