



## 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:

<b>Title:</b>	HIE Impact Women Programme
<b>Type of activity:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Policy <input type="checkbox"/> Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> Partnership activity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> HIE Own Hand <input type="checkbox"/> Third Party Client
<b>Is your proposal:</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New <input type="checkbox"/> Existing and being revised <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Subject to Procurement
<b>MyHIE Reference (if applicable):</b>	PRG 0001060
<b>Directorate/Team delivering the proposal:</b>	Client Programmes

## Screening Section

For detailed guidance hover next to each Guidance heading and click on the blue arrow that will pop 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 (i.e. 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?

This pilot programme, led by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), aims to enhance the skills, confidence, and entrepreneurial capacity of women across the Highlands and Islands region. Scheduled to run from January to June 2026 (dates to be confirmed), the initiative will test both the demand for a women-only support programme and the effectiveness of a flexible, modular delivery model.

The programme is part of HIE's broader ambition to develop a dynamic and responsive Framework for Specialist Business Support. This framework will encompass a range of development themes—including leadership, entrepreneurship, business strategy, finance, and sector-specific support—with a particular focus on addressing the unique challenges faced by women in business.

HIE will work with partners for example Business Gateway, women's groups, to deliver this support and build on a pipeline of new and existing HIE clients with a mix of early-stage, and more in-depth, support for women, providing them with safe women-only virtual and face-to-face spaces to learn and develop business ideas. It will offer a flexible approach to learning and development for clients to access and avoid busy holiday periods to maximise attendance.

The proposed support will be structured using a hybrid approach including a blend of webinars and residential in person or 1-2-1 telecall support. Running a number of these events online makes this support more inclusive, cheaper to deliver, and will reduce carbon emissions associated with travel. It will give clients the opportunity to select from a "pick and mix" selection of high-quality support to tailor learning to their individual needs and stage in business. Having a limited number of events in-person will encourage networking and collaborative opportunities. Clients will be signposted to other appropriate HIE and partner support to support their ongoing business development and growth.

This project includes support tailored to women in business, including a focus on fundraising, pitching, and building networks (which HIE's baseline study highlighted as being areas that women found challenging) and mentoring.

### 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
<p>Relative to men, women are often more logistically constrained, making participation in entrepreneurship difficult. Society commonly assigns the primary-carer role and the home-manager role to women and then doesn't provide sufficient balancing support. This state of affairs isn't compatible with the intensive demands of an entrepreneurial career-path.</p>	<p><b><u>Pathways: A new approach for women in enterprise</u></b></p>
<p>Women frequently have a sense of "not belonging" in entrepreneurship, which affects their confidence and self-belief. The sparsity of women founders in entrepreneurship establishes a vicious circle leading others to conclude that entrepreneurship isn't a natural environment for them, which then further drives this sparsity.</p>	<p>Pathways: A new approach for women in enterprise</p>
<p>Women receive far less investment than men at all stages of the entrepreneurial journey from the investment community. For example, of the companies that received external investment in 2022, 12% were female-led and 73% were male-led. Overall, there was a 6:1 ratio of male-founded to female-founded companies that received investment. Over the past five years only 2% of institutional investment went to female-led businesses.</p>	<p>Pathways: A new approach for women in enterprise</p>
<p>W-Power has supported female entrepreneurship in remote and rural areas. The Programme was deemed to have a number of advantages over more traditional business support programmes including providing a safe space for women, more supportive and relaxed environment, and less egocentric and hierarchical. The majority of stakeholders and participants viewed it as a good starting point for the Entrepreneurship journey, allowing women to more safely share concerns and challenges.</p>	<p><b><u>W- Power</u></b></p>

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

Women hold only 36% of the key decision-making positions in Scotland. Research highlights that the underrepresentation of women in key high-level roles, means that women's views and perspectives are therefore not being considered at higher levels. The number of new female-led companies in Scotland increased by 11% in 2023, compared to the whole UK increase of 7%. The percentage of female-led companies in Scotland remains lower than those of male-led companies at just under 20%, in line with similar figures in Wales, England and Northern Ireland. This project aims to address the issues, highlighted above, by providing training to a range of women entrepreneurs/leaders.

### Question B2 Guidance

### Question B3 - Evidence gaps

Are there any 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.

N/A

### 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](#)

<b>**Hover over each category below for further information</b>	<b>Impact</b>			<b>Please explain the potential impacts</b>
	<b>Positive impact</b>	<b>Negative impact</b>	<b>No/neutral impact</b>	
<b>Age</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	This project is expected to have positive impacts across all age groups by building entrepreneurial skills and confidence.
<b>Disability</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Contractors will ask for information on additional requirements of participants and adapt delivery accordingly. This will include consideration of needs both for residential in person provision and online accessibility.
<b>Gender Reassignment</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The programme is designed to be as inclusive, open and welcoming as possible.
<b>Marriage and Civil Partnership</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Pregnancy and Maternity</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Race</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>The programme is designed to be as inclusive, open and welcoming as possible and recruitment may include engagement with various organisations which represent racialised minorities to help understand barriers to entry and how they can be overcome.</p> <p>Targeted assistance supports financial independence and mobility, particularly in communities facing employment discrimination or economic disadvantage.</p>

<b>Religion or Belief</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Sex</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>The programme will be promoted to women and encourage them to participate in a safe, women only space. The programme will be flexible and adapted to individual needs and requirements. Financial support towards travel and childcare costs will be accessible to participants.</p>
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Entrepreneurship can offer a pathway to financial independence and self-determination, particularly for LGBTI individuals who may face discrimination in traditional employment.</p> <p>Supporting diverse sexual orientations in business helps challenge stereotypes and promotes inclusive role models.</p> <p>LGBT+ entrepreneurs can create businesses that reflect their values and provide inclusive environments for others.</p> <p>Businesses led by LGBT+ individuals often serve and uplift their communities, contributing to social cohesion and innovation.</p>

#### 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
<p><b>Eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation</b>  <i>We can do this by eliminating less favourable treatment or indirect discrimination</i></p>	<p>Specific mention of inclusive delivery methods is included in procurement documents and will be assessed as part the procurement process.</p> <p>Protocols will be agreed with the supplier on inception and relevant action taken if necessary.</p>
<p><b>Advancing equality of opportunity</b>  <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></p>	<p>The programme will be aimed at women. They will be targeted through appropriate routes and encouraged to participate in women only safe spaces. The characteristics of a safe space include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Non-judgmental:</b> People are encouraged to express themselves without fear of ridicule or criticism.</li> <li>• <b>Inclusive:</b> Everyone, regardless of background, identity, or experience, is welcomed and valued.</li> <li>• <b>Respectful:</b> Differences in opinion or experience are acknowledged and handled with care and empathy.</li> <li>• <b>Confidential:</b> What’s shared in the space stays in the space, fostering trust and openness.</li> <li>• <b>Empowering:</b> It allows individuals—especially those from marginalized or vulnerable groups—to speak up, share experiences, and feel heard.</li> </ul> <p>The programme will be delivered in a flexible way with a blend of webinars, face to face and 1-2-1 telecall support, with sessions being recorded for those who cannot join at that particular time. Childcare and travel costs will be available to participants. The contractors will assess any individual needs and requirements and adapt delivery accordingly.</p>
<p><b>Fostering good relations</b>  <i>We can do this by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding amongst our staff and client groups</i></p>	<p>The project will lead to a more diverse business base thereby broadening both formal and informal networks and supply chains and helping to foster good relations across the HIE region.</p>

### 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?

This is a women-only programme designed to foster inclusivity by actively engaging women from diverse backgrounds. To ensure accessibility, the programme should offer flexible delivery formats and address common barriers such as childcare, transport, and digital access. Childcare and travel costs will be accessible to participants.

## 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](mailto: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)?**

- The personal development outcomes in leadership for women will be raising ambition and confidence
- The business outcomes will be to increase the desire for growth in women led businesses
- The programme will seek to put in place the building blocks to achieve the above through knowledge transfer, networking and peer to peer support.

**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)**

Programme will be flexible and one-to-one activity will be designed around each client to make them accessible.

## 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
Perceived sex discrimination	Work with winning bidder to develop clear eligibility criteria	Programme manager	Inception stage
Disability discrimination	Include a section in tender documents to address accessibility	Programme manager	Tender stage
Eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation	Work with winning bidder to develop protocol to handle any disruptive behaviour; ensure added to contract risk register	Programme manager	Inception stage
Monitoring of equality data	Equality participation form to be completed by applicant	Programme manager	Registration stage

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](#).

Date of signing off completed assessment:	17/11/2025
---	------------