

UK Research and Innovation

GUIDANCE FOR REVIEWERS OF FUTURE LEADER FELLOWSHIP PROPOSALS

The UK Research and Innovation [Future Leader Fellowship](#) scheme will support early career researchers and innovators with outstanding potential in universities, UK registered businesses, and other research and user environments including recognised Independent Research Organisations (IROs), and Research Councils' institutes and laboratories. The objectives of the scheme are:

- To develop, retain, attract and sustain research and innovation talent in the UK
- To foster new research and innovation career paths including those at the academic/business and interdisciplinary boundaries, and facilitate movement of people between sectors
- To provide sustained funding and resources for the best early career researchers and innovators
- To provide long-term, flexible funding to tackle difficult and novel challenges, and support adventurous, ambitious programmes.

Recognising the potential multidisciplinary nature of the applications, you should comment on the proportion of the proposal that is relevant to your expertise. Please indicate within the Reviewer Expertise Section of the reviewer form whether you have provided comment on the whole of the application or specific portions.

Fellowships are not restricted to work that would be seen as formal research in their area, but can also lead and develop innovation. Innovation is defined as the practical translation of disruptive ideas into novel, relevant and valued products, services, processes, systems or business models, making them readily available to markets, government and society. Innovation means creating economic and/or social value from ideas. Within the Future Leaders Fellowship scheme innovation projects will be those that aim to move research through the development pathway towards commercialisation and/or application.

Conflict of Interest

Before you complete a review please ensure that you do not have a conflict of interest with the proposal. UKRI as a publicly funded organisation is accountable to Government and the public for its actions and the way it conducts its business. UKRI has a conflicts of interest policy in place to protect both the organisation and the individuals involved in providing it with knowledge and advice, and to reduce the risk of impropriety or any perception of impropriety. We request that you make yourself familiar with the policy available at [Annex A](#) and inform us as soon as possible if you have or suspect any conflicts of interest with the proposal you have been asked to review.

UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship Scheme Written Assessment Factors

UKRI has a policy of feeding back anonymised reviewer comments to applicants, and to the organisation hosting the Fellowship. As such you should avoid comments that could identify you, your level of expertise or the scores you have awarded to the applicant/proposal. All comments made should be suitable to be fed back to the applicant without alteration. You must avoid bias in your assessment including on the grounds of a protected characteristic such as age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy, maternity, race, religion/belief, sex or sexual orientation.

These fellowships support applicants from diverse career paths, including those returning from a career break or following time in other roles. Proposals may also be from those wishing to work part-time in order to combine the fellowship with personal responsibilities. Your review should take into account time spent outside an active research or innovation environment, whether through career breaks, flexible working or as a consequence of working in other roles.

We also ask reviewers to consider other aspects of the research and/or innovation, including the potential [impact and pathways](#) to achieving this, ethical issues, appropriate use of animals and/or human tissue, methodology and experimental design and [data management plans](#). Guidance on ethical issues can be found at Annex B.

Your review must be evidence-based, and the evidence used should be stated clearly in your comments. In order to ensure that your review is as useful as possible please:

- Familiarise yourself with the assessment factors and scoring matrix before you begin
- Provide clear comments and recommendations that justify, and are consistent with, your scores.
- Ensure that your comments are comprehensive and concise, clearly identify the strengths and weaknesses of the application in a constructive manner, and raise any concerns in the form of questions for the applicant.
- Avoid the use of jargon, bearing in mind that the panellists who rely on your review for their decisions may not be specialists in your field

A key aspect of the assessment will be whether the added value of the fellowship mechanism of support – e.g. the scale, flexibility and duration offered – is well demonstrated, as opposed to more standard project grant support. For business applications, consideration of the added value will include, for example, whether the novelty and levels of risk involved in the project mean that it is beyond the normal activity of the business.

You are requested to provide comment on the proposal against each of the assessment factors:

Applicant and their Development Factor

1. Applicant, Training and Development

Comment on the applicant, considering their:

- Potential for the future, does the applicant have the potential to progress to a long term research and/or innovation career path
- Current research and/or innovation standing relative to their career stage and on a trajectory to become world-class
- Ability to carry out the proposed work
- Training and development plans for themselves (and, if applicable, their team) and for gaining advice or mentorship; supporting not only the programme but also their broader professional development
- Independence and thought leadership, which may go beyond the level normally expected of their current position
- Proposed placements or collaborations
- Understanding of the research and/or innovation landscape at both the national and international level
- Ability to be, or become, a clear communicator and disseminator of knowledge and innovation, able to inspire and lead others; and ability to develop new relationships and influence across multiple disciplines and sectors

Research and Innovation Excellence

Impact and Strategic Relevance

2. Programme

Comment on the importance, excellence and impact of the proposed research and/or innovation, including:

- Excellence of the research and/or innovation case
- Appropriateness and rigour of the methods and study designs including ethical considerations where appropriate
- Importance, novelty and feasibility of the proposed programme of work (and whether long-term fellowship support is needed to enable this)
- Overall potential of the fellowship to establish or maintain a distinctive and outstanding research and/or innovation activity
- Timeliness of the proposal
- Robust methodology and appropriate consideration of research and innovation reproducibility, openness, governance and ethical/social responsibility issues
- The importance and potential impact of the research and/or innovation for society and/or the economy
- What are the potential short or long-term impacts, and how significant are they?
- Are the pathways to achieving this impact well understood, and are the plans for maximising impact (from the applicant and host organisation) proportionate, timely and credible
- Where the proposal aligns with a specific priority area identified by UKRI, the assessment will also address how strongly the proposal fits with the aims for the area; and what it will contribute alongside other proposals and activities in the same priority area (not required in round one)

Research and Innovation Environment and Costs

3. Host Organisation

Comment on the suitability of the host organisation where the proposed Fellowship will be held, including:

- Appropriateness of the host organisation for the work proposed
- Level of commitment from the host organisation to realising the potential of the fellow and establishing them as a research and/or innovation leader
- Plans for supporting the fellow's programme of work; enabling the time commitment needed; ensuring access to space, equipment/facilities, other resources and other relevant programmes and ability to enable the applicant to maximise the social/economic impact of their work
- Are opportunities for training and career development actively supported
- Whether consideration has been given to equality, diversity and inclusion aims of UKRI in support for the fellow and (where applicable) their wider team and in using the Fellowship's provision for flexible working

4. Resources Requested

Comment on:

- Whether funds requested for the first four years are appropriate and fully justified to deliver the proposed project
- Whether the proposal demonstrates value for money in terms of resources requested

- Whether any animal use is fully justified in terms of need, species, number and conformance to guidelines
- Whether the project plan and management arrangements are proportionate to the scale and complexity of the activity to be undertaken

5. Ethics and Data Management

Comment on any ethical and/or research/innovation governance issues, including:

- Whether the proposed research/innovation is ethically acceptable in relation to risks to humans, animals or the environment including the need to use animals and lack of realistic alternatives, evaluation of the scientific strength and weaknesses of proposals involving animal use, plans to obtain ethical approval from relevant body
- Where applicable, whether the data management plan indicates the applicant has a sound plan for managing the data funded through the award and in the long-term including the methodologies for data collection/generation, storing and curating data, data repository and suitability for sharing

6. Relevance to the Aims of this Scheme

Provide any further comments here including how the proposal and applicant meet the scheme specific criteria outlined in the Fellowship scheme documentation.

<https://www.ukri.org/funding/funding-opportunities/future-leaders-fellowships/>

7. Overall Assessment Score

Having provided comment against each of the above headings, please also provide a score for the proposal as detailed in **Table 1** below:

Table 1: Overall Assessment Score descriptions

Score	Overall Assessment
1	This proposal is scientifically or technically flawed
2	This proposal does not meet one or more of the assessment factors
3	This proposal meets all assessment factors but with clear weaknesses
4	This is a good proposal that meets all assessment factors but with minor weaknesses
5	This is a strong proposal that broadly meets all assessment factors
6	This is a very strong proposal that fully meets all assessment factors

Contact

This is a UKRI scheme, please ignore the MRC logo on the peer review form. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding your written review, please contact the UKRI Future Leaders Fellowships team using the below details:

fellows@ukri.org

Annex A

Conflicts of Interest

Good governance in public sector organisations recognises the need for having arrangements in place to prevent, counter and deal with potential conflicts of interest. UKRI has no reason to believe that conflicts of interest undermine decision making but UKRI must be vigilant about the risk and have appropriate policies and plans in place. It is important in this context that we guard against the perception of impropriety as well as the reality. We must be able to withstand both internal and external scrutiny.

Definitions

UKRI defines a conflict of interest as a set of circumstances that creates a risk that an individual's ability to apply judgement or act in one role is, or could be, impaired or influenced by a secondary interest. Even a perception of competing interests, impaired judgement or undue influence may be damaging to UKRI's reputation.

Generally conflicts might occur if individuals have for example:

- a direct or indirect financial interest
- non-financial or personal interests
- competing loyalties between an organisation they owe a primary duty to and/or some other person or entity

The existence of an actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest does not necessarily imply wrongdoing on anyone's part. However, any private, personal or commercial interests which give rise to such a conflict of interest must be recognised, disclosed appropriately and either eliminated or properly managed. Reporting, recording and managing potential conflicts effectively protects staff and can help to generate public trust and confidence.

Examples of Conflicts of Interest

Financial Interests

This is where an individual receives or may receive a direct financial benefit from the consequences of the awarding of funding, for example:

- a director, including a non-executive director, or senior employee in an organisation which is doing, or which is likely, in receipt of funding or possibly seeking to obtain funding;
- a shareholder (or similar ownership interests), a partner or owner of a private or not-for-profit company which is doing, or which is likely, or possibly seeking to obtain funding;
- a shareholder of a Research Council related start up, that the Council (UKRI) has shares;
- a management consultant for a business/individual;
- in receipt of secondary income from an business/individual;
- in receipt of any payments (for example honoraria, one-off payments, day allowances or travel or subsistence) from an organisation possibly seeking to obtain funding.

Indirect Financial Interests

This is where an individual has a close association with an individual who has a financial interest, a non-financial professional interest or a non-financial personal interest in a commissioning decision (as those categories are described above) for example:

- spouse / partner;
- close relative (e.g., parent, grandparent, child, grandchild or sibling);

- close friend; or
- business partner; and
- a financial relationship (e.g. pension) with a business/individual seeking to obtain funding.

Non-financial Professional Interest

This is where an individual may obtain a non-financial professional benefit from the consequences of a funding award, such as increasing their professional reputation or status or promoting their professional career. This may, for example, include situations where the individual is:

- an advocate for a particular group; or
- a member of a particular specialist professional body.

Non-financial Personal Interests

This is where an individual may benefit personally in ways which are not directly linked to their professional career and do not give rise to a direct financial benefit. This could include, for example, where the individual is:

- a voluntary sector champion for business/individual;
- a volunteer for business/individual; or
- a member of a lobby or pressure group with an interest research or development

Indirect Interests

This is where an individual has a close association with an individual who has a financial interest, a non-financial professional interest or a non-financial personal interest in a commissioning decision (as those categories are described above) for example, a:

- spouse / partner;
- close relative (e.g., parent, grandparent, child, grandchild or sibling);
- close friend; or
- business partner.

Roles with heightened risk in relation to perceived conflicts of interest

In the list below we have provided some guidance on roles that have a perceived higher risk factor in relation to perceived conflicts of interest. In these roles [a form](#) should be filled even if no perceived conflict exists (i.e. a nil return):

- Procurement – particularly those roles responsible for administering tenders, supplier decisions and contract terms;
- Grant awards – particularly those administering and supporting grants panels;
- Contracting – including those determining contract terms or financial terms, particularly in relation to estates contracts and commercial contracts; or
- Board and Council appointments - particularly those in administering and supporting boards or councils.

This list should not be perceived as exhaustive, if other specific roles exist that have a perceived higher risk factor then please ensure a declaration is submitted (including nil returns).

Annex B – Animal use

Use of animals

The elaboration of a compelling research or innovation case is an essential prerequisite for justifying the use of animals. Over the past few years there have been a number of important initiatives that have been aimed at raising the sometimes-inadequate standard of reporting of animal experiments in the scientific literature. The NC3Rs' ARRIVE guidelines, for example, lay out criteria that should be met in reporting animal studies in order that their results and conclusions can be appropriately evaluated by readers. These criteria address a range of issues relating to transparency and validity of experimental design, the avoidance or minimisation of bias and the adequacy of statistical aspects of the study including statistical power and appropriate statistical analysis.

In light of these initiatives RCUK has revised and updated its guidelines on what information needs to be provided to allow appropriate and thorough evaluation of the scientific strengths and weaknesses of proposals for funding involving animal use. In some cases, adherence to the principles defined in this section will require additional resources e.g. for animal identification such as 'microchipping', increased maintenance charges resulting from the randomisation procedure, or salary costs associated with obtaining statistical support. We recognise this and will support such costs where fully justified in the appropriate sections.

The NC3Rs has developed guidance for applicants when selecting contractors for animal research and the expectations of UK public funders. A presentation detailing the information that applicants should provide can be found at <http://www.nc3rs.org.uk/news/choosing-contractors-animal-research>.

Applicants should be aware that all applications involving the use of non-human primates, cats, dogs, pigs and equines will be referred to the NC3Rs via their Peer Review Service. In some circumstances, applications involving the use of other species may also be referred, at the discretion of UKRI.

Home Office licences and ethical and welfare standards

Experiments using animals must comply with the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (ASPA), amended 2012 and any further embodiments. Institutions and grant holders are responsible for ensuring that all appropriate establishment, personal and project licences required under the Act have been granted by the Home Office, including gaining approval via their institution's local ethical review process. All awards are made on the absolute condition that no work that is controlled by the Act will begin until the necessary licences have been obtained.

In addition, applicants must ensure that they are following best practice in relation to animal husbandry and welfare. Where proposed work is not covered under an existing ASPA project license, applicants should make certain that their proposals are received by their local Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (AWERB), prior to submission and ensure that any ethical or welfare implications raised are addressed.

Replacement, reduction and refinement of animal experiments

Applicants are expected to have developed their applications in accordance with the cross-funder guidance for the use of animals in research: [Responsibility in the Use of Animals in Bioscience Research](#) and [NC3Rs Guidelines: Primate Accommodation, Care and Use](#).

Experiments using animals funded by UKRI must comply with the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (ASPA), amended 2012 and any further embodiments in: 28

Using the simplest possible, or least sentient, species of animal appropriate

Ensuring that distress and pain are avoided wherever possible

Employing an appropriate design and using the minimum number of animals consistent with ensuring that objectives of the proposal will be met.

Advice on opportunities and techniques for implementing these principles can be found on the [NC3Rs website](#). This includes the [Experimental Design Assistant \(EDA\)](#), a free online tool from the NC3Rs to help optimise experimental design and ensure that the number of animals used is consistent with the objectives of the proposal.

Proposals involving animal use

Researchers are strongly advised to read the following section carefully before preparing a proposal to ensure all the relevant information required is included in the appropriate sections of their application. Applicants should ensure their proposal clearly sets out and justifies the following:

Research objectives and how the knowledge generated will advance the field

The need to use animals and lack of realistic alternatives

Choice of species of animals to be used

Type of animal(s), for example, strain, pathogen free, genetically modified or mutant

Planned experimental design and its justification

Numbers of animals and frequency of measurements/interventions to be used

Primary outcomes to be assessed

Planned statistical analyses

Applicants proposing to use animals must complete the following section of the Je-S form:

Animal Costs

- Detailing the costs associated with the purchase, breeding and maintenance of each species of animal

Animal Research

- Detailing any procedures categorised as moderate or severe (in accordance with the maximum prospective severity rating in the Home Office licence under which the work will be carried out) in order that the assessment of the proposal can balance the importance of the potential scientific advancement to the welfare of the animals.

Animal Species

- Detailing scientific reasons for the use of animals and an explanation of why there are no realistic alternatives must be given, with an explanation of how the choice of species complies with ASPA.

Use of animals overseas

If the proposal involves the use of animals overseas, applicants must submit a signed statement (uploaded as a Letter of Support to the Je-S application) from both UK and overseas partners that:

They will adhere to all relevant national and local regulatory systems in the UK and overseas

They will follow the guidelines laid out in the NC3Rs 'Responsibility in the use of animals in bioscience research' document and ensure work is carried out to UK standards 29

Before initiation of the proposed work, appropriate approvals from Organisational and / or central animal ethics committees will be obtained for experimental protocols to be adopted in their projects. Successful applicants may be expected to provide copies of these permissions before funding is released.

Details on where the animal research will take place (UK or overseas) and through which funder the resources are being sought.