

UKRI and the peer review process

Peer review

UKRI and the Research Councils of UKRI fund research on a competitive basis employing independent expert peer review.

In peer review, proposals for research funding are considered and assessed for scientific quality by a number of academics or "peers" from the UK and overseas who work within relevant areas of research. This assessment or "review" provides the basis of the funding decision.

The peer review processes reflect the variety of mechanisms employed to support different types of research e.g. basic or strategic research, or the need to encourage adventurous or multidisciplinary research.

Each Council publishes information about its peer review process and maintain a commitment to use a variety of approaches to peer review, Councils are keen to simplify and standardise the processes involved in applying for research funding.

The process

Within UKRI, for different calls under different schemes, such as GCRF and Newton Fund, there are different stages to the peer review process, but depending on the call, the process may look like this...

Stage 1: Submission of proposal

Proposals to the majority of Calls are submitted via the Joint electronic-Submission (Je-S) system. Applicants must submit the appropriate proposal form for the call which they are applying. If the scheme has a closing date, this information must be received by the published deadline for the scheme. Late or incomplete grant applications will not be accepted by the Je-S system.

Stage 2: Office checks

Fx eligibility, budget, ODA compliance, attachments, duration, start and end dates

Stage 3: Reviews

Grant applications are reviewed by 2 or more reviewers

The process - continued

Stage 4: PI Response

For most schemes and calls the grant applicant has the opportunity to provide a response (Principal Investigator - or PI - Response) to the anonymised reviews.

Stage 5: Panel Meeting

The grant applications, reviews and Principal Investigator responses are considered by members in a panel meeting.

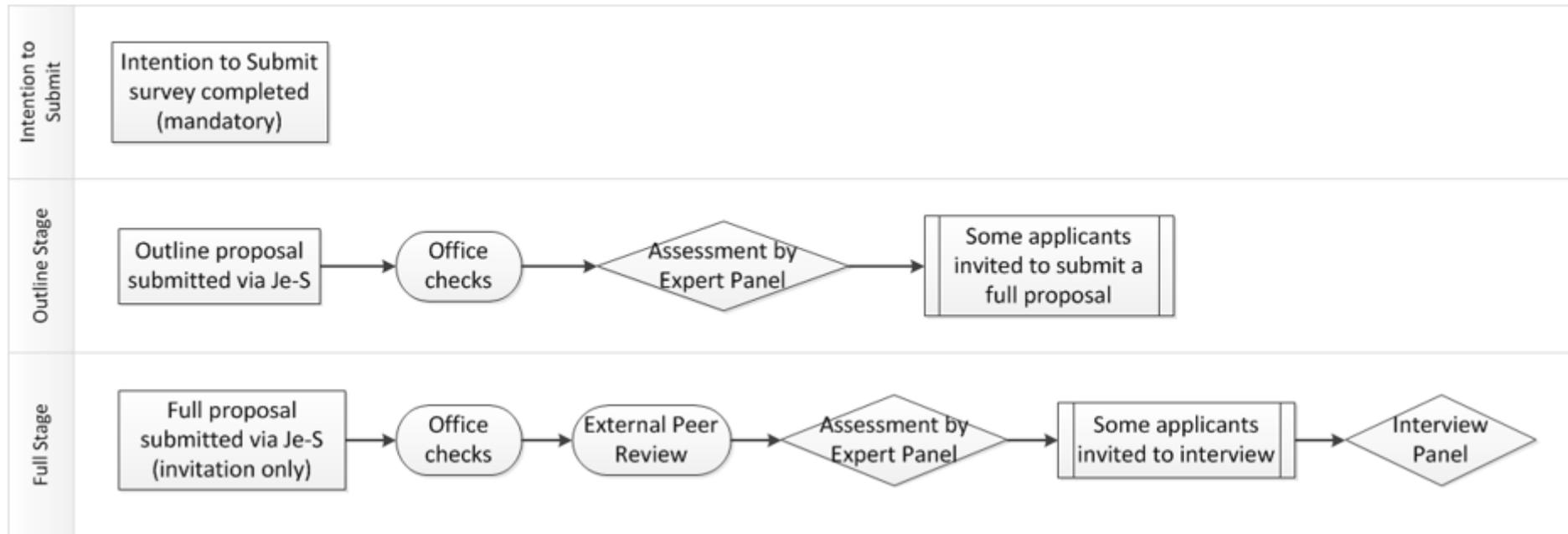
Stage 6: Ranking

The panel grades / scores each grant application and ranks them in order of funding priority

Stage 7: Awards

The panel's recommendations are considered by UKRI or the UKRI Council and final decisions are made on which awards will be funded.

Interdisciplinary Research Hubs



Useful reviews

Useful reviews are invaluable in helping the panel make funding decisions.

Panel members will use a reviewer's comments and score to help them in their assessment and ranking. To write a useful review, a reviewer should:

- read the assessment criteria
- be familiar with the grading scale / score and descriptors
- be objective, fair and professional
- provide full, clear and concise comments and objective criticism
- clearly identify strengths and weaknesses
- provide justification for your comments and grade, whether you are supportive of the proposal or not
- be aware that not everyone reading the comments will be a specialist in the field
- be aware of unconscious bias
- treat all information as confidential

But don't...

- make it personal
- reiterate the proposal or re-state the assessment questions
- include anything in the assessment that will identify you, such as references to your own work, where you have worked or who you have worked with
- exceed the space restriction in Je-S or part of your review will be lost
- allow your review to be influenced by bias for your own field of research

Questions to ask yourself

- How important are the research questions, or gaps in knowledge, that would be addressed?
- Is the proposal novel, innovative and timely?
- Are the researchers up to the job? Do they have the right team, experience and infrastructure? Are they at the forefront nationally? Internationally?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal?
- Is the methodology and experimental design clearly set out and justified? Are the methods appropriate? What could they do better? Are there alternative approaches?
- Are there major flaws or weaknesses?
- Are there any ethical issues?
- Does this proposal represent good value for money?
- How convincingly has the potential impact of the activity been described?
- How appropriate/effective are the arrangements described for facilitating the impact?

Peer Review Breakouts

In your breakout group, we ask you to:

1. review an application (either for a GCRF call or a NF call), comment on it and come up with a review score
2. compare your comments to the real reviews, and reflect on any differences
3. consider the PI response to the reviews, and further reflect on applications and the process
4. decide as a group on an overall score and key comments

Then:

- reflect on the process, thinking about what worked and what didn't in the review process; how you would like to do things; what would you like more guidance on?
- come up with your group's top three tips for reviewing