Stephen Hawking Fellowships

Before proposals are considered at review panels, applicants are invited to respond to the reviewers' comments. This gives applicants the chance to address any factual inaccuracies and questions raised. Any response is submitted in confidence to the panel.

Role in peer review process

Responding to the reviewers' comments is an important part of the peer review process as panel members are not allowed to re-review proposals. Panel members consider the response carefully when discussing the issues raised by the reviewers to see how applicants resolve them. A good response can make a competitive difference at the panel meeting.

An applicant can choose not to respond to the reviewer comments although this may leave the panel with unresolved questions.

How to respond

Your response should be in A4 format with a maximum length of half a page per reviewer, written in a minimum of 11pt font (Arial, Helvetica Regular or equivalent) and with a minimum of 2cm margins. If an applicant exceeds this limit the EPSRC and STFC reserve the right to reject the response.

In writing a response, it is best to tackle the issues raised by the reviewers concisely and with a calm, measured tone. An aggressive response is likely to appear arrogant and less considered. In particular, dismissing a reviewer's criticism as 'obviously' wrong may make panels feel that the issues of concern have not been properly addressed. In some cases reviewers may suggest ways in which the project could be improved that you may want to respond to.

In the response, reviewers comments related to all criteria may be addressed. For example, if a reviewer has questioned the research area(s) the proposal addresses, this can be discussed in the response.

Some tips on drafting your response:

- Refer to parts of your proposal that you feel already address the reviewers' concerns.
- Use references to publications to add weight to your argument.
- It is not a chance to re-write your case for support.
- In order to meet the page limits please concentrate on only the major issues.
- Keep to the issues and avoid wasting space thanking reviewers or copying at length what they have already said.