

EQUALITY AND INCLUSION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

STFC : Projects Peer Review Panel (PPRP)

Question	Response
<p>1. Policy/activity being assessed</p>	<p>Projects Peer Review Panel</p> <p>The Panel assess new large/complex novel projects (PPRP large projects) and other ad-hoc activities including Opportunities and Capital Calls.</p>
<p>2. Summary of aims and objectives of the policy/funding</p>	<p>The Projects Peer Review Panel (PPRP) is responsible for the assessment of projects that are considered to have significant scientific priority in particle physics, nuclear physics, astronomy, particle astrophysics, accelerator and solar system science, as well as associated computing infrastructure</p> <p>The specific aims of the PPRP scheme are to assess each proposal in a systematic and time constrained process; calls for proposals and PPRP meetings are scheduled in advance according to need. A PPRP meeting is held to assess the proposal and question the applicants. In its assessment of proposals the panel will look at each category referred to in the Assessment Framework to ensure all requirements are met. Where undergoing the full process, feedback questions from the meeting are sent to the applicants; the responses to which are assessed at a Visiting Panel Meeting.</p> <p>The Visiting Panel meeting carries out a detailed assessment of the proposal against the Assessment Framework containing five areas for consideration: Scientific/Technical Excellence: Specific objectives of the project, Strategic Value within the STFC Programme, Leadership and Track Record, Planning and Project Management, Social and Economic Impact. The Visiting Panel consists of external experts and members of PPRP. The final recommendation made to Science Board usually takes place at the end of this meeting during a closed session.</p>

3. What involvement and consultation has been done in relation to this policy?

The PPRP process is currently being reviewed in 2021. The review was initiated by STFC management and on the following Terms of reference :

- 1) Review the range of different peer review functions that STFC requires from PPRP and whether there are alternative options for peer review/decision making.
- 2) Determine if PPRP operates as effectively as it can and whether
 - The process can be redesigned or streamlined to reduce workload
 - The workload for different activities is proportionate to the investment
 - The roles and responsibilities of all involved in the process are clearly defined
- 3) Review the interaction between Science Board and PPRP across the whole process including
 - The process by which Science Board decides what projects go to PPRP for review
 - The SOI process

The PPRP review Panel looked at potential ways forward to streamline/reform the process, reducing workloads whilst **ensuring the most** effective programme is funded within the budget. Whilst investigating whether the current process was fit for purpose, it was also acknowledged that any changes to the STFC peer review mechanism would have to accommodate any UKRI Peer review guidelines.

STFC is dedicated to ensuring that our processes for funding are open and inclusive. Individuals engaged with our funding processes endeavour to conduct each stage in a fair and objective manner, without prejudice or bias. In line with this, STFC adheres to the seven principles of public life. In addition, we adopt the following principles for each PPRP Call:

General Public

(a) Information on project and the review process is published on STFC/UKRI website, allowing interested to members to attend the open sessions

(b) Details of meeting date, venue and zoom details are published, for those interested to participate.

For applicants

- (a) The call is advertised clearly on the STFC and UKRI websites.
- (b) The call text and guidance clearly states the eligibility and assessment criteria
- (c) The STFC website conforms to accessibility requirements for websites, including the ability to adjust the text size or use a text reader on the page
- (d) STFC will offer hard copies of the call documentation to an applicant if requested
- (e) STFC will provide all reasonable support to applicants before and after submission in order to assist them in the application and assessment process. This opportunity is highlighted in the call documentation
- (f) STFC will make all reasonable efforts to accommodate the requirements of any applicant who are invited to present, considering issues of accessibility, travel restrictions and alternative working patterns. The STFC team will request details of any such requirements when an applicant is invited to present their application to the committee.

For assessors: reviewers

- (a) The PPRP reviewers are selected from the expert community world-wide, on their scientific or project management expertise and also after considering anticipated or declared conflicts of interest. A conscious effort will be made to ensure a balance of male and female reviewers is achieved as far as is possible.
- (b) PPRP reviewer guidance clearly states our expectations of reviewers
- (c) STFC will provide all reasonable support to our reviewers in order to ensure they understand the aims, objectives, and processes of PPRP.

For assessors: panel members

- (a) All new members are provided with induction training, starting from March 2020
- (b) As part of this induction all panel members involved in the process will receive training in unconscious bias to raise awareness of conditions that may impact upon their decision making. The Meeting Chair will remind members of the need for discussions to be objective and based only on the evidence presented at the start of every meeting
- (c) By preparing an appropriate Chair's Brief and holding pre discussions, STFC staff will work with the Panel Chair to agree approaches that are designed to minimise opportunities for bias and improve the transparency of decision-making
- (d) The membership of the Projects Peer Review Panel as a whole will aim to be a minimum of 30% female, though this proportion may vary between the proposals considered. Where PPRP cannot achieve a membership that is at least 30% female this will be objectively justified on the basis of the available qualified applicants. Membership of the PPRP is reviewed annually. In addition, PPRP is committed to increasing the diversity of Reviewers and External Experts .
- (e) STFC is committed to taking all reasonable steps to enable participation for individuals with alternative working patterns, including reduced working hours
- (f) Panel members are asked to inform STFC if they have any additional needs to enable attendance or participation
- (g) STFC will schedule appropriate breaks and provide appropriate refreshments for panel members
- (h) Panel members are made aware of STFC's Code of Practice.
- For STFC staff**
- (a) STFC recognises that unconscious bias can impact staff's ability to foster and promote an inclusive working environment.

	<p>(b) Unconscious bias training help teams understand how unconscious biases can affect their day to day practices and the strategies they can implement to ensure their actions and approaches are inclusive and objective.</p> <p>(c) All STFC staff involved in the process will receive training in unconscious bias to raise awareness of conditions that may impact upon their decision making.</p> <p>Venue arrangements</p> <p>(a) Currently offering virtual, face-to-face and hybrid meetings</p> <p>(b) Will be selected for ease of accessibility</p> <p>(c) Will not conflict with different cultures, religions or beliefs</p> <p>(d) Will offer a full range of sensory accessibility relating to visual and hearing impairments</p> <p>(e) Catering will be arranged with clear labelling and be appropriate to those who have specific cultural, religious, health or disability needs</p>
<p>4. Who is affected by the policy/funding activity/event?</p>	<p>Anyone who is applying for an STFC PPRP grant, panel members , external and internal stakeholders involved in the assessment process.</p>
<p>5. Arrangements for monitoring and reviewing actual impact of the policy</p>	<p>Membership of the PPRP is reviewed annually. STFC holds an annual application exercise for Panel membership and provides guidance on diversity targets as part of this. To increase the number of project managers in PPRP, an additional exercise to appoint these members in addition to scientific members of PPRP was held in 2020. PPRP is committed to increasing the diversity of Reviewers and External Experts. For each proposal, Reviewers and External Experts are selected primarily based on scientific expertise. A conscious effort is made to ensure an appropriate balance of male and female reviewers and experts is achieved where possible.</p> <p>Currently 23% of PPRP members are female. While 2015/16 HESA data for the UK physics community indicates that 14% of the staff population is female, we are committed to a minimum proportion of 30% female</p>

	<p>members, consistent with other STFC Panels. Therefore, PPRP will actively seek more female members in coming years and will be making all conscious efforts to increase the diversity of members on PPRP.</p> <p>PPRP considered 70 applications during the 33 meetings organised from 2014 to 2021. In addition another 51 visiting panels were organised during this period. There were three PRD rounds, two Opportunities calls, One Capital Call and one Tensioning meeting. Workload is steadily increasing and in 2022, PPRP has scheduled 6 meetings to consider 12 applications. 13 Visiting panels are likely to be scheduled and as a result of two proposals potentially needing two visiting panel to reach final recommendations.</p> <p>STFC has received 401 applications to PPRP call since April 2010, there is a total of 724 successful applicants (Principal Investigators and Co-Investigators), out of which 599 (83%) were male applicants, 88 (12%) Female applicants, 32 (4%) not disclosed and 5 (1%) unknown. Actual success rates for Male applicants is 75% and for Female applicants 38%. Applications with an 'RO withdrawn' status are not included in the statistics as these did not complete the peer review process. To improve the gender balance of applicants, STFC will review this equality and impact assessment annually to identify any actions or interventions that are required to improve equality, diversity and inclusion. In addition STFC monitors, analyses and publishes data to better understand the diversity of our applicant and assessor community.</p> <p>We will continue to monitor our application and award rates, and consider appropriate steps to better tailor and publicise the opportunity to female members of the community.</p>
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Group	Potential for positive or negative impact?	Examples of any evidence/data used	Action to address negative impact (e.g. adjustment to the policy)
Disability	Negative		STFC will take all reasonable steps to make adjustments to the assessment process in order to enable participation. As examples, this may include

		<p>Applicants and/or reviewers with visual disabilities or impairments may find it difficult to access and review electronic documentation.</p> <p>Applicants or panel members with mobility disabilities may face difficulties in attending the panel meetings.</p> <p>Panel members with hearing difficulties may find it hard to engage in discussions.</p>	<p>the use of video conferencing or equivalent tools, tailored timing of the meeting schedule, or provision of specific facilities to enable an applicant or panel member to be comfortable in the meeting environment.</p> <p>During the COVID-19 pandemic, all meetings were held virtually (using zoom facilities) and members had access to all different tools, including automatic transcripts, ensuring their easy participation.</p> <p>Electronic information is accessible and STFC will investigate the ability for the potential use of screen readers for personnel who are visually impaired.</p> <p>STFC will respond to individual support needs on a case by case basis.</p> <p>STFC will ensure the meeting venue is compatible with the use of hearing aid loops and will work with individuals to understand what other help can be provided.</p> <p>STFC will select a room that is light and airy, ensure that plenty of breaks are built in to the agenda and ensure that colours chosen don't trigger migraines, different colours may assist in this if personnel don't bring their own laptops. For virtual meetings, PRRP STFC the use of closed captioning and</p>
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Gender reassignment1	Negative	<p>Information regarding gender reassignment is not made available throughout the peer review process. However, this may become apparent during the meeting stage or it may be possible that panel members already know this information or could endeavour to seek it out.</p>	<p>Panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting. STFC staff presence during meetings acts as an additional assurance to ensure unbiased peer review</p>

<p>Marriage or civil partnership</p>	<p>Yes - Negative Impact</p>	<p>Bias may be voiced in relation to new partners starting a family therefore not given as a high a priority for funding</p>	<p>Panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting. STFC staff presence during meetings acts as an additional assurance to ensure unbiased peer review</p>
<p>Pregnancy, Maternity, Paternity, Nursing mothers, Caring responsibilities?</p>	<p>Yes - Negative Impact</p>	<p>Information regarding pregnancy or family arrangements is not made available throughout the peer review process. However, this may become apparent during the meeting stage or it may be possible that panel members already know this information or could endeavour to seek it out.</p> <p>Panel members who are pregnant or on maternity/paternity leave may be unable to participate in the peer review process, or require changes to be made to enable their participation.</p>	<p>Panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting. STFC staff presence during meetings acts as an additional assurance to ensure unbiased peer review.</p> <p>The virtual meetings during the Covid-19 pandemic, PPRP made all reasonable efforts to ensure the timing of the meeting is convenient for any requirements relating to the current homeworking environment, for example, adjusted working hours, caring and childcare responsibilities.</p> <p>STFC will liaise with the panel members on a meeting-by-meeting basis to identify and address barriers that may prevent their participation in the process. In the event that a panel member cannot</p>

		<p>An applicant's career path and track record may be criticised due to the existence of a number of career breaks due to maternity.</p> <p>Nursing mothers may need additional support in terms of suitable accommodation or childcare</p> <p>Panel members may face additional childcare costs if having to work outside of their normal hours.</p>	<p>participate, STFC will seek a replacement panel member from the membership of PPRP.</p> <p>STFC recognise this issue and the potential impact and will consider as part of the review. The Chair will appropriately moderate discussions and ensure the objective application of the assessment criteria.</p> <p>Meetings are timetabled to allow for adequate breaks. STFC will ensure suitable accommodation is provided for nursing mothers and additional childcare.</p> <p>STFC will reimburse additional childcare costs, above any beyond that are required during normal working hours.</p>
Race	Negative	<p>Information regarding race is not made available throughout the peer review process. However, it may be possible that panel members already know this information or could endeavour to seek it out.</p>	<p>Panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting. STFC staff presence during the meetings acts as an additional assurance to ensure unbiased peer review.</p>

Religion or belief	Negative	<p>Information regarding religious belief is not made available throughout the peer review process. However, this may become apparent during the meeting stage.</p> <p>Panel members may be unable to attend panel meetings due to religious observances.</p> <p>Panel members or attendees may have specific dietary requirements due to religious belief</p>	<p>Panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting. STFC staff presence during meeting acts as an additional assurance to ensure unbiased peer review.</p> <p>STFC will liaise with the panel members on a meeting-by-meeting basis to identify and address barriers that may prevent their participation in the process. In the event that a panel member cannot participate, STFC will seek a replacement panel member from the membership of PPRP, and ensure that any replacement panel member is provided with the same level of information as all other panel members.</p> <p>The criteria for selection of panel meeting venues includes a consideration of catering and dietary requirements.</p>
Sexual orientation	Negative	<p>Information regarding sexual orientation is not made available throughout the peer review process. However, it may be possible that panel</p>	<p>All assessment criteria are applied objectively, as reinforced by the panel briefing at the start of the peer review meeting. Panel Chairs are provided with specific briefings on assessment criteria and</p>

		<p>members already know this information or could endeavour to seek it out</p>	<p>panel processes ahead of all peer review meetings and, alongside STFC staff, play a key role in moderating discussions and ensuring objective application of assessment criteria.</p> <p>Panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting. STFC staff presence during meeting acts as an additional assurance to ensure unbiased peer review.</p>
<p>Sex (gender)2</p>	<p>Negative</p>	<p>Applicants or panel members with caring responsibilities may face difficulties in attending the panel interviews.</p>	<p>STFC will take all reasonable steps to make adjustments to the assessment process in order to enable participation. As examples, this may include the use of video conferencing or equivalent tools, tailored timing of the meeting schedule, or provision of specific facilities to enable an applicant or panel member to be comfortable in the meeting environment.</p> <p>Panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that</p>

		<p>Negative perceptions of an applicant's gender may be expressed by a peer reviewer or a panel member.</p>	<p>may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting. STFC staff presence during meeting acts as an additional assurance to ensure unbiased peer review.</p>
<p>Age</p>	<p>Negative</p>	<p>Panel members and reviewers may cite age as a proxy for level of experience or criticise those near retirement</p>	<p>Panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting. STFC staff presence during meeting acts as an additional assurance to ensure unbiased peer review.</p> <p>The Assessment criteria for PPRP related to track record are not linked to age and is considered on a more holistic basis related to the applicants ability to undertake the work of the proposal.</p>

1 'A person has the protected characteristic of gender reassignment if the person is proposing to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process (or part of a process) for the purpose of reassigning the person's sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex. **Gender reassignment also includes a person who identifies as non-binary or gender fluid.'**

2 Although the definitions of the Equality Act 2010* are set out as per above comment, at UK Research and Innovation we recognise all gender identities and sexualities including asexual and intersex people. The definition of gender reassignment was extended in September 2020 to include people who identify as non-binary or gender fluid – recognising that gender is a spectrum.