Productivity Programme 2021/22
Peer Reviewer Guidance

Thank you for agreeing to act as a peer reviewer for this Economic and Social Research Council call. This document provides guidance on the review process for proposals received under the call.

Plead read this guidance carefully before beginning your reviews, even if you are an experienced reviewer.

If you have any queries or concerns, please email productivity@esrc.ukri.org.

Background

UK Research and Innovation is making a major investment to support the ESRC's strategic priority of significantly extending the understanding of productivity in the UK and finding ways to improve it, adding to the portfolio of ongoing productivity research.

The ESRC is looking to fund between four and six projects, funded through UKRI's Strategic Priorities Fund, which address in particular the following under-researched areas in relation to improving UK productivity:
- diversity
- net zero and the green economy
- financial markets

The above list is not exhaustive; proposals in other areas that have the potential to improve UK productivity were also invited.

Proposals should cost between £1 million and £2 million at 100% fEC over three years, commencing from April 2022.

Proposals should seek to work proactively with policymakers and businesses, focusing efforts on making tangible, real-world impact to productivity in the UK.

Proposals should complement the current portfolio of productivity research and not overlap with the themes of ongoing ESRC productivity and other investments.

Please refer to the full call details for further information.

Review process

You have been invited to review one or more proposals as part of a pool of experts selected to cover a range of relevant disciplinary areas. We invite you to provide feedback on each proposal based on its individual merit. Please note that the proposal may contain elements which you are not a specialist in, however, we encourage you to review the proposal as a whole; your input would be very much appreciated.

If a proposal meets the standard ESRC minimum quality threshold, the respective applicants will be given the opportunity to respond to the reviewers' comments (see transparency of the review process below).

Proposals will be assessed by a specially convened expert commissioning panel, which will take into consideration reviewers' scores and comments. This panel will make funding recommendations to the ESRC at its meeting in January 2022. The ESRC Productivity Research Executive Board will then make a final decision on proposals based on these recommendations.

Conflict and confidentiality

Conflicts of interest can be due to a direct or indirect financial, non-financial or personal interest, links to the Research Organisation (RO) and/or some other person or entity at the RO. Examples of instances where a conflict of interest could occur for a reviewer include situations where you:

- Have an existing business or professional relationship with any individual named on the proposal;
- Have collaborated on a research project and/or have co-published with any individual named on the proposal in the last three years;
- Are directly involved in the work that the applicant proposes to carry out and/or have assisted the applicant with their application for funding;
- Are a current member of staff or a Professor Emeritus/Emerita at the same research organisation as any individual named on the proposal;
- Have a vested interest, or stand to gain a financial or professional advantage from a particular outcome for an application which they are asked to review.

If you have any concern that there is a potential conflict of interest with any proposal that we have assigned to you and have not taken account of, you should contact productivity@esrc.ukri.org for advice.

As a reviewer, you are not allowed to disclose to outsiders any information concerning application documents or assessments, nor are you allowed to use this confidential information to your own benefit or anyone else's benefit or disadvantage. In addition, you must not reveal to outsiders that you are reviewing the proposal of particular Research Organisations.

Please refer to the full conflict of interest guidance for further information.

Transparency of the review process

Please note that your comments, along with the scores assigned to each of the assessment headings, and your overall grading of the proposal, will be fed back to the applicants. Given this, it is important that your scores reflect your textual comments. Your comments should clarify your assessment of the different elements of the proposal. Please be assured that all the reviews seen by the applicants will be anonymous. All the personal details and the self-assessment sections on the form will automatically be removed from the version seen by applicants.

Comments are passed to the applicant as they are received and are not edited by the

ESRC in any way. This provides greater transparency and is also in accord with data handling standards. You are therefore reminded of the need to ensure that you provide professional and constructive comments and that you do not reveal your identity through your comments.

We will of course read all comments that are received. If a comment is considered unusable in its current form it will be referred to the reviewer for revision. Reasons why a comment might be considered unusable include:

- the reviewer's identity is disclosed
- discriminatory or gratuitously offensive remarks
- inadequate justification of the scores assigned to the proposal
- text does not match the scores
- text suggests a misunderstanding of ESRC policy, such as the remit of a call.

Declaration on research assessment
UKRI recognises the relationship between research assessment and research integrity, and supports the [San Francisco declaration on research assessment (DORA)](#).

Completion of the form

You have been invited to complete a review using the Joint Electronic Submissions (Je-S) system. Guidance on completing the form can be found below.

If you have not used Je-S before we will create an account for you; you will be able to activate this account by following the link in the email notifying you of the review request. Once your account has been activated, once you have logged in you will be taken to the 'Assigned Document' summary screen in the system where you should select the 'Peer Review' option.

Knowledge of applicant
Please indicate in what capacity you know the applicant(s) and their work. Please record any potential conflicts of interest relating to your assessment of the proposal which need to be brought to the attention of the ESRC Office.

Self-Assessment
Please indicate, using High, Medium or Low, what level you judge your competence to be in each of the following areas:
- Academic Merit
- Value for Money

Please also clarify your self-assessment, or comment on your competence to assess the proposal.

Application assessment

The academic peer review form has the following four core criteria.
- Originality; potential contribution to knowledge
- Design and methods
- Value for money
- Outputs, dissemination and impact

The scores on the form for each criterion are on a scale from 1 to 6, where 6 is 'Outstanding' (see scoring scales for peer reviewers below). If you feel unable to assess a proposal against a particular criterion, you can also indicate this by ticking 'Unable to assess.' Detailed comments in support of these grades should be provided in the free text overall assessment section.

Full proposals should **clearly demonstrate** how they satisfy all of the criteria below.

The assessment criteria as provided in the call specification can be mapped against the following core criteria as follows:

Originality; potential contribution to knowledge; Design and methods

- Proposals must fit strategically with the overall aims of the ESRC's productivity investment. This will include explaining how the proposal's activity is aligned with the requirements of the funding opportunity.
- The proposal is situated within the wider research context.
- The proposal adds value to the existing research landscape.
- The project takes place within the timeframe required.
- A compelling plan for new research that aims to be internationally excellent and breaks new ground in understanding and addressing productivity.
- Track record of academic excellence, incorporating expertise from a wide range of disciplines and methodologies.
- Plans for new research with the potential to generate new knowledge and lead to new insights on under researched themes.
- Plans should not overlap with productivity research funded by the ESRC.
- Clearly described and justified research methods.
- Clearly described and justified data management and access plans that identify risks to, and mitigations for, accessing and sharing data.

Value for money

- Sufficient detail and justification of the costs of the project in the justification of resources attachment.
- Funds requested are essential for the work.
- The importance and scientific potential justify funding on the scale requested.
- Clear allocation of duties and responsibilities, if the proposal has more than one investigator.
- The proposal represents good value for money.
- Commitment to work constructively and proactively with investment funders and supporters.

Outputs, dissemination and impact.

- Clear proposals for generating impact underpinned by a thorough understanding of the principles and practices of effective knowledge exchange and impact generation.
- Evidence of well thought out and realistic plans for engagement and knowledge exchange, that maximise opportunities for academic, societal, economic and user impact.
- The proposal sets out clear, measurable and achievable outcomes that demonstrate evidence of the research's planned impact, which goes beyond a list of outputs.
- The project has practical outcomes, a policy impact or both.

| | Clear commitment to work constructively and proactively with other grant holders from this funding opportunity and investments in productivity already funded by ESRC in order to maximise the impact of the portfolio as a whole. |

Overall Assessment

Feedback for Applicant: please provide detailed comments in support of the grades you have given and on any other aspects of the proposal that you consider relevant. These comments will be passed on, unattributed, to the applicant(s) and also with notification of the outcome of the application, to other external reviewers if applicable.

Overall Grade: please indicate your overall assessment of the proposal, using the 1 to 6 scale, as set out below.

Scoring scales for peer reviewers

Score	Description
6 (Outstanding)	The proposal is **outstanding** in terms of its potential scientific merit, is of consistently high quality and has high potential for impact.
5 (Excellent)	The proposal is **excellent** in terms of its potential scientific merit, is of high quality and has potential for impact.
4 (Good)	The proposal **good** in terms of its potential scientific merit, is of good quality and has some potential for impact.
3 (Satisfactory)	The proposal has potential scientific merit but is not of a consistently high quality or potential for impact.
2 (Fair/Some weaknesses)	The proposal will add to understanding, but is of lesser quality or urgency than more highly rated proposals. Such proposals are unlikely to have a significant influence on the development of the research area.
1 (Poor)	The proposal is flawed in its scientific approach, or is repetitious of other work, or otherwise judged not worth pursuing; or which, through possibly having sound objectives, appears seriously defective in its methodology.

Further information

You may also find the [Je-S electronic peer review FAQs](#) and [FAQs for peer reviewers](#) helpful.

Enquiries about reviewing proposals under this call should be addressed to productivity@esrc.ukri.org.