



Interview Panel – Panellists’ Guidance

Contents

Introduction

1. The role of the Chair	1
2. The role of Panellists	1
3. Panel meeting documentation	3
4. Pre-interview preparation	3
5. Conflicts of Interest	3
6. Pre-panel briefing session	3
7. Interview technique	4
8. Interview structure	4
9. Selection	5
10. Feedback to applicants	5
Appendix A: Standard Grading Scale	6

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to help you, as a panellist, to prepare for the forthcoming interview panel meeting. In addition to this document, you should also feel free to contact the meeting’s nominated AHRC Programme Co-ordinator/PSO if you have any questions you wish to raise prior to the meeting.

1. The role of the Chair

The role of the Chair is:

- to have read and familiarised yourself with all applications.
- to oversee and to run the panel meeting.
- to ensure that the meeting keeps to time.
- to ensure that AHRC procedures and protocols are followed and to refer to AHRC staff for guidance when necessary.

2. The role of Panellists

The role of panellists is:

- to have familiarised yourself with the guidelines and assessment criteria for the interviews.
- to have alerted the office to any conflicts of interest you may have, including potential conflicts, not picked up by the office.
- to attend the panel meeting to agree final grades and rankings for all proposals.
- to agree any feedback where applicable.

In undertaking the above tasks, panellists are expected to:

- exercise their knowledge, judgement and expertise in order to reach clear, sound, evidence-based decisions.
- treat all applications as strictly confidential at all times.
- be always fair and objective, and to adhere to [Research Council Equality and Diversity Policy](#) which states that:

The UK Research Councils are committed to eliminating unlawful discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity and good relations across and between the defined equalities groups in all of their relevant functions.

Accordingly no eligible job applicant, funding applicant, employee or external stakeholder including members of the public should receive less favourable treatment on the grounds of:

- gender
- marital status
- sexual orientation
- gender re-assignment
- race
- colour
- nationality
- ethnicity or national origins
- religion or similar philosophical belief
- spent criminal conviction
- age
- disability

Equally, all applications must be assessed on equal terms, regardless of the sex, age, and/or ethnicity of the applicant. Applications must therefore be assessed on their merits, in accordance with the criteria and the aims and objectives set.

Code of Conduct

AHRC is committed to ensuring that our decision making is fair, robust, transparent and credible. We are also committed to raising awareness of and taking steps to remove the impact of unintentional bias in our systems, processes, behaviours and culture and to ensuring that our funding is not influenced by, for example, the gender of the applicant or by other protected characteristics.

Safeguarding decision making

AHRC is committed to ensuring that those who make funding decisions recognise the factors that introduce risk into the decision making process. To do this, it is important to be aware of and take steps to remove any impact of unintentional bias in our processes, behaviours and culture. We know that pressure to make decisions, time pressures, high cognitive load and tiredness all create conditions that introduce the risk of unintentional bias.

Many of these factors could be present in the panel meeting; therefore we ask that you are aware of this risk and safe guard the panel's recommendation by taking the actions described below:

- All applications must be assessed on equal terms, and objectively assessed on their merits using the criteria set.
- Decisions must be evidence-based and based on all the information provided.
- Question and challenge cultural stereotypes and bias, as well as being prepared to be challenged.

- Be aware that working with a high cognitive load, with time pressures and the need to make quick decisions, creates conditions for bias which could have an impact on decision-making.
- Try to slow down the speed of your decision making, allowing sufficient time for discussion of each application
- Reconsider the reasons for your decisions, recognising that they may be post-hoc justifications.
- Question cultural stereotypes and be open to seeing what is new and unfamiliar.
- Remember you are unlikely to be fairer and less prejudiced than the average person.
- You can detect unconscious bias more easily in others than in yourself so all panel members should feel able to call out bias when they see it.

For further information, the Royal Society has issued a Briefing and video on unconscious bias: <https://royalsociety.org/topics-policy/publications/2015/unconscious-bias/> .

Applications are submitted to the AHRC in confidence and may contain confidential information and personal data belonging to the applicant and others mentioned in the application. Please ensure therefore that all applications are treated confidentially, [referring to the AHRC website](#) for further guidance on confidentiality, data protection, and freedom of information.

3. Panel meeting documentation

You will have been supplied with:

- Interview Panel Meeting Agenda
- Interview Panel Format
- Assessment Form
- Call Documentation
- Full Proposals, including Gantt Charts, Technical Plans, CVs etc.

If any documentation is missing, please contact the relevant team within the AHRC.

4. Pre-interview preparation

Please read through all the applications and consider their content in preparation for the Interview Panel meeting. The applications have been sent for peer review and the reviewers' comments are attached along with any PI response received. At this point we are asking you to moderate – not re-review - the reviews and the PI response and to consider and assign the proposals an initial grade on the assessment form against the grading scale attached at Annex A.

The AHRC does not require you to submit comments and scores in advance of the interviews; however the assessment form has been included for you to use when recording your grades and thoughts (If you have printed it out, you will be asked to leave it behind at the end of the meeting when it will be destroyed along with any paper copies of applications and other documentation).

5. Conflicts of interest

It is possible that you may have a connection with the PI or Co-I that we are not aware of and we would therefore ask that, on receiving the set of proposals, you have a quick look at them to check whether such a conflict of interest exists. If this is the case, the conflict of interest must be disclosed and you should inform the AHRC as soon as possible. Examples of what might be considered a conflict of interest can be found on the [website](#) but this is not an exhaustive list and you should contact us if you are unsure.

6. Pre-panel briefing session

A briefing session will take place before the first interview. This may take the form of a moderating panel. See our [guidance for moderating panellists](#).

During the session the panellists will:

- have an initial discussion of their views and grades for each proposal.
- consider how to address any information that is unclear or incomplete, as raised through peer review.
- consider further questions raised by the PI response.
- prepare questions based on the essential and desirable criteria set out in the call documentation.
- consider the structure of the interview.
- decide who will cover each topic during questioning.
- if a presentation takes place, consider which areas to highlight after the presentation.

7. Interview Technique

The areas of questioning need to be similar but, given that the applications are by their nature different, the questions will need to be tailored for the specific details and/or context dictated by the individual application.

The Chair may ask interview panels to group questioning into areas, such as:

- Research/intellectual context
- Delivery of the research
- Project team and management
- Impact
- Legacy and significance

But, the questions to individual applicant teams under those headings may be specific to the queries the reviewers raised on their proposal.

If questions are asked by any member of the panel that may be deemed unfair, biased or discriminatory, either the Chair or another member of the panel should intervene and redirect the questioning.

8. Interview Structure

i) Introduction

The Chair welcomes the applicant(s), introduces the panel members and explains the structure of the interview, note-taking by panel members, questions at the end, etc.

ii) Presentation

For some schemes the PI or project group may have been asked to give a presentation on a specific topic. This can give the panel an opportunity to assess the proposal in further detail.

iii) Gathering information

This is the main body of the interview. The agreed questions should be used to gather further information from the PI and the team.

v) Applicant's questions

The Chair will ask the applicants if they have any questions they would like to ask.

vi) Closing

The Chair will ask the applicant if there is anything they would like to add or if they have other relevant information about the project which they have not had a chance to raise.

The Chair will inform the applicant what will happen next in the process and when they can expect to receive the outcome.

9. Selection

After each interview, the panel will have the opportunity to discuss the proposal in order to come to an initial assessment of the submission. All interview evidence should be reviewed, including the proposals, reviewer comments, PI's response (if applicable) and notes from the interviews. Applicants should be assessed against the criteria for the scheme, and panel members should consider only the evidence presented in the application and during the interview and not take prior knowledge of the applicant(s), institution(s) or partner(s) into account. The Chair should ensure that all relevant information is covered, and that the same standards are applied to all applicants.

After all interviews have taken place, panellists will agree a final grade for each application and decide the ranked order of the proposals, using the grading scale.

10. Feedback to applicants

The panel should consider the feedback to give to unsuccessful applicants. There may also be feedback for successful applicants, for example, specific conditions, areas they need to develop or other issues which may have been raised. Feedback will be agreed at the end of the meeting and will be included by the AHRC as part of the outcome process, in agreement with the Chair. Maintaining confidentiality is paramount and the Chair should remind panellists that it is vital that they do not divulge or discuss panel meeting outcomes with individuals outside the meeting.

All announcements of outcomes and funding decisions will be made by the AHRC. Any panel member who is asked directly for feedback by applicants should refuse and advise applicants to direct such requests to the AHRC.

Appendix A: The standard grading scale and descriptors are provided below. A different grading scale may be used for some panel meetings as per the Call documentation.

Grade	Description	Definition
6	Exceptional Should be funded as a matter of the very highest priority	Work that is at the leading edge internationally, in all of the assessment criteria – scholarship, originality, quality and significance, and meets the majority of them to an exceptional level. Likely to have a significant impact on the field. The proposal’s evidence and justification are fully and consistently provided and management arrangements are clear and convincing.
5	Excellent Should be funded as a matter of priority	Work that is internationally excellent in all of the assessment criteria – scholarship, originality, quality and significance, and meets them to an excellent level. Will answer important questions in the field. The proposal’s evidence and justification are fully and consistently provided and management arrangements are clear and convincing.
4	Very Good Worthy of consideration for funding	Work that demonstrates high international standards of scholarship, originality, quality and significance. Will advance the field of research. It meets all assessment criteria. The proposal’s evidence and justification are good and management arrangements are clear and sound.
3	Satisfactory In a competitive context, the proposal is not considered of sufficient priority to recommend for funding	Work that is satisfactory in terms of scholarship and quality but lacking in international competitiveness. It is limited in terms of originality, innovation and significance and its contribution to the research field. It meets minimum requirements in terms of the assessment criteria and the proposal’s evidence and justification are adequate overall.
2	Not Competitive Not recommended for funding	Work that is of inconsistent quality with some strengths, innovative ideas and good components, but has significant weaknesses or flaws in its conceptualisation, design, methodology and management. Unlikely to advance the field significantly. It does not meet all scheme assessment criteria.
1	Unfundable Not suitable for funding	A proposal that has an unsatisfactory level of originality, quality and significance. Has limited potential to advance research within the field and may be unconvincing in terms of its management arrangements or capacity to deliver proposed activities, especially for the amount of funding being sought. Unlikely to advance the field. It falls short of meeting the assessment criteria for the scheme