AHRC Moderating Panel - Panellists' Guidance

Contents

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to help you, as a panellist, to prepare for the forthcoming 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. COVID-19 Update for Panel Members

1.1 Guidance for mitigation against submitted applications

UKRI recognises that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused major interruptions and disruptions across our communities and are committed to ensuring that individual applicants and their wider team, including partners and networks, are not penalised for any disruption to their career(s) such as breaks and delays, disruptive working patterns and conditions, the loss of on-going work, and role changes that may have been caused by the pandemic. When undertaking your assessment of the research project, you should consider the unequal impacts of the impact that COVID-19 related disruption might have had on the track record and career development of those individuals included in the proposal, and you should focus on the capability of the applicant and their wider team to deliver the research they are proposing. Any comments made by reviewers relating to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic which negatively impact their assessment of the applicants should be disregarded.

In addition to adding text to the generic panel guidance councils may also wish to highlight the above in any briefing material which is provided to the panel chair. Council staff attending panel meetings should also be aware to look out for comments relating to these issues and to advise panels to disregard such information, if needed.

1.2 Accounting for unknowns in new applications

UKRI acknowledges that it is a challenge for applicants to determine the future impacts of COVID-19 while the pandemic continues to evolve. Applicants have been advised that their applications should be based on the information available at the point of submission and, if applicable, the known application specific impacts of COVID-19 should be accounted for. Where known impacts have occurred, these should have been highlighted in the application, including the assumptions/information at the point of submission. Applicants were not required to include contingency plans for the potential impacts of COVID-19. Requests for travel both domestically and internationally could be included in accordance to the relevant scheme guidelines, noting the above advice.

When undertaking your assessment of the research project you should assess the project as written, noting that any changes that the project might require in the future, which arise from the COVID-19 pandemic, will be resolved as a post-award issue by UKRI if the project is successful. Potential complications related to COVID-19 should not affect your assessment or the score you give the project and you should disregard any comments made by reviewers that go against the guidance supplied by UKRI.

In addition to adding text to the generic panel guidance councils may also wish to highlight the above in any briefing material which is provided to the panel chair. Council staff attending panel meetings should also be aware to look out for comments relating to these issues and to advise panels to disregard such information, if needed.

2.   The role of the Chair
The role of the Chair is:
- to have read and familiarised him/herself with all applications.
- to have familiarised themselves with the UKRI Principles of Assessment and Decision Making
- to oversee and to run the panel meeting.
- to set the context and tone for the meeting in terms of process and methods of working, following guidance from the AHRC's pre-meeting briefing.
- to ensure that the meeting keeps to time.
- to seek clarification of the panel's views and to ensure there is appropriate discussion, before the panel agrees a grading for each proposal.
- to rank those proposals in the funding range with a score of 6-1.
- to ensure that AHRC procedures and protocols are followed and to refer to AHRC staff for guidance when necessary.

- to provide final approval for feedback, invited resubmissions and conditions on awards, where necessary.
- to ensure the AHRC is provided with a final and agreed ranked list of applications.
- to ensure the discussions by the panellists stay focussed on the comments from the reviewers and the PI's response to those reviews (i.e. ensuring they do not introduce new comments or criticisms).

3. The role of the panellists

As a panellist, you will be provided with all the necessary information prior to the meeting and are expected to:

- have familiarised yourself with the guidelines and assessment criteria for the scheme.
- have familiarised yourself with the UKRI Principles of Assessment and Decision Making
- have commented on and to have graded all proposals to which you have been assigned as an introducer (Primary introducer, Secondary introducer or Supporting introducer).
- have alerted the office to any conflicts of interest you may have, including potential conflicts, not picked up by the office.
- attend the panel meeting to agree final grades and rankings for all proposals.
- 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 proposals must be assessed on equal terms, regardless of the sex, age, and/or ethnicity of the applicant. Proposals must therefore be assessed and graded on their merits, in accordance with the criteria and the aims and objectives set for each scheme or call for funding.

3.1 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.

3.2 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 proposals or nominations must be assessed on equal terms, and objectively assessed on their merits using the criteria set for each funding mechanism.
- 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 the research we fund.
- 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/) .

Proposals are submitted to the AHRC in confidence and may contain confidential information and personal data belonging to the applicant (and other researchers named in the proposal). Please ensure therefore that all proposals are treated confidentially, referring to the AHRC website for further guidance on confidentiality, data protection, and freedom of information.

4. The role of panel meetings

The purpose of panel meetings is to consider and reach final agreement on the grading and ranking of proposals and where necessary, to agree broad feedback for applicants. The ranking of proposals is based on the reports of the academic peer reviewers on the overall research quality of the proposal and the PI's response to their comments. The role of the panel members is **not** to review the proposals themselves.

The panel's ranked list is presented to AHRC Senior Management, who will make the final funding decisions. They will never overturn or alter the order of the list in making the funding decisions. The exception is applications submitted under the early career schemes for which proposals ranked lower than standard proposals may be funded.

Panel meetings also provide an opportunity for panellists to raise issues, such as the quality of peer review or the potential impact of the research proposed through the applications received to that meeting.

Comments and grades (with the exception of the final agreed grade) will not be used outside the peer review / funding decision making process, unless they are subject to specific legal requirements or to be used as the basis of feedback. The AHRC will only collect introducer forms in the case of drafting feedback and then only with the agreement of the panel.

4.1 Role of Introducers

To assist in this meeting process, three panel members have an 'Introducer' role for each proposal and these are nominated prior to the panel meeting. Each proposal has a Primary Introducer, a Secondary Introducer and a Supporting Introducer. Introducers should lead discussion on the proposal with prepared notes and will have assigned the proposal an initial grade prior to the meeting.

Depending on each role, introducers should lead discussion on the proposal by:
- Primary Introducer - give a brief one to two minute summary of the proposal to aid the panel discussion, followed by comments on the reviews and PI response to the proposal.
- Secondary Introducer - avoid repetition and confine comments on the reviews and PI response to points not already covered, or where there is disagreement with the 1st Introducer.
- Supporting Introducers – only introduce points not already covered by the preceding Introducers.

Prior to the meeting, you will have been given access to the applications being moderated at the meeting via the Peer Review Extranet; these will have accompanying academic reviews and replies received from applicants in response to their reviews ('PI Responses'), as well as any additional information regarding the proposals to be considered.

All proposals should have three academic reviews and a Data Management Plan (except for Research Networking proposals which have no Data Management Plan and only 2 reviews) attached to them, but some may not have the PI response to the reviews. This will be because the PI Response is either still outstanding or has not been received. You will be forwarded any outstanding PI responses as soon as they are available or advised if the PI does not wish to supply a PI response.

4.2 Assigning of roles

From the Peer Review Extranet you can download the introducers' list which sets out your assigned roles for any of the proposals for which you have one of the three introducer roles, along with any additional information regarding the proposals to be considered.

As you will be aware, within a single panel it is not possible to achieve total coverage of the full range of subjects and the wide diversity of applications submitted to the AHRC. Therefore, you may have been assigned some proposals that do not lie within your precise area of subject expertise. The primary activity that moderating panels are being asked to perform is to consider the content of the peer reviews provided; therefore a precise subject expertise is not needed.

You will be required to consider whether an applicant's response provides a convincing rebuttal of any conceptual misunderstandings or factual errors in the peer reviews. In doing this, you should be guided by your experience as both a reviewer and as a researcher.

You are asked to read as many proposals as you can as this greatly aids discussion at the meeting. For the proposals that have been assigned to you as introducer, you **must** read these proposals, the reviews and PI responses and then consider the reviewers' comments and the PI's responses to the reviews. The academic grade descriptors are detailed in Appendices A or B (depending on the scheme). These should be used to assign a grade to the proposals and your notes should contain your rationale for assigning that grade.

4.3 Introducer report form

We recommend you complete an introducer's report form for each proposal for which you have been assigned the role of Introducer. Although the form only act as an aide memoire at the panel meeting (it does not need to be submitted prior to the meeting), it will help structure your comments effectively. You should assign the proposal a grade 6 – 1; please refer to the grade descriptors (see Appendix A/B). If you decide not to use the form, we would encourage you to still follow the structure for your comments.

Before completing the introducer form you should check whether the proposal has an outstanding PI Response and tailor your comments accordingly.

5. Conflicts of interest

It is vital that panel members are seen to be completely impartial at all stages of the review process.

Panel members (including the Chair) should not therefore, take part in the assessment of any proposal where a conflict of interest could be construed. If you think you might have a conflict, as in the examples on the AHRC website, please inform the staff member responsible for your panel at the earliest possible opportunity.

If anyone is in conflict with a proposal, s/he will be required to leave the room whilst the proposal is being discussed. All panellists are permitted to be present for the ranking of all proposals; however, for any proposal where a conflict has been identified, the panel member cannot be present if the application is discussed again in detail. Should discussion need to take place, the panel member who is in conflict with the proposal should leave the room again.

6. Moderating approach

In considering proposals, panellists must ensure that their judgements are based solely on the aims and criteria for the scheme and the information that is provided in the application form, the reviews, and the PI's response to these, where received.

Panel members should not allow private knowledge of the applicant or the proposed research to influence their judgement; panellists are expected to decline invitations to sit on a panel if their private views, knowledge or relations will affect the judgement of applications.

Should panellists appear to be providing their own assessment of an application, rather than moderating the reviews and PI response, the Chair assisted by the AHRC representative will direct the discussion back to moderation.

6.1 Academic reviews

In order to fully understand the quality and content of the reviews you should familiarise yourself with the aims and objectives of the relevant scheme in our Research Funding Guide.

When considering the academic reviewers' comments, you are advised to use a 'compare and contrast' approach to identify consistencies and/or contradictions in the reviews and to note on the Introducer form any significant issues. Points to note in particular are:

- any important issues identified by the reviewers which the PI has failed to address in their PI Response form.
- any discrepancies between reviewers' comments.
- any comments on the general level of resource requested (e.g. when requested resources are considered excessive or inappropriate).
- any specific feedback that may need to be provided to the applicant.
- where the reviewers' comments were of insufficient quality to help in the decision.

You are advised to pay particular attention to the reviewers' comments rather than grades; grades are not always consistent with the comments, especially around the margins of a particular grade, e.g. one reviewer may think of an application as a 'high 4', but another will think of it as a 'low 5'.

All costs that are considered justified as reasonable for the research proposed are allowable and should be accepted. Any observation should therefore be restricted to where the **reviewers** have specifically commented on inappropriate, unjustified or excessive costs and the PI has not satisfactorily responded to these comments. Comments on the justification can only be considered for:
- 'directly incurred' costs.
- the level of investigators' effort (i.e. the time they are spending on the project).
- 'other directly allocated' costs (except charge out costs for departmental technicians and administrative services).

6.2 Data Management Plans

All proposals except Research Networking proposals should have a Data Management Plan (DMP). This should outline the project's approach to managing data. By submitting an application, applicants are confirming their institution has considered and met a number of points listed in the Research Funding Guide.

Reviewers are asked to consider and comment on whether the DMP is appropriate for the research project being proposed and if they would expect to see anything differernt and if overall the data plan seems feasible, sensible, appropriate and valid.

As a panellist you are asked to moderate if these points have been taken into consideration by the reviewers and if any concerns have been addressed by the PI.

6.3 Ranking pre-scores and the collated mark list

One week prior to the panel meeting the AHRC will collect ranking pre-scores from all introducers (Primary, Secondary and Supporting). Introducers should use the Meeting Record provided on the Extranet to list their indicative ranking pre-scores. Once you have listed all your pre-scores on the Meeting Record, please upload it to the Extranet. The AHRC will then produce the collated Meeting Record with all introducers' pre-scores for the Chair to use at the panel meeting. It is important this is completed in good time before the meeting; this enables the Chair to preview scores before the meeting and steer the meeting effectively in terms of time allocated per application.

7. Guidance for UKRI grant assessors (reviewers and board/panel members, etc.)

We are committed to support the recommendations and principles set out by the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA; https://sfdora.org/read/). You should not use journal-based metrics, such as journal impact factors, as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles, to assess an investigator's contributions, or to make funding decisions.

For the purpose of research assessment, please consider the value and impact of all research outputs (including datasets, software, inventions, patents, preprints, other commercial activities, etc.) in addition to research publications. You should consider a broad range of impact measures including qualitative indicators of research impact, such as influence on policy and practice.

The content of a paper is more important than publication metrics, or the identity of the journal, in which it was published, especially for early-stage investigators. Therefore, you should not use journal impact factor (or any hierarchy of journals), conference rankings and metrics such as the H-index or i10-index when assessing UKRI grants.

We encourage you to challenge research assessment practices that rely inappropriately on journal impact factors or conference rankings and promote and teach best practice that focuses on the value and influence of specific research outputs. If you are unsure about DORA, please speak to the panel convener or the panel chair.

8. Proposal grading and ranking

Regardless of whether you are Primary, Secondary or Supporting Introducer or not assigned to a proposal which you have read, it is acceptable to begin to think about a relative 'rank' for proposals which you have graded similarly. This will help you gauge how you think applications might fare against each other when ranking during the panel meeting.

The Panel as a whole will agree an overall grade from 6-1 for each proposal, reached through discussion of the proposals – taking into account the Introducers' initial grades and comments, alongside the comments of the panel as a whole. The overall grade will be used in determining the proposal's relative ranking.

The panel should rank proposals relative to one another as they proceed through the meeting. For most panels panellists should use decimals or high/mid/low when allocating grades if they have a high number of proposals to rank e.g. 5.5 or 5 mid. At the end of the meeting, the panel will review the ranking list before finally agreeing the ranked order. Proposals graded 3, 2 or 1 do not need to be ranked.

AHRC does not use averages or 'weighted grades'; in determining the grade, you need to weigh up all the information that has been provided and make a judgement as to the appropriate grade. The descriptors will be available in the meeting, should you need to refer back to them at any point in the discussion.

All proposals need to be graded but only those graded 4 or above should be ranked. Using a decimal grading system for proposals is an effective and efficient mechanism for the ranking of proposals. Introducers should assign a decimal grade to each proposal with a view to the panel agreeing a final decimal grade. This allows the introducers to indicate the strength of their grading. For example, a good 4 might become a 4.6, a weak 5 a 5.1, and an excellent 6 a 6.8 (this is essentially a more nuanced version of high/medium/low). As the meeting progresses, it is permissible to revisit the earlier decimal places in light of the discussion on other applications. The key thing is to make sure that the grade and its descriptor fit the quality of the proposal i.e. a proposal graded '4' fulfils the

criteria for a grade of 4, and that the panel is content with the ranked order of the proposals.

Importantly, the decimal grading is a mechanism to aid the ranking of proposals and it is only the final agreed grade which will be fed back to the applicant.

Please remember to bring with you to the panel meeting:
- all the applications, reviews and PI responses.
- introducer forms for all proposals where you are Primary, Secondary or Supoprting Introducer, if you have used them.

9. Amendments, conditions and feedback

The panel can make recommendations on individual proposals based on panellists' comments, for the AHRC to take forward, for example:

- Costings: the panel may make adjustments to the costs identified in proposals prior to making awards, if the assessors are clear that the case has not been made for the costs.

- Conditions: the panel can suggest conditions, based on reviewers' comments, for the AHRC to impose on the award. These could either be conditions that need to be met before an award is confirmed OR a requirement that the condition be met during the undertaking of the project. Once the award holder has advised the AHRC that they have met the conditions imposed for the award to be granted, the AHRC will expect the Chair or a designated panel member to advise on whether they are satisfied the conditions have been met.

- Feedback: The panel can decide to provide feedback if the application is likely to be successful and it wishes to highlight some advice from the panel, but where it is not significant enough to be made a condition of the award.

Any feedback for both successful and unsuccessful applications should be agreed in principle by the panel at the meeting, providing either specific text, or a clear set of bullet points, with the final text of the feedback being agreed by the Chair before being communicated back to the applicant.

10. Resubmission Policy

Resubmission of unsuccessful applications is no longer permitted except in very particular circumstances, where the panel may exceptionally decide to invite the applicant to resubmit the proposal.

This will happen only where the panel identifies an application of exceptional potential and can identify specific changes to the application that could significantly enhance its competitiveness. In this case, the panel does not need to agree a grade for the application, but it will need to agree specific feedback – based on the panellists' comments - to be provided to the applicant.

In order for a proposal to be invited for resubmission the panel should satisfy itself that it meets all of the following criteria:

- the core research ideas and approach are original, innovative and exciting and the proposal has outstanding, transformative potential. It has clear potential to secure a grading of 6 if the identified weaknesses can be satisfactorily addressed.

- there should be clear potential for the revised proposal to significantly increase its overall grading and priority for funding.

- the panel should be confident that issues identified in deeming a proposal to be unfundable can be addressed through resubmission and that these are surmountable. This does not necessarily mean that the panel is able to identify how this will be achieved, just that they are confident that it is possible (the PI response may also be taken into account in this context).

- the issues should be of sufficient scale and significance that they could not have been adequately addressed through the PI response or through the use of conditions. Requested changes should be of sufficient scale to require the proposal to go through the full peer review and panel moderation process.

- the panel must be able to provide clear guidance on the key issue or issues which need to be addressed in any resubmission, referring to peer reviewers' comments and PI responses as appropriate.

We would normally expect invited resubmissions to be used in instances where the panel considers the proposed research to be particularly challenging, novel, complex, adventurous or risky and where it may be difficult to get everything right first time, or where the peer review process reveals issues or challenges that might have been difficult for the applicants to have anticipated in preparing the proposal (an example might be a development which has happened since the proposal was submitted in terms of new or recently published research or a change in 'real world' conditions affecting the project).

When invited resubmissions are submitted they will be assessed in the usual way in competition with all other proposals.

Invited resubmissions should not be used:

- where the identified weaknesses relate to under-development, poor presentation or other problems relating to the preparation of the proposal, which could reasonably have been expected to be addressed in submitting a proposal of this kind.

- for proposals where the core ideas, rationale and foundations, aims and focus or overall design of the project need substantial re-working, since such radically revised proposals could be submitted as a significantly re-worked new proposal rather than as a resubmission.

In addition, there are schemes/calls where invited resubmission is not an option due to the particular nature of the scheme/call, i.e. because the call is a one off and there will be no further rounds under which to submit applications. In such cases the panel may wish to consider the possibility of a conditional award (as detailed above), where appropriate.

11. Feedback on AHRC peer review processes

Should the panel have any feedback on the AHRC peer review process and/or documentation, this can be discussed and recorded once all applications have been assigned a final grade and ranked. If

there is not sufficient time to discuss this at the end of the meeting, the chair may collect and collate any comments from panellists via email before forwarding them to an AHRC officer. These will be formally recorded and used by the AHRC to inform the future development of peer review processes.

12. After the panel meeting

After the panel meetings, the final funding decisions will be made by the AHRC on the basis of the ranked list provided and the level of funding available. It is, therefore, vital that panel members do not divulge or discuss panel meeting outcomes with individuals outside the meeting. Maintaining confidentiality is paramount.

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 all such requests to the AHRC.

You will be asked to leave any hard copies of the documents at the panel meeting but, following the meeting, you must delete all e-copies that you have created.

12.1 Panel outcomes

Panellists can find the final funding decisions in relation to their panel on the AHRC web site.

12.2 Scheme guidance

Please refer to the Research Funding Guide for guidance about the AHRC schemes.

Appendix A. Research Grants Scheme grading scale

Score	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

Research Grants Scheme guidance

Please refer to the Research Funding Guide, sections 1.1-1.2.4 for guidance about the Research Grants Scheme.

Appendix B. Leadership Fellows Scheme Grading Scale

Grade	Description	Definition

6	**Exceptional** Should be funded as a matter of the very highest priority	An outstanding proposal that is world-leading in all of the following: scholarship, originality, quality and significance. It fully meets all the assessment criteria for the scheme and excels in many or all of these. It provides full and consistent evidence and justification for the proposal and management arrangements are clear and convincing. A convincing case is made that the proposed Fellowship has outstanding leadership and transformational potential, commensurate with the applicant's career stage. **A proposal will only be scored at this level if both the research and leadership elements of the proposal are considered to be at this level.**
5	**Excellent** Should be funded as a matter of priority	A proposal that is internationally excellent in all of the following: scholarship, originality, quality and significance. It fully meets or surpasses all the assessment criteria for the scheme. It provides full and consistent evidence and justification for the proposal, demonstrates strong institutional support and management arrangements are clear and convincing. A convincing case is made that the proposed Fellowship has excellent leadership and transformational potential, commensurate with the applicant's career stage. **A proposal will only be scored at this level if both the research and leadership elements of the proposal are considered to be at this level.**
4	**Very Good** Worthy of consideration for funding	A very good proposal demonstrating high international standards of scholarship, originality, quality and significance. It meets all the assessment criteria for the scheme. It provides good evidence and justification for the proposal and management arrangements are clear and sound. A convincing case is made that the proposed Fellowship has leadership and transformational potential, commensurate with the applicant's career stage. **A proposal will only be scored at this level if both the research and leadership elements of the proposal are considered to be at this level.**
3	**Satisfactory** In a competitive context, the proposal is not considered of sufficient priority	A satisfactory proposal in terms of the overall standard of scholarship and quality, but which is not internationally competitive and/or does not make a fully convincing case that the proposed Fellowship has significant leadership and/or transformational potential, commensurate with the applicant's career stage and/or which is more limited in terms of originality/innovation, significance and/or its contribution to the research field.

	to recommend for funding	It satisfies at least minimum requirements in relation to the assessment criteria for the scheme, provides reasonable evidence and justification for the proposal and management arrangements are adequate overall.
2	**Not Competitive** Not recommended for funding	A proposal of inconsistent quality which has some strengths, innovative ideas and/or good components or dimensions, but also has significant weaknesses or flaws in one or more of the following: conceptualisation, design, methodology, management, leadership and transformational potential, collaborative activities and/or institutional support. As a result of the flaws or weaknesses identified, the proposal is not considered to be of fundable quality. A proposal would also be graded 2 if it does not meet all the assessment criteria for the scheme.
1	**Unfundable** Not suitable for funding	A proposal which falls into one or more of the following categories: - has unsatisfactory levels of originality, quality and/or significance - falls significantly short of meeting the assessment criteria for the scheme - contains insufficient evidence and justification for the proposal - displays limited potential to advance the field of research - potential outcomes or outputs that do not merit the levels of funding sought - is unconvincing in terms of its management arrangements or capacity to deliver the proposed activities. - displays inadequate institutional support - does not make a convincing case that the proposed Fellowship has leadership and transformational potential commensurate with the applicant's career stage - contains insufficient proposals for relevant collaborative activities

Leadership Fellows Scheme guidance

Please refer to the Research Funding Guide Leadership Fellows Scheme for guidance about the Leadership Fellows Scheme.