



New Investigator Grant Scheme Guidance notes for non-academic reviewers

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Introduction

These notes provide guidance on the process for reviewing proposals received under our new investigator grant scheme. New Investigator grants are a stream of our Research Grant scheme specifically aimed at supporting early career researchers who are aiming to transition to being an independent researcher.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Before you begin your assessments, please read the specification for this call and familiarise yourself with its aims and objectives. The call specification can be found here:

<https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ESRC-040121-Funding-Opp-NewInvestigatorGrants-CallSpecification.pdf>

This scheme is specifically aimed at supporting early career researchers and as such we would suggest that you review the applicant’s statement of eligibility before proceeding with your assessment.

Aims and objectives

This scheme aims to support new researchers and academics at the start of their careers to become independent researchers through gaining experience of managing and leading research projects and teams. In addition, they will provide applicants with an opportunity not only to support their own skill development but also the skill development of research staff employed on the grant.

Successful proposals must include:

- A well-defined high-quality research project with strong plans for maximising potential impact.
- A clear articulation of how receipt of a new investigator grant will have a demonstrable benefit to the applicant’s research career in terms of establishing independence.

- A clear explanation of why they should be considered an early career researcher and a skill development programme that will support their further development.

When reviewing a proposal you need to consider the extent to which it has addressed the aims of the call.

Inter/multidisciplinary working is strongly encouraged in this scheme, although proposals must demonstrate that at least 50 per cent of the proposed programme of research is within ESRC remit.

Eligibility

In recognition of the increasing diversity of career trajectories, we no longer provide a timebound definition of early career researcher but all applicants must justify why they should be considered as such in their application. We have adopted this approach in order to support our ambition to be inclusive of people with different career paths and trajectories.

This recognises that applicants experience different career paths for a variety of reasons, from personal circumstances to disciplinary differences, as well as being employed in posts that preclude them from undertaking research, to support those who are moving between disciplines or those who are returning to a career in academia.

The onus is now on applicants to articulate why they should be considered an early career researcher and you should consider this justification when undertaking your review. Where the justification is unconvincing, this should be reflected in your overall score.

Procedure

The New Investigator grant scheme is administered alongside our research grant scheme and through our Grant Assessment Panels (GAPs).

Every proposal is being sent to a minimum of three reviewers for expert comment. Please note that comments may also be sought from non-academic reviewers. Reviewers are predominantly chosen from the ESRC Peer Review College and the applicants themselves can also nominate reviewers from which we approach one of the academic and non-academic nominees (if applicable).

We do realise that everyone we approach is already very busy but a timely response from reviewers is crucial. If insufficient reviews are received by the due date we have to approach additional reviewers. Therefore, if you feel that you would like to comment but cannot meet the requested deadline, please contact us as soon as possible to see whether it is feasible to extend the deadline.

If you are **unable** to review the application, please **decline the Je-S invite as soon as possible** to enable the office to select an alternative reviewer. If you feel you are unable to help us in this instance any recommendations you may have for alternative expert reviewers would be greatly appreciated.

Peer Review form on Je-S

You have been invited to undertake this peer review through the UKRI Joint Electronic Submissions System (Je-S). You will be asked to complete a brief section on your knowledge of the applicant, a self-assessment section, and to allocate a grade on a number of categories, as outlined on page 5 of this document. You will then be asked to allocate an overall grade for the proposal and provide comments in support of this grade. Please ensure that your overall grade reflects your written comments.

The decision-making process

Proposals where the average reviewer grading is below a minimum threshold are normally rejected without referral to the Panel. Therefore reviewers' grades and comments are **vital** to the assessment process. Proposals that receive supportive reviews will be forwarded to the Panel for consideration together with the reviewer comments, grades and the applicant's response to them.

Assessment criteria

Detailed below are the grading and assessment criteria to be used when reviewing the proposals. In addition, reviewers should note the following:

- Reviewers should not assess proposals with which they have a conflict of interest with the applicant, the mentor, or Research Organisation (you should not assess proposals from your own institution). Please notify the office if you have been allocated a proposal with which you have a conflict of interest.
- As a reviewer, you are not allowed to disclose to outsiders any information concerning application documents or evaluations, nor are you allowed to use this confidential information to your own benefit or anyone else's benefit or disadvantage. In addition, you may not reveal to outsiders that you are assessing the research plans of particular researchers. Once the evaluation has been completed, you are required to destroy all application documents and any copies made of them. Confidentiality must also be maintained after the evaluation process has been completed.
- You should bear in mind that this is a scheme aimed at supporting early career researchers and your assessments should take this into consideration. You should judge New Investigator proposals on the level of knowledge and experience that is appropriate to someone at the early stages of their career and not judge the proposals against more ambitious research undertaken by more senior academics.

Proposals should be assessed against the following criteria:

- Originality, potential contribution to knowledge ie research excellence, including the academic potential of the applicant
- Research design and methods, including the appropriateness of collaborations, also including but not limited to multi-disciplinary/international links
- Value for money
- Outputs, dissemination and impact

- The applicant’s justification for being an early career researcher, the appropriateness of their programme of skill development and demonstration of commitment of the proposed mentor(s)

Overall grading

You are invited to indicate your overall judgement of the research proposal using the following scale:

- **High** - Research of high importance to users of research and fit to the aims of the scheme (ie of such novelty or timeliness and promise that a significant contribution to policy or practice is likely).
- **Worthy** - Research that will add to understanding and is worthy of support but which may not be of such relevance or urgency as to have a significant influence on policy or practice and fit to the aims of the scheme.
- **Reject** - Research which is flawed in its proposed contribution to policy or practice or is repetitious of other work or the applicant’s justification as an early career researcher is unconvincing.

Scientific merit

If you feel confident in judging the scientific merits of the proposal, please provide a grade according to the following definitions. If you feel that you are unable to assess the scientific merit of the proposal then please select the ‘Unable to assess’ grading option. The form will not validate unless you select one of the options.

Score	Description
6	The proposal is outstanding in terms of its potential scientific merit, the applicant has made a convincing case as to why they should be considered an early career researcher, and shown how this project will support their transition to being an independent researcher.
5	The proposal is excellent in terms of its potential scientific merit, the applicant has made a convincing case as to why they should be considered an early career researcher, and shown how this project will support their transition to being an independent researcher.
4	The proposal is important as it has considerable potential merit, the applicant has made a convincing case as to why they should be considered an early career researcher, and shown how this project will support their transition to being an independent researcher but should not be considered a priority for this scheme.
3	The proposal has significant potential scientific merit but is not of a consistently high quality. The applicant has made a convincing case as to why they should be considered an early career researcher and shown how this project will support their transition to being an independent researcher but should not be considered a priority for this scheme.
2	The proposal will add to understanding and is worthy of support, 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 applicant’s career.
1	The proposal is flawed in its scientific approach.

0 The applicant's justification as an early career researcher is **unconvincing**.

Please note, in instances where the scientific merit of the application is high but the applicant has not provided a convincing justification as to why they should be considered an early career researcher a score of reject/0 should be allocated and your comments justify why you consider this to be the case.

Comments

Please ensure that your comments address all of the criteria identified above. Whilst we don't stipulate the length of the comments you provide, these should provide sufficient detail to support and justify the grade you have given and will be used as feedback to applicants.