



## UKRI Future Leaders Fellowships - PI Response Guidance

### Overview

The Future Leaders Fellowships (FLF) scheme allows for Principle Investigators (PIs) (the prospective fellow) to respond to Peer Reviewers' comments prior to their application's consideration and ranking by sift panels. Panel members do not introduce additional information at panels and do not re-review proposals. To score and rank proposals, panel members moderate and judge the peer reviewers' comments alongside the response from the PI.

Panel members will consider how well applicants have addressed any concerns raised by the reviewers and will consider any additional evidence provided within the response.

Applicants can decide not to respond to reviewers' comments, although this is not advised. A well thought-through PI response can clarify reviewer misunderstandings, provide the applicant a chance to respond and to dispute specific evidence points, or provide additional supporting information for the application. Even if your review scores are low it is worth submitting a response as this may persuade the sift panel to progress the application to interview. If you do not wish to provide a PI Response then you will be able to select this option within Je-S.

All responses are submitted in confidence to the panel and are not seen by those who provided the original reviews. The FLF is a UK Research and Innovate scheme that is hosted by the Medical Research Council (MRC) for system purposes and so peer review forms include MRC branding. Should a reviewer refer to the FLF as an MRC scheme, please disregard this comment.

### Document Guidelines

The PI Response must be attached in Je-S as a separate document (Word or PDF). It must:

- Be written in standard Arial font, 11 point
- Not exceed a maximum of 3 sides of A4 (irrespective of the number of reviews received)
- Have page margins that are at least 2cm
- Have a file name that is 140 characters or less
- Have a file size less than 5MB
- Not have any website links
- Cover ALL reviews received and mention the unique Reviewer Reference for each review.

Applicants can provide relevant information in the form of diagrams or mathematical symbols as necessary. This should be done in moderation as symbols, diagrams or high resolution images may increase the attachment file size above the allowed limit.

Applicants will have 10 working days to respond to reviews. If this deadline cannot be achieved, please contact the FLF team as soon as possible at [fellows@ukri.org](mailto:fellows@ukri.org). The latest possible date by which the PI response will be issued will be published for each round on the [FLF website](#). Requests for PI Responses will start being issued when proposals have received sufficient reviews, and this could be several weeks before this date.

In rare cases, an additional review might be received after the response has been completed and returned, and applicants may be asked to amend the submitted response to address this additional review. A subsequent response to any additional reviews will replace the original response and therefore must still address all earlier reviews, whilst keeping within the 3 sides of A4 limit. The original response will need to be removed from Je-S and the amended version uploaded in its place.

The decision on whether to respond or not by the applicant will not be recognised by the FLF Team until the PI response document or the decision not to respond is successfully submitted in the usual way, using the standard 'Submit Document' functionality within the Je-S System. The FLF Team would therefore like to emphasise the importance regarding the timely submission of the electronic response document regardless of the applicants desire to respond or not.

UKRI has signed up to the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment \(DORA\)](#); a key message of which is that the content of a paper is more important than the publication metrics or the identity of the journal in which it was published. Where a review contravenes this (for example, describes journals in terms of quality/impact and/or names specific journals) you can disregard these comments and do not need to address them in your response. The panel will be asked to disregard these comments as well.

Please contact Je-S Helpdesk should you require assistance with this or any other Je-S System related matter.

Tel: 01793 444164

E-mail: [JeSHelp@je-s.ukri.org](mailto:JeSHelp@je-s.ukri.org)

If you have any concerns that a review you have received may be conflicted or biased, please contact the FLF Team at [fellows@ukri.org](mailto:fellows@ukri.org)

## Response Guidance

A good PI Response can reassure the panel that you can achieve the aims set out in your proposal, answer questions or concerns raised by reviewers and significantly boost your chances of progressing to Interview. Applicants are free to respond to reviewers in any way they wish; however, when writing your response, we would recommend considering the below points:

- **Be concise.** Focus on answering questions and addressing issues. It's fine to refer to sections of your proposal that you feel already address the reviewers' concerns, but do not duplicate sections. Similarly, try not to repeat reviewer comments. The panel will have access to your proposal and reviews when assessing your response, so repeating parts of either verbatim will just use up space.

- **Be clear.** Use Reviewer References to avoid any ambiguity. Where possible, address points raised by multiple reviewers in one section using clear headings, rather than addressing the reviewers' comments individually. If reviewers are making the same points, it might be better to try explaining that section differently but avoid re-writing your application.
- **Be relevant.** Aim to be specific in your comments and avoid making blanket statements. You can use figures and references to publications to add weight to your argument but try to use them only when they are genuinely helpful. Avoid referring to positive reviews or comments to try to offset negative ones- use evidence-based statements to address concerns.
- **Be objective.** If you feel you might be getting defensive, take a break and re-read the review later, when you can assess it objectively. Use examples to back up your claims. If you have new data that will allow you to respond to a comment, include it in your response. If the data is published, provide a reference for it.
- **Be resourceful.** Where possible, consult your Co-I, mentor, your research office/manager or a colleague familiar with your work and discuss the comments with them. They may be able to provide a different perspective. Unfortunately, the FLF Team can provide technical advice on writing your response, but they are unable to provide advice on how to address a specific comment.
- **Be positive.** Be open to feedback, even if you disagree with it and acknowledge the reviewer's efforts. Don't be discouraged by low scoring reviews. Review scores can differ greatly between individual reviewers, so the panel will focus instead on the actual comments made. A good response will positively influence the panel's decision.
- **Don't be aggressive.** An aggressive response might appear arrogant and that the reviewers' concerns have not been properly considered. Don't dismiss a reviewer's comment as irrelevant or wrong. Instead, address the issues raised concisely and with a calm, measured and neutral tone, providing an explanation to reassure the panel that you've considered their comments and have clear and cogent arguments to address them.
- **Use the space.** This document is three pages to get across to the panel why you should be funded, and is often the last document the panel will read as part of your proposal. Use the opportunity to bring in additional evidence and positives about your work. If you have addressed the concerns of all reviewers in less space, give the panel even more evidence of the quality of your proposal.
- **Keep to the guidelines.** If your response does not meet the guidelines, the FLF Team will return it to you to amend. Requests for additional space to write your response will be rejected, regardless of the number of reviews you must respond to. The panel will be aware that you have limited space to address concerns.