

STFC - ASTRONOMY GRANTS PANEL (AGP)

EQUALITY AND INCLUSION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

1. Policy / activity being assessed	Astronomy Small Awards – is a highly competitive funding mechanism available to support the Astronomy research community, looking to fund all aspects of Astronomy, Astrophysics and aspects of solar system and planetary studies
2. Summary of aims and objectives of the policy / activity	<p>The aim of the scheme is to advance excellent science within Astronomy Observation (AO), Astronomy Theory (AT), Solar Studies (SS) and Planetary Science (PL). It does this by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that the programme supported is scientifically excellent and is clearly in line with stated Council strategic science objectives; • Considering the strategic objectives of the UK Space Agency, addressing the impact agenda and being responsive to changes and new ideas; • Ensuring that the process is transparent and accountable, particularly with respect to the means of prioritisation; • Ensuring that the outcome, where appropriate, takes account of the Council’s and the UK Space Agency’s current and planned investment in facilities; • Ensuring that there is an appropriate balance between observations, instrumentation and theory and between the various sub-disciplines of astronomy and the development of novel, generic technologies for astronomy and space science, consistent with the overall strategy of Council and the UK Space Agency. • Ensuring that awards follow the standard RCUK Terms & Conditions, research grant proposals can be submitted annually for assessment by the AGP, which comprises of four sub panels, AO, AT, SS, PL. Two sets of sub panels meet annually (AO/AT and SS/PL) followed by a merging meeting. Panel members use their own knowledge and experience to select suitable reviewers, evaluate the proposal, reviewer’s comments and PI response against set assessment criteria. Following which each project is ranked and resources recommended and presented to STFC - Science Board and UKSA – Science Programme Advisory Committee for approval.
3. What involvement and consultation has been done in relation to this policy?	STFC is dedicated to ensuring that the process is open and inclusive. Those engaged in the process endeavour to conduct each stage in a fair manner, without prejudice or bias, In line with this we follow the Nolan Principles. Additionally, comments and suggestions received as part of the peer review survey are implemented where possible to improve the process.

Specific to Small Awards - Small awards were introduced in 2023 after a review and community consultation of the Consolidated Grant process which took place in 2022. . As a result a number of significant changes have been implemented which are likely to improve E&D, for example removing the restriction of one proposal per per group/organisation every three years has resulted in

- Applicants permitted to submit individual proposals, thus recognising PI roles
- Providing more flexibility for when Applicants can apply, so mitigating against paternity, maternity sick leave etc

The full scheme will be phased in over a 3 year period to help mitigate the possibility of unmanageable submission numbers

For Applicants:

- The call is advertised widely to reach the largest possible audience
- The call text and guidance provides detailed guidelines to Applicants about the process and links to the Research Grants Handbook, which has clear eligibility and assessment criteria
- STFC will make available hard copies of documents when necessary to do so
- The UKRI / STFC website conforms to accessibility requirements for websites
- STFC will support Applicants throughout the process, from pre-submission right through to informing them of the outcome.

For Reviewers:

- A wide range of reviewers are approached, and usage and spread is monitored each round
- Reviewers are pre-approached via email where the process is explained and availability checked prior to formal request for comments via JeS
- Written guidance is available and reviewed annually
- STFC will provide all reasonable support to our reviewers in order to ensure they understand the aims, objectives, and processes of the Small Award calls.

For Panel Members:

- Pre-meeting discussions take place, STFC - AGP staff will work closely with the Panel Chairs to agree approaches that are designed to minimise opportunities for bias and improve transparency of the decision making process

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone involved in the decision-making process is aware of Unconscious Bias and encouraged to undertake training. It is planned that going forward such training will be mandatory • STFC endeavour to achieve the minimum 30% female participation (this round we achieved 43% female panel membership) • STFC enable participation for people with alternative work patterns, including reduced working hours • Panel members are asked to inform STFC if they have any additional needs to enable attendance or participation • STFC will schedule appropriate breaks and provide refreshments for Panel members <p>For STFC Staff:</p> <p>All STFC staff involved in the process will be made aware of unconscious bias to raise awareness of conditions that may impact upon decision making</p> <p>Venue arrangements when required will be selected for ease of accessibility; will not conflict with different cultures, religions or beliefs; and will offer a full range of sensory accessibility relating to visual and hearing impairments.</p> <p>Catering will be arranged with clear labelling and be appropriate to those who have specific cultural, religious, health or disability needs</p>
4. Who is affected by the policy?	Applicants and everyone involved in the peer review process. i.e STFC staff, Reviewers, Panel members
5. Arrangements for monitoring and reviewing actual impact of the policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STFC will review this equality impact assessment annually to identify any actions or interventions that are required to improve diversity and inclusion. • STFC monitors and analysis data to better understand the diversity of its Community • STFC hold an annual nominations exercise for Panel membership and when published provides guidance on diversity targets • Panel membership for each meeting is published on the website • STFC - AGP monitors, analyses and publishes data to better understand the gender balance within the Astronomy Community at Applicant level. The data collected indicates a higher proportion of Male Applicants submitting proposals, but with a slightly

higher percentage success rate for Female Applicants. In 2022 - of the Applications received 79% were Male and 21% Female. With the Applicant success rate being 48% Male and 49% Female

Group	Potential for positive or negative impact?	Examples of any evidence/data used	Action to address negative impact (e.g. adjustment to the policy)
Disability	Yes – negative impact	<p>Applicants and/or reviewers with visual disabilities or impairments may find it difficult to access and review electronic documentation.</p> <p>Applicants or panel members with mobility disabilities may face difficulties in attending the panel meetings.</p> <p>Panel members with hearing difficulties may find it hard to engage in discussions.</p> <p>Attendees with neuro-disabilities may experience difficulties with concentration during panel assessments.</p>	<p>STFC will take all reasonable steps to make adjustments to the assessment process in order to enable participation. As examples, this may include the use of video conferencing or equivalent tools, tailored timing of the meeting schedule, or provision of specific facilities to enable an applicant or panel member to be comfortable in the meeting environment.</p> <p>STFC will ensure the meeting venue is compatible with the use of hearing aid loops and will work with individuals to understand what other help can be provided.</p> <p>STFC will select a room that is light and airy, ensure that plenty of breaks are built in to the agenda and ensure that colours chosen don't trigger migraines, different colours may assist in this if personnel don't bring their own laptops.</p> <p>STFC will ensure the meeting venue is compatible with the use of hearing aid loops and will work with individuals to understand what other help can be provided.</p> <p>STFC consult with all Panel members to understand any specific requirements for participation and will accommodate where required.</p> <p>Panel meetings may be held either face to face or via videoconferencing facilities such as Zoom (the UKRI Primary VC choice). STFC will take all reasonable steps to make adjustments to enable participation in virtual meetings. This can include, for example, use of screen readers, closed</p>

			captioning, automatic transcripts and keyboard accessibility. More frequent breaks will be scheduled in virtual meetings. Electronic information is accessible and STFC will investigate the ability for the potential use of screen readers for personnel who are visually impaired. For virtual meetings, Zoom follows the latest accessibility standards to ensure it is fully accessible for the latest screen readers. Where other VC programmes are to be used, we will ensure this is also the case. STFC will respond to individual support needs on a case by case basis.
Gender reassignment		Information regarding gender reassignment is not made available throughout the peer review process. However, this may become apparent during the meeting stage or it may be possible that panel members already know this information or could endeavour to seek it out.	Panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting. STFC staff presence during interview acts as an additional assurance to ensure unbiased peer review
Marriage or civil partnership	Yes – negative impact	Bias may be voiced in relation to new partners starting a family therefore not given as a high a priority	Panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting. STFC staff presence during meetings acts as an additional assurance to ensure unbiased peer review.
Pregnancy, Maternity, Paternity, Nursing mothers, Caring responsibilities?	Yes – negative impact	Panel members who are pregnant or on maternity/paternity may find it difficult to access the venue and /or participate in meetings.	Panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting. STFC staff presence during meetings acts as an additional assurance to ensure unbiased peer review.

		<p>Nursing mothers may need additional support in terms of suitable accommodation or childcare</p> <p>Panel members may face additional childcare costs if having to work outside of their normal hours.</p>	<p>For virtual meetings STFC will make all reasonable efforts to ensure the timing of the meeting is convenient for everyone. STFC consult with all Panel members to understand and cater for their requirements for participation. As a general principle, venues are easily accessible to main rail links.</p> <p>Meetings are timetabled to allow for adequate breaks.</p> <p>Ensure suitable accommodation provided for nursing mothers and additional childcare.</p> <p>STFC will reimburse additional childcare costs, above any beyond that required during normal working hours.</p>
Race	Yes – negative impact	Information regarding race is not made available throughout the peer review process. However, this may become apparent during the meeting stage or it may be possible that panel members already know this information or could endeavour to seek it out.	Panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting. STFC staff presence during meetings acts as an additional assurance to ensure unbiased peer review.
Religion or belief	Yes – negative impact	Panel members may be unable to participate in meetings due to religious observances	Panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting. STFC staff presence during meetings acts as an additional assurance to ensure unbiased peer review.

		Panel members or attendees may have specific dietary requirements due to religious belief.	STFC consult with all Panel members to understand and cater for their requirements for participation. Ensure the venue caters for all dietary requirements.
Sexual orientation	Yes – negative impact	Information regarding sexual orientation is not made available throughout the peer review process. However, this may become apparent during the meeting stage or it may be possible that panel members already know this information or could endeavour to seek it out.	Panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting. STFC staff presence during meetings acts as an additional assurance to ensure unbiased peer review.
Sex (gender)	Yes – negative impact	Panel members, reviewers may criticise track record, publication history which could be as a result of extended maternity, paternity leave. Negative perceptions of an applicant's gender may be expressed by a peer reviewer or a panel member.	STFC are committed to ensuring that Panel Chairs are briefed on how to handle such situations. Panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting. STFC staff presence during meetings acts as an additional assurance to ensure unbiased peer review.
Age	Yes – negative impact	Panel members, reviewers may cite age in terms of lack of experience or in terms of near retirement	Panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may

			<p>lead to unconscious bias during each meeting. STFC staff presence during meetings acts as an additional assurance to ensure unbiased peer review.</p> <p>The Assessment criteria for Small Awards are not linked to age</p>
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