Future Leaders Fellowships – Round 7 Interview guidance

Contents

FLF Round 7 Interviews, September 2023

1. Introduction

The Future Leaders Fellowships (FLF) interviews are the final assessment stage for the FLF awards. At the end of the interview stage, there will be ranked and recommended lists of applications for funding.

The approach taken to FLF panels is likely to be different from other UKRI interview panels you may have experienced previously. Differences include but are not limited to the structure and length of the interviews, number of interviews per day/meeting, size of panels, set questions, reflection time, and assessment criteria and scoring practice.

Due to the scale of the funding scheme and the remit spanning all UKRI disciplines, communities, sectors and applications are assessed over multiple panels. It is vitally important that we maintain consistency across these panels, and that our panel member community adhere to the process and guidance. This will ensure consistency of experience and fair assessment for candidates.

This guidance aims to cover information relevant to all panel members with specific notes relevant to particular roles in Appendices 10, 11 and 12. We also ask that all panel members also read the document "*UKRI Additional Panel Guidance – Safeguarding Peer Review*". Please access via the [Extranet site.](#)

Round 7 has around 190 candidates being invited to attend an interview. Nineteen interview panels are taking place over 4 days in the week commencing 11th September 2023.

Panels One to Eight, Ten, Eleven and Thirteen will take place on Monday 11 and Tuesday 12 September and Panels Nine, Twelve and Fourteen to Nineteen will take place on Wednesday 13 and Thursday 15 September between 09.30 -17.30.

Panel Members and UKRI staff are expected to attend for the full duration of the panel, all in attendance are noted in the panel membership list available on the extranet.

An outline schedule is provided in Appendix 1.

2. Background

The UK Research and Innovation Future Leaders Fellowships (FLF) will grow the strong supply of talented individuals needed to ensure that UK research and innovation continues to be world class. The scheme is open to businesses, as well as universities and other research and user environments (including Research Councils' institutes and laboratories). The scheme is open to the best researchers and innovators from around the world ensuring the UK continues to attract the most exceptional talent.

The FLF provides up to seven years of funding for early-career researchers and innovators, including support for part-time awards and career breaks, providing researchers with the flexibility to tackle ambitious and challenging research questions. We are now in the seventh funding round, with an eighth funding round in progress. We are yet to receive confirmation for future rounds of the FLF scheme and we are waiting on UKRI budget allocations.

There are, of course, many funding routes open to researchers and Innovators at these career stages. **In allocating funding from this scheme, it is important to focus on the people**

whose work and careers will benefit most from the scale, duration, and flexibility offered by the FLF Scheme.

The fellowships are designed to be in partnership with a hosting institution, with significant host support expected to enable the fellow to transition to or establish their research/innovation independence in any area supported by UKRI. It is expected the fellowship proposals will include time for the candidate to improve their skills and to work on their professional development, to ensure they realise their potential over the course of their fellowship.

At a scheme level the FLF objectives are:

• To develop, retain, attract and sustain research and innovation talent in the UK.
• To foster new research and innovation career paths including those at the academic/business and interdisciplinary boundaries, and to facilitate the movement of people between sectors.
• To provide sustained funding and resources for the best early-career researchers and innovators.
• To provide long-term, flexible funding to tackle difficult and novel challenges, and support adventurous, ambitious programmes.

These fellowships support candidates from diverse career paths, including those returning from a career break or following time in other roles. We also encourage applications from those wishing to work part time to enable the Fellowship to be combined with personal responsibilities. Panels will take into consideration time spent outside an active research or innovation environment, whether through career breaks, flexible working or as a consequence of working in other roles.

Further information about this scheme is available in the 'UKRI FLF call document', hosted on the Extranet site.

3. Interview panels

3.1. Panel structure and format

Nineteen panels will interview around 190 candidates over 4 days (with an additional panel taking place later in September to support those candidates that cannot attend due to personal circumstances). Each panel will interview up to 11 candidates. Panels are tailored to broad areas of research/innovation to ensure each candidate is interviewed by a panel with breadth and depth of expertise.

Each panel will last for two days. On 11 and 12 September we have 10 panels running concurrently, and on 13 and 14 September we have 9 panels running concurrently; this has been organised around candidate and panel member availability.

A total of 50 minutes is allotted per candidate (including interview and pre/follow up discussions. However, this may vary where candidates require more time for reasonable adjustments and so you should refer to your panel agenda for exact timings. Please see section 3.3 for the template interview schedule.

Interviews are taking place via Zoom; further details are provided on the Extranet. Please note it is essential that members set their screen name to 'Forename Surname, Institution' so that candidates can see clearly who is on their interview panel.

3.2. Roles at the panel

Most panels are made up of five to six members plus the Chair. All members will act as Introducing Members (IMs) for specific proposals, with a Deputy Chair standing in where the Chair has a

conflict of interest. UKRI staff and additional external to UKRI staff have roles in supporting the panel and wider panel processes. An overview of the panel roles are provided below.

Role	Responsibilities
Panel Chair	Facilitate the fair and evidence-based assessment of applications and safeguard the decision making of the panel.
Introducing Member 1 (IM1) – Programme of Work	Lead questions regarding the proposed programme of work. IM1 will have the most relevant expertise in the candidate's proposed research/innovation project and will be responsible for questions regarding this to ensure points raised at the Sift Panel meeting are addressed. Specific questions from Sift are provided to IMs on the Panel Agenda document on the Extranet
Introducing Member 2 IM2) – Leadership & Impact	Lead questions regarding research and innovation leadership, wider leadership, and how the candidate will develop their leadership potential, and the impact of their project.
Introducing Member 3 (IM3) – Candidate Development & Fellowship Management	Lead questions regarding how the Fellowship will support career development, and how the Fellow will support the development of others in their group/field/sector.
Deputy Chair	Stand in where Chair has a conflict of interest.
UKRI Convener	Primary UKRI Point of Contact during the panel.
UKRI Assistant Convener	Support UKRI Convenor and provides technical support. Will manage panel members moving in and out of the rooms due to conflicts of interest.
Roving Panel Members & UKRI Observers	Observe and move between panels at break points to ensure consistency across panels.

Assistant Conveners, Rovers and Observers will have their cameras switched off throughout the interview panels.

For each interview, four members will act as the candidate's primary interview panel; the Chair and the three IMs, who will each have an area of focus for their questions from a standard set to ensure consistency across interviews and panels. IMs are asked to consider how the candidate's responses relate to the published assessment criteria; please see grid in Appendix 2B.

Please note, given the spread of proposals, panel members may be playing a more generalist or a specialist role depending on subject area(s). The panels are 'moderating panels', and are cross disciplinary and cross-sectoral, to reflect the interdisciplinary nature and open remit of the scheme. _IM1 will have the closest expertise to the research/innovation proposed and will therefore lead on specialist questions._

3.3. Interview schedule, assessment criteria and scoring

There will be up to 11 interviews per Panel. The interview schedule will be confirmed in the panel agenda. Please note that the interview schedule may be extended slightly for candidates requiring adjustments. **Refer to specific panel agenda for accurate timings**.

Chair's introduction
On day one this will take place between 09.30-10.00 and will include:
- Ensuring that panel members add their full name and organisation to their screen name on the Zoom meeting. The Assistant Convener will share housekeeping slides for this.
- Emphasising the importance of following the wording of the standard set of interview questions, to ensure consistency and fairness for all candidates. If the candidate is struggling with the set wording, only then may the question be rephrased.
- Ensuring that the panel use plain English wherever possible and do not use idioms when interviewing candidates. This is to help inclusivity, recognising that English may not be the first language of the candidate.
- Encouraging thanking the candidate and moving on when each question has been satisfactorily answered.
- Reminding the panel of the importance of making the candidate feel welcome and use positive body language consistently to create a supportive atmosphere.
- Explaining that there will be internal (to UKRI) and external Roving Panel Members ("Rovers") who are there to observe the process and that neither will interject in the interview process.

On day two, the Chairs introduction is shortened to 09.30-09.45

Conflicts of Interest
Institutional conflicts of interest have been avoided when assigning Introducing Members (IMs) to proposals but may occasionally arise. Any conflicts that UKRI have been made aware of will be highlighted by the UKRI Convener and affected panel members will be placed in a 'waiting room' for the duration of the interview by the Assistant Convener. Discussions should not commence until all conflicted members have been placed in the waiting room.

Panel Members have been asked to complete a declaration of Interest form; however, Panel Members must highlight any additional conflicts on the day if necessary. If a conflict affects an Introducing Member, the Chair will reallocate the IM role.

The interview format is as follows:

Panel activity	Time allocated
Closed panel discussion	5 minutes
Candidate welcome and presentation	7 minutes
IM1 interview questions	7 minutes
IM2 interview questions	7 minutes
IM3 interview questions	7 minutes
Any last questions and wrap up	2 minutes
Reflection time	2 minutes
Discussion and scoring	10 minutes
Buffer and break	3 minutes

<u>Closed panel discussion (5 minutes):</u> Chair to detail application for discussion and with support from Convenor and Assistant Convenor to ensure that the required panel members are present i.e. Rovers and any panel members with conflicts in the waiting room before discussion.

Chair to lead overall discussion with input from IMs, identifying key themes and confirming any questions to be asked in addition to the standard questions asked of all candidates. *It is not required to discuss the area or research/innovation, strengths or weakness in this 5-minute discussion as this will be discussed later in the interview.*

<u>Candidate welcome and presentation (2 + 5 minutes):</u> Chair to lead welcome and introductions, and candidate 'settling'. The candidate will then be asked to give a five-minute presentation entitled: *"The vision for my Future Leaders Fellowship"*. The use of slides is at the candidate's discretion and the candidate is responsible for screen sharing. UKRI staff will time the presentation. Candidates have been instructed this should cover research/innovation goals and how they will use the fellowship to establish themselves as a leader.

<u>Interview questions (7+7+7+2 minutes):</u> Each IM will be allocated 7 minutes for questioning. After these three blocks of IM questions, there will be 2 minutes for additional questions from the panel or candidate. *See Appendix 2A for details of the interview questions and additional guidance.*

<u>Reflection time (2 minutes):</u> Before discussions, there are 2 minutes' silent reflection time where members can consider their score based on the presentation, interview performance, and application, using the assessment and scoring criteria provided in Appendix 3 and 4.

Members are also asked to write down key bullet points to be used to supplement feedback to the candidate. The FLF office will be in contact after the meeting if these notes are needed to supplement the notes captured by the convener.

<u>Discussion and scoring (10 minutes):</u> Panel members are reminded that assessment is based on the published criteria set out in Appendix 3. The three focus areas for question sets cut across the assessment criteria and shouldn't be used as a proxy for any one area.

The Chair will ask each IM to state their overall score for the candidate, with no commentary. The Chair will then lead a discussion involving the whole panel, including panel members not acting as IMs for the candidate, in order to reach a consensus final score and high/medium/low allocation (see Appendix 4).

The UKRI Convener will record this discussion and ensure enough information is recorded to allow feedback to be provided to candidates. The Convener will be expected to add a bullet point against each assessment criteria and for the added value of the fellowship.

Assessment Criteria

Across all four factors assessed (below) a key issue will be whether the added value of the Fellowship mechanism of support – e.g., the scale, flexibility and duration offered – is well demonstrated, as opposed to more standard project grant support. For business applications, consideration of the added value will include, for example, whether the novelty and levels of risk involved in the project mean that it is beyond the normal activity of the business.

Factor	What the assessment will look for:
Research and Innovation Excellence	• Excellence of the research and/or innovation • Importance, novelty and feasibility of the proposed programme of work (and whether long-term Fellowship support is needed to enable this) • Robust methodology and appropriate consideration of research and innovation reproducibility, openness[1], governance and ethical/social responsibility issues • Overall potential of the Fellowship to establish or maintain a distinctive and outstanding research/innovation activity
Applicant and Their Development	• Be recognised to be of the highest standard relative to their career stage and on a trajectory to become world-class • Clear evidence of independence and thought leadership, which may go beyond the level normally expected of their current position • Demonstrate an ability to be, or become, a clear communicator and disseminator of knowledge and innovation, able to inspire and lead others; and ability to develop new relationships and influence across multiple disciplines and sectors • A broad understanding of the research/innovation landscape at both the national and international level and clarity on how their research/innovation will contribute to it • A clear plan to support the training and development of the Fellow (and, if applicable, their team) and for gaining advice or mentorship; supporting not only the programme but also their broader professional development
Impact and Strategic Relevance	• Importance and potential impact of the research/innovation for society and/or the economy. What are the potential short- or long-term impacts, and how significant are they? Are the pathways to achieving this impact well understood, and are the plans for maximising impact (from the applicant and host organisation) proportionate, timely, and credible? • Where the Fellowship proposal aligns with a specific priority area identified by UKRI, the assessment will also address how strongly the proposal fits with the aims for the area; and what it will contribute alongside other proposals and activities in the same priority area

Research and Innovation Environment, and Costs	- A demonstrable commitment from the Host Organisation to realising the potential of the Fellow; and establishing them as a research/innovation leader - Consideration has been given to the equality, diversity and inclusion aims of UKRI in support for the Fellow and, if applicable, their wider team, and in using the Fellowship's provision for flexible working - Plans for supporting the Fellow's programme of work; enabling the time commitment needed; ensuring access to space, equipment/facilities, other resources and other relevant programmes; and enabling the applicant to maximise the social/economic impact of their work - Funding requested is appropriate and fully justified - The project plan and management arrangements are proportionate to the scale and complexity of the activity to be undertaken

1 For business-hosted Fellowships UKRI still supports the principle of open access for a project which has specifically identified a requirement to publish outcomes as a route to dissemination. This requirement should be included within a project's collaboration agreement. It should also follow the guidelines contained in the UKRI policy on open access.

Scoring criteria

Overall Score	Usual indicators
10	The proposal is **exceptional**; it very strongly meets all of the assessment criteria. The proposal is at the leading edge internationally, addresses all of the assessment criteria, and meets them all to an exceptional level. The candidate has demonstrated that the Fellowship will provide exceptional added value. The panel agree that it is difficult to articulate how the proposal could be improved.
9	The proposal is **outstanding**; it strongly meets all of the assessment criteria. The proposal is at the leading edge internationally, addresses all of the assessment criteria, and meets all of them to an outstanding level. The candidate has demonstrated that the Fellowship will provide outstanding added value.
8	The proposal is **excellent**; it strongly meets the assessment criteria. The proposal is of a high international standard and addresses the majority of the assessment criteria to a very high level. The candidate has demonstrated that the Fellowship will provide excellent added value.
7	The proposal is **very good**; it meets the assessment criteria well but with some minor weaknesses/limitations. The proposal is internationally competitive. It has some weaknesses but meets the majority of assessment criteria to a high level. The candidate has demonstrated that the Fellowship will provide very good added value.
6	The proposal is **good**; it meets the assessment criteria well but with some clear weaknesses/limitations. The proposal has a number of weaknesses but generally meets most of the assessment criteria well. The candidate has demonstrated that the Fellowship will provide good added value.
5	The proposal is **adequate**; it meets the assessment criteria adequately but with clear weaknesses/limitations. The proposal meets some assessment criteria well, but has weaknesses relating to a number of criteria. The candidate has demonstrated that the Fellowship will provide adequate added value.
4	The proposal is **weak**; it meets the assessment criteria but with significant weaknesses/limitations. The proposal is potentially of some merit and meets all of the assessment criteria to an adequate level but is not internationally competitive. The candidate has not demonstrated that the Fellowship will provide added value.
3	The proposal is **poor**; it meets the assessment criteria but has major weaknesses/limitations. The proposal is potentially of some merit, and weakly meets all of the assessment criteria, but is not internationally competitive. The candidate has not demonstrated that the Fellowship will provide added value.

2	The proposal is **unsatisfactory**; it does not meet one or more of the assessment criteria. The proposal is of limited research/innovation merit or contains significant flaws. The candidate has not demonstrated that the Fellowship will provide added value.
1	The proposal is **unsatisfactory**; it does not meet any of the assessment criteria. The proposal is of limited research/innovation merit or contains significant flaws. The candidate has not demonstrated that the Fellowship will provide added value.

Once a score has been decided, panels should allocate a 'High', 'Medium' or 'Low' allocation to proposals based on the below criteria:

- **High** – at the top of that scoring definition and close to scoring one higher, e.g. "all things being equal this is a seven, but with a few small improvements would have been an eight".
- **Medium** – firmly within that score
- **Low** – meeting that description of the score but only minimally, e.g. "all things being equal this is a seven, but is close to being scored a six"

Eligibility and 'Early Career Status'

A yes/no eligibility check based on candidate career stage is not carried out by the FLF team as part of our application checks. This is due to the variability of markers of career stage across disciplines and sectors and through expert written reviews and panel meetings, we aim to identify those candidates who may be ineligible for the scheme.

At sift stage panellists were asked to consider this as part of the added value of the Fellowship mechanism of support compared to more standard grant funding. This should have ensured that candidates who are established leaders within the area of their proposed project, were not competitive and not invited to interview. In cases where eligibility was flagged to the UKRI office at the Sift meeting, the FLF team have looked at the applications and have provided notes on how to proceed. These notes can be found in the panel agenda document.

In the call text we have explicitly stated that: These fellowships are for early career academics and innovators who are transitioning to or establishing independence. Senior academics and innovators are not permitted to apply.

As the FLF aims to enable the Fellow to transition to or establish their research/innovation independence, candidates who have already achieved research/innovation independence (e.g. by securing funding aimed at this career stage, or by already managing their own significant programme of work within a business) will not be competitive.

Due to the variety of pathways and experiences that would lead someone to have already achieved research/innovation independence, the scheme relies on the expert judgement of panels to confirm that a candidate is "early career" in the area of their proposed project.

If, at interview stage, the panel have concerns that a candidate is not an early career, i.e. already established as a research/innovation leader in the area of their proposed project, this should be highlighted and noted by the Convener. However, the candidate should be assessed in the same way as all other candidates, and the decision of eligibility will then be referred back to the office.

3.4. Accessing the information required for the interview panels

All relevant information is hosted on the Extranet site; a secure online platform that allows UKRI staff and panel members to view panel documentation.

Members are added to the relevant meeting on the extranet and informed when the proposals and panel documentation are available to view.

Meetings are accessed from the Extranet. This is UKRI's method for safely and securely sharing all documentation with panel members.

Prior to the meeting, the following documentation will be uploaded to the Extranet:

Document	Purpose	Location
Grant Proposals	Information to guide assessment - including application, peer review comments and PI response	Grant Proposals
Panel agenda	Interview schedule; details running order of proposals, break timings and IM allocations.	Meeting Documents
Provisional IM Allocations	Information on the proposals you are being asked to assess. *This will be obsolete once complete Agenda is available (we are working with applicants to confirm interview attendance and aim to complete this asap)*	Meeting Documents
UKRI FLF Panel Guidance	This document – guidance to support your understanding of the panel process and provide key information such as interview questions, assessment and scoring criteria.	Meeting Documents
Additional Panel Guidance – Safeguarding Peer Review	Provides information relating to bias in peer review.	Meeting Documents
UKRI FLF call document	Guidance on the scheme used by applicants in preparing their proposals	Meeting Documents
Panel membership	Membership for all interview panels	Meeting Documents
Declaration of Interests form	Form to declare any interests UKRI should be aware of that are related to the meeting	Meeting Documents
T&S Claims	Template form for panel members to claim for attendance (and any other associated costs). Remuneration is £160/day	Travel and Subsistence Form

In addition, standalone documents for the Assessment Criteria, Scoring Criteria and Banding Table (that are annexed in this document) are uploaded under 'meeting documents'.

4. Actions prior to the interviews

Introducing Panel members (IMs) should identify proposals they are acting on as IM1, IM2 and IM3 and check that conflict information is correct. We intend to upload agendas to the Extranet by 1 September.

Where possible, UKRI has identified known conflicts of interest; however, it is important to inform the FLF team of any further conflicts of interest as soon as possible so that proposals can be reassigned to other panel members in advance of the interviews.

Please inform the FLF team by email at FLFpanel@UKRI.org along with details of the conflict. Please read all proposal documentation and the information provided by UKRI in the panel agenda

summarising discussions of the proposal held at the prior sift meeting, and any suggested interview questions highlighted by Sift Panel members.

IMs should ensure they are prepared to ask the set interview questions on the day (see Appendix 2A) and that they are aware of potential questions raised by referees and Sift Panel members. **UKRI FLF does not require any written comments or scoring to be submitted in advance of the interviews.**

As well as the proposals allocated, panel members should read as many of the proposals in their panels as they are able to (time permitting). This will allow a full discussion of each proposal at the interviews.

Assessment of business-hosted candidates (applies to panel members assigned to business specific panels 5 and 19 only)

Applications from Fellows hosted within a business have been grouped into business specific panels therefore the following guidance is only applicable to panel members assigned to the business panels 5 and 19. When discussing and scoring these applications the following points should be considered:

Assessment criteria are the same for both academic and business applications; the panel should take the same approach to decision making across all applications as far as possible.

When looking at business applications, please be mindful to consider:
  •   Innovation and applied research led proposals are allowed and encouraged within this scheme.
  •   Micro-SMEs and SMEs are eligible to apply.
  •   Previous outputs should be viewed in terms of quality of research and/innovation outputs. For business-based candidates this may mean outputs other than publications.
  •   There are specific UK Subsidy Control framework rules in place that mandate levels of funding and leverage for a company, this replaces what was formally known as 'State Aid'. In addition, overheads are calculated at a standard 20% of labour costs.
  •   Business-hosted applications may be written in a different style to 'traditional' research council grant applications. Most companies do not have access to grant-writing support and are unfamiliar with the Fellowship application process.
  •   Business-hosted candidates tend to have different career routes than those within an academic organisation. The panel should judge whether candidates without a PhD have demonstrated their equivalent experience and whether the award of the Fellowship at this stage of their career will enable them to become a future leader of similar standing to others within the scheme.
  •   Assess leadership in line with what is appropriate for the host/sector and not against other candidates or academic 'norms'.

Additionally, business-hosted applications are subject to the following conditions:

  •   **Eligibility and UK Subsidy Control Framework**

UKRI carry out checks on eligibility and financial security of the business prior to award to ensure all funding is in line with UKRI eligibility and UK Subsidy Control framework requirements, such as mandated levels of funding and leverage for a company. An example would be Overheads fixed at 20%.

If the panel has concerns over the eligibility or viability of a host business please raise this with UKRI, through the panel convenor or prior to the panel via fellows@ukri.org. Scoring should be

made against the criteria and eligibility of organisations to apply should be assumed. Further considerations.

- **Sensitive information**

Commercially sensitive information may be withheld in some applications. The panel should make their assessment based on the information provided. If the candidate has stated that there is additional information available upon request, or if the panel believe there is confidential information missing that is needed for the assessment, this should be raised within the interview so that candidates have an opportunity to respond.

- **Intellectual Property**

Within the FLF scheme IP generated from the project can be wholly owned by the host business, in line with UK subsidy control framework and in recognition of the contribution that a business is making.

We have encouraged businesses to make as many of the outcomes public as possible, to ensure maximum impact from the investment. Panels should consider both the positive economic impact of the Fellowship, the benefit to the company and its supply chain, and any efforts to ensure the impacts are felt more widely. Businesses should **not** be compared directly to academically hosted candidates, where dissemination of results is mandated.

- **Data sharing**

Data sharing should be appropriate for the business and context. In some cases, minimal data will be shared externally (for example, where data is commercially sensitive) and this is acceptable.

5. Seven Principles of Public Life

UKRI would like to bring to the attention of the panel the "Seven Principles of Public Life" drawn up by the Nolan Committee and endorsed by Parliament. These Principles are described in more detail on the UKRI web site and refer to selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

6. Equal Opportunities and Unconscious Bias

UKRI is committed to equal opportunities in all its activities. Panel members must maintain objectivity in their assessment and should be aware of the potential for conscious or unconscious bias and the impact this may have at a panel meeting. Further guidance is available in the *UKRI Additional Panel Guidance – Safeguarding Peer Review* document, hosted on the Extranet site. Members are encouraged to challenge bias that is observed at a panel meeting.

7. Communication and Language

IMs should aim to use plain English wherever possible and not use idioms when interviewing candidates. This is to help ensure inclusivity, recognising that English will not always be the first language of the candidate. **Questions asked of candidates must be asked as per the interview questions provided, however, if the candidate struggling with the wording, the question may then be rephrased.**

IMs must make questioning and communication precise, for instance, by asking for examples and thanking the candidate before moving onto the next question when they have enough information.

8. Responsible Use of Metrics

We are committed to support the recommendations and principles set out by the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA). **You should not use journal-based metrics,**

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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, public engagement, 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 (where there is often a barrier to access). 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.**

9. Career Breaks and Flexible Working

The assessment of UKRI proposals frequently involves appraisal of the candidate's track record. In making this appraisal, members should consider time spent outside the active research environment, whether through career breaks or flexible working. Further guidance on how to assess the impact of career breaks and flexible working is available at Appendix 6.

10. New Information

Candidates should be given the opportunity to respond to any new information/questions that any panel members wish to raise. Panel members must ensure that any new information is raised during the interview so that the candidate has a chance to reply. The 'right to reply' is a cornerstone of FLF assessment and **no new information should be introduced at the final, closed discussions.**

11. Pruning

UKRI expects that pruning will not be necessary for most applications; however, in exceptional cases, the panel may make a lower commitment to an award than requested by the candidate (or 'prune') where:

• An aspect of the programme of work is not fully justified by peer review, or;
• Significant resources are not fully justified for this programme of work.

A decision to prune should occur during the main assessment prior to scoring, not in the later banding and funding decisions. The final scoring is based on the value of the pruned award.

12. Banding Proposals

Upon completion of interviews, each panel will list their proposals (up to ten) in order of score, and applying one of four bandings, as per the banding descriptions in Appendix 4. All proposals which are scored the same (e.g. both numerical score and high/medium/low allocation) should be placed in the same band. These banded lists will then be discussed during the tensioning process to determine the final recommendations for investment.

13. Tensioning Meeting

The tensioning meeting will take place following the banding sessions of the initial 19 panels on Friday 15 September. These meetings will be attended by the Chairs and Convenors of each panel and the Rovers and will be supported by Conveners. The meeting will be chaired by FLF Director Stephen Meader.

Discussion will focus on how scores and bands have been used across panels, with consideration of how each panel reached their decision regarding any proposals at the interface between bands.

Rovers will inform these discussions by advising on how each panel operated and the relative allocation of scores and banding.

The tensioning process will agree, based on the banding, score and rank order, which candidates should be prioritised for investment. These recommendations will then be taken forward by UKRI.

14. Communication of Decisions

UKRI staff are responsible for communicating funding decisions and panel members should not enter into individual discussions with the candidates. All meeting discussions should therefore be treated in confidence.

15. Feedback for Candidates

All candidates received peer review comments prior to the sift stage for which they were invited to provide a rebuttal response. After the interviews, candidates will receive a summary of the panel's discussion, prepared by UKRI staff. The panel should clearly highlight any points for feedback during the discussion. **Any candidates who approach members directly for feedback after the interviews should be directed to contact UKRI.**

16. Confidentiality

All papers and discussions must be treated in confidence. All members are asked to keep secure any documents that come to them in their official capacity and ensure these are destroyed as soon as no longer needed. UKRI will manage removal of information from the Extranet site.

17. Conflicts of Interest

On joining the panel, members are required to declare any private, professional or commercial interests, which might conceivably conflict with the interests of UKRI. Such interests might include company appointments, directorships, consultancies and honorary appointments.

The office will identify institutional conflicts of interest and record these on the proposed agenda and interview schedule. **If members realise that they have a conflict of interest with any other proposals, they should notify the office in advance of the interviews.**

Members who have a conflict of interest with a proposal are required to leave the room prior to the interview and should not participate in any subsequent general discussions concerning the relevant proposal. If the Chair of the panel has a conflict of interest with a proposal, the same rules apply, and the Deputy Chair will be asked to chair the discussion.

18. Questions

If you have any questions about the role of the panels or the interview process, please contact the FLF team at: FLFpanel@ukri.org

Appendix 1 – Interview panel schedule:

Day 1

Time	Event
9:30	Chair's Welcome and Introductions
10:00	Interview #1 pre-candidate discussion
10:05	Candidate 1 enters
10:35	Candidate 1 leaves
10:50	Break
11:20	Interview #2 pre-candidate discussion
11:25	Candidate 2 enters
11:55	Candidate 2 leaves
12:10	Interview #3 pre-candidate discussion
12:15	Candidate 3 enters
12:45	Candidate 3 leaves
13:00	Lunch
14:00	Interview #4 pre-candidate discussion
14:05	Candidate 4 enters
14:35	Candidate 4 leaves
14:50	Interview #5 pre-candidate discussion
14:55	Candidate 5 enters
15:25	Candidate 5 leaves
15:40	Break
16:10	Interview #6 pre-candidate discussion
16:15	Candidate 6 enters
16:45	Candidate 6 leaves
17:00	End of Day

Day 2

Time	Event
9:30	Introductions
9:45	Interview #1 pre-candidate discussion
9:50	Candidate 1 enters
10:20	Candidate 1 leaves
10:35	Interview #2 pre-candidate discussion
10:40	Candidate 2 enters
11:10	Candidate 2 leaves
11:25	Break
11:55	Interview #3 pre-candidate discussion
12:00	Candidate 3 enters
12:30	Candidate 3 leaves
12:45	Lunch
13:45	Interview #4 pre-candidate discussion
13:50	Candidate 4 enters
14:20	Candidate 4 leaves
14:35	Interview #5 pre-candidate discussion
14:40	Candidate 5 enters
15:10	Candidate 5 leaves
15:25	Break
15:55	Banding
16:45	Wrap up and close
17:00	End of day

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Appendix 2 – Interview Questions

Interview questions redacted for web version. See Example questions at Microsoft Word - Example questions finalised changes (ukri.org)

Appendix 3 – Assessment criteria

Across all four factors assessed (below) a key issue will be whether the added value of the Fellowship mechanism of support – e.g., the scale, flexibility and duration offered – is well demonstrated, as opposed to more standard project grant support. For business applications, consideration of the added value will include, for example, whether the novelty and levels of risk involved in the project mean that it is beyond the normal activity of the business.

Factor	What the assessment will look for:
Research and Innovation Excellence	• Excellence of the research and/or innovation • Importance, novelty and feasibility of the proposed programme of work (and whether long-term Fellowship support is needed to enable this) • Robust methodology and appropriate consideration of research and innovation reproducibility, openness[1], governance and ethical/social responsibility issues • Overall potential of the Fellowship to establish or maintain a distinctive and outstanding research/innovation activity
Applicant and Their Development	• Be recognised to be of the highest standard relative to their career stage and on a trajectory to become world-class • Clear evidence of independence and thought leadership, which may go beyond the level normally expected of their current position • Demonstrate an ability to be, or become, a clear communicator and disseminator of knowledge and innovation, able to inspire and lead others; and ability to develop new relationships and influence across multiple disciplines and sectors • A broad understanding of the research/innovation landscape at both the national and international level and clarity on how their research/innovation will contribute to it • A clear plan to support the training and development of the Fellow (and, if applicable, their team) and for gaining advice or mentorship; supporting not only the programme but also their broader professional development

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Impact and Strategic Relevance	• Importance and potential impact of the research/innovation for society and/or the economy ○ What are the potential short- or long-term impacts, and how significant are they? ○ Are the pathways to achieving this impact well understood, and are the plans for maximising impact (from the applicant and host organisation) proportionate, timely, and credible? • Where the Fellowship proposal aligns with a specific priority area identified by UKRI, the assessment will also address how strongly the proposal fits with the aims for the area; and
	what it will contribute alongside other proposals and activities in the same priority area
Research and Innovation Environment, and Costs	• A demonstrable commitment from the Host Organisation to realising the potential of the Fellow; and establishing them as a research/innovation leader • Consideration has been given to the equality, diversity and inclusion aims of UKRI in support for the Fellow and, if applicable, their wider team, and in using the Fellowship's provision for flexible working • Plans for supporting the Fellow's programme of work; enabling the time commitment needed; ensuring access to space, equipment/facilities, other resources and other relevant programmes; and enabling the applicant to maximise the social/economic impact of their work • Funding requested is appropriate and fully justified • The project plan and management arrangements are proportionate to the scale and complexity of the activity to be undertaken

[1] For business-hosted Fellowships UKRI still supports the principle of open access for a project which has specifically identified a requirement to publish outcomes as a route to dissemination. This requirement should be included within a project's collaboration agreement. It should also follow the guidelines contained in the UKRI policy on open access.

Appendix 4 Scoring criteria

Overall Score	Usual indicators
10	The proposal is **exceptional**; it very strongly meets all of the assessment criteria. The proposal is at the leading edge internationally, addresses all of the assessment criteria, and meets them all to an exceptional level. The candidate has demonstrated that the Fellowship will provide exceptional added value. The panel agree that it is difficult to articulate how the proposal could be improved.
9	The proposal is **outstanding**; it strongly meets all of the assessment criteria. The proposal is at the leading edge internationally, addresses all of the assessment criteria, and meets all of them to an outstanding level. The candidate has demonstrated that the Fellowship will provide outstanding added value.
8	The proposal is **excellent**; it strongly meets the assessment criteria. The proposal is of a high international standard and addresses the majority of the assessment criteria to a very high level. The candidate has demonstrated that the Fellowship will provide excellent added value.
7	The proposal is **very good**; it meets the assessment criteria well but with some minor weaknesses/limitations. The proposal is internationally competitive. It has some weaknesses but meets the majority of assessment criteria to a high level. The candidate has demonstrated that the Fellowship will provide very good added value.
6	The proposal is **good**; it meets the assessment criteria well but with some clear weaknesses/limitations. The proposal has a number of weaknesses but generally meets most of the assessment criteria well. The candidate has demonstrated that the Fellowship will provide good added value.
5	The proposal is **adequate**; it meets the assessment criteria adequately but with clear weaknesses/limitations. The proposal meets some assessment criteria well, but has weaknesses relating to a number of criteria. The candidate has demonstrated that the Fellowship will provide adequate added value.

4	The proposal is **weak**; it meets the assessment criteria but with significant weaknesses/limitations. The proposal is potentially of some merit and meets all of the assessment criteria to an adequate level but is not internationally competitive. The candidate has not demonstrated that the Fellowship will provide added value.
3	The proposal is **poor**; it meets the assessment criteria but has major weaknesses/limitations. The proposal is potentially of some merit, and weakly meets all of the assessment criteria, but is not internationally competitive. The candidate has not demonstrated that the Fellowship will provide added value.
2	The proposal is **unsatisfactory**; it does not meet one or more of the assessment criteria. The proposal is of limited research/innovation merit or contains significant flaws. The candidate has not demonstrated that the Fellowship will provide added value.
1	The proposal is **unsatisfactory**; it does not meet any of the assessment criteria. The proposal is of limited research/innovation merit or contains significant flaws. The candidate has not demonstrated that the Fellowship will provide added value.

Once a score has been decided, panels should allocate a 'High', 'Medium' or 'Low' allocation to proposals based on the below criteria:

- **High** – at the top of that scoring definition and close to scoring one higher, e.g. "all things being equal this is a seven, but with a few small improvements would have been an eight".
- **Medium** – firmly within that score
- **Low** – meeting that description of the score but only minimally, e.g. "all things being equal this is a seven, but is close to being scored a six"

Appendix 5 Banding table

Score	Possible action
A	These Candidates are judged to have addressed all of the assessment criteria and show evidence of the highest standards and obvious added value from a FLF award. They are a priority for investment.
B	These Candidates are judged to have addressed all of the assessment criteria and are of a high standard, they show good evidence of added value from a FLF award. They should be considered for investment but are not prioritised.
C	These Candidates adequately address all of the assessment criteria but are not of the highest quality across the criteria. They are the lowest priority to consider for investment.
D	These Candidates failed to adequately address one or more of the assessment criteria and are not recommended for investment.

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Appendix 6 Career breaks and flexible working

The assessment of Fellowship applications frequently involves appraisal of the candidate's track record. In making this appraisal, review panels take into account time spent outside the active research/innovation environment, whether through career breaks or flexible working.

Definitions

Career breaks are defined as a substantive period of time spent outside research/innovation. Reasons may include* the following:
- Personal reasons
- Trying out a new career
- Parental leave
- Ill health, injury or disability
- Caring/domestic responsibilities
- Study/training/further education

Flexible working describes any working arrangement where the number of hours worked, or the time that work is undertaken, vary from standard practice and could include* the following:
- Reduction in full time hours
- Long-term partial return to work
- Job sharing
- Compressed working hours
- Term-time only working
- Annualised hours

Guidance for panels

In assessing the effects of career breaks or flexible working, panels will note the candidate's career trajectory and potential at the beginning of a break, relative to the stage of the candidate's career. In assessing candidates, panels will recognise that the effects on productivity of a career break, or a period of flexible working, may continue beyond the return to work.

The following areas may be affected*:
- Presentation and publication record
- Patents filed
- Track record of securing funding, including time to obtain preliminary data
- Maintaining networks of research/innovation contacts and collaborations
- Recruitment of staff
- Time required for training
- The ability to take up opportunities in different geographical locations
- The ability to take up courses, sabbaticals, 'visits', placements and secondments

Guidance for candidates

Candidates should make clear any substantive periods of absence from research/innovation within their application. Further details on the nature of the absence and how it has affected track record, productivity and career progression may be provided if desired[1]. Information provided will be used

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[1] The information provided in response to this question helps UKRI in assessing how effective our policies and procedures are in promoting equal opportunities. This information may be used anonymously for statistical purposes and any publication would be on aggregate level. The information is treated in confidence and in line with the UKRI's data protection procedures.

*Lists are not exhaustive

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only to make appropriate adjustments when assessing an individual's track record, productivity and career progression.

Appendix 7 Animal usage

UKRI supports the use of animals in scientific research, but only when strict conditions are met:

- Candidates must provide sound scientific justification in their funding application for the use of animals
- Candidates must have given due consideration to the replacement, refinement or reduction of the animals used in the experiment and there must be no viable non- animal alternatives • The research must be carried out in full compliance with current legislation

When assessing animal usage, you should review the grant application, ethical/peer reviewer comments, and the candidate response, and consider whether the principles and procedures for responsible use of animals are being adhered to. For example, whether:

- The research question can be answered without the use of animals
- The potential benefit justifies the possible adverse effects to the animals
- The species and number of animals is appropriate
- The experimental design is sufficiently robust
- The fate of the animal(s) post experimentation has been considered
- The potential information gained from the animals has been maximized

Appendix 8 Ethical issues and topics of potential public concern

We require you consider potential ethical and social issues arising from grant applications for three reasons:

- Public confidence in self-governance and conduct of research/innovation requires transparency and evidence of social responsibility.
- UKRI credibility and reputation as a public funder demands the ability to justify its portfolio, not only on the grounds of research excellence and strategic relevance, but also the wider social context.
- Early identification of ethical/social issues enables UKRI, the researchers/innovators, and their organisations, to address them appropriately, and better equips UKRI to respond to media and other enquiries.

The following checklist may help you identify potential ethical and social issues, and we ask you to consider these from the perspective of a non-specialist member of the public.

Research/Innovation Objectives:

- Is there a clear need for this research/innovation? Could the purpose be perceived to be trivial?
- Does the purpose imply a lack of respect for human or animal life, or the environment?

Research/Innovation Outcomes:

- Is there a potential for the outcomes of the project to be misused?
- Could there be a perceived threat to consumer choice or human dignity?
- Could the research/innovation generate information that could be used to discriminate against ethnic groups or other underrepresented groups, developing countries, etc.?
- Does the risk of the research outweigh any benefit?

Research/Innovation Conduct – is there potential for public concern about:
- Safety of the research/innovation, what might go wrong, worst case scenario, etc.?
- The number and species of animals used, or the severity of procedures?
- Experimentation close to farms, schools, homes, etc