Future Leaders Fellowships (FLF) Scheme – Quick guide for peer reviewers

The FLF Reviewers' Guidance is a comprehensive guide for reviewers, which can be found on the UKRI website. We recommend all reviewers take the time to read the document, alongside this quick guide which highlights some key areas that will be helpful when writing a review. Referrals to the sections in the reviewer guidance can be found below each heading where applicable.

Conflict of interest

Before you complete a review, please ensure that you do not have a conflict of interest with the proposal. If you are conflicted or are in doubt, please inform the FLF team at fellowspeerreview@ukri.org ASAP so they can advise and approach an alternative reviewer, if necessary. Full details on our conflicts of interest policy can be found in Annex A of the Reviewers' Guidance.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Our assessment process is confidential in order to protect the innovative research ideas proposed by applicants and anonymous to support the free and frank exchange of views. Reviews are seen by the applicant and panel members, so please do not identify yourself, as your review will be rejected.

Use of Generative AI

Use of generative AI tools to prepare funding applications is permitted with some caveats. As a reviewer, you however must not use generative AI tools as part of your assessment activities. Speculation on whether generative AI has been used to develop the application is also not permitted.

Assessment criteria

Reviewers must refer to the 'Assessment criteria' when writing their review. All proposals are to be assessed against these criteria:

- Vision and Approach
- Career development
- Ethics and responsible research and innovation (RRI)
- Applicant capability to deliver
- Host organisation support
- Resources and cost justification

Review Format

With the move to UKRI's new Funding Service (TFS), you will now have a single text box to submit your review. This means you must use the above assessment criteria as headings to separate each section of your review to ensure clarity and sufficient level of content across all assessment criteria

How to write a good review

Good reviews are invaluable in helping the panel make funding decisions for the FLF scheme. They also provide constructive feedback to applicants in order to help them improve their research, and you should bear in mind how your review will be used. Your review will be fed back anonymously to the fellow, who will have an opportunity to respond to your comments and any questions you raise. Panel members will also use your comments and score to help them in their assessment.

Do:

- Structure your review by using relevant headers to separate sections.

- Read and address all the of the FLF scheme's Assessment Criteria.

- Reflect on the final written review and assign an appropriate overall assessment score based on the score descriptors.

- Be objective and professional – comments should be evidence-based.

- Provide clear and concise comments.

- Clearly identify strengths and weaknesses.

- Provide justification for your comments and grade, whether you are supportive of the proposal or not.

- Be aware that not everyone reading the comment will be a specialist in that field.

- Be aware of the impact of unconscious bias.

- Consider the added value of fellowship support rather than the use of standard project grant support across all criteria.

- Keep a back-up of your comments in case of a system timeout or error.

Don't:

- Make it personal.

- Use an emotive or confrontational tone or language.

- Reiterate the proposal or re-state the assessment questions.

- Include anything in the assessment that will identify you, such as references to your own work, where you have worked or who you have worked with.

- Be too brief, even if you deem the proposal very strong.

- Use Journal-based metrics to measure quality.

- Allow your review to be influenced by bias for your own field of research.

- Use discriminatory or gratuitously offensive remarks.

- Use or refer to the amount of time since PhD to inform your assessment.

- Bring in outside information about the Project Lead(s) or named staff members not included in the application.

Example questions to ask yourself

These are examples of the types of questions you might consider when writing a review in line with the assessment criteria and therefore is not an exhaustive list.

Vision and Approach:

- Is the proposed work original, important, and of excellent quality?
- Are the aims and objectives clearly defined and achievable with the proposed approach?
- Is the methodology (if applicable) robust, detailed, and appropriate? What could they do better? Are there alternative approaches that might be considered?
- What are the key strengths and weaknesses?
- Are there major flaws or weaknesses?

Applicant Capability to deliver:

- Have they shown the right balance of skills and aptitude to deliver the proposed work?
- In what ways has the Project Lead(s) evidenced the relevant experience (appropriate to career stage) to make best use of the benefits presented by this funding opportunity to develop their career?

Career Development:

- Will the fellowship provide a feasible and appropriate trajectory for their personal development and to achieve their stated career development goals?
- Have you appropriately considered any unequal impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic described by the applicant?

Host support:

- Is there evidence that the host organisation will support the fellow?
- What evidence has the applicant provided in terms of host support, for example, how will the research environment contribute to the success of the work in terms of suitability of the host organisation and strategic relevance to the project?
- What development and training opportunities will be provided, and/or financial or practical support?

Ethics and responsible research and innovation (RRI)

- Has the applicant identified and evaluated the relevant ethical or responsible research and innovation considerations
- Are there any that have not been considered?

Resources and cost justification

- Are the resources comprehensive, appropriate, and justified?
- Does the proposal represent the optimal use of resources to achieve the intended outcomes, and will it maximise potential outcomes and impacts?

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Examples of helpful and unhelpful comments

"Excellent application – must be funded" – Sparse comment offering no context. Comments of this quality are of little assistance to the moderation panel or to the applicant.

"This is a very important and timely application. However, I am concerned that the project may not see success as it depends critically upon one technique, with which the applicant has little expertise and requires a resolution level never previously reported. Can they demonstrate they can actually obtain these measurements?" – A strong comment that makes a compelling point. It raises and explains a concern so that its nature and importance are both clear to the panel and also to the applicant in terms of how they need to respond.

"This is a strong applicant, however multiple career breaks have affected their publication output and the few publications they do have are all in low-impact journals" – The FLF scheme allows applicants from a variety of backgrounds including those who have taken career breaks and this should not be held against them. Additionally, UKRI has signed DORA and do comments relating to journal impact factors cannot be accepted either.

"This is an excellent proposal in an important area and the combination of experimental and theoretical methods is a key strength. However, the work plan lacks detail leaving me unclear if work package three is needed. I also doubt whether work package four can be fully completed, but I do not think that is a big issue. The impact has been well-described and excellent collaborators identified. A minor point is that the travel costs sought seem to be based on a higher level of visits than required for the meetings scheduled." – Proposals will have both strengths and weaknesses. This comment highlights both, indicates their relative importance and, where appropriate, balances them one against another. This gives the panel a lot of information to help them in coming to a decision.

"Proposal is studying the economic situation in coastal areas, however I don't think this is a worthy area of research or that they should be receiving any funding" – This is a clear example of personal bias unrelated to the proposal and would not only be disregarded as a comment, but the entire review would also be marked as unusable as there would be no guarantee the rest of the review is unbiased.

Contact the FLF team: fellowspeerreview@ukri.org
For queries about a review request, extending a review date or conflict query.

Contact the TFS helpdesk: support@funding-service.ukri.org or +44 (0)1793 547 490
For queries about using the TFS system to provide your review.