Arts and Humanities Research Council
Peer Review College Handbook

Section 1: Becoming a PRC member

In April 2021, AHRC launched an updated [EDI statement and action plan](#) with a renewed commitment to ensure that diversity and inclusion is embedded both at all levels of our organisation and in the portfolio of research that we fund and support.

We are currently reviewing our recruitment process and structures; the information below is subject to change.

1.1. Nomination process

To determine the validity of launching a call for nominations, AHRC review PRC membership annually looking at the number of members and expertise available for upcoming funding calls.

1.1.1 Eligibility

Potential candidates must identify and contact a nominator who will complete a case for support for the candidate concerned. Nominators must be senior members of staff or representatives within higher education institutions or other organisations, for example: Pro-Vice Chancellor, Dean, Head of School or College, Head of Faculty, Research Director. The Nominator must be from the candidates' institution or learned societies, or professional associations.

Candidates must meet the criteria for academic reviewers to be eligible for membership of the College, but they can also be nominated for other groups detailed below alongside the Academic; providing they meet the eligibility criteria.

1.1.2 Academic College

Academic reviewers are appointed to provide reviews of proposals for academic research and postgraduate training within their area(s) of research expertise.

Essential criteria:

- Researchers with an active track record who are held in esteem by their peers.
- Able to demonstrate potential to review proposals within and on the margins of their main subject specialism or discipline.
- Experience of leading a research project and having responsibility for the overall management of the research or other activities.

Desirable criteria:

- Experience of reviewing proposals for the AHRC and/or other funding bodies.
- Involvement in activities on a national or international level, for example external examining or national level committees.
- Experience of supervising PhD students and/or engagement with research student issues.
- Experience of leadership and responsibility.
- Experience of managing high levels of academic administration.
- Experience of collaborative working (within or beyond the academic sector).

1.1.3 International College

International reviewers are appointed to provide reviews of research proposals of potentially international significance. The criteria for appointment are the same as for academic reviewers, but nominees for international reviewers must also be able to demonstrate one or more of the following:

- Experience of assessing applications for Research Funding Organisations at International level (e.g. for the National Science Foundation (NSF); or for the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)).
- Experience of assessing other types of documentation with an international dimension (e.g. being part of international review panels, reviewing for international academic journals).
- Experience of international research collaboration (e.g. collaboration with international researchers).

1.1.4 Strategic College

Strategic Reviewers are appointed to provide reviews of applications to the Research, Development and Engagement Fellowship Scheme and those proposals which involve issues at an organisational level (e.g. Doctoral Training Partnerships or Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships) or high levels of complexity.

The criteria for appointment are the same as for academic reviewers, but nominees for strategic reviewers must also be able to demonstrate the following:

- A good strategic overview of arts and humanities in the United Kingdom.
- Experience of a senior management or senior leadership role within a higher education institution (e.g. Pro Vice-Chancellor, Dean, Head of School or College, or Research Director).
- Experience of a leadership role outside the research organisation (e.g. leading a subject organisation or learned society).

1.1.5 Strategic Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) College

In recent years the AHRC has significantly expanded its International Development portfolio through its engagement with the Newton Fund and Global Challenge Research Fund (GCRF). Given the importance and complexity of these awards, following internal and external consultations, it has been recognised that a dedicated Strategic Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) College would help to ensure the continued success of these Programmes. As well as creating a pool of experienced reviewers to draw upon, the creation of this specialised College will allow the AHRC to offer standardised training and a more consistent approach to assessment.

The criteria for appointment are the same as for academic reviewers, but nominees for knowledge exchange reviewers must also be able to demonstrate:

Essential criteria:

- Experience leading research focused on, and/or based in, developing countries (as recognised by the current DAC list of ODA recipients); and/or an understanding of the practical challenges associated with undertaking research in developing contexts.
- A good strategic overview of the value and importance of arts and humanities research to addressing the challenges faced by developing countries.
- An understanding of the potential for arts and humanities research to contribute to and, where possible, lead interdisciplinary research in developing countries.

- Experience of international research collaboration and or capacity in assessing research applications with an international dimension, for example on behalf of research funding organisations outside the UK or as a member of an international review panel.

Desirable criteria:

- Experience working with wider partners in the development sector such as NGOs, charitable organisations and community groups.
- Experience leading research focused on, and based in, the least developed countries and territories as identified by the DAC list of ODA recipients.
- Experience assessing research applications focused on developing countries.

1.1.6 Knowledge Exchange (KE) College

Knowledge Exchange reviewers are appointed to provide reviews of proposals that are focused on or include elements of knowledge exchange activities.

- The criteria for appointment are the same as for academic reviewers, but nominees for knowledge exchange reviewers must also be able to demonstrate:
- A good understanding of the distinctive nature of knowledge exchange in the arts and humanities, and experience of one or more of the following:
- Participation in any knowledge exchange or impact activity as the result of their research; this can include formal and informal, funded or un-funded, and may have encompassed policy work, active dissemination, commercialisation, and/or public engagement activities.
- Collaboration and/or partnership working (including collaborative studentships) with non-academic partners, including commercial business, public sector, and third sector organisations.
- Reviewing knowledge exchange proposals for Research Councils or other funding bodies.

1.1.7 Non-higher education institution (HEI) College

Non-HEI reviewers are appointed to provide reviews on the social, cultural, or economic impact of proposals from a perspective outside the academic community.

Reviewers from Non-HEIs or with Non-HEI experience are sought to assess proposals requiring a perspective outside of the academic community. Many reviewers from organisations outside the higher education sector are part of the other College groups and will also be approached to comment on other aspects of proposals.

Non-HEI reviewers will usually be based in a non-academic organisation (e.g. public- sector bodies, businesses, third sector organisations, museums, and galleries) and must have experience of one or more of the following:

- Collaborating with academic researchers.
- Using the results of academic research or reviewing applications for Research Councils.

1.2 Assessment of applications

A panel of assessors, comprising current and previous College members, and Advisory Board and AHRC Council members, is invited to review and assess all applications received.

The panel cannot discuss panel proceedings outside the meeting; any panel member who is asked directly for feedback by nominees should refuse and advise nominees to direct all such requests to the AHRC.

1.3 Appointment to the College

Once all assessments have been received, the AHRC will use these scores to assign a final recommendation regarding appointment to the Peer Review College and the various College groups. This recommendation is ratified by AHRC's Executive Committee. Outcomes are then communicated to applicants by AHRC.

Members are appointed to the College for an initial term of four years. At the end of a College member's term, they may be invited to remain on the College for a further term of two or four years. An offer of reappointment to the College is contingent on the contribution a College member made during any prior term(s). Once a former College member's term ends, they become eligible to reapply to join the College after two years have elapsed.

1.4 New member training

Successful candidates attend a training induction session. During 2020, induction training events have been held virtually. If government guidelines allow, it is likely that we will return to holding induction training sessions in person at locations across the UK.

Induction events are typically split into two sessions, the first session is an introduction to the PRC which is ten followed by the second session of a mock panel meeting. The purpose of the mock panel is to familiarise new PRC members with how a panel meeting works, with the flexibility and safety of being in a training environment.

Once members have undertaken the induction, their College membership will be activated meaning they are able to complete reviews and attend panel meetings.

1.5 Resignation from the PRC

Members can submit their resignation from the College at any time during their term. If you wish to withdraw your membership, please contact the PRC team by emailing peerreviewcollege@ahrc.ukri.org.

If do not want to resign but need to take a break from AHRC peer review activity, you can set a period of 'Unavailability' in Je-S during which time you will not be asked to complete reviews, see Section 5.3.

Section 2: What to expect as a PRC member

2.1 What is the role of a Peer Review College member?

AHRC Peer Review College members provide AHRC with high quality and objective assessments of research proposals, a core part of the decision-making process to allocate grants using public funds.

In line with our Standards of Service, members can be asked to review up to 8 proposals during a 12 month period (normally no more than 4 in any quarter). This commitment is usually lessened if members serve on panels, though in exceptional circumstances we may ask members to review more proposals.

PRC members must treat all grant applications confidentially and not discuss their contents with anyone falling outside AHRC's assessment processes. Members are asked to agree to abide by our Standards of Service, along with UKRI policies, standards and guidance.

PRC members must also read all terms and conditions in the Handbook, outlined later in this section, as well as relevant UKRI and AHRC policies:

- Code of Practice and Seven Principles of Public Life
- Freedom of Information and Data Protection
- UKRI Principles of Assessment and Decision Making
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Counter Fraud and Bribery
- Conflicts of Interest

2.1.1 Reviewer selection
AHRC Funding Officers select reviewers based on reviewers' self-reported Je-S data and match this to applications. For information on keeping your Je-S Classifications and Keywords up to date, please see Section 5.2. Not keeping Je-S data up to date or providing sufficient detail is one of the main reasons College members do not receive requests to review.

AHRC selects reviewers from within the College in the first instance but will seek non-College reviewers from the wider academic and user communities where expertise cannot be sourced from the College alone.

2.2 PRC terms and conditions

2.2.1 Standards of Service

The AHRC relies on reviews from members of its Peer Review College to provide informed assessments of applications as part of the decision-making process. It is imperative that we maintain a high standard throughout the process to ensure the efficient processing of proposals. Reviews are requested and must be submitted through the Research Councils' Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) system.

College members are asked to agree to abide by our Standards of Service as well as UKRI policies, standards and guidance. If members fail to comply with these standards, AHRC reserves the right to review individual College membership. Please see our membership withdrawal policy under Section 2.3.

The AHRC reserves the right to make reasonable changes to these Standards of Service. Any changes will be affected by a general notice to members of the Peer Review College.

2.2.2 Code of practice

The AHRC has adopted a [Code of Practice](#) for members of the AHRC Council, Committees, Panels and Advisory Groups and for those who assist in the work of the Council. In fulfilling your role, you should abide by the [Seven Principles of Public Life](#) that were drawn up by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (the Nolan Committee).

2.2.3 Freedom of information and data protection

This section describes your obligations as a Peer Review College member in relation to information legislation. The following paragraphs provide the context and practical implications.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations 2004 give you specific rights to obtain information about what we do and how we do it.

[The EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act 2018](#) gives you the right to request personal information we hold about you.

All UKRI bodies must ensure that the peer review process encourages and supports the free and frank exchange of views between specialists, whilst maintaining the highest possible standards of openness and accountability. As such, the UKRI Councils have set out [Principles for Assessment and Decision Making](#) which outlines peer review information that is routinely disclosed and that which is routinely withheld.

All written information, electronic or physical (including notes you take), relating to AHRC matters could be the subject of a Freedom of Information request. It is essential that Peer Review College members operate impartially, honestly and fairly. The AHRC expects that panel members will shred applications, relevant papers and notes after the panel meeting, or leave them at the meeting for the AHRC to dispose of. Any personal data received by email must also be kept securely, copies must not be made, and electronic files, CDs, etc. must be destroyed as soon as possible.

When completing peer reviews using the Je-S system, the first time you access an application and on an annual basis thereafter, "Reviewer Protocols" will be shown. These outline the standards of confidentiality and conduct UKRI requires of reviewers. You must agree to follow these protocols before being presented with any review material.

If you receive any requests for information relating to your work for the AHRC, please pass them immediately to the AHRC's Information Manager at foi@ukri.org. You should not respond directly to any requests from applicants or other members of the public.

2.2.4 Confidentiality

UKRI operates an open peer review process, whilst at the same time preserving reviewer anonymity. Reviewers are required to treat proposals in confidence and keep any personally retained documentation (paper or electronic) secure.

Peer Review College members agree to treat all applications made to the AHRC confidentially. This duty of confidence covers: (i) the fact that the applicant has applied; (ii) the content of the application.

AHRC provides copies of review to applicants who are given the opportunity to write a response to be assessed by a moderating panel, for all schemes other than Research Networking or Follow on Fund (under £30k only). The applicant's research organisation will also be given access to the anonymised review.

The AHRC will not normally disclose panel member comments (or notes) to the applicant, although in some rare cases panels may recommend specific feedback or conditions of funding be conveyed to the applicant.

Comments will only be disclosed to individuals outside of the AHRC if it is required as part of the funding decision process, or is required under the Data Protection Act or the Freedom of Information Act (or any other law or regulation to which the AHRC is or may become subject to).

The AHRC will not release your name in connection with any specific comments that are released under the Data Protection Act or the Freedom of Information Act without first obtaining your permission. In such circumstances, the AHRC will ask the applicant to keep your comments confidential and not to release your name in connection with them without first obtaining your permission.

The names of panel and Peer Review College members .

2.2.5 Equal opportunities

UKRI believes and a dynamic, diverse and inclusive research and innovation system must be an integral part of UK society, giving everyone the opportunity to participate and to benefit. Everyone has an important contribution to make – the researchers and innovators, and the wider support system including the technical and administrative support, and those who maintain our infrastructure.

Accordingly, no eligible job applicant, funding applicant, employee or external stakeholder including members of the public should receive less favourable treatment on the grounds of: gender, marital status, sexual orientation, gender re-assignment, race, colour, nationality, ethnicity or national origins, religion or similar philosophical belief, spent criminal conviction, age or disability. UKRI is committed to its obligations under the Equality Act (2010).

All proposals must be assessed on equal terms, regardless of the sex, age and/or ethnicity of the applicant. Proposals must therefore be assessed and graded on their merits, in accordance with the criteria and the aims and objectives set for each scheme or call for funding.

2.2.6 Anti-Bribery Policy

AHRC is committed to the practice of responsible corporate behaviour and to complying with all laws, regulations and other requirements which govern the conduct of our operations (Anti-Bribery Policy).

The AHRC is fully committed to instilling a strong anti-corruption culture and is fully committed to compliance with all anti-bribery and anti-corruption legislation including, but not limited to, the Bribery Act 2010 ("the Act") and ensures that no bribes or other corrupt payments, inducements or similar are made, offered, sought or obtained by us or anyone working on our behalf.

2.2.7 Employment transitions and retirement

If a College member leaves employment, moves outside academia/research or retires, it may be possible for them to remain on the College and participate in peer review activities should they wish to do so.

Please ensure Je-S profiles are kept up to date with any changes to circumstances or contact details, and contact peerreviewcollege@ahrc.ukri.org to discuss College membership status.

2.3 Withdrawal of membership

As a member of the Peer Review College, AHRC requires you to adhere to and observe our Standards of Service and UKRI policies, standards and guidance. We reserve the right to discontinue the membership of individuals who fail to observe these standards.

AHRC collects data and reports on peer review related activities, including completing reviews and acting as a panel member or chair. If PRC members are found to be persistently declining or not responding to requests

made by the AHRC or persistently declining to provide information on their expertise via Je-S classifications and key words, this may be grounds for withdrawal of membership. It is possible to note periods of unavailability in Je-S; we encourage members to make use of this function as necessary and having any such periods of unavailability recorded will not count against any PRC member in their capacity as a reviewer or as an applicant.

As an underpinning principle, we will always seek to informally resolve any issues directly with a PRC member prior to withdrawing their membership.

If unacceptable conduct during engagement with the AHRC or other parties representing us is reported, we will investigate the issue and reach a balanced, evidence-based conclusion. Note that we take our obligations under the Equality Act (2010) seriously and consequently take a zero-tolerance approach to all bullying and harassment.

2.4 Applying for funding from AHRC

You may apply to the AHRC's funding calls and schemes but you will not be permitted to review competing proposals in the round to which you intend to apply or to attend the panel meeting at which your application will be assessed. See Section 3.4 Conflicts of Interest for more information.

AHRC Peer Review College members are free to apply for funding from other sources, including the British Academy and other UKRI Research Councils.

Section 3: The peer review process

3.1 The peer review process

For the majority of the AHRC schemes, the review process operates as follows:

1. Proposals are considered by three reviewers, usually members of the Peer Review College
2. Depending on the specific scheme, applicants may then provide a response (Principal Investigator response) to the anonymised comments of the reviewers
3. Proposals, reviews, and PI responses to the reviews are moderated by a panel of peers
4. The panel grades and ranks the proposals in order of funding priority
5. Panel recommendations are considered by the Executive Chair and Directors Group, and a final decision is taken on the list of awards to be supported depending on funds available.

There are some exceptions to the peer review process outlined above, and the peer review process used for a particular scheme or call will be outlined in the documentation for that scheme or call.

If potential conflicts of interest are identified, reviewers and panel members should advise AHRC **before** starting any assessment activities, see Section 3.4.

3.2 Application assessment process

3.2.1 Submitting a proposal

Proposals to most of our calls and schemes are submitted through the Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) system. Applicants must complete the appropriate proposal form for the call or scheme to which they are applying and submit this along with a 'Case for Support' and other supporting attachments. If the call or scheme has a closing date, this information must be received by the published deadline. Late or incomplete proposals will not be accepted by the Je-S system.

3.2.2 Office eligibility checks

AHRC Funding Officers check applications to ensure that they adhere to the rules set out by the specific call or scheme. This includes a check of disciplinary remit; in most instances, for a proposal to proceed in the assessment process, 51%+ of an application's content must fall within the AHRC remit. As this check takes place prior to peer review, we do not ask reviewers to assess a proposal's disciplinary remit. If a proposal does not pass all checks, it will be rejected (with right to resubmit) or returned to the applicant for amendment.

3.2.3 Written peer review

AHRC Funding Officers identify suitable reviewers for an application and request reviews to be completed through Je-S. They will perform a preliminary check for conflicts but we cannot be aware of all potential conflicts; if any reviewer suspects they might be conflicted, they should seek advice from the relevant Funding Officer before starting the review by replying to the request to review or emailing operations@ahrc.ukri.org. For a proposal to advance further in the process, reviewers must be majority-supportive of the application (i.e. for an application with three reviews, at least two reviews need to be graded at a 4 or above). Reviews should be evidence-based and objective, outlining a proposal's strengths and weaknesses and providing justification for the score awarded. Reviews are made available to applicants, and all criticism should be made in such a way that they could respond. Offensive or personal comments are not permitted. Reviews are anonymised and reviewers should be careful not to include comments that would reveal their identity.

Reviewers should note that policies related to areas such as research ethics, procurement and organisational process may vary from organisation to organisation and that the context for the applicant may differ from their own. Reviewers may make comments related to the design of projects in this context or clarify potential issues, but should be mindful of the possible limits institutional policies place on applicants.

We return unsuitable reviews to reviewers for amendment; our comments must be addressed so that a review can be used in the assessment process.

There are separate grading scales for each main AHRC scheme which can all be found in the [Research Funding Guide](#). Any variations to the scales are outlined in the guidance for individual calls.

3.2.4 Principal Investigator response

Where permitted under the rules of a call or scheme, applicants with majority-supportive reviews are invited to submit a PI response to reviews received. This is an opportunity for applicants to correct any factual errors or conceptual misunderstandings, or to respond to any queries highlighted in comments from the reviewers. Applicants are not obliged to submit a response but are encouraged to do so they are assessed at panel and are considered in the ranking of proposals. If a response is not received from the PI within the period stated, then the application will proceed to panel without it.

3.2.5 Panel meeting

Panellists are selected to ensure a suitable spread of expertise and balanced to ensure diverse representation from across the UK population. Panellists receive papers several weeks in advance, and their role is to assess all evidence placed before them before reaching a decision on proposals' overall quality. It is not unusual for an application to receive a range of grades in the reviews, so the panel plays a vital moderating role in the assessment process. The panel grades and ranks all proposals in priority order to receive funding.

3.2.6 Awards

The AHRC Executive Chair and Directors Group assesses the panel's recommendation and agrees a final list of awards to be made depending on the available budget.

3.2.7 Announcements

Once the successful proposals have been approved, AHRC staff notify applicants of the outcome of their application.

3.3 Interdisciplinary proposals

UKRI Research Councils have an agreed approach for collaborating on the peer review and funding of research proposals that straddle their remits under their 'responsive mode' research grants schemes, the Cross-Council Remit Agreement. This approach ensures that no gaps develop between the Councils' subject domains and safeguards equality of opportunity for proposals at the interface between traditional disciplines, where many major research challenges are located.

For multidisciplinary proposals, it is unlikely that each individual reviewer will be familiar with all the elements of the programme of research. A reviewer may have been approached for comment because of their expertise in one element and reviews will also be sought from experts in the remaining aspects. Reviewers should outline their expertise in the usual way and note the areas of the proposal they are commenting on. This will greatly assist the panel in placing your comments in context.

You should assign the proposal a grade and respond only to those elements on which you consider it appropriate for you to comment. You may additionally want to justify the grade you have given or indicate any reservations you have. Please use the "Overall Assessment" section of the review form to ensure that the reasons for your grade are clear.

Multidisciplinary research is often to be found at the cutting edge, which is inherently risky. You should not be afraid of recommending innovative, speculative, and adventurous proposals. If you think something is risky, it is important to ask yourself what the risks are; is it risky because the outputs are unknown or does the project lack the subject specialism it needs?

It is possible that a standard technique or method is being used in a novel way or context. It is not appropriate to lower your grade to reflect this element if it underpins an otherwise exciting piece of research.

3.4 Conflicts of interest

The peer review process is essential in allowing the UKRI Research Councils to serve their communities by providing recommendations for funding of world class research.

As the corner stone of grant funding, it is essential that the process be both transparent and objective, and that reviews are conducted in line with the [Seven Principles of Public Life](#). Decisions must be made and seen to be made impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias. While the AHRC recognises that is possible for reviewers to objectively assess research proposals, putting any personal knowledge of the applicant aside, it is crucial there be no perception of conflict of interest, to protect the integrity of the recommendations made on our behalf.

3.4.1 When invited to undertake a review

It is vital that all reviewers are seen to be completely impartial at all stages of the review process. You should not take part in the review of any proposal where a conflict of interest may be construed.

AHRC Funding Officers endeavour to identify conflicts of interest and will not select you as a reviewer if there is a clear conflict. However, not all conflicts are obvious from the information we have available. **If you think you may have a conflict of interest, please contact the relevant Funding Officer before starting a review by replying to the request to review or emailing operations@ahrc.ukri.org.**

3.4.2 When invited to sit on a panel

It is vital that panel members are seen to be completely impartial at all stages of the assessment process. You should not take part in the moderation of any proposal where a conflict of interest could be construed. **If you think you might have a conflict, please inform the staff member responsible for your panel at the earliest possible opportunity.**

In most cases, you may still serve on the panel, but you will be required to leave the room whilst the proposal(s) for which you have a conflict is/are being discussed. Conflicted panel members are not permitted to contribute to any ranking discussion specifically related to the placement of the proposal on which they are conflicted. It will be the responsibility of the panel chair to ensure that such proposals are not discussed again in detail, to ensure fairness.

3.4.3 Examples of conflicts of interest

Type of conflict	Example	Result

Employment/Financial	You have been or are currently a member of staff or Professor Emeritus at same Institution as any of the named investigators or Project Partner organisation involved in the project or receive personal remuneration from the institution.	Conflicted if present within the past two years
	Formal arrangement as an External PhD Examiner within the same institution as that of any of the named investigators.	
Relationship	A personal friend or relative of any of the named investigators or named staff on the proposal.	Conflicted
Professional relationship	Former PhD Supervisor for any of the named Investigators or named staff of the proposal.	Conflicted if present within the last five years
	You have worked closely or are in close regular collaboration with the named investigators, research staff, collaborators and/or project partners.	
Book/Journal collaboration	Joint editor or author with any of the named investigators (excluding membership of Journal editorial boards).	Conflicted if present within the last five years
Project collaboration	If you are directly involved in the work proposed by any of the named investigators, e.g. you have agreed to be a member on an advisory committee connected with the project.	Conflicted
Other	If you are intending to submit or have already submitted a proposal to any scheme/Call within six months of the time, or to the same round that you are being asked to provide a review for.	Conflicted

It is not possible to list all scenarios due to the complexities of relationships between researchers, especially in niche research areas. Some cases will be clear cut and others will need to be judged on a case by case basis.

Note: If you have any collaborative work under development with an applicant that would place you into a conflicted category once it is complete/published, please seek guidance from the AHRC before starting a review.

You should not be involved in any way with a proposal prior to its submission or once a decision has been made, e.g. you should not comment on, or help colleagues in preparing a proposal, or sit on advisory boards, if you have already agreed to act as a reviewer for that call or scheme. If AHRC requests that you review such a proposal, please decline the request promptly.

If you are approached by applicants to discuss their proposals in any way – whether it be before, during or after an assessment process that you are involved in – you should decline. You are free to talk to applicants about the Council's structures, policies, and modes of operation, so long as the information is in the public domain (e.g. in the Research Funding Guide or on the website). You must not divulge information about individual awards or application statistics unless the information is already in the public domain.

If you are in any doubt as to whether you should review a proposal due to a possible conflict of interest, before starting the review you should contact the AHRC by replying to the request to review or emailing operations@ahrc.ukri.org.

Section 4: Reviewer guidance and effective reviewing

4.1 Effective reviewing

Your primary role will be to provide informed reviews of proposals submitted to the AHRC. Reviews should provide an objective analysis of research proposals.

It is important that before you accept to undertake a review, you consider the initial actions listed below:

- Familiarise yourself with the [UKRI Principles of Assessment and Decision Making](#).
- Ensure you accept the review on Je-S before starting so AHRC are aware you are doing it.
- If you are unable to do the review, decline as soon as possible. Alternatively, you can ask for an extension to the due date. Please do not request an extension and then decline as the extension date is reached.
- **Before completing a review, please check for any potential conflicts of interest before starting any work. If in any doubt, contact the relevant Funding Officer by replying to the request to review or emailing operations@ahrc.ukri.org.**

Below are some points to consider when undertaking a review:

- Read the proposal carefully alongside the relevant scheme and call guidance.
- Provide an objective, fair and analytical assessment of the proposal, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the application and contextualising it within current work in the field.
- Don't mention your name or any personal information that can identify you in your comments, to keep the review anonymous.
- Make sure your comments and grades for each section of the review form match.
- Avoid personal comments and make sure your language is clear and jargon-free.
- Any criticism made should be constructive and provide an evaluation, not a description of the project.
- Any criticism made should be framed in such a way that the applicant could respond.
- Assign an overall score that reflects your overall conclusion and the various weightings you have given in the sections of the review form, using the scheme's grading descriptors and assessment criteria found within the [AHRC Funding Guide](#) (Section 5: Assessment Criteria and Peer Review).
- Make a clear case whether the application should be funded or not. Remember, an overall score of 3 or below is classed as unfundable.
- Make sure that a non-expert can make a final grading decision based on your review.

4.2 COVID-19 update for reviewers

4.2.1 Reviewer guidance for mitigation against submitted applications

UKRI recognises that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused major interruptions and disruptions across our communities and are committed to ensuring that individual applicants and their wider team, including partners and networks, are not penalised for any disruption to their career(s) such as breaks and delays, disruptive working patterns and conditions, the loss of on-going work, and role changes that may have been caused by the pandemic. When undertaking your assessment of the research project, you should consider the unequal impacts of the impact that COVID-19 related disruption might have had on the track record and career development of those individuals included in the proposal, and you should focus on the capability of the applicant and their wider team to deliver the research they are proposing.

4.2.2 Accounting for unknowns in new applications

UKRI acknowledges that it is a challenge for applicants to determine the future impacts of COVID-19 while the pandemic continues to evolve. Applicants have been advised that their applications should be based on the information available at the point of submission and, if applicable, the known application specific impacts of COVID-19 should be accounted for. Where known impacts have occurred, these should have been highlighted in the application, including the assumptions/information at the point of submission. Applicants were not required to include contingency plans for the potential impacts of COVID-19. Requests for travel both domestically and internationally could be included in accordance to the relevant scheme guidelines, noting the above advice.

When undertaking your assessment of the research project you should assess the project as written, noting that any changes that the project might require in the future, which arise from the COVID-19 pandemic, will be resolved as a post-award issue by UKRI if the project is successful. Potential complications related to COVID19 should not affect your assessment or the score you give the project.

4.3 Level of confidence

Given the importance of high-quality reviewer reports to the peer review process, it is essential that you can speak with confidence when assessing the proposal, justifying your comments in full. However, because of the nature of the proposal, you may feel that you are only able to comment with confidence on some aspects of it. For this reason, confidence boxes are provided against each section. These boxes are the opportunity to tell us about your own confidence, or otherwise, in being able to make your assessment, not your confidence in the success of the proposal if it were funded. If, for any reason, you feel that you were not able to confidently assess the proposal, please advise the AHRC Funding Officer by replying to the request to review or emailing operations@ahrc.ukri.org.

4.4 Review length

There are certain factors which may determine the length of a review for example: level of reviewer experience, familiarity with the subject area. Therefore, a review could take anything between an hour to half a day to complete.

There is no set length for reviewer comments. We would prefer reviews to be summarised concisely whilst comprehensively assessing the strengths and weaknesses of a proposal, and you may wish to comment on a number of specific aspects in detail. However, relatively short comments that are clearly stated, well justified and constructive can be useful to a panel (as well as to applicants). No matter the length of your review, please ensure there is always enough detail to show how you reached your conclusions.

4.5 Timeframe for reviewing proposals

The exact timeframe for each review will be provided when you are invited to review a proposal, but in general you will have three weeks (15 working days) from the date of invitation. Please be aware that it is important that your review is received by the due date specified, so that we are able to progress the assessment of applications in accordance with the timescales published in the AHRC Funding Guide. If your review is received after the due date, without having negotiated this with AHRC Funding Officers first, it may be marked as unusable. If you anticipate having any difficulties meeting the due date specified, please reply to the review request or email operations@ahrc.ukri.org.

4.6 Reasons for returned reviews

When a review is submitted to AHRC, our Funding Officers will ensure that the review satisfies our initial checks before proceeding to the next stage. On occasions reviews can be returned to you for amendment by our Funding Officers, most likely for one or more of these reasons:

- Final grade is not consistent with comments and scores made throughout the review
- Comments made within a single section do not match the grade given for that section
- A low confidence rating has been declared
- Tone and language used is confrontational or emotive
- Reviewer identity is revealed in their comments, whether inadvertently or overtly
- Comments made are speculative or don't relate to the content of the proposal
- Comments do not provide an evidence-based assessment of a proposal's strengths and weaknesses
- Comments are made about AHRC processes and policies

Note: It is only possible to return reviews via Je-S once, therefore please ensure all requested amendments are made before resubmission. If you have any questions, please contact the relevant Funding Officer before resubmitting by replying to the request or emailing operations@ahrc.ukri.org.

We welcome feedback on our processes and policies, but ask that any such comments are addressed to the PRC team and not included in reviews: peerreviewcollege@ahrc.ukri.org.

4.7 The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)

We are committed to support the recommendations and principles set out by the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment. You should not use journal-based metrics, 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, etc.) in addition to research publications. You should consider a broad range of impact measures including qualitative indicators, such as influence on policy and practice.

Section 5. Using the Joint electronic Submission System (Je-S)

5.1. Your research expertise

In order to ensure the most appropriate reviewers are invited to complete peer reviews on applications, AHRC Funding Officers use the information submitted under the classifications, keywords and expertise from PRC member's accounts to match reviewers to the subject matter of each application. If your Je-S account contains no or limited information, we will be unable to match you to any applications we receive.

It is possible to update classifications and keywords by logging into Je-S and selecting the 'Classification Expertise' link under the 'Research Expertise' section within the menu on the left of the Homepage. Additional guidance on how to update this information can be found within the Je-S Helptext under the 'Research Expertise' section.

This information should be updated regularly to ensure you capture different avenues your research may have taken since first joining the College that has increased or changed the areas in which you could be asked to review.

5.2 Keeping your personal details up to date

As a PRC member and a user of the Je-S system you are responsible for updating your personal details, including keep your contact details and your institutional affiliation up to date.

To amend your details please log-in to the Je-S system using your Je-S User ID and password and then select "My Details". Some changes, including a change to Department and/or Organisation, will not be displayed until the details have been verified by the Je-S Helpdesk. For guidance please refer to the System Help notes and the Maintaining Personal Details Tutorial. If you experience any difficulty using Je-S or have any questions please contact the Je-S Helpdesk by emailing JeSHelp@je-s.ukri.org or calling 01793 444164.

5.3 Submitting a period of unavailability

The unavailability tool can be used to indicate a time frame in which you will be unable to undertake any peer review activity. A start date and an end date can be entered. Where possible, we ask that you include an end date; however, if you do not know when your period of unavailability will come to an end this can be left blank and updated at a later time. If you return from a period of unavailability and have not submitted an end date, you will still be classed as 'unavailable' on AHRC systems and will therefore continue to not receive any review requests or panel invites

5.4 ORCID Reviewer Recognition

5.4.1 Key benefits for reviewers

ORCID Reviewer Recognition provides a visible and verifiable way for UKRI to publicly credit reviewers' contributions.

It can act as an effective reference point to keep track of the number of reviews that you have carried out for UKRI over time, which will be useful when it comes to applying for a promotion and funding.

5.4.2 Important points to remember

Reviewers do not need to claim ORCID review credits. The ORCID Reviewer Recognition process is automated and only required reviewers to grant UKRI permission to send review information into their ORCID

account; you must opt in to receive credits. UKRI processes this information on the reviewer's behalf based on their consent. The reviewer decides whether to grant or deny permission to UKRI through their Je-S account.

To retain reviewer anonymity and confidentiality of the review process, the transfer of data from Je-S to ORCID does not include details of individual application, the full date of the review or the UKRI Council the review was submitted to. UKRI will only send ORCID review credits to those reviewers that have explicitly granted permissions in the Je-S profile.

5.4.3 Further Information

You can read more about ORCID reviewer recognition on the [ORCID website](#) where you will also find guidance on creating an ORCID account.

Section 6: Panels

6.1 Purpose of panel meetings

The purpose of panel meetings is to consider and reach final agreement on the grading and ranking of proposals, and where applicable agree feedback or conditions for applicants. The panels' recommendations are then presented to the AHRC Executive Chair and Directors Group who make the final funding decisions. Panellists are briefed at the start of the meeting following standard panel guidance; if you have any questions in the days and weeks prior to a panel, please contact the member of staff responsible for your meeting.

6.2 Types of panel meetings

6.2.1 Moderating panels

Moderating panels are used to make funding decisions for the majority of AHRC schemes including Research Grants and Leadership Fellows. The panel assign final grades and rank proposals in order of priority for funding. The rank ordered list agreed by the panel forms the funding recommendation for AHRC. The role of the panel is to make judgments on the applications based on the feedback from the **peer reviewers** and **PI response** only. It is not their role to reassess the applications when deciding the final grade.

6.2.2 Assessment panels

Assessment panels operate differently. As applications are discussed it is the role of the members of these panels to assess the application and assign a grade against the scheme criteria. The panel discusses each application's strengths and weaknesses on their own merit, and then rank proposals in order of priority of funding. The rank ordered list agreed by the panel forms the funding recommendation for AHRC.

6.3 Panel selection

Whenever possible, panel membership is drawn from the College. Unfortunately, not all College members will have the opportunity to sit on a panel during their term of membership. To avoid conflicts of interest, College members are not appointed to panels for which they have submitted a review or where they are involved with a proposal that is being considered at the meeting.

The following is taken into consideration when selecting panellists:

- Number of panellists required relative to the number of applications being discussed.
- Required panellist experience and expertise, noting that some panels may evaluate a broader range of applications than others.
- Balancing the number of panellists who have previously sat on an AHRC panel against those who have not.
- There will only be one panel member from any one institution.
- Ensuring that a representative spread of panellists sit on panels in any given year, considering protected characteristics (gender, ethnicity and disability) and geographic location across the UK.

6.4 Panel member roles

In accepting an invitation to serve on a panel, panellists and chairs agree to adhere to the following panel protocols:

- Familiarise themselves with the UKRI Principles of Assessment and Decision Making
- Exercise knowledge, judgment, and expertise to reach clear and evidence-based decisions.
- Treat all proposals, reviews and PI responses and assessments as strictly confidential at all times.
- Always be fair and objective.
- Adhere to the AHRC's Equality and Diversity Policy, avoiding any bias in assessments of proposals, especially relating to gender, disability, racial or ethnic origin, sexual orientation or religious beliefs.
- Disclose any conflicts of interest and any possible perceptions of conflicts of interest

6.4.1 Introducers

- Ahead of the meeting, panel members are assigned the role of Primary, Secondary or Supporting introducer to a number of proposals.
- Introducers should read all their assigned proposals.
- They should grade and comment on all their assigned proposals in advance of the panel meeting, taking account of the aims and assessment criteria for the scheme concerned.
- Scores should use decimal points to aid final ranking, with the maximum possible score being 6.9.
- Panellists should provide their pre-scores, to one decimal point, to the AHRC ahead of the meeting as these drive panel discussion in a logical and structured way.
- During the meeting, Secondary and Supporting introducers should only add comments that have not already been raised by the Primary introducer.

6.4.2 Panel Chair

- Ensure that the correct procedures are followed, and the meeting runs to time.
- Moderate the discussion of applications and ensure each application is graded solely according to its merits and ranked accordingly, ensuring that all panellists are given time and space to make their assessment.
- Ensure that an agreed rank ordered list of proposals is produced and any recommended conditions or feedback is recorded.
- Help to identify intellectual trends apparent from the proposals assessed.
- Liaise and work with AHRC staff responsible for your panel.
- Wherever possible, comply with any deadlines given, to enable staff to conduct panel arrangements as smoothly as possible, for example commenting promptly on draft minutes or feedback comments to unsuccessful applicants.

6.5 Panel meeting papers

Meeting papers are typically made available to panel members via our Peer Review Extranet 3-4 weeks prior to a panel. They include:

- Scheme and call guidance
- Grant proposals
- Peer reviews
- Principal investigator's response to the reviews (if relevant)
- Meeting record, where all Introducers are required to input a score ahead of the meeting in accordance with set deadlines
- Introducer forms (to record grades and comments)

- Panellists' guidance

6.6 COVID-19 update for panel members

6.6.1 Guidance for mitigation against submitted applications

UKRI recognises that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused major interruptions and disruptions across our communities and are committed to ensuring that individual applicants and their wider team, including partners and networks, are not penalised for any disruption to their career(s) such as breaks and delays, disruptive working patterns and conditions, the loss of on-going work, and role changes that may have been caused by the pandemic. When undertaking your assessment of the research project, you should consider the unequal impacts of the impact that COVID-19 related disruption might have had on the track record and career development of those individuals included in the proposal, and you should focus on the capability of the applicant and their wider team to deliver the research they are proposing. Any comments made by reviewers relating to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic which negatively impact their assessment of the applicants should be disregarded.

6.6.2 Accounting for unknowns in new applications

UKRI acknowledges that it is a challenge for applicants to determine the future impacts of COVID-19 while the pandemic continues to evolve. Applicants have been advised that their applications should be based on the information available at the point of submission and, if applicable, the known application specific impacts of COVID-19 should be accounted for. Where known impacts have occurred, these should have been highlighted in the application, including the assumptions/information at the point of submission. Applicants were not required to include contingency plans for the potential impacts of COVID-19. Requests for travel both domestically and internationally could be included in accordance to the relevant scheme guidelines, noting the above advice.

When undertaking your assessment of the research project you should assess the project as written, noting that any changes that the project might require in the future, which arise from the COVID-19 pandemic, will be resolved as a post-award issue by UKRI if the project is successful. Potential complications related to COVID19 should not affect your assessment or the score you give the project and you should disregard any comments made by reviewers that go against the guidance supplied by UKRI.'

6.7 During the panel meeting

The panel discuss and agree a grade for the proposal and rank it relative to the other proposals.

Finally, the panel review its final grades and rank-ordered list which constitutes its funding recommendation.

In considering the proposals, you must ensure that your judgment is based solely on the aims and assessment criteria for the scheme, and the information provided to you in the application form, the reviews and the PI's response to these, where received. You should not allow private knowledge of the applicant or the proposed research to influence your judgment nor should you introduce new concerns or criticisms that have not been raised by the reviewers.

At the panel meeting AHRC staff:

- minute questions concerning policy, protocols and assessment practices
- advise on any points of protocol or policy where necessary
- ensure that proper procedures and protocol guidelines are enforced during the meeting, including adherence to AHRC's commitment to equal opportunities
- ensure that the panel provides and records appropriate feedback comments for applicants where necessary

If you think you may have a conflict of interest when invited to sit on a panel, please see Section 3.4 for further information.

Individual panellists' comments on and grading of, applications will be recorded by AHRC staff. The AHRC will not use these minutes or grades, or disclose them to any person or organisation, except:

- As is necessary to record the decisions of the panel
- To inform any other person or body within the AHRC, or any other body that may be co- funding the applications, as part of the funding decision process
- As may be required under the Data Protection Act or the Freedom of Information Act (or any other law or regulation to which the AHRC is or may become subject).

6.8 Ranking proposals to recommend for funding

Panels will be asked to rank all fundable proposals. When ranking applications where there is a conflict of interest for a member of the panel, the application should not be discussed again in detail unless that panellist leaves the room.

AHRC staff may adjust the costs identified in proposals prior to making awards, acting upon recommendations from panels (for example reducing the amount of staff time, or reducing the overall resource for travel or equipment).

Conditions may also be applied by panels before awards can be confirmed.

6.9 Post-panel actions

6.9.1 Funding decisions

After the panel, the final funding decisions will be made by the AHRC based on the rank list provided and level of funding available. It is, therefore, vital that panel members do not divulge or discuss panel meeting outcomes with individuals outside the meeting. Maintaining confidentiality is paramount.

All announcements of outcomes and funding decisions will be made available by AHRC. Any panel member who is asked directly for feedback by applicants should refuse and advise applicant to direct such queries to the AHRC.

You will be asked to leave any hard copies of the documents at the panel but following the meeting you must ensure all e-copies of the documents are deleted.

6.9.2 Payment of expenses and honoraria fees

Panellists will normally receive a fee of £170 for their attendance and Chairs will receive a fee of £230. Payments are paid in full and are subject to income tax and NI deductions.

Panellists and Chairs will be reimbursed their necessary expenses incurred in attending panel meetings or other events they are required to attend. Please refer to the Travel, Subsistence and Expenses Policy before submitting an expenses claim form.

The expenses claim form must be completed in full and signed. Receipts should be attached, and we can accept scanned copies of receipts. If you wish to send your form to us electronically, please send this to pso@ahrc.ukri.org.

Web link glossary

EDI Statement and Action Plan: https://ahrc.ukri.org/funding/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/

Standards of Service: https://ahrc.ukri.org/peerreview/peer-review-resources/reviewerguidance/standards-ofservice/

UKRI policies, standards and guidance: https://www.ukri.org/who-we-are/policies-standards-and-data/corporate-policies-and-standards/

Code of Practice: https://www.ukri.org/who-we-are/ahrc/our-policies-and-standards/code-of-practice/

Seven Principles of Public Life: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life

Freedom of Information: https://www.ukri.org/who-we-are/contact-us/freedom-of-information-request/innovation/

Data Protection: https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-standards-and-data/good-research-resource-hub/openresearch/

UKRI Principles of Assessment and Decision Making: https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/how-we-makedecisions/

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: https://www.ukri.org/publications/ahrc-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-action-plan/https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/supporting-healthy-research-and-innovation-culture/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/

Counter Fraud Policy: https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/policy/ahrc-policy-on-counter-fraud-and-bribery/

Conflicts of Interest: https://ahrc.ukri.org/peerreview/peer-reviewresources/reviewerguidance/conflictsofinterest/

Je-S: https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/

EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act 2018:
https://www.ukri.org/publications/data-protection-policy/

AHRC Research Funding Guide: https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/guides/research-funding-guide1/

San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA): https://sfdora.org/read/

ORCID : https://support.orcid.org/hc/en-us/articles/360006971333-Peer-Review

Panel Guidance: https://ahrc.ukri.org/peerreview/peer-review-resources/panellistsguidance/

Travel, Subsistence & Expenses Policy:
https://www.ukri.org/files/termsconditions/rcukukriterms/travelsubsistence-and-expenses-pdf/

Expenses Claim Form: https://ahrc.ukri.org/peerreview/peer-review-resources/panellistsguidance/