

## **RESEARCH COUNCILS' INDIVIDUAL MERIT PROMOTION PROCEDURE**

### **(Revised 2025)**

#### **PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

1. The purpose of the Individual Merit Promotion (IMP) procedure is to give recognition to scientific researchers who have made, and who will continue to make, an outstanding personal contribution in their field.
2. Individual merit promotion reflects scientific merit. It does not require a wider range of organisational duties to be taken on within the management structure of the employing organisation. Indeed staff can transfer from an organisational line management post to an IM post at the same level if they meet the requirements of the IM procedure.
3. The criteria for each of the three levels of IM promotion are described at Annex A.

#### **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

4. The Research Councils and other participating organisations are invited to make nominations annually for individual merit promotion. These will be considered by the IMP Panel, currently chaired by Professor M Benton of the University of Bristol. The IMP procedure aims to ensure that all nominations are treated fairly regardless of ethnic origin, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability or gender and will take account of individual career patterns when assessing candidates for promotion.

#### **INDIVIDUAL MERIT PROMOTION CRITERIA**

5. Promotion within the IMP procedure is based on the following general criteria:
  - a) Candidates will have made an outstanding personal contribution to their area of scientific and/or technical enquiry. It is not sufficient to demonstrate that they have worked well and achieved good results in their present grade. Candidates, and their line management, must be able to clearly demonstrate excellence in the current grade, show consistently very high evaluations in their annual appraisals, and be clearly worthy of promotion to the higher grade on scientific merit.
  - b) Candidates must also demonstrate the potential to make a further outstanding personal contribution to scientific enquiry, and to have a clear conception of the general objectives of their future research and the methods of achieving them.

- c) Candidates, and their line management, must demonstrate that their research has made, and is likely to continue to make, a significant contribution to the goals and priorities of the employing organisation.
  - d) Candidates should be able to demonstrate that their research achievement and performance has achieved a high degree of external recognition, both nationally and internationally, and has influenced other scientists working in their field.
6. More specific criteria, linked to the nature of the research being undertaken (eg basic, strategic, applied etc.) are set out at Annex C.

## **PROCEDURE FOR NOMINATIONS**

- 7. When initially considering the nominations, the Panel can decide that some candidates do not meet the criteria of the scheme and should therefore not be interviewed. Where the Panel considers there to be a prima facie case for IM promotion, or where the Panel is uncertain, opinions will be obtained from at least three referees (four for promotion to IMP levels 2 and 1) from outside the employing Council or organisation, who have relevant specialist knowledge. A minimum of one referee (in the case of IMP level 3) or two referees (in the case of IMP levels 2 and 1) will be active members of internationally recognised non UK research groups.
- 8. The Panel will appoint two or three of its number to sit with one or more experts from outside the employing organisation to interview candidates who have been approved in the initial sift. The experts must be distinguished senior scientists, whose peer judgements are widely respected.
- 9. The purpose of the interviews is to examine in greater detail the candidates' work, their contribution to scientific enquiry and their intended future work. Candidates should be prepared to give a short description of their work and to be questioned on all aspects, but particularly in some depth on those elements they have selected as being representative of their most significant work.
- 10. The report and recommendation of the interview panel will be considered by the full IM Panel at its plenary meeting in May, and a decision will be made on each candidate's suitability for promotion.
- 11. In endorsing the candidate's nomination, the employer must provide assurance that the candidate will be able to carry out the proposed future work, in terms of both opportunity and facilities. In this context, Directors are required to confirm that candidates will be able to devote the major proportion of their work time to personal research and associated activities over the next five year period,

consistent with the high levels of scientific quality and productivity required for IMP, and that any organisational role which they are required to play within the institute during this period will be compatible with this commitment to personal research.

## **APPEALS**

12. There is no appeals procedure against a decision on IM promotion, since Panel judgements are based on peer assessment of scientific quality. Unsuccessful candidates may be reconsidered for IM promotion in the following or in subsequent years.

## **PERIODIC REVIEW OF INDIVIDUAL MERIT PROMOTION HOLDERS**

13. Candidates hold Individual Merit promotion only as long as they continue to meet the criteria for the scheme, and continue to maintain the standards for which it was awarded. Periodic reviews are held to ensure that the overall and individual standards of the scheme are being rigorously maintained. Each holder of an individual merit promotion will be fully reviewed within a maximum of five years from the initial promotion. These reviews will involve a submission by the IMP holder's line management covering details of the work since promotion or last review; the distinction of the work; and a plan of the work to be undertaken during the next five years. Referees' reports will be called for at the Panel's discretion. Institute Directors or Heads of Organisations are required to notify the IMP Secretariat if the time available to an IMP holder for personal research ceases to be a major proportion in any consecutive two year period.
14. As a result of the review, the Panel may:
  - (i) confirm the postholder in their IM grade;
  - (ii) ask for more information, either internally or externally by way of referees' comments, to assist in the review;
  - (iii) as a result of the additional information it may confirm the postholder's IM grade;
  - (iv) either initially or as a result of the additional information it may decide to interview the IMP holder before deciding on future IM status;
  - (v) it may withdraw the IM grading if it considers that the IM criteria are no longer being met.

15. As in the case of the original IM promotion, there is no appeal against a decision of the Panel on a review of IM status.

## **RESEARCH COUNCILS' INDIVIDUAL MERIT PROMOTION PROCEDURE**

### **ANNEX A – GRADING GUIDANCE**

#### **a) IMP LEVEL 3**

Candidates involved in basic and strategic research should be able to demonstrate an excellent record of innovative and original research, with substantial and significant contributions to the development of their area of science. They are expected to have a good international reputation. Candidates should be able to justify their intended future research programme with a clear statement of the nature and extent of their involvement in it as active scientists.

Candidates involved in the application of existing knowledge should have an excellent record of innovation in the development and exploitation of technology, processes or products (including computer software and systems). Candidates should be able to demonstrate that their future programme of work will maintain a high level of development and innovation.

#### **b) IMP LEVEL 2**

Candidates should be established leaders in their fields and have made clear and substantial contributions to the development of their area of science.

Candidates involved with basic and strategic research should be able to show that they have provided a high level of original published material in terms of both quality and quantity.

Candidates should have an excellent and wide international reputation for their research and should have contributed to important discoveries, which are recognised as of broad international significance to the development of their area of science. Candidates should be able to provide a clear statement of the nature and extent of their future research programme and their likely personal contributions to scientific advance.

Candidates concerned with the application of existing knowledge should have introduced innovative concepts to the development and exploitation of technology, processes or products, including computer software and systems. Candidates should have been responsible, where appropriate, for the take up of these techniques, processes or products by industry. They

should be able to demonstrate an expectation that this level of creativity will continue.

**c) IMP LEVEL 1**

Candidates should be widely acknowledged authorities and world leaders in their subject and specialism who have contributed substantially to the discovery of new scientific knowledge and discoveries or who have opened new fields of fruitful and useful research. They should be of pre-eminent international standing and acclaim.

Candidates in the field of basic and strategic research should hold a leading position among scientists in their specialism. They should be regarded as people whose published work has had a major influence on the development of their specialism. Candidates should be able to state clearly their plans for future research, and illustrate how it will continue to have a significant impact on their field of science.

Candidates concerned with the application of existing knowledge should have made contributions, which have resulted in major advances in the development or exploitation of technology, processes or products of special significance. They should be acknowledged leaders in their field who are likely to have a profound influence on the future development of their specialism.

## **RESEARCH COUNCILS' INDIVIDUAL MERIT PROMOTION PROCEDURE**

### **ANNEX B – INDIVIDUAL MERIT PROMOTION CRITERIA**

#### **1. CANDIDATES INVOLVED IN BASIC AND STRATEGIC RESEARCH**

Candidates undertaking basic or strategic research will be assessed initially from their record of achievement as indicated by their publications and other outputs. Candidates are expected to present evidence of innovative and original research in high quality publications, both in the open scientific and professional press and internal papers, indicating whether they were refereed, their length, and the extent of their personal contribution to jointly authored publications. Candidates should be able to demonstrate their individual contribution in:

- a) the recognition of research problems;
- b) the formulation and management of each programme and its resources;
- c) the research outputs arising from their personal insights; and, if appropriate,
- d) the development of their research to a practical and cost-effective application to a product or process.

#### **2. CANDIDATES WHOSE WORK INVOLVES THE APPLICATION OF EXISTING KNOWLEDGE**

Candidates whose work is associated with technical innovation, design, development and the application of existing knowledge will be assessed through their ingenuity and effectiveness in developing techniques, products and processes, the filing of patents or the commercial/practical exploitation of techniques, processes or products. Candidates will be expected to produce evidence, such as technical reports, design documents, professional publications, drawings, photographs, models and programme documentation, which will assist in demonstrating the importance of their achievement and advances. Candidates involved in project and contract management should include in their evidence progress reports, planning documents, trial results and other evidence, which would illustrate the success of the project/contract, its contribution to the objectives and priorities of the department, and their individual contribution to the work involved.

Candidates whose work involves research of a basic or strategic nature and who are also involved in the type of work covered in this paragraph, associated with innovation, design, development and project/contract management, may present evidence under both of these heads.

### **3. GENERAL**

In all cases, candidates should be able to demonstrate that their work has:

- contributed significantly to the general level of scientific or technical understanding within the discipline(s) concerned;
- contributed significantly to the goals and priorities of the Council/employing organisation;
- influenced other senior scientists working in their field