



Future Leaders Fellowships Reviewers' Guidance

Contents

1	Major changes to Future Leaders Fellowships Peer Review	2
2	The Future Leaders Fellowships scheme overview	2
3	Before you review	3
3.1	New Reviewers	3
3.2	Conflict of Interest.....	3
3.3	Timescales	3
3.4	Changes to UKRI Peer Review Platform	3
4	Considerations when completing a review	4
4.1	Proposal considerations	4
4.1.1	Fellow eligibility	4
4.1.2	Animal Usage	4
4.1.3	Covid-19.....	4
4.1.4	Research Integrity and Responsible Innovation.....	5
4.1.5	Hyperlinks	5
4.1.6	Resume for Research and Innovation (R4RI)	5
4.2	Reviewer considerations	6
4.2.1	AI	6
4.2.2	Principles of Assessment and Decision Making.....	6
4.2.3	Language	6
4.2.4	Bias	6
4.2.5	Multidisciplinary Proposals	7
4.2.6	Information Rights Legislation	7
4.2.7	Journal Impact Factors	7
5	Completing the Review Form	7
5.1	Vision and Approach	8
5.1.1	Vision	8
5.1.2	Approach.....	8
5.2	Applicant capability to deliver	9
5.3	Career development.....	10
5.4	Host organisation support.....	10
5.5	Ethics and responsible research and innovation (RRI)	11
5.6	Resources and cost justification	12
5.7	Overall Assessment.....	13

6	What Happens Next.....	14
7	Reviewer Recognition	14
8	Queries	14
Annex A	Conflicts of Interest.....	15
Annex B	Career Breaks and Flexible Working	17
Annex C	Principles of Assessment and Decision Making.....	19

1 Major changes to Future Leaders Fellowships Peer Review

Below are the major changes which have been made to the peer review process for the (UKRI) Future Leaders Fellowships (FLF) scheme since Round 10:

- Co-Leads (previously Co-Investigators) are no longer permitted under this scheme. Additionally, requests for Visiting Researchers and Specialists should be by exception only and must be clearly justified.
- Fellows can now request costs associated with reasonable adjustments where they increase as a direct result of working on the project. Reviewers should not assess these costs.
- UKRI has amended their AI policy to allow AI tools for language refinement during assessment, however entering any part of the application into a Gen AI tool or using Gen AI to understand, summarise or evaluate any part of the application is still not allowed.

2 The Future Leaders Fellowships scheme overview

The FLF scheme supports academics and innovators who are transitioning to or establishing Independence to become leaders in their field.

It is open to people working in universities, businesses and research organisations.

The objectives of the scheme are to:

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

Applications are encouraged from the entirety of the UKRI remit. We welcome and encourage applicants from remits including the arts, humanities and social sciences and the five critical technologies as set out in the Department for Science and Innovation's [Science and Technology Framework](#).

Fellowships can also lead and develop innovation. We define innovation as the practical translation of disruptive ideas into novel, relevant and valued products, services, processes, systems or business models, making them readily available to markets, government and society, creating economic or social value from ideas.

3 Before you review

3.1 New Reviewers

Those new to review writing either generally or for UKRI should consider completing our short [online training course](#). The training course is made up of two modules, the first covering the FLF scheme and the second providing guidance on good review writing. The course should take around 30 minutes to complete. If you need help registering, you can read our [guidance on how to register for the training](#).

3.2 Conflict of Interest

Please ensure that you do not have a conflict of interest with the proposal. The number one reason for a received review being considered unusable is because of a conflict of interest, so we request that you make yourself familiar with the policy available at [Annex A](#) and inform us before writing the review if you have or suspect any conflicts of interest with the proposal you have been asked to review by email to fellowsppeerreview@ukri.org.

UKRI is a publicly funded organisation and is accountable to government and the public for its actions and for the way it conducts its business, which must be undertaken in a way that is transparent and guards against potential conflicts of interest influencing the outcome of decisions.

3.3 Timescales

You will have 15 working days to provide your review. If you cannot comment within this timescale, please confirm by reply or by emailing fellowsppeerreview@ukri.org immediately, so we can discuss extending the deadline or, if you are still not able to provide a review with an extension, so that we can invite another reviewer in your place as quickly as possible.

If you can suggest possible alternative reviewers we could approach when you decline, this would be much appreciated.

3.4 Changes to UKRI Peer Review Platform

The Funding Service (TFS) aims to address many of the issues of unnecessary complexity and bureaucracy which have been identified in various reviews of research funding. However, there are also some limitations:

- Instead of individual text boxes under each question, your review will now be provided within a single text box. This means you must insert the relevant headers for each section yourself.
- If you identify yourself within a review, do not provide enough detail, confirm that you have used AI or do anything else that makes your review unusable, we will not be able to amend or return your review and it will not be used.

For more information on the new TFS system, you can read our [In-depth guidance for reviewers](#).

4 Considerations when completing a review

4.1 Proposal considerations

4.1.1 Fellow eligibility

The FLF scheme supports people to work in a way that suits their personal circumstances. This includes:

- career breaks
- support for people with caring responsibilities
- flexible working
- alternative working patterns
- from diverse career backgrounds
- coming to the UK from abroad

More information on career breaks and flexible working can be found in [Annex B](#).

Because of the interdisciplinary nature of the scheme, applications are received from a diverse range of applicants from across UKRI's entire remit. UKRI therefore cannot provide exact eligibility criteria.

Instead, it is up to the applicant to make the case that they are appropriately positioned for the scheme as part of their application and for you, as a reviewer, to decide the strength of this case.

You must not refer to the amount of time since PhD during any part of your assessment.

4.1.2 Animal Usage

We expect all proposals to conform to the National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs) guidance on [Responsibility in the use of animals in bioscience research](#)

This requirement applies whether or not the animals are to be purchased with UKRI funds and whether the work is to be undertaken within or outside the UK.

4.1.3 Covid-19

UKRI recognises that the COVID-19 pandemic caused major interruptions and disruptions across our communities. We are committed to ensuring that individual applicants and their wider team, including partners and networks, are not penalised for any disruption to their career, such as breaks and delays; disruptive working patterns and conditions; the loss of ongoing work, and/or role changes that may have been caused by the pandemic.

Where disruptions have occurred, the applicant can highlight this within their application if they wish, but there is no requirement to detail the specific circumstances that caused the disruption as our concern is not the details of what happened, but the impact it has had on the applicant.

In your review, you should consider the unequal impacts that COVID-19 related disruptions might have had on the applicant's capability to deliver; the career development of the individuals included in the application, and the capability of the applicant and their wider team to deliver the research they are proposing.

4.1.4 Research Integrity and Responsible Innovation

The high integrity of research supported by UKRI is part of what makes it trustworthy and trusted. High integrity is the product of responsible research practices and a culture and environment that promotes and supports it. You should highlight where you believe research is not being conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal, regulatory, and professional frameworks, obligations and standards.

For researchers, responsible innovation is a process that takes the wider impacts of research and innovation into account. It aims to ensure that unintended negative impacts are avoided, that barriers to dissemination, adoption and diffusion of research and innovation are reduced, and that the positive societal and economic benefits of research and innovation are fully realised. You are expected to describe and analyse the impacts, intended or otherwise, positive or negative, that might arise from the proposal where appropriate.

Full details on [Research Integrity](#) and [Responsible Innovation](#).

4.1.5 Hyperlinks

Applications should be self-contained, and hyperlinks should only be used to provide links directly to reference information. To ensure the information's integrity is maintained, where possible, persistent identifiers such as digital object identifiers should be used.

As a reviewer, you are not required to access links to carry out assessment and are not expected to consider anything outside of the documents provided by the applicant. If the applicant has included any non-reference hyperlinks, we advise you do not click these as it could compromise reviewer anonymity.

4.1.6 Resume for Research and Innovation (R4RI)

The R4RI is a flexible narrative CV template that has been adopted across all UKRI funding opportunities for applicants to structure their answer to the 'Applicant capability to deliver' section.

This section is designed to give the applicants the opportunity to demonstrate their experiences and skills to lead, manage and deliver the project they propose and should be assessed in the context of the rest of the application. The evidence that applicant provides under each module and the activities they describe should be assessed in the context of their career stage.

You should consider:

- the individual or team as a whole and the full breadth of their contributions
- skills and outputs of all types, not just academic outputs.
- whether the team as a whole has the right balance of skills and expertise to deliver the proposed work and the complementary skills demonstrated by different team members with varied backgrounds and experiences.
- how flexible working may have impacted their track record (for example, career breaks, secondments, voluntary work).

Do not:

- let the writing style or language used influence your assessment (for example, narrative prose vs list and bullets).
- score the individual R4RI modules, nor assign any weighting to them.
- penalise applicants for providing more content under one module compared to another, or for including outputs under a different module.
- seek information outside of the application, particularly websites that rely on journal-based metrics (for example, Google Scholar).

4.2 Reviewer considerations

4.2.1 AI

Our expert assessors are selected for their expertise and experience in their field. We seek their knowledge and judgement of an application in relation to the assessment criteria, and value their unique perspectives.

As a reviewer, you must ensure that:

- no part of the application being assessed is entered into a generative AI tool.
- no personal information from the application is disclosed.
- generative AI is not tasked with understanding, summarising or evaluating the application's content.
- relevant intellectual property and data protection legislation is complied with.
- you do not take into account or speculate within your assessment whether generative AI has been used to develop the application.

Providing that you adhere to the above, you may use AI tools to correct language, spelling, grammar and formatting. If you inform UKRI that you have not complied with any of the above, the review you have provided will not be used.

The release of confidential material into generative AI tools constitutes a breach of confidentiality and integrity as set out in our [policy on the governance of good research practice](#) and [our principles of assessment and decision making policy](#).

For more information, please see [UKRI's Use of generative artificial intelligence in application preparation and assessment policy](#).

4.2.2 Principles of Assessment and Decision Making

Expert review is governed by several underlying principles, including those of integrity, confidentiality and anonymity. A summary of points relevant to reviewers are listed in [Annex C](#).

Full information on [UKRI's Principals of Assessment and Decision-Making](#).

4.2.3 Language

As a reviewer, you must use plain English wherever possible and avoid using idioms or slang. This is to help ensure inclusivity, recognising that English will not always be the first language of the candidate.

You must also avoid the use of jargon, bearing in mind that the panellists who rely on your review for their decisions may not be specialists in your field.

4.2.4 Bias

As a reviewer, you must ensure you maintain objectivity in your assessment of applications. Part of your role is to be aware of potential biases and the impact these may have. Reducing and challenging bias in peer review is important to ensure the integrity of the process and help advance equity, diversity, and inclusion in our scientific communities.

If it is believed that your comments are unfairly biased, your review may be considered unusable.

Before writing a review, you should familiarise yourself with MRC's guidance for peer reviewers on [Tackling Bias in Peer Review](#).

4.2.5 Multidisciplinary Proposals

The FLF scheme supports fellowships in all areas of UKRI's remit, including multi- and interdisciplinary projects. Because of this, you might feel that you can only comment with confidence on a specific part of a proposal. In this situation you should provide a review on only the aspects that you are able to comment. We will invite different reviewers to review the aspects you are not best placed to assess, and the assessment panel will then integrate these different comments.

If in doubt, please contact the FLF team at flfpeerreview@ukri.org before declining.

4.2.6 Information Rights Legislation

All information we hold, including information around expert review, is subject to the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). All requests are considered on a case-by-case basis and in some cases, it might be necessary to seek your view on releasing information relating to the review you have provided.

4.2.7 Journal Impact Factors

We are committed to support the recommendations and principles set out by the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment \(DORA\)](#).

The content of a paper is more important than publication metrics. You should therefore not use journal impact factors (or any hierarchy of journals), conference rankings and metrics such as the H-index or i10-index as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles, to assess an applicant's contributions or to make funding decisions.

Both the applicant and panel will be advised to disregard all comments that do not adhere to the above.

5 Completing the Review Form

To ensure that your review is as useful as possible to both the applicant and panel please:

- ensure comments are evidence-based and the evidence used should be stated clearly in your comments.
- Avoid just describing the proposed work and focus on feedback and criticisms.
- provide clear comments and recommendations that justify, and are consistent with, your scores.
- ensure that your comments are comprehensive and concise
- clearly identify the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal in a constructive manner
- raise any concerns in the form of questions for the applicant.

Proposals will be assessed according to the scheme's Assessment Criteria:

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

You must format your review using the above assessment areas as subheadings. Headings help the applicant and panel to better understand the review and how your comments relate to each assessment criteria.

Reviews are welcome from experts with all levels of experience of review writing, providing they are confident in their ability to assess all or parts of the proposal. Advice on writing a good review can be found in the [Reviewers' Quick guide](#).

Before you complete a review, please ensure that you do not have a conflict of interest with the proposal. Please refer to [Annex A](#) for full details on what is considered a conflict of interest.

UKRI peer review is anonymous. Please ensure you do not provide any information in your review that would identify you or your review may be considered unusable.

5.1 Vision and Approach

To what extent has the applicant explained how their proposed work:

5.1.1 Vision

Is of excellent quality and importance within or beyond the field(s) or area(s) – The importance, novelty and feasibility of the proposed programme of work and whether long-term fellowship support is needed to enable this.

Has the potential to advance current understanding, generates new knowledge, thinking or discovery within or beyond the field or area – Whether the ambition and novelty of the work is well articulated and whether the fellowship has the potential to establish or maintain a distinctive and outstanding research and/or innovation activity.

Where relevant, comment on the value of taking a multidisciplinary approach and the likely impact on these (and other) fields.

Is timely given current trends, context, and needs – Whether the proposal aligns with a specific priority area identified by UKRI and how strongly the proposal fits within the aims for the area and what it will contribute alongside other proposals and activities in the same priority area.

Impacts world-leading research, society, the economy, or the environment – Whether applicants have demonstrated a robust thought process around the potential international short and long-term impacts of the research or innovation and whether they have proposed a way to move towards, accelerate or implement these impacts.

5.1.2 Approach

Is effective and appropriate to achieve their objectives – Whether the methodology is robust enough to deliver on all of the proposed aims of the project.

Is feasible, and comprehensively identifies any risks to delivery and how they will be managed – How likely the proposal is to deliver on its objectives. Whether there is appropriate consideration of factors that might affect their ability to deliver, including research and/or innovation governance and ethical/social responsibility issues and how these risks will be mitigated.

Uses a clear and transparent methodology (if applicable) – Whether the research methods and procedures that will be used in the project have been described comprehensively and plans for disseminating research findings are defined, where applicable.

Summarises the previous work and describes how this will be built upon and progressed (if applicable) – What pre-existing research and/or innovation in the area exists and how the proposed project will provide a ‘next step’ in this area and not just reiterate it, where applicable.

Will maximise translation of outputs into outcomes and impacts – Whether the pathways for maximising impact (from the applicant and host organisation) are proportionate, timely and credible.

5.2 Applicant capability to deliver

To what extent has the applicant demonstrated they have:

The relevant experience (appropriate to career stage) to deliver the proposed work – Whether they have a track record of producing challenging, original and productive research and/or innovation outputs that stand out in their field.

Whether their current research and/or innovation standing relative to their career stage puts them on a trajectory to become world-class.

The right balance of skills and expertise to cover the proposed work – Whether they have the necessary level of skills, knowledge and experience to take forward the proposed project/programme and how gaps in these areas have been addressed.

Whether they have demonstrated the ability to choose and develop appropriate collaborations and networks nationally, internationally or across disciplines to maximise collaboration, partnership and knowledge exchange within and beyond the length of the fellowship.

The appropriate leadership and management skills to deliver the work and their approach to develop others – Whether they have demonstrated their ability to be, or become, a clear communicator and disseminator of knowledge and innovation, able to inspire and lead others; and their ability to develop new relationships and influence across multiple disciplines and sectors.

Whether they have a clear plan to support the career development of their team and others, in both the delivery of the project and with broader professional/development opportunities, considering the appropriateness of training, access to facilities and level of support.

Contributed to developing a positive research environment and wider community – Whether they have demonstrated evidence of creating an inclusive and accessible environment including diversity in the research design.

As well as evidence of existing professional activities that seek to break down the barriers between research, innovation and society.

5.3 Career development

To what extent has the applicant demonstrated:

Career development goals appropriate to the fellowship funding opportunity – Whether the proposed programme of work will position the applicant as a leader within their research/innovation field by the end of the fellowship and provide added value, over standard grant support.

How the fellowship will provide a feasible and appropriate trajectory for their personal development and stated career development goals (as appropriate to their career stage and field) – Whether they have the potential to progress to a long-term research and/or innovation career path and that they understand the research and/or innovation landscape at both the national and international level.

Whether they have identified opportunities to access career development support, mentorship and relevant training courses that will underpin their future career ambitions and learning, supporting not only the programme but also their broader professional development.

How they will instigate positive change in the wider research and innovation community, for example through Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), advocacy or advisory roles, stakeholder engagement, participation in peer review, influencing policy, public engagement, or outreach – Whether they have identified good EDI practice to ensure a broader range of people and talent have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from the research, such as:

- recruitment and selection process plans that will ensure diverse teams.
- ensuring diversity and inclusivity in all activities such as events, sandpits, networking.
- plans to create or continue to foster an inclusive and accessible environment.
- plans to include diversity in the research design and making research outputs accessible and inclusive.

As well as evidence of existing or plans to engage in professional activities that seek to break down the barriers between research, innovation and society.

5.4 Host organisation support

To what extent has the applicant demonstrated:

Evidence detailing how the host will support the fellow, as appropriate for their personalised career development and the vision and approach of the fellowship - Whether the applicant has secured the backing of an institution that is prepared to host them, and whether the level of commitment to realising the potential of the fellow and establishing them as a research and/or innovation leader has been demonstrated by their supervisor(s), host institution and, where applicable, mentor(s).

Additionally, whether the host has confirmed an open-ended UK-based independent research or innovation position to be taken up during or on the completion of the fellowship.

How the research environment will contribute to the success of the work, in terms of suitability of the host organisation and strategic relevance to the project – Whether the proposed research environment is suitable to support the fellow's programme of work and enable the applicant to maximise the social/economic impact.

How the host organisation will ensure their time commitment to the fellowship is protected – Whether a plans for enabling the time commitment needed have been sufficiently detailed and consideration has been given to support for the fellow and (where applicable) their wider team and in using the fellowship's provision for flexible working.

What development and training opportunities will be provided and how they form a cohesive career development package tailored to their aims and aspirations – Whether supported opportunities for development offered by the host organisation will develop the applicant into an impactful and influential research and/or innovation leader, and commensurate with the development aims of the applicant. For example:

- time for work in other environments
- developing international links
- development of new skills
- mentoring and professional training and development
- relevant training courses that will underpin their future career ambitions and learning

What financial or practical support, such as access to the appropriate services, facilities, infrastructure, or equipment, is being provided and how this strengthens their application – Whether the host organisation has detailed plans to ensure access to resources and other relevant programmes and whether these sufficiently support the aims of the project.

5.5 Ethics and responsible research and innovation (RRI)

To what extent has the applicant demonstrated that they have identified and evaluated:

The relevant ethical or responsible research and innovation considerations – Whether the applicant has recognised and evaluated the ethical implications of their research and/or innovation, including potential impacts on society, the environment, and individual rights.

How they will manage these considerations – Whether the strategies and measures the applicant has proposed to address the identified ethical and responsible research considerations are sufficient.

The replacement, refinement or reduction of the animals in their experiments (if applicable) – Whether:

- animals are needed for the proposed research
- the potential benefit justifies any adverse effects on the animals
- the species and model chosen are appropriate
- the experimental design and planned statistical framework chosen are suitable to address the scientific objectives
- the primary outcomes to be assessed and frequency of measurements and interventions are appropriate
- the total number of animals and chosen sample sizes are appropriate in relation to the planned statistical analyses, including the sex of the animals, cells or tissues (both sexes, unless a strong justification is given for not doing so)
- appropriate plans to minimise experimental bias are in place.

Refer to [Annex B](#) for more information.

Is the proposed work ethically acceptable? – Whether the proposed research aligns with research ethical standards and principles and is overall morally acceptable, considering the benefits and potential harms.

Are there any ethical issues that need further consideration, such as dual use or misuse of research? – Whether any additional ‘Trusted research’ considerations have been made with regards to protecting the UK’s intellectual property, sensitive research, people and infrastructure from potential theft, manipulation and exploitation, including as a result of interference by hostile actors and the potential for the findings to be used for harmful purposes.

Are the proposed ethical review and research governance approaches appropriate? – Whether the mechanisms for ethical review and research governance are suitable and robust (for example, the use of review boards, the transparency of the review process, and the governance structures in place).

Will there be any potential adverse consequences for humans, animals or the environment and have these risks been appropriately considered? – Whether there are any ethical considerations for humans, animals, or the environment that have not been adequately addressed and mitigated including (where applicable): the need to use animals and lack of realistic alternatives; evaluation of the scientific strengths and weaknesses of proposed animal use and plans to obtain ethical approval from the relevant bodies.

5.6 Resources and cost justification

To what extent has the applicant demonstrated that the resources needed for the proposed work:

Are comprehensive, appropriate, and justified – Whether all funds have been addressed in the Justification of Resources and whether the justification for these funds is clearly described and appropriate, highlighting any costs that you feel may be lacking in detail, inappropriate or insufficiently justified or where costs seem insufficient to achieve the proposed work.

Fellows can now request costs associated with reasonable adjustments where they increase as a direct result of working on the project. Reviewers should not assess these costs.

Represent the optimal use of resources to achieve the intended outcomes – Whether the proposal has demonstrated an understanding of the amount of work to be done and whether they have identified the level of staffing (both the amount in full time equivalent and the experience and skills), travel and subsistence and other costs that will be needed in order to achieve the aims of the project.

For example, in terms of the work planned for the research assistant, is the amount of work achievable within the timescale for someone with that level of expertise, and with the level of support and resource described?

Maximise potential outcomes and impacts – Whether funds requested for the first four years for the project plan and management arrangements are proportionate to its potential outcomes and provide the best possible opportunity to maximise the impact.

Here are some illustrative examples of the sort of issues you may be asked to consider under the 'Resources and cost justification' section, in the hope of further clarifying the way in which you should be approaching this part of a review:

We are not expecting you to say whether £200 is the correct price for a flight but we would like you to consider whether all the trips that have been requested on a proposal are justified as being needed to conduct the research.

We are not expecting you to comment on whether the applicant should receive a certain salary, rather, we ask you to assess whether there is sufficient work, of the appropriate level, to warrant a researcher being employed for the period which the proposal requests.

We are not expecting you to comment on whether a project should cost £300,000 rather than £350,000, but we would like you to consider whether the total amount of resources (staff, trips or equipment) is warranted by the amount of project outputs and if the project is going to be completed in an effective way.

We are not expecting you to comment on whether a particular piece of equipment should cost £1,000, but we would ask you to consider whether a piece of equipment offers the most efficient way to do that piece of work.

5.7 Overall Assessment

Having provided comments against each of the above headings, please also provide a score, using the description best matches your overall comments for the proposal as detailed below.

Because of the interdisciplinary nature of the scheme, there are no specific guidelines or examples for how a proposal demonstrates each score and instead you should score a proposal based on which assessment description best matches your overall comments.

1 – Poor: the application is flawed or of unsuitable quality for funding. It does not meet the assessment criteria to an adequate level.

2 – Weak: the application is not sufficiently competitive. It meets some of the assessment criteria to an adequate level. There are, however, significant weaknesses.

3 – Good: the application is of good quality. It meets most of the assessment criteria to an acceptable level, but not across all aspects of the proposed activities. There are weaknesses.

4 – Very good: the application demonstrates considerable quality. It meets most of the assessment criteria to a high level. There are minor weaknesses.

5 – Excellent: the application is very high quality. It addresses most of the assessment criteria and meets them to an excellent level. There are very minor weaknesses.

6 – Exceptional: the application is outstanding. It addresses all of the assessment criteria and meets them to an exceptional level.

6 What Happens Next

Applicants will receive anonymised copies of their received reviews and will have 10 working days to prepare a response to address any questions or concerns raised by reviewers. This response is not seen by reviewers.

All proposals are moderated at a sift panel. During the moderating sift panel stage, the panel will form conclusions based on their interpretation of the specialist peer review reports, the applicants' responses to these reports and their own broad sectoral expertise.

During the interview panel stage, applicants are asked a series of both set and variable questions. As part of this process the panel members will consult the reviews received to identify any key questions that should be addressed by the applicant.

At both panels, applications will be assessed against the following four assessment criteria:

- Research and Innovation Excellence
- Applicant and their Development
- Impact and Strategic Relevance
- Research and Innovation Environment and Cost

Across all four factors assessed, a key issue will be whether the added value of a fellowship is well demonstrated, as opposed to more standard project grant support.

7 Reviewer Recognition

Previously, reviewers that provided a usable review via Je-S, received 'review credits' to their Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID) account.

The new TFS platform does not currently have ORCID functionality but is aiming to implement the same functionality that Je-S had previously in the future, including the ability to receive review credits.

8 Queries

If you have any queries about the review process or concerns regarding your written review, please contact the FLF team at fellowsppeerreview@ukri.org

For further guidance on using TFS, please contact the TFS team directly:

Email: support@funding-service.ukri.org UKRI Funding Service Helpline: +44 (0)1793 547 490

Annex A Conflicts of Interest

Introduction

UKRI is a publicly funded organisation and is accountable to government and the public for its actions and for the way it conducts its business, which must be undertaken in a way that is transparent and guards against potential conflicts of interest influencing the outcome of decisions.

UKRI defines a conflict of interest as a situation in which an individual's ability to exercise judgement or act in one role is, could be, or is seen to be impaired or otherwise influenced by their involvement in another role or relationship. Even a perception of competing interests, impaired judgement or undue influence may be damaging to UKRI's reputation.

The existence of an actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest does not imply wrongdoing or that the assessor is not well-placed to make an impartial assessment. However, as an assessor, it is vital that they are seen to be impartial at all stages of the decision-making process. Any private, personal or commercial interests which might give rise to such a conflict of interest must be recognised, disclosed appropriately and either eliminated or properly managed.

Everybody involved in UKRI decision-making and funding processes must comply with [UKRI declaration of interest policy](#). UKRI will support all individuals to ensure compliance of the policy.

How and why do we collect conflict of interest information

Applicants may declare potential conflicts of interest in their application, related to individuals or organisations. UKRI will endeavour to avoid asking these potentially conflicted individuals/organisations to assess that application when feasible and if the request meets UKRI definitions of a conflict as defined in the UKRI Declaration of Interest Policy. Reporting, recording and managing potential conflicts effectively protects assessors (reviewers and panellists) and helps ensuring a transparent decision-making process.

UKRI acknowledges that individuals working in the same research and innovation field may know each other, and therefore, this does not prevent them from assessing an application. However, as assessors, they must declare any interest which they feel would prevent them giving an unbiased assessment, for UKRI awareness and evaluation.

Once an assessor declares interests, UKRI evaluates the declaration of interests and deem them as actual, perceived or no conflict. If the assessor's knowledge/ relationship with the application/applicants is such that they feel it would be difficult to be impartial when commenting on the application, then we ask them to decline the invitation to be part of the assessment by selecting "conflict of interest" as the reason why.

FLF Peer Review

When you are invited to review an application for the Future Leaders Fellowships (FLF) scheme, you will receive a summary of the application and the name(s) of the applicant(s). You must declare any known conflict of interest at this stage and select 'conflict of interest' as a reason when declining the invitation as a result of a known conflict of interest.

If you are unsure as to whether you have a conflict of interest, you should contact the FLF Team by emailing fellowsppeerreview@ukri.org.

If you accept an invitation to review and then identify a conflict of interest, you must let UKRI know as soon as possible so that the nature of the conflict can be assessed, and appropriate measures can be taken. If a conflict becomes apparent, either to you or to UKRI, after the submission of a review, UKRI will classify your review as 'unusable' and not use it in the decision-making process.

Examples of conflicts of interest for assessors

The list below shows examples of conflicts of interest, including but not limited to review and panel stages. The list is not exhaustive; therefore, you must declare any actual or perceived conflict of interest, reflecting on the perception of both you and others.

Personal conflict

- You are named on the application.
- You have assisted the applicants in preparing the application.
- You are named as a project partner, subcontractor, visiting researcher or have any type of relationship with the application.
- You have written a letter of support for the application.
- You have been approached and agreed to be a member of a committee or board connected with the proposed project, for example an advisory group or steering committee/board.
- You are in close regular collaboration with any individuals named in the application, including investigators, research staff, collaborators, subcontractors and project partners, to an extent where you feel uncomfortable being involved in the discussion or you feel unable to give an unbiased opinion.
- You have a personal, financial or professional relationship with any individuals named in the application.
- You have been any of the applicants' PhD supervisor, line manager or group leader in the last three years, or the other way around.
- You stand to gain a financial or professional advantage from a particular outcome for an application which you are asked to review.

Organisational conflicts

- You are a current/Emeritus/secondment/visiting member at the same/proposed organisation as any individuals named on the application. This includes holding a position on the governance body or an honorary position within the applicants' current/proposed organisation.
- You belong to an organisation that is a project partner, subcontractor, are a visiting researcher from or to the Organisation.
- You have any type of recognised significant organisational collaboration with the application which would mean that your participation in the assessment would be seen as a conflict.
- You are in receipt of personal remuneration in excess of £5,000 per annum from the applicant's current or proposed organisation.
- Fellowships only: you are at an organisation chosen by the candidate to be the hosting organisation for their fellowship.
- Your organisation is due to merge with another organisation which falls under any of the above conflicts.

Commercial or financial conflicts

- You have any commercial or financial/pecuniary interest, for example where you are a member of an organisation that may benefit financially, directly or indirectly, from any decision made.
- You have stocks or shares in a company named in an application.

Annex B Career Breaks and Flexible Working

The assessment of fellowship proposals frequently involves appraisal of the applicant'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 review panels

In assessing the effects of career breaks or flexible working, panels will note the applicant's career trajectory and potential at the beginning of a break, relative to the stage of the applicant's career. In assessing applicants, 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 applicants

Applicants should make clear any substantive periods of absence from research/innovation within their proposal. Further details on the nature of the absence and how it has affected track record, productivity and career progression may be provided if desired¹. Information provided will be used only to make appropriate adjustments when assessing an individual's track record, productivity and career progression.

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

Annex C Principles of Assessment and Decision Making

Expert review is governed by several underlying principles, including those of integrity, confidentiality and anonymity. A summary of points relevant to reviewers are below. Full information on [UKRI's Principals of Assessment and Decision-Making](#) can be found on the UKRI website.

Expert Assessment

- Tailored guidance provided to reviewers before they undertake review of applications.
- Reviewers are expected to have peer recognition or established expertise in the field to review the application.
- Continuous review of the assessment processes to ensure that our assessors have the appropriate range of expertise and knowledge to carry out assessments, which is especially important for the assessment of cross-disciplinary applications.

Transparency

- Funding guides, assessment criteria and details of the assessment process are published online.
- Review comments are made available to applicants in advance of the panel meeting, so that the applicants can respond to comments by reviewers.
- After the funding decisions are made, we inform applicants on the outcomes of the funding decision.

Impartiality

- Reviewers with an actual or perceived conflict of interest are instructed to decline our request to review applications.
- UKRI takes steps to mitigate against implicit biases that can be present in individuals, which can impact fairness and objectivity in funding decisions.

Appropriateness

- We aim to ensure that our assessment processes are appropriate to the proposed research and innovation with respect to its scale and complexity.
- We are committed to continually evolving funding assessment and design our assessment processes to reduce biases, which includes our commitment to responsible use of metrics in research evaluation.

Confidentiality

- Applications to UKRI, including related data, intellectual property and application documents, must be treated in confidence by any individuals or organisations involved in the assessment process. When you agree to review for UKRI you are bound by a confidentiality agreement, either through the TFS terms and conditions and reviewer protocol or a standalone agreement.
- Reviewers are instructed to not inadvertently identify themselves in the text of the assessment.

Integrity and Ethics

- Responsible research conduct is intrinsic to society's trust in research and innovation. We aim to promote and safeguard the public value of research and innovation and ensure that funding decisions are based on evidence and rigorous analysis.

- UKRI refers to the core values of honesty, rigour, care and respect, openness and transparency, and accountability.
- We expect assessors to take ethics and integrity into account when undertaking their assessments. This means exhibiting impeccable integrity and following the principles of good research practice detailed in the [UKRI Research Integrity Guidance](#) considering the principals of [Responsible Innovation](#).

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- Our evolving processes are designed to reduce biases against gender, ethnicity or other protected characteristics, demonstrating our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.
- We will take steps to improve the assessment process by utilising the talent and resources offered by assessors from underrepresented groups such as women, early career researchers, and members of all ethnicities.

Separation of Duties

- Decisions on individual funding applications are taken following an independent assessment of their quality and likely impact and adhere to the Haldane Principle.
- Those who are assessing applications will not also be responsible for authorising the funding decision, which is made by our senior staff with the relevant delegated authority.