



Engineering and Physical Sciences
Research Council

Programme Grant Outline Panel Member Guidance

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1. Background Information on the Programme Grant Scheme

Programme Grants are a mechanism to provide flexible funding to world-leading research groups to address significant major research challenges. They are intended to support world leading researchers, bringing together ‘best with best’ teams to undertake a variety of activities focusing on one strategic research theme. Programme Grants can be awarded for up to a six year duration. It is expected that most Programme Grants will be interdisciplinary and collaborative but they can address key challenges in a single discipline. They are seen by EPSRC as critical mass investments which cover a diverse engineering and physical sciences (EPS) portfolio and benefit UK research through the concentration of high performing talent. Programme Grants are not just large grants but must be strategic in nature. It is also likely that the majority will require the expertise of a number of internationally recognised scientists or engineers.

Programme Grants are assessed in a different way to standard grants. Applicants must go through a pre-outline and outline stage before being invited to submit a full proposal.

The full guidance for this scheme is available on the EPSRC website [here](#).

Each Programme Grant outline proposal has been invited to submit the outline following a pre-outline discussion with EPSRC.

2. Terms of Reference

The role of the outline panel is to assess the submitted Programme Grant outline proposals according to their fit to the assessment criteria (listed in [section 4](#)), and to produce a Yes/No recommendation to EPSRC regarding whether the applicant team should be invited to submit a full proposal.

The panel will not be generating a rank ordered list. Given the nature of the proposals, the panel should be considering how the outline proposal fits the assessment criteria and therefore the ethos of the Programme Grant scheme.

Note that Panel Members names & their organisation are published on the EPSRC website one month after a meeting.

3. Format of Applications

Applications will consist of the following documents:

- Case for support (up to four sides A4) including the following sections:
 - Vision of the Programme Grant – including timeliness and importance
 - Justification for a Programme Grant
 - Inter-relation of research projects
 - Applicant(s) – including expertise, track record, and international esteem factors
 - Management and monitoring
- Information on resources (up to one side A4) including headline figures. This attachment is only for UKRI staff.

Further details on the application format can be seen on the [EPSRC webpage](#).

4. Assessment Criteria

Outline proposals will be assessed against their fit to the Programme Grant scheme using the following criteria:

- Suitable and timely vision and demonstrable importance of the proposed research (primary)
- Evidence of value of long term funding and flexibility of resources (primary)
- Coherent programme of inter-related projects and other research activities rather than individual project grants (primary)
- Ability of team to lead, establish or maintain a unique world leading research activity (primary)
- Appropriate management and monitoring structures (secondary)

Applicants who are successful at the outline stage, will be invited to submit full proposal, which will be assessed by postal peer review and an interview panel.

5. Your Role as the Panel

The panel is asked to give a recommendation to EPSRC about the merit of inviting each application to submit a full proposal.

6. Your Role as Introducers

For each outline proposal, three panel members will have been nominated as “introducers”. Their role is to lead the discussion on the proposal. The meeting schedule lists all the proposals and the

nominated introducers. As well as the proposals that have been allocated to you as introducer, you should read as many of the others as you are able. This allows you to set the proposals that you are an introducer on into context and allows a full discussion of each proposal at the meeting. The role of each introducer is as follows;

First Introducer should:

- Highlight important issues
- Lead discussion on the proposal, basing this around the assessment criteria and the rating given to each criterion (Yes/ partially made/No)

Second Introducer should:

- Add any additional comments to first introducer
- Highlight reasons for differences in ratings between introducers (where appropriate)

Third Introducer (generalist, contextual) should:

- Add any additional comments to the first and second introducer
- Highlight any discrepancies, particularly where there's disagreement between the first and second introducer (where appropriate)

7. Before and At the Meeting

Before the meeting you should review all the papers on the Extranet.

For each proposal you are introducing, you should complete the relevant Introducer Form to use as an aide-memoire at the panel meeting. At this point, you should assign initial ratings for each of the assessment criteria and an overall recommendation for the proposal. These recommendations will be finalised after panel discussion.

In advance of the meeting you are requested to complete and return the Advanced Introducer Scores Form to EPSRC (Introducer forms are not required to be submitted in advance of the meeting). The Advanced Introducer Scores Form lists all scores (sub scores and overall) for all the proposals on which you are an introducer. This advance notification of the scores helps us to highlight any issues or discrepancies relating to particular proposals which may need to be drawn to the panel participants' attention.

There will be a panel briefing session at the start of the day. EPSRC will give a brief introduction to the outline panel process and clarify any questions the panel may have.

The overall recommendation for each proposal should be based on the assessment criteria described above. The Panel will be asked to consider the proposal against each of the assessment criteria and also to provide an overall recommendation. The following scale should be used:

Score	Descriptor for Individual Assessment Criterion	Descriptor for Overall Recommendation
Yes	Meets assessment criterion	The outline proposal meets the expectations as outlined in the assessment criteria

Partially made	Fit to assessment criterion not clear – discussion needed at panel	¹
No	Does not meet assessment criterion	The outline proposal does not meet the expectations as outlined in the assessment criteria

There will of course be different scales of how well a proposal meets a criterion and the panel should seek to discuss this for each proposal, as we will not generate a rank ordered list.

The overall recommendation for the outline proposal, and if it should be invited, will include the consideration of the balance across each assessment criteria.

It is expected that only outline proposals that meet at least all of the primary assessment criteria will be invited to submit a full proposal.

Once all of the proposals have been considered and the overall recommendations been compiled, the panel will be asked to review their recommendations (revising them as they consider appropriate) and agree a finalised invite or not invite grouping.

All outline proposals will receive feedback on whether their proposal met the individual assessment criteria as well as the overall outcome.

8. Safeguarding Peer Review

EPSRC is committed to ensuring that those who participate in the peer review process recognise the factors that introduce bias into decision making. To do this, it is important to raise awareness of, and take steps to remove the opportunities for unconscious bias in all aspects of our decision making processes.

All those involved in peer review must help us safeguard our decision making by taking the following steps:

- All applications must be assessed on equal terms and assessed using the published criteria.
- Question and challenge cultural stereotypes and bias in any EPSRC meetings and be prepared to be challenged.
- Be aware that working with a high cognitive load, with time pressures and the need to make quick decisions, creates conditions for bias which could have an impact on what we fund.

As part of your panel papers you will also receive a Panel Member guide to managing Unconscious Bias in Peer Review and the Panel Protocols which should be read in conjunction with the panel guidance as they provide further guidance to all panel members on their role as a panel member and the panel meeting process.

9. Journal-based metrics

We are committed to support the recommendations and principles set out by the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA; <https://sfdora.org/read/>). You should not use

¹ Score not allowed for overall recommendation category

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 of research impact, such as influence on policy and practice.

The content of a paper is more important than publication metrics, or the identity of the journal, in which it was published, especially for early-stage investigators. Therefore, you should not use journal impact factor (or any hierarchy of journals), conference rankings and metrics such as the H-index or i10-index when assessing UKRI grants.

We encourage you to challenge research assessment practices that rely inappropriately on journal impact factors or conference rankings and promote and teach best practice that focuses on the value and influence of specific research outputs. If you are unsure about DORA, please speak to the panel convener or the panel chair.

10. Invited Resubmissions

EPSRC does not accept uninvited resubmissions, but panel members can still advise the resubmission of a proposal. However, this is only for exceptional cases. If the panel recommends a resubmission, the convenor will discuss the panel's recommendation with the Theme Lead after the meeting. The final decision on inviting resubmissions lies with the Theme Lead. Invited resubmission will be sent to the pre-outline stage, where the outline panels assessments of the proposal will direct the discussion EPSRC has with the applicants.

Please note:

- The panel should raise the issue of a proposal being invited to resubmit as they work through the running order of the meeting;
- If a proposal is invited for resubmission then it should be clear why from the comments made by the panel;
- It is not acceptable if at the end of the meeting the panel review the agreed panel recommendations and then ask if any proposals should be invited to resubmit – this is not in the spirit of invited resubmissions;
- The invited resubmission decision should be based on the panel's assessment of the outline proposal against the assessment criteria.

11. Panel Questionnaire

After the meeting, panel members are asked to complete a brief questionnaire (available via the extranet) designed to enable evaluation of the effectiveness of the peer review mechanisms operated by the EPSRC. Please upload completed copy to your Personal Space or email a copy to the convenor.

12. Further Information

Information about EPSRC and its processes can be found on [our website](#).

Information on the Programme Grants scheme is available at [Programme Grants webpages](#).

Information on the creativity@home initiative which is aimed at leading researchers in receipt of critical mass funding is available on the [EPSRC webpages](#).

Further information or clarification of any issues relating to this meeting or to the peer review process is available from the member of staff responsible for the operation of this panel meeting.