Guidance for Programme Managers on the recruitment of Board and Panel members

The purpose of this guidance is to support Programme Managers (PMs) in identifying candidates for Board/Panel member vacancies and align best practice across the office. A *shortlisting record* has also been designed to document appointment decisions and enhance transparency about how these are reached.

Overview of the recruitment process:

MRC Board and Panel members are recruited annually and serve four-year terms; two years in the first instance with a mid-point review with the Chair and Deputy before confirming final two-years. Each year several Members step down, and new Members are recruited. The recruitment process involves advertising on the MRC website, via social media, and via emails sent to University department heads asking them to promote the openings on MRC Boards and Panels to their staff. To help support the best candidates applying, PMs also regularly reach out to prospective candidates to highlight the opportunity and to encourage them to apply. Regardless, all appointments are made on a competitive basis through the formal application process.

Candidates apply via the MRC website and applications are collated and stored on Minerva. Access to the application material is provided to MRC teams throughout the application window and also once the application deadline has passed.

PMs are responsible for identifying suitable candidates from the applications submitted for the vacancy/vacancies relevant to their scientific patch or Panel. Board and Panel teams (PMs and HoP/HoT) meet for a preliminary discussion of the candidates within their remit, to identify preferred 1st and 2nd (and 3rd where appropriate) choices for each vacancy, taking into account a number of critical factors that contribute to the overall requirements of the relevant Board/ Panel membership (further details below).

The teams then consult with their Board/Panel Chair and Deputy (usually through a meeting) to discuss shortlisted candidates and seek agreement on the final preferred set of candidates for all vacancies. After this meeting, the PM/HoP prepares a short summary that justifies the selection and prioritisation for each of the preferred candidate, set against the assessment criteria. This should include; scientific expertise and interests, peer review experience, reason for selection of first/second/third choices. The information provided by each team is collated into a paper for the shortlisting meeting between the HoT/HoPs, Associate Director of Research Programmes and the CSO. Any final revisions are then made and presented in a comprehensive recruitment paper for consideration and approval by Executive Board.

Successful candidates are notified of their appointment by email from the CSO and invited to attend an induction meeting prior to formally joining the Board/Panel. Unsuccessful candidates are notified by email from the CSO one week after successful candidates, and informed that due to the volume of applications received MRC is unable to provide direct, tailored feedback for unsuccessful applicants.

Guidance for shortlisting candidates

The recruitment advert can be found [here](#)

Candidates for Board and Panel vacancies should be shortlisted using the following primary criteria, as set out in the external vacancy text:
*   scientific 'fit' for the vacancy
*   breadth of relevant knowledge/expertise

- appropriate level of experience

Information to support the shortlisting should be sought primarily from:

- Application spreadsheet
- Applicant CV
- Applicant personal statement

Secondary sources may be helpful to inform on the breadth of expertise/experience according to the needs of the Board/Panel, such as:

- Academic webpages
- LinkedIn (for industrial applicants)
- Publications (in line with the [Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA](#)))

If a candidate is from a research organisation that is already well represented on the Board/Panel (i.e. 2 members) then they can be excluded without further justification. If there is insufficient evidence to support the application or if the candidate's expertise doesn't meet the needs then this should be documented in the shortlisting record and the candidate should not be selected – further detail is provided below. Please indicate the primary reason for non-selection in column B (use the drop-down list) and record any further comments in column C (as necessary).

Key Board/Panel member criteria:

The primary criteria for determining the suitability of candidates are scientific fit to the vacancy and the level of experience expected of an MRC Board or Panel member (e.g. scientific track record and peer review experience).

1. Scientific fit to the vacancy and breadth of expertise

PMs will need to consider if the candidate's scientific expertise is suitable for the vacancy:

- Is there good evidence of deep and broad experience in research topics core to the vacancy?
- Does the candidate have expertise to cover other areas that will positively contribute to the wider Board/Panel business, e.g. will they be able to comment more broadly on particular methodologies, techniques, are they clinically trained/active, do they have industry experience (where appropriate for the specific board/panel)?

2. Level of experience

To ensure that Boards and Panels have the appropriate knowledge and skills to review high-quality research and multi-dimensional proposals, it is important that their members have a successful track record of delivering high-quality research:

- Is there evidence of conducting/leading internationally respected research?
- Is there evidence of obtaining grant funding over several years?
  - This may be as a co-Investigator or critical contributor to team science, which may be more appropriate for specific research areas (e.g. data scientists, statisticians etc.)
- Other relevant experience could include membership of journal editorial boards, membership of/fellowship with learned societies and academies etc.
- Evidence of grant funding does not apply to candidates from industry, however, the leadership position within the company and other indicators that demonstrates leadership in the research field should be considered.

3. Experience as a reviewer

To ensure robust assessment of applications, candidates should have clear experience of the peer review process and of contribution to the UK or international funding systems. This could be demonstrated with evidence of activity as:

- Expert reviewer for scientific publications
- Expert reviewer for funding applications
- Membership of funding panels, e.g. internal, charity, philanthropic and/or public sector research funding panels
- Membership of strategic review panels e.g. strategic reviews, QQRs
- Membership of journal editorial boards

Selecting preferred candidates

Once you have identified suitable candidates you will need to consider other critical factors that contribute to the overall requirements of the Board and Panel membership and develop a final shortlist of the preferred candidate(s) for the vacancies, to discuss further within the team.

These may include, but are not limited to:

- Geographical distribution of research institutions across the UK (e.g. balance of greater south-east with the rest of the UK, and devolved nation representation). Geographical balance is important in its own right but also to manage institutional interests.

- Increasing membership of under-represented groups: The MRC has set targets to ensure its boards and panels are representative of the diversity of the UK research community and wider population. These targets apply to the combined membership of all MRC boards and panels, but every board and panel should endeavour to have a diversity of representation.

  Where applications have reached a quality threshold, those from under-represented groups may lawfully be prioritised using positive action to mitigate disadvantage linked to certain characteristics in the wider research and innovation sector and/or address disproportionate levels of participation identified in our data. Such characteristics include applicants:
  - who identify as female (annual target 41%, long-term target 50%)
  - who are from an ethnic minority group[1] (target 21%)
  - with a disability or long-term condition

- Industrial experience: each Board and Panel should have industry representation, the extent is dependent on the specific Board/Panel and relevance to the remit. Research Boards are expected to have at least 2 industry members.

- International representation: to set UK research in the context of international research. It is recommended that each Board/Panel has 1-3 international members, however, this may vary dependent on the specific Board/Panel e.g. the AGHRB may seek greater international representation.

- Representation from MRC Unit or Institute

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[1] Ethnic minority groups could include: Arab or Arab British; Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Other; Black or Black British – African, Caribbean, Other; Mixed or multiple ethnic groups – White or White British and Asian or Asian British, White or White British and Black African or Black African British, White or White British and Black Caribbean or Black Caribbean British, Other; White – Gypsy, Irish traveller, Traveller or Roma.

- Applicant career stage (Board and Panels should have a breadth of career stage from mid to late independent researchers)

- Motivation to join the Board/Panel, contribute to delivering MRC's mission and objectives, and to support the system and the funders to fairly disperse research funding.

The factors used to prioritise the preferred candidate should be documented in Column C of the shortlisting record, this will align with the summary paragraph required for the Executive Board paper.

<u>Record of shortlisting decisions</u>

The shortlisting record (Excel spreadsheet) should be used to document the reasons for not selecting a candidate, the additional criteria used to support candidate selection.

In line with the data protection policy on the Board/Panel recruitment application spreadsheet, the retention period for this tool is 12 months. Note that the record document is FOI-able.