

Panel Meeting Best Practice

Panel Composition:

- When we select our panel members we try, where possible, to get a gender balance and also a spread of representation from different Research Organisations. Ideally we would try to have no more than two people from the same organisation on a panel.
- If you want to use anyone from the NERC Peer Review College as a panel member please check with the Peer Review College team via [REDACTED] before you invite them.

To try and mitigate against unconscious bias we have implemented the following changes to our panel meeting processes:

- All our Discovery Science standard and large grant moderating panel meetings are now held over two days. This gives the panel longer to discuss all the proposals and also allows more time for the final ranking, meaning that panel members are less likely to be trying to rush off to catch trains etc.
- We have changed the process around the discussion and assessment of each individual proposal. We now ask each of the introducers (and readers) to give their comments on the proposal first. Only once everyone has given their comments do we then move onto scores. This means the panel as a whole can determine whether the suggested scores match the comments given. It also means that second introducers (and readers) are less likely to revise their initial thoughts as we found in the past that introducers would change their score if it was not in agreement with the first introducer.
- The scoring criteria used by the panel is published in advance of the meeting and the panel Chair stresses the importance of using these at the start of the meeting and also re-emphasises this throughout the meeting referring the panel back to the criteria during discussions.
- We try to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest for the first proposal we discuss. That way all panel members can be in the room for the initial discussions which helps with benchmarking.
- We also try to ensure that the introducers for the first few proposals discussed are experienced panel members. This helps with benchmarking but also gives new panel members the opportunity to see how the process works before having to contribute.
- We allocate readers (usually 2) to each proposal. Historically we used to only assign 2 introducers but we found that there were occasions where introducers had given widely divergent scores for a proposal and no other panel members had read it, making it difficult for the panel to agree a final score. The introduction of readers means that for every proposal at least 4 panel members have read the proposal, the associated reviewers comments and the PI response.

Other things to note about panel meetings:

- The Funding Operations admin team can produce nameplates and scorecards for panel meetings.

- For panel meetings based in Swindon we have Velcro boards that you can use for ranking. These enable you to put up your scorecards and then move them around as the panel discuss the final ranking.