ESRC Grant Assessment Panel Members' Handbook 2022

A summary of the ESRC's processes and regulations for members of the Grant Assessment Panels

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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

This handbook is designed to provide Grant Assessment Panel (GAP) members with a document which collects all of the information and policies relevant to their role in one place. Where appropriate it contains web links to more detailed information and/or policy documents. The booklet will be updated and re-issued as necessary.

If you require any further advice, the contact details of relevant ESRC staff members are also included.

I.i About the ESRC

ESRC is part of UK Research and Innovation, an organisation that brings together the UK's seven research councils, Innovate UK and Research England to maximise the contribution of each council and create the best environment for research and innovation to flourish. The vision is to ensure that the UK maintains its world-leading position in research and innovation.

UK Research and Innovation is a non-departmental public body funded by a grant-in-aid from the UK government.

We are the UK's largest organisation for funding research on economic and social issues. We support independent, high quality research which has an impact on business, the public sector and civil society. ESRC's total budget for 2018-19 was around £234 million. At any one-time ESRC supports over 6,000 researchers and postgraduate students in academic institutions and independent research institutes.

I.ii Our mission

1. Promote and support, by any means, high-quality research and related postgraduate training on social and economic issues;
2. Develop and support the national data infrastructure that underpins high-quality research;
3. Advance knowledge and provide trained social scientists who meet the needs of users and beneficiaries, thereby contributing to the economic competitiveness of the UK, the effectiveness of public services and policy, and the quality of life;
4. Communicate clearly and promote public understanding of social science.

The ESRC website has further information on governance:
http://esrc.ukri.org/about-us/governance-and-structure/

I.iii The Research Funding Guide

The ESRC Research Funding Guide sets out our funding rules and can be found on the website at: https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/

I.iv   ESRC Remit and the Cross Council Remit Agreement

Remit

A full list of the social science disciplines which ESRC covers can be found on the website at: [Social science disciplines - Economic and Social Research Council (ukri.org)](). A joint AHRC/ESRC statement on interfaces between the arts and humanities and the social sciences can be found on the website at: [Research overlapping social sciences and arts and humanities: joint AHRC and ESRC statement – UKRI]().

We welcome interdisciplinary proposals as we recognise that many of the most pressing research challenges are interdisciplinary in nature, both within the social sciences and between the social sciences and other areas of research.

Any proposal which comes to the GAPs has either been deemed to be 100% within ESRC remit, or to span the remits of two or more councils where ESRC science represents the largest proportion of the effort (making ESRC the lead Council).

Case officers are required to indicate in their office notes to panel if the remit of a proposal has been checked by ESRC's Remit Team, and to state if any interest from other Councils has been agreed. Where interest is agreed a proposal will be processed by the lead Council, with peer review inputs from the supporting Council(s). More information can be found below.

The Cross Council Remit Agreement

The Cross Council Remit Agreement (CCRA) enables multidisciplinary proposals, which cross a Council's remit boundaries, to be adequately peer reviewed and funded without double jeopardy. The CCRA applies to research Councils' "responsive mode" research grant schemes, and ensures that proposals do not fall into a gap between Councils' remits.

All Councils have a named "remit mailbox" that applicants can contact to get advice on where their proposal fits best. The Council remit teams liaise to determine the best fit and the percentage of each Council remit, providing advice back to the applicant. As decisions are based purely on remit, applicants cannot use CCRA to get around the demand management or resubmission policies. The lead Council will generally have at least 51% interest in the proposal. A three-way Council split is rare, but possible. The non-lead Council can provide reviewer suggestions to the lead Council.

Under the Cross Council Remit Agreement (CCRA), Councils will discuss proposals that cross Councils' remits, agree a percentage interest based on remit and provide reviewer suggestions, but funds will not be exchanged between Councils. As well as the responsive mode research grants, the CCRA also includes research Councils' responsive mode fellowships. This could encourage more applicants to apply with a multidisciplinary proposal and allow for a better peer review process, involving reviewers suggested by the non-lead Council.

SECTION II. THE GRANT ASSESSMENT PANELS

II.i   The Grant Assessment Panels

There are four Grant Assessment Panels (GAPs) organised around clusters of disciplines comprising approximately 60 members in total. The role of the GAPs is to appraise applications submitted under three responsive mode schemes and classify them by grade according to procedures and criteria approved by the Grants Delivery Group (GDG) and monitored by the ESRC Council.

Funding recommendations of other responsive mode schemes (e.g. the Large Grants competition and Centres Competition) are made by specially constituted Commissioning Panels.

The Grant Assessment Panel structure is reviewed periodically to ensure that it is fit for purpose, with particular reference to workload, cognate disciplines and panel culture.

Since November 2016 the panel structure has been as follows:

Panel A
- Demography
- Environmental Planning
- Human Geography
- Psychology
- Statistics, Methodologies and Computing

Panel B
- Education
- Linguistics
- Social Work
- Science and Technology Studies
- Socio-Legal Studies
- Sociology

Panel C
- Area and Development Studies
- Economic and Social History
- Economics
- Management and Business Studies
- Political Science and International Relations
- Social Anthropology
- Social Policy

Panel D
- Secondary Data Analysis Initiative

II.ii   The GAP Secretariat

The GAP Secretariat facilitate the commissioning process and advise on ESRC rules and procedures. The Secretaries will flag any issues which need to be addressed to the panel

chairs; record decisions, comments and outcomes; feedback any additional advice to the applicant from the Panel (as directed); and agree final funding decisions with the Grants Delivery Group based on panel recommendations.

Each panel also has designated Panel Support for minute taking and logistics at the meetings.

II.iii   Schemes covered by the GAPs

Research Grants (Open Call)

The Research Grants Open Call is open to proposals on any research area (subject to ESRC remit). Awards ranging from £350,000 to £1 million (100% fEC) can be made to eligible institutions to enable individuals or research teams to undertake anything from a standard research project through to a large-scale survey and other infrastructure or methodological development.

The call specification, Je-S guidance, and FAQs for the Research Grants Open call can be found on the UKRI website at: ESRC research grant – UKRI

New Investigator Grants

New Investigator Grants form one element of our support for early career researchers and the scheme is specifically aimed at supporting those looking to make the transition to an independent researcher through managing their first major research project. The call is open to high-quality candidates from anywhere in the world and grants ranging from £100,000 to £300,000 (100% fEC) can be awarded.

This call is aimed towards supporting early career researchers, however this eligibility criteria for applicants is not time-bound. This is in recognition of the increasing diversity of career paths and trajectories and our ambition to be as inclusive and supportive of these as possible. New Investigator grants remain a funding opportunity aimed at supporting early career researchers who have yet to make the transition to be an independent researcher and the onus is now on applicants to articulate why they consider themselves to be in that career stage. This could reflect differences across disciplines or fields of research; periods of employment in non-research roles; where applicants are looking to re-skill in a new research area; or, where relevant, personal circumstances such as career breaks. Peer reviewers are directed to consider that justification when they assess applications.

The call specification, Je-S guidance, and FAQs for the New Investigator call can be found on the ESRC website at: ESRC new investigator grant – UKRI

Secondary Data Analysis Initiative (Open Call)

The Secondary Data Analysis Initiative aims to deliver high-quality, high-impact research through utilising existing data resources created by the ESRC and other agencies in order to address some of the most pressing challenges facing society. Proposals are welcome at any time. Funding is provided for up to 24 months with an overall limit of £300,000 (100% fEC) per grant. The ESRC welcomes proposals that aim to exploit secondary data resources funded by ESRC or other agencies, given sufficient justification and confirmation.

The call specification, Je-S guidance, and FAQs for the Secondary Data Analysis Initiative call can be found on the ESRC website at: Secondary Data Analysis Initiative – UKRI

SECTION III: PANEL MEMBER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

III.i Code of Practice

All members of the Grant Assessment Panels are expected to abide by the Code of Practice for Members of Committees or Groups, which can be found on the ESRC website: https://www.ukri.org/publications/esrc-code-of-practice-for-members-of-committees-and-groups/.

III.ii Roles and Responsibilities

The role of the GAPs is to appraise applications submitted under three responsive mode schemes and classify them by grade according to procedures and criteria approved by the GDG and monitored by the ESRC Council.

There are two distinct roles within the panel meetings.

- Introducer (only academic members) – score, write a formal report and introduce a proposal
- Reader (academic and user panel members) – should come prepared to discuss a proposal at the meeting.

We ask all panel members to read as many other proposals as they can. This ensures a full discussion of proposals takes place and helps with a better calibration of overall scores within the panel.

The panel introducer scores the application on a scale of 1-10 and writes a report which weighs up the peer review comments and the PI response, effectively 'reviewing the review' in light of their own expertise. The introducer's report should show a close reading of the proposal, reviewer comments, PI response and office notes. Introducers may introduce additional concerns not raised in the peer review comments if these are flagged as such. Although the introducer is not another reviewer, they must do more than just average the scores:

- Are the peer review comments fair?
- Do the reviewers have the necessary expertise?
- Should any reviews be discounted? Why?
- Have the reviewers missed something?
- Do the reviewer scores match the comments?

If panel introducers are deviating from reviewer scores and/or comments, or giving more weight to some comments than others, they should explain why in their reports.

It is crucial that Panel members flag to the Office as early as possible if they think that the peer review is flawed in some way (for instance does not cover the full scope or disciplinary range of the proposal, is partisan, or misses key weaknesses in a proposal) in order that the Office can secure additional comments in advance of the meeting. A decision should be deferred to the next meeting if additional comments cannot be secured in time.

It is entirely legitimate for panels to down-grade or up-grade a proposal's final score in relation to the peer review scores if they feel that the peer review does not fully capture the quality of the proposal.

It is extremely important that panel members complete their designated tasks on time in order that there are no delays. In particular, we ask members to flag as soon as possible if there are any proposals that they cannot review so that they can be re-allocated to other members. Reviews should be completed by the deadline so that we can:
- address any issues raised in your comments e.g. obtain more reviewer comments
- discuss divergent scores
- allow you sight of all Introducer comments before the meeting
- produce an accurate index
- advise the cut-off for discussion

Prior to the meeting we ask that members flag any proposals which they would like to have discussed but which fall below the cut-off, so that we can advise other members to prepare for the discussion.

III.iii Attendance

Meeting dates and other key deadlines are provided to all panel members at least a year in advance. Panel members' attendance is crucial to the GAP process and their participation is not confined to their Introducer role. The role of reader is critical in broadening debate within the panel. Where an absence is absolutely unavoidable members should notify the Office as early as possible in order to allow for an interim member to be recruited if necessary, or for proposals to be reallocated in order to minimise disruption.

If a panel member is unable to attend at short notice then the relevant panel secretary will read their comments at the panel meeting and will ask the absent member for any supplementary comments (in advance of the meeting) that they may have in light of the other introducer's scoring. This is a less satisfactory solution than appointing an interim member, since the panel secretary is not in a position to explain or defend the position of the absent member.

GDG has set minimum standards for attendance and will act upon them where members do not meet the standards. One absence within two years might be entirely understandable, but two will trigger a communication from the relevant chair asking if the member is still able to devote the necessary time to their role on the GAP. A third absence within a two year period will trigger a discussion about whether the member should be asked to stand down.

III.iv GAP members applying for funding from schemes covered by the panels

GAP members are not disbarred from applying to the schemes covered by the panels. If a GAP member is a named individual on an application (PI, Co-I, partner or consultant) they should step out of the panel for the duration of that GAP round. In these circumstances the Office may seek to fill their role on an interim basis. Where possible this might involve the use of former GAP members to act as interim members, thereby ensuring that the interim members would have the necessary experience to fulfil the role.

III.v   Grant funding to members of GAP or GDG

To ensure transparency all awards made to members of GAP or GDG will be countersigned by an ESRC Director, who will be asked to confirm that the correct process has been followed in considering these applications.

III.vi   Payment

Members of the GAPs receive a payment of £800 per year to recognise the workload and time contributed by members.

III.vii Fees and expenses

Details of allowances and expense entitlements, when engaged on ESRC business, can be found on the ESRC website: https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/UKRI-081020-TravelAndSubsistencePolicy.pdf

Travel and subsistence will be claimable via the ESRC Expenses Portal on the Extranet where applicable.

SECTION IV: THE PEER REVIEW PROCESS

IV.i   Peer reviewer selection

Once a proposal has undergone initial case officer checks including eligibility, remit and content/format, peer reviewers will be selected and invited. We seek a standard number of three academic reviews on all grant proposals irrespective of value of proposed project. However, case officers have the freedom to decide that more reviews are needed for a proposal that is, for example, highly interdisciplinary, particularly complex, or where there is a significant divergence in the review scores.

Applicants are able to nominate two potential academic peer reviewers and two potential user reviewers. Case officers will select the most appropriate of these to invite, and if they decline, they will invite the second choice (subject to suitability). The remaining reviewers are selected in two ways:

1) through a reviewer matching tool, which draws on ESRC's Peer Review College.
2) by case officers drawing expertise from outside of the college (where the expertise is not available within the college or bringing in international reviewers).

Once peer reviews have been secured for a proposal they will be checked for usability. If the initial reviewers decline or provide unusable reviews (where there are conflicts of interest or the quality of the comments received will not effectively contribute to the decision-making process), the case officer will select and invite further reviewers.

We also seek to secure one user reviewer for each proposal. User scores do not feed into the aggregate scoring but provide important evidence of potential impact. It is more challenging to secure user peer reviews, so not all proposals have user peer review inputs.

We aim to provide a set of peer review comments which cover all thematic dimensions and disciplines relevant to the proposal, with no known conflicts of interest. Peer reviewers should be from a different institution from the applicant(s), other peer reviewers and the panel introducers.

IV.ii   The ESRC Peer Review College

The ESRC Peer Review College was established in 2010 and refreshed in 2015. It consists of approximately 2,000 independent academic experts drawn from across the social sciences. The ESRC is currently refreshing and updating the College, alongside related content on the ESRC website.

The College covers the majority of our schemes, including both directive and responsive mode initiatives. College members are expected to provide up to eight high quality reviews of proposals within their areas of expertise per year. In addition to using members of the College, also draw upon the wider academic and user communities to conduct peer review assessment.

An online Peer Review Training Tool is available to help peer reviewers with their work. It can be accessed by anyone (subject to user access) using this guidance on how to access the tool.

IV.iii   Reviewer rejections

If the average score of academic reviewers on the six point scale (see Annex III) is below 4.5 the proposal will normally be rejected on the basis of reviewer comments. Otherwise it will be sent to two panel Introducers. The case officer has the discretion to advance a proposal to panel even if its average score falls below this threshold if circumstances demand (for instance if there remains a significant divergence in reviewer grades.) All applicants reaching the Introducer stage are offered the opportunity to respond to reviewers' comments (the PI response).

IV.iv   PI Response

Applicants will have five days to provide a response of up to two sides of A4, which can be used to highlight any areas of agreement or disagreement with reviewers, factual errors or misunderstandings about the proposal and/or to clarify issues raised by reviewers. The response is not intended to provide an opportunity to change a proposal or the financial aspects of the proposal in light of reviewers' comments.

It is our usual practice to forward reviews received after the five-day response period to applicants for further response, although we reserve the right not to do so depending on circumstances.

IV.v   Conflict of Interest

Individuals are asked to refrain from acting as a peer reviewer, introducer or reader if:

- They are a personal friend or a relative of the applicant
- They have submitted a proposal to the same round of the competition for which they are being asked to provide a review (for calls with closing dates)

- They are intending to submit, or have already submitted a proposal within three months of the time that they are being asked to provide a review (for schemes without closing dates)
- They are directly involved in the work proposed by the investigator(s)
- They are a current member of staff or a Professor Emeritus/Emerita at the same Research Organisation as any of the investigators
- They have worked closely with any of the investigator(s) in the last five years
- They have a vested interest in the research, for example they are a general editor of the series to which the proposed outputs will contribute, or a curator of a gallery where the work will be exhibited
- They have been approached and agreed to be a member of a committee connected with a research project, for example an advisory group or steering committee

SECTION V: GUIDANCE DOCUMENTS

V.i   Introducer Guidance for the schemes covered by the GAPs: Research Grants (Open Call) and New Investigator Grants

Introduction

Your role as an Introducer is to assess the proposal in light of the reviewers' comments, bringing your own expertise to the assessment, rather than simply summarising the reviewers' comments.

In assessing all applications, firstly you should check for the following:

- Do you have any conflicts of interest with the applicant, co-applicants or Research Organisation (RO)? You should not get any applications from your own institution, but sometimes the system can allow an application to get through.
- Is the application an invited resubmission? If so, a copy of the following information should be attached to the pack:
    - A covering letter from the applicant summarising the revisions.
    - The feedback from the Panel on the original application providing an explicit invitation to resubmit and clear guidance on the modifications which would merit reconsideration of the applicant.
    - The original (unsuccessful) application, including the peer review and Introducer comments.

Note: For invited resubmissions the Office will aim to secure assessments from a previous reviewer and Introducer where possible.

Members of Panels A, B and C will be invited to act as introducers for proposals submitted to both our research grants and new investigator schemes. These are both covered by this guidance.

Research Grants: The ESRC Research Grants (open call) invites proposals from eligible individuals and research teams for standard research projects, large-scale surveys and other infrastructure projects and for methodological developments. The call offers researchers considerable flexibility to focus on any subject area or topic providing that it falls within

ESRC's remit. Proposals can draw from the wider sciences, but the social sciences must represent more than 50 per cent of the research focus and effort.

For further information on this call please see: ESRC research grant – UKRI

New Investigators: This call is a grant scheme specifically aimed at supporting early career researchers aiming to make the transition to being independent researchers and gain their first UKRI grant. The scheme is aligned to the research grant scheme in terms of the primary criteria of funding excellent social science, but proposals may also include a programme of skill and development opportunities and the provision of a mentor.
As applicants are early career researchers and academics at the start of their careers, your assessments should take this into consideration. We no longer specify a timebound eligibility criteria. Proposals must include an attachment where the applicant must justify why they should be considered an early career researcher and the programme of skill development that will support them in becoming an independent researcher. This is in recognition of the increasing diversity of career paths and trajectories and our ambition to be as inclusive and supportive of these as possible.

The justification of why an applicant considers themselves to be an early career research might reflect differences across disciplines or fields of research; periods of employment in non-research roles; where applicants are looking to re-skill in a new research area; or, where relevant, personal circumstances such as career breaks. Peer reviewers will be directed to consider that justification when they assess applications.

Assessments must reflect both the scientific merit of the proposed research and whether the applicants have made a convincing case to be considered an early career researcher. Where the scientific merit of the proposed research is high, but the applicant has not made a convincing case as to why they should be considered an early career researcher, an invited resubmission could be considered.

There may also be instances where an applicant has had prior non-UKRI funding for a similar career stage, in those circumstances consideration should also be given as to whether an award would be good value for a further investment.

You should judge New Investigator proposals on the level of knowledge and experience that is appropriate to someone at the start of their career and not judge the proposals against more ambitious research undertaken by more senior academics. For more information on this call please see: ESRC new investigator grant – UKRI

Secondary Data Analysis Initiative: From time to time you may also be invited to act as an Introducer on proposals submitted to our Secondary Data Analysis Initiative (SDAI) which are usually considered by Panel D but may draw on expertise from across all panels. Separate guidance is available for those proposals (see below).

How to Assess a Proposal

In making your assessment you should reflect carefully on what weight should be given to the different reviewer comments, taking into account reviewers' expertise and also whether there might be any potential conflict of interest.

We suggest that you do not attempt to assess the proposal in full in the first instance; you should instead look at the reviewer comments and use these as a guide to your assessment.

You can then use these comments to pick out sections of the proposal which might require particularly close attention in arriving at an overall score. You may then want to look at the proposal overall.

Assessment Criteria

We ask both reviewers and Introducers to consider carefully the following aspects of all proposals considered through our responsive mode schemes. The relative importance of some of these criteria may vary across schemes, but scientific excellence remains our primary assessment criterion.

Originality/Potential Contribution to Knowledge
- Is the proposed research likely to make an original and significant contribution to theory, methods or knowledge?
- ESRC is keen to support research which is ambitious (but clearly specified) and has potential for high scientific impact and/or user impact. As there might be a higher than normal risk in such cases that the research will fail to deliver the full range of expected research outputs, are the risks justified, and are there realistic plans in place to mitigate this risk?

Research Design and Methods
- Does the proposal have clear conceptual and theoretical foundations, and are the research methods and framework for analysis suitable to the aims and objectives?
- Is the timescale and scheduling of the work appropriate and realistic, and have potential ethical issues been addressed?
- If it is appropriate, have any particular difficulties of combining approaches from more than one discipline been considered and addressed?

Value for Money
In judging value for money Assessors should consider the overall project budget and specified costs to ensure they are appropriate to carry out the proposed research and are justified by its potential outcomes, impact and advancement of knowledge.

There may be factors which make an application particularly good or poor value for money. For example, an application attracting a high level of third party or an international or inter-institutional collaboration which shares expensive costs very effectively would do well under this criterion. Conversely, an application which duplicates resources available elsewhere or seeks to compete rather than collaborate with other groups might not, depending on the circumstances.

Assessors should state in their comments where they (or peer reviewers) are particularly impressed with a proposal's justification for resources, or where they have concerns that a proposal includes elements which do not demonstrate value for money. Scrutiny of small, incidental costs is not required.

So long as costs are clearly pertinent to the research, appropriately justified, and are not double-counted (e.g. costed both under indirect and direct costs, or covered by block grants for open access publication, or computer hardware) they may be included within a research proposal. All ineligible costs will be cut by ESRC prior to award.

In your assessment please consider:

Are the potential outcomes of the research project sufficient to justify the costs involved?

This should include:
1. assessment of whether the overall budget and specified costs are appropriate to carry out the proposed research
2. assessment of its contribution to the advancement of knowledge, understanding or methodology, either within this specific focus area, or across the sciences more generally and
3. assessment of its potential for societal and economic impact

Are specific funding requests essential and sufficient for the proper conduct of the research proposed?

This should include:
I. The overall length of time for the proposal; the amount of time to be devoted to the project by the proposed principal and co-investigators, and their level.
II. The amount of time for research, technical and support staff and the level of appointment for such staff.
III. The equipment, consumables and other directly incurred costs such as travel and subsistence.
IV. Costs of collecting, establishing, providing or organising the necessary data and research materials.
V. The costs of plans for user engagement, research dissemination and maximising the potential impact of the research.
VI. Access to institutional research facilities.
VII. For new investigators, the costs for training to support their skill development.

Areas where you should not comment:

Some costs are agreed economic costs between Research Councils and other relevant bodies and are not under the control of the applicant. You should not therefore comment upon:
I. the level of estate costs in different institutions;
II. the level of indirect costs;
III. charging rates of institutional or other research facilities which are not open market provisions;
IV. specific salary levels in individual institutions.

Outputs, Dissemination and Impact
- Is the planned output of the research appropriate?
- Have the applicants made effective and appropriate plans to maximise the potential scientific, economic and societal impacts at all stages of the research?
- Have appropriate arrangements been made (where relevant) for engaging potential users of the research at relevant stages of the project?
- Have the applicants identified the whole range of potential beneficiaries of the research and how they might be reached?

For New Investigators, Introducers should also consider the applicant and their skill development programme.

- Has the applicant clearly justified why they should be considered an early career researcher?
- Will the planned programme research and broader skills development will support the applicant's transition to being an independent researcher?
- Consider the appropriateness, and demonstration of commitment, of the proposed mentor.
- Would an award have a demonstrable impact on their career trajectory?

Research Ethics

ESRC has adopted six key principles of ethical research which we expect to be adopted whenever applicable. (If the application is successful and there are ethical issues, then appropriate approvals will be required, normally before funding commences.)

In summary, the six principles of ethical research are:

- Research should be undertaken in ways that ensure integrity and quality;
- Staff and subjects must be informed fully about the purpose, methods and uses of the research, and any risks involved (exceptionally, variation may be allowed in very specific contexts);
- Confidentiality and anonymity must be respected;
- Participation must be voluntary and free from coercion;
- Harm to participants must be avoided;
- Research must be independent, and any conflicts of interest or partiality explicit.

For full details see ESRC's *Framework for Research Ethics* at: Research ethics guidance – ESRC – UKRI

Reviewers and Introducers are invited to comment on whether they feel the proposal shows sufficient awareness of and, as applicable, adequately addresses the above issues and any other ethical issues that might be raised by the proposed research.

Comments and scores

Please provide substantive comments (one or two paragraphs) for feedback to applicants so that all applicants receive useful and equivalent feedback.

Introducers are asked to score each application on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is an exceptionally strong proposal, and provide justification for the score which will form the basis of the Panel's funding recommendation. Comments should support and justify the score given, and will be sent, unattributed, to applications with their decision notifications. The table at Annex IIb summarises the meaning of the scores for our Responsive Mode schemes. Please note that the definitions of each score may vary for other schemes, such as those focused on knowledge exchange activities. Introducers are encouraged to make full use of the (1 to 10) scale as far as possible. By scoring proposals 10, 9, 8 and 7 you are recommending the proposal for potential funding. Scoring proposals 6 and 5 will place proposals in the marginal category which are not a priority for funding. Scores of 4-1 can also be assigned, although it can be expected that all funded proposals will be above this category.

Reviewer scores

The table at Annex III summarises the meaning of the reviewer scores for our Research Grants scheme and our New Investigator scheme.

All peer review forms now have four core questions. For standard research proposals the criteria are as follows:

Assessment Criterion 1	Originality; Potential Contribution to Knowledge
Assessment Criterion 2	Research Design and Methods
Assessment Criterion 3	Value for Money
Assessment Criterion 4	Outputs, Dissemination and Impact

Non-academic reviewer scores

Non-academics, or users, are invited to indicate overall judgment of the research proposal using the following scale:

High	Research of high importance to users of research, i.e. of such novelty or timeliness and promise that a significant contribution to policy or practice is likely.
Worthy	Research that will add to understanding and is worthy of support, but which may not be of such relevance or urgency as to have a significant influence on policy or practice.
Reject	Research which is flawed in its proposed contribution to policy or practice or is repetitious of other work.

Likely importance of research to potential users:

- Does the proposal have the capacity to make a significant impact on policy or practice?
- Does the proposal show appropriate awareness of issues important to potential users?
- Does the planned activity engage with appropriate people and/or organisation?

Timeliness of the outcomes for potential users:

- Are the issues addressed in the proposal timely? Will the results be available at an appropriate time to contribute to policy or practice?
- Effectiveness of plans for involving potential users and disseminating results to them:
    o Are the plans to engage with users of the research during the course of the research appropriate?
    o Are the proposals for the communication of the results to users appropriate?
    o Have adequate plans been made by the applicants to disseminate the results of the research?
- Is the planned output of the research appropriate?

Scientific merit

Non-academic reviewers can provide an assessment of scientific merit if they feel able to otherwise, they will select the 'Unable to assess' grading option.

For reference, the call specification for the Research Grant Scheme can be found here: ESRC research grant – UKRI.

V.ii   Additional panel guidance for proposals submitted to the New Investigator call

Introduction

The New Investigator scheme was launched in August 2016 and is specifically aimed at supporting early career researchers to make the transition to being independent researchers and gain their first Research Council grant.

The scheme is aligned to the research grant scheme in terms of the primary criteria of funding excellent social science, but proposals should also include a programme of skill and development opportunities and the provision of a mentor which Panels will need to consider when discussing those proposals.

Proposals will be considered by the Grant Assessment Panels (A, B and C primarily but expertise may also be drawn from the membership of Panel D where relevant) and will be considered as a distinct group of proposals rather than as part of a joint index with the research grants.

The Panel will need to consider fit to the aims of the New Investigator call in a way that peer reviewers are unlikely to address in detail and ensure that all proposals funded under this call must be in line with that overarching aim. If the case has not been adequately made this should be reflected in the overall score allocated by the Panel.

We cannot provide an exhaustive list of likely scenarios, but this guidance should provide a flavour of the kind of factors that the Panels will need to consider over and above the peer review comments.

Eligibility

This call is open to high-quality candidates from anywhere in the world to enable them to further their research careers. However, all potential applicants must have the strong support of an eligible research organisation in the UK to host them if they are successful.

- Eligibility criteria is not timebound, but this remains a scheme to support early career researchers. Applicants must justify why they consider themselves to be an early career research might reflect differences across disciplines or fields of research; periods of employment in non-research roles; where applicants are looking to re-skill in a new research area; or, where relevant, personal circumstances such as career breaks. Applicants cannot be current or former principal investigators on ESRC or other UKRI grants, except ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowships.
- The call is open to applicants with or without a permanent academic post, subject to the above restrictions.

Activities

These awards aim to support applicants to become independent researchers through gaining experience of managing and leading research projects and teams as well as support their continued professional development.

- Does the proposal provide the applicant with the opportunity to manage research staff?
- If not, have the demonstrated whether they already have experience of that or how they plan to obtain those skills?
- If assessed separately would both the research element and the applicant, and their skills development programme, be scored 7 or above?

Mentoring

All applicants are required to have a named mentor based at the research organisation where the grant is to be held and must include a mentor's statement and CV as part of their proposal.

- Does the mentor's statement demonstrate that they have considered the individual applicant's training needs carefully and tailored a programme of support to meet those needs?
- If there's more than one mentor, does the statement address how the mentoring team will work together?
- Is the mentor of high academic standing and have a strong interest in the applicant's field of research?
- If the mentor is the applicant's former PhD supervisor, is there a clear justification why that is the case and how funding offers a step-change in their career trajectory rather a simple extension to existing work?

Skill development

A key area where this call differs from a standard grant is in the expectations around the continuing professional development of the applicant.

- Does the proposal include a programme of research and broader skill development appropriate to the applicant and their planned research?
- Has the applicant addressed the training needs of any staff employed on the grant?

Mobility

Mobility is encouraged as part of this scheme but is not mandatory so applicants should not be penalised for not including it.

- Has the applicant adequately justified their choice of host institution for their career development?
- Does the project include a visit to other national or international research centres as part of their programme of activities and is the potential benefit for undertaking such a visit clear?

- If the applicant is unable to travel, have they invited experts to visit them or demonstrated other ways through which they will develop new, or extending existing, networks?

Further information

Please note the full call specification and a detailed set of Frequently Asked Questions can be found on the Funding Finder website here: ESRC new investigator grant – UKRI

V.iii   Introducer Guidance for the schemes covered by the GAPs: Secondary Data Analysis Initiative (SDAI)

Please note, this guidance should be read alongside the 'Guidance for GAP Introducers in assessing research grant proposals' document. Proposals submitted under the Secondary Data Analysis Initiative (SDAI) will be directed to Panel D however introducers can be drawn from across all four Grant Assessment Panels (GAPs). Members of Panel D may also be invited to act as Introducers on standard grant proposals.

Background and overview of the Scheme

The Secondary Data Analysis Initiative (SDAI) aims to deliver high-quality high-impact research through the deeper exploitation of major data resources created by the ESRC and other agencies.

Please familiarise yourself with the specific requirements of SDAI before undertaking your assessment, see our website for the call specification:
Secondary Data Analysis Initiative – UKRI

Aims and objectives

The SDAI call focuses on the following principles:

- Maximising the use of key ESRC-funded data resources
- Developing the capacity of early career researchers to undertake research using complex data resources
- Working collaboratively with non-academic stakeholders to extract value from data resources for mutual benefit.

The open call is not thematically driven: proposals are welcome in any area of social and economic research that can deliver high-quality research, knowledge exchange and policy and practitioner impact.

Please note primary data collection is not permitted as part of this call and cannot be funded under any circumstances. Data preparation work such as digitisation, anonymisation, etc, which is necessary to the conduct of the research project, can be carried out but must not be the focus of activity. Projects must be research driven and designed to answer substantive research questions.

The following requirements are specific to the call:

Dataset use

Proposals are required to use at least one dataset funded by ESRC or any other agency. The inclusion of a relevant data infrastructure will initially be checked by the Office and reviewers should consider the extent to which that dataset is essential to the delivery of the project.

Letters of support are required from the relevant approvals panel, data owner or data controller where such data is being exploited. This is to provide clarification where there are ambiguities surrounding access to the dataset(s) and in order to offer assurances that if a proposal is successful the dataset(s) will be accessible (subject to subsequent negotiations).

Where proposals are creating new datasets through, for example, data linkage they are required to include a data management plan as part of their proposal. Specific guidance for the assessment of these is available at [Publishing your research findings – UKRI](#)

Highlight notices

From time-to-time there may be highlight notices in operation on this scheme. In those instances, applicants would also need to demonstrate how their proposal fits with the aims of the highlight notice.

Highlight notices may allow the use of specific datasets and will usually have their own budget allocation. If a proposal submitted under a highlight notice uses datasets in addition to those required by the highlight notice, it could be considered under both the highlight and the standard scheme.

Assessment Criteria

We aim to ensure that all proposals have been reviewed by three academic reviewers and one non-academic reviewer where appropriate.

We ask both reviewers and Introducers to consider carefully the following aspects of SDAI proposals. Scientific excellence is our primary assessment criterion.

Originality, innovation and potential contribution to knowledge

- Is the proposal innovative in terms of identifying problems or formulating research questions to address stated issues?
- Will the proposal lead to new understanding, insights, advice or solutions to the stated problems?
- Does the proposal offer to address shortcomings in the current state of knowledge and understanding?
- Is the proposal novel and timely?

Research design and methods

- Is there a clear understanding of the issue addressed through this research?
- Is the conceptual framework of the proposed research appropriate to address the issue?
- Is there clarity and coherence in the research design between research questions, research methods and anticipated intellectual outcomes?
- Is the proposal methodologically innovative?
- Are the research questions clearly set out?

- Are the research methods clearly specified, robust and appropriate to the stated questions?
- Are issues of data validity and reliability appropriately addressed?
- Are plans for data linkage feasible, and will they deliver the proposed objectives?
- Do data management plans follow best practice, and adhere to ESRC data policy?
- Have appropriate considerations been given to ethics issues arising from this project?

Potential for capacity-building

- Are any identified capacity-building activities set out in relation to the core intellectual agenda of the research?
- Does the proposal include wider programmes of training for the designated early career researcher, and are these appropriate to their stated career development aspirations?
- If applicable, has the eligibility of the early career researcher been clearly articulated, and will they make a substantive contribution to the project?

Project management and research partnerships

- Are the project management plans and configuration of roles and responsibilities reasonable, appropriate and credible for the proposed project?
- Are the credentials of the investigators and host institutions appropriate to deliver the project?
- Have project partners been fully involved in the design of the research, and do they have a clear and meaningful role in future activities?

Outputs, dissemination and potential for impact on theory, policy and practice

- Does the project have real potential for impact on theory, policy and/or practice?
- Does the proposal demonstrate that there is effective demand for the research from policymakers and other non-academic stakeholders beyond the academic community?
- Are the stakeholders or potential users of research outputs properly identified, and the processes and means for engaging with them appropriate, at all stages of the research process?
- Are there clear plans to make findings available to target audiences and to maximise potential research impact?

Comments and scores

Please provide substantive comments (two or three paragraphs) for feedback to applicants so that all applicants receive useful and equivalent feedback.

Introducers are asked to score each application on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is an exceptionally strong proposal, and provide justification for the score which will form the basis of the Panel's funding recommendation. Comments should support and justify the score given, and will be sent, unattributed, to applications with their decision notifications. Annex II shows the table of the scores.

Introducers are encouraged to make full use of the (1 to 10) scale as far as possible.

By scoring proposals 10, 9, 8 and 7 you are recommending the proposal for potential funding. By scoring a proposal 6 or below, you are recommending that the proposal is not fundable.

Academic reviewer scores

The table at Annex III summarises the meaning of the academic reviewer scores for the scheme.

The table below maps SDAI's six core criteria against the four core criteria found on the peer review form.

SDAI Criterion	Peer Review Form Criterion
Originality, innovation and potential contribution to knowledge	Originality; potential contribution to knowledge
Research design and methods	Research design and methods
Potential for capacity-building	Outputs, dissemination and impact
Project management and research partnerships	Research design and methods
Outputs, dissemination and potential for impact on theory, policy and practice	Outputs, dissemination and impact
Value for money	Value for money

Non-academic reviewer scores

Non-academics, or users, are invited to indicate overall judgment of the research proposal using the following scale:

High	Research of high importance to users of research, i.e. of such novelty or timeliness and promise that a significant contribution to policy or practice is likely.
Worthy	Research that will add to understanding and is worthy of support, but which may not be of such relevance or urgency as to have a significant influence on policy or practice.
Reject	Research which is flawed in its proposed contribution to policy or practice or is repetitious of other work.

Likely importance of research to potential users:

- Does the proposal have the capacity to make a significant impact on policy or practice?
- Does the proposal show appropriate awareness of issues important to potential users?
- Does the planned activity engage with appropriate people and/or organisation?

Timeliness of the outcomes for potential users:

- Are the issues addressed in the proposal timely? Will the results be available at an appropriate time to contribute to policy or practice?
- Effectiveness of plans for involving potential users and disseminating results to them:

- o Are the plans to engage with users of the research during the course of the research appropriate?
- o Are the proposals for the communication of the results to users appropriate?
- o Have adequate plans been made by the applicants to disseminate the results of the research?
- o Is the planned output of the research appropriate?

Scientific merit

Non-academic reviewers can provide an assessment of scientific merit if they feel able to otherwise, they will select the 'Unable to assess' grading option.

V.iv   Guidance for GAP User members in their role as 'Reader'

Academic members of the Panels are asked to provide formal assessments of each grant proposal utilising the following criteria:

- Originality/Potential Contribution to Knowledge
- Research Design and Methods
- Value for Money
- Outputs, Dissemination and Impact

The reports are received ahead of the meeting and inform which proposals will be discussed at the meeting itself.

In order to facilitate a greater breadth of discussion on proposals, two academic readers and one user reader will be allocated to each proposal deemed to be in the discussion zone. As a reader you will be asked to read the proposal in sufficient detail to be able to actively participate in the discussion. No formal report is required from you.

As a User member, your views are critical within ESRC's decision-making processes. The Research Grants scheme is highly competitive and the potential for impact beyond academia is of particular importance in identifying which proposals are funded and especially when ranking the proposals. User members are therefore expected to read proposals for each meeting paying particular attention to the relevance, timeliness and utility of the research for policymakers and practitioners. You will be expected to assess the appropriateness and quality of the extent to which they have demonstrated plans to maximise the scientific and/or user impact arising from the research, the communications plan and knowledge exchange strategy in the context of the full proposal.

The proposal(s) allocated may or may not be strictly within your own area of expertise although it is hoped that you will have broad appreciation for the area. It is expected that as a reader you will be able to contribute to the discussion of a proposal and provide a considered view on the proposed approaches to maximising impact. If, however you feel uncomfortable or conflicted with any proposal that you have been asked to read then please do let us know so that we can look to re-allocate it. All of the relevant documentation, including the Introducers' comments, relating to the proposals allocated to you to read will be available on the extranet site in your My Grants folder approximately one week before the meeting.

All panel members are encouraged to read as many of the proposals as they can in addition to those that you have been asked to act as a 'reader' for and are welcome to participate in

the discussion for any proposals that you would like to. This approach maximises the number of panel members who are able to participate in the discussion for any one proposal.

Note: This should be read in conjunction with the Introducer guidance notes which provide more detail of the criteria against which panels make their judgements.

V.v   Full Economic Costing (fEC)

Proposals will show 100% of the full Economic Cost (fEC) of the proposed research. The Research Councils will meet 80% of the full Economic Cost of successful proposals.

V.vi   Guidance on Project Staff and Publication Costs

Project staff

Investigators - The Principal Investigator should be the individual who takes responsibility for the intellectual leadership of the research project and for the overall management of the research. The PI may be supported by a number of Co-Investigators. A Co-investigator assists the Principal Investigator in the management and leadership of the research project.

Project Partner - Proposed collaboration with another individual or institution, including any funding committed. An organisation should only be named as a project partner if it is providing specific contributions (either direct or indirect) to the research project. Co-funding itself is neither necessary nor sufficient for an award to be made and contributions in kind, access or other assistance can be as important as financial contributions.

Consultancy fees - Consultancy fees are for essential specialist services required from outside the institution(s) involved in the project (daily rate to be specified). Clear justification should be provided for consultancy costs, and why the use of a consultant is appropriate and represents value for money.

Publication costs

In line with UKRI's policy on open access to research outputs, Research Organisations are provided with specific block funding for publication costs. Research Councils no longer provide funding in individual research grants for any publication costs associated with peer-review journal articles and conference papers. Publication costs associated with research outputs other than journal articles and conference papers, such as books, monographs, critical editions, catalogues etc may, however, continue to be included in grants as a Directly Incurred Other Cost. Any request for such costs should be fully justified in the case for support/justification of resources.

Research organisations can use the UKRI open access block grant for a wide variety of activities that enable them to comply with the policy. Further details about what the block grant can and cannot be used for are provided in the 2022 to 2023 open access block grant terms and conditions and UKRI open access policy supplementary frequently asked questions (FAQs).

V.vii   The Peer Review Extranet

The Peer Review Extranet is administered by BBSRC on behalf of the Research Councils. It is a harmonised system which complies with Government Security Policy and allows information to be shared securely between the Councils and with Panel members.

Advantages to the system include:

- a single log-on for all meetings and Councils;
- the information can be read in 'real time';
- the facility is there to download and combine proposals if you choose to;
- it allows the upload of late papers up to the day of the meeting;

When panel members join the GAPs they are sent a link which allows them to register on the Extranet if they are not already registered.

There is a comprehensive help function on the system – follow the link in the top right-hand corner of the Portal Homepage which reads 'Extranet Guidance and FAQs'.

SECTION VI: THE PANEL PROCESS

VI.i   The Panel Meeting

Once a decision has been made to progress a proposal to Panel (either due to meeting the reviewer threshold or because it has divergent reviewer grades), each proposal is allocated to two academic panel members who act as 'Introducers'. One should represent the primary discipline of the application (indicated by the applicant on their Je-S form) unless a conflict of interest makes this impossible. In any case, the proposal will be allocated to the panel which covers the proposal's primary discipline. The role of the Introducer is discussed in detail above under 'Panel Member Roles and Responsibilities'.

On the day of the meeting each proposal is discussed in turn, in ranked order (based on the Introducer scores received in advance of the meeting. Low ranked proposals are not discussed in the meetings unless a panel member has requested in advance that they be discussed (this allows for the allocation of readers and for all members to be alerted to the fact that a proposal will be discussed). As well as two allocated Introducers each proposal has three 'Readers' (two academics and one 'user') which means that there will be at least five panel members sufficiently prepared to engage in active discussion of the proposal. Introducers as asked to briefly (1-2 minutes) introduce the proposal and summarise their assessment. The second introducer should not repeat points made by the first although they may endorse them (if they are in agreement) and may add to their comments introducing additional points. The Readers will then be asked to provide additional comments and give an indicative score. Discussions should draw out the positives and negatives of each proposal, and panel members should be respectful of disciplinary differences at all times.

Important additional considerations for the GAP discussions include:

- Are project plans appropriate and realistic?
- Does the proposal represent good value for money and is it appropriately costed? Value for money is an important consideration therefore panels should agree on a reduction in the final score where proposals are poorly costed or costs are unjustified. Please see VI.vii   Guidance on Imposing Cuts below for more information.

- Are risks discussed and have the applicants outlined appropriate plans to mitigate them?
- Has good attention been paid to ethical issues?
- Would it be useful to add conditions, provide advice or guidance?

The meetings are structured in such a way as to focus particular time and attention on marginal proposals, so those which are very highly scored should not require lengthy discussion. Once the panel has discussed all of the proposals in the discussion zone the GAP Co-ordinator will work out where the funding cut off is likely to fall. It will then be necessary to rank the proposals at the funding margin. Please see VI.v   Ranking the proposals at the funding margin below for more information on this process.

At the end of the meeting each panel will have generated a ranked list of proposals (based on final scores) noting any additional advice to Grants Delivery Group (GDG). Panels can use four levels of condition, and invite resubmissions (in exceptional circumstances) – see

VI.vi   Panel Condition types and VI.viii   ESRC's Resubmission Policy below. Panels are making *recommendations* for funding only – the final decision on funding rests with GDG. Recommendations and panel discussions should remain confidential.

VI.ii   Unconscious Bias

UKRI has a responsibility to promote equality and diversity throughout its activities as part of its public sector duties. More information can be found at: https://www.ukri.org/about-us/esrc/policies-and-standards/. Our ambition is for ESRC, as part of UKRI, to be recognised as a leader in equality, diversity and inclusion in the research community, working with partners throughout the sector. Individuals acting on behalf of ESRC, including Council and advisory committee members, and members of commissioning panels are both protected by and expected to act in accordance with the law.

To mitigate against unconscious bias we ensure the following practises are followed at our GAP meetings (based on external expert advice):

- Panel Chairs read a Statement on Unconscious Bias at the beginning of each meeting. This reads as follows: "It is our intention to ensure that the panel's deliberations today are fair and equitable and we will achieve this through paying close attention to the scoring criteria and definitions, and by challenging any imprecise language used by panel members which might allow unconscious biases to creep into the panel's discussions."
- The score definitions used by the panel are available in hard copy at the meetings and the Chairs will refer to them throughout the meeting.
- We allocate three readers to each proposal in addition to the two introducers. This ensures that there is a good breadth of opinion represented in discussions and no one individual has undue influence on decisions.
- We ensure that comfort breaks in the morning and afternoon are at least 10 minutes long, and preferably 15 minutes. The lunch break should be at least 30 minutes long, and ideally will last 45 minutes. This allows panel members sufficient time to recharge throughout the day and helps to reduce cognitive load.
- We ensure that there are adequate supplies of refreshments (tea and coffee, fruit and biscuits) in order to protect against low blood sugars amongst the panel.

- The Panel Chairs and Secretaries are mindful of potential biases and should be quick to challenge imprecise language. Discussions should be evidence-based.
- We try to ensure that we do not discuss too high a number of proposals for a one-day meeting by setting the cut-off for the discussion zone at a level where we are not required to discuss a large number of proposals which are not likely to secure funding.

VI.iii   Evaluating Track Record

Panels should not pay particular attention to track record of applicants. Whilst track record should play into panel decisions it should not be emphasised to the extent that innovative/potentially high impact work by less established researchers is disadvantaged. It is important that panels assess the application in front of them and do not 'read between the lines' or give the benefit of the doubt based on the reputation of the individual applicant or team, as this would be a form of confirmation bias.

VI.iv   Research Ethics

Proposals submitted to the ESRC must provide a full ethics statement that confirms that proper consideration has been given to any ethics issues raised. All ESRC-funded grants must be approved by at least a light-touch ethics review.

The ESRC does not require a favourable ethics opinion to be secured prior to submission of a research proposal. However, a proposal must state what the applicant considers to be the possible ethics implications throughout the research project lifecycle, what measures will be taken for ongoing consideration of ethics issues, what review will be required for their proposed research and how and when it will be obtained.

Risk and benefit to researchers, participants and others (e.g. potentially stigmatised or marginalised groups) as a result of the research and the potential impact, knowledge exchange, dissemination activity and future re-use of the data should also be considered as part of the ethical statement.

If an ethics review is required at a later stage in the project, this should be discussed, and funding arrangements agreed in advance with the ESRC. At a minimum we expect that an ethics review will be undertaken prior to the stage in the project that the actual research is carried out.

During peer review, reviewers and assessors will be asked to consider the ethical statement in the proposal. If they disagree with the proposed approach to ethics issues, or the statement does not adequately address these issues, this could lead to the rejection of a proposal, or the award of a conditional grant to ensure the necessary ethical considerations and ethical review are undertaken.

ESRC's Core Ethical Principles

Our six key principles for ethical research are:

- research should aim to maximise benefit for individuals and society and minimise risk and harm
- the rights and dignity of individuals and groups should be respected
- wherever possible, participation should be voluntary and appropriately informed

- research should be conducted with integrity and transparency
- lines of responsibility and accountability should be clearly defined
- independence of research should be maintained and where conflicts of interest cannot be avoided, they should be made explicit

VI.v   Ranking the proposals at the funding margin

Once Panels have agreed final scores for all proposals in the discussion zone the GAP Co-ordinator will work out where the funding cut off is likely to fall in terms of the score range. Then it will be necessary for panels to rank the proposals within this score as High, Medium or Low, and then within the high to low categories where there are multiple proposals in a category.

This ranking helps the Grants Delivery Group (GDG) to make its final funding decisions.

Secondary criteria may be useful in the ranking process. These might include:
- the innovative nature of the research
- the potential for impact
- the importance of the research topic
- the quality of any capacity building elements
- value for money considerations.

Given past misunderstandings about what exactly the High, Medium and Low ratings mean, and how they fit with other scores, the two examples provided here may help to clarify things.

Assuming that we are ranking within score 8, a ranking might look like the following:

Score 10		
Score 9.5		
Score 9		
Score 8.5		
Score 8	High	1
		2
		3
	Medium	1
	Low	1
		2
Score 7.5		
Score 7		

Please note that 8.5 is more highly ranked than 8 High, since the High, Medium and Low rankings operate within a single score banding.

An example where a panel ranks at the score 8.5 level illustrates this:

Score 10		
Score 9.5		
Score 9		
Score 8.5	High	1
	Medium	1

		2
		3
		4
	Low	1
		2
Score 8		
Score 7.5		
Score 7		

VI.vi   Panel Condition types

Panels can recommend applications for funding subject to conditions.
Conditions can be distinguished between the following four types:

Condition 1   Where the Panel expects the applicants to take account of advice from the Panel and/or reviewer comments.

Condition 2   Which are to be imposed as part of the award.

Condition 3   Where a response is required, and the Office can decide if it is satisfactory.

Condition 4   Where a response is required, and a Panel member decides whether it is satisfactory on the Panel's behalf.

Conditions falling into category 1 or 2 do not require the applicant to respond and will form part of their conditions. Awards with conditions falling into category 3 and 4 require a written response and subsequent approval before funds could be released or an award letter issued.

VI.vii Guidance on Imposing Cuts

ESRC will only make cuts to an award in exceptional circumstances following recommendation by the panel. In such circumstances ESRC will impose a condition requiring the principal investigator to provide an updated budget and project plan. We do not impose cuts which would substantially distort the science, since this would effectively rewrite the proposal.

The panel should not consider recommending cuts of more than 30% to any project. If significant cuts are required it may be more appropriate to invite a resubmission with specific feedback relating to costings and value for money.

VI.viii ESRC's Resubmission Policy

ESRC does not allow the resubmission of any previously unsuccessful proposals, unless applicants have been **explicitly invited** to do so. Where there is compelling evidence from peer review, we will invite a small number of resubmissions where advised by the Grant Assessment Panels (GAPs), or equivalent.

ESRC has introduced this policy as part of a suite of demand management measures, to help alleviate pressure on all involved in our peer review process. Over the past two decades the

number of proposals received by the Research Councils has rapidly increased. This level of demand is putting huge pressure on the peer review system, including reviewers and panels. Using the peer review process to improve proposals through multiple resubmissions puts extreme pressure on our pool of reviewers, the majority of whom are also at some stage applicants for ESRC funding. ESRC expects all proposals entering the peer review process to have been carefully written by applicants and quality assured by institutions, so that when they are submitted, they are highly competitive, with a genuine prospect of being funded. This policy will promote high-quality peer review for each proposal, which will in turn be of benefit to applicants, reviewers, panels, and the community as a whole.

The definition of a resubmission is "Any proposal (including an outline) that has been previously submitted to ESRC – through any kind of funding scheme, including both calls for proposals and open-date responsive mode. If you apply through a call and your proposal is not funded, you cannot resubmit it in responsive mode (and vice versa) unless explicitly invited to do so."

If a proposal submitted to another Research Council is judged to be out of their remit before undergoing peer review, it can be submitted to ESRC if it is within our remit.

The purpose of our invitation-only policy is to allow for the modification and/or further development and improvement of only those proposals that have the potential to be a highly competitive proposal with a genuine prospect of being funded. There is no guarantee that a resubmitted proposal will be successful, as it will be in competition with an entirely new tranche of proposals. We will, however, look to invite some reviewers and assessors who commented on the previously submitted proposal.

Where a resubmission is invited, a covering letter summarising the major revisions must accompany the proposal. If a proposal is being resubmitted following an invitation to do so, applicants must complete a new submission through the Je-S system and should identify the application as an invited resubmission using the appropriate tick-box.

Proposals identified by the ESRC as uninvited resubmissions will not be processed. These will be classified as unsuccessful on quality grounds in data provided to the Research Organisation as part of our demand management strategy.

What constitutes a new proposal?

A new proposal should involve a significant change of focus from any previous proposal submitted to ESRC and will likely be accompanied by a different set of costings to deliver the project. Proposals which demonstrate only minor amendments from previous submissions, for example specific changes based on previous peer review feedback alone, will be counted as resubmissions.

We expect new proposals to have fresh or significantly modified objectives and/or an entirely revised methodological/analytical approach to a research question. Any proposal which does not meet either of these criteria will be judged a resubmission.

If any of the following conditions apply, then a proposal may be considered a resubmission:

- Broadly the same title and/or proposal summary
- Overall aim of a new proposal and its high-level objectives broadly the same
- Broadly the same research questions

- Broadly the same resources required to carry out the research
- Principal and Co-Investigators on a proposal are amended (e.g. swapping of roles) whilst the content of the proposal is essentially the same.

However, this is not an exhaustive list and none of these points in isolation will be used to define a resubmission.

In order to treat everyone fairly, ESRC cannot engage in discussions about whether a particular proposal will be treated as a resubmission before application or whether a proposal should have been considered by a Panel as an invited resubmission. Applicants are advised to consult within their own institution before making an application which they believe may be considered a re-submission.

The identification of uninvited resubmissions will rest with staff within the ESRC, as was previously the case with undeclared resubmissions. In considering the eligibility of a new proposal the ESRC may approach a member of the Grant Assessment Panels to assess whether the proposal is an uninvited resubmission of a previous proposal. This will generally only be in difficult cases where external advice is required to inform the decision.

Guidance to panels on inviting resubmissions

1. The option to invite a resubmission is not expected to be used frequently and **should not** be used to address fundamental flaws in proposals or to address issues within proposals which are ranked as marginal due to a variety of issues.

2. Panels are only able to invite a resubmission under the following instances:
   a) Where the proposal is judged to be of high quality, but a moderate change could make it a very highly competitive proposal and in serious contention for funding.
   b) Where the proposal is clearly highly regarded by the Panel but needs specific changes to be considered a very highly competitive proposal and in serious contention for funding. The nature of the change, in this particular case, could be more than moderate.
   c) Where an application to the New Investigator grant scheme is judged to be of high quality but the applicant was not considered to be an early career researcher.

3. This invitation to resubmit a proposal may be seen as an additional option to the traditional ESRC condition types, in particular as an alternative to a condition type 4, where the change requires a modification to the research proposal content. Please remember that there should be compelling evidence from the reviewers that this is a worthwhile exercise, which would result in a highly competitive proposal with a genuine prospect of being funded. Such proposals are likely to be really good ideas but are missing something which could be remedied.

4. On inviting a resubmission, the feedback from the Panel should contain an explicit invitation to resubmit and clear guidance on the modifications which the Panel believe would merit reconsideration of the proposal.

5. It is not expected that the applicants will be invited to rewrite the whole proposal; the resubmission will be expected to include specific changes which have the potential to make the proposal of the highest priority for funding.

6. ESRC staff will ensure that the applicants have addressed those specific issues before accepting the resubmission for processing.

7. Please remember that the resubmitted proposal will have to go back through peer review; it is not advisable to trigger this process unless you are confident that the proposed change(s) could be made to satisfy the reviewers'/Panel's specific concerns.

8. Panels may wish to suggest additional reviewers who would be able to comment beyond those already approached on the original proposal.

9. There is no guarantee of funding upon submission of the second proposal. The resubmission must compete again against other new proposals. However, the Office will look to reuse some of the referees and Panel Members who commented on the original proposal.

SECTION VIII: GRANTS DELIVERY GROUP

VIII.i   The role of the Grants Delivery Group

The Grants Delivery Group (GDG) makes scientific recommendations for funding grants under the Research Grants Scheme. It also oversees the Secondary Data Analysis Initiative and New Investigators Scheme. These funding recommendations are informed by the Grant Assessment Panels (GAPs).

GDG is chaired by a member of ESRC Council and consists of the GAP Chairs, the GAP Secretaries, the GDG Secretary and the GAP Co-ordinators. The group combines and considers the GAPs' recommendations and ranking, moderating (where necessary) to provide a final overall ranked list of proposals and ensure consistency of practice and treatment between panels. The ranking is based primarily on scientific quality. Additional factors are considered in marginal cases, including, for instance, the innovative nature of the research and the extent to which they have demonstrated plans to maximise the scientific and/or user impact arising from the research. GDG also plays a role in feeding into ESRC policy.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Typical Timeline for a GAP round

Lead up to GAP

Lead Up to Meeting	Tasks	Responsibility
26-10 weeks	Proposals go through Peer Review Process Meetings arranged and dates confirmed etc	Office
10 - 9 weeks	Office to ensure proposals are ready for this particular round (Fully and appropriately reviewed, PI response received and notes for Introducers put on file)	Office
9 – 7 weeks	Introducer allocations are completed, ensuring a fair spread across panel members Checks carried out that proposals are allocated to the correct panel Allocation list created for ease of reference to Introducers Re-allocations carried out where panel members feel unable to review proposals allocated to them	Office
	Proposals uploaded to the extranet, guidance added, conflicts carried out, allocation list uploaded Email notifying papers ready sent to Introducers	Office
	Introducers check proposal allocation list to ensure they are able to carry out the reviews (notifying the office where this is not possible) Also notify the office if they feel a proposal is better placed in another panel	GAP members
5 weeks	Late papers uploaded to the extranet	Office
	Re-allocations continue where notified Preparation of the index begins	Office
	Introducer reviews submitted	GAP members
4 weeks	Introducer report deadline	GAP members
4 – 3 weeks	Chase late Introducer comments	Office
	Update index, read Introducer comments to ensure they do not flag anything that needs to be addressed (and if they do, address the issue where possible e.g. gain extra reviewer comments) Costing checks carried out on proposals likely to be discussed at the meetings Introducer comments added to the index for panel Chairs reference	Office
2 weeks	Late papers and Introducer comments uploaded	Office

	Introducers approached where scores are divergent (we can only do this once the scores are in) Index circulated to panel members Budgets and likely 'cut-off' for discussion agreed	Office
	Panel Members to flag any proposals they feel should be discussed at the meetings but fall below the threshold for discussion	GAP members
1 week	Chairs brief and final index circulated to Chairs 'Readers' allocated for proposals due to be discussed (we can only do this once we have proposals fully reviewed)	Office

N.B. The purpose of this timeline is to show the activities and interdependencies of those activities for each round of GAP meetings

Following the GAP Meeting

1 week post-GAP	GAP Minutes produced and signed off	Office, Panel Chairs
1.5 weeks post-GAP	Combined GDG Index prepared	Office
2 weeks post-GAP	Grants Delivery Group meets to make final funding decisions	GDG members
2.5 weeks post-GAP	GDG Minutes produced and signed off, budget signed off	Office, GDG Chair
4 weeks post-GAP	Decisions announced, finance checks, PIs respond to any conditions*, proposal sent to SBS	Office
4-6 weeks post-GAP	SBS prepares the offer (10 day turnaround)	SBS
7-9 weeks post-GAP	Grants authorised by Team Heads within ESRC (5 day turnaround)	Office
Approximately 12 weeks post-GAP	Once all grants have been issued data on decisions is uploaded to the ESRC website (this happens on the 16th day of the month).	Office

*The table above shows the typical timeline. Where PIs are required to respond to conditions this can take some time to resolve, especially where it involves panel member sign-off. In particularly complex cases it may take a number of weeks for everything to be resolved. This delays the remainder of the process of issuing the grant.

Annex IIa: Introducer form template

INTRODUCER SCORING & COMMENTS SHEET

INTRODUCER NAME:

PROPOSAL REFERENCE NUMBER:

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

REVIEWER SCORES:

INTRODUCER FEEDBACK ON REVIEWER SELECTION AND QUALITY OF REPORTS RECEIVED [Mandatory]

*Please tick one box below to provide feedback to the office on the **selection** of reviewers for this proposal [Please refer to the meeting schedule to see the list of reviewers approached]:*

Excellent mix/selection of reviewers		**Good** but some minor gaps / weaknesses		**Fair** but some important gaps / weaknesses		**Poor** – selection inappropriate/not fit for purpose	

*Please add comments to amplify your assessment of the reviewer **selection***

*Please tick one box below to provide feedback to the office on the **quality** of peer review reports received for this proposal:*

Excellent quality overall		**Good** but some minor issues/weaknesses		**Fair** but some important weaknesses		**Poor** quality overall / inadequate	

*Please add specific feedback on the **quality** of the reviews received*

OVERALL INTRODUCER SCORE: ……….

Please note that the principal criterion is scientific excellence, however this score should incorporate the four criteria listed below.

Please tick one box below for each criterion to provide feedback on the quality of the proposal

	Outstanding	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality / Potential Contribution to Knowledge					
Research Design and Methods					

Impact, Outputs and Dissemination					
Value for Money					
For New Investigators, Introducers should also consider the applicant and their skill development programme	37				

Has this proposal been appropriately costed? Yes / No
(Please elaborate in your panel introducer comments below)

CONFIDENTIAL COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSAL (if any – exceptional use only)

Please provide below this line comments which will be detached and sent on **unedited** to applicants.

PANEL INTRODUCER COMMENTS
(Incorporating VFM issues)

Annex IIb: Introducer Score Definitions

Introducers are asked to ensure that their scores are whole numbers. Proposals scoring 6 and below are deemed not fundable.

Introducer scores	Score description based on scientific quality. *All assessment criteria should be considered before arriving at an overall score.*
10	**Exceptional** proposals which are of outstanding scientific merit, i.e., of such innovation, novelty or timeliness that they are highly likely to make an exceptional scientific contribution and/or greatly enhance the development of the applicant's academic career.
9	**Outstanding** proposals which are of excellent scientific merit, i.e., of such innovation, novelty or timeliness that they are likely to make an outstanding scientific contribution and/or greatly enhance the development of the applicant's academic career.
8	**Excellent** proposals which are of significant value, and are highly likely to make a very important scientific contribution and/or will significantly enhance the development of the applicant's academic career.
7	**Very good** proposals which are of significant value, and are likely to make a very important scientific contribution and/or will significantly enhance the development of the applicant's academic career.
6	**Good** proposals which are of considerable value, and have the potential to make an important scientific contribution and/or will seriously promote the development of the applicant's academic career.
5	**Good** proposals which are of considerable value, and have the potential to make a valuable scientific contribution and/or will seriously promote the development of the applicant's academic career.
4	Proposals which are of value in their scientific contribution and/or may augment the development of the applicant's academic career.
3	Proposals which offer some value in the potential scientific contribution of the proposal, but which may not be of a consistently high quality and/or are unlikely to enhance the development of the applicant's academic career.
2	Proposals which will add to understanding and are worthy of support, but which are of lesser quality or urgency than more highly rated proposals and would not greatly enhance the development of the applicant's academic career.
1	Proposals which are flawed in their scientific approach, or are repetitious of other work, or otherwise judged not to be worth pursuing, or which, though possibly having sound objectives, appear seriously defective at a technical level. Also, where an applicant to the new investigator scheme is not considered to be an early career researcher.

Annex III: Academic Reviewer Scores for Research grants

Reviewer Scores	Score Description
6	The proposal is **outstanding** in terms of its potential scientific merit. Equivalent to Introducer scores 9-10.
5	The proposal is **excellent** in terms of its potential scientific merit. Equivalent to Introducer scores 7-8.
4	The proposal is **important** as it has considerable potential merit. Equivalent to Introducer scores 4-6.
3	The proposal has **significant** potential scientific merit but is not of a consistently high quality. Equivalent to Introducer score 3.
2	The proposal will add to understanding and is **worthy** of support, but is of lesser quality or urgency than more highly rated proposals. Such proposals are unlikely to have a significant influence on the development of the research area. Equivalent to Introducer score 2.
1	The proposal is **flawed** in its scientific approach, or is repetitious of other work, or otherwise judged not worth pursuing; or which, though possibly having sound objectives, appears seriously defective in its methodology. Equivalent to Introducer score 1.

Academic Review Scores for New Investigator Grants

Reviewer Scores	Score Description
6	The proposal is **outstanding** in terms of its potential scientific merit, the applicant has made a convincing case as to why they should be considered an early career researcher and shown how this project will support their transition to being an independent researcher.
5	The proposal is **excellent** in terms of its potential scientific merit, the applicant has made a convincing case as to why they should be considered an early career researcher and shown how this project will support their transition to being an independent researcher.
4	The proposal is **important** as it has considerable potential merit, the applicant has made a convincing case as to why they should be considered an early career researcher, and shown how this project will support their transition to being an independent researcher but should not be considered a priority for this scheme.
3	The proposal has **significant** potential scientific merit but is not of a consistently high quality. The applicant has made a convincing case as to why they should be considered an early career researcher and shown how this project will support their transition to being an independent researcher but should not be considered a priority for this scheme.
2	The proposal will add to understanding and is **worthy** of support, but is of lesser quality or urgency than more highly rated proposals. Such proposals are unlikely to have a significant influence on the development of applicant's career.
1	The proposal is **flawed** in its scientific approach.
0	The applicant's justification as an early career researcher is **unconvincing**.