Why have these changes been made?

UKRI has reviewed the impact of the evolving Covid-19 situation on all of its research and innovation activities, including live calls such as this one. Following discussions within UKRI and with applicants and institutions involved, UKRI has decided to extend the call closing date by one month and provide some flexibility on some requirements in the call.

The call document has been updated to reflect these changes, providing clarity to applicants, reviewers and the panel on the revised processes.

How has this affected the timing of the peer review process?

The dates have been revised as follows:

- The Notification of Intent to Submit deadline has moved from 16.00 07 April to 16.00 07 May.
- The full proposal submission deadline has moved from 16.00 21 April to 16.00 21 May.
- Postal peer review has been pushed back by a month accordingly, and will take place in June and July.
- Applicants that receive sufficiently supportive comments in their reviews will be invited to submit a response. This is expected to take place in late July; UKRI will aim to confirm in advance when responses will be due. It is expected that applicants will have the standard one week to submit this.
- As alluded to in the original call document, UKRI will now hold a sift panel in late August, to prioritise applications for interview.
- The interview panel is expected to take place w/c 7 September 2020. Dates will be confirmed with applicants individually, to ensure no applicant is disadvantaged.
- Grant start dates remain 1 October 2020 for now (but more information on this is provided below).

Applicants will appreciate that this is a fast-moving situation. The above dates are subject to change, but UKRI will communicate with prospective PIs if any changes are made.
Why has a sift panel been introduced? How will this operate?

On the outline panel’s recommendation, UKRI invited 18 proposals to full proposal stage to ensure an appropriate balance of proposals. However, in the current situation, UKRI wants to reduce the burden on applicants in preparing for an interview where there is a very limited chance of success. Furthermore, holding 18 interviews would have been logistically difficult in person, but will be even more so if held virtually.

UKRI has therefore introduced a sift stage before interview. The sift panel will prioritise applications for interview, based on the applications, reviews received and PI responses. This prioritisation will be against the assessment criteria.

The sift panel membership has not yet been confirmed, but UKRI intends this to overlap with the interview panel membership (for example, the interview panel members who are available, as well as several additional panel members). Both panels’ membership will be confirmed with applicants before the meetings.

Is there any change to the assessment criteria?

The assessment criteria are unchanged, for transparency and because UKRI did not identify any criterion that would be different in the current situation. The reviewer guidance has been updated to remind reviewers of the guidance that:

- UKRI understands the challenges with securing industry letters of support and has relaxed leverage and Project Partner requirements.
- UKRI encourages applicants to remain flexible in their proposals, allowing their proposed research to respond to the evolving external situation.

Similar guidance will be provided to both panels.

How does this change the Project Partner contribution targets?

UKRI recognises that Project Partner communications and contributions are likely be affected by the current external situation.

UKRI currently have a target to attain £10m of leverage across the programme (the Centres, Hub and SME funding). To deliver this target, Centres were expected to elicit at least £1.5m of Project Partner contributions (in-kind or cash) over the lifetime of the Centre. Both the overall and Centre-level targets will be reviewed in the context of the evolving external Covid-19 situation.

There is no set target at the point of application. At this application stage, applicants should demonstrate the Project Partner interest (and where possible, contributions) that they have identified at the point of their application, and detail planned approaches to eliciting more leveraged support.
Reviewers and the panel will be asked to assess evidence of stakeholder interest and contributions at application stage, in the context of each application’s chosen resource flow, the disciplines and sectors involved, and in the context of the current external Covid-19 situation.

Once Centres have been selected, UKRI will consider targets for each Centre, in consultation with the programme’s Strategic Advisory Group. Again, this will be in the context of each application’s chosen resource flow, the disciplines and sectors involved, and the context of the external situation.

**Can we change our application to reflect the Covid-19 situation?**

UKRI encourages Centres to retain flexibility within the overall programme of work to allow for the Centre to respond to emerging priorities and opportunities, especially in the context of the evolving external situation. This flexibility should be reflected in the proposed research programme and the workplan.

**Covid-19 has limited our ability to broaden our project team. How will this be reflected in the assessment process?**

Reviewers have been asked to take the current situation into account when evaluating proposals, including on the Fit to Call criterion. The panel will be provided with additional guidance to take this into account when considering applicants’ progress in addressing the outline panel’s feedback.

The additional month has been provided to allow applicants more time to complete discussions with potential collaborators. Applicants are also reminded to allow for flexibility in their proposals, which may include flexibility in collaborations over the lifetime of the Centre.

**How does this affect the spend profile for the programme/our Centre?**

The programme has a fixed spend profile. As a result, applicants are asked to prepare their proposals according to the original expectations – to start on 01 October 2020 and run for 48 months.

There is recognition that the current external Covid-19 situation and delays to the peer review process may result in slower than anticipated spend in 2020-21, and these can be reflected in applicants’ spend profile document. Any specific requirements will be considered at the post panel stage.

UKRI are actively considering the spend profile and applicants will be provided with further information if any changes are made. The grant conditions will be finalised and discussed with applicants in September.

**My question is not answered here.**

Please contact us at circular.economy@epsrc.ukri.org. These FAQs will be updated as necessary until the call closes.