



Engineering and  
Physical Sciences  
Research Council

**Change to Pathways to Impact:  
EPSRC External Briefing  
20<sup>th</sup> February 2020**

**PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT**

From 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020 a separate Pathways to Impact statement and Impact summary will **no longer be required for ALL UKRI SCHEMES by 01 March 2020.**

This briefing document is to provide an update on this change and what this means in terms of EPSRC's peer review process.

This document complements and augments the information that has been provided by UKRI.

**We would particularly like to draw your attention to the guidance pertaining to submitting standard mode applications during 24<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> February 2020**

***We would advise applicants to avoid submitting standard mode proposals during this period if possible. Please see [Section 5](#) for more information.***

**Contents of this document**

1. [New Peer Review Assessment Criteria](#)
2. [UKRI Context and External Communications](#)
3. [What this means for EPSRC applications](#)
4. [Managing the change for existing managed /directed calls during the transition](#)
5. [Managing the Transition for EPSRC Standard Mode](#)
6. [Assessment FAQs](#)

## 1. New Peer Review Assessment Criteria

To reflect this change assessment of impact will be considered as part of overall proposal assessment. EPSRC peer review will use the following new standard criteria for proposals submitted after 01 March 2020.

***Exceptions to this may will apply to some calls that are already open. Please see [Section 4](#) from more information.***

<b>Quality</b> (Primary Criterion)	Please comment on the degree of research excellence of the proposal, making reference to:  (1) The novelty, relationship to the context, timeliness and relevance to identified stakeholders;  (2) The ambition, adventure, transformative aspects or potential outcomes;  (3) The suitability of the proposed methodology and the appropriateness of the approach to achieving impact.  (For multi-disciplinary proposals please state which aspects of the proposal you feel qualified to assess)
<b>Importance</b> (Secondary major criterion)	Comment on the national importance of the research. How the research:  (1) Contributes to, or helps maintain the health of other disciplines contributes to addressing key UK societal challenges and/or contributes to future UK economic success and development of emerging industry(s);  (2) Meets national needs by establishing/maintaining a unique world leading activity;  (3) Complements other UK research funded in the area, including any relationship to the EPSRC portfolio.
<b>Applicant and Partnerships</b> (Secondary criterion)	Please comment on the applicant's ability to deliver the proposed project, making reference to:  (1) Appropriateness of the track record of the applicant(s);  (2) Balance of skills of the project team, including collaborators.
<b>Resources and Management</b> (Secondary criterion)	Please comment on the effectiveness of the proposed planning and management and on whether the requested resources are appropriate and have been fully justified, making reference to:  (1) Any equipment requested, or the viability of the arrangements described to access equipment needed for this project, and particularly on any university or third-party contribution;  (2) Any resources requested for activities to either increase impact, for public engagement or to support responsible innovation.

## 2. UKRI Context and External Communications

The impact agenda is vital. UK Research and Innovation exists to fund the researchers who generate the knowledge that society needs, and the innovators who can turn this knowledge into public benefit. Pathways to Impact has been important in driving a culture change and the requirement to capture this in a separate section is no longer needed.

Reflecting this, UKRI Executive Committee agreed at its December 2019 meeting to remove the requirement for the Pathways to Impact attachment and the associated Impact summary within Je-S for funding applications.

- Initial UKRI announcement can be [found here](#).

### Why is this happening?

- The change is designed to simplify bureaucracy at the point of application as well as to help streamline our systems for applicants. It also enables impact to be truly embedded throughout applications as appropriate.
- Pathways to Impact has been in place for over a decade and we recognise the research and innovation landscape has changed since its implementation. Impact is now a core consideration throughout the grant application process.
- UKRI Chief Executive Professor Sir Mark Walport said:

*Throughout 2020, UKRI will be strengthening our strategy, our operations and the systems we use. We have made it a priority to ensure these systems and processes free up researchers and innovators to focus on their work, whilst at the same time supporting us to make the best funding decisions. In doing this, we will be driven by the expertise across our communities.”*

*‘Pathways to Impact’ is a section of the current research grant application process where researchers must detail the actions they will take to increase the chances of their research findings reaching key stakeholders. Further details on these changes will be reflected in the individual call guidance.*

*Over the next 12 months, UKRI will be piloting simpler, streamlined application and assessment processes for its research and innovation calls. These pilots will inform changes across UKRI to reduce the burden placed on researchers and innovators applying to UKRI whilst ensuring it continues to invest in the best ideas and people.*

### 3. What this means for EPSRC applications

#### Benefits and opportunities

- The change allows applicants to be more creative, integrating appropriate activities to realise the impact of their work throughout their proposed research programme.
- Pathways to Impact was a 'one size fits all' approach. The focus will now be on supporting the level of impact activities that are appropriate to the specific research discipline and project.
- Reviewers will be able to use their experience to assess whether the proposed impact activities are appropriate for the scientific discipline and project as a whole.

#### What does this mean for the assessment of impact in proposals?

- **Impact will no longer be a separate assessment criterion.**
- Impact remains a central consideration in terms of how we allocate resources. This is reflected in our decision to take a holistic approach and embed assessment of impact planning throughout the assessment criteria:
  - Assessment of scientific methodology and all additional activities to realise the outcomes of the research will be collectively considered as part of the 'Quality' assessment criterion.
  - Fundamental aspects of impact planning such as the project partners and requesting appropriate resources for impact enhancing activities are embedded into other assessment criteria where appropriate.
- Where impact is integral to the funding programme, we will request additional documentation or include call specific assessment criteria as necessary.

#### How do we expect this to be reflected in research proposals?

- Activities that support impact creation are an integral part of high-quality research programmes. Applicants should still consider how they will or might achieve impact throughout their projects and include this as part of their Case for Support.
- Applicants should consider what impacts are appropriate for their research programme across the widest definition of impact, for example on society, economy, people or knowledge.
- Appropriate resources to facilitate this impact within applications should be requested. These should be justified in the Justification of Resources attachment.
- Partnerships, and co-creation of research are important mechanisms to enable knowledge exchange.
- Public engagement and activities to support Responsible Innovation also continue to be supported through EPSRC research projects, and where appropriate these should also be described in the Case for Support.

**To assist applicants and reviewers in adopting this change more detailed guidance will be made available from 01 March 2020.**

## 4. Managing the change for existing managed / directed calls during the transition

### How will the calls that are currently open but close after 1<sup>st</sup> March be impacted?

A number of EPSRC calls are currently open or are due to launch before the 1<sup>st</sup> March but will close after the removal of Pathways to Impact has taken place.

- If the call has already been launched, EPSRC call leads have directly contacted applicants with additional guidance on what information they need to include in their applications. Where appropriate, information on our call webpages will be updated to reflect this.
- If the call has not yet launched, the call documentation will reflect this change prior to publication.

### Will the assessment criteria for these calls change after they have already been published?

- No. In line with our Transparency Principle of Peer Review, Impact will continue to be used as a separate assessment criterion for these opportunities if it has been stated in the call document.

## 5. Managing the Transition for EPSRC Standard Mode

### How will the change affect applicants who have already started writing their standard mode proposals?

As stated in the recent central UKRI communications, changes to Je-S will be made during 24<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> February.

1. **Applicants who submit before 24th February 2020:** Applications will still require a Pathways to Impact attachment and Impact summary and will be assessed against the existing EPSRC review criteria.
2. **Applicants who submit between 24th-28th February 2020:** Changes are being implemented in Je-S, with the impact summary section of the Je-S form and Pathways to Impact attachment being removed. **We do not know specifically when the changes will take place for each council within this window. Therefore, we do not know when EPSRC applications will be affected.**

Applicants / research offices may find that when they try and submit, the impact summary and Pathways to Impact attachment has disappeared and an error message asking them to remove their Pathways to Impact attachment will appear. If this is the case, please contact EPSRC for advice and guidance.

3. **Applicants who submit after 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020 implementation date:** Applications will no longer require a Pathways to Impact attachment and Impact summary and will be assessed against the new EPSRC assessment criteria.

**We would advise applicants to avoid submitting standard mode proposals during 24<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> February 2020 if possible.** If you intend to submit during this period and would like to discuss this further please contact EPSRC at: [EPSRCPeerReviewPolicy@epsrc.ukri.org](mailto:EPSRCPeerReviewPolicy@epsrc.ukri.org) for further guidance.

## 6. Assessment FAQs

### When will this change to assessment criteria be implemented?

Proposals submitted prior to 1<sup>st</sup> March implementation will continue to be assessed against the current EPSRC assessment criteria.

This change in assessment criteria will apply to:

1. New calls published after 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020.
2. EPSRC Schemes such as Programme Grants and Strategic Equipment for rounds launched after 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020.
3. For Standard Mode proposals<sup>1</sup> and Fellowships submitted after 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020 (i.e. proposals submitted without a Pathways to Impact and Impact Summary).

### How will my standard mode proposal be reviewed?

As highlighted earlier, the EPSRC assessment criteria will be changing. In order to align with the “Transparency” EPSRC Principle of Peer Review:

- **Proposal contains a Pathways to Impact and Impact Summary:** Reviewers should use EPSRC’s old assessment criteria and guidance, completing all boxes in the review form that has been sent.
- **Proposal does not contain Pathways to Impact and Impact Summary:** Reviewers should use the new EPSRC assessment criteria, completing the review form according to the new guidance.

Additional guidance is being developed<sup>1</sup>, along with communications to EPSRC College members.

### When will the review forms be changing?

- As we are still processing applications that were submitted prior to the removal of Pathways to Impact, EPSRC review forms will not immediately change.
- Changes to all the EPSRC review forms will be made over the next few months.

### How will reviewers know that there are new assessment criteria?

- Reviewer guidance on the EPSRC website that is provided when a proposal is sent for review will be updated. This will include a flow chart to help reviewers understand what review criteria and guidance they need to follow.
- We will also be publicising this change through the EPSRC College and our Research Organisation and Strategic Partner contacts.
- EPSRC staff will be monitoring applications and reviews closely during this time and will continue to work closely with applicants, reviewers and panel members to help manage this transition and change.

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<sup>1</sup> This includes: Standard Research, Overseas travel grants, Networks, New Investigator Awards, ICT Discipline Hopping grants.

**How will my standard mode proposal be assessed at panel?**

- Panels will use the assessment criteria that the reviewers used to score proposals. Proposals will then be ranked as per our existing process.
- For a period of time we will see a mixed economy of proposals at our standard mode panels (i.e. those submitted before the change and those submitted after the change). Panel members will receive additional guidance and briefing during this time to help them manage this process.

**For applications submitted before the change, will EPSRC continue to return Pathways to Impact that have been identified by panels as “unsatisfactory” before proposals are funded?**

- No.