

# Peer Review College Newsletter

January 2010

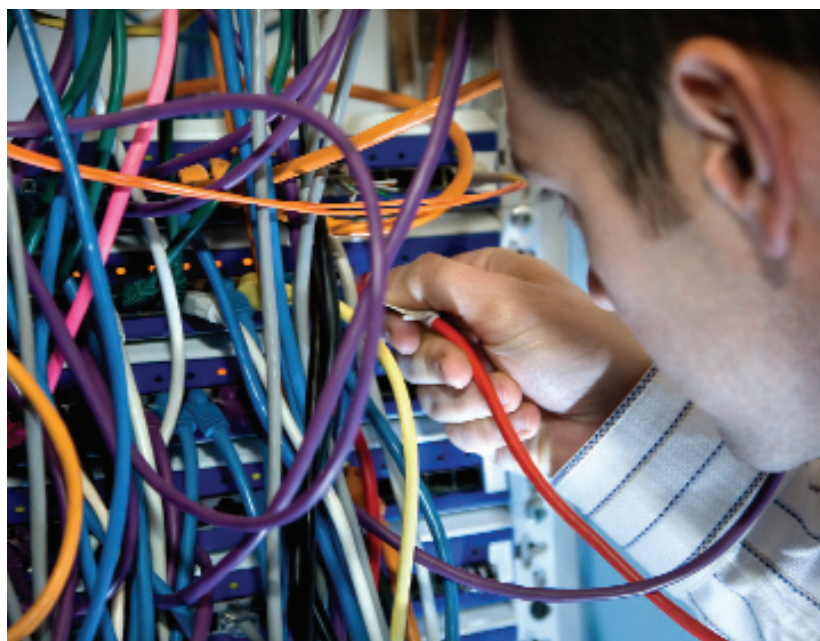
## Plans for the Future

As members will no doubt be aware, the intended four-year term of membership for the College came to an end on 31 December 2009. As outlined in the last edition of the College Newsletter, work has been taking place to analyse both the future requirements of EPSRC, and the future format for the College. This has led to our deciding to await the development and implementation of new Keywords before progressing further at this stage. This will benefit members, as they will need only to select the new-style of Keywords, rather than the old and then subsequently the new-style. It is therefore planned to continue with the current membership, until the new College is in place, which should be in early 2010.

Those existing members who have been supportive of the peer review process over the last four years will be invited to continue in membership beyond the initial extended period. These will then be supplemented by individuals who have been put forward by our strategic partners, and it is intended that these two groups of people will comprise the future EPSRC Peer Review College. Should this lead to any gaps in College membership (i.e. lack of coverage in certain areas) then we will seek to fill these by means of a nomination exercise.

We are extremely grateful to College members for their forbearance, as we move to the new College structure.

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## Changes to the Panel Process

EPSRC has updated the process used by Peer Review Panels for scoring and ranking proposals.

The reasons for making changes to the process are:

- To improve the quality of the decision making process by focussing the panel discussion and assessment around the criteria on the new reviewer forms
- To demonstrate more clearly that panel decisions are directly based on reviewer comments and the Principal Investigator's response as required by published EPSRC policy
- To enable the strengths and weaknesses of individual proposals relative to the assessment criteria to be explicitly identified and used for ranking, thereby increasing the transparency of the decision making process
- To improve the perceived objectivity and repeatability of the assessment process.

Whilst most aspects of how panels operate will remain the same, a change has been made to how pre-scores are determined and how the panel uses these to generate the rank ordered list.

For each proposal, panel members will submit a pre-score for each section of the reviewer form (quality, impact, applicant, resources and management) based on the reviewer comments.

The overall score agreed at the panel meeting will be based on the individual criterion scores given by the introducers, following discussion with the whole panel. Quality is the primary criterion and will be given the greatest weighting.

Responsive mode panels will move to the new process when the majority of the proposals at the panel have been written in the new format that includes impact plans.

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## New Reviewer Forms

New reviewer forms were introduced by EPSRC in April 2009. These incorporated a new section for comment on the impact information now required in research proposals, but at the same time the forms were simplified with fewer questions, each one focussed around one specific assessment criterion to be used in reviewing a research proposal. The first groups of proposals reviewed using these forms are now going through panel assessment.

We have been monitoring the use of the new forms, across all application types, and generally reviewers seem to be finding the new forms helpful and useable. Feedback has been broadly supportive. A number of reviewers have queried the restricted number of characters currently allowed for replies to some questions and I am pleased to be able to report that we will be increasing the space available to 4000 characters per question. This change will be made in one of the scheduled updates to the Je-S system and is currently expected to become available in January 2010.

One perennial issue that continues to appear regularly is that of very terse reviews where only a sentence or two are provided under each question. Please remember that it is the detail in the comment that is important in the review rather than the tick boxes, which simply serve to give a general indication of the reviewer's assessment. This seems to be a particular issue where reviewers are highly supportive of a proposal. It appears some reviewers find it easier to identify weaknesses than strengths!

Prioritisation panels rely on the quality and completeness of the individual expert reviews given on each proposal. They have a very difficult task to compare many high quality proposals. Their role is not so much to separate the good proposals from the poor, which is relatively easy, but rather to separate the truly excellent from the merely very good, which is much harder. To help them to discriminate effectively between proposals, reviewers are asked to answer all sections of the review as fully as possible.

Generally, it is most helpful when reviewers can clearly identify both the strengths and weaknesses for each aspect of the proposal, and explain their overall conclusion by balancing these. Where a proposal is felt to be very strong with few obvious weaknesses it is however still important to explain clearly why you think it is strong. Excellent proposals may fail if the panel is not given the information that makes the case for ranking it ahead of other strong submissions.

Guidance for reviewers is available both as on-line helptext on Je-S, and also on EPSRC's website <http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/Forms/default.htm> and you are asked to refer to this when completing reviews.



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We would very much welcome your feedback to help with further refining and improving our process. Comments based on your experience in completing reviews with the new forms, or as an applicant responding to reviews made using them, would be very helpful. Please e-mail any feedback to [PeerReview@epsrc.ac.uk](mailto:PeerReview@epsrc.ac.uk). Please do **not** ever send feedback on the process within the body of a review as this might influence the assessment of the proposal and could therefore be unfair to the applicant. Feedback relating solely to routine use of the Je-S interface would more usefully be directed to Je-S rather than to EPSRC, unless there is a significant impact on your ability to review, when it would be something of legitimate interest to us.

We will however be running an on-line survey about use of Je-S and you will shortly receive an e-mail explaining more about this and providing you with a link to access it. These surveys are very important in helping us maintain and improve our processes and we would be very grateful if you could give the time to respond.

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## Further Information

Details about EPSRC and the peer review process may be found at <http://www.epsrc.ac.uk>. EPSRC's current support may be found through the easily searchable "Grants on the Web" facility at <http://gow.epsrc.ac.uk>