Welcome by the editor

Welcome to the winter issue of the EPSRC Peer Review College Newsletter. This has been prepared against a backdrop of a period of significant change within the funding landscape and for the Research Councils. Although we now know the overall outcome of the 2015 spending review we are still waiting to understand the detail of what this means in terms of the funding allocation we will receive as a council for the next four years. We will publish more about our grant funding budget next year via our web page as this situation becomes clearer.

The government has a clear expectation that this spending review will deliver significant savings across most of its departments and agencies. In response to this the research councils have already collectively agreed to find a saving of 20% out of our operating budget over the spending review period. A project to identify and deliver these savings is currently getting underway. Although this project is not expected to result in fundamental changes in how we go about our business it is likely to involve a significant degree of process simplification, some of which may have implications for how we seek your help in terms of reviewing grants or in attending prioritisation panels. We will ensure that you are kept informed of any such changes as they are identified and what it will mean in terms of your help. In addition, you will have seen that Sir Paul Nurse has published his review in to the Research Councils and the Chancellor has accepted the recommendations in the Autumn Statement. We will keep you informed as to how and when these recommendations are implemented.

In the meantime, life goes on and we continue to receive and process grants. Under the circumstances it is important that we continue to do this to the very best of our ability and it is therefore of some concern that the reviewer data included in this issue shows a significant reduction, from 60% to 50%, in the number of usable reviews resulting from requests made to college members over the past two years. There is no clear or obvious reason that can be identified as to why this has happened, but this will certainly add cost and delay to this part of the process. Can I therefore make a strong plea that if you do receive a request to provide a review you do your very best to provide it. If you cannot do so then please notify us of this promptly, and if you could also identify other researchers who we could appropriately approach instead, that would be very helpful.
Changes to Equipment Funding

EPSRC is currently working on changes to the equipment funding process which will affect both applicants and those involved in the peer review process. These changes will bring equipment funding in line with the majority of EPSRC peer review processes. All information about applying for equipment can be found on our website: https://www.epsrc.ac.uk/research/facilities/equipment/process/.

Equipment on Research Proposals

Currently we allow equipment requests on research proposals where a piece of equipment is vital in order to deliver the research in that proposal. Requests for equipment are allowed between £10,000 and £134,011 (anything under £10K is counted as resource costs rather than equipment). The applicant is expected to demonstrate a minimum of 50% towards the cost of the equipment in their proposal (usually this comes from the host organisation but it could come from a project partner). Any equipment request above £134,011 which is related to a research proposal has previously gone through a separate process known as strategic equipment, and has a separate peer review process. In practice this means that the equipment proposal and the research proposal have gone through two different peer review processes and we are now looking to change this to streamline things.

In early 2016, we will be implementing a process which allows equipment on research proposals of a higher value (i.e. up to £400,000). What this means is that as a reviewer or panel member, you may see standard research proposals with larger pieces of equipment on them. In your capacity as a peer reviewer (or panel member), you will need to consider the proposal in the same way as before, but ensure you comment on the requested equipment when considering the resources and management criterion – examples of things to think about include, is the equipment good value for money? is the equipment really vital for the research proposed? will the equipment be managed appropriately? is the access to the equipment viable and suitable? when the funding ends, what are the plans for sustaining the equipment? Providing there are sufficiently supportive reviews, the proposal will then be considered at a panel as normal.

Strategic Equipment

The strategic equipment process allows for applications for equipment not related to research proposals over a value of £400K (including VAT). The strategic equipment process is intended to fund equipment that will enhance capability and benefit a range of research of high priority to EPSRC. The equipment can underpin both existing and potential research projects and the request should fit with the host university strategy and enable research that predominantly falls within EPSRC’s remit.

Prior to August 2015, applications for strategic equipment were for any value over £134,011 (including VAT), and went through a two stage process of an outline proposal, then submission of a full proposal and an interview.
From August 2015, applications for strategic equipment are for any value over £400K, and will go through a slightly lengthened two stage process of an outline proposal, a full proposal which is sent to postal peer review, and then if sufficiently supportive reviews are received the applicant[s] will be interviewed.

In order to help everyone manage this additional postal peer review stage, we will be updating the research infrastructure reviewer form and reviewer guidance (which can be found here: https://www.epsrc.ac.uk/funding/assessmentprocess/review/rev/). The updated reviewer form should help you, as a peer reviewer, to focus in on certain questions which will help you judge the application. If you are approached to review a strategic equipment proposal and you do not feel able to do so, as always, please respond in good time and try to make an alternative reviewer suggestion as this is really helpful for the EPSRC staff dealing with the proposal.

If you have any questions regarding any aspects of equipment funding, please contact us at the following email address: EPSRCEquipmentfunding@epsrc.ac.uk

**Peer Review Extranet**

Since we began using the EPSRC Peer Review Extranet in July 2014 for all standard research peer review meeting paperwork, we have held over 190 meetings with over 1400 panel members. Over this period feedback from users has been positive, with the majority of the respondents saying that once they had become familiar with the functionally of the site, it worked very well and that they felt it is an excellent means of receiving information.

Of course, we did not get everything right straightaway, but thanks to the feedback we received from panel members we have been able to make a number of changes and improvements to address the main concerns raised. Your feedback remains very important to us, which is why we would like to encourage you to provide feedback of your experience whenever you use the Extranet.

To help with this we have recently introduced a new online meeting questionnaire which asks questions about the panel process as a whole, including a number about use of the Extranet. This questionnaire is accessed from the Extranet and all panel members are asked to complete this after participating in a panel meeting.
Reviewer Guidance

It is our policy that in addition to the help text provided within the Je-S portal, we provide full reviewer guidance on our web-page (https://www.epsrc.ac.uk/funding/assessmentprocess/review/rev/) to inform both applicants and reviewers about the assessment process. Currently this is held as a set of individual PDF documents (one for each grant type we support) but early next year we plan to change the way that this information is held and displayed. There will instead be a link for each grant type that will open a tailored web document with the relevant guidance. The benefit to us of this change is that it will make it much easier to keep the guidance content up to date and consistent. Hopefully you will also find it easier to use, and in particular that it will be much quicker and easier to find and view specific sections within the guidance. I should stress that this will not change the content of the guidance, only how it is held and displayed.

EPSRC Funding for International Collaborations

Research is clearly an international endeavor and many of the challenges that we face are global. EPSRC’s strategy for international engagement is to maintain the UK’s position for high-quality research and training, and to provide opportunities for researchers to collaborate internationally.

Our aim is to enable every EPSRC-sponsored researcher — from PhD student to Principal Investigator — to collaborate with the best researchers across the world. The UK costs of international collaborations may be included in any request for funding to us. Although as an organisation we concentrate our targeted activities on Europe, China, India, Japan and the USA, potential collaborators on EPSRC grant proposals may be from anywhere in the world as long as their involvement adds value to the research and training to be undertaken. When you are reviewing proposals which include international partners, we ask you to consider whether the collaborators are well chosen and to check that the associated costs are appropriately justified in the scientific case made by the applicants.

As well as the usual UK-based costs, eligible costs for international collaboration can include travel, subsistence and consumables for research staff to visit or have extended work placements to a partner’s laboratory overseas. Visiting researcher costs may be included as part of a standard research proposal. In addition, our funding may be used to fill UK postdoctoral researcher positions with candidates from an international partner’s laboratory, subject to university recruitment guidance and visa requirements. Network grants may also include overseas partners.
College Update

As reported in previous newsletters we have an ongoing project to deliver changes to the Peer Review College as recommended following the Independent review of Peer Review. Feedback from the college member survey [reported on in the Spring Newsletter] will be used when developing new ideas.

All new members have been invited onto the Associate Member College which has now been initiated.

Ongoing work-streams include: increasing the diversity of members, encouraging more widespread use of members for reviewing, improving the on-line college training and working on the process for the next college refresh.

We are aiming to complete a college refresh in the summer of 2016 when the college will move to a fixed term reflecting our delivery plan period.

The following charts and data show the number of reviews sent to college members and the usable response rates.

Reviewing Data

The charts shown below provide information about recent reviewing statistics. Chart 1 shows the overall numbers of all review requests issued by EPSRC over the last five years, and the percentage of these providing usable reviews. Chart 2 gives a more detailed look at requests sent specifically to college members over the last three years and the responses to these. Chart 3 shows the proportion of reviews identified by panels as being “appropriate” or “highly appropriate” for the proposal under consideration, and also shows how EPSRC identified reviews compare against applicant nominated reviews.

Over the period January to October 2015 we have invited 2,800 college members to review proposals. The average number of invitations sent per college member over this period was 2.4.
Chart 1: Reviews Requested and Usable Response Rates

Chart 2: Number of Reviews issued to college Members by Response Class
description By percentage of response type

Chart 3: Reviewer Appropriateness as scored by Introducers

Data shown as calendar year quarter
Membership Matters

Congratulations
EPSRC extends its warmest congratulations to our College members who have recently been elected to Fellowship of the Royal Academy of Engineering.


Professor Claire Adjiman
Professor David Butler
Dr Darwin Caldwell
Professor Anthony Cohn
Professor Mohan Edirisinghe
Professor Colin Garner
Professor Karen Holford
Professor Robert Parkin
Professor Stephen Roberts
Professor Daniel Rueckert
Professor Nilay Shah
Professor Mark Tooley
Professor Michael Wisnom

Imperial College
University of Exeter
Italian Institute of Technology
University of Leeds
University College London
Loughborough University
Cardiff University
University of Bradford
University of Oxford
Imperial College
Imperial College
University of Bath and West of England
Rolls Royce

Keeping in Touch
We include a list of college members we have lost contact with in the ‘Gone Away’ section of the newsletter. This may be for a variety of reasons, so to avoid this we would remind you:

• If your circumstances change please update your record, particularly your contact details on Je-S.

• If you no longer wish to remain a college member then please let us know, at college@epsrc.ac.uk so we don’t continue to send you reviews you may not wish to consider.

• If you move organisations please do not create a new record on Je-S, but update your existing one. A new record will not include your college membership and reviewing history.

• Some people are shown as ‘Gone Away’, even when they clearly haven’t moved. This is usually due to problems with e-mail delivery, where our attempts to contact you fail, often by being blocked by your organisation’s firewall. As college members you can try to prevent this by identifying EPSRC as a recognised safe organisation, and also doing the same for the UK SBS who now issue many e-mails on our behalf.

Gone Away
If you are still in contact with anyone listed below please could you ask them to check that their contact details on Je-S are correct and up to date. If they believe their details are correct so that we should be able to contact them, or if they no longer wish to remain a college member, they should contact us at college@epsrc.ac.uk

Dr Wendy Nice
Dr David Nicholson
Professor David Titterton

Rolls-Royce Plc
BAE Systems
DSTL
New Starters

We wish to welcome the following new members to the College:

Dr Shirley Ashforth-Frost  University of Nottingham
Dr Dr Jonathan Aylott  University of Nottingham
Professor John Batchelor  University of Kent
Dr Joseph Betouras  Loughborough University
Dr Andrew Buchan  Imperial College London
Dr Earl Campbell  University of Sheffield
Dr Davoud Charaghi  Imperial College London
Dr Anes Dallagi
Dr Tariq Dawood  EDF Energy Plc
Dr Alexandre de Oliveira Stauffer  University of Bath
Dr Charles Delalonde  EDF Energy Plc
Mr Stefan Egan  Proctor & Gamble UK
Dr Alessandro Fedrizzi  Heriot-Watt University
Dr Aires Ferreira  University of York
Professor Mike Fraser  University of Bristol
Dr Abhijeet Ghosh  Imperial College London
Dr Philipp Grunewald  University of Oxford
Dr Peter Huthwaite  Imperial College London
Dr Christopher Jones  Queen Mary, University of London
Professor Richard Layfield  The University of Manchester
Professor Stephen Liddle  The University of Manchester
Dr Johannes Lischner  Imperial College London
Dr Abbie McClaughlin  University of Aberdeen
Dr Andrew McPherson  Queen Mary, University of London
Dr Benjamin Morgan  University of Bath
Dr Ivor Morrow  Cranfield University
Dr Stephen Niederer  King’s College London
Dr John Orr  University of Bath
Dr George Pasparakis  University College London
Dr Robert Phipps  University of Cambridge
Dr Jonathan Pritchard  University of Strathclyde
Dr Eric Robles  Proctor & Gamble UK
Professor Jonathan Rossiter  University of Bristol
Dr Samuel Staton  University of Oxford
Dr Van-Xuan Tran  EDF Energy Plc
Professor James Worrell  University of Oxford

Stepping down

The following long-standing members have chosen to stand down from the College:

Professor A Horrocks  University of Bolton
Professor Sir Charles Hoare  Microsoft Research Ltd
Professor Brian Howard  University of Oxford
Professor Alan McKane  The University of Manchester
Professor Wolfram Meier-Augenstein  The Robert Gordon University
Professor Raymond Jones  Loughborough University
Professor R Newport  University of Kent
Professor Alma Hodzic  University of Sheffield

We wish to record our grateful thanks for the important contribution they have made as members of the College and wish them well for the future.
Editor’s End-Piece

I hope you have found this issue of the newsletter to be both interesting and useful and I would welcome any feedback you might have on its content. Please send any comments to me at the e-mail address shown below. I would also be pleased to have any suggestions for future content. If there is anything about EPSRC or its operations that you would like to know more about then please let me know and I will look to see if we can include an item about this in a future edition.

Can I take this opportunity to thank you on behalf of everyone here at EPSRC for all your help and support over the past year – it is vital to us and we do fully appreciate it – and to wish you a happy and prosperous New Year.

Editor: Paul Tomsen: College@epsrc.ac.uk

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