

EPSRC Reviewer Helptext Standard Grants

GEN1 General

These notes are intended to provide reviewers with specific guidance for the completion of the reviewer form. They should be read in conjunction with the reviewer protocols. Specific guidance is available for each individual section of the report you are completing. A full justification for your assessment of the proposal should be provided. The prompts are given as a reminder of those issues that are likely to be most significant in determining the overall merit of a proposal. Please provide as full a response as you believe you are qualified to. You should note that your review will be sent back, unattributed, to the investigator, who will then be allowed the opportunity to comment on any factual errors and answer any specific queries you have raised.

GEN2 Assessment methodology

You are asked to assess the proposal/report against a number of criteria. These criteria may vary according to the scheme or Programme the proposal has been submitted to. Prompts are provided as a reminder of those issues that are likely to be most significant in determining the overall merit of a proposal. A full justification for your assessment of the proposal should be included in each section: please provide as full a response as you believe you are qualified to.

You are asked throughout to assess "the proposal" but please be clear that this means the ideas, concepts and approaches contained therein not the specific form of the document itself. The clarity of presentation may help or hinder your ability to review a proposal, so a comment to this effect would be appropriate, but this should not become in any form a competition in stylish writing. Elegance of presentation is not of itself an assessment criterion for an EPSRC grant!

There is no set way for answering questions on the form. However, prioritisation panels generally find reviews most useful where they explicitly identify the main strengths and weaknesses in the proposal, while also giving a clear view on which should be accorded the greater significance and why. It is also a helpful technique to raise issues or concerns with the proposal in the form of explicit questions for the applicants. This makes it easier for the panel to assess how complete and convincing the applicants responses are.

GEN3 Ethics

It is important that EPSRC funds are used ethically and responsibly but this is mainly assured by requiring that universities have in place and operate appropriate ethical approval processes. Ethical considerations should not therefore normally be an assessment criterion and you should not take these into account when making your assessment.

If the proposal is in a subject or area that causes you serious personal concern, to the extent that you feel you cannot provide an objective review, then you should decline to review the proposal giving the reason as other, and stating "ethical issues" in the comment box. If you have a concern that the proposal raises ethical issues that have not been clearly identified or addressed, then you should raise this directly with EPSRC who will need to make a policy decision on how the proposal should be treated.

GEN4 Linked proposals

Where two or more proposals have been formally linked to form a single research project, you are requested to submit a single review covering the project as a whole.

GEN5 Web links in the proposal

The proposal you are asked to review includes a case for support. In some instances, the case for support may include a link to a web site containing information on the research proposed. Reviewers are not required to consider this additional information when providing comments on a proposal. If you do choose to look at this information, it is possible that your anonymity to the applicant will be compromised.

EXC1 Excellence

There is no simple definition of excellence. Proposals may build directly on prior work, or may involve a speculative leap forward. It may involve progress along an established research direction or a tangential switch into a new or different area, or may bring together expertise and approaches from different discipline areas. All of these approaches could demonstrate excellence so your judgement should not simply be based on which approach has been adopted.

A proposal that demonstrates excellence can be characterised by terms such as: novel, ambitious, timely, exciting, at the international forefront, adventurous, elegant, or transformative but need not demonstrate all of them. Normally you might expect to see a plausible hypothesis with some basis within the published literature, and some clearly identified objectives that sensibly test that hypothesis. Certainty of outcome is not an indicator of excellence, but neither is an incremental approach necessarily an indicator that a proposal lacks excellence.

Applicants are asked to set their proposal in context in terms of the current state of knowledge and other work under way in the field. You should comment explicitly on this aspect of the proposal and where possible give your view of where this work would sit in relation to related activity internationally, and the extent to which it would provide the UK with a unique capability. Note that the existence of competing groups elsewhere should not of itself be seen as a reason for downgrading a proposal.

MET1 Methodology

The proposal should clearly demonstrate the methodology the applicants intend to use to attain their stated objectives, and you should comment on how clearly they are described, how appropriate they are for the planned activity and their scientific or technical feasibility.

IMP1 Importance

Drawing upon what the applicant has said, reviewers should comment on;

- how the proposed research contributes to, or helps maintain the health of other research disciplines, contributes to addressing key UK societal challenges, contributes to current or future UK economic success and/or enables future development of key emerging industry(s)
- the extent to which the research proposed has the potential to meet national strategic needs by establishing or maintaining a unique world leading research activity (including areas of niche capability)
- How the research fits with and complements other UK research already funded in the area or related areas, including the relationship to the EPSRC portfolio and our stated strategy set out in "Our Portfolio" (<https://www.epsrc.ac.uk/research/ourportfolio/>)

The extent to which each bullet point is addressed will depend on the nature of the research proposed. Reviewers should comment on how the research relates to EPSRC's research areas and strategies (<https://www.epsrc.ac.uk/research/ourportfolio/>) (many projects will be relevant to more than 1 EPSRC research area) and complements EPSRC's current portfolio. Information on the portfolio is available through the EPSRC's Grants on the Web (GoW) (<http://gow.epsrc.ac.uk/>).

What is the relationship between national importance and Impact?

- The purpose of national importance is to encourage applicants to articulate why it's important for their research to be supported by the UK taxpayer so that the UK remains internationally competitive. National importance has a number of strands and so answers to this question might cover; why the research might benefit the UK economy, why it may lead to advances in a different academic discipline, or why it's important that an internationally leading group continues to be supported.
- The Impact criterion focuses much more on how you might accelerate the route to making it happen; what activities are you proposing to ensure that the potential beneficiaries have the opportunity to benefit? Impact is about who the beneficiaries of the research might be and how you are going to work with them to shorten the time between discovery and use of knowledge.
- We do not expect applicants to be able to predict the impact of their research, nor do we expect reviewers to make assumptions about the probability of the benefits being fully delivered. The purpose of national importance is to encourage applicants to articulate how their research aligns to national UK priorities, user/stakeholder pull or if it underpins other research areas.

PAT1 Pathways to Impact

A clearly thought through and acceptable pathways to impact is an essential component of a research proposal and a condition of funding.

Applicants are required to use this section of the proposal to identify the potential impact of their work and to outline the steps they can sensibly make now to facilitate the realisation of those impacts.

Identified impacts should clearly align with the case made for the importance of the research but may be much broader. If a proposal is ranked high enough to be funded but does not have an acceptable Pathways to Impact it will be returned. Applicants will be asked to revise the Pathways to Impact and the proposal will only be funded once that acceptable revision has been received.

A clearly thought through and acceptable Pathways to Impact statement should:

- be project-specific and not generalised;
- be flexible and focus on potential outcomes;

Researchers should be encouraged to:

- identify and actively engage relevant users of research and stakeholders at appropriate stages;
- articulate a clear understanding of the context and needs of users and consider ways for the proposed research to meet these needs or impact upon understandings of these needs;
- outline the planning and management of associated activities including timing, personnel, skills, budget, deliverables and feasibility;
- include evidence of any existing engagement with relevant end users.

It is expected that being able to describe a pathways to impact will apply for the vast majority of proposals. In the few exceptions where this is not the case, the Pathways to Impact statement should be used to fully justify the reasons why this is not possible.

More detailed information about what impact does and does not include is available on the EPSRC web page at:

<http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/funding/howtoapply/preparing/impactguidance/>

You are asked to assess how effectively and realistically the applicants have addressed this issue in their proposal. For this you should consider:

- How convincingly the potential impact of the activity has been described
- How that impact compares to your normal expectations for the general type of activity proposed
- How appropriate/effective the arrangements described for facilitating the impact are
- How appropriate the collaboration arrangements in the proposal are in this respect

You should not be seeking tangible deliverables, direct return on investment or detailed routes to exploitation in making your assessment. Pathways to Impact is **not** synonymous with early exploitation.

We don't need you to take the relative importance of the identified impacts into account in reaching your judgement. The key element to be assessed is the **range and appropriateness** of the activities to be undertaken to help realise them.

Proposals where impact activities are clearly integrated throughout the broader project should normally be seen as stronger than those where they are seen as an afterthought bolted on to the back of the project. As for any other part of the review please ensure you comment fully on the pathway to impact, and that your comments are all explained and justified. Terse comments are generally seen as unhelpful by panels and are often discounted. This is particularly true for tersely supportive comments.

What is the relationship between national importance and Impact?

The purpose of national importance is to encourage applicants to articulate why it's important for their research to be supported by the UK taxpayer so that the UK remains internationally competitive. National importance has a number of strands and so answers to this question might cover; why the research might benefit the UK economy, why it may lead to advances in a different academic discipline, or why it's important that an internationally leading group continues to be supported.

The Impact criterion focuses much more on how you might accelerate the route to making it happen; what activities are you proposing to ensure that the potential beneficiaries have the opportunity to benefit? Impact is about who the beneficiaries of the research might be and how you are going to work with them to shorten the time between discovery and use of knowledge.

We do not expect applicants to be able to predict the impact of their research, nor do we expect reviewers to make assumptions about the probability of the benefits being fully delivered. However, we would encourage all researchers to think at the earliest stage who might use the outputs of their research and how to make that happen.

MAN1 Management and Planning

You are asked to comment on the project plan and management arrangements in the proposal. These should be proportionate to the scale and complexity of the activity to be undertaken.

RES1 Resources

Applicants are required to identify on the application form all resources required to undertake the project, and to clearly explain the need for these in the justification of resources

appended to the case for support. You should comment on how well this has been done and on the appropriateness of the resources requested. You should draw attention to anything in your view that has been requested but not justified or conversely needed but not identified. You should also comment on the suitability of arrangements for accessing resources other than through the grant, such as by collaboration with external groups. You should explicitly consider the amount of time being allocated to the project by the applicant(s) in this assessment. Your assessment should be based solely on the resources sought and not on the costs derived from them.

RES2 Animal Research and Human Participation

Where the applicants have ticked any boxes confirming that the proposal involves either animal research or human participation then you are asked to comment specifically on any ethical considerations and particularly on whether ethical approval procedures have been complied with. You should also comment on any potential adverse consequences for humans, animals or the environment and whether these risks have been addressed satisfactorily in the proposal. It is particularly important that resources relating to these aspects are explicitly justified in terms of need, scale and nature of resource, so for example for animal research you should comment specifically on the need to use animals, the choice of species, the number of animals it is intended to use.

ASS1 Overall Assessment

You should provide your overall assessment of the proposal. Think of this as your report to the prioritisation panel, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses you identified in the individual questions and then making a clear and explicit recommendation about whether or not you believe the proposal warrants funding.

Not all questions carry equal weighting. Research Quality (excellence) will always be pre-eminent and no proposal can be funded without clearly demonstrating this aspect. National Importance should also be a major consideration in making your assessment. The weighting between the remaining aspects will depend on the specific nature of the particular proposal. You should indicate those aspects that you accorded higher or lower priority and why.

ASS2 Part Assessment

It may be that you feel you can only comment with authority on some specific part or component of a proposal, for example with a multidisciplinary project, or perhaps where there is a strong user-led element. In such a case you should identify those aspects that you are able to comment on, and then give your review on just those aspects. Different reviewers will have been asked to cover those aspects you cannot and the panel will then have the job of integrating these different comments. It is particularly important therefore that the panel have clear advice on the merits of each component. Your comments, scores and confidence level should explicitly reflect your views on those aspects you can assess, and you are asked **not** to moderate these in any way to reflect those areas you feel you cannot comment on.

A risk with part assessment is that it will miss the added value of the overall project (the whole ideally being greater than the sum of the parts) so even where you can only comment with authority on one aspect it will be helpful to the panel to have your views on how compelling the arguments for the overall proposal are. Other issues you might also comment on are the uniqueness (or otherwise) of the collaboration, the value of the contribution of the component you can judge, and the significance of this in terms of future potential development in your own field.

ASS3 Overall Score

You should assign a score using the six point scale provided. This should reflect your overall conclusion, and should be consistent with your comments on the individual sections of your review taking account of all the assessment criteria and the various weightings you applied.

ASS4 Level of confidence

To assist the prioritisation panel in reaching their overall conclusion on the proposal, and to help EPSRC in monitoring the effectiveness of its reviewer selection procedures, you are asked to indicate your confidence with regard to this review. This should report your own confidence, or otherwise, in being able to make your assessment, not your confidence in the success of the proposal if it were funded. If, for any reason, you feel that you are not able to assess the proposal, please advise EPSRC accordingly.