Introduction

Welcome to the Summer 2014 issue of the College newsletter. The lead article in this issue is concerned with the Independent Review of Peer Review, and includes a summary of its recommendations and the agreed actions. We also include an article on our policy concerning Conflicts of Interest, plus information on the Cross Council Funding Agreement, the EPSRC Peer Review Extranet, and changes to the EPSRC web site. This includes the introduction of a new tool, Visualising our Portfolio, which we hope you will find useful. Congratulations to our members who have been elected to Fellowship of the Royal Society and welcome to our newest College members.

Publication of the Independent Review of Peer Review

The independent review of EPSRC peer review, mentioned in the Winter 2013 College Newsletter, has now been completed and the report on the findings has been published (12 June 2014), together with an action plan setting out how EPSRC will address the issues raised. For full details please see: http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/ newsevents/news/independentreviewfindingspublished/

The panel, chaired by Professor Dame Julia Goodfellow, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Kent, stated “There is overwhelming support for the use of peer review in selecting research proposals of the highest scientific quality from the peer community and from EPSRC staff themselves. Our recommendations are intended to offer some guidance to EPSRC Council around the issues that have been raised and to encourage continued dialogue between EPSRC and the peer community to further strengthen the peer review process.”

The report sets out the views of those consulted and makes a series of recommendations on how EPSRC could improve some aspects of the peer review process. Based on the evidence gathered through verbal and written submissions, the vast majority of responses were positive about EPSRC’s peer review process, with most respondents believing that the process was robust and fair.

The panel’s view is that EPSRC should be positive about its focus on peer review and the fact that its process compares favourably with other funders including European Councils. The panel also recognised the hard work and integrity of EPSRC working in a climate of tight administrative budgets.

Recommendations

The panel made a set of 10 recommendations to offer some guidance to EPSRC Council about the issues raised and to encourage an open debate between EPSRC and the peer community in order to strengthen the transparency and fairness of the peer review process.
**Recommendation 1:**
EPSRC should ensure that their communications and associated actions emphasise that peer review is seen as a shared endeavour. Moreover, these should emphasise the primary role that peer review plays in EPSRC decision making. Within EPSRC, Council and the Executive should ensure that those of its staff who are involved in peer review feel valued.

Agreed Actions: Biannual report on peer review. EPSRC will produce a report on peer review, including information on reviewer selection statistics, which will be presented to Council biannually. This will also be made available on the EPSRC website.

Engagement. EPSRC staff will continue to engage universities and the community in discussions on peer review as part of business as usual and will ensure that any issues raised are passed to the peer review team for consideration. EPSRC will also gather knowledge on the different practices of other Research Councils to engage grant holders on peer review and will agree a strategy to take forward.

Budget allocation. EPSRC will up-date its web pages to include information on how it receives and allocates its funding to help clarify the role of Theme leads in peer review.

Also see actions against recommendation 8.

**Recommendation 2:**
EPSRC should think through more clearly how the strategic criteria are incorporated into the processes and documentation. In particular we recommend that the postal peer review form is changed to reflect a primary focus on quality of science and that the panel process in the use of strategic criteria is better defined and communicated.

Agreed Actions: Reviewer forms. EPSRC will make every effort to amend the reviewer form whilst recognising that this is a shared form that needs to be agreed across all Research Councils. Also see actions against recommendations 1, 2 and 3.

**Recommendation 3:**
EPSRC needs to articulate why postal peer review with right of reply is not being used for distribution of funds in specific cases and to manage the risks that it generates.

Agreed Actions: Peer review process. EPSRC will up-date its web pages to clarify the different types of peer review that it uses and the rationale for selection. All call documents will detail the peer review being used. Also see actions against recommendations 1, 2 and 8.

**Recommendation 4:**
EPSRC should consider how the structure of the postal referees’ form affects engagement from the community, including international referees, in order to maximise assessment of the proposals by the best and most appropriate experts.

See actions against Recommendations 1, 2 and 8.

**Recommendation 5:**
EPSRC should reinvest the funds currently used for the incentive payments (£1M) into science.

Agreed Actions: Reviewer incentive scheme. EPSRC will stop this scheme. Also see actions against recommendations 2, 3 and 9.
Recommendation 6:
EPSRC should work closely with HEIs to ensure greater participation in peer review by those who benefit from considerable funding.

See actions against recommendations 1 and 8.

Recommendation 7:
EPSRC should consider the status of the College. The panel cannot see justification for its existence when so many referees are not chosen from the College.

Agreed Actions: College Working Group. EPSRC will establish a working group to address the issues identified with the current College model including the nomination process, performance and use of college members and diversity of membership.

Recommendation 8:
EPSRC needs to reassure the peer community that the choice of referees and panel members is transparent, appropriate with oversight and ownership by the peer community.

Agreed Actions: Reviewer selection. EPSRC will refresh its information on the standard peer review process, providing more detail on the selection of reviewers for all proposals. Also see actions against recommendations 1, 2 and 3.

Recommendation 9:
EPSRC should work with the community to identify and capture efficiencies but also to maintain sufficient funds for an effective peer review process to take place.

Agreed Actions: Return for amendments policy. EPSRC will review the evidence and agree a policy that will reduce the staff resource needed.

Efficiency and effectiveness. EPSRC will continue to work with the community to identify and implement efficiencies in the process that do not compromise effectiveness. Also see actions against recommendations 2, 3 and 5.

Recommendation 10:
EPSRC should look to engender a far greater shared ownership in peer review giving the peer community more input, ownership and oversight into different aspects of the process.

See actions against recommendations 1 and 8.

Update
Further to recommendation 5, we can confirm that the reviewers incentive scheme will be closed, and final payments will be based on reviews requested before 31 August 2014.

Further to the agreed actions for recommendation 7 Council has reviewed the evidence and agreed that EPSRC retain the College but investigate improving its effectiveness. A working group is being set up to consider the future structure of the College.
Managing Conflicts of Interest

A conflict of interest occurs where an individual involved in some way with the assessment of a proposal has a personal or organisational relationship with the applicants that calls into question their ability to undertake their role in an objective and unbiased way. It is one of the EPSRC Principles of Peer Review that such conflicts should be identified and managed, and we have well established procedures to try to ensure this. However, the EPSRC process evolves with time, both to reflect changes in our funding policy, and also more general changes to the way the research community organises and operates. Recently we have identified some circumstances that have developed since the original conflicts procedure was instituted, and where they no longer provide the required level of process assurance in this respect. We have therefore reviewed and updated our procedures to address these issues, and have published a new EPSRC policy on conflicts of interest. The full document can be found on our website at http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/funding/assessmentprocess/coi/

The underlying policy, that conflicts of interest should be managed so that they do not influence EPSRC funding decisions, remains unchanged. In the great majority of cases where a possible conflict is identified the existing arrangements still provide an appropriate and robust way of managing it and will continue to be operated as before. The changes relate mainly to panel membership. There are clearer restrictions on applicants acting as panel members, and to avoid conflict between the roles of reviewer and panel member. The biggest change relates to membership of small panels, and particularly interview panels, which have become an increasing feature of our process in recent years. Experience has shown that the arrangements for standard panels can be impractical or ineffective for these smaller panels so our policy is now that members of such panels must have no conflicts with any of the applicants/interviewees being assessed. This will clearly make setting up such panels rather more complicated and we hope you will understand if you experience this as either a panel member or applicant.

The key thing is that, while we can and will identify more obvious conflicts of interest we cannot possibly know of everything so we depend on individuals to ensure that any other conflicts are declared so that they can be properly managed. Timing is very important as late notification is much more difficult to manage (for example a conflict for a panel member identified when the panel is being set up is straightforward to manage, the same conflict identified on the day of the meeting can create major problems).
Cross-Council Funding Agreement

EPSRC works with the other research councils when the remit of the research proposal lies at the remit boundaries of the Councils. This is to ensure that there are no gaps in funding and that proposals at the interfaces of traditional research disciplines are treated equally with proposals that fall well within research council remits. The Cross-Council Funding Agreement (CCFA) is the process for collaborating on the peer review and funding of research proposals that straddle their remits under their ‘responsive-mode’ research grants schemes.

All responsive-mode research grant proposals that extend significantly beyond a single Research Council’s remit will be assessed by peer reviewers from across the relevant domains, including where appropriate by reviewers with relevant expertise in inter-disciplinary research, thereby ensuring fair and rigorous assessment. Beyond this stage, decisions will be made through a single Council’s peer review process, but any significant element residing within another Council’s remit will be funded by the Council(s) concerned. This will avoid the ‘double jeopardy’ of parallel review processes within each relevant Council involved.

Further information can be found here: http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/fundingagreement/

EPSCRC Peer Review Extranet

EPSRC is committed to the cross-council harmonisation agenda which includes the adoption of paperless panel meetings. To achieve this, EPSRC has trialled an extranet system that will allow panel members to access the meeting papers through a secure site. From the 1st July 2014 EPSRC will be running standard research peer review meetings on the EPSRC Peer Review Extranet.

The Extranet is being implemented for a number of reasons including our ability to print volumes of papers, the cost implications and the changes in technology.

College members will be invited to join the Extranet as and when they are invited to attend a standard research peer review meeting.

To assist members in using the Extranet, EPSRC has prepared a list of FAQs which is accessible through the Peer Review Extranet site, which will be part of our Peer Review Panels page: http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/funding/assessmentprocess/panels/

EPSRC will continue to monitor the performance of the Extranet and will seek feedback from the community on their experience in using the system.
Changes to EPSRC Website

The planned changes to the EPSRC website have now taken place and you should see the following changes:

A restructure and up-date of our Funding pages - http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/funding/

A new Visualising our Portfolio (VoP) tool (see next article), complementing Grants on the Web (GoW) and the RCUK Gateway to Research (GtR).

Content filters enabling you to filter content to what you are most interested in.

A membership area allowing you to subscribe and manage your call alerts

For full details please see: http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/newsevents/news/websitefreezeupdate/

Please note that the EPSRC in-site search will no longer return results from Grants on the Web (GoW), so these searches should be done separately using the GoW link - http://gow.epsrc.ac.uk/

The College pages can now be found within the Funding pages, as part of the Assessment process - http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/funding/assessmentprocess/college/

Visualising our Portfolio

Visualising our Portfolio (VoP) is a web based tool that allows you to browse and search the portfolio to find connections between grants, researchers, organisations and collaborators. VoP complements both Grants on the Web (GoW) and Gateway to Research (GtR) by providing a visual view of the portfolio for current data, allowing you to ‘swim’ through the data and follow your own path of interest. GoW should still be used to find panel information and historical data for EPSRC. GtR provides access to historical data for all Research Councils and the Technology Strategy Board.

It can be found at http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/research/ourportfolio/vop/ and includes help text within the tool to guide you through its functionality. Further feedback is welcome as you explore using this new tool.
Membership Matters

Congratulations
EPSRC wish to extend its warmest congratulations to the following members upon their election to Fellowship of the Royal Society:

Professor Steven Armes University of Sheffield
Professor Paul Attfield University of Edinburgh
Professor Martin Hairer University of Warwick
Professor Paul Midgley University of Cambridge
Professor Gareth Morris University of Manchester
Professor Miles Padgett University of Glasgow

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

Mr James Baker, previously at BAE Systems
Dr David Berrisford, previously at the University of Manchester
Dr Graham Bushnell-Wye, previously at STFC, Daresbury
Dr John Heaton, previously at u2t Photonics UK Ltd
Professor Sir Tony Hoare, previously at Microsoft Research Ltd
Professor R Lewis, previously at Monash University
Dr Brian McParlland, previously at General Electric Healthcare
Dr R Miles, previously at the Health & Safety Executive
Dr Kieran Molloy, previously at the University of Bath
Dr Jules Pagna-Disso, previously at the University of Aberystwyth
Dr Niek Verhoeven, previously at BAE Systems
Professor J Vincent, previously at the University of Bath
### New College Members

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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>University</th>
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<tr>
<td>Professor Tim Ashley</td>
<td>University of Warwick</td>
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<td>Dr Nathanael Berestycki</td>
<td>University of Cambridge</td>
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<td>Dr Gonçalo Bernardes</td>
<td>University of Cambridge</td>
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<td>Dr Padraig Cantillon-Murphy</td>
<td>University College Cork</td>
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<td>Dr Paolo Cascini</td>
<td>Imperial College London</td>
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<td>Dr Kirill Cherednichenko</td>
<td>Cardiff University</td>
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<td>Professor Helen Cooper</td>
<td>University of Birmingham</td>
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<td>Dr Ravinder Dahiya</td>
<td>University of Glasgow</td>
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<td>Dr Simone De Liberato</td>
<td>University of Southampton</td>
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<td>Professor Andrew D Ellis</td>
<td>Aston University</td>
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<td>Professor Piotr Fryzlewicz</td>
<td>London School of Economics &amp; Political Science</td>
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<td>Dr Christopher Gourlay</td>
<td>Imperial College London</td>
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<td>Dr Ian Griffiths</td>
<td>University of Oxford</td>
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<td>Dr Iain Gordon Hannah</td>
<td>University of Glasgow</td>
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<td>Dr Wei Huang</td>
<td>University of Sheffield</td>
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<td>Dr Christopher Anthony Jefferson</td>
<td>University of St Andrews</td>
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<td>Dr Viv Kendon</td>
<td>University of Leeds</td>
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<td>Dr Stefan Kiefer</td>
<td>University of Oxford</td>
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<td>Dr Alicia Kim</td>
<td>University of Bath</td>
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<td>Dr Peter Kinnell</td>
<td>Loughborough University</td>
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<td>Dr Steven Frank Lee</td>
<td>University of Cambridge</td>
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<td>Dr Ashley Montanaro</td>
<td>University of Bristol</td>
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<td>Dr Xavier Moya</td>
<td>University of Cambridge</td>
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<td>Dr William Parnell</td>
<td>The University of Manchester</td>
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<td>Dr Brian Robert Patton</td>
<td>University of Oxford</td>
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<td>Dr Silvestre Pinho</td>
<td>Imperial College London</td>
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<td>Dr Christopher John Price</td>
<td>University of Strathclyde</td>
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<td>Professor Michael Christopher Smith</td>
<td>The University of Manchester</td>
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<td>Dr Guy-Bart Stan</td>
<td>Imperial College London</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr Dan Stowell</td>
<td>Queen Mary, University of London</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr Richard Trask</td>
<td>University of Bristol</td>
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Editor’s End-Piece

It’s now six months since the last newsletter, during which a number of changes have been completed. Separate from any process changes EPSRC now has a new chief executive, Professor Philip Nelson, formerly Pro Vice-Chancellor of the University of Southampton.

The report resultant from the independent review of peer review has been published, actions agreed, and it is now for us to consider and implement changes which will improve the effectiveness of the College. Apart from the closure of the reviewers incentive scheme, which is not exclusively linked to College members, no major changes have been agreed, although we have temporarily suspended the College self-nomination process. We will keep you up-dated as and when changes are proposed.

Please note that with the changes to the EPSRC web site previous links will no longer work but perhaps this will provide an opportunity to explore the new structure and revised content. The College pages content is essentially unchanged, although their new location is http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/funding/assessmentprocess/college/

As ever, your suggestions for the content of the newsletter are welcome, so please do not hesitate to contact us at college@epsrc.ac.uk with your suggestions and we will see if we can include them in a future newsletter. We always try to include articles which you will find interesting and useful as College members and are happy to consider suitable material regardless of whether it has been EPSRC-generated.

Angela: 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