School of Arts, Languages and Cultures

GUIDANCE AND TEMPLATE FOR INTERNAL PEER REVIEWERS OF RESEARCH GRANT APPLICATIONS

1. Please try to provide your comments in a timely fashion and keep to the suggested deadline; we need to give applicants enough time to make any improvements you suggest.

2. Be honest, but constructive. If an application seems to have a serious flaw, it is helpful if you state this clearly; the whole idea of internal peer review is to alert applicants (and the School) to weaknesses prior to submission. Be prepared to signal that the application is, in your view, premature, and needs a lot more work. The applicant will be told your name, unless you prefer to remain anonymous

3. There is always room for improvement in even the very strongest applications, so it is not helpful simply to comment that an application is so good that you have nothing to add (just as it is not often the case that an application is so bad that there is nothing to be salvaged from it)

4. Just because the proposal is not in your immediate research area, does not mean that you cannot provide useful feedback (it is often an 'outside' perspective which is most insightful). Proposals will always be read by one or more specialist and non-specialist reviewer, so individual reviewers will not necessarily need to cover all aspects of a proposal in the same depth.

5. Please be sure to use the template below for your review. However, depending on the particular scheme, some sections may not need to be filled in. There is no minimum or maximum number of words per heading. Please expand the boxes as necessary.

6. Further guidance on what to cover under each heading are as follows:

    a. Contextualisation and innovation (how 'original' the proposed research seems to be, and how well it has been placed in the context of existing research)

    b. Quality of the proposal (this is the most important issue and will probably require the most attention; you should comment in particular on the clarity, coherence and significance of the objectives and research questions, the scale of ambition reflected in the work proposed, and the extent to which the proposed methods will enable the questions to be answered and the objectives met)

    c. Outputs and dissemination (how appropriate are the proposed publication outlets and dissemination activities; are the outputs consistent with the scale of the project and the time permitted for it?)

    d. Description of potential impact (to both academic and non-academic users; have all the potential pathways to non-academic impact been exploited? How concrete and convincing are the impact plans?; have the appropriate academic audiences been identified?)

    e. Roles (say whether the roles and responsibilities of the people concerned are clear and appropriate, and whether there are any gaps in requisite expertise in the proposed research

team). If studentships are included, please comment on the viability of the proposed area of study, and its relationship to the core of the project.

f. Management (say if the project look as though it will be efficiently managed; focus in particular on how the work of any RAs will be overseen, and how their career pathways will be enhanced by the project work)

g. Timetable (comment on whether the timetable seems realistic)

h. Presentational issues (layout; style; typographical errors etc)

i. Budgetary issues (you may spot inconsistencies and errors that others have overlooked)

j. Overall significance and value for money (this is ultimately what will decide whether the proposal is funded or not; you should ask yourself not 'how expensive is this project?', or 'how can the budget be increased or cut?', but 'are the outputs of a scale and ambition commensurate with the money being requested?', and 'how important is the research likely to be to its target audiences?')

7. You are asked to assign an overall grade to the application you are reviewing, using the AHRC grading scheme (see below)*. This does not represent a definitive judgement on the quality and viability of the proposal, but will help the School determine how close the application is to being ready to submit, and how much more help and support the applicant may require. Please be frank in assigning grades; you would not be serving the applicant well by indicating that a proposal is likely to be funded in its current form when you in fact have doubts about this. Remember that applications that receive a score of less than 5 are unlikely to be funded in the current environment. Try to make sure that the grade you assign corresponds to the gist of the comments you have made earlier in the peer review template.

8. Please make sure that you send your completed peer review to the research office.

*AHRC GRADING SCHEME

Grade 6

An outstanding proposal that is world-leading in all of the following: scholarship, originality, quality, and significance. It fully meets all the assessment criteria for the scheme and excels in many or all of these. It provides full and consistent evidence and justification for the proposal, and management arrangements are clear and convincing. It should be funded as a matter of the very highest priority.

Grade 5

A proposal that is internationally excellent in all of the following: scholarship, originality, quality, and significance. It fully meets or surpasses all the assessment criteria for the scheme. It provides full and consistent evidence and justification for the proposal, and management arrangements are clear and convincing. It should be funded as a matter of priority, but does not merit the very highest priority rating.

Grade 4

A very good proposal demonstrating high international standards of scholarship, originality, quality and significance. It meets all the assessment criteria for the scheme. It provides good evidence and justification for the proposal and management arrangements are clear and sound.

Grade 3

A satisfactory proposal in terms of the overall standard of scholarship and quality but which is not internationally competitive and/or which is more limited in terms of originality/innovation, significance and/or its contribution to the research field. It satisfies at least minimum requirements in relation to the assessment criteria for the scheme, provides reasonable evidence and justification for the proposal, and management arrangements are adequate overall. In a competitive context, the proposal is not considered of sufficient priority to recommend for funding.

Grade 2

A proposal of inconsistent quality which has some strengths, innovative ideas and/or good components or dimensions, but also has significant weaknesses or flaws in one or more of the following: conceptualisation, design, methodology, and/or management. As a result of the flaws or weaknesses identified, the proposal is not considered to be of fundable quality. A proposal should also be graded 2 if it does not meet all the assessment criteria for the scheme. It is not recommended for funding.

Grade 1

A proposal which falls into one or more of the following categories:

- has unsatisfactory levels of originality, quality, and/or significance,

- falls significantly short of meeting the assessment criteria for the scheme,

- contains insufficient evidence and justification for the proposal,

- displays limited potential to advance the research field,

- the potential outcomes or outputs do not merit the levels of funding sought, or

- is unconvincing in terms of its management arrangements or capacity to deliver the proposed activities.

It is not suitable for funding.

SALC RESEARCH GRANT PEER REVIEW TEMPLATE

Name and Division of Applicant:

Title of Proposal:

Funding Scheme:

CONTEXTUALISATION AND INNOVATION
QUALITY OF THE PROPOSAL
OUTPUTS AND DISSEMINATION
DESCRIPTION OF POTENTIAL IMPACT (ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC)
ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
MANAGEMENT
TIMETABLE
BUDGET AND JUSTIFICATION OF RESOURCES
PRESENTATIONAL ISSUES
OVERALL SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUE FOR MONEY

GRADE (please select the appropriate numerical score, using the AHRC grading scheme above):

ANY OTHER COMMENTS