



## **Role of the Peer Review College reviewer within the Peer Review process**

### **Introduction**

1. Peer review has always been at the very heart of the AHRC's activities. The College was set up to improve the effectiveness of the peer review process in terms of providing high quality and objective reviews.
2. College reviewers are nominated by peers as experts, and able to comment authoritatively on proposals for AHRC research funding. The profile of the Peer Review College is intended to reflect the breadth of disciplines and subjects within the AHRC's subject domain.
3. One of the main reasons for establishing a College is that it allows members to review a number of AHRC proposals each year. This equips you over time to make robust, comparative reviews of the strengths and weaknesses of proposals. The peer review procedures that were previously in place meant that external assessors were only approached once or twice over a two-year period for an evaluation of a research proposal.
4. To ensure that you provide reviews that add value to the peer review process you are expected to attend an Induction Day, to be trained in the main aspects of the role of a College member.

### **Overview**

5. An overview of the review process is provided below and is diagrammatically illustrated at **Annex A**. For the majority of the AHRC schemes the process operates as follows:
  - proposals are considered by two or more members of the Council's Peer Review College. Where the proposal requires a Technical Appendix, the technical feasibility of the proposal will be assessed separately.
  - applicants provide a response (PI Response/Right of Reply) to the comments of the Peer Review College reviewers and the technical review where applicable.
  - proposals, College members' reviews, technical reviews and PIs' responses to the College reviews are considered by peer reviewers appointed by the Council to its subject panels, where they grade and rank proposals in order of funding priority.
  - awards are finalised by the Director of Research.
6. Panel members are expected to make informed judgements of all proposals passed to them for review. It is impossible to achieve coverage within a single panel of the full range of subjects and the wide diversity of proposals submitted to the AHRC. Therefore, under the system outlined above, specialist advice is available via the reviews provided by the Peer Review College reviewers. In framing proposals for peer review, however, applicants are advised to address as wide a group of peers as possible.

7. Exceptions to this process include:
  - Research Grants – route for practice-led and applied research
  - Research Networking scheme
8. In these cases, Peer Review College reviews are obtained, but proposals are not considered by peer review panels. Instead they are moderated in the office where possible. If an in-house grading decision cannot be made they are passed to a member of our Strategic Reviewers group within the College.
9. Other exceptions to the review process can be found at the [Funding Opportunities](#) page or the [Research Funding Guide](#) on the website.

## **Main Stages of the assessment process – a fuller description**

### **Submitting a proposal**

10. Proposals to the majority of our schemes are submitted through the cross-council Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) System. Applicants must complete the appropriate proposal form for the scheme to which they are applying and submit this along with a Case for Support and other supporting information to Je-S. This information must be received by the published deadline for the scheme - that is with the exception of schemes without formal deadlines. Late or incomplete proposals will not be accepted by the Je-S system. Applicants indicate up to three subject classifications on their proposal form to identify the research area of the proposal. The primary classification determines the panel to which the proposal will be submitted.

**AHRC Staff:**

- *check proposals for matters such as eligibility*
- *ensure that each proposal is assigned to two or more appropriate members of the Peer Review College for review (or non-College reviewers if suitable College members are not available)*

### **Technical Review**

11. A Technical Reviewer is selected from the Peer Review College to provide grades and comments on the technical aspects of proposals which are submitted with a Technical Appendix. If you are selected, you will receive an email request from the Je-S (Joint Electronic Submission) system regarding the proposal that you are being asked to review. You will be required to complete and submit your assessment via the Je-S system.
12. The AHRC aims to ask Technical Reviewers to assess around 8 proposals to its funding schemes and programmes during each 12-month period, but on occasions we may ask you to review more. Please note that standard College Members who also have Technical Reviewer membership will undertake Technical Reviews in addition to the quota of academic reviews normally undertaken. You will have between three and four weeks to provide the assessment, although the timetable may be shorter if you are not the first person approached.
13. You will be asked to provide an assessment covering the following broad headings:
  - Project Management
  - Data Development Methods

- Infrastructural Support
- Data Preservation and Sustainability
- Access
- Copyright and IPR
- Overall Assessment (grade and overall conclusions on proposal, including strengths and weaknesses)

### Technical Review Grading Scale

14. The grades and definitions you will use are provided in the table below:

Grade	Definition
5	<b>Strong Support</b> – the technical aspects of the proposal are strong, well thought out and appropriate to the needs of the proposed project.
4	<b>Support with advice</b> – the technical aspects of the proposal are sufficient to allow the project to be completed successfully, although there are some issues raised in the review that the P.I. is advised to bear in mind.
3	<b>Conditional Support</b> – in general, the proposal has addressed the technical requirements of the project but there are one or more issues which would need to be addressed before an award is made. Minor issues may be addressed through PI response whereas larger issues may need to be addressed through a conditional grant offer. Please indicate whether the issues are minor or major.
2	<b>Unsatisfactory</b> – there are significant concerns about the technical aspects of the proposal. The proposed approach is inappropriate to the nature of the project and would need to be completely revisited. The concerns are of such significance that the project should not be funded as it currently stands.
1	<b>Insufficient information</b> – the proposal has not provided enough information to enable a review to be provided. The proposal would need to be resubmitted.

15. The technical assessment will be forwarded to the peer review panels, or other decision making body as appropriate, to assist them in making their grading decisions. In addition to providing Technical Reviews we may ask you to attend at least one Panel meeting during your period of appointment to provide technical advice.

**Please ensure you have read and understood the following sections which provide further information on your role:**

- Conflicts of Interest
- Decline to Review
- Equal Opportunities
- Freedom of information and data protection

- Principal Investigator Response

### **Role of College Reviewer**

16. Your primary role will be to provide the AHRC with informed reviews of proposals submitted to the AHRC. **The Council is seeking expert academic reviews of proposals, not personal testimonials.** Reviews that provide an objective analysis of research proposals are key to the assessment process.
17. As a Peer Review College reviewer, you should exercise your knowledge, judgement and expertise to reach clear and soundly based decisions that are fair, objective and evidence-based. The AHRC is committed to equal opportunities. Please ensure therefore that all proposals are reviewed on equal terms. Proposals must therefore be reviewed and graded on their merits, in accordance with the criteria for each scheme or call for funding.
18. Since January 2009 the standing peer review panels have been replaced by non-standing panels convened from the membership of the College. You may be invited to serve as a panel member, as a representative of your (broad) subject area. Panels will be required to rank and grade proposals to a given scheme based on the aims, objectives and criteria of the scheme, as well as its assessment procedures.

### **Peer Review College Review**

19. The AHRC normally contacts two or more Peer Review College members to review each proposal received. You will be selected on the basis of the subject expertise you supplied. The AHRC reserves the right to seek reviews from specialists who are not current members of the College if the required number of suitable College members is not available. If you are selected, you will receive an email request from the Je-S (Joint Electronic Submission) system regarding the proposal that you are being asked to review. The proposal and all the paperwork can be accessed via the Je-S system and you will need to complete and submit your review on the Je-S system.
20. All Peer Review College members have a Je-S account. You will need to activate this account the first time you receive a review request. Details about how to do this will be included within the review request email and there is also a set of [FAQs](#) about the Je-S system that can be found on our website.
21. For almost all of our schemes you will need to use the Je-S system to submit your review. Please note that the AHRC will not be able to accept your review via email or in hard copy, unless otherwise stipulated by us.
22. If you need any assistance or advice in your use of the system or experience any problems, you should contact the Research Councils' Je-S Helpdesk. They can be contacted by telephone on 01793 444164 or by email on [JeSHelp@rcuk.ac.uk](mailto:JeSHelp@rcuk.ac.uk) and are available from 9am to 5pm Monday–Friday.
23. If you consider that you have been inappropriately matched to a proposal or are unable or unwilling to complete the review **please log in to the Je-S system and decline the review (by selecting 'Decline to Review' under the Document Data menu in the Je-S review form and select SUBMIT), preferably as soon as possible and no later than 5 working**

**days** so that an alternative reviewer can be approached as quickly as possible. It would also be helpful if you could suggest the name of an alternative reviewer. Please do not, however, approach the individual yourself.

24. If you intend to complete the review, please also email the AHRC contact named in the 'Reviewer Information' section of the form. This is important so that officers can keep a log of reviews that are being completed.
25. If you are unable to return the review by the due date please get in touch with the AHRC Officer named under 'Research Council Contact Details' in the review form or email for advice. If a review is received after the due date and you have not sought prior approval to submit it late, we may not be able to use it.
26. You will be expected to review around 8 proposals during each 12-month period (normally no more than 4 per quarter). There may also be other *ad hoc* requests, for example in relation to cross-Council proposals or those received as part of our Knowledge Transfer schemes or International activities. In addition you may be asked to assist with the monitoring of awards, by reviewing a final report.
27. You will be asked to provide a review, covering the following broad headings:
  - Quality and importance
  - People
  - Resources and Management
  - Value for money and appropriateness of resources requested (not applicable for the Research Leave or Fellowships in the Creative and Performing Arts schemes)
  - Outputs, Dissemination and Impact
  - Overall Assessment (grade and overall conclusions on proposal, including strengths and weaknesses)
28. Scheme/Programme specific guidance, including review criteria, is available via the Je-S system review pages and is known as Helptext. This will detail what points you should address under each of the headings. You will also need to assign each proposal a grade as shown in the guidance.
29. When composing your review please bear in mind that a copy of your comments will be forwarded – anonymised – to the applicant. You are asked to keep in mind the guidance within the [Freedom of Information and Data Protection](#) section of the e-Handbook. You are also asked to word your comments carefully, to avoid any personal remarks that may cause offence, and to adhere to the AHRC's Equal Opportunity policy (see paragraph 22 of the 'Role of the Peer Review College reviewer within the Peer Review process' [section](#) of the e-Handbook). Please ensure that you only provide comments that relate to the information in the proposal and are relevant to the criteria for the scheme in question.
30. The review form is available to complete on the Je-S system. There is also detailed guidance for completing the form; this is known as [Je-S Helptext](#). It is important that you take account of the scheme to which the proposal has been submitted. Specific scheme guidance can be accessed when you are completing the review form on-line via the Je-S Helptext. You will also be asked to assign each proposal a grade using the grading scale descriptors that are included within the Helptext.

31. You are responsible for keeping your contact details up-to-date. To amend your details, please login to the Je-S System at <https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/> using your Je-S User Id and password, and then select the "My Details" option to amend the details. Please be aware that some changes, including a change to Department & Organisation, will not be displayed until the details have been verified by the Je-S Helpdesk. If the information in your account is correct and does not need updating then we would welcome feedback to that effect. In future the system will prompt you, at regular intervals, to check and re-affirm your details.
32. If you are unable to provide reviews for a given period of time - for example, you are intending to go on sabbatical, are ill or on maternity leave - please contact Katie Lambert, Peer Review College Coordinator (Membership) at [peerreviewcollege@ahrc.ac.uk](mailto:peerreviewcollege@ahrc.ac.uk) so that you can make a request for your membership to be suspended. We will not ask you to do any reviews during that period.

### **Cross-Research Council Proposals**

33. The Research Councils have collectively produced guidance on reviewing interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary proposals, including those that straddle Council boundaries. This is detailed in **Annex B**. If you are asked to review a Cross-Research Council proposal it is important that you read this guidance.

### **Conflict of Interest**

34. It is vital that all Peer Review College reviewers, including technical reviewers, are seen to be completely impartial at all stages of the review process. You should not, therefore, take part in the review of any proposal where a conflict of interest could be construed.
35. The AHRC will not allow a reviewer's proposal to be submitted to the same scheme and round as the application they have reviewed. Therefore, if you have been asked to provide a review to the same scheme and round within 3 months of applying or intending to apply, please decline the review.
36. Where possible, AHRC staff will ensure that proposals are not forwarded to you for review where there is an obvious conflict of interest, but if you consider that you may have a conflict of interest you must advise the AHRC before proceeding. Conflicts of interest may arise:
  - if you are a personal friend or a relative of the applicant
  - schemes with closing dates - if you have submitted a proposal to the same round of the competition for which you are being asked to provide an review
  - schemes without closing dates - if you are intending to submit, or have already submitted a proposal to the **same scheme**, within three months of the time that you are being asked to provide a review
  - if you are directly involved in the work proposed by the investigator(s)
  - if you are a current member of staff or a Professor Emeritus/Emerita at the same institution as the investigator. If you are at Cambridge or Oxford University you should not review proposals from the college to which you belong or others at the institution. Staff employed by a member institution of London University or University of Wales may review proposals from other member institutions

- if you have been employed at the same department as the investigator(s) in the last 12 months
  - if you have collaborated on a research project, or worked closely with the investigator(s) in the last five years
  - if you were the PhD Supervisor for the investigator(s)
  - if you have a vested interest in the research, for example you are a general editor of the series to which the work that is the subject of the proposal will contribute, or a curator of a gallery where the work will be exhibited
  - if you have been approached and agreed to be a member of a committee connected with a research project, for example an advisory group or steering committee. You should not - if approached - also act as a reviewer for that project.
37. Please also refer to the 'conflicts of interest' listed within the [Code of Practice](#) for members of the AHRC Council, Committees, Panels and Advisory Groups.
38. If you consider that you may have a conflict of interest you must advise the member of staff whose details appear in the 'Reviewer Information' section of the form before proceeding. Awards Officer details can also be found on the email requesting you to undertake the review.

### **Decline to Review**

39. If you need to decline a review request please login to the Je-S System, as soon as possible and no later than 5 working days of the request and navigate to the 'Decline to Review' section of the Document menu to decline the request. It would also be helpful if you could suggest alternative reviewers who might have the appropriate subject expertise to complete the review, but please DO NOT approach them yourself. Please decline the request as soon as possible so that we have time to contact an alternative reviewer.

### **Equal Opportunities**

40. The AHRC is committed to equal opportunities and all proposals must be assessed on equal terms, regardless of the sex, age, ethnicity of the applicant. Proposals must therefore be assessed and graded on their merits, in accordance with the criteria and the aims and objectives set for each scheme of awards. The Council monitors the outcomes of all competitions for awards, including the sex, age and ethnicity of applicants and award holders relative to those of the research community as a whole.

### **Grading scale for Academic Reviews**

41. You will be asked to provide a confidential review of each proposal you are sent and to award it an overall grade in accordance with the guidance. You should bear in mind that the AHRC is seeking an expert review of the proposal, including evidence-based comments, not a personal testimonial.
42. The grades and definitions you will use are provided in the table below.

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Descriptor</b>
6	An outstanding proposal meeting world-class standards of scholarship, originality, quality and significance. It fully meets all the assessment criteria for the scheme and provides full and

	consistent evidence and justification for the proposal. It should be funded as a matter of the very highest priority.
5	An excellent proposal meeting world-class standards of scholarship, originality, quality and significance. It fully meets all the assessment criteria for the scheme and provides full and consistent evidence and justification for the proposal. It should be funded as a matter of priority, but does not merit the very highest priority rating.
4	A good proposal of a high standard of scholarship, originality, quality and significance. It meets all the assessment criteria for the scheme and provides good evidence and justification for the proposal. It is suitable for funding.
3	A satisfactory proposal in terms of the overall standard of scholarship, originality, quality and significance, which meets the assessment criteria for the scheme and provides reasonable evidence and justification for the proposal but which in a competitive context is not a priority. It is not recommended for funding.
2	A proposal of inconsistent quality which has some strengths, but also contains a number of major weaknesses or flaws in its conceptualisation, design, methodology and/or management. It does not meet all the assessment criteria for the scheme. It is not suitable for funding.
1	A proposal of an unsatisfactory level of originality, quality and significance, which does not meet the assessment criteria for the scheme and does not provide satisfactory evidence and justification for the proposal. It is not suitable for funding.

43. This grading scale is in use across all programmes and schemes run by the AHRC, although the descriptors may vary slightly for the Studentship Competition, CDA's and KT schemes. You will be informed of any variances in the relevant scheme guidance.

44. Please note that in providing a peer review only your comments are forwarded to the applicant. Your identity and grade are not disclosed.

### **Freedom of information and data protection**

45. Proposals are submitted to the AHRC in confidence and may contain confidential information and personal data belonging to the applicant (and other researchers named in the proposal). You must not disclose the fact that an applicant has applied to the AHRC for a grant nor the content of the proposal to any other person, without the prior written consent of the AHRC or the applicant. You must not use the information in the grant proposal for any purpose other than providing a review of it to the AHRC.

46. You are asked to bear in mind that your comments will be forwarded anonymised to the applicant and that you should not include any personal comments that may cause offence. Please provide only comments that relate to information in the proposal, and are relevant to the scheme/programme criteria.

47. Full details of how Freedom of Information (FOI) and Data Protection (DP) impact on your role and your obligations to these can be found within the separate [FOI and DP section](#) of the Handbook.

### **Sifting of Proposals**

48. Proposals to the following schemes will be quality sifted by the AHRC:

- Collaborative Doctoral Awards
- Cross-council funded responsive mode schemes (Research Grants)
- Research Grants standard, early career and speculative
- Research Grants – Practice-led and Applied Route
- Research Networking

***Proposals are sifted on the following principals:***

- *The AHRC will reject a proposal upon submission where the proposal does not meet the published eligibility criteria; either relating to documentation requirements or where it does not meet the aims or criteria of the scheme to which it has been submitted.*
- *The AHRC will sift proposals against quality criteria, solely on the basis of information supplied by an AHRC peer review process.*
- *The AHRC will not sift on the basis of the information supplied by a non-AHRC peer review process.*
- *The AHRC will not sift a review based solely on a technical review.*
- *The AHRC will not sift outline proposals submitted to its strategic programmes as this process is conducted by a Commissioning Panel.*
- *The AHRC will not sift a proposal where the final funding decision does not fall wholly within a Research Council peer review process.*

49. A sifting decision will be made based on the overall confidence levels and grades given by the peer review process. A proposal will be rejected if it receives two or more reviews that give the proposal an un-fundable grade. A grade is considered 'un-fundable' where it is described as either *Not Recommended for Funding* or *Not Suitable for Funding* (grades 1 – 3).

### **Principal Investigator (PI) Response**

50. For all schemes for which peer reviews are sought except the Research Grants – practice-led and applied route, and Research Networking scheme, applicants who pass the quality threshold (i.e. receive two or more reviews graded at 4,5 or 6) will be invited to submit a PI response to the Peer Review College reviews and technical assessments received. This allows applicants to correct any factual errors or conceptual misunderstandings, or to respond to any queries highlighted in the comments from the Peer Review College reviewers. It is not intended to be an opportunity for the applicant to change

or re-constitute a proposal in light of the comments. Applicants are not obliged to submit a response, but are encouraged to do so, as responses from applicants are forwarded to the peer review panel and are taken into account in the ranking of proposals.

***Once the deadline for receipt of the PI Response has expired, AHRC Staff forward the following documents to members of the appropriate subject panel for consideration:***

- *proposal*
- *Peer Review College reviews*
- *technical review (if appropriate)*
- *principal investigator's response to the Peer Review College reviews (if received)*
- *a marksheet (to record grades and comments), and*
- *panel guidance*

### **Peer Review Panels**

51. The Council relies on four Peer Review subject panels, to prioritise and rank the majority of proposals submitted to the AHRC. Some schemes operate one panel only (eg Fellowships in the Creative and Performing Arts; CDA's; Strategic Initiatives). Proposals to some schemes such as the Research Networking scheme and the Research Grants – route for practice-led and applied research scheme do not go to panel at all. Further information about the assessment route for these schemes can be obtained from our [website](#).
52. The panels are non-standing and convened on an ad hoc basis from the College membership. Details of the panel membership can be found on our [website](#). The panel subject remit can also be found on the [peer review pages](#) of the website.

### **Role of the panellist**

53. As a panellist, you are expected to familiarise yourself with the guidelines and assessment criteria for the scheme(s) with which you may be involved; comment on and grade all proposals which are directed to you, except where you have a [conflict of interest](#); attend panel meetings to agree final grades and rankings for all proposals, and feedback for applications where applicable and provide a short reasoned summary of your opinion of the proposals, normally in advance of a panel meeting.
54. Full guidance on what kind of comments you are expected to make will be sent to you along with the applications. Your comments will facilitate discussion at the meeting, and contribute to feedback if applicable. Please ensure that your remarks are carefully worded, as applicants may request access, under the Freedom of Information Act, to all personal data being held on them by the AHRC
55. In undertaking the above tasks, you are expected to exercise your knowledge, judgement and expertise to reach clear and soundly based decisions; treat all applications, award reports and assessments as strictly confidential at all times and always be fair and objective, and adhere to the Council's [Equal Opportunity Policy](#).

56. Panel Members are paid honoraria of £170 per meeting and Chairs will receive £230 per meeting. This is considered as income from self-employment and is taxable as such.
57. If you are sitting on a moderating panel, you will not be allowed to introduce new criticisms or comments that have not already been raised by the peer reviewers. Full guidance about your role will always be provided when you accept an invitation to sit on a panel.
58. It is impossible to achieve coverage within a single panel of the full range of subjects and the wide diversity of applications submitted to the AHRC, therefore you will be expected to make informed judgements of **all** proposals assigned to you for review, including those which do not lie within your precise area of subject expertise, except where there is a conflict of interest. Even if you consider that you cannot make informed judgements on matters such as the significance and importance of the research, you may have valuable comments to make on matters such as the feasibility of the methodology, or whether the proposed research would present value for money. You should be guided by your experience as a researcher as well as the expert advice from the peer reviewer.
59. Under the system outlined above, specialist advice will be provided by the assessments from Peer Review College assessors. In framing applications for peer review, however, applicants are advised to address as wide a group of peers as possible and to consider the widest possible routes for dissemination of their work.
60. If you have been approached to sit on a panel and you know that you will be applying to any AHRC scheme, you are asked to inform the AHRC as soon as possible. This is important in order to provide the AHRC with enough time to find a replacement.

***Once panellists' comments and grades have been received AHRC staff:***

- compile a consolidated marklist – a table listing the grades assigned by the relevant panellists to each proposal*
- finalise the arrangements for the panel meetings, ensuring that room and catering where necessary has been booked*
- provide panellists and chairs with all the relevant paperwork for the panel meeting*

61. The purpose of panel meetings is to consider and reach final agreement on the grading and ranking of proposals, and also to agree broad feedback for applicants if applicable. The panels' recommendations are then presented to the Director of Research who will make the final funding decisions. Panel meetings also provide an opportunity for panellists to raise issues such as the quality of peer review or the potential impact of the research proposed through the applications received to that meeting.
62. If you are invited to sit as panel chair, you may particularly wish to focus on those proposals where there is a divergence of views amongst panellists. Your principal role would be to chair panel meetings; check draft minutes of

panel meetings and draft feedback comments provided by staff responsible for your panel; moderate the discussions of applications and ensure each one is graded and ranked appropriately; help to identify intellectual trends apparent from the proposals assessed, or particularly significant or newsworthy projects, for discussion by the panel and other AHRC bodies and for use in AHRC publicity and other documentation for wider audiences and liaise and co-operate with AHRC staff responsible for your panel, and wherever possible comply with any deadlines given, to enable staff to conduct panel arrangements as smoothly as possible, for example commenting on draft minutes or feedback comments to unsuccessful applicants.

63. Panellists and chairs are normally appointed for approximately 7 weeks before and 5 weeks after the scheduled panel meeting date. You will be expected to fulfil your agreed role during this period. If for any reason you cannot, you are asked to notify us as soon as possible so that we may find a replacement.
64. If you know that you will not be able to attend a meeting, please inform staff member responsible for your panel as soon as possible. You may still be required to provide detailed comments, which can be taken into account at the meeting.
65. If you intend to apply to the AHRC and you have been asked to sit as a panellist for that scheme, you must inform the staff member responsible for your panel as soon as possible. This is important to provide the AHRC with enough time to find a replacement.
66. You are expected to have familiarised yourself with the proposals to be discussed and, taking account of the aims and assessment criteria for the scheme concerned, to have graded and commented in advance on all of the proposals sent to you. You should grade the applications independently, and send a copy of your completed marksheet to the office before the meeting, preferably by e-mail.
67. If you think that you do not have all the paperwork, or if you are aware of any problems that could be resolved in advance of the meeting, please alert the AHRC staff member responsible for your panel at the earliest opportunity and at the very least before the meeting so that s/he can take the appropriate action.
68. Any feedback given to applicants as part of the review process will normally be released to the applicant in an anonymised form which they are asked to keep confidential. It is important therefore that your comments are coherent, carefully considered and avoid any personal remarks.
69. Your comments and grades will not be used outside the peer review/funding decision making process unless they are subject to specific legal requirements.

## At the panel meeting

### ***At the meeting AHRC Staff:***

- *minute questions concerning policy, protocols and assessment practices*
- *advise on any points of protocol or policy where necessary*
- *ensure that proper procedures and protocol guidelines are enforced during the meeting, including adherence to AHRC's commitment to equal opportunities*
- *ensure that the panel provides, and records appropriate feedback comments for applicants where necessary.*

70. It is vital that Panel members are seen to be completely impartial at all stages of the review process. You should not, therefore, take part in the review of any proposal where a conflict of interest could be construed. If you think you might have a conflict, please inform the staff member responsible for your panel at the earliest possible opportunity.
71. If you are in conflict with a proposal, you will be required to leave the room whilst the proposal is discussed. You are, however, permitted to be present for the ranking of all proposals and it will be the responsibility of the chair to ensure that such proposals are not discussed again in detail, to avoid any potential embarrassment.
72. You should also not be involved in any way with a proposal prior to its submission or once a decision has been taken – eg you should not agree to advise or comment on, or help colleagues in preparing, a proposal. If you are in any doubt as to whether you have a conflict of interest, you should consult staff working with your panel. If you are approached by applicants to discuss their proposals in any way – whether it be before, during or after the assessment process – you should decline.
73. You are of course free to talk to applicants about the Council's structures, policies and modes of operation, so long as the information is in the public domain (eg in the Research Funding Guide or on the website). You must not divulge information about individual awards or application statistics, unless the information is already in the public domain (via press release, Annual Reports, Podium, etc).

## **Grading and ranking proposals**

74. Panels are asked to consider each proposal on its merits and award it a grade. Grading decisions at prioritisation panels are reached through discussion of the proposals - taking into account the comments of the PRC reviewers, the Principal Investigator's response to the College reviews, grades and supporting comments of individual members of the panel, and (where applicable) the technical review. At assessment panels grading decisions are reached through discussion of the proposals based on grades and supporting comments of individual members of the panel.

75. Panels will be asked to rank proposals. The number of proposals that need to be ranked will vary according to the scheme, the round and the level of funding available. AHRC staff will be able to advise further at the meeting. When ranking applications where there is a conflict of interest for a member of the panel, the application should not be discussed again in detail.
76. AHRC staff may make adjustments to the costs identified in proposals prior to making awards, acting upon recommendations from panels (for example reducing the amount of staff time or project students, or reducing the overall resource for travel or equipment). Conditions may also be applied by panels before awards may be confirmed.
77. In considering the proposals, you must ensure that your judgment is based solely on the aims and assessment criteria for the scheme, and the information provided to you in the application form, the Peer Review College reviews and the PI's response to these, where received. You should not allow private knowledge of the applicant or the proposed research to influence your judgment.

### **Funding decisions**

78. The Director of Research agrees the final funding decision within the budget agreed for each round of a scheme.

***After the panel meeting AHRC Staff:***

- *prepare paperwork for the Director of Research so that a final list of award allocations can be made.*

### **Award Announcements**

79. Once the successful proposals have been approved it is the role of AHRC Staff to ensure that applicants are notified of the outcome of their proposal. Feedback is compiled as appropriate.

***AHRC Staff:***

- *compile feedback for proposals where directed, and forward it to the Chair of the panel for approval*
- *despatch letters to unsuccessful applicants, enclosing a copy of the Council's resubmission policy where appropriate*
- *despatch letters to successful applicants, together with a copy of the Terms and Conditions of awards, a payment schedule (if appropriate to that scheme) and a Starting Certificate*

### **Resubmission**

80. Some AHRC schemes, including those in responsive mode for post-doctoral

research, allow for resubmission of unsuccessful applications; please see scheme-specific guidance for more information. An application graded **3, 2 or 1** cannot be resubmitted to the same scheme in any future competition (although it may be possible to submit it to a different AHRC scheme if it meets the appropriate aims, objectives and criteria). An application graded **6, 5 or 4** can normally be resubmitted once more to the same scheme.

### **Monitoring of awards**

81. As part of the Terms and Conditions of an AHRC award, the award-holder is normally required to submit a final report no later than three months after the end of the award period. Further information about monitoring requirements for specific schemes can be found on our website.

As a College member you may be asked to assist with the monitoring of these awards by providing reviews of final reports. These may include awards that you have previously peer reviewed at the application stage. For certain schemes where your review has identified issues that may lead to sanctions for the award-holder, it may be necessary to introduce a second tier of assessment. In such cases, the final report will be forwarded to a member of the PRC Strategic Reviewers group, together with your review, and s/he will be asked to make a final decision based on the information provided. All comments provided by PRC members assessing a report will be forwarded to the award holder in an anonymised format. You must therefore word your comments carefully, and avoid any personal remarks that may cause offence.

### **Payment of Expenses**

82. Expenses can be claimed for AHRC meetings or other events that Members are required to attend. Expenses for other relevant meetings that Members are invited to may be paid but require advance authorisation in writing from an Associate Director.

83. Panel members must complete a Claim Form, available from the relevant staff member, and submit it with receipts within 3 months of the meeting / event.

### **Applying to the AHRC**

84. You may apply to the AHRC's research programmes but will not be permitted to review competing proposals in the round to which you intend to apply or attend the relevant panel meeting.

85. If you are connected to a proposal which is either awaiting a funding decision or which will be submitted in the next three months, please check whether it is directed to the **same scheme for which you are being invited to provide a review**. If this is the case, please decline the review.

86. If you have already agreed to sit on a panel and intend to apply, please notify the staff member responsible for your panel as soon as possible. You will need to stand down from that meeting and will not be able to receive the panel member's honorarium for that meeting.

87. In order to ensure the propriety of the assessment of panel members' applications the AHRC's Audit Committee monitors the management and outcome of such applications on an annual basis.

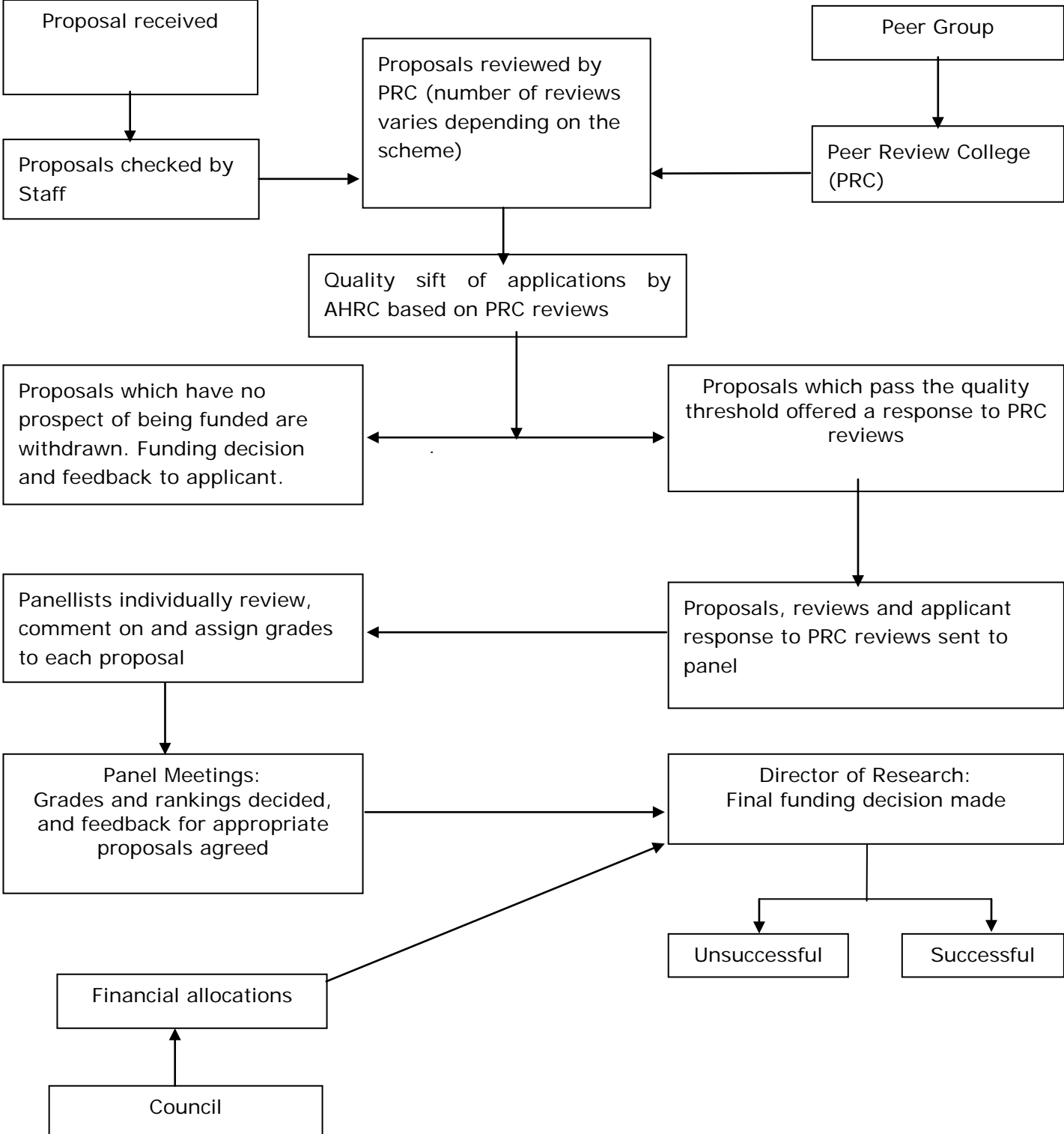
88. AHRC Peer Review College reviewers are free to apply for funding from other sources, including the British Academy and other Funding Councils

### **Monitoring and Performance**

89. We expect you to observe the information contained within the 'Standards of Service' document which you signed on becoming a member of the College. We will periodically review data on numbers of requests made, numbers of reviews provided and number of acceptances and declines made. You may be asked to withdraw if you do not comply with the 'Standards of Service'.

Main Stages of the Review Process

Note: This overview is not applicable to all schemes, for which aspects of the full process will not be required.





### Cross-Research Council Proposals

1. In its investment framework for Science and Innovation<sup>1</sup>, the Government highlighted the need for an enhanced culture of inter- and multidisciplinary research in the UK, and for a Research Council peer review and funding infrastructure that supports this.
2. The Research Councils already collaborate on programmes of research with defined remits that cross Council boundaries. However, peer review can often be more difficult for responsive mode proposals, which can be submitted in any research area. Responsive mode is taken to mean unsolicited research proposals received in any area relevant to the research councils' remit. For some Councils, this will include those received in response to highlight notices or priority areas that are processed as if they were unsolicited.
3. This document aims to provide you, as a reviewer, with guidance to help you consider multidisciplinary proposals. This guidance is equally relevant to proposals that cross discipline boundaries *within* a Council's remit as well as those crossing *between* remit boundaries.
4. For multidisciplinary proposals, it is unlikely that you will be familiar with all the elements of the programme of research. You may have been approached as a reviewer because of your particular expertise in one element and reviews will also be sought from experts in the remaining aspects. If you only feel confident commenting on particular elements of the proposal, please restrict your comments to these. This will greatly assist the panel in placing your comments in context.
5. You should assign the proposal a grade and respond to those elements on which you consider it appropriate for you to comment. You may additionally want to justify the grade you have given or indicate any reservations you have. Please use the "Overall Assessment" section of the on-line review form to ensure that the reasons for your grade are clear; but please ensure that you DO NOT disclose the grade you awarded the proposal, as your comments are returned to the applicant.
6. Multidisciplinary research is often to be found at the cutting edge, which is inherently risky. You should not be afraid of recommending innovative, speculative and adventurous proposals. If you think something is risky, it is important to ask yourself what the risks are; is it risky because the outputs are unknown or does the project lack the subject specialism it needs?
7. It is possible that a standard technique or method is being used in a novel way or context. It is not appropriate to lower your grade to reflect this element if it underpins an otherwise exciting piece of research.

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spending\\_review/spend\\_sr04/associated\\_documents/spending\\_sr04\\_science.cfm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spending_review/spend_sr04/associated_documents/spending_sr04_science.cfm)

8. Do not be tempted to adjust your grade or score downward because you don't think that the research project fits fully within the administering Council's remit. Responsive funding can cross remit boundaries and where this is the case, a co-funding agreement will have been considered<sup>2</sup> by the relevant councils. If we have forwarded this application to you, please respond on the assumption that we have accepted it as falling within our remit.
9. Multidisciplinary research may necessitate a researcher moving disciplines. While it is important that you are convinced that the appropriate logistical support is in place (including training where necessary), you should take care to review the project not the applicant(s).
10. Don't forget that your comments may be fed back, anonymously, to the Principal Investigator. Where you consider the research is flawed in approach or contains elements of poor quality, the reasons must be clear, unambiguous and evidence-based.

<sup>2</sup>Note: co-funding is not considered appropriate for values of less than £150k