



Frequently Asked Questions

The Peer Review College – what, why and how?

[Why was a Peer Review College set up?](#)

[What is the role of a Peer Review College reviewer?](#)

[How will I benefit from being a member of the Peer Review College?](#)

Contacting the AHRC

[Who should I approach if I am unable to review a proposal or consider that I do not have all the information in which to review the proposal\(s\)?](#)

[Who should I approach if my contact details need updating?](#)

Reviewing research proposals

[How many proposals will I be asked to review?](#)

[How long will I have to review a proposal?](#)

[Do I have to use the Je-S system to write and send my review?](#)

[Is there any guidance on how to use the Je-S system?](#)

[Who should I contact if I have problems using the Je-S system?](#)

[What sort of review am I expected to provide?](#)

[What should I do if I think I have a conflict of interest in considering a proposal?](#)

[What constitutes a conflict of interest?](#)

[What should I do if an applicant approaches me about a proposal to the AHRC?](#)

[If I provide a review to the AHRC could my name be disclosed in connection with it?](#)

[What if I do not feel sufficiently knowledgeable to review a proposal?](#)

[What happens if I accept to undertake a review and am then unable to submit it by the due date?](#)

[What should I do if I will be unavailable to review proposals for a given period of time?](#)

[If I am successful in applying to the AHRC Research Leave scheme, should I review proposals during the period of my leave?](#)

Peer review panel membership

[How long is a term of office?](#)

[How much will I be paid?](#)

[What does a panellist do?](#)

[What is the role of a chair?](#)

[Will my comments be confidential?](#)

[Can I act as a referee for an applicant to the Studentship Competition?](#)

[How do I claim expenses?](#)

Peer review panel meetings

[Will I have to attend a peer review panel meeting?](#)

[Where are panel meetings held?](#)

[How long is a panel meeting?](#)

[What happens if I am required to attend a panel meeting that includes the review of a proposal where a conflict of interest could be construed?](#)

Applying to the AHRC's research schemes

[May I apply to the AHRC's research programmes?](#)

Monitoring and evaluation of awards

[Will I be asked to review monitoring reports?](#)

Other responsibilities

[Will I have any other responsibilities?](#)

The Peer Review College – what, why and how?

Q Why was a Peer Review College set up?

A 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.

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.

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.

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.

[Back to Top](#)

Q What is the role of a Peer Review College reviewer?

A 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.

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.

From 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.

You should treat all proposals, final reports and reviews as strictly confidential at all times. The proposal has been submitted to the AHRC in confidence and may contain information and personal data belonging to the applicant (and other researchers named in the proposal). You must not disclose the fact that the 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 proposal for any purpose other than providing a review of it to the AHRC.

[Back to Top](#)

Q How will I benefit from being a member of the Peer Review College?

A Indirectly you will derive benefit from your exposure to the peer review process, including the opportunity to monitor the research development in your area(s) of expertise. You may also be invited to serve as a Panel member. Membership will constitute evidence and recognition of your reputation within your subject community. Finally, an understanding of the application process as reviewer and panel member will improve your chances of drafting better applications for funding to the AHRC.

[Back to Top](#)

Contacting the AHRC

Q Who should I approach if I am unable to review a proposal or consider that I do not have all the information in which to review the proposal(s)?

A If you have a query, or want more information concerning a proposal, please contact the Awards Officer whose details appear in the 'Reviewer Information' section of the form on the Je-S system or within the review request email. 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 within two 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.

[Back to Top](#)

Q Who should I approach if my contact details need updating?

A We would be grateful if **you** would review and update your personal details through the Research Councils' Joint electronic Submission (Je-S) System. The reason for this is that Research Council staff are not normally permitted to make any changes to your Je-S account on your behalf once you have signed the Je-S Terms and Conditions.

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.

For guidance refer to the System Help notes and the Maintaining Personal Details Tutorial (<http://www.pparc.ac.uk/jes/jes1/jes1system.asp#Tutorials>). If you experience any difficulty using Je-S or have any questions regarding its use, please contact the Je-S Helpdesk.

E-mail: JeSHelp@rcuk.ac.uk

Phone: 01793 444164 (Out of hours: please leave a Voice Mail message)

If you have any specific queries please contact the Peer Review College Team: peerreviewcollege@ahrc.ac.uk.

[Back to Top](#)

Reviewing research proposals

Q How many proposals will I be asked to review?

A A Peer Review College reviewer 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.

[Back to Top](#)

Q How long will I have to review a proposal?

A The exact timetable for each scheme will be provided when you are asked to review a proposal, but in general you will have three or four weeks, depending on the scheme/programme to which you are providing a review. If the first person approached declines the request it is inevitable that the timeframe for subsequent reviewers will be shorter. All requests for providing reviews must be returned within the period specified to ensure that final funding decisions are made by the dates indicated to applicants.

[Back to Top](#)

Q Do I have to use the Je-S system to write and send my review?

A 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.

[Back to Top](#)

Q Is there any guidance on how to use the Je-S system?

A Some [FAQs](#) can be found on the AHRC website.

In addition, you may wish to look at the [document](#) 'Accessing and Completing a Peer Review Document to assist you in navigating the system. Furthermore, Helptext, within the Je-S system, displays the guidance notes for completing the review form.

[Back to Top](#)

Q Who should I contact if I have problems using the Je-S system?

A 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 and are available from 9am to 5pm Monday–Friday.

[Back to Top](#)

Q What sort of review am I expected to provide?

A You are asked to provide a confidential review using 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 scheme or Fellowships in the Creative and Performing Arts)
- Outputs, Dissemination and Impact
- Overall Assessment (grade and overall conclusions on proposal, including strengths and weaknesses)

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.

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 'Role of the Peer Review College reviewer within the Peer Review process' [section](#) of the e-Handbook paragraph 22). 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.

[Back to Top](#)

Q What should I do if I think I have a conflict of interest in considering a proposal?

A It is vital that Peer Review College 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.*** If you consider that you may have a conflict of interest you must advise the Awards Officer 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. Please login to the Je-S system and decline the review, so that we can find an alternative reviewer as quickly as possible. It would also be helpful if you could suggest alternative reviewers who might have the appropriate subject expertise, but please do not approach them yourself.

[Back to Top](#)

Q What constitutes a conflict of interest?

- A Award Officers will aim to ensure that proposals are not forwarded to you for review where there is an obvious conflict of interest, but for information please ensure that you do not review a proposal:
- 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 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 worked closely with the investigator(s) in the last five years
 - if you have a vested interest in the research, for example you are a general editor of the series to which the proposed outputs 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.

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.

[Back to Top](#)

Q What should I do if an applicant approaches me about a proposal to the AHRC?

- A You may advise people within the subject area about applying to the AHRC and can talk to applicants in general terms about the Council's structures, policies and modes of operation. You must not, however, discuss with the applicant the content of any proposals you have reviewed, either during or after the round, or reveal any information that is not in the public domain.

[Back to Top](#)

Q If I provide a review to the AHRC could my name be disclosed in connection with it?

- A The AHRC will release your anonymised comments to the applicant, but will ask the applicant to keep those comments confidential and will not release

your name in connection with them without first obtaining your permission to do so. The AHRC will not otherwise use comments provided by Peer Review College members for any purpose other than is necessary for the peer review/funding process and will not disclose them to any person except as is required for the peer review/funding decision process or as is required under the Data Protection Act 1998 or the Free of Information Act 2000 (or any other law or regulation to which the AHRC is or may become subject).

[Back to Top](#)

Q What if I do not feel sufficiently knowledgeable to review a proposal?

- A If you consider that you are not in a position to review a proposal please login to the Je-S system and decline the review as soon as possible and no later than 5 working days so that an alternative reviewer can be approached. It would also be helpful if you could suggest the name of an alternative reviewer. Please however, do not approach the individual yourself.

[Back to Top](#)

Q What happens if I accept to undertake a review and am then unable to submit it by the due date?

- A In the first instance 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 will not be able to use it.

[Back to Top](#)

Q What should I do if I will be unavailable to review proposals for a given period of time?

- A 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 manage your availability through your Je-S account <https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/>. After logging into your account, from the column on the left, under the heading of personal details, select *Unavailability*. Click the *Add Unavailability Details* button. This will take you to another screen which will allow you to record details of your unavailability. From the drop down menu for *Timescale* select '*Specified Period*' and enter the reason for the unavailability, e.g. Annual Leave. Finally, choose your start and end dates and click 'save'. If you have any questions, please contact the Peer Review College Team: peerreviewcollege@ahrc.ac.uk.

[Back to Top](#)

Q If I am successful in applying to the AHRC Research Leave scheme, should I review proposals or serve on a panel during the period of my leave?

- A No. Peer Review College reviewers who gain a Research Leave award are not expected to undertake any peer review duties for the duration of their research leave (both the HEI and AHRC period of leave). This will allow award-holders to comply with the aims of the scheme, allowing them to commit 100% of their time to their research project.

On notification of your award the AHRC will provide you with an information sheet explaining that your membership will be suspended for the duration of your institutional and AHRC periods of leave.

[Back to Top](#)

Peer review panel membership

Q How long is a term of office?

- A A term of office normally lasts for approximately 7 weeks before to 5 weeks after the scheduled panel meeting date.

[Back to Top](#)

Q How much will I be paid?

- A 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.

[Back to Top](#)

Q What does a panellist do?

- A 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.

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

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](#).

[Back to Top](#)

Q What is the role of a chair?

- A As a panel chair, you may particularly wish to focus on those proposals where there is a divergence of views amongst panellists. Your principal role is 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.

[Back to Top](#)

Q Will my comments be confidential?

- A 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.

Your comments and grades will not be used outside the peer review/funding decision making process unless they are subject to specific legal requirements.

[Back to Top](#)

Q What if I do not feel sufficiently knowledgeable to review a proposal?

- A Given the extensive subject areas that we cover and the diversity of applications that we receive, it is impossible for us to guarantee that the entire range will be covered by the expertise of our Panel Members.

In the case of Research Grants schemes, you will receive up to 4 Peer Review College Members' reviews with the application, whose expertise in the area should inform your own.

You will be expected to comment on and grade all applications sent to you unless there is a clear [conflict of interest](#).

[Back to Top](#)

Q Can I act as a referee for an applicant to the Studentship Competition?

- A Members and chairs of panels reviewing the Studentship Competition may act as a referee for a student applicant where to refuse to do so might disadvantage the candidate. In such circumstances, panel members should not participate in the evaluation of the application. You are free to participate in the evaluation of competing applications in that round of the scheme concerned.

[Back to Top](#)

Q How do I claim expenses?

- A 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.

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.

Day subsistence allowances are available to cover extra costs when a member is prevented from eating where they would normally eat. Night allowances are available when overnight stays are necessary.

Other expenses may be reimbursed in exceptional circumstances.

[Back to Top](#)

Peer review panel meetings

Q Will I have to attend a peer review panel meeting?

A From January 2009 the AHRC will be sourcing panellists for all panel meetings from its Peer Review College Members. Therefore, you may be asked to sit on a future AHRC panel either as chair or as a panellist. You will always receive guidance on both your role and the purpose of the panel meeting, as well as any other related paperwork, once you have agreed to sit on the panel.

[Back to Top](#)

Q Where are panel meetings held?

A Panel meetings are normally held at the AHRC offices in Swindon, Polaris House, North Star Avenue, Swindon, SN2 1FL.

[Back to Top](#)

Q How long is a panel meeting?

A The number of proposals received to the round dictates the length of a panel meeting, but in general, the meeting will commence around 10.30am and finish by 4pm.

[Back to Top](#)

Q What happens if I am required to attend a panel meeting that includes the review of a proposal where a conflict of interest could be construed?

A 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.

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.

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.

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).

[Back to Top](#)

Applying to the AHRC's research schemes

Q May I apply to the AHRC's research programmes?

A 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.

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.

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.

If you intend to apply to a scheme that operates without formal deadlines, you may not apply to these schemes within three months of providing a review. This will ensure that your proposal is not reviewed within the same batch in which you have reviewed a proposal.

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.

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

[Back to Top](#)

Monitoring and evaluation of awards

Q Will I be asked to review monitoring reports?

A Peer Review College members will be asked to assist with the monitoring of awards by providing reviews of final reports, and in some cases Interim reports, arising from AHRC-funded projects.

Please note that your comments will be forwarded to the award-holder. You are therefore 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 'Role of the Peer Review College reviewer within the Peer Review process' section of the [e-Handbook](#) paragraph 22).

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 Large Collaborations 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.

Further details of the Council's monitoring policy are provided in the [Monitoring and Evaluation](#) section of the e-Handbook.

[Back to Top](#)

Other responsibilities

Q Will I have any other responsibilities?

- A You may be invited to shape programme development, for example, through participating in discussion about potential strategic programmes and to represent the AHRC at symposia, colloquia and other events. Additionally, you may be invited to help train new members at Induction events.

[Back to Top](#)

Term of office

Q What is my term of office?

- A Peer Review College membership is normally for a period of up to four years. Continuation beyond this period or earlier withdrawal of membership will be at the discretion of the AHRC. The membership of the College will be monitored closely with expansion/reduction as necessary. If you are unable to undertake College business for a period of time (for example you are on Research Leave) your membership will be temporarily suspended but your term of office will remain the same.

[Back to Top](#)

Q Who should I approach if I wish to request a temporary suspension of membership?

- A Please contact the PRC Team at peerreviewcollege@ahrc.ac.uk.

[Back to Top](#)

Q How can I become a peer review panel member?

- A From 2009 all postgraduate and research standing panels will cease to exist, and will be replaced by non-standing panels which will be convened on an ad hoc basis from college membership. You may, therefore, receive an invitation

to serve as a panel member. You will receive payment of either £160 (as a panellist) or £200 (as a Chair) per meeting day.

[Back to Top](#)

Monitoring of performance

Q Will the AHRC monitor and review my performance?

- A Yes. 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'.

[Back to Top](#)