

## **Feedback on Fellowship Proposals from Strategic Reviewers**

### **February 2014**

Members of the Strategic Reviewer Group of the AHRC's Peer Review College met in February at two separate meetings. One of the areas they discussed was leadership in the context of the Fellowship Scheme and their comments are summarised below.

- Leadership, and the Research Organisation's support for it, is not an 'add-on' but an integral part of the proposal.
- How the research will impact on the research field and beyond, including other disciplines and outside academia. The potential for inter-disciplinary research and collaboration should be considered but is not a requirement.
- The potential for longer-term impact and how the research might evolve in the future should be clear.
- Where non-academic engagement is included, the resource required to make this a success should not be under-estimated.
- Proof (evidence) of active leadership should be demonstrated – both past experience and proposed – commensurate with career stage. Potential for leadership needs to be demonstrated.
- Mentoring – this is both how the fellow will be mentored for the early career route and how the fellow will mentor others. The nature of the relationship should be clear and it should last beyond the life of the project.
- Network-building can show vitality and originality.
- Need to distinguish between leadership and management, particularly where the project involves research assistants. Leaders should be able to develop capability in others.
- Research excellence is crucial but the leadership aspect should add an extra dimension to what is proposed.

- Leaders should be inspirational and be able to communicate excitement about the project. A confident tone is good but arrogance should be avoided.
- Applicants need to show vision and demonstrate leadership in the idea and in the disciplinary context.
- Novelty of the research – the application needs to show an understanding of the current field and how the project will contribute uniquely to the body of knowledge in the field.
- Ambition is encouraged but needs to be coupled with a clear plan to address risks and challenges. Projects need to be achievable and realistic.
- The Research Organisation's role should be clear (before, during and after the fellowship) – how have they identified the individual as a (potential) leader and how they will help the individual to develop or continue as a leader. This goes beyond standard training courses. Engagement must be tailored to the individual and their proposed research: it is not a 'tick box' exercise.
- Organisations should be able to say what impact research leaders will have within their organisation.
- There was an idea for Research Organisations to share resources to allow for a wider range of support to be provided.

Strategic Reviewers also flagged related, wider issues around support for research assistants and how this provided opportunities for researchers in the period post-PhD and before securing an academic position. Also, the question around equal opportunities: ensuring that potential applicants had support from the Research Organisation which was appropriate to their circumstances.

In terms of reviewing, it was felt that more encouragement could be given to reviewers to be open to more ambitious projects which have the potential to be ground-breaking. If we want to support intellectual leaders, we need to be prepared to support 'disciplinary radicalism'.

It was suggested that AHRC provide training or case studies to demonstrate how leadership looks within the context of the Scheme.