Principles and Best Practice for Managing Demand

Research Grant Application Selection in Research Organisations

This document sets out high-level principles and best practice that provide a framework for managing funding demand within Research Organisations. These draw upon [UKRI principles of assessment and decision-making](https://www.ukri.org/publications/ukri-principles-of-assessment-and-decision-making/), those outlined within the [Independent Review of Research Bureaucracy](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62e234da8fa8f5033275fc32/independent-review-research-bureaucracy-final-report.pdf) and the sector’s commitment to supporting equity and inclusivity in research funding.

# Excellence

Demand management should support a dynamic research and innovation system that promotes excellent, high-quality applications. It should create a system where reproducibility, transparency, high quality reporting, and a breadth of diversity of activity are valued as the foundations of research culture and practice.

# Positive Submission Behaviours

Demand management interventions should encourage positive submission behaviours that create an inclusive environment for research and innovation which enables participation. The impacts of any process should be considered from the outset to mitigate against unintended advantages or disadvantages that it might present for any groups.

# Proportionality

The nature of internal selection processes should be proportionate to the type, scale, and complexity of the funding call as well as actual or anticipated interest in opportunities. All efforts should be made to reduce bureaucracy whilst maintaining processes that are designed to ensure fairness.

# Consistency

Consistent processes should be adopted wherever possible and with due consideration of proportionality. This includes the style and accessibility of communications, the format of internal application forms, the assessment and decision-making process, the quality and timeliness of feedback, support for candidates who are shortlisted and those who are not.

# Timing

It is recommended that designing and consulting on a selection process should balance the time needed for the internal process to be undertaken with the time needed for the selected applicants to prepare and submit their applications. Internal deadlines should avoid common national holiday periods and religious festival dates where possible. A degree of flexibility should be built into processes to enable participation, especially in the case of extenuating circumstances.

# Panel Expertise and Support

Reviewers and panellists involved in internal selection within Research Organisations must have established expertise in the field, interdisciplinary expertise, or expertise that is relevant to the specific funding call.This expertise does not necessarily have to be academic, and technical or professional services staff may be involved depending on the nature of the scheme.

Reviewers should receive guidance tailored to the relevant opportunities before undertaking internal assessment of proposals. Reviewers from a range of career stages should be invited to participate in internal selection processes to support capacity building and train the next generation of reviewers. Less experienced colleagues could be invited to observe or participate on panels with appropriate training and support provided.

# Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

Demand management processes must be attentive to EDI in their selection of internal reviewers and panel members. Selection panels must be balanced, and where practicable, representation across protected characteristics should be enabled. Reviewers and panel members are required to actively engage with their organisation’s EDI and unconscious bias training and reflect this in their selection practices. The use of trained rovers could be trialled to improve consistency of EDI practices across different selection panels.

# Integrity

Colleagues involved in internal selection must act ethically and impartially and are expected to apply these principles in practice. Chairs as well as professional staff supporting internal panels must be trained and supported to spot and constructively challenge poor behaviour if it occurs. Conflicts of interest must be declared as soon as known, so that appropriate alternative arrangements can be made. Discussions at panel meetings are confidential and must be treated as such.

# Transparency

Internal selection must be undertaken robustly and transparently. Details of the selection process should be accessible and easy to follow. Information about the panel composition, criteria and anticipated timescales for proposal selection, and feedback must be made available to applicants in the internal guidance. If there are institutional strategic priorities that must be addressed in addition to funder criteria, these should be made clear in the application guidance. Transparency also extends to being clear about the effort involved from applicants and expected competitiveness throughout the various stages of proposal development and selection, so that they can make an informed decision about whether to apply.

# Accountability

Colleagues involved in management and selection as well as applicants engaging with the process are expected to be accountable. It should be clear who is managing and signing off different parts of the process and what those involved can expect. Panel chairs and the lead professional services facilitator should oversee the process and be accountable for the decision-making process. They must be able to address applicant queries or complaints, especially where these may concern issues related to EDI. Demographic data should also be recorded and analysed at an institutional level to monitor the impact of demand management processes and mitigate against unequal outcomes. Applicants are accountable for progressing their bids in a timely and efficient manner to the external deadline once bids have been selected internally.