MODERATING/ASSESSMENT INTERVIEW PANELS: GUIDANCE NOTES FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF STRATEGIC RESEARCH GRANT PROPOSALS

Published: September 2018

1. Introduction

NERC operates a range of strategic research funding opportunities that support research grants aimed at providing the understanding to meet environmental challenges.

2. Conflicts of Interest

NERC maintains a conflicts of interest policy, available at Annex A. We ask that you make yourself familiar with the policy and let us know as soon as possible if you have – or are unsure whether you have - any conflicts of interest with the proposals to be discussed that have not already been identified in the documentation. Please make these known to the panel secretary as soon as possible, particularly if you are an introducer or reader so that the proposal can be reassigned to an alternative panel member.

For any proposal where panel members have been identified to have a conflict of interest they will be required to leave the room whilst discussions are taking place. During the ranking process any panel member who is named as a PI or Co-I on a proposal will be required to leave the room whilst their proposal is ranked. Panel members may remain in the room for the remainder of the ranking but must not make any comments during discussions for proposals where they have a conflict of interest.

If there is doubt as to whether the member should be asked to leave, the Chair may discuss this with the rest of the panel and the NERC executive. The NERC executive have the final decision in any case where there is debate about whether a conflict of interest exists at all stages of the peer review process.

3. Panel Confidentiality

Research grant proposals are submitted to NERC in confidence and may contain confidential information and personal data belonging to the applicant. NERC undertakes to the applicants to keep proposals confidential and not to use or disclose them except as required for the peer review/funding decision process or as is required under the Data Protection Act 1998 or the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (or any other law or regulation to which NERC is or may become subject).

Panel members may not disclose the fact that any of the enclosed grant proposals have been submitted to NERC or any of the information contained in any of the proposals to any person outside the Panel or otherwise involved in the peer review/funding decision process. Nor may they disclose or use the information in the
grant proposals for any purpose other than as part of NERC peer review/funding decision process.

The Panel’s comments on and scoring of these proposals will be recorded by NERC staff at the meeting at which they will be discussed. NERC will not use these minutes or scores, nor disclose them to any person or body except:

- as is necessary to record the decisions of the Panel and to inform any other person or body within NERC or any other body that may be co-funding the proposals as part of the funding decision process;
- to the applicant as part of NERC feedback to successful and unsuccessful applicants; or
- as may be required under the Data Protection Act 1998 or the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (or any other law or regulation to which NERC is or may become subject).

NERC will not attribute any comments that are disclosed under the Data Protection Act 1998 or the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to any individual panel member, but the fact that you are a member of the one of the Panels is publicly available information.

All personal data collected by NERC will be handled in accordance with the UK Data Protection Legislation and as set out in the UKRI Privacy Notice.

4. Role of the Panel

The primary role of the moderating/assessment panel is to review the grant proposals assigned to it by NERC.

The moderating/assessment panel will receive the full proposal and any additional background information. In addition, a moderating panel will receive all reviewers’ comments and any applicant’s responses to reviewers’ assessments as appropriate. Using this information for reference, all moderating/assessment panels are responsible for:

- providing scores for the Excellence and Fit to Scheme of each proposal presented to them,
- deciding if Pathways to Impact are acceptable,
- producing a final ranked list of these proposals, and
- satisfying themselves that the financial resources requested for proposals in the funding frame are reasonable to meet the project objectives and recommending any areas of budget adjustment where necessary.

To assist in the prioritisation process, panel members will be assigned, in advance of the meeting, to act as introducers or readers for individual proposals. The roles of both introducers and readers are described below.

4.1 Role of Introducers

For each proposal, two panel members will be nominated as introducers. Their role is to lead the discussion on the proposal. As well as the proposals that have been allocated to an introducer, panel members should read as many of the other proposals as possible (time permitting). This allows them to put the proposals on

---

1 A panel is referred to as a moderating panel when it is preceded by an expert peer review stage, and the panel receives copies of those reviews. A panel is referred to as an assessment panel when there is no additional expert peer review, and the panel provides both the critical expert assessment as well as the moderating function.
which they are speaking into context with the rest of those submitted and ensures a full discussion of each proposal at the meeting.

4.2 Role of Readers

The role of reader is not as comprehensive as introducer. Readers are expected to provide a verbal summary and provisional scores for Excellence and Fit to Scheme for those proposals to which they have been assigned, where the two introducers fail to agree. Readers are not expected to provide a written summary, but simply to be familiar with the proposals to which they have been assigned and be able to provide an opinion on these if called upon to do so.

Readers should also consider what questions they would like to ask during the interview.

5. The Panel Meeting

5.1 Before the Panel

Prior to the panel meeting, it is the responsibility of the introducers to read all the proposal material including the reviewer comments and PI response and to moderate comments made (being careful not to introduce any new information which the applicants have not had a chance to respond to). Introducers need to be prepared to lead the panel discussion to determine a final score for Research Excellence and Fit to Scheme. Your moderation of the reviewers’ comments and PI response should consider:

- the potential rewards of the project: the significance and quality of the work, and the scientific impact it will have in terms of enhancing or developing insights, developing the field and adding to knowledge or understanding in the area to be studied in a national or international context;
- the extent to which the research questions, issues or problems that will be addressed through the work are stated and their importance and appropriateness specified; and
- the appropriateness, effectiveness and feasibility of the proposed research methods and/or approach.
- the evidence available on the proposals fit to scheme.

When assigning provisional scores, introducers must take into account all supporting documentation. The scores awarded by reviewers may be at variance with their comments. Where this is clearly the case, introducers are asked to give careful consideration to the reviewer comments provided. Introducers must be prepared to justify fully these scores. Please note: the scoring systems for Excellence and Fit to Scheme can be found in section 10 of this document.

Introducers should also consider what questions they would like to ask the applicants during their interview; these can be on anything the reviewers raised, including studentships if relevant.

Announcements of Opportunity for Strategic Research currently being assessed can be found at ‘Announcements of opportunity for peer review’.
5.2 At the Panel

i. With the applicants

Applicants will enter the room, the Chair will welcome them and invite them give a 15 minute presentation to the panel. Following the presentation for the next 20-25 minutes, panel members will have an opportunity to ask questions to gain clarification on any outstanding points. Introducers will lead the questioning, then readers will have the opportunity to ask any further questions. The total time allocated to each proposal is 65 minutes. Depending on timings there may not be enough time to open up questioning to everyone on the panel.

All panel members can listen to the presentation and question & answer session, but those listed as having conflicts of interest cannot participate in the questioning of the applicants, and must leave the room for the private discussion. Following the presentation and questions, the applicants and those panel members with conflicts of interest leave the room.

The remaining panel members then have 25-30 minutes for discussion, at the end of which the final Research Excellence and Fit to Scheme scores for the proposal and the feedback for the applicants will have been agreed.

Panel members should focus their questions on substantive issues raised by the reviewers and NOT introduce information to the discussion that has not been previously raised by them, unless a serious issue has been identified. If an introducer (or reader/panel member) considers there is a serious issue, they should raise this at the beginning of the meeting, before the applicants enter the room. The chair and the panel can then agree whether the issue should be raised with the applicant during the interview, so they have the opportunity to respond. Any such issues should not be raised later as the applicant will not have had an opportunity to respond to the additional information, and its introduction may raise serious risks of prejudicing the decision made by the panel. It also ensures that all proposals are treated on an equal basis—an issue central to the management of the peer review process.

ii. Private discussion

The Chair and Panel Secretary will ensure that panel members with conflicts of interest leave the room before the proposal is discussed, then:

- Invite the first introducer to give their comments.
- Invite the second introducer to add any additional comments.
- Invite the readers to add any further comments.
- Then, each introducer (first then second introducer), then the readers are invited to give their scores for Research Excellence and Fit to Scheme.

The panel then discusses and agrees scores for Research Excellence and Fit to Scheme.

Feedback will be provided for every proposal discussed at the moderating /assessment panel meeting.

It is the responsibility of the first introducer to provide a summary of the panel's discussion of the proposal as feedback to the applicant(s) and as a record of the justification for the panel scores and decisions. The same feedback will also be copied to the applicant's Research Organisation Administration Office.
The first introducer should record the key points using the template document provided in **Annex B**. Second introducers, readers and other panel members should be prepared to provide the first introducer with inputs if they request it. NERC will provide time as part of the meeting, where possible, for attendees to complete their feedback comments and expects panel members to use any available time to prepare feedback or agree the arrangements for coordinating feedback with other members.

Care should be taken to present the feedback constructively; this should not be a list of strengths and weaknesses like a review but should give context to the key factors that led to the proposal getting the score it did and should explain how the applicants could have achieved a higher score. New information not raised by the reviewers should not be included in the feedback and comments should not be made that could reveal reviewer identities or scores. Introducers should ensure that the feedback provided is of a sufficient length to ensure that it provides an appropriate level of detail so that the applicants are clear as to why the proposal received the score it did and can see how it could be improved.

Introducers should also ensure that feedback is provided for the Pathways to Impact. In particular, if the Pathways to Impact is graded as unsatisfactory by the panel, the feedback should provide sufficient information to enable the applicants to re-write their Pathways to Impact document to an acceptable standard.

**5.3 After the Panel**

The first introducer should send the feedback to the Panel Secretary by e-mail as soon as possible and within one week of the meeting date.

**6. Proposal Scoring**

Please note where there has been a peer review stage, reviewers will have been asked to provide up to three scores: one for Excellence, one/two for Fit to Scheme. These scores are based on a 0-6 scoring system (6 being highest) and should be used to guide the panel in their final scoring and ranking of the proposal. The scores should not be summed or averaged by the panel but treated as distinct scores.

**6.1 Excellence - Primary Criterion**

The panel must assign an Excellence score of between 0 and 10 (highest) to each proposal.

There is no simple definition of Excellence. Proposals may build directly on prior work, or may involve a speculative leap forward. It may involve progress along an established research direction or a tangential switch into a new or different area, or may bring together expertise and approaches from different discipline areas. All of these approaches could demonstrate excellence, so your judgement should not simply be based on which approach has been adopted.

A proposal that demonstrates excellence can be characterised by terms such as: novel, ambitious, timely, exciting, at the international forefront, adventurous, elegant, or transformative but need not demonstrate all of them. Often you might expect to see a plausible hypothesis, with some basis within the published literature, and clearly identified objectives that sensibly test that hypothesis. However proposals do not need to be hypotheses driven and may instead focus on an exploratory approach or the development of a new technology. Certainty of outcome is not an indicator of excellence, but neither is an incremental approach necessarily an indicator that a
proposal lacks excellence. How the Excellence criterion is applied is, therefore, likely to be dependant in part on the objectives of the Strategic Research opportunity to which the proposals have been submitted, and the panel will need to refer to those objectives in considering this criterion.

6.2 Fit to Scheme - Primary Criterion

The panel must assign a Fit to Scheme score of between 0 and 6 (highest) to each proposal. The panel reserves the right to assign a 0 score if the proposal in question fails to fit the objectives and requirements of the Strategic Research opportunity. Thus in effect, the proposal is rejected.

When assessing strategic research grant proposals please assess the proposal against the objectives and requirements, as expressed in the related Announcement of Opportunity. Where both scientific and non-scientific objectives are key to delivery, panels are asked to score both types of Fit to Scheme objectives separately. Where no non-scientific objectives are stipulated no score is required.

Announcements of Opportunity for Strategic Research currently being assessed can be found at [Announcements of opportunity for peer review](#).

7. Pathways to Impact

An exploration of ‘Pathways to Impact’ continues to be required with every proposal; the Pathways to Impact attachment describe potential opportunities and approaches to generate economic and social impact from the proposed research over different timescales.

Whilst NERC does not expect applicants to be able to predict the economic and societal impact of their research, NERC does expect applicants to have explored the following from the outset:

- Who could potentially benefit from the proposed research over different timescales?
- How might the potential beneficiaries benefit?
- What will be done during and after the project to increase the likelihood of the research reaching the identified beneficiaries and maximize the likelihood of the identified benefits being achieved?

Whilst Pathways to Impact is not a secondary assessment criterion for ranking of proposals, an acceptable Pathways to Impact is required before a grant may start. Where appropriate to the call objectives, the requirement to engage relevant beneficiaries and users will also be part of the Fit to Scheme criteria. Grants will not be allowed to start unless unacceptable Pathways to Impact are enhanced to an acceptable level within one month of notification of the panel outcome.

Panels are responsible for discussing Pathways to Impact and identifying any unacceptable Pathways to Impact or unjustified costs associated with proposals within the funding frame and providing feedback on the unacceptable Pathways to Impact. Panel members should assess whether applicants have completed a robust thought-process around the potential economic and societal impacts of their research and proposed ways to move towards, accelerate or implement these and whether any costs requested to deliver these are justified.

An acceptable Pathways to Impact will:

- be project-specific and not generalized;
• be outcome-driven;
• identify and actively engage the key relevant research end-users and stakeholders at appropriate stages;
• demonstrate a clear understanding of the project-relevant needs of end-users and consider ways for the proposed research to meet these needs;
• contain evidence of existing engagement with relevant end users e.g. via letters of support/supporting statements;
• detail the planning and management of associated activities including timing, personnel, budget, deliverables and feasibility.

Pathways to Impact which meet the relevant criteria above should be considered “acceptable” and those failing to meet criteria appropriate to the proposed research should be considered “unacceptable”. Where Pathways to Impact are identified as “unacceptable” the panel should give details in their feedback of where the criteria were not met and what action and improvements are required to raise it to an acceptable level of quality.

Further information on Pathways to Impact can be found at ‘Pathways to impact’.

8. Proposal Prioritisation

Once all the proposals have been scored, the panel is then asked to place them in priority order. A ranked list of the proposals will be compiled based on the scores assigned to each proposal for Excellence and Fit to Scheme. In the assessment of Strategic Research grant proposals the primary criteria are Excellence and Fit to Scheme. Consideration of the two/three scores by the assessment/moderating panel must reflect this.

9. Consideration of Resources Requested

The paragraphs below describe the approach the panel should take to the resources requested on the proposals.

Full Economic Costing

All research proposals submitted for consideration are expected to present the full economic cost (FEC) of the project. Proposals must include the funds for the investigators’ effort and the overheads supporting the research activity. Proposals are composed of four summary fund headings, as follows:

- **Directly Incurred Costs** – Costs that are explicitly identifiable as arising from the conduct of a project, are charged as the cash value actually spent and are supported by an auditable record.
- **Directly Allocated** – The costs of resources used by a project that are shared by other activities (including the costs of estates). They are charged to projects on the basis of estimates rather than actual costs and do not represent actual costs on a project-by-project basis.
- **Indirect Costs** – non-specific costs charged across all projects, based on estimates that are not otherwise included as Directly Allocated costs.
- **Exceptions** – Directly Incurred costs that are funded at 100% of FEC, subject to actual expenditure incurred, or items that are outside FEC.

For any proposals in the funding frame, the panel is asked to consider and comment upon the resources requested.
Individual Aspects of Resourcing the Proposal

Are the specific funding requests in the following areas essential and sufficient for the proper conduct and exploitation of the research proposed?

- The amount of time to be devoted to the project by the proposed principal and co-investigators.
- The level of the proposed principal and co-investigators.
- The amount of time for research, technical and support staff proposed.
- The level of appointment for such staff.
- The equipment, consumables and other directly incurred costs such as travel and subsistence. Where equipment has been requested please comment explicitly on the viability of the arrangements described to access equipment needed for this project, and particularly on any university or third party contribution.
- Costs of collecting, establishing, providing or organising the necessary data and research materials.
- Resources devoted to maximising the scientific, societal and economic impacts of the proposed research.
- Access to institutional research facilities.
- The overall length of time for the project.

Please comment if you believe any of these might need to be curtailed or expanded.

Please note that under full economic costing applicants can request all costs that they believe are necessary to undertake the proposed research and maximise the impact. It is not possible for NERC to set specific rates or limits (e.g. a maximum of two conferences per researcher or a maximum of £1200 per conference) as this goes against the principles of full economic costing. Panel members should assess whether what has been requested is appropriate and justified in the supporting documentation.

Areas where you should not comment: The costs of particular resources are for resolution as to true economic cost between the research councils and other relevant bodies. You should not comment therefore upon:

- The level of estate costs in different institutions
- The level of indirect costs
- Charging rates of institutional or other research facilities which are not open market provisions
- Specific salary levels in individual institutions

Equipment

See Annex C of this panel guidance for assessment of Equipment requests costing over £10k.
10. Panel Scoring Systems

Excellence (0-10)

The panel are asked to assign a final score of between 0-10 to each proposal for Excellence using the definitions provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Usual Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excellent quality proposal</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The proposed work is outstanding and represents world-leading standards in terms of quality, significance and scientific impact. Highest priority for funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The proposed work is excellent and represents world-class standards in terms of quality, significance and scientific impact. Very high priority for funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The proposed work is very good, contains aspects of excellence, and represents high standards in terms of quality, significance and scientific impact. High priority for funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Good quality proposal</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The proposed work is of a good quality, internationally competitive, at the forefront of UK work and has a high level of scientific impact. Should be funded if possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The proposed work is of a good quality, on the borderline between nationally and internationally competitive, and has a good level of scientific impact. Potentially fundable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The proposed work is of a good quality, has some scientific merit and addresses useful questions, but is not at the leading edge. It is suitable for funding in principle but in a competitive context is not a priority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Potentially useful proposal</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The proposed work is of a good quality, has some scientific merit, but has a number of weaknesses. Not recommended for funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The proposed work is of a satisfactory quality. It would provide some new knowledge, but fails to provide reasonable evidence and justification for the proposal. Not recommended for funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unacceptable proposal</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The proposed work is weak in terms of quality, significance and scientific impact, and has only a few strengths. Not suitable for funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The proposed work is of an unsatisfactory quality and is unlikely to advance the field. Not suitable for funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>For special cases, e.g. flawed in scientific approach, subject to serious technical difficulties, does not address operational risks, sufficiently unclearly written that it cannot be properly assessed, success depends on the project student, or is duplicative of other research.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fit to Scheme (0-6)

The panel are asked to assign a final score of between 0-6 to each proposal for Fit to Scheme – Scientific Objectives and Fit to Scheme – Non-scientific Objectives (if applicable) using the definitions provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Fit to Scheme- Scientific Objectives (Primary Criterion); refer to Programme Announcement of Opportunity for statement of objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Outstanding</strong>&lt;br&gt;Outstanding alignment with the Programme’s scientific objectives and requirements as outlined in the Announcement of Opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Excellent</strong>&lt;br&gt;Excellent alignment with the Programme’s scientific objectives and requirements as outlined in the Announcement of Opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Very Good</strong>&lt;br&gt;Very good alignment with the Programme’s scientific objectives and requirements as outlined in the Announcement of Opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Good</strong>&lt;br&gt;Good alignment with the Programme’s scientific objectives and requirements as outlined in the Announcement of Opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Adequate</strong>&lt;br&gt;Adequately aligned with the Programme’s scientific objectives and requirements as outlined in the Announcement of Opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Poor</strong>&lt;br&gt;Limited alignment with the Programme’s scientific objectives and requirements as outlined in the Announcement of Opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td><strong>Non-Scoring</strong>&lt;br&gt;Not aligned with the Programme’s scientific objectives and requirements as outlined in the Announcement of Opportunity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Fit to Scheme – Non-scientific Objectives (Primary Criterion); refer to Programme Announcement of Opportunity for statement of objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Outstanding</strong>&lt;br&gt;Outstanding alignment with the Programme’s non-scientific objectives and requirements as outlined in the Announcement of Opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Excellent</strong>&lt;br&gt;Excellent alignment with the Programme’s non-scientific objectives and requirements as outlined in the Announcement of Opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Very Good</strong>&lt;br&gt;Very good alignment with the Programme’s non-scientific objectives and requirements as outlined in the Announcement of Opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Good</strong>&lt;br&gt;Good alignment with the Programme’s non-scientific objectives and requirements as outlined in the Announcement of Opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Adequate</strong>&lt;br&gt;Adequately aligned with the Programme’s non-scientific objectives and requirements as outlined in the Announcement of Opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Non-Scoring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A conflict of interest occurs when an individual involved in the assessment of a proposal for funding has a personal, professional or organisational relationship with the applicants, affecting their ability to undertake their role in an objective and unbiased way. If you are asked to take part in NERC peer review, either to review a NERC proposal or be a member of a NERC moderating or assessment panel then you need to be aware of the NERC policy on conflicts of interest for members of NERC boards, advisory groups and peer review panels.

The NERC policy defines a conflict of interest as being associated or involved in any way with:

- An institution, department or individual that has submitted a funding proposal or would otherwise benefit from a decision
- The development or implementation of proposals seeking NERC/UKRI funds or in the evaluation of research investments

You will have connections and collaborations both formal and informal with a range of organisations and individuals. In order to help you interpret the broad definitions above, this advice aims to set clear expectations of the specific situations considered to represent a material conflict of interest, and when conflicts of interest need to be declared to NERC so that appropriate action can be taken. Definitions of the individuals that may be involved in a proposal (investigators, project partners etc) can be found in the NERC Grants Handbook.

NERC will try to avoid asking you to review or introduce proposals where you have conflicts that can be identified from our own records, but many will not be obvious to us. The final responsibility for identifying and reporting conflicts of interest must therefore rest with the individual. Timing is very important as late notification is much more difficult to manage. A conflict for a panel member identified when the panel is being set up is straightforward to manage, the same conflict identified on the day of the meeting can create major problems, so please check the proposals assigned to you carefully as soon as you receive them.

**What Constitutes a Conflict of Interest?**

Due to the complexities of relationships between researchers it is challenging to provide definitive and exclusive definitions. Some cases will be clear cut, others will be less so and will require a judgement call. We expect researchers who work in the same field to know each other, and this doesn't bar you from commenting on their proposals. The test should be 'will a neutral observer have confidence in the impartiality of any advice provided' and in any case where there is significant doubt the relationship should be treated as a conflict. The NERC Executive have the final decision in any case where there is debate about whether a conflict of interest exists. The following are examples of conflicts of interest considered material by NERC for a proposal you have been asked to review or introduce:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>Action Required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 You are a named investigator, staff member or project partner involved in the proposal or have signed a letter of support</td>
<td>NERC should identify these conflicts please tell us if an error has been made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 You have a formal affiliation to any Research Organisation or Project Partner organisation involved in the proposal.</td>
<td>NERC should identify staff conflicts please tell us if an error has been made</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This generally means you are a current member of staff at the organisation. You also have a formal affiliation if you are a Professor Emeritus, or Visiting Professor, or have signed a contract of employment or receive personal remuneration in excess of £5,000 per annum from the organisation.

For Fellowship proposals conflicts apply to both the organisation where the applicant is currently based and the organisation where the fellowship would be held.

[Association with an organisation that has provided a letter of support but is not a Project Partner is not a conflict]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Conflict Description</th>
<th>NERC Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>You are directly involved in the work proposed and would benefit from it being funded and/or have assisted the applicants with their proposal for funding and/or have agreed to be a member of an advisory committee connected with the project.</td>
<td>Please inform us NERC may not have received complete information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>You have an existing business or professional partnership with any of the investigators or staff named in the proposal</td>
<td>Please inform us NERC does not hold this information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>You are a close relative - spouse, child, sibling or parent - of any of the investigators or staff named in the proposal.</td>
<td>Please inform us NERC does not hold this information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>You are a close personal friend of any of the investigators or staff named in the proposal and think that might affect your judgement or be seen as doing so by a neutral observer familiar with the relationship.</td>
<td>Please inform us NERC does not hold this information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>You are in close regular collaboration with any individuals named in the proposal, including investigators, research staff, collaborators, subcontractors and project partners, to an extent where you feel uncomfortable being involved in the discussion or you feel unable to give an unbiased opinion.</td>
<td>Please inform us NERC does not hold this information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>On Fellowship proposals: you have been the applicant’s supervisor within the last eight years.</td>
<td>Please inform us NERC does not hold this information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>You have had any involvement in the development of the proposal, at any stage of its preparation, including providing comments or advice to the applicants.</td>
<td>Please inform us NERC does not hold this information.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Managing conflicts

**Reviewers** - NERC aims to avoid selecting reviewers where a conflict of interest is clear or applicants have requested that specific reviewers are not used. This will include anyone with a personal or organisational association with the proposal identifiable from the information available to NERC. In the peer review of funding calls with a specific research scope NERC will also avoid selecting reviewers that have submitted a proposal to the same call. Anyone asked to provide a review should check to ensure they have no other material conflicts, if so they should...
decline the request citing 'conflict of interest' as their reason. Please contact NERC quickly for advice if you are unsure. Where a material conflict is identified after a review is submitted that review will be classed as unusable and excluded from the process.

Panels - Panel members are reminded to identify any material conflicts of interest, especially with proposals they have been asked to introduce, as early as possible in advance of the meeting. Where a conflict of interest is identified, panel members’ meeting papers will be edited to remove relevant information regarding the conflicted proposal and the member will be asked to leave the meeting room when it is discussed. The meeting record will note all instances where a conflict of interest was identified and managed at a panel. For some panels, particularly where these are interview panels, the standard practice of members leaving the meeting for a conflicted proposal may not be practical. However they will never participate in the discussion of that proposal, or be permitted to influence the final ranking of a proposal where such a conflict exists. In the peer review of calls with a specific research scope NERC will avoid appointing anyone to a panel that is a named investigator on any proposal to be considered by that panel. For Discovery Science panels, where the research scope can be broad, NERC will only involve applicants in panels when their expertise is critical, the meeting procedures will prevent them being able to influence or receive immediate information on the score or ranking of their proposal.

NERC staff
NERC staff may also have connections with applicants that constitute a conflict of interest. Although their opportunity to influence outcomes is limited, in such circumstances staff will not be involved in reviewer selection or any decision stage for proposals where a material conflict exists.
Annex B

This form should be used to provide a description and justification of the assessment/moderating panel's assessment of research proposals. Comments included will be used as feedback to the applicant and as a record of the panel's discussion for NERC. The same feedback will also be copied to the applicant's Research Organisation Administration Office.

Please note:
- the first introducer for each proposal is responsible for completing this form and sending it to the Panel Secretary within one week of the meeting date
- your comments will be fed back verbatim to the applicant and their Research Organisation Administrative Office

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introducer Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI Name</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal Assessment details and feedback to applicant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Panel Score for Research Excellence (0 – 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please detail the panel’s justification for this score</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel Score for Fit to Scheme – Scientific Objectives (0 – 6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please detail the panel’s justification for this score</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel Score for Fit to Scheme – Non-Scientific Objectives (0 – 6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please detail the panel’s justification for this score</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel Assessment for Pathways to Impact (Acceptable/Unacceptable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please detail the panel’s justification for this assessment below.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the panel considered that the Pathways to Impact was unacceptable, please detail any actions/improvements required of the applicants to raise this to an acceptable level.

Please detail any comments and recommendations made by the panel (including any adjustments) regarding cost effectiveness and resources requested, including e.g. staff time, equipment costs etc.

Additional comments. Please add any other comments pertinent to the assessment of this proposal at the assessment/moderating panel meeting which have not been included above.

15
Annex C

Assessment of Equipment Requests for items of equipment costing between £10k and £138k (£115k ex VAT)

Evidence must be provided of an evaluation of the use of existing relevant capital assets. The Justification of Resources should be used to:

- confirm that the piece of equipment is not already available for use within the host institution, or at any other accessible location (for instance by making reference to any asset registers consulted)
- provide evidence that at all other reasonable options have been considered
- explain, if the equipment requested will replace existing equipment, what will happen to the existing equipment
- set out what contribution the Research Organisation is making towards the cost of the equipment

Panel members are asked to comment explicitly on the viability of the arrangements described to access equipment needed for this project, and particularly on any university or third party contribution to new purchases. The panel should provide NERC with a recommendation as to whether requests to purchase new equipment are justified and should be funded, whether the proposed contribution level is appropriate, whether the planned work can proceed without the equipment and any points of clarification needed from the applicants before any funding should be released.

Assessment of Equipment Requests for all items above the upper threshold value

Applicants must provide a business case which should outline the strategic need for the equipment. NERC will decide the strategic location for these items and will potentially fund them at 100% FEC. Funding at this level will be exceptional and a contribution from the Research Organisation of at least 50% of the cost will be the normal expectation. The business case should not be more than 2 sides of A4 and should include at least 3 quotations from different potential suppliers. Where there are less than 3 potential suppliers, this must be fully explained in the accompanying Justification of Resources.

Panels are asked to assess the strength of the strategic business case and comment on whether the requested equipment is appropriate and has been fully justified. Panels should consider the following:

- Is the provision of this equipment essential to the completion of the proposed work i.e. is the proposal feasible without the requested equipment?
- Are the costs quoted sensible and justified?
- Are their suitable arrangements detailed for the ongoing support and maintenance of the equipment?
- Have the host institution and/or other third party collaborators made appropriate contributions?
- Is this an appropriate location and user base for this investment?
- Does this represent a coherent and effective package across this institution?
- Does this proposal effectively build on and properly utilise existing inventory?
- Have effective arrangements been demonstrated for extending the user base i.e. is there evidence that this will be used for more than one project?

The panel should provide NERC with a recommendation as to whether the request should be funded, whether the proposed contribution level is appropriate, whether the planned work can proceed without the equipment and any points of clarification needed from the applicants. Business cases supported by the panel may be further
assessed against other business cases recommended for funding if the capital budgets available are exceeded. The advice provided by the panel will inform this process.