

NERC Peer Review College – Research Council Reviewer Protocols

Change Log

Version	Date	Changes and points to note
0.1	06/03/2013	Minor updates for publication

Introduction / Context Setting

The Research Councils have adopted a code of practice for all those who assist in the work of the Council which embraces the "Seven Principles of Public Life" drawn up by the Nolan Committee and endorsed by Parliament. These principles refer to selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. The impact of this code is described in more detail below.

Confidentiality

The Research Councils operate an open peer review process, while at the same time preserving reviewer anonymity. Reviewers are required to treat proposals in confidence and keep any personally retained documentation (paper or electronic) secure.

Reviewers should review all proposals or final reports in accordance with instructions given in the Je-S HelpText and should refer any questions relating to reviewing the application to the Council, and must not contact applicants. Applicants may be given the opportunity to respond to any completed reviews.

The Councils expect all parties to respect the roles of all involved in the peer review process. **If you feel unable to comment on any occasion, please let the Council know as soon as possible so that alternative reviewers can be sought.** (Your suggestions for possible alternatives would be welcomed.)

Conflicts of Interest

An important aspect of this code is the avoidance of any conflicts between personal interests and the interests of the Research Councils. In the context of peer review of research proposals and final reports, a conflict of interest might arise as a result of direct, or indirect, personal, academic, financial or working relationships. The acid test is

whether a member of the public, knowing the facts of the situation, might reasonably think the judgment could be influenced by the potential conflict of interest.

The selection of academic reviewers is subject to certain constraints within some Councils, who may not wish to approach anyone with a current application under consideration in direct competition with the proposal under review, or from the same institution as any of the applicants. If you think that your involvement in assessing a particular research proposal or final report might be perceived as a conflict of interest, you should decline the invitation to act as a reviewer as soon as possible, or contact the Council for further advice about this matter.

On occasion, applicants ask that certain individuals are not asked to review their proposals or final reports. Given this and the constraints on reviewer selection outlined above please do not show the proposal to others or ask someone to review the proposal or final report in your place.

Equal Opportunities

The Research Councils are committed to equal opportunities in all their activities. Reviewers should ensure that they avoid any bias in the assessment of proposals and final reports due to gender, disability, age, racial or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, or religious belief. Comments by the reviewers must not contravene this policy. Defamatory or otherwise actionable comments should also be avoided.

Protection of Ideas

The integrity of peer review is dependent on the selflessness of reviewers. All papers relating to the consideration of proposals and final reports must be treated as strictly confidential and seen for the purpose of review only. After assessment any personally retained documentation relating to the review should be destroyed. Reviewers must not take advantage of any information obtained as a result of their role.

Research Misconduct

Progress in research depends on honesty in the presentation of genuine results. The Research Councils take research misconduct, including misrepresentation in research proposals or final reports, very seriously and we would expect you to draw to our attention any instances which are observed as a matter of urgency. Further advice is given on the Councils' websites, and questions about this issue arising from the review of proposals or final reports should be raised with the Council.