

CHECKLIST FOR AN EFFECTIVE REVIEW

The aim of this checklist is to help you ensure that your review is both fully informative for ESRC introducers and assessment panel members and developmentally useful for applicants. Note: this checklist is a more detailed version of the 'Promptlist for Reviewers'.

Preparing to Conduct the Review

1. Have you first **checked whether you may have any conflict of interest as a reviewer** (see *FAQ 4.18* for examples of what constitutes a conflict of interest) of this proposal? Consider anything that the applicants might, in principle, perceive to threaten the impartiality of your review if they were ever to discover your identity. If your knowledge of or relationship with the applicants means that you might find it difficult to be impartial when commenting on the proposal, notify the ESRC contact point immediately. Please indicate why you would rather not comment on this occasion. ESRC staff may then make a note of your reason for future reference if necessary.
2. Have you also **read the entire proposal thoroughly to familiarise yourself with the focus of the research and how it is to be carried out?** Many reviewers start with the objectives and the non-technical summary to give themselves an initial overview. Then they read in depth the case for support, the remaining sections of the application form, and the other attachments.
3. Do you know what **the aims of the scheme are for the proposal** you are assessing, so you can judge how well the proposal fits within them?
4. Are you **conversant with full range of grades, assessment criteria and their descriptors** at your disposal? You will then be in a position to use them, as appropriate. They are set out in the separate ESRC guidance for reviewers provided via Je-S.
5. Are you familiar with and willing to accept **the ESRC's code of practice for reviewers?** You are expected to abide by this code and conduct your review with integrity: in a confidential, respectful, impartial, transparent, developmental, and timely manner. The code implies that your task is to judge the proposal, not the applicants. Avoid doing anything as a reviewer that you would perceive to be unfair if you were an applicant.
6. **Contact staff at the ESRC if you are unclear** about any aspect of the reviewing task. Having a clear initial sense of this task will help you to conduct a discerning, fair and useful review.

Working towards your Judgements and Reasons for them

1. Are you **providing clear evidence of your own expertise in the subject area** and stating if you are unsure about something? Be realistic about how far your background knowledge and experience enable you to make well-grounded judgements against the different

assessment criteria on this proposal. ESRC panel members will then be clear about your perceived capacity to judge the proposal's merit.

2. Are you **making the quality of the social science your over-arching concern and assessing the proposal on its own terms**, according to the case made by the applicants? Consciously avoid letting your own theoretical or methodological preferences intrude. The ESRC considers that social science phenomena are amenable to diverse and innovative approaches to investigation. Receptivity to new disciplinary thinking and methodological novelty are encouraged in order for social science to advance. An impartial and rigorous review which embraces the possibility of theoretical innovation and methodological pluralism will be of greatest assistance to ESRC introducers and assessment panel members, and most informative for applicants.
3. Are you **engaging in detail with the various strengths and weaknesses of the proposal** (rather than merely summarising its content and then offering a global judgement)? Be ready to draw attention to ways in which the proposal meets specific assessment criteria particularly well, and to point to any major logical flaws, contradictions or omissions. A fine-grained evaluation benefits the ESRC introducers and assessment panel members by alerting them to different aspects of the quality of the proposal. It also benefits the applicants by indicating in detail what they have done convincingly and what bears improvement.
4. Are you making **a reasoned judgement against each assessment criterion** which is based on evidence (or lack of it) contained in the proposal, or on your wider expert knowledge? It will then be transparent to ESRC introducers and assessment panel members why you arrived at your judgement and associated grade for each assessment criterion. The grounds for each judgement contained in the feedback will be equally transparent to the applicants, and so offer maximum potential to support their learning. Such transparency will give introducers, assessment panel members and applicants confidence that you have judged the proposal fairly.

Writing up the Review

1. Is **the grade you are giving against each assessment criterion consistent with your stated reasoning** in the accompanying feedback? Consistency enables ESRC introducers and assessment panel members quickly to comprehend both your judgement grade and why you assigned it.
2. Are you **assigning an overall grade to the proposal which is consistent with the grades you have given for each assessment criterion**? Your overall grade provides ESRC introducers and assessment panel members with their starting-point for determining the degree of agreement amongst reviewers about the merits of the proposal. It also offers ESRC staff a starting-point for ranking this proposal relative to others under consideration. So it is essential that your overall grade represents a synthesis of your judgements against the individual assessment criteria.
3. Are you constructing **a summary statement in the feedback which contextualises the proposal within current work in the field and synthesises your overall assessment of its merits and worthiness for funding**, consistent with the overall grade you have given it?

In the case of interdisciplinary applications, do the different disciplines contribute in a mutually supportive and coherent way?

4. Are you including in the feedback your **judgement of the applicants' ability to carry out the proposed programme of work**, based on the evidence in the proposal or your wider knowledge of the applicants' track record?
5. Where appropriate, are you being constructively critical in **identifying issues which the Principal Investigator could realistically address in her or his response** to anonymous reviewer feedback which the ESRC will be inviting?
6. Is the **language you are using in your feedback clear and jargon-free**, so that it can be readily understood by ESRC introducers and assessment panel members who are not expert in your field?

Completing the Review

1. Have you **completed all components of the review** where you feel competent to comment, in order fully to benefit ESRC assessors and applicants?
2. Are you ready to **submit the completed review within the requested timeframe**? (If not, have you let ESRC staff know well ahead of the deadline?)
3. Have you **avoided any statements in the feedback which might disclose your identity**? Remember that the applicants will be sent this feedback, which should remain anonymous.
4. Have you **made secure information storage or disposal arrangements**, so that the proposal and your review remain confidential between you and the ESRC?