

Peer Review College Standards of Service

This document explains what we expect from you and what you can expect from us.

Peer Review College members are expected to provide high quality reviews within their areas of expertise. Reviews are requested and must be submitted through the Research Councils' Joint electronic Submission (Je-S) System.

More specifically College members are expected to:

- provide informed, objective, and timely reviews when requested
- provide up to eight such reviews per year
- provide ESRC with a full review using the online Je-S system within 15 working days of receipt of the proposal, or a mutually agreed extended period if appropriate
- notify ESRC within five working days of a request for review if you are unable to meet the request, so that an alternative reviewer can be sought without delay
- notify ESRC of any prolonged period of absence (in excess of four weeks) in order that review requests can be suspended for an agreed period of time or provide an alternative email and postal address to which requests can be sent
- keep Je-S details up to date, particularly those elements relating to your availability to undertake reviews and describing your areas of expertise
- keep up to date with developments that may affect your role as a member of the College. Members are also encouraged to attend ESRC organised events and to review the ESRC website regularly for new content that may impact on your role.

ESRC will:

- limit the number of review requests to no more than eight in any 12 month period. Generally demand will be lower than this
- seek to ensure that all proposals sent to you for review are appropriate to your area of expertise
- avoid soliciting reviews during any period where you have indicated you will be temporarily unavailable
- make training available that explains your role within the ESRC process
- provide an annual individual peer review activity report
- undertake an annual review of your College member status (Fellow, Senior, member) and revise it as appropriate
- ensure that you are updated when necessary with developments which affect your role and responsibilities as a Peer Review College member.

We reserve the right to discontinue the membership of individuals who fail to observe these standards of service.

We also reserve the right to make reasonable changes to these standards of service. Any changes will be effected by a general notice to members of the Peer Review College.

Training

We have developed an on-line tutorial to enable you to understand our peer review process, the roles members may be asked to fulfil, how they fit into that process, and how to ensure that their contributions are as helpful as possible in reaching sound decisions. It takes about an hour to complete. We strongly urge all College members to complete the tutorial, which can be found at <http://peerreviewtraining.esrc.ac.uk>

Peer review activity report

Each year we will provide you with a short report summarising the peer review activity you have undertaken as a College member over the previous 12 months. This will include information on the number of reviews you have undertaken and how your grade compares to those from other reviewers on the same application. The report will also include details of response times. It will capture data on other Panels that you may have sat upon on behalf of the ESRC during the period. This will be sent to you during the autumn of each year.

Reviewer protocols

The Research Councils have adopted a code of practice 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 in accordance with instructions given in the Je-S Helptext and should refer any questions relating to reviewing the application to the ESRC. They 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 ESRC 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 judgement could be influenced by the potential conflict of interest.

The selection of academic reviewers is subject to certain constraints. We will not 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.