

Internal Review of Research Funding Applications – Guidance

Overview

As part of its commitment to increasing and diversifying research income, the University is implementing a formal process for the internal review of research proposals that fall within set criteria. This is focused on improving the quality of research proposals and ensuring consistency of approach at an institutional level. The process will be carried out in conjunction with REO Research Development Managers (RDMs), who will provide support for the development of proposals in the usual way alongside other REO specialists (such as the Impact and KE teams). The checks undertaken by REO specialists around ethics and costings will continue to be carried out in line with usual practice and timelines.

The applicant will be responsible for identifying and approaching academic colleagues to undertake the reviews of their proposal. The RDMs will note reviewers' names on the application's RCP record, log when the process is complete, and upload the reviews to RCP. The responsibility for approving an application for submission remains with the HoD, who will be able to view in RCP whether an internal review process has been completed and consider this as part of the approval process.

Proposals that fall within scope for this Internal Review process will not normally be submitted until internal review has been carried out and recorded on RCP.

Scope

The Internal Review process requires applicants to seek feedback from **at least two** academic colleagues on both outline/EoI and full proposals where the University of Essex is the lead institution for the application and the value of the application is above £50k, where **any** of the following criteria apply:

1. Any application to:
 - i. UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Research Councils;
 - ii. Nuffield Foundation;
 - iii. Leverhulme Trust;
 - iv. Wellcome Trust;
2. Applications to schemes identified to be strategically important by the PVC (Research);
3. Schemes where the funder has a cap on institutional application numbers - institutional sifting and selection is required;
4. Applications where there is a substantial resource implication for the University (e.g. Host Institution Commitment (HIC)).

The internal review process will operate alongside the internal sift processes we already have in place for applications to funding opportunities of strategic importance to the University, or where there is a limit on the number of institutional applications.

Internal Review process

1. The REO Pre-Award team will provide a link in their email to the guidance document and review template, which are published on the REO webpages. The RDM will advise on the process.
2. The RDM will support the development of the research proposal in the usual way, providing advice on the application and feedback on successive drafts.
3. Once a full draft has been produced, the applicant should approach **at least two academic** colleagues to review it, one of whom should be a specialist from the same or closely related area, and one from another discipline.
4. The applicant should inform the RDM and the Director of Research of the names of the reviewers. The RDM will note these on RCP.
5. The applicant should forward the full draft proposal and review template to their selected reviewers. Reviewers are asked to comment on the proposal's suitability for the scheme, and:
 1. clarity and accessibility of the proposal;
 2. importance and potential contribution to the field;
 3. urgency and timeliness of the research;
 4. methodology and feasibility of the research
 5. consideration of ethics, health & safety, and any other risk factors;
and, where relevant:
 6. plans for engagement and impact;
 7. consideration of equipment and technical support needs
6. Internal reviews should be completed and returned to the PI for consideration. The PI should forward them to the RDM **no later than 5 working days** before the internal deadline for institutional authorisation, which is a minimum of three working days before any external deadline for submission or internally agreed submission date.
7. The RDM will review the final draft of the application in line with usual practice. If, in light of all the feedback provided, and based on the scheme criteria, the RDM considers the proposal is not yet ready for submission, they will advise the REO Head of Research Development and Impact, who will provide a summary of the issues to the applicant and HoD, DoR and DDR for consideration. Final approval remains the responsibility of the HoD.

Exceptions

It is recognised that there may be instances, for example when the funder announces a call with a short deadline, where truncating or not following the agreed process will be necessary. To seek an exception, agreement should be sought from the DDR and REO Head of Research Development and Impact and noted on the RCP record.