

College of Life Sciences and Medicine

Mentoring & Peer Review Process and Conditions

The University's "Research Excellence Agenda" has identified a need for the University to improve its consistency in achieving a high level of research performance, including improving our success rates in winning external research grant funding.

To address this point, it has been agreed that there is a need for the University to move towards a system of internal peer review for certain proposals being submitted to external funding bodies. This is in line with several of our competitor institutions, who already have similar processes in place. There are indications that internal peer review will become an essential eligibility criterion for submissions to Research Councils in the near future. Therefore, we have a window of opportunity to introduce a system of peer review that suits our needs and preferences before this becomes a compulsory eligibility activity for all submissions to research councils.

In the College of Life Sciences and Medicine, the College Executive and Research Directors have decided that, in the first instance, there will be two broad categories of grants for which there will be a compulsory, formal mentoring or peer review process that must be completed before submission to the external funding body*. These categories are:

- Junior/mid range fellowships, new investigator applications and all grants from research staff who have not yet had a successful grant awarded as a lead applicant
- All grant proposals with a possibility of being over £250,000 if applying to a funder with full economic costing (fEC) **OR** over £150,000 if applying to Chief Scientist Office (CSO) or a funder without fEC
(note that for the School of Psychology the threshold for peer review has been set at £50,000 for all proposals)

*Contract research for industry is excluded from this process

The introduction of this system should be seen as formalisation of a process that many of our most successful colleagues already undertake. This process is intended to be supportive and constructive, and it is hoped that we will quickly benefit through an increase in the numbers of successful grants. This process is not intended to take the place of any informal peer reviewing process that is undertaken with colleagues, but should add value to current processes.

Definitions

Fellowships and New Investigator awards will be defined as those grants that are termed “fellowships” or “new investigator awards”, or similar wording by the external funding body, or any grant where a post-doctoral fellow will be the principal applicant and be expected to work independently to deliver the research project. This category will include career development awards. This category does not include Senior Fellowships or Personal Research Fellowships (those fellowships awarded at professorial level).

First grant as lead applicant will be defined as any applicant’s first project grant application as an independent PI, where the value of the grant is expected to exceed £20K, and will hold meaning until the first *successful* application to any one of these funding bodies.

Procedures

1) Fellowship/New Investigator applications and first grant as lead applicant

Potential applicants falling into the above categories will be asked to provide an abstract and a statement of the competitiveness of their application at an early stage, and in any case **at least 8 weeks** before any funding body deadline. This abstract and statement should be submitted to Research & Innovation (R&I), who will forward these documents to the relevant Head of School and Institute Research Director, copying in the College Director of Research for information. The applicant will be given the opportunity to discuss the application with the Head of School and/or Institute Research Director (or delegated deputy if appropriate).

This group will make the decision as to the suitability of the applicant and proposed research to the funding opportunity, and if satisfied that the applicant and the proposed research are appropriate, then a Mentor will be allocated to the applicant.

The proposal should be worked up in full consultation with the Mentor. The discussions with the Mentor should not replace discussions with colleagues, and these discussions should continue throughout preparation of the proposal. The applicant is encouraged to seek the further advice of colleagues and peers, but only the allocated Mentor will ultimately advise the Head of School on the suitability of the application for submission. The Mentor should act as an advisor/support only, and should not be expected to draft, revise or mark up any proposal. However, the Mentor should give the applicant sufficient advice and support, written when appropriate, on the general content, format, research plan, competitiveness and suitability of the research proposal to inform the development of the application. In addition to the advice and support directly from the Mentor, the Mentor should ensure that the applicant seeks appropriate additional peer review of the final proposal prior to submission.

The Mentor must sign the internal cover sheet before submission (or in exceptional circumstances signal approval in another way such as by email). By giving approval, the Mentor is confirming that the application is, in their opinion, of sufficient quality and competitiveness for submission. The Head of School will only sign the internal cover sheet following approval from the Mentor. If the Mentor does not see the final application or does not believe that the application has a reasonable chance of success, he/she will advise the Head of School accordingly so that the Head of School can decide whether or not to sign off the application. In the absence of the Head of School or designated deputy, then the Head of College or College Director of Research will substitute.

R&I will not be permitted to authorise submission of the application without Head of School or designated deputy's signature on the internal cover sheet.

2) All grants over £250K (fEC) or £150K (CSO or non-fEC funder) with the UoA academic as lead applicant

(note that this threshold is set at £50,000 for the School of Psychology).

All applicants whose grants fall into this category and where the lead investigator is based in the College of Life Sciences and Medicine will be required to show evidence of peer review by at least two colleagues before submission. At least one of the reviewers should not be directly involved in the application (for example as a co-applicant). All potential applicants in this category should disseminate their proposal to two academic colleagues to request their review of

the proposal. It is important that appropriate peer reviewers are identified as early as possible to maximise the value of this process, and to give the reviewers sufficient time to review. It would be appropriate to allow **at least 2 weeks** before the submission deadline for peer review to take place, unless a reviewer advises that a shorter time scale is acceptable to them. If any applicant is in doubt as to who could be a suitable peer reviewer for their proposal, then the advice of their Institute Research Director, Head of School or Research Programme Leader should be sought.

The reviewers will review the draft submission, and offer advice to the applicant on the general content, format, presentation, research plan, competitiveness and suitability of the research proposal.

Both reviewers will be required to sign the internal cover sheet (or in exceptional circumstances indicate in another way such as by email) to confirm that they have reviewed the submission and are satisfied that, in their view, the proposal is of sufficient quality for submission. The Head of School (or designated deputy) will only sign off the application for submission following confirmation by the reviewers. In the absence of any comments/signature from the reviewers, it will be at the discretion of the Head of School (or a designated deputy) to authorise submission of the proposal by means of signing the internal cover sheet and providing an explanation by email that can be filed by R&I.

R&I will not be permitted to authorise submission of the application without Head of School or a designated deputy's signature on the internal cover sheet.

Other Considerations

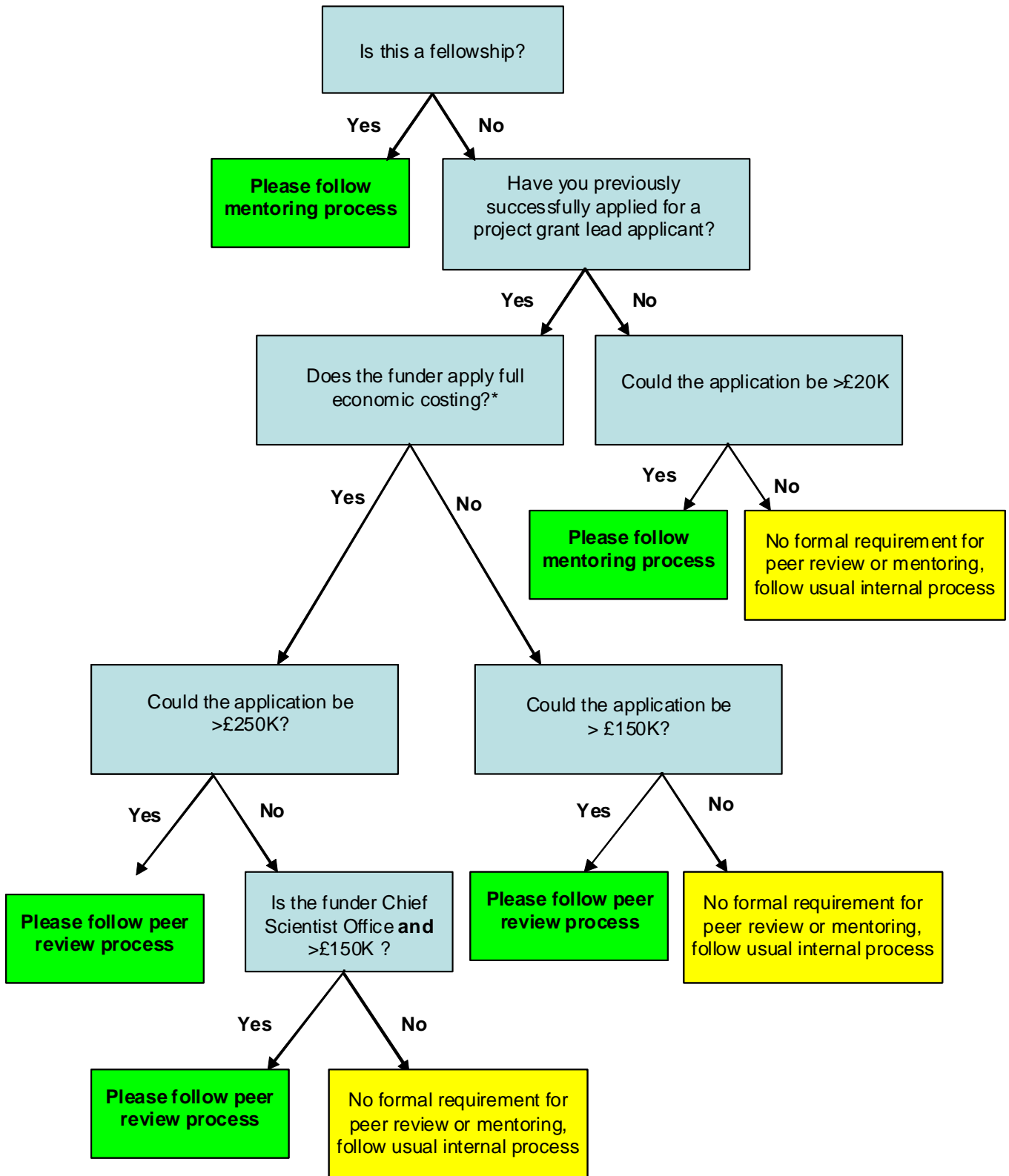
- **Fellowships:**
 - The Head of School will be sympathetic to requests to change the allocated mentor, for example for competitive or conflict-of-interest issues.
 - Accurate costings will not be required for the abstracts of eligible applications, but a description of the likely resource required should be detailed in the abstract. Research Financial Services (RFS) should be approached for accurate costings when the full application is started and should be kept informed by the applicant of any changes to the proposal that will have a knock-on effect on the project costings.

- **All Applications:**

- All applicants are encouraged to liaise with the points of contact at the funding body to optimise the fit of their proposal within the call and remit of the funding body.
- The College understands that absences due to prior commitments/unforeseen circumstances are inevitable, and may result in the levels of notice described here not always being possible. If an applicant is aware that that he/she will be absent in the weeks before a deadline and that this could impact on interactions with the reviewers/mentor or on getting the final draft to the reviewers/mentor, it will be imperative for the applicant to inform the reviewers/mentor as soon as possible such that a contingency plan can be formulated. Only under exceptional circumstances, will the Head of School, Head of College or Senior Vice Principal (depending on the financial value of the proposal) decide to permit submission in the absence of mentoring/peer review.
- R&I will be tracking which members of the College have been peer reviewers/mentors on applications, and this will be periodically reviewed by the Head of School to ensure that the work load of mentoring/peer review is spread appropriately.
- The College will expect successful applicants who have been through these processes to act as internal peer reviewers where appropriate for future applications.
- A process chart for the scheme is in the Appendix to this paper.

CLSM Mentoring and Peer Review Process

Please use this process chart to determine what procedure you should follow before submission of your grant application. Please refer to the “College of Life Sciences and Medicine Mentoring & Peer Review Process and Conditions” for detailed explanation of the relevant processes.



*please contact RFS if you are unsure
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