Health and Care Research Wales Faculty
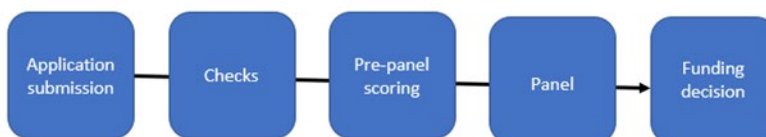
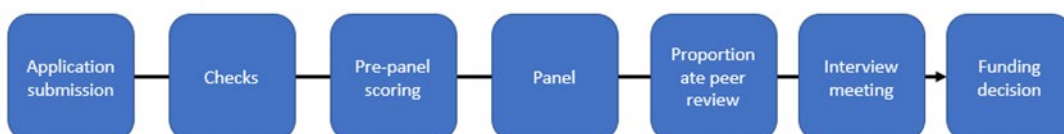## Personal awards assessment process overview

Principles:

- We aim to ensure that our assessment processes are appropriate to the proposed research /project and investment and with respect to its scale and complexity.
- The aims and objectives of funding opportunities along with timeframe and resource required are some of the factors that determine the design of the assessment process. As such, some of the funding decisions may be made after a robust panel assessment considering the application against the award criteria and other funding opportunities will go through an initial panel review followed by proportionate peer review and a panel interview stage.
- We are committed to continually improving our funding assessment processes to ensure we meet the highest standards for decision making and are as inclusive as we can be.
- We recognise the benefits of simplifying and standardising the processes involved in research funding applications and have streamlined and kept processes consistent where possible.
- We continue to work to improve the experience of our applicants and assessors.

We have outlined two assessment processes below where process B follows the same steps as process A but has additional stages for more complex and applications with greater investment considerations.

Assessment process A

Application submission → Checks → Pre-panel scoring → Panel → Funding decision

Assessment process B

Application submission → Checks → Pre-panel scoring → Panel → Proportionate peer review → Interview meeting → Funding decision

Assessment Process A

Checks
Checks form the initial part of the assessment process, these involve initial eligibility checks ensuring all information needed is provided within the form and all necessary signatures are present and basic eligibility and remit criteria has been met by the applicants as outlined in the award guidance. This initial check is carried out by the Faculty team. If applications are outside of remit at this stage, applications will be removed from the process and the applicant provided with feedback.

Pre-panel scoring
Each application will have 3 Designated Members (DM) allocated, depending on areas of expertise and ensuring any conflicts of interest are avoided.

Each DM is asked to score and take account of the following when assessing the applications; **the person** (e.g., the applicant), **the project** (e.g., the research, where applicable) and **the place** (e.g., host organisation).

Should there be a very high number of applications the number of panel members asked to score each application will be increased to enable identification of those applications that should not be put forward for discussion at panel.

Scoring templates are provided for the DMs to provide their scores and give a brief summary to explain the scores given; these comments will be used in the feedback to applicants where necessary. Scoring practice across all panels is consistent with scores based on the score indicators in the scoring matrix (which is a scale of 1-10 see appendix 1). We have expanded the scoring range to help prioritise applications that receive a fundable score and to aid ranking.

DM scores are collated and ranked prior to the panel meeting. Any applications whose mean scores fall below the cut off threshold agreed by the Chair in discussion with the panel at the outset of the meeting will not be discussed at the meeting as they will be considered definitely unfundable.

Panel
All panel members will be expected to have read all the applications to be discussed at the meeting.

At the panel meeting, all Lead DMs are requested to present a full review of each application, appraising members of its strengths and weaknesses in relation to the assessment criteria set out.

DM2 should supplement the presentation by the LDM. In the interest of panel efficiency, it is recommended that the DM2 and DM3 highlight only issues, concerns

or points of view that have not already been covered by the LDM. DM3 will be required to summarise the points of feedback for the applicant as a result of the panel discussion.

Following the discussion led by the DMs, the Chair will seek the views of the public members on public involvement and engagement aspects of the application. Comments on the application will then be received from all members of the panel. The Chair will provide a summary of discussions for the panel and to support applicant feedback. DMs will be asked for guide scores and all panel members will then be invited to give an overall score.

Below is an outline of the process that will be followed for each application:

1. Declaration of any conflicts of interest
2. Lead DM (LDM) assessment (maximum of 5 minutes)
3. Second DM (DM 2) comments (maximum of 3 minutes)
4. Third DM (DM 3) comments (maximum of 2 minutes)
5. Public member comments
6. Panel discussion
7. Chair summary of panel discussion
8. All DMs give guide scores based on their initial assessment and panel discussion
9. Panel members give an overall score which is used to collate and rank scores during the meeting.

Following the application discussions, the Faculty team will produce a ranking spreadsheet based on the mean scores given. Applications with the same overall mean score will be displayed in a random order based on their reference numbers. The panel will be invited to discuss the relative prioritisation of the proposals with the same score to ensure proposals are in the right order and agree outcomes to provide funding recommendations to go to Welsh Government for approval.

A summary of the decision and main feedback points will be provided by DM3. This summary information will be used to provide written feedback to unsuccessful applicants and any conditions of funding for successful applicants or points of advice from the panel.

Funding Decision

Once the Chair's report has been finalised, the Research & Development Division in Welsh Government will be provided with a ranked list of those applications recommended for funding. When a decision on funding has been given, the Faculty team will send outcome letters to all applicants, this will be followed by award letters

from Welsh Government. Funding announcements are under strict embargo and should not be shared until they are formally announced by Health and Care Research Wales.

Assessment Process B

Process B follows the same format as process A but includes additional steps following the panel meeting. After the initial panel meeting those which are successful are put through to the next stage which includes a peer review and an interview.

Peer review

Peer review will initiated be on a proportionate and case-by-case basis. Should a DM feel that there is a need for a further review of an application due to a lack of panel member expertise in a specific area a review will be attained from a relevant reviewer in that field. Public member (reviews can also be sought where the DM feels it would be of benefit to have a review from a public member with relevant lived experience.

Interview Meeting

Interview panel members play a vitally important role in generating a high-quality discussion of the potential Fellow and their application.

For the interview meeting there will be 3 DMs these will be the same as from the initial panel meeting. During the meeting the applicant will be asked to give a ten-minute presentation on their proposal. The DMs lead the questioning of the candidate before giving the opportunity for other panel members to ask questions All panel members will then be asked to score, and the Chair will provide a summary of discussions. It is the role of DM3 to capture feedback for both successful and unsuccessful applicants which will be used as part of the outcome letters.

Following the candidate interviews, the Faculty team will produce a ranking spreadsheet based on the mean scores given by panel members. Applications with the same overall mean score will be displayed in a random order based on their reference numbers. The interview panel will be invited to discuss the relative prioritisation of the proposals with the same score and to agree funding recommendations to go forward for Welsh Government for approval.

Funding Decision

Once the Chair's report has been finalised, Welsh Government will be provided with a ranked list of those applications put forward for funding. When approval of these has been given, the Faculty team will send outcome letters to all applicants, this will be followed by award letters from Welsh Government. Funding announcements are

under strict embargo and should not be shared until they are formally announced by Health and Care Research Wales.

Conflicts of Interest

Conflicts of interest are judged on an application-by-application basis. Panel members with a conflict of interest may be asked to leave the meeting for the discussion of that item. The degree of conflict of interest is measured as follows:

- The Chair shall be deemed to have a conflict of interest if any of the applicants are from the same institution or there is a personal relationship with any of the applicants.
- Other members of the panel shall be deemed to have a conflict of interest if any of the applicants are from the same department and the conflict is classed as direct.
- If the applicant is from the same institution as an LDM, a conflict of interest will not necessarily arise, and this can be left to the discretion of the panel member and the Chair. Should the Chair decide that a conflict of interest does exist, that panel member may be asked to leave the meeting for the duration of the relevant item.

Conflicts of Interest should be declared at the earliest opportunity, conflicted members are not able to score on applications at any point in the process.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

We are committed to driving a culture of equality, diversity and inclusion, providing the best environment for individuals and teams of people from all backgrounds to thrive. Our panel members will all have completed training in unconscious bias and EDI. Our evolving processes are designed to reduce biases against gender, ethnicity or other protected characteristics, demonstrating our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. We will take steps to improve the assessment process by utilising the talent and resources offered by assessors from underrepresented groups such as women, early career researchers, and members of all ethnicities. Reducing and challenging bias in peer review and assessment is critically important to ensure the integrity of the process and to help advance equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Appendix 1

Assessment Criteria

DMs are to provide a score from 1 - 10 (1 being lowest and 10 highest) and comment for each of the criteria (the person; the project and the place).

Person

Score	Descriptors
10 Exceptional Considerable potential to become an internationally competitive researcher Highest priority for funding	• Exceptionally high achiever at the appropriate level for this award • Clearly demonstrates necessary expertise and skills set • Identifies and proactively seeks opportunities for career advancement
9 Excellent Significant potential to become an internationally competitive researcher Very high priority for funding	• Very high achiever at the appropriate level for this award • Demonstrates necessary expertise and skills set • Identifies and proactively seeks opportunities for career advancement
8 Very High Quality Potential to become an internationally competitive researcher High priority for funding	• High achiever at the appropriate level for this award • Demonstrates necessary expertise and skills set • Identifies and highlights opportunities for career advancement
7 High Quality Significant potential to become a leading edge, nationally competitive research leader Fundable	• High achiever at the appropriate level for this award • Demonstrates majority of skills and expertise required • Identifies and proactively seeks opportunities for career advancement
6 High Quality Potential to become a leading edge, nationally competitive research leader Fundable	• Potentially a high achiever at the appropriate level for this award • Demonstrates most skills and expertise required

	• Identifies some opportunities for career advancement
5 Good Quality Some potential but not yet fully demonstrated Unfundable	• Candidate does not demonstrate the appropriate level of experience for this award • Demonstrates some skills and expertise required • Limited opportunities for career advancement
4 Potentially Useful Several Weaknesses Unfundable	• Candidate does not demonstrate the appropriate level of experience for this award • Demonstrates some skills and expertise required
3 Potentially Useful Major Weaknesses Unfundable	• Candidate does not demonstrate the appropriate level of experience for this award • Demonstrates few of the skills required
2 Poor Quality Bordering on unacceptable Unfundable	• Candidate is not at the appropriate level of experience for this award
1 Unacceptable Quality or Serious Ethical Concern	

Project

Score	Descriptors
10 Exceptional Considerable potential to become an internationally competitive researcher Highest priority for funding	• Crucial scientific question or knowledge gap • Innovative methodology and design • Excellent training plans, with well justified placements and collaborations • Excellent value for money
9 Excellent Significant potential to become an internationally competitive researcher Very high priority for funding	• Crucial scientific question or knowledge gap • Innovative methodology and design

	- Very good training plans, with well justified placements and collaborations - Excellent value for money
8 Very High Quality Potential to become an internationally competitive researcher High priority for funding	- Key scientific question or knowledge gap - Robust methodology and design (some innovation) - Good training plans, with well justified placements and collaborations - Very good value for money
7 High Quality Significant potential to become a leading edge, nationally competitive research leader Fundable	- Worthwhile scientific question or knowledge gap - Robust methodology and design - Robust training plans, with well justified placements and collaborations - Very good value for money
6 High Quality Potential to become a leading edge, nationally competitive research leader Fundable	- Worthwhile scientific question or knowledge gap - Sound methodology and design - Appropriate training plans, with well justified placements and collaborations - Good value for money
5 Good Quality Some potential but not yet fully demonstrated Unfundable	- Worthwhile scientific question or knowledge gap - Methodologically flawed study - Appropriate training plans, with well justified placements and collaborations - Adequate value for money
4 Potentially Useful Several Weaknesses Unfundable	- Scientific question potentially useful but requires major revision - Methodologically flawed study - Adequate training has not been identified
3 Potentially Useful Major Weaknesses Unfundable	- Scientific question poorly defined and methodologically flawed - Adequate training has not been identified

Score	Descriptors
2 Poor Quality Bordering on unacceptable Unfundable	• Poor quality project proposal and inappropriate training plans
1 Unacceptable Quality or Serious Ethical Concern	

Place

Score	Descriptors
10 Exceptional Considerable potential to become an internationally competitive researcher Highest priority for funding	• Environment well justified with high scientific impact in chosen field • Demonstrable commitment from supervisors and/or mentors and host institution • Career development actively supported with appropriate placements and collaborations identified and encouraged
9 Excellent Significant potential to become an internationally competitive researcher Very high priority for funding	• Environment well justified with high scientific impact in chosen field • Demonstrable commitment from supervisors and/or mentors and host institution • Career development actively supported with appropriate placements and collaborations identified and encouraged
8 Very High Quality Potential to become an internationally competitive researcher High priority for funding	• Environment well justified with high scientific impact in chosen field • Demonstrable commitment from supervisors and/or mentors and host institution • Career development actively supported with appropriate placements and collaborations identified and encouraged
7 High Quality Significant potential to become a leading edge, nationally competitive research leader	• Environment well justified with high scientific impact in chosen field

Fundable	• Demonstrable commitment from supervisors and/or mentors and host institution • Career development actively supported with appropriate placements and collaborations identified and encouraged
6 High Quality Potential to become a leading edge, nationally competitive research leader Fundable	• Environment well justified with high scientific impact in chosen field • Some evidence of commitment from supervisors and/or mentors and host institution • Career development supported with appropriate collaborations and placements identified
5 Good Quality Some potential but not yet fully demonstrated Unfundable	• Environment poorly justified with low scientific impact in chosen field • Commitment from supervisors and/or mentors and host institution • Career development supported with appropriate collaborations and placements identified
4 Potentially Useful Several Weaknesses Unfundable	• Environment not adequately justified or inadequate evidence of scientific impact • Weak commitment from supervisors and/or mentors and host institution
3 Potentially Useful Major Weaknesses Unfundable	• Inappropriate host environment or supervisor/mentor • Poor supporting statements from supervisors and/or mentors and/or host institution
2 Poor Quality Bordering on unacceptable Unfundable	• Weak commitment from supervisors and/or mentors and/or host institution
1 Unacceptable Quality or Serious Ethical Concern	