



BBSRC Guidance Notes for Reviewers Using the Je-S System

These notes are intended to provide reviewers with specific guidance for the completion of the reviewer form. They should be read in conjunction with the reviewer protocols. Specific guidance is available for each individual section of the report that you are asked to complete.

A full justification for your assessment, indicating the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal, should be provided. In identifying the strengths and weaknesses you should clearly state which should be accorded the greater significance and why. It is also helpful to raise issues or concerns with the proposal in the form of explicit questions for the applicants.

You should note that your review will be provided, unattributed, to the investigator, who will be allowed the opportunity to comment on any factual errors and answer any specific queries raised in the review.

A. Reviewer Self-Assessment

Comments in this section will not be sent to the applicant but will be provided to the Peer Review Committee or Panel.

1. Knowledge of the Applicant

Indicate briefly in what capacity you know the applicant(s) and their work. If there are any potential conflicts of interest, please contact the BBSRC Office before reading the proposal. Examples of a conflict of interest include:

- Employed by the same institution as the applicant(s)
- Actively involved in research collaborations with the applicants(s)
- Working closely with the applicant(s), for example as a co-author or PhD Supervisor, or has worked closely in the last 4 years
- Holding a current position on the governing body of or an honorary position within the institution(s) of the applicant(s)
- In receipt of personal remuneration in excess of £5,000 per annum from the applicant's organisation
- Personal/family relationship with the applicant(s)

2. Your areas of expertise

Indicate briefly the areas of your expertise that are relevant to your assessment. Please indicate any areas of the proposal that you consider you are not qualified to assess, to enable the Office to select additional referees in these areas.

B. Application assessment

ALL comments in this section will be sent, unedited, to the applicant. Your identity will not be revealed.

SECTION 1: OVERALL SCORE

Please indicate an overall score for this application, taking into account the definitions of each score. Please tick **one** box only.

Score	Description	Definition
6	Exceptional Fundable	Work that is at the leading edge internationally, addresses all of the assessment criteria, and meets the majority of them to an exceptional level. Likely to have a significant impact on the field.
5	Excellent Fundable	Work that is of a high international standard, and addresses and meets the majority of the assessment criteria to a very high level. Will answer important questions in the field.
4	Very Good Fundable	Work that is internationally competitive and meets the majority of the assessment criteria to a high level. Will advance the field.
3	Good Fundable	Work that has merit and meets the majority of the assessment criteria to an adequate level. Likely to advance the field.
2	Not Competitive Not Fundable	Work that is potentially of some merit, and meets some of the assessment criteria to an adequate level, but which is not internationally competitive. Unlikely to advance the field significantly.
1	Unfundable Not Fundable	Work that is of no significant scientific merit, flawed, or duplicative of other research, or for which the applicants do not present evidence of a satisfactory track record, and which does not meet the majority of the assessment criteria to an adequate level. Unlikely to advance the field.

SECTION 2: OVERALL ASSESSMENT

1. Scientific excellence

Comment on the extent to which the proposal meets the highest international standards of current research in its field. High performance against this factor will indicate a project of the highest standard, competitive with the best activity anywhere in the world.

It is not necessary to extensively restate the programme plan other than as an aid to making critical comment.

a) Clarity of hypotheses, aims, and objectives

Comment on whether the aims and objectives are understandable and unambiguous, and whether it will be clear when the objectives have been achieved.

If the work is proposing or testing hypotheses, please comment on whether these hypotheses are clear and appropriate for meeting the objectives.

b) Strengths and weaknesses of the experimental design

Comment on the strengths and the weaknesses of the experiments that are proposed.

c) Feasibility of the work programme, given the track-records of the applicants

Comment on the skills and experience of the investigator(s) and team (including project partners) to deliver the proposed research. Refer to Part 1 of the Case for Support and the CVs.

2. Strategic Relevance

a) Relevance to industry and other stakeholders

Comment on any relevance the application may have in providing underpinning science which meets industrial needs, or addresses the potential policy requirements for other BBSRC stakeholders.

b) Relevance to BBSRC strategy

BBSRC has a set of Council-wide strategic priorities (research and policy) that are applicable to all aspects of our funding; as described here <https://bbsrc.ukri.org/funding/grants/priorities/>. Comment on whether and to what extent the proposal addresses the research and policy priority areas of BBSRC.

3. Economic and Social Impact

Impact refers to the benefits scientific research has on the economy, society and knowledge. Examples of impact outputs are available at <https://bbsrc.ukri.org/funding/grants/priorities/>. A key element in this factor will be the arrangements that exist within the project to achieve the necessary interaction with relevant users that will ensure that these aims are realised.

4. Timeliness and promise

Comment on the extent to which the application is particularly appropriate at the present time, or offers longer-term benefits over and above the direct value of the research.

Timeliness factors include:

- addressing a subject of pressing topicality or intense international competition or
- exploiting an opportunity available for a limited period, such as access to particular data, samples or facilities or the availability of a particular person.

Promise factors include:

- the opportunity for a new investigator to begin working in a research area of particular future importance
- the opportunity to secure the availability of or access to data or materials for future research
- the development of techniques and tools of broader future application.

5. Value for money

Comments are sought on the extent to which the resources requested, relative to the anticipated scientific gains, represent an attractive investment of BBSRC funds.

UK Government funding for university research is provided through the Dual Support mechanism, in which underpinning and infrastructure funding comes from the four regional Funding Councils, and the Research Councils provide grants for the additional costs of specific research projects.

There may be factors which make an application particularly good or poor value for money. For example, an application attracting a high level of industrial or other external support, an application with a high level of new equipment or infrastructure investment from university funds, or an international or inter-institutional collaboration which shares expensive costs very effectively would do well under this criterion. Conversely, an application which duplicates resources available elsewhere or seeks to compete rather than collaborate with other groups might not, depending on the circumstances.

Resources under Directly Incurred, Directly Allocated (except estates costs) and Exceptions can be assessed for their necessity and appropriateness. Estates and Indirect costs must not be considered, and the overall costs of the grant should not normally affect your assessment of its quality. Referees may comment on the amount of PI/Co-I time requested, but not on the associated costs.

Particular care is needed in connection with the assessment of the salary levels requested for RAs (both named and unnamed). [BBSRC's Grants Guide](#) (section 5.9) states that applicants should seek to determine the extent to which market conditions make it difficult to recruit staff of appropriate quality in areas of high market demand and therefore require an uplift from normal salary levels. Salaries for research staff should take account of both the skill levels needed for the work and any shortages or difficulties in recruiting staff in particular areas.

6. Staff training potential of the project

Where resources are requested for postdoctoral or other research staff, comments are sought on the extent to which the proposed project will provide research training and development opportunities of benefit both to the individual(s) employed, and to the wider science base beyond the completion of the specific project. For example, the project may give staff the opportunity to acquire new skills that are in demand.

SECTION 3: SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Please identify specific issues which have influenced your assessment of this proposal and which you wish the applicant to address before the grant funding Committee meets.

1. Technical issues

Comment on any technical issues that you wish to draw to the attention of the applicant, for them to address.

2. Data sharing

Comment on the strategy for communicating the outputs of the research. All applications must include a statement on data sharing that may include details of:

- Data areas and data types - the volume, type and content of data that will be generated e.g. experimental measurements, records and images;
- Standards and metadata - the standards and methodologies that will be adopted for data collection and management, and why these have been selected;
- Relationship to other data available in public repositories;
- Secondary use - further intended and/or foreseeable research uses for the completed dataset(s);
- Methods for data sharing - planned mechanisms for making these data available, e.g. through deposition in existing public databases or on request, including access mechanisms where appropriate;
- Proprietary data - any restrictions on data sharing due to the need to protect proprietary or patentable data;
- Timeframes - timescales for public release of data;
- Format of the final dataset.

BBSRC recognises that effective data sharing is already practised in certain areas and expects this to continue. Through consultation, BBSRC has identified two further areas where there is a particularly strong scientific case for data sharing. These are:

- Data arising from high volume experimentation
- Low throughput data arising from long time series or cumulative approaches

BBSRC expects data sharing to take place in these areas. Data sharing in other areas is also encouraged where there is strong scientific need and where it is cost effective. Applicants may claim justifiable costs associated with data sharing activities.

3. Research involving animals

BBSRC works in partnership with the National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs) and other funders, with regard to responsibility in the use of vertebrate animals in bioscience research. Details of expectations can be found in the document [Responsibility in the use of animals in bioscience research](#). For each proposal that uses animals reviewers are asked to assess whether:

- the research question can be addressed without the use of animals
- the potential benefit justifies the possible adverse effects to the animals
- the numbers of animals to be used is appropriate
- the species is justified.

These requirements apply whether or not the animals are to be purchased with funds requested within the proposal itself.

4. Ethical or societal issues raised by the proposed work

Comment on any ethical or societal issues raised by the proposed research, giving consideration to the following:

- Is there a clear need for this research? Could the purpose be perceived to be trivial?
- Does the purpose imply a lack of respect for human/animal life, or the environment?
- Is there a potential for the outcomes of the research to be misused (e.g., research tools, therapeutic or agri-food developments that could also be used in bioterrorism)?
- Could there be a perceived threat to consumer choice or human dignity?
- Could the research generate information that could be used to discriminate against ethnic groups or other under-represented groups, developing countries etc.?
- Does the risk of the research (e.g., to the environment or food safety) outweigh any benefit?
- Will the outcome benefit the public, or will it only benefit e.g., the industrial/business community?
- Is there a potential for public concern about the proposed research?