

Reviewer guidance for UK Intelligence Community Postdoctoral Research Fellowships 2024

Introduction

The Government Office for Science offers [UK Intelligence Community \(IC\) Postdoctoral Research Fellowships](#) to outstanding early career science or engineering researchers. These Research Fellowships are designed to promote unclassified basic research in areas of interest to the intelligence, security, and defence communities.

Each year members of the IC identify research topics and the Research Fellows work locally with their University Research Advisor to develop and submit research proposals that align with the topics.

The research is conducted by the Research Fellows while working in partnership with the University Research Advisor and collaborating with an advisor from the Intelligence Community (IC Advisor).

The Research Fellowships are aimed at early career researchers from all branches of science and engineering who have up to five years postdoctoral experience. Only citizens of Australia, Canada, the EEA, New Zealand, Switzerland, the UK or the US can apply.

Each application for the UK IC Postdoctoral Research Fellowships is capped at a maximum contribution from the Academy of £250,000 over the 2-year period. Research Fellowships must be held at a UK higher education institution/university.

New Eligibility Requirement: nationality restrictions and basic security checks are now required by the Government Office for Science. This is to mitigate risks in the researchers' relationships with UK government and to safeguard awardees. Nationality is a protected characteristic under the [Equality Act 2010](#), however exceptions for the purpose of safeguarding national security are permitted.

The scheme has one-stage assessment process. Applications will be assessed by reviewers consisting of the UK government intelligence, security, and defence community members (under the auspices of the Government Office for Science) and Academy Fellows. The reviewers will provide comments against each assessment criteria, the overall quality of the application, and make a recommendation on whether the applicant should be funded. The selection panel will consider the reviewers' comments and select the top ranked candidates for awards. To ensure both diversity and excellence, awards will be distributed across the different topics.

The reviews should be submitted online through the Academy's Grants Management System (<https://grants.raeng.org.uk/>).

Confidentiality

Applications and reviews are submitted to the Academy in confidence.

- Reviewers should not discuss and share the application and assessment information with any third party without prior approval from the Academy.
- Reviewers should not discuss the application and have any contact with the applicant
- Reviewers should not retain any hard copies and electronic versions of application documents once their role as reviewer has been completed.
- The identity of reviewers will not be made known to applicants, but may be revealed to the panel members of the assessment process.

Conflict of interest

Reviewers should inform the Academy if they believe they have any conflict of interest, or could be perceived by others to have a conflict of interest, which may affect their ability to provide a fair and independent review of an application. The Academy will then decide on the appropriate course of action. Conflicts include, but are not limited to, knowing the applicant outside of or through work, having a working relationship with their organisation or having a commercial interest relevant to the application.

Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)

The Academy's research programmes are aligned with the Declaration on Research Assessment ([DORA](#)), which is a set of principles aiming to improve the ways in which the output of research is evaluated by funding agencies, academic institutions, and other parties. The outputs from research are many and varied, and as a funder of engineering research the Academy needs to assess the quality and impact of these outputs in order to make awards - it is thus imperative that research output is measured accurately and evaluated wisely.

In the assessment of research output, we would like to emphasise that all outputs are welcome and considered valuable to the Academy. Outputs can include open data sets, software, publications, commercial, entrepreneurial or industrial products, clinical practice developments, educational products, policy publications, evidence synthesis pieces and conference publications. With regard to research articles published in peer-reviewed journals, the scientific content of a paper is much more important than publication metrics or the identity of the journal in which it was published.

We value and appreciate the time and effort that reviewers give to support our research programmes. A good, helpful review for the Academy is one which assesses research on its own merits rather than by surrogate measures, such as on the basis of the journal in which research

is published.

Guidelines on the use of generative AI in the grant application process

1. **Exclusion of AI in Evaluation:** Assessors must refrain from using generative AI tools to make judgments or write feedback on grant applications. The Academy's approach relies on the expertise of its Fellows (or other assessors identified by Fellows or Academy staff) in evaluating applications and passing on their knowledge to the next generation. Any reliance on machine intelligence is not in line with our established working methods.
2. **Confidentiality of Application Content:** Assessors are explicitly prohibited from sharing the content of grant applications with any generative AI tool as this can lead to the submitted data being used for other purposes. Maintaining the confidentiality of the application materials ensures the integrity of the assessment process and upholds the trust placed in the Academy's evaluation procedures.
3. **Detection of improper use of AI:** At present the Academy has no formal tools for identifying whether AI has been used in generating content (although it may seek to acquire such tools in future, subject to strict data security requirements), and therefore is primarily relying on honesty and integrity from applicants. However, the use of current tools can generally be identified through close reading, particularly if the applicant has also been interviewed. Exceptionally, assessors may request a short interview with applicants that they would otherwise not have interviewed prior to confirming funding, to build confidence that there has not been improper use of AI tools.

As stated in the applicant guidance notes, applicants must provide clear acknowledgement if they have used generative AI tools in the process of writing their grant applications. This includes disclosing the name of the tool used and describing how it was utilised. The statement should be added to the 'Reference' section of the application.

National Security

The Academy is the UK's National Academy for engineering and technology and seeks to increase the potential positive benefit that innovations can have for society, whilst reducing the risks of harm. Hence, in all our activities, we seek to minimise the risk that technology developed as part of work that we support could be misused by a foreign state to build a capacity to target UK interests in a hostile fashion or to control or repress their population. There is a risk that for some grant activities, failure to protect IP and a lack of due diligence into collaborators could result in sensitive technology being transferred to and misused by a hostile

or repressive foreign state.

National security risks are managed in the first instance by the Academy's steering group and its National Security Research Group, and the Academy does not therefore require expert reviewers to focus on these issues. Any concerns raised by reviewers, however, will be directly passed on into our internal processes.

If you believe there is a security risk, please contact Programme Manager Claudia Allori at Claudia.allori@raeng.org.uk

Online Grants Management System

Applications have been submitted through the Academy's Grants Management System (GMS) at <https://grants.raeng.org.uk> and reviews must also be undertaken on the system. Reviewers may already have an account with the Academy, e.g. from being the Academy Fellow, previous reviewers, or grant applicants. The same login details should be used. Once logged into the system, reviewers will be presented with the applications that have been allocated to review. Clicking on the application reference number (in the format ICRF2425-8-xxx) will take reviewers through to the application summary page, where reviewers can view the application and access the review form. A visual step-by-step guide on using the system has been sent to you along with this document.

Please save your reviews as often as you can, making use of the Save buttons beneath each scoring criterion. Furthermore, please avoid having multiple Flexi-Grant windows opened at the same time. **If you do not click the 'Save' buttons at least once within 120 minutes, the system will timeout and you will lose your work.**

Once a review form is completed, the 'submit review' button will become available at the bottom right corner of the form. Please note that the submitted review form cannot be altered and will be read by the selection panel members only.

Common cases of unconscious bias

Before review and assessment, reviewers and the selection panel members are reminded of the following common cases of unconscious bias that should be avoided during the review and assessment process:

- **Recent PhD graduates:** applicants' research profiles should be assessed by their research track record that is adequate for delivering the research proposal, rather than by the year they have obtained PhD
- **Applicant's PhD awarded more than 5 years ago:** all applications assigned for review and assessment have been checked and meet the eligibility criteria. For the applicants, whose PhD were awarded more than 5 years ago, extenuating circumstances (e.g. maternity/paternity, extended sick leave or national service) have

been considered

- **Staying in the same institution:** applicants' research independency should NOT be assessed purely by the change of the institution. Reviewers and the panel members should assess the support provided by the host institution and its appropriateness for the research programme proposed.

All applications are assessed on equal terms regardless of the sex, age and/or ethnicity of the applicant.

Review form

For each application, reviewers should provide:

- **commentary against each assessment criteria** (see below)
- **an overall score out of 7 and comment on the overall quality of the application**
- **a YES or NO recommendation on whether the applicant should proceed to next stage**

The assessment criteria include:

1. Candidate

- quality of the applicant's research track record

2. Research quality and vision

- quality of the applicant's research vision, relevance, and novelty of the approach to the chosen research topic

3. Impact

- the potential contribution of the research to the UK government intelligence, security, and defence community

4. Research environment

- quality and level of support and commitment from the University Research Advisor and the host institution to complete the research fellow's research project and support their career development.

Overall comment, score (out of 7), and YES or NO recommendation for an award

The overall score is out of seven and is defined below. **If a YES recommendation is given, the overall score must be above 5.**

Rating	Definitions	Recommendation for an award
7	Outstanding (worthy of a Fellowship)	YES
6	Excellent (worthy of a Fellowship)	
5	Very good (potential for a Fellowship/reserve)	

4	Good (worthy, but uncompetitive for this scheme)	NO
3	Average	
2	Below average	
1	Poor	

Feedback

Where possible the Academy will provide feedback to applicants. **Please ensure that any comments provided are gender-neutral and are both complete and specific enough to allow the Academy to derive useful and constructive feedback for applicants.**

Selection panel meeting

The Academy staff will collate all reviewers' comments and scores into a summary table, and rank the applications by overall score and the Yes/No recommendations. These are presented to the selection panel for a final decision on which applications should be awarded.

Where there is disagreement between the selection panel members on an application, the following process should be followed:

- Each member of the panel should be offered the opportunity to give reasons why they agree or disagree with the decision and raise any concerns;
- Following this discussion, the members of the panel will be asked to indicate clearly whether they wish for the application to proceed or not. The consensus will carry the decision;
- If there is no majority, the Chair will make the final decision.

All decisions made at the meeting are final and binding.

Contact

If you have any further queries on the review process or on using the GMS, please contact Programme Manager Claudia Allori at Claudia.allori@raeng.org.uk