How peer review works: grant applications

Researchers

submit applications to funding body

In-house staff

- log and acknowledge receipt
- check to ensure applications meet basic eligibility criteria
- send to peer reviewers

Peer reviewers

- examine and assess the application for such matters as quality and track record of researcher(s), research design and methodology, originality and value for money
- grade in accordance with a pre-determined scale

Some funding bodies allow applicants to nominate one or more reviewers themselves

Many funding bodies have established panels of reviewers, for whom they provide training before they undertake reviews.

The number of reviewers will usually depend on the scale of the funding request, and may range from 2 or 3 up to 6 or 8

Peer reviewers are not paid, and may spend up to 8 hours reviewing a proposal

In-house staff

- receive assessments
- where competition for funds is intense, staff may inform applicants with low grades that their applications have been withdrawn, and provide feedback from reviewers
- for applications that pass a grading threshold, staff may transmit reviewers' comments to applicants, and invite a response

Researchers

respond to reviewers' comments if given the opportunity

In-house staff

transmit applications to funding committee

Funding committee

- consider reviewers' assessments and recommendations, and any responses from applicants
- assign final grades to applications, and agree feedback as appropriate
 - make funding decisions

Success rates in UK Research Council competitions averaged around 28% in 2005-06. Since then they have fallen to well under 20% in several competitions

Members of funding committees may individually review and grade applications before the committee meets