
Guide for Carnegie Research Assessors

Carnegie Trust for the
Universities of Scotland

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THE CARNEGIE TRUST
FOR THE UNIVERSITIES OF SCOTLAND

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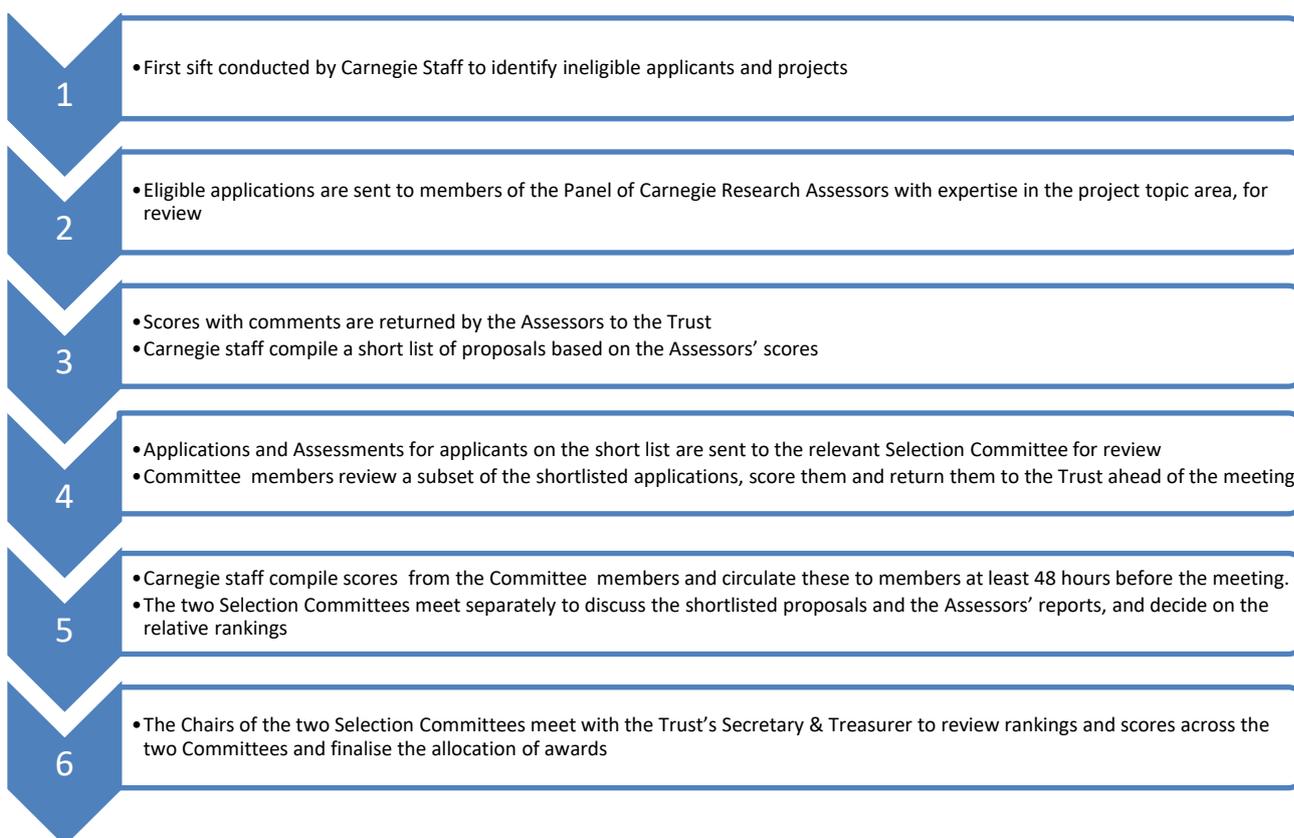
1. Peer review at the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland

As part of an extensive review of its research funding schemes, Trustees of the Carnegie Trust for the Universities decided in February 2014 to establish a panel of Carnegie Research Assessors to assist with the review and selection of research proposals submitted for the Carnegie Research Incentive Grants for Early Career Researchers.

This document explains the Peer review process for this scheme.

a. Structure of the Peer review process

Peer review is organised as follows:



b. The Panel of Carnegie Research Assessors

Carnegie Research Assessors are principally recruited from within the Scottish academic community and represent the different areas of research undertaken in Scotland. Additional Assessors may also be identified further afield when no local expertise is available, or to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

Assessors are selected on the basis of their expertise in reviewing and their in-depth knowledge of their research/subject field. Some are previous Carnegie Trust grant recipients, others are, or have been, reviewers for the Research Councils, or for other funding bodies such as the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

c. Selection Committees

For each scheme round two Selection Committees are established, one for each categories below:

Selection Committee A: covering research in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Selection Committee B: covering research in the fields of Science, Medicine, Engineering, Technology

The Selection Committee members will be drawn from the panel of Carnegie Research Assessors. Individuals will be invited to serve for specific Committee meetings, depending on availability. The composition of the Committees will recognise the areas of specialism required while also ensuring that the load is suitably spread over time.

Each Committee will be chaired by one of the Assessors – selected as Chair for that meeting alone, on the basis of their relevant experience.

Committee members will receive a subset of all shortlisted applications, together with the reports from the Assessors. If practicable, inclusion as a member of the Selection Committee of an Assessor for one of the proposals being reviewed will be avoided. Where this is not possible he or she will be expected to refrain from participating in the discussion of the particular application on which they had previously reported, unless otherwise invited by the Chair.

The subset of applications forwarded to Committee Members for review will include: any proposals with an overall score of 4 and above based on the combined initial assessment scores; applications with a difference of 3 points or more between the scores returned by the initial Assessors; and those proposals for which only one assessment was returned.

Ahead of meetings, Selection Committee members will be asked to rank those proposals which they have been allocated according to the aims of the schemes and the specific criteria listed below. A guide will be provided as to where the cut-off point is likely to be (i.e. as determined by the budgeted total set aside by the Trustees for the scheme). Careful consideration of those proposals that would appear likely to be in the vicinity of the cut-off (above and below) will be undertaken by the Committee, which will be asked to give some form of assessment as to their absolute standard.

Once both Committees have met, the Secretary, working with the Committee Chairs, will seek to merge the two lists into a single ranking. Applying the available funding to this overall list will then determine which applications are to be awarded a grant.

Should any special issues arise in the course of the above process, concerning one or more particular proposal, the Secretary will consult with individual Trustees or the Chair of Trustees, as appropriate, before making final funding decisions.

2. Assessment process

Each proposal will be reviewed by at least two different Assessors. More assessments may be sought if the Trust deems it necessary, for example if there is a strong difference of opinion between Assessors.

a. Research Incentive Grants

Assessors will be sent a link to an online review form and asked to assess proposals according to the following criteria:

Criteria	Description
Significance and originality	<p>A clearly specified research question/hypothesis.</p> <p>Addressing a significant scientific, societal or intellectual issue.</p> <p>Strong case for the proposal's importance and originality from an international perspective.</p> <p>Clearly filling gaps in, or extending, existing knowledge.</p> <p>Potential to advance the academic field of the proposed research, or expected to impact on industry, culture or public policy, or more widely.</p> <p>Is there the prospect for this project to open up new areas of study?</p> <p>Is there potential to further strengthen research in the chosen field within the Scottish universities (strategically significant)?</p>
Feasibility	<p>Applicant has the necessary expertise and experience to deliver the research project.</p> <p>Clear and realistic rationale for the proposed methodology, timescale and resources.</p> <p>Specified research methodology and activities are appropriate for the project to yield results.</p> <p>Applicant has considered potential pitfalls or difficulties and how these could best be handled.</p> <p>Requested funds are appropriate for the scope of the project and essential for its successful completion.</p> <p>The budget demonstrates value for money.</p>
Outcomes and outputs	<p>The proposed research outcomes are relevant and of sufficient scope.</p> <p>The academic outputs are anticipated to be of high quality and sufficient strength, e.g. likely to be included in future REF.</p> <p>Is the project likely to open up a new area of research and/or lead to the preparation of larger grant applications to other funders?</p> <p>Are the anticipated outcomes and outputs likely to have an impact through industrial applications, cultural events, or public policy development and/or on the chosen research field?</p>
Overall quality	<p>An overall quality assessment on the basis of the above criteria.</p> <p>This will take the form of an overall score, arrived at on the basis of the proposal's strengths and weaknesses in relation to each individual criterion.</p>

b. Scoring

Each assessment criterion will be scored on a scale of 0 to 6, where

- 6.0** Demonstrates outstanding merit and excels in all relevant aspects of the assessment criterion
- 5.0 - 5.9** Excellent, fully meets the assessment criterion
- 4.0 - 4.9** Very strong, meets the assessment criterion in most respects
- 3.0 - 3.9** Strong, broadly meets the assessment criterion
- 2.0 - 2.9** Good but with some weaknesses
- 1.0 - 1.9** Of some merit but too many weaknesses to meet the criterion satisfactorily
- 0.0 - 0.9** Below standard, does not meet the criterion; intellectually, technically or scientifically flawed; insufficient information with which to properly assess.

c. Assessor’s level of confidence

Assessors are also asked to indicate their level of confidence when reviewing proposals on a scale of 1 (low confidence) to 3 (high confidence).

3. Practical details about the Peer review process

a. Tenure

When recruited, Assessors are asked to commit to a term of 3 years, in the first instance. After the initial period, Assessors will be offered the opportunity to renew their term.

The Trust hopes that Assessors who move away from Scotland will be willing to continue reviewing proposals.

b. Availability

Prior to each deadline, Assessors will be contacted by email and asked to confirm that they are available to provide reviews in the six weeks following a submission deadline. The deadlines are as follows:

Deadline	Scheme	Reviewing period for Assessors	Reviewing period for Committee members	Committee meeting
2nd week of September	Research Incentive Grants	First 3 weeks in October	4 weeks from end October	1 st half of December
2nd week of March	Research Incentive Grants	First 3 weeks in April	4 weeks from early May	1 st half of June

Assessors who are unavailable during a certain period should let the Trust know as soon as possible by email (Research-Assessors@carnegie-trust.org) or by phone: 01383 724 990.

c. Applying for grants while acting as an Assessor/Committee member

An Assessor who plans to submit an application for a particular round of the research scheme should notify the Trust in advance of the deadline. In such circumstances, Assessors will not be called upon to contribute to the peer review process for that particular round.

d. Time allocated to review proposals

In general, Assessors will have three full weeks to review and report on the proposals issued to them.

Members of the Selection Committees will receive the shortlisted proposals and assessments 3 weeks ahead of the meeting date.

e. Completing and submitting assessment

Assessors will be sent an email containing a link to the Trust's research grant online review form as well as two attachments; (i) the proposal's Case for Support, and (ii) the completed online application form. If an Assessor is called upon to review more than one proposal, a separate email will be generated for each. Assessors are granted 3 weeks to complete and submit their assessments. A given assessment can be completed over multiple sessions by utilising the forms 'save' option, and accessed each time via the original email link. As part of the online form Assessors will be asked to confirm that:

- a. They are available to undertake the review;
- b. There is no conflict of interest, and;
- c. The proposal is within their area of expertise.

It is highly recommended that Assessors add the addresses below to their email's whitelist, to ensure that messages from the Trust reach their inbox and are not mistakenly diverted to the spam/junk mail folder:

- admin@carnegie-trust.org
- Incentive-Grants@carnegie-trust.org
- Research-Assessors@carnegie-trust.org

A sample scoring sheet can also be found within Annex B of this guide.

f. Confidentiality

The online assessment form includes short sections under each assessment criteria within which Assessors are requested to provide feedback/comments in support of their scores. The Trust may subsequently share these comments with applicants. Also provided under each of the assessment criteria headings are sections where the Assessor may, if so desired, provide comments for the attention of the Trust only. Information provided within these sections of the form will be held as confidential and will not be shared with the applicant.

g. How many proposals a year will I be asked to assess?

Potentially Assessors could be asked to review up to 6 proposals in the course of a year (over the two RIG scheme rounds). In practice however, the actual numbers will depend on the pattern of applications received during each round.

h. Conflict of interest

A conflict of interest may occur when a Carnegie Assessor has a personal or organisational relationship with the applicant(s) named on a proposal. Instances which may call into question the objectivity and impartiality of an Assessor, include:

- Being a named investigator or collaborator on a proposal;
- Holding a formal position at the same organisation as the applicant(s) and/or collaborators;
- Being a close relative of an applicant and/or collaborator named in the proposal;
- Close personal relationship with any individual named in the proposal;
- Recent professional link with an applicant or collaborator, including a recently graduated student or a researcher who directly worked under the Assessor;
- Direct involvement in the proposed research;
- Applying for funding in the same round;
- Benefitting directly from the proposed research and its outputs, and;
- A commitment to serve on an advisory group or steering committee of a proposed research project.

The Trust will attempt to avoid sending applications to Assessors where an easily identifiable conflict of interest exists. However, it may not always be possible to do so. Upon receiving proposals, Assessors should first check each application for any potential conflict of interest and, where any are discovered, report these to the Trust so an assessment can be made as to whether it will prove necessary to appoint an alternative Assessor.

The Trust will follow the same principal as above when sending assessments and proposals to the members of the Selection Committees. The latter should also first identify any applications where conflict of interest might occur and inform the Trust accordingly.

At each meeting, the Chair will ask members of the Committee to refrain from commenting on proposals submitted by academics at their own university.

i. Expenses

The Trust will reimburse travel expenses incurred by Assessors attending the Selection Committee meetings. Due to limited funds, no further remuneration is available.

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Version 1.4, September 2019

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Annex A: Research Incentive Grant Regulations

General

1. The purpose of the Research Incentive Grants (RIG) scheme is to make it possible for an Early Career Researcher to undertake, as the Principal Investigator, a short research project, either of a stand-alone nature or in the form of an initial study that could be expected to lead to a more extensive project.
2. The principal criterion for the award of a RIG is that the planned research is of excellent quality, will enable the principal investigator to develop a new project or line of research and is likely to lead to high quality outputs and outcomes.
3. The Trust will not normally support established lines of research, projects pursued from year to year over a period of time, or projects arising from previous pilot studies. Where a proposal does relate to a continuing research project, a clear case for additional support from the Trust must be made.
4. The following types of activity are excluded: the formation and operation of networks or similar discussion groupings; projects mainly directed at digitising, cataloguing or archiving existing data; projects centred on running conferences, workshops, seminars, summer schools or similar symposia; knowledge exchange projects; or projects that are directed at confirmation and dissemination of previously acquired research results.
5. Research Incentive Grants are tenable between 1 and 12 months. The maximum award that can be applied for is £15,000 and the minimum is £1,500.
6. There are two deadlines each year: one during the second week of September for projects starting after the 1st January immediately following the closing date and another during the second week of March for projects starting after the 1st July immediately following the closing date (check website for details). All research projects must start within 12 months of the date of award.

Applicant eligibility

7. The Principal Investigator must be an Early Career Researcher, employed by a Scottish university, the Glasgow School of Art, or the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, on a contract consistent with their having the time and resources required to undertake the proposed research, and must, at the time of application, be planning to remain in post at that institution for at least three months after the award period has ended.
8. For the purpose of the Trust, an Early Career Researcher is defined as a researcher who, at the time of applying (e.g. the closing date for applications) is either:
 - i. Within 7 years of successfully completing their PhD (measured from the date of submission), OR
 - ii. Within 7 years of starting their independent academic career (pro-rata for part-time staff and excluding breaks such as parental leave, extended sick leave, secondments out with academia or periods of unemployment)
9. The applicant must demonstrate that, without the support of the Trust, the planned research would not take place or would be significantly delayed.
10. Submissions will not be accepted from applicants when a report on a previous grant is overdue.

Eligible costs

11. RIGs are awarded to help with the costs directly incurred by, or on behalf of, the principal and co-investigators while pursuing the planned research project.
12. Eligible costs include, but are not limited to, payments for:
 - i. travel, accommodation, and subsistence;
 - ii. research support staff;

- iii. other technical/administrative staff;
 - iv. surveys;
 - v. laboratory consumables;
 - vi. minor equipment;
 - vii. costs associated with disseminating results arising from the project – through publication or presentation at specialist conferences (up to a maximum of **10%** of the requested budget);
 - ix. other research costs, as deemed appropriate by the Trust.
13. The following costs are not eligible:
- i. the applicant's (and co-investigator's, if applicable) own time or that of dependants, or buy-out of their time;
 - ii. stipends or scholarships;
 - iii. indirect overhead costs and bench/desk fees;
 - iv. insurance cover.

Application process

14. Applications must be completed and submitted online through the Trust's online grant portal.
15. Applications must be electronically endorsed by the Head of Department and Research Office at the Principal Investigator's institution. This approval process must be completed by the deadline for submission of applications. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that sufficient time is available for the approval process to be completed prior to the closing date.
16. The closing dates for submitting applications are listed on the Trust's website at <https://www.carnegie-trust.org/award-schemes/research-incentive-grants/>. Results will be notified within 15 weeks of the closing date.
17. Funds awarded by the Trust may be applied only to activities undertaken after the Grant has been formally notified to the applicant. Retrospective applications will not be considered.
18. The Trust will not consider more than one application from the same applicant at any one time. Nor will it consider more than two applications to this scheme from the same applicant over a period of five academic years.
19. It is possible to resubmit a revised proposal to a subsequent round of the Research Incentive Grants as long as the applicant(s) still meet the eligibility criteria.

Assessment process

20. Applications will be reviewed by assessors selected by the Trust, who will be consulted by the Trust on the merits of the application.
21. Applications, together with the assessors' comments, will be submitted to a Selection Committee established by the Trust. The Committee will recommend approval, or otherwise, on the basis of the criteria set out in these Regulations, within the overall level of funding allocated to the scheme by the Trustees.
22. The criteria upon which the proposal will be judged, in addition to those already mentioned, will include:
- i. the originality and significance of the proposed research;
 - ii. its feasibility, in terms of the resources being provided and the time available;
 - iii. the suitability of the applicant to undertake the project;
 - iv. the level of support being provided by the principal investigator's institution.
23. The final funding decision will be made by the Secretary on the basis of the Committee's

recommendation. Should any special issues arise, the Secretary will also consult with individual Trustees, or the Chair of Trustees, as appropriate.

24. Unsuccessful applicants can request feedback on their proposals. The Trust reserves the right to disclose only information deemed appropriate.
25. All grants awarded will be on the basis of the published terms and conditions of award.

V2.5 July 2019

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Annex B: Carnegie Research Incentive Grants, Sample Assessment Form

Completing the assessment

Assessors are asked to review the proposals sent to them according to the assessment criteria listed in this form. Assessors are invited to familiarise themselves with the assessment criteria before reading the proposal. The proposal should then be scored against each criterion using the scale provided, before giving an overall quality score for the project as a whole.

Confidentiality

Comments or suggestions made by assessors may be shared with the applicants who request feedback. If you wish to make additional comments that should remain confidential between the Trust and the assessor please use the relevant section of the form to do so.

Take care to avoid providing information that may reveal your identity to the applicant. All assessment forms will be destroyed securely within 6 months of the outcome of the selection process.

Assessor's name and university	
Applicant's name and university	
Short title of proposed research	

1. Assessment

For each of the assessment criteria, use the table to highlight particular strengths or weaknesses in the proposed project you have identified while reviewing the proposal.

You should comment on aspects of the proposal that are particularly strong as well as make suggestions on how the project could be improved.

a. Significance and originality

Description

- A clearly specified research question/hypothesis.
- Addressing a significant scientific, societal or intellectual issue.
- Strong case for the proposal's importance and originality from an international perspective.
- Clearly filling gaps in, or extending, existing knowledge.
- Potential to advance the academic field of the proposed research, or expected to impact on industry, culture or public policy, or more widely.
- Is there the prospect for this project to open up new areas of study?
- Is there potential to further strengthen research in the chosen field within the Scottish universities (strategically significant)?

Assessment (max. 200 words)	
Confidential comments for the attention of the Trust only	

b. Feasibility

Description

- Applicant has the necessary expertise and experience to deliver the research project.
- Clear and realistic rationale for the proposed methodology, timescale and resources.
- Specified research methodology and activities are appropriate for the project to yield results.
- Applicant has considered potential pitfalls or difficulties and how these could be best handled.
- Requested funds are appropriate for the scope of the project and essential for its successful completion.
- The budget demonstrates value for money.

Assessment (max. 200 words)	
Confidential comments for the attention of the Trust only	

c. Outcomes and outputs

Description

- The proposed research outcomes are relevant and of sufficient scope.
- The academic outputs are anticipated to be of high quality and sufficient strength, e.g. likely to be included in future REF.
- Is the project likely to open up a new area of research and/or lead to the preparation of larger grant applications to other funders?
- Are the anticipated outcomes and outputs likely to have an impact through industrial applications, cultural events, or public policy development and/or on the chosen research field?

Assessment (max. 200 words)	
Confidential comments for the attention of the Trust only	

d. Overall quality

- An overall quality assessment on the basis of the above criteria.
- This will take the form of an overall score, arrived at on the basis of the proposal's strengths and weaknesses in relation to each individual criterion

Assessment (max. 200 words)	
Confidential comments for the attention of the Trust only	

2. Scoring

In the table below, please score each criterion and the proposal as a whole using the following scale:

- 6** Demonstrates outstanding merit and excels in all relevant aspects of the assessment criterion
- 5** Excellent, fully meets the assessment criterion
- 4** Very strong, meets the assessment criterion in most respects
- 3** Strong, broadly meets the assessment criterion
- 2** Good but with some weaknesses
- 1** Of some merit but too many weaknesses to meet the criterion satisfactorily
- 0** Below standard, does not meet the criterion; intellectually, technically or scientifically flawed; insufficient information with which to properly assess.

Criteria	Significance and originality	Feasibility	Outcomes and outputs	Overall quality
Score				

3. Assessor's level of confidence

My level of confidence in assessing this proposal is:

Low	Medium	High
1	2	3

September 2014