Reviewer guidance for UK Intelligence Community Postdoctoral Research Fellowships 2026

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Introduction

Thank you for volunteering as a reviewer for the UK-IC Postdoctoral Research Fellowships scheme. Your expertise is essential in identifying promising candidates, and we greatly value the time and effort you are contributing.

This review aims to ensure a fair and rigorous assessment. We ask all reviewers to uphold principles of impartiality, confidentiality, and professionalism. Please ensure that deadlines are met to support a smooth process.

Your role is crucial to advancing the Academy's mission to foster innovation and research excellence, and we appreciate your support.

Reviewer Acceptance

Before you are able to start a review, please read the provided abstract information and confirm that you are willing and able to complete this request.

Please note that by accepting, you are agreeing to keep all information provided confidential and that you will not share or use the information for any other purpose after the review. For the avoidance of doubt, you must not input any content from an Academy funding application into generative AI tools and before undertaking the review should familiarise yourself with the [Academy's Policy on National Security related risks](). All information in any form (soft or hard copies) should be deleted or securely destroyed following completion of this review. Reviewers should not contact applicants regarding their review. Any potential conflicts of interest should be declared to Academy staff per the [Conflict of Interest Policy]() and prior to recording your acceptance.

Confidentiality

Applications and reviews are submitted to the Academy in confidence and;

- Reviewers must not discuss or share the application with any third party, without prior approval from the Academy.
- Reviewers must not discuss the application or have any contact with the applicant.
- Reviewers must not act upon any of the information they obtain through the applications and should not engage with applicants if approached about their review.
- Reviewers must not retain any copies of application documents once their role as reviewer has been completed.
- Any hard copies of application documents, or any electronic versions of application documents saved locally, must be destroyed/ deleted upon

submission of the review and/or participation in any panel meetings or interview.

- The identity of reviewers will not be made known to applicants but may be revealed to other 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.

Equity, diversity and Inclusion

Reviewers are reminded that the Academy is committed to equity, diversity and to increasing the participation of women and other minority and under-represented groups across science, engineering and technology. For more on Academy diversity activity and policy please visit https://raeng.org.uk/diversity.

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.

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

The Academy has aligned with other UK funders around the use of generative AI tools in funding applications through the Research Funders Policy Group [joint statement.](#)

1. **Exclusion of AI in Evaluation:** Reviewers 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:** Reviewers 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, reviewers 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.

Export control

This programme has been flagged by the Academy as one where applicants may provide information that is subject to [export control law](#). If an applicant flags that the content of their submitted application is subject to export control law, the Academy will select UK based reviewers. Reviewers of those application will need to ensure they access that application only within the UK. Please note that you will be notified directly if an application you have been assigned is subject to export control law.

Grant programme details

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

Research topics are identified each year by members of the IC, and applicants are expected to work with their university research advisor to develop and submit a research proposal that align with their chosen topics.

The research is conducted by the Research Fellow in partnership with their university research advisor and in collaboration with an advisor from the Intelligence Community (IC Advisor).

The IC Advisor is the government representative for each research topic. They are responsible for ensuring that the UK IC Postdoctoral Research Fellow's research remains aligned with aims of the research topic.

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 Andorra, Australia, Canada, the EEA, Monaco, New Zealand, San Marino, Switzerland, the UK, the US or Vatican City are eligible to apply.

Please note there are no nationality restrictions for the University Research Advisors.

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 or at a UK research organisation that is eligible to receive UKRI funding. Please note that organisations represented in the UK Intelligence Community for this scheme are not eligible to host a fellowship.

Note: 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.

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. You may already have an account with the Academy, e.g. from being a Fellow or when you applied for events or grants, and the same login details should be used.

Once logged into the system, you will be presented with the application you have been allocated to review. Clicking on the application reference number (in the format ICRF-2627-10-xxx) will take you through to the application summary page, where you 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.

When completing your review through the system, it is recommended that you **save your work regularly by clicking the 'Save' button** located beneath each scoring criterion. Avoid opening multiple Flexi-Grant windows or tabs at the same time, as this can interfere with saving your progress. **Please note: progress should be saved at least once every 120 minutes otherwise the system will automatically timeout, and any unsaved work may be lost.**

Once the 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 – if you wish to amend your review, please get in touch with your Academy contact for support.

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.

Assessment of applications

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.

It is important to note that the scores and comments from the topic authors carry significant weight in the evaluation process. A project may face challenges in securing funding if the topic author provides a negative assessment, as their expertise is closely tied to the relevance and feasibility of the proposed work.

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. 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.

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.

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
   - quality and appropriateness of research methods and ethical and inclusive experimental design (including, if relevant, alignment with the Academy's Animal Use and Human Participants in Research, Innovation and Development Policies).

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.

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.

For applicants and reviewers 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 that you have generated.

With regard to research articles published in peer-reviewed journals, we ask applicants to use a range of article metrics and indicators on personal/supporting statements as

evidence of the impact of individual published articles and other research outputs. The Journal Impact Factor in particular is unacceptable for inclusion in any part of an application, and applicants may be asked to resubmit if anything is found to contradict this as part of the eligibility checks. Reviewers who utilise the Journal Impact Factor or who rely too heavily on metrics and do not show evidence of having understood and evaluated the content of research may be asked to resubmit reviews.

Scoring matrix

For each application, reviewers should provide:

- **commentary against each assessment criteria**
- **an overall score out of 7 and comment on the overall quality of the application**
- **a YES or NO recommendation for an award with final remarks.**

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

Rating	Definitions	Recommendation for an award
7 **6** **5**	Outstanding (clearly worthy of a Fellowship) Excellent (worthy of a Fellowship) Very good (potential for a Fellowship/reserve)	**YES**
4 **3** **2** **1**	Good (worthy, but uncompetitive for this scheme) Average Below average Poor	**NO**

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**.

Contact

If you have any questions or concerns please refer to our FAQs or contact the Programme Manager Claudia Allori at Claudia.allori@raeng.org.uk.

The Academy is committed to a fair and transparent process, and any concerns during the review process can also be addressed through the Academy's complaints policy.