

# Refereeing Fellowship Applications

NAOMI MCCLURE-GRIFFITHS

CSIRO ASTRONOMY & SPACE SCIENCE

[www.csiro.au](http://www.csiro.au)



# Setting the Scene

## Australian Research Council Fellowship programs:

- Discovery Early Career Research Awards - up to 5 years post-PhD
- Future Fellows - 5 to 15 years post-PhD
- Discovery Outstanding Researcher Award (pseudo-fellowship)
- Laureate Fellows 10+ years experience

# The ARC Fellowship review process\*

\*DECRA example

**late Mar:** DECRAAs submitted (1427 received 2013)

**early Apr:** CoE has 1 week to assign expert assessors (4 +2 reserves)

- Assessors sent emails to accept proposals or reject

**mid-Apr - early-June:** CoE and expert assessors review proposals

**early-June:** Expert Assessors reports due

**mid-June:** Proposers have ~2weeks for rejoinder

**mid-June - mid-July:** CoE review assessor reports, rejoinders, proposals and finalise scores

**mid-Aug:** CoE meet to allocate fellowships

# The ARC Fellowship review

## During the College of Experts meeting:

- Proposals are pre-ranked by a weighted score of referees and 2 CoE readers
- Rankings are adjusted if:
  - The CoE members deem an assessor as unfair/conflicted/unethical
- Usually work through the ranked proposals until we run out of money\*

\* Some variation if necessary

# Your job as a referee

## Use your expert knowledge to score the proposal and inform the College of Experts

- Accept proposals to review if at all possible - you'd want someone to do the same for you
- Your assessment must be based on the selection criteria
- Grade proposal against criteria:
  - Score A-E (see next slide)
- Comment on the proposal against the criteria
  - be specific and support your arguments
  - you are writing to the College of Experts, but the Proposer will see and write rejoinder to your comments
- Match your scores to your comments
  - Proposers do not see your scores
- Use the full range of scores:
  - A: 10% of proposals, B: 15%, C: 20%, D: 35%, E: 20%

# About Scoring

Your scores are really important!

| Rating band | Criteria  | Recommendation  |
|-------------|---|---|
| <b>A</b>    | <b>Outstanding:</b> Of the highest quality and at the forefront of research activity.   | <b>Recommended unconditionally</b>                        |
| <b>B</b>    | <b>Excellent:</b> Of high quality and strongly competitive.                             | <b>Strongly support recommendation of funding</b>         |
| <b>C</b>    | <b>Very Good:</b> Interesting, sound and compelling.                                    | <b>Support recommendation of funding with reservation</b> |
| <b>D</b>    | <b>Good:</b> Sound, but lacks a compelling element.                                     | <b>Unsupportive of recommendation for funding</b>         |
| <b>E</b>    | <b>Uncompetitive:</b> Uncompetitive and has significant weaknesses or more fatal flaws. | <b>Not recommended for funding</b>                        |

From ARC Assessor handbook 2013

# Selection Criteria: Future Fellows

## Future Fellowship Candidate: 40%

- research opportunity and performance evidence (ROPE);
- capacity and leadership to undertake the proposed research;
- record of high quality research outputs appropriate to the discipline/s;

## Project Quality: 35%

- Address a significant problem?

- Is the work innovative and original?

## Strategic Alignment 15%

- How well does the Candidate align with and/or complement the research strengths of the host?
- Necessary facilities available?
- What resources will be provided by the host?

## Collaboration/Outreach: 10%

Overarching criteria: Value for money

# Selection Criteria: DECRA

## Project Quality & Innovation: 40%

- Does the project address a significant problem?
- Is the project innovative and original?

## DECRA Candidate: 35%

- Research opportunity and performance evidence (ROPE)
- capacity to undertake research

## Research Environment: 15%

- Is there a supportive collaborative environment?
- Will the project provide the candidate with the chance to develop?
- Necessary facilities?

## Feasibility and Benefit: 10%

- Is the project designed to be feasible?
- Produce national benefits?

Overarching criteria: Value for money



# How to be a great reviewer

Give constructive feedback to help the proposer make a better proposal (Only 14% are funded!)

- “Joe Blogg’s proposal would be enormously improved if he showed his individual contribution to projects”

Accept multiple proposals to review - cross comparison is helpful

Remember the CoE may not be experts in this area

- Give the College members info they might not know - “this work is amongst the most significant and well-funded work in Europe”

Match your scores to your comments

- Don’t say “This proposal fantastically innovative and must be done” and then give it a D.

Watch out for and comment on ROPE

Provide helpful comments for cross-comparison

- “Jane Brown ranks outstandingly high when compared with Future Fellows awarded in 2012 & 2013”

Point out if an application satisfies or fails the “Value for money” test

- Will they will do the research regardless of whether they receive a Future Fellowship?

# Some notes on ethics

## Be fair!

- You have to comment on the individual's track record, but do it with an even hand
- Imagine that you spent 2 months writing this proposal...

Don't review a proposal from close collaborators, colleagues, friends, spouses (!), former supervisors, students, etc.

Be confidential about all contents of the proposal

Remain anonymous

If you have concerns about originality raise those in your reports

# Your Job as a Proposer

## Things to do when writing an ARC proposal

- Put it in context!
  - Define clear sections of 'motivation', 'the problem', 'the solution'
- Avoid large blocks of text, bullet point proposals are great!
  - Less text, more space is easier to digest.
- Can you express an aim in 1 or 2 sentences? You should.
- Don't bite off more than you can chew. One interesting, well described project is better than many prongs that are poorly described.
- Discuss how well suited you are to do the research in the feasibility section. If a team, show evidence of the team's ability to work as a team.
- In section about yourself don't highlight periods of low productivity unless they had a substantial impact or were very extended. Otherwise it makes the reviewer look for the bad parts of your applications.
- Proofread and spell check.
- Minimise use of acronyms
- DECRA's are a bit different, here proposal weights heavily.
  - Show what your personal contribution will be if based on a large projects.

## Rejoinders:

- Rejoinders are only read by the College of Experts, address your comments to them:
- Don't waste space arguing with the assessors about fine details, stick to the big picture
- Tackle particularly issues about feasibility, innovation and quality. You can't argue with their assessments of your track record.
- If you feel a reviewer has given a biased report, say so but back up your claim.
- Be positive and don't highlight negative statements unless you can counter them
- Statements like "we thank the reviewers" or "we are glad the reviewers like us" are a waste of space.
- Short is better.
- Use quotes from one report to counter another.