

Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) Application Support

In February 2015, the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) introduced 'Demand Management' measures to limit the number and size of applications submitted to its standard grants competitions:

www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/available/researchgrants/demand/. This resulted in NERC restricting the number of Newcastle University applications and the University subsequently implementing an internal selection process.

As of July 2019, NERC removed the cap on the number of applications Newcastle can submit for the July 2019 and January 2020 rounds. This is because Newcastle's success rate over the previous six rounds has risen above 20%. Grants are limited to £800k at 100% full economic cost.

To maximise an applicant's chance of success and ensure the quality of Newcastle's applications remain high (to avoid future NERC restrictions), all applications will still benefit from an internal application support process. The process will mirror the NERC's procedures as closely as possible, through internal peer review followed by support from the NERC application support panel. All applicants will receive detailed feedback from reviewers and panel members, to help them to improve their proposals for submission to the next, or a future, NERC round.

In order to apply to the NERC's standard grant competitions, please therefore follow the steps below.

1. Group support and proposal drafting

Please seek support within your own Group or discipline—to refine your basic idea and articulate the project aim and objectives (e.g. by pitching your idea at a group meeting). Identify within your Group a mentor to support you through drafting of your application and providing feedback. Reach out to the relevant Professional Services for support with your project costings, impact plans, data management, ethics, and so on, as required. Discuss your idea with potential collaborators and partners, and inform your Director of Expertise/Research and Head of School of your intentions. **To ensure that your proposal is mature for the internal deadlines, seek support from the Research Funding Development Team as soon as possible.** You should contact Holly Davidson in the first instance.

2. Notification of your intention to apply

Please notify Holly Davidson (holly.davidson@newcastle.ac.uk) by the following dates if you wish to be considered to make a standard application to the NERC:

To be considered to apply in the July competition, please notify Holly by 1st April.

To be considered to apply in the January competition, please notify Holly by 16th September.

At this stage, where possible, a member of your local Research Funding Development team (RFDM) will be in contact with you to offer their support/feedback on your draft application if you have not already sought it.

3. Submission of your full proposal and recommendation of internal peer reviewers

Please submit the JeS print-out of your full proposal (including all of the JeS sections [costings and text] and attachments) and names of three Newcastle University members who could potentially review your proposal to Holly Davidson. This will be around 12-14 weeks before the NERC deadline. For the January 2020 round, please send this information to Holly Davidson by **Tuesday 1st October 2019**. This lead-in time allows applicants time to revise their proposal in response to the detailed feedback that they will be given.

4. Internal peer review as per the NERC process and using NERC reviewers' forms

Internal reviewers will be approached by Holly Davidson (taking into account your recommendations) and asked to peer review your proposal using NERC reviewers' forms. We will ensure that you receive at least 2 reviews wherever this is possible. This peer review stage will take about 2 weeks. Anonymised internal reviews will be returned to you and you will be asked to give a short (half side of A4 per reviewer) response to reviewers' comments within 5 working days. This

will be your opportunity to use evidence to respond to any questions or concerns that your reviewers have. Previous applicants have recommended this as an opportunity to make sure that the panel fully understands their ideas.

5. **Newcastle NERC Application Support Panel**

The Newcastle University NERC Application Support Panel will meet to discuss proposals at least 8 weeks before the NERC deadline. This will be done in the same way as it is done by the NERC. The Panel will receive your full proposal, reviewers' comments and your response to reviewers. The Panel will evaluate proposals based on research excellence and other criteria used by the NERC (panel guidance documents can be found [here](#)). Soon after the meeting, you will be sent written feedback on your proposal. You will receive one of the following outcomes for your proposal:

Green: The Panel invites you to submit your proposal to the NERC. You are advised to consider your reviewers' comments and Panel feedback to revise your proposal.

Amber: The Panel advises that in its current form your proposal is not ready for submission. You will be provided with specific advice on how to improve it so that it stands the best chance of success, either in this round or a future round. You will be asked to work with a designated support panel member who will be happy to meet with you to discuss your proposal and the feedback you have been given. It is possible that you will be asked to defer submission to a future round to allow time to develop a proposal of the very highest standard. This will be necessary to ensure that we maintain a success rate >20% and are not restricted in the number of applications we are permitted to submit in the future.



Figure 1: Indicative process and timeline (note, NERC responsive-mode deadlines are around mid-January and July each year)

NERC Application Support Panel Membership

NERC Application Support Panel membership is given below. Panel meetings will be minuted for transparency, although comments will not be attributed to individuals. Panel discussions will be made on the basis of research excellence and any other criteria used by the NERC.

The Newcastle NERC Application Support Panel will be made up of individuals from the pool below. These individuals have been selected to give a spread of expertise and experience with the NERC funding system. The panel Chair will rotate:

Grant Burgess, John Bythell, Peter Clarke, Hayley Fowler, Rachel Gaulton, Ian Head, Andy Henderson, Andy Large, David Werner, Mark Whittingham, Andrew Willmott.

Points to Note

New Investigators

NERC rules apply to New Investigator Awards (<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/available/researchgrants/standard/>). The NERC has stated that no special consideration will be given to 'New Investigators' under Demand Management. The Newcastle NERC Application Support Panel will, however, pay particular attention to ensuring that early career applicants receive feedback and support at all stages of the proposal preparation and review process. If you are a New Investigator, please include a short cover-letter with your internal application, giving details of your new investigator status and how long this will continue in line with the NERC's rules on eligibility.

Proposals made in Collaboration with other Universities/Research Organisations

Please be mindful that other institutions may be under NERC demand management measures.

There are two ways to submit a collaborative standard research proposal to the NERC (i.e. one with investigators from 2 or more universities). These are described below. Each has different demand management implications so please consider this very carefully:

- a. As a single application with investigators from all institutions named on the same JeS form. In this case the funding is paid to the PI's institution and channelled to partner institutions through collaboration agreements. **An application of this type will only count towards the success rate calculations and quota for demand management of the PI's institution.**
- b. As multiple 'component' applications, with each partner institution submitting a 'component' application (a separate JeS form) with a named PI. In this case the funding is paid directly to each institution. **Each component application (JeS form) will count towards the success rate calculations for demand management, so all institutions involved will be affected (positively or negatively, depending on whether the application is successful or not).** Each component application (JeS form) will also count towards the quota for each institution, and if any component application is rejected because the submitting institution is over quota, all other component applications making up the collaborative proposal will also be rejected. Newcastle PIs are therefore advised to ensure that all collaborators' institutions have robust measures in place to avoid this, before investing significant effort in joint proposals.

Having a PI or CoIs who are members of the Newcastle NERC Application Support Panel

Anyone who declares an interest in a proposal will not take part in the discussion of that proposal when it is discussed by the Newcastle NERC Application Support Panel.

Resubmitting a Proposal

If your proposal is not recommended to go forwards to NERC, you will be encouraged to act on your feedback in time to be considered for a future NERC deadline.

Newcastle NERC Success Rate

The NERC has used the previous six rounds of data on NERC standard grant applications to calculate Newcastle's success rate and demand management quota. Success rates are reviewed annually by NERC and quotas revised or removed accordingly. The Newcastle NERC Application Support Panel is committed to supporting the University in ensuring that we have the opportunity to make as many high-quality NERC applications as possible. **Even though our quota limit has been removed, the panel's support is required to ensure that we maintain success rates above the 20% threshold.** Newcastle's success rates have increased as a result of the internal process. Feedback from those who have used our support has been positive and we are committed to continuing this support for our environmental science colleagues.

Selecting Internal Reviewers

Please select Newcastle colleagues whose research expertise is as close as possible to the research proposed on your application. They do not need to be from the same School/Institute or Faculty as you.

Support for your Research Idea

If you would like to discuss your research ideas before you begin to prepare a NERC proposal, the best place to start is with colleagues in your Academic Group. The NERC Application Support Panel would then be very happy to give you some feedback on a short summary of a research idea and how well this would suit a NERC application. You can seek this at any time, through Holly Davidson.

Questions

If you have any questions about this support or about making a NERC research funding application, please contact Holly Davidson, Research Funding Development Manager (holly.davidson@newcastle.ac.uk, 0191 208 4812).