

## Peer review at the Royal Society (and beyond)

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The Royal Society is the independent scientific academy of the UK dedicated to promoting excellence in science.



## Structure of presentation

- General introduction to the Royal Society
- Current international grant schemes
- Selection principle and procedures at the Royal Society (International Grants)
- Selection procedures for big grants (from my previous experience at the Wellcome Trust)
- Final remarks



## What is the Royal Society?

- Founded in 1660, the Royal Society is the independent scientific academy of the UK, dedicated to promoting excellence in science.





## What we do

- Influence science policy worldwide
  - Communicate science
  - Support research scientists
- Plus
- Publications: oldest in the world (1665)
  - Library: history of science





## Vital statistics:

- 120 staff
- £122M of assets
- £36M Parliamentary Grant
- £56M annual expenditure



## Funding scientists

- 80% of the Society's budget is spent on funding research in science, engineering and technology
- 400+ research appointments
- Awards
- Grants
- UK and International



## | The future

- 2010: 350th Anniversary
- Develop our strategic direction
- Portfolio of new activities



## | Our mission vis-à-vis international activities

- Generally: To offer grant schemes enabling the UK to engage with the best science around the world
- Special initiatives: Capacity building programme for South Africa (since 1996) and for Ghana & Tanzania (launch planned for this year)



## International grant portfolio

- International Incoming & Outgoing Short Visits
- Conference Grants
- Joint Projects
- Fellowships to the UK



## Conference grants and Short Visit programme

- Supports UK based scientists to either present their own paper/poster or chair a session at an overseas conference.
- Attend a conference in any country outside the UK
- Funding up to a maximum of 10 days
- International airfare, registration & subsistence
- To initiate one to one collaborations
- To explore opportunities to build lasting networks
- To gain access to complementary equipment, data, observations and ideas
- Global Reach



## Internat. Joint Projects & Fellowships to the UK

- Provides basic mobility funds for bilateral international scientific collaboration between the UK and countries all over the world
- Joint Projects run for a duration of 2 years
- Maximum £6,000 provided annually for travel and subsistence, with up to £1,000 of this available for research expenses/consumables
- Must be lead by postdoctoral scientist but PhD students can participate in travel and research
- Supports overseas scientists to spend extended periods of time conducting research in the UK
- One year fellowships to the UK from China, India, Japan, South Korea and South East Asia
- Three year fellowships from USA and Canada
- Mainly awarded to recent postdoctoral scientists



## | Selection principles

- Merit-based selection of most worthy candidates and projects
- Independent peer-review process of selection through expert panels (“triage”)
- Relatively rapid through-put of high numbers of applications



## | Selection procedures

- Checks for eligibility of candidates and institutes
- Triage (and ranking) through expert panel
- In cases of nominations and cost-sharing agreements parallel assessment through partner organisations with subsequent mutual agreement of awards
- For US/Canada fellowship scheme: Final decision made at annual panel meeting



## Selection criteria

- Track record of candidates and host institutions
- Quality of the proposal
- Added value of the collaboration
- Mutual benefits to both partners
- Potential contribution to the UK (and overseas) science base



## | Does it work?

- Efficiency: International schemes provide small amounts of money (as seed-funds) resulting in high numbers of applications: External peer review rather than triage mechanism through expert panels would be impractical.
- Impartiality: The selection process is independent of the grants office, wide choice of experts available to cover all areas of science.
- Joint assessment with partners in cost-share agreements can complicate the procedures as strategic priorities and selection criteria might be different.



## Scaling up: Project/programme grants and fellowships

- Preliminary application: Short-listing for full applications through triage using virtual (international) expert panel
  - Full application: International peer review
  - Rebuttal (following feedback)
  - Final decision at panel meeting recruited from the pool of experts involved in virtual panel
  - Co-opting additional experts to cover certain areas of research if necessary
- Preliminary application: Short-listing for full applications through triage using virtual (international) expert panel
  - Full application: International peer review
  - Short-listing for interview stage either at panel meeting or through triage
  - Interviews and final decision



## And finally.....

- Right balance between administrative “burden” against the level of funding – “light touch” and efficiency (turn-over time)
- Clearly defined selection criteria for panel members and external referees
- Need for policy on conflict of interest and establishment of a code of conduct (for panel members)
- Clear division of labour between office, panel members, and panel chairs
- Pre-selection (triage) before short-listing can cut down on workload for funding organisations while maintaining a fair and transparent selection procedure



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