

PUBLISHED GUIDANCE FOR ADVISORY COMMITTEE

BBSRC-EPSRC Strategic Promotion of Ageing Research Capacity (SPARC)

GENERAL GUIDANCE

For SPARC to be successful it must support an exciting programme of capacity building awards but must not duplicate the activities of funding instruments already provided by EPSRC and BBSRC. Thus following each call an initial meeting of the advisory committee will be convened to triage applications on the basis of remit. In essence two committee members will be asked to act as the introducing member (IM) for each of the applications. Subsequently two IMs (one expert, the other a non-expert in the field) will subsequently be assigned to each application progressed. **Under no circumstances should an advisory committee member agree to serve as IM for an application where a conflict of interest (as defined by SPARC) exists.** The initial role of an IM at the meeting to triage applications is to indicate whether they feel applications to be within the remit of SPARC. This remit covers areas of work that are not realistically supportable under existing BBSRC or EPSRC funding instruments. The definition of 'not realistically supportable' is, in essence, designed to convey the 'feel' of work which would not be routinely funded through RC responsive modes. It is thus necessarily fluid. However, applications can be considered to be firmly **within** remit if:

- The area falls between, or combines elements of, the core strategic areas of the two councils (*i.e.* it is 'interdisciplinary').
- The application has a high capacity building element relative to its value (for example through contingent institutional support).
- In the view of the advisory committee member the capacity building value of the science to be supported is extremely high as it stands and its quality is likely to be acceptable following peer review (*e.g.* the generation and dissemination of extremely useful research tools).
- The work appears to of great value within its own field but might be judged to be less sophisticated than ordinary responsive mode work in different fields by a disinterested referee (*i.e.* it is outstanding work but in a less developed area of gerontology).
- Previous communication with EPSRC or BBSRC has indicated that SPARC is an appropriate vehicle for this work.

Applications will be presented to the committee in alphabetical order by applicant surname. If after discussion, there is no general agreement within the committee applications will be progressed by simple majority voting. Where there is a hung vote the final decision will rest with the chair. Although participating fully in discussions Research Council representatives will not vote but will have the right to veto applications. For rejected applications EPSRC & BBSRC officers will use their best offices to advise the committee of the most suitable funding instruments to which the applicants

should be directed. This will be recorded in the feedback provided to the applicants.

IM's will be asked to prepare a list of suitable referees for each of the applications assigned to them and to pass these to the SPARC secretariat so that the application can be sent to referees. The IM should indicate the area of expertise of the referee. Should the applicant have nominated referees at least one of them should be included. **Under no circumstances should an individual whom the applicant considers to have a conflict of interest with the application be used as a referee.**

Following receipt of the referees comments the appropriate IMs should also complete an IM reviewer's form for each application on which he or she is expected to lead. IMs should follow the SPARC *guidance for referees* when doing this. However rather than simply commenting on scientific excellence and capacity building the IM's form should assign a score of 1-10 for each category. Scores of 7 and above are the threshold standards for acceptability in both categories and should be used to indicate work that is internationally competitive or capacity building activities that will make a significant impact. Fractional scoring (e.g. 7.7) is acceptable.

At the following advisory committee meeting applications which do not score *at least 7.0* in **both** scientific excellence and capacity building will not be supported. IMs will have an opportunity to modify their initial score based on brief discussion with the rest of the committee. Applications will then be ranked on their aggregate score. Where awards are 'tied' for funding the application with the highest capacity building score will be preferentially ranked.

Example 1:

An application is awarded a score of 7.9 in scientific excellence and 4.6 in capacity building. It will not be supported.

Example 2

Two applications have aggregate scores of 17.0. Award A scored 9.0 on scientific excellence and 8.0 on capacity building. Award B scored 7.0 on scientific excellence but 10.0 on capacity building. In accordance with the capacity building remit of SPARC award B is ranked higher than award A.

*In accordance with the interdisciplinary nature of SPARC committee members should **not** mentally assign quotas of 'BBSRC' or 'EPSRC' work to be supported. SPARC funds exclusively on the basis of quality. It is unrealistic to force a raft of interdisciplinary applications and areas of work deemed not realistically supportable by either council into 'EPSRC' or 'BBSRC' categories.*