

## PUBLISHED GUIDANCE FOR REFEREES

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

#### GENERAL GUIDANCE

All applications sent out for review have been pre-judged by the SPARC advisory committee to fall within the remit of the exercise. It is not necessary to comment on the 'fit' of the application to the SPARC objectives.

For the benefit of both the applicant and the committee please evidence your comments where possible. Please note that open source evidence (*e.g.* prior peer-reviewed publications, existing patents etc) usually carries the most weight.

Please use the form provided. **In the interests of fairness to applicants referees comments not returned on the form will not be used.**

Please note that although your name will be withheld a synopsis of your comments and those of the advisory committee may be passed to the applicant. However, section 6 of the referee's form is for other information you may wish to bring to the committee's attention. **Nothing written here will be disclosed to the applicant.** This should normally be reserved either for explanations of potential conflict of interest or notification of genuinely **serious** matters (*e.g.* scientific fraud on the part of the applicant, a deliberate attempt to deceive the committee etc).

Please evaluate the application using the following criteria:

**1. SCIENTIFIC EXCELLENCE** Please comment on the standard of the proposal (bearing in mind that applicants are limited to £40k (Directly Incurred Costs) and 12 months duration). It would be helpful if your comments could address the following questions:

- *Should this work be done?* Will the work usefully advance knowledge, practice or technical ability within the field under investigation?
- *Can the work be done?* In your opinion is it possible to do this? How difficult is it? If you consider that success is doubtful what are the likely reasons for failure?
- *Can the applicant do it?* Does the applicant seem credible? If the applicant is unlikely to be able to carry out the work what weaknesses must be compensated for?
- *Who else is doing this?* Are other groups or individuals trying to do the same thing? Are they in the UK or abroad? Does the applicant have unique resources which confer a competitive edge? What is the likelihood of the applicant being 'beaten to it'?

**2. CAPACITY BUILDING** A primary objective of SPARC is to build capacity in ageing research within the UK. SPARC defines capacity building as activities as those 'likely to lead to an increase in the ability of the UK to conduct ageing research in the medium (5-6 year) term'. Considered in these

terms how likely is this application to build capacity? Some markers of capacity building you may wish to consider are:

- The environment of the applicant. Is the applicant being supported by their host institution in a meaningful way? Do they have an infrastructure of external contacts appropriate to their proposed work? What concrete benefits are being offered?
- Is the researcher likely to become an independent Principal Investigator either as a new appointment or through discipline bridging?
- Will the applicant be able to use the outcomes/results of their work to obtain further funding (*i.e.* will it lead to peer-reviewed publications or the availability of tools that would strengthen the applicants credibility).
- If successful will the project open up new areas or rapidly advance existing areas?

**CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:** Please ensure that you have no conflict of interest when reviewing a SPARC application. SPARC will consider you to have a conflict of interest if:

- You are currently a 'direct competitor' of the applicant. If you have been so in the past this does not prevent you for reviewing the application. However please bring this to the attention of the committee using section 6 of the form.
- You are currently working in collaboration with or have supervised the applicant. Previous collaboration or supervision does not prevent you for reviewing the application. However please bring this to the attention of the committee using section 6 of the form.
- You are working at the same institution as the applicant (University of London and University of Wales constituent colleges are treated as separate institutions for the purposes of reviewing).
- You stand to gain financially from the results of the research.

If you have a conflict of interest please do not review the application. Inform the SPARC secretariat as soon as possible so that an alternative referee may be found.

Thank you for your assistance.

SPARC Directorate