

Reviewer Assessment Form: guidance for providing a review (Public Contributors)

This guidance accompanies the reviewer form. It provides the questions and issues for you to consider so that you can complete the reviewer assessment form. A useful glossary of public involvement and research terminology can be found on the INVOLVE website. It is called Jargon Buster: <http://www.invo.org.uk/resource-centre/jargon-buster/>

Introduction

First of all thank you for agreeing to act as a reviewer for the NIHR Evaluation, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre (NETSCC). Public contributors play an important role in the funding of all aspects of research. In undertaking this role you are supporting public involvement within the programme.

There are three aspects to this review work. By completing a review you will be:

1. providing comment on a proposal that will inform the funding board's decision-making process
2. providing guidance to the research teams about their proposed work
3. helping us to ensure that the proposed research is what is needed.

To support our decision-making we seek a variety of individuals to provide a range of opinions about the proposed research. The range includes a variety of professional backgrounds (including Clinicians, Methodologists and Academics, as well as NHS managers and others as appropriate) as well as a public perspective, which we have asked you to provide.

Please answer only those questions which you feel you are able to answer based on your own personal understanding, experience or interest. We appreciate that reviewers have a range of different knowledge and experience. Each reviewer offers a different perspective on the research proposal. We acknowledge and value this diversity.

This guidance should be read alongside the reviewer assessment form as you complete it in our Management Information System (MIS). It explains what we would like you to focus on in the different sections of the form. If you require this assessment form in a

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word format or would like paper copies in a font size of your choice, please ask for this directly by contacting the person who invited you to complete the review.

Confidentiality

Once you accept to undertake a review, you will need to confirm that you will not disclose to any other person the fact that the applicant has applied for a research award, nor will you disclose the content of the application to any other person or use the information for any purpose other than providing a review of it. If you would like to discuss any aspect of your review with anyone else you must contact us first, to ensure that it will not present particular problems. For instance, sharing the task with organisations such as charities. When completing your review, you should not mention other applications where a decision on the funding of a study has not been made publicly available. If you have any direct comparisons to make between competing applications, please use the confidential comments box which will only be seen by the board and not the applicants.

Your completed responses are considered confidential by NETSCC. Your anonymised responses to the questions, excluding the confidential section, will be passed to applicants to consider and respond to before the funding board meeting. A copy of the anonymised reviewer comments will also be shared with other reviewers after the board meeting has taken place. Any comments made in the confidential section of the form will only be seen by members of the funding board but please be aware that these may be subject to requests for release under the Freedom of Information Act and Data Protection Act. Please take account of the potential for requested release of confidential sections when providing your written comments.

Potential competing interests

Please check the names of the lead applicant and co-applicants before completing your review. If you are aware of any potential competing interests that you may have then please include them in this section. If you are at all unsure or have any queries regarding competing interests, then please contact us.

We believe that in order to make the best decisions, we should know about any competing interests that reviewers may have. We will not reject your opinion simply because you declare a competing interest, but we do need to know about it. An example of a competing interest could be that you know someone in the research team personally, or if you could gain financially if the research is funded.

Guide to completing your online review on the MIS

If you have completed a review on the MIS before, please go to <https://netscc-mis.nihr.ac.uk> and enter your login details (your email address) and password and click “Log In”

If you haven't used the MIS system before, please check your email inbox as we will have set the system to send you a username and password. If you lose your password, please

click on the 'Forgot your password' link and enter your email address as your Login ID. You will then be emailed a temporary password, which you can use to login and then change to something more memorable. If you are having problems accessing the system, please contact us.

1. Once logged in, under 'My Tasks', click on 'Submit External Review Comments'. Do not click 'View PDF' as this is not the application
2. To view the application click 'Application PDF' under the Download Application section.
3. On the left hand menu, click on 'Confidentiality Agreement'
4. Next, click 'Competing Interests' and enter your response on this page. Click 'Save and Continue' when you are finished.
5. You will be taken to the 'Review Questions' page, you can also access this page from the menu on the left. Under the 'Text Area' section, click the 'Add' button next to each of the questions and write your comments (based on the guidance below). Click 'save and close' to progress to the next question.
6. Once you have answered all the questions according to the guidance below, click 'Continue' or click the 'Score' link on the left hand menu and enter your score and any confidential comments. Click 'Save and Continue'.
7. On the 'Review & Submit' page, once you are happy you have completed the review, click on the 'Submit' button to finish the task.

Where to start?

The Summary (in plain English) is always a good place to start, you will find this under the 'Case for Support' section. This should give you a good background to help you understand the proposal. There may also be additional documents included, such as study flow diagrams and reference material which may help explain the study.

Most proposals will be in two parts:

1. The **application form** that contains the information you need about what the project is planning to do and why. There is also detailed information about the team and the finances as well as the methodology and study design.
2. The **detailed project description** that follows a standard format and forms part of the proposal. You will also find a fuller account of the proposed project as well as more detail about the way the project will be done and its timelines.

Please be aware that you may need to read through the documents several times before completing the reviewer assessment form. You need only review the sections that you feel comfortable commenting on. You should look at both parts of the proposal in order to understand it properly.

If you need guidance or assistance, please contact the person who has approached you to undertake the review. Alternatively, you can contact a member of our Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) team: call 023 8059 9302 or email netspublic@nihr.ac.uk

Completing the reviewer assessment form

The two main sections of the form are used in different ways:

Section 1: Review Questions

This will normally be shared anonymously with applicants prior to consideration by the funding board, and applicants will be given the opportunity to respond to the issues raised.

Section 2: Score and Confidential Comments

This section remains confidential unless a Freedom of Information request is received.

Section 1: Review Questions

1.1 Issues for consideration by the board

When answering this question you may wish to consider the following points:

Importance, acceptability and potential impact of the proposed research

- Is there a clear reason for doing this research?
- Is the research looking at an issue that is important to patients and/or members of the public?
- Are the research findings likely to make a difference? E.g. to treatments or public services?
- Does this research overlap with other publicly available research that you are aware of?

Patient and Public Involvement (PPI)

- To what extent do you think that the relevant people or groups (i.e. patients, carers, or members of the public) have been appropriately involved in the development of the research proposal and in what capacity?
- If funded, to what extent do you think that the relevant people or groups will be involved in the conduct of the proposed research?
- Do the applicants appear to have considered the costs of ongoing public involvement in the study?

Research outputs

- Do you think that the circulation of the research findings to members of the public has been well planned? Is it appropriate?
- Please outline any opportunities, which you feel the team may have missed, to share what they have learned.

1.2 Key strengths

- What are the key strengths of this proposal? Please give an overall assessment of the key strengths of the research proposal from your perspective.

1.3 Key weaknesses

- What are the key weaknesses of this proposal? Please identify and summarise any aspects of the proposal that you perceive to be a weakness from your perspective.

You may wish to consider the following questions when preparing your response in sections 1.2 and 1.3:

Proposed research methods, recruitment and scientific quality

- Could the recruitment process work?
- Would you be happy to become a participant in the research? Would you be happy for a friend or family member to become a participant in the research?
- Are there any issues, which may be caused due to the setting or timing of any proposed intervention, and commitments, that are likely to impact on the daily lives of participants?
- Do you think the research is likely to be doable? What are your reasons?
- Have the researchers chosen the right study group?
- Are there any changes that should be made to the research to make it better for patients taking part in it?
- If you feel that the study may not work or may have difficulties, because the researchers do not understand enough about the relevant patient or participant groups, it is very important that you highlight this in your response.

Research team, resources and research management

- Does the research team have an appropriate mix of skills (i.e. researchers from different disciplines, managers and professionals, patients and/or public members)?
- Are the resources requested appropriate for the proposed study?
- Does the proposal appear to be good value for money?

1.4 Does the plain English Summary give a clear explanation of the research?

- Does the plain English summary give a clear explanation of the research?
- Does it help you carry out your review? If not, why not?
- Is the language used appropriate and clear? If not, where are the problems?
- Are scientific terms, abbreviations and jargon explained? If not, which terms need explanation?
- If this research is funded, the plain English summary will be published on a variety of websites without the rest of this application form. Could this plain English summary be used on its own to describe the proposed research? If not, what further information is needed?

1.5 Questions to applicants

If you have any questions, thoughts or reflections that you would like to raise with the applicants prior to an assessment by the funding board, please raise them in this section. Applicants are given an opportunity to respond to your anonymized questions and these will then be provided to the funding board.

You might want to consider the following:

- Is there anything that you would like the researchers to clarify?
- Is there anything that you think they should consider or reconsider?
- Is there anything that you think they should include or exclude?

Section 2: Score & Confidential Comments

2.1 Please use this section to raise any other comments you would like to make in confidence from the applicants.

This section should be used if you are concerned that making a comment may identify you to the applicants. It would be most useful if the majority of your comments were made in prior sections as your feedback may help applicants to improve their application. If you are unsure about this or have any queries then please contact us.

2.2 Please provide a summary score that reflects your overall assessment of the proposed research

In this section we ask you to provide a summary score.

Your score should reflect your overall assessment of the proposal. For more information about the funding process please see **Appendix A**.

Score	Description of application	Suggested outcome	What this means from the perspective of a public contributor, including considerations around the delivery, PPI, conduct and dissemination of the proposed research.
6	Excellent	Proposed research can be funded as it stands	I have no concerns about this proposal.
5	Good	Proposed research can be funded with minor changes	The concerns that I have about this proposal could be easily corrected.
4	Good potential	There is much merit in this proposal, but it could be funded, perhaps after resubmission, with additional external support.	The concerns that I have about this proposal could be corrected.
3	Some merits	There are significant weaknesses in this proposal, but these could in principle be addressed.	I have significant concerns but it may be possible for these to be addressed, although it would not be straightforward to do so.
2	Poor	Weak proposal	I have very strong concerns, which would be difficult to address, but the proposal does have some merit.
1	Extremely poor	Unsupportable proposal	I have very strong concerns that would be extremely difficult to address.

Feedback from reviewers

We are always seeking to improve our processes, including the guidance and support we give to our reviewers. Please let us know if you have any comments or feedback about any aspect of this process.

Appendix A: The funding process

When considering full proposals, the board members have the responsibility to take into account the views from all reviewers and other board members to decide what research to recommend for funding. Board members are asked to score each proposal based on the view they have formed, and an average score is calculated for the proposal. The highest scoring proposals will be recommended for funding. Those proposals that are deemed 'important' but have other issues, which may prevent them achieving a high score, can be designated as a 'fund with change'.

All of our funding boards include public members, and all full proposals should include an assessment by an appropriately experienced member of the public. All proposals which are designated as a 'fund with change' are required to go through an iterative process to ensure that they have corrected all issues before they are taken further.