

UoL Protocols governing research grant applications

IMPORTANT: During the changed working environment as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, while everyone is working from home, all application paperwork (including completed application form, research ethics forms, etc) must be submitted to Research Services a minimum of five working days before the funders' deadline to ensure that financial review is undertaken and Institutional Approval is provided in full and on time.

CONTEXT

- 1 Engaging with research grant funding opportunities is an important part of an academic's portfolio of activities. Obtaining research grants from peer-reviewed competitive sources is an important marker of the external esteem of researchers and is used in reviewing applications for academic posts and for promotions. External grant-funded research adds to the quantum of academic activity in the School and its institutes and provides a welcome diversification of income. These protocols are offered to help your success in these endeavours. Putting a grant application together takes a lot of your time; the Research Services and its processes have been established to ensure that your time is used to the very best effect.
- 2 External funders require submitting institutions to assure them that they have procedures in place to ensure that applications are quality controlled internally before submission. This is part of their policy of 'demand management' – for institutions to screen weak applications before submission to enable applicants to revise and strengthen them to save their and the funder's time (and cost).
- 3 A set of research protocols has been established for those making grant applications under the aegis of the University of London and they apply to all departments, the School of Advanced Study, but also Senate House Library, Co-Sector, UoLWorldwide and University of London Institute Paris. They are part of the UOL financial regulations in particular the financial protocols FP12, and include a light-touch approach for small grants.
- 4 Non-Adherence to current protocols exposes the University to risk of blacklisting by funders – a risk which cannot be accepted. These protocols are **mandatory** for all schemes that require institutional sign-off, which must be secured through Research Services before submission (i.e. all research councils and major UK research funding charities such as Leverhulme and Wellcome)..

PROTOCOLS

The protocols make mention of deadlines and indicate minimum amounts of time that should be allowed between the various stages up to submission. For 'open date' schemes, you should interpret deadline to mean your intended date of submission.

For proposals under £15K:

- a. **Deadline minus three weeks:** You should let your institute (or equivalent) Director know at least this far in advance that you are intending to submit an application. The Director needs to authorize the application to proceed. Institute administrator/manager and Research Services must be notified when approved.
- b. **Deadline minus two weeks:**
 - I. **Draft proposal** should be sent to Research Services to ensure that enough time is given to
 - I. Undertake a light-touch review if needed (advisable if proposal is close to £15K and additional staffing will be required);
 - II. Assess ethical issues and their implications;
 - III. Cost the proposal;
 - IV. A risk assessment may be needed if the application includes recruitment.
- c. **Deadline minus five working days: Final paperwork** must be submitted to Research Services either by email or via the relevant portal to ensure all checks can be undertaken and approval (usually online) can be provided in a timely fashion. (Formal institutional approval is currently being provided by Research Services and the Dean/PVC (or his nominee)).

Tip: Even for a small grant, we would strongly recommend allowing two months to review details of schemes, write the proposal (and discuss it with peers) and confirm any collaboration where appropriate.

For proposals of more than £15K:

- a. **Deadline minus three months:** You are advised to discuss your proposal with your Director this far in advance of submission so that she/he has proper time to discuss matters such as the effects on your workload model, what University resources are required to support the proposed work, etc. The Director's (or equivalent) approval is required and the institute administrator/manager and Research Services should be notified if/when approved. RS will provide the relevant documentation, timetable and template required to support and coordinate the process.

NB: For a **fixed-term member of staff** who wishes to submit a grant application under the University's aegis beyond the period of their actual employment contract, it is absolutely vital that the applicant discuss and review **as early as possible** all the implications of making a grant application **with their Director**, who hold the ultimate responsibility and authority on the matter, to avoid developing proposals that the University ultimately *cannot* support. If applicants cannot apply under the University's aegis but wish to apply as independent scholars, they should take advice either from the funder and/or from Research Services, who would still provide full support.

- b. **Deadline minus five weeks:** You need to confirm with Research Services your intention to apply. The RS will review the scheme and clarify any issues with you and the Director if needed.

NB: Any proposals made to **the EU funding schemes** should be as strong as they can be and the notification and preparation time **for all EU grant applications** is now **3 months before the deadline**, instead of the standard 5 weeks.

- c. **Deadline minus five-four weeks: Final Draft proposal and Costing Request** must be submitted to RS to ensure enough time is given to:
- Organize a peer review (which takes five working days);
 - Cost proposal (which takes five working days);
 - Financial assessment based on first costing and any other implications reviewed and discussed if needed,
 - Consider ethical issues and implications, and, if needed, submit proposal to the Research Ethics Committee (which can take up to 3 weeks);
- d. **Deadline minus three weeks:**
- This is the very latest point at which the **applicant needs to give RS access to the online application and/or relevant template** to ensure that support can be given to you and checks of funder's process requirements are made;
 - Adjustment to costing is undertaken based on peer-review feedback if needed (3 working days);
 - Any other adjustments to proposal are made;
- e. **Deadline minus two weeks:**
- **A Risk Assessment Form** must be finalised 10 working days **before the deadline**, once all costs have been agreed, to allow institutional assessment to be carried out thoroughly, resolve any queries, and acquire final sign off by the Dean/PCV on behalf of the University.
- Submission cannot be approved if a risk assessment has not been conducted and approved by the Director of the unit/institute (or his/her deputy), the Head of Management Information and Research Services and the Dean/PVC (Research)*
- f. **Deadline minus five working days:**
- **Final paperwork** must be submitted to Research Services either by email or via the relevant portal to ensure all checks can be undertaken and final approval (online) can be given. (Formal institutional approval is currently being provided by Research Services and the Dean/PVC (or his nominee)).

Things you need to know:

- These protocols apply to all colleagues (staff, students and fellows) who wish to submit a **research proposal**, whether in the form of a fellowship scheme, a knowledge exchange scheme, a standard research grant scheme, a professorship scheme, a small grant scheme, a mobility scheme, etc.
- These protocols apply to **all funders** which require institutional approvals before submissions are accepted. They do not apply to bids for **philanthropic**

funds/donations, for which the Development Office manage the process.

- **Outline applications** do not require risk assessment (unless new staff are to be recruited) or ethical assessment (unless the funder insists upon it), though we do recommend that peer review is conducted. Costing policies apply as most funders do not want to see significant change between the outline and the full proposal.
- These internal deadlines apply to all grants whether we are the **lead** or **collaborating**. If our collaborators have an internal deadline in addition to the funders' deadline, the applicant should discuss the timeline with RS to ensure our own part of the proposal (in particular costing) is approved appropriately before it is sent to the collaborator. (Only RS can circulate the agreed costing which is done on institutional-headed letter)
- Some calls do have a **short turn-around that cannot be avoided**. Protocols still apply and the timetable should be clarified for each with the applicant.
- Costing/modelling scenarios is possible but takes more than five working days and should be factored into the application's timetable as needed.
- **Risk assessment** covers **staffing, student, space, procurement, ICT, legal and other contractual assessments and commitments before, during and after** the grant has finished as described in the Financial Regulations FP12. They all need to be cleared, **with ethical approval** to secure institutional approval.

SUMMARY

Research Services will not submit applications, which do not abide by these protocols. This has the inevitable consequence that your application cannot be submitted until the next deadline, or, *in extremis*, will miss being submitted entirely if it is responding to a one-off call. That would be incredibly unfortunate but an eventuality that can be easily avoided by following the protocols, which are designed to support you in maximizing your success.

The research services team will endeavour to be as flexible as possible but managing the grant application process in this way will ensure that as many applications as possible are given the best chance to be successful.

Please let Sandrine Alarçon-Symonds, our Head of Management Information and Research Services, know if you think of ways to improve these protocols further.



Rick Rylance, Dean and Chief Executive/Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research)

(Updated June 2020)