

ESRC Good Practice Event – Cardiff, 25 November 2011

Feedback from Workshop Discussion Groups

What is current practice in HEIs in terms of quality assurance and volume control?

- All of the HEIs represented at the event operate internal peer review systems to act as a quality control mechanism prior to the submission of applications. Precise mechanisms vary, and some participants reported that there can be difficulties in ensuring that applicants allow sufficient time for the internal peer review process to be completed.
- It was pointed out that quality assurance and demand management are two different things.

At what level and through what structures should HEIs manage the submission of funding applications?

- In most institution, the internal peer review is undertaken at the level of schools/colleges. However, one institution is considering setting up broader panels which reflect the structure of the ESRC panels, and two institutions which collaborate closely are considering establishing a joint peer review process.
- It was felt that there were issues about who in the institution would have the final decision on whether or not an application should be submitted. Care would also need to be taken to ensure that the system does not favour applications from established senior researchers over early career researchers.

What more could ESRC do to support institutions in managing demand?

- There were some concerns that demand management might encourage institutions to submit safer, less innovative bids. It was suggested that there should be a system of Innovation Awards, applications for which would lie outside the sanction arrangements.
- ESRC should provide greater clarity on how sanctions will operate in the case of multidisciplinary and cross-institutional applications.
- ESRC should make greater use of outline applications.
- The ESRC could potentially make the review criteria for award schemes more available and transparent. Universities could then use this information to

develop a pro forma enabling them to prioritise and judge the quality of any potential bids that they might be considering for submission.

- Outlying marks from 'rogue' assessors can pull down the overall score for proposals which are otherwise assessed as being very strong. ESRC should review this aspect of its assessment system.
- It would be helpful if the ESRC could provide more detailed feedback on unsuccessful applications. It was also considered that institutions need to make more effective use of the feedback and, to this end, it was suggested that feedback (including reviewer comments) should be provided to the research office as well as to the applicant.
- It was suggested that it would be helpful to hold an event at which successful applicants from Welsh HEIs could share their experience and good practice with others.