EARLY CAREER FELLOWSHIPS

PEER REVIEW GUIDELINES

for funding commencing in 2014

Prepared by the
National Health and Medical Research Council
(February 2013)
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Overview of 2013 Early Career Fellowships Peer Review Process

**PEER REVIEW PANELS**

- PRP membership selection & appointment process.
- Panel members declare Conflicts of Interest for all applications assigned to their panel.
- Panel members score all non-conflicted applications against the selection criteria and 1SP provides a feedback comment.
- NHMRC provides each panel member with a normalised combined provisional ranked list of applications for each category on each PRP prior to the teleconferences. The list includes the 1SP feedback comment.

**NHMRC**

- Applications close
  1 May
  NHMRC staff confirms eligibility.
- NHMRC staff checks for CoI, allocates spokespersons & provides panel members with access to applications in RGMS (excluding high COIs).

**EXTERNAL TO PRP & NHMRC**

- Indigenous External Assessors, Electromagnetic Energy and Bioinformatics/Biostatistics Advisors declare CoIs and prepare reports.

**Final Ranking**

NHMRC interleave ranked lists to create a single ranked list for each category (only where there is more than one panel within a specific category). This is based on the panel’s final agreed normalised scores.

**Ranking Teleconferences**

5 July – 26 July 2013
Panels confirm final ranking of applications and agree on the 1SP feedback comment.

**Research Committee**

- Research Committee will:
  - consider funding recommendations & advise Council; and
  - review rules and recommend changes for the following year.

**Council**

- Council will consider funding recommendations & advise CEO.

**CEO**

- CEO submits funding recommendations to Minister.

**Minister**

- Minister considers funding recommendations & instructs CEO.

- NHMRC staff notifies applicants of outcomes & commences award process.
1. Introduction

The Early Career Fellowships Peer Review Guidelines for funding commencing in 2014 (the Guidelines) describe the general process, procedures and timeline for peer reviewing applications for Early Career Fellowships (ECFs). They also contain important information about the conduct of peer review. The Peer Review Panels (PRPs) will be provided with separate detailed instructions for each phase of the peer review, including processes undertaken within the Research Grants Management System (RGMS).

These Guidelines complement the NHMRC Funding Rules incorporating the Early Career Fellowships scheme for funding commencing in 2014 (the Funding Rules), which were made available to applicants to assist them in preparing and submitting their applications. It is important that the Guidelines be read in conjunction with the Funding Rules. The Funding Rules contain essential information about the aims of the ECF scheme, eligibility and requirements of the scheme, assessment criteria, ethics and other required approvals, budgets and reporting requirements, the application process and other relevant matters. Additionally, it may prove beneficial to understand the NHMRC Early Career Fellowships Advice and Instructions to Applicants for funding commencing in 2014 (the Advice and Instructions). The Funding Rules and Advice and Instructions can be found at: http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/grants/apply-funding/early-career-fellowships.

Researchers from the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and the University of Melbourne will be conducting research on peer review processes within biomedical and/or public health full-time categories of the ECF scheme. Further information on the study is provided in the NHMRC Information Document.

Panel members are required to provide consent if they wish to also take part in the study. The peer review process followed by panel members will not be affected by the study.

2. Changes to the Funding Rules which impact on the peer review process

The following changes have been made to the Funding Rules since 2012 which will impact on the peer review process:

- Only the supervisor is required to submit a referee report – the independent and applicant nominated referee reports are no longer required.
- Wording for the Indigenous category has been clarified to ensure that it is for Indigenous researchers wishing to undertake postdoctoral research in any field and for all researchers wishing to undertake research in areas of relevance to Indigenous health. The scoring matrix has also been updated.
- When an applicant wishes to remain in the same research group the selection criteria and scoring matrix have been modified so that panel members can score applicants in a consistent manner.

The following changes to the peer review process for ECFs will also be implemented for this application round:

- All Chairs will be appointed as independent members and therefore will not score applications. Their role is to lead panel discussions, ensure due process is followed in regards to conflicts of interest and ensure all applications are given a fair and equitable assessment.
• Further refinements have been made to the scoring process. Scores will be normalised at criterion level and the panel will adjust each normalised criterion score at the teleconference.

• Feedback reports will include a quartile rating.

• A new process has been introduced to review sensitive career disruptions. NHMRC will advise panels in regards to the amount of time to be taken into consideration towards such career disruptions.

3. Conduct during peer review

The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research stipulates that participants in peer review should:

• be fair and timely in their review;
• act in confidence and not disclose the content or outcome of any process in which they are involved;
• declare all conflicts of interest, not permit personal prejudice to influence the peer review process and not introduce considerations that are not relevant to the review criteria;
• not take undue or calculated advantage of knowledge obtained during the peer review process;
• ensure that they are informed about, and comply with, the criteria to be applied;
• not agree to participate in peer review outside their area of expertise; and
• give proper consideration to research that challenges or changes accepted ways of thinking.

All participants in the peer review process must observe, or be aware of, relevant policies and standards with respect to the following:

3.1. Confidentiality and Privacy

3.1.1 Responsibility of panel members

Section 80 of the National Health and Medical Research Act 1992 (NHMRC Act) prevents members of the NHMRC (including staff and members of NHMRC Council, committees and peer review panels) from disclosing confidential information acquired in the course of their duties and relating to matter under consideration by NHMRC, unless the disclosure is made in the performance of duties under the NHMRC Act. Information which may properly be regarded as confidential should be designated as such.

3.1.2 Privacy

Documents containing personal information must be handled and protected in accordance with the provisions of the Privacy Act 1988 (the Privacy Act), which sets standards for access to, collection, storage, use and disclosure of personal information. Personal information can only be disclosed with permission from the individual to whom it relates or where the Privacy Act allows.

3.2. Commonwealth Freedom of Information Act 1982

NHMRC is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (the FOI Act) and is committed to meeting the Australian Government's transparency and accountability requirements. The FOI Act provides a legal right of access to any person to obtain documents of Commonwealth agencies. Access to documents may only be refused where the FOI Act provides a legal basis for the refusal, such as where the documents are exempt.

However, subject to its FOI obligations, NHMRC remains committed to maintaining the confidentiality of grant applications, the peer review process and the privacy of people participating in peer review. If an FOI application is received in relation to peer review documents, NHMRC will
take into account the nature of those documents and where appropriate, consult with anyone whose personal information or business information may be affected by the release of those documents.

### 3.3. Conflict of interest

A conflict of interest (CoI) arises in any situation in which a participant in a peer review process has an interest which may influence, or be perceived to influence, the proper performance of the participant’s responsibilities to the NHMRC. The perception of a CoI is as important as any actual CoI.

The NHMRC is committed to ensuring that CoIs are dealt with consistently, transparently and with rigour.

The peer review process requires that people within the field have access to others’ grant applications. This is a privilege which carries an obligation on the part of reviewers to act in good faith, in an open and sensible manner and in accordance with NHMRC policy, the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and best practice in peer review.

Guidance on the management of CoI is provided in Attachment A. Panel members will receive separate detailed instructions regarding the process for completing the CoI process.

### 3.4. Contact with applicants

Researchers whose work is undergoing peer review must not seek to influence the process or outcome of their applications. Applicants, or Research Administration Officers (RAOs) on applicants’ behalf, must not directly contact peer review panel members or external assessors in relation to their application or the peer review process. If they do so, panel members/assessors must inform NHMRC, and NHMRC may exclude their application from further consideration. Similarly, panel members/assessors must not contact applicants. In instances where applicants have queries, they are to direct these to their Administering Institution’s RAO in the first instance.

### 3.5. Productivity relative to opportunity & career disruptions

Panel members are to assess each application against the selection criteria taking into account relative to opportunity considerations and career disruptions, as outlined in Part 1, Sections 3.6 and 3.7 of the Funding Rules.

#### 3.5.1 Relative to Opportunity

Peer reviewers’ consideration of relative to opportunity may take into account the amount of time spent as an active researcher; career disruption; available resources; clinical, administrative or teaching workload; relocation of an applicant and his/her research laboratory or clinical practice setting; restrictions on publication associated with time spent working in other sectors (e.g. industry, policy and government) and the typical performance of researchers in the research field in question.

Recognition of relative to opportunity reflects NHMRC’s aim that assessment processes should accurately measure an applicant’s track record relative to stage of career, by aligning considerations of productivity and contribution with the opportunities that have been available to them.

#### 3.5.2 Career Disruption

Career disruption represents a special category within the assessment of relative to opportunity, and includes pregnancy; major illness; and carer responsibilities including parental leave. Employment outside the research sector including time spent working in industry, clinical, administrative or teaching workload; relocation of laboratory or clinical practice setting or other similar
circumstances that impact upon research productivity are not considered to be career disruption and are considered under relative to opportunity.

NHMRC will advise panel members on any applicant-identified career disruptions that are of a sensitive nature.

3.6. Use of Impact Factors and other metrics
Peer reviewers should take into account their expert knowledge of their field of research, as well as the citation and publication practices of that field when assessing the publication component of an applicant’s track record. Track record assessment should take into account the overall impact, quality and contribution to the field of all of the published journal articles from the applicant, not just the standing of the journal in which those articles are published. NHMRC encourages the publication of articles in high-impact journals, but warns against using the overall impact of all publications in a journal as a proxy measure for the impact of individual published outputs.

It is not appropriate to use publication and citation metrics such as Journal Impact Factors, Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) Ranked Journal List or h-index when assessing applications as these can potentially be misleading when applied to the peer review of publication outputs of individuals. More information on this topic can be found at:

or


3.7 Complaints
Applicants may contact the NHMRC seeking clarification on the outcome of their application for funding, or to state an objection to any part of the process. The objection should be directed to the NHMRC Complaints Officer through the Administering Institution’s Research Office. Applicants also have the right to lodge a complaint with the Commissioner of Complaints who, under the NHMRC Act, is empowered to conduct an administrative review of each complaint.

Part 1, Section 8 of the Funding Rules provides information about the objection and complaints process, including the grounds on which the Commissioner of Complaints can review the outcome of an application.

4. Peer review participants

4.1 Peer Review Panels (PRPs)
PRPs are established under Section 39 of the NHMRC Act to review all ECF applications. Each PRP will consist of at least five panel members and an independent Chairperson. The number of PRPs used to assess applications will depend on the number of applications received.

PRP members are chosen to ensure content and field expertise across biomedical, clinical, population health, primary health care and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander categories. Geographical spread, gender balance and institutional representation are also considered when determining each panel’s membership. Members are appointed for one year, and are generally not reappointed for more than three consecutive years. Current applicants are not permitted to participate in the assessment process as PRP members.
Following the allocation of applications to PRPs, identification of CoIs, and subsequent allocation of applications to spokesperson for review, if the NHMRC or panel Chairs consider that the panel membership requires augmentation, additional members with specific expertise will be identified and appointed.

In the event of a PRP member withdrawing from the peer review process, the NHMRC will, if time permits, replace them with another member possessing appropriate expertise. If a replacement member cannot be found, the NHMRC will reallocate the application/s within the relevant PRP. If the PRP member is contactable after withdrawing from the process, the NHMRC may contact the member with queries relating to the applications originally allocated to them.

4.1.1 Quorum

NHMRC has identified that three voting members are a sufficient quorum to discuss and score applicants. Fewer than three members would require the appointment of an extra panel member to maintain a quorum.

4.2 Bioinformatics and/or Biostatistics Advisor(s)

Bioinformatics and biostatistics have been identified by NHMRC as important and emerging fields in which Australia needs to build capacity. In order to support capacity building in these areas, a senior Bioinformatician and/or Biostatistician will be involved as an advisor in the peer review of the ECF applications. This advisor will only be required if applications are received from bioinformaticians or biostatisticians.

4.3 Electromagnetic Energy Advisor

Electromagnetic Energy (EME) research has been identified by the NHMRC as a special interest area for the 2013 application round of ECFs. The aim is to build capacity in research knowledge to ascertain the health effects of electromagnetic emissions.

In order to support capacity building in these areas, a senior Electromagnetic Energy Advisor will be involved in the peer review of the ECF applications. This advisor will only be required if applications are received from researchers within this field.

5. Duties and responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of participants in the peer review of applications as well as the NHMRC CEO, Council, Research Committee, the Research Committee Portfolio Representative and NHMRC Staff are detailed in the following table.

Key participants in the peer review process will be publicly acknowledged on the NHMRC website without reference to the specific application that they assessed, following the peer review process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>The primary duties and responsibilities of the Chair are to ensure NHMRC’s procedures are adhered to and that a fair and equitable consideration is given to every application being reviewed by the PRP. Chairs are appointed to be independent of the review of applications and to manage the process of peer review in accordance with these Guidelines. Chairs will: • participate in the peer review process as the panel Chair of their allocated panel; • identify and advise the NHMRC of all real or potential CoIs they have with applications in their PRP;</td>
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- confirm the assignment of applications to panels and spokespersons is appropriate;
- familiarise themselves with ALL applications being considered by the PRP;
- chair the PRP meetings;
- ensure appropriate action is taken in relation to declared CoIs;
- ensure that observers are fully aware of the names and affiliations of the applicants under discussion to ensure CoI guidelines are followed;
- ensure procedures are followed;
- keep discussion on time and focussed;
- promote good engagement by spokespersons and PRP members;
- ensure consistency across reviews;
- assist PRP members in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities; and
- in consultation with the NHMRC, confirm applications identified as being non-competitive.

**PRP Member**

The primary duties and responsibilities of a PRP member are to:

- identify and advise the NHMRC of all real or potential CoIs they have with applications in their PRP;
- provide a fair, impartial and scientific assessment in a timely manner;
- read and have a thorough understanding of ALL applications being assessed by the PRP, paying particular attention to those for which they are 1SP and 2SP (see duties and responsibilities of 1SP and 2SP below);
- provide scores against the selection criteria for each application reviewed by the PRP taking into consideration relative to opportunity and career disruptions, where applicable; and
- prepare for and participate in panel discussion for each application.

**Primary Spokesperson (1SP)**

The primary duties and responsibilities of a 1SP in addition to that of a standard PRP member are to:

- glean any productivity ‘relative to opportunity’ considerations highlighted in the application and ensure these are considered by the other panel members when the application is being discussed at teleconferences;
- provide a score prior to the teleconference;
- provide an overall comment that is suitable for provision in a feedback report to applicants; and
- lead the PRP teleconference discussion on the competitiveness of the application with reference to the selection criteria.

**Secondary Spokesperson (2SP)**

The primary duties and responsibilities of a 2SP in addition to that of a standard PRP member are to:

- glean any productivity ‘relative to opportunity’ considerations highlighted in the application and ensure these are considered by the other panel members when this applications is being discussed at teleconferences;
- provide a score prior to the teleconference; and
- support the application discussion at the PRP teleconference on the competitiveness of the application with reference to the selection criteria.

**Bioinformatics/Biostatistics Advisor(s)**

The primary duties and responsibilities of the Bioinformatics and/or Biostatistics Advisor(s) are to:

- identify and advise the NHMRC of all real or potential CoIs they have with applications;
- brief all PRP members at the briefing teleconference on:
  1. What the track record of a “successful early career Bioinformatician/Biostatistician” would look like.
  2. Highlight any other special issues panel members should consider when assessing Bioinformaticians and Biostatisticians; and
- provide written feedback on Bioinformatics/Biostatistics applicants for PRP members to consider.

**They will not score applications.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Electromagnetic Energy Advisor</th>
<th>The primary duties and responsibilities of the Electromagnetic Energy Advisor are to:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• identify and advise the NHMRC of all real or potential CoIs they have with applications;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• brief all PRP members at the Briefing Teleconference on:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. what the track record of a “successful early career Electromagnetic Energy Researcher” would look like, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. highlight any other special issues panel members should consider when assessing Electromagnetic Energy Researchers; and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• provide written feedback on Electromagnetic Energy applicants for PRP members to consider.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>They will not score applications.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th>Observer</th>
<th>The PRP may have independent observers present during teleconferences. Observers will be briefed on PRP procedures. They will not participate in the discussion of any applications.</th>
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<td>The primary duties and responsibilities of an observer are to:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• identify and advise the NHMRC of all real or potential CoIs they have with applications;</td>
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<td>• during PRP discussions, monitor procedural aspects of the PRP’s conduct;</td>
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<td>• provide feedback to NHMRC on the consistency of procedures; and</td>
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<td>• raise any issues of a general nature with NHMRC staff who may communicate these issues to Chairs.</td>
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<tr>
<th>NHMRC CEO</th>
<th>The NHMRC CEO is ultimately accountable for the peer review of applications for NHMRC funding.</th>
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<td></td>
<td>With authority under <em>Section 39</em> of the NHMRC Act, the CEO may establish any working committees that are necessary to carry out the functions of the CEO, the Council or a Principal Committee.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Following advice from Council, the CEO is also responsible for making recommendations for funding to the Minister for Health.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Council</th>
<th>The functions of the NHMRC Council are:</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• to provide funding recommendations to the CEO;</td>
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<td>• to provide advice to the CEO in relation to the performance of his or her functions;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• any other functions conferred on the Council in writing by the Minister after consulting the CEO; and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• any other functions conferred on the Council by the NHMRC Act, the regulations or any other law.</td>
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| Research Committee           | As outlined in *Section 35* of the NHMRC Act, the functions of the Research Committee are: |
- to advise and make recommendations to the Council on the application of the Medical Research Endowment Account (MREA);
- to monitor the use of assistance provided from the MREA;
- to advise the Council on matters relating to medical research and public health research, including the quality and scope of such research in Australia;
- other functions as the Minister from time to time determines in writing after consulting the CEO; and
- any other functions conferred on the Committee by the Act, the regulations or any other law.

| Research Committee Portfolio Representative | The primary duties and responsibilities of the member of the Research Committee with the ECF Portfolio are to:
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>advise staff in relation to finalising Funding Rules and Peer Review Guidelines;</td>
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<td>advise (as appropriate) on membership of PRPs and Chairs;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>identify and advise the NHMRC of all real potential CoIs they have with applications;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>along with NHMRC staff and the Chair, observe/monitor the processes and contribute to finding solutions for any problems that may arise;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>support NHMRC staff as they implement policy and follow established procedures;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>delegate their responsibility if a CoI impedes their ability to act in the above capacities; and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>report back to Research Committee as to the processes and any improvements for the future.</td>
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<td>As the Research Committee Portfolio Representative is not involved in assessing applications, they should not make comments on the merits of individual applications.</td>
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<tr>
<th>NHMRC Staff</th>
<th>Under direction from the CEO, NHMRC staff will be responsible for overall administration of the peer review process and for the conduct of specific activities.</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NHMRC staff will:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• approach potential PRP members and Chairs;</td>
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<td>• assign applications to the appropriate panels and assign spokespersons;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• provide the following administrative support and advice to the Chair and members:</td>
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<td>o facilitate use of RGMS;</td>
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<td>o provide policy advice to the PRP Chair and members including on the management of CoIs;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o maintain accurate records of CoI;</td>
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<td>o ensure that the Chair is aware of all CoI declared by members;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o provide advice on the treatment of declared CoI; and</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o provide advice on dealing with sensitive career disruptions.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• ensure that observers are fully aware of the names and affiliations of the applicants under discussion to ensure CoI guidelines are followed;</td>
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<td>• ensure that all PRP members and assessors are provided with the necessary information to review each application;</td>
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<td>• ensure that all feedback reports are provided to applicants;</td>
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<td>• maintain scoring records for each application;</td>
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<td>• record outcome of PRP recommendations;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• act as the first point of contact for PRP members; and</td>
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6. Peer review process

The NHMRC peer review is expected to provide a rigorous, fair, transparent and consistent assessment of the merits of each application in keeping with the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*.

Outlined below are the stages of the ECF peer review process.

6.1 Briefing teleconference

Briefing teleconferences will take place shortly after the close of applications to outline the peer review process for the ECF scheme and to highlight particular issues PRP members should be aware of and take into consideration.

6.2 Receipt and initial processing of applications

NHMRC staff will verify that ECF applications meet eligibility criteria. Applicants will be advised if their application is ineligible, however in most instances these applications will remain in the peer review process until their ineligibility is confirmed by NHMRC.

6.3 Assignment of applications to PRPs

Applications are assigned to a PRP based on the category of ECF and/or fields of research chosen by applicants within their RGMS application.

6.4 Identification of CoIs

Panel members will be provided access to the Snapshot Summary Report of each application assigned to their PRP, and will declare their CoI in accordance with the guidelines provided by the NHMRC (*Attachment A*).

Panel members will be given access to the full application only if they have no or a low CoI. Where panel members declare that they have a high CoI they will not be granted access to the full details of the application.

Some members may have a CoI for which they require a ruling. In this instance NHMRC will assess the information in the declaration made by the member and specify a level of participation in RGMS. Members are requested to ensure they include sufficient detail in their declaration to ensure an accurate CoI assessment can be made by NHMRC staff. All CoI rulings will be confirmed by the Chair. Rulings on CoIs declared by panel Chairs will be confirmed by senior NHMRC staff.

CoIs must be declared at the beginning of the peer review process. However, CoIs may be declared at any stage of the peer review process if new conflicts become apparent.

6.5 Allocation of Spokespersons

Taking into account CoIs and where possible the indicated preferences of PRP members, NHMRC staff will assign each application a 1SP and 2SP. It is expected that each member of the PRP (apart from the Chair) will be allocated an equal proportion of applications as 1SP and 2SP.

Panel members should read ALL applications for their panel carefully, but pay particular attention to those for which they are 1SP and 2SP.
6.6 PRP members access to applications

All panel members will be provided with RGMS access to those applications on their PRP, excluding any applications where a high CoI exists. When accessing the full application, PRP members should again check whether they have a CoI not previously evident and notify NHMRC if a previously undeclared CoI exists. The PRP member may be required to delete the files pertaining to applications with which they are conflicted.

The “Download All” function of RGMS will enable PRP members to download the following documents required to review an application:

- ‘Assessor’ Snapshot (relevant sections of the application and Profile and CV required to assess the application, to be used by panel members and assessors);
- Uploaded documents which include:
  - Mandatory documents
    - ‘Evidence of the date applicants PhD was passed’ PDF
    - ‘Academic Transcript’ PDF
    - ‘Proposed Research’ PDF
  - If applicable documents
    - ‘Letter of Explanation’ PDF if remaining at the same institution
    - ‘Supervisor Signed Agreement’ PDF if applying under the Health Professional Research Fellowship category
    - ‘Evidence of Australian registration in relevant dental or medical field’ if applicant holds dental/medical qualifications
    - ‘Evidence of Career Disruption’ PDF(s) if career disruptions exist
    - ‘Supporting Documents’ PDFs if application is for the Australia-China Exchange Fellowship.

6.7 Review of applications

6.7.1 General guidelines for scoring of applications

The ECF application funded rate over the last few years has been around 30%. In 2012, the funded rate for ECFs was 28%.

Panel members must critically examine all applications against the selection criteria, relative to opportunity.

6.7.2 Indigenous health assessment process for 2013

NHMRC will endeavour to obtain at least one Indigenous researcher or expert to take on the role of an extra external assessor to complete the peer review of applications with a focus on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health.

The external assessor’s review will have a particular focus on the Criteria for Health and Medical Research of Indigenous Australians (the Criteria – Attachment B). The external assessor will also take into consideration applicants’ track record relative to opportunity.

6.7.3 Initial scoring of applications

Prior to the initial teleconference, PRP members must score all applications against the ECF selection criteria using the scoring matrices provided (Attachments C and D). The Funding Rules indicate that the entire track record for an applicant should be considered, taking into account career disruptions and relative to opportunity considerations (for explanation of these concepts refer to the Funding Rules, Part 1 Sections 3.6 Relative to Opportunity and 3.7 Career Disruption).
Panel members should take into account the written feedback provided by the Bioinformatics, Biostatistics and Electromagnetic Energy Advisor(s) where applicable, and for applications with an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health research focus, the written external assessment against the Criteria.

The PRP will be provided with scoresheets via email in which to enter their scores.

The criterion scores from each panel member will be normalised (see Attachment E) and combined to create a provisional ranked list of applications for each category on each PRP. These lists will be provided to all PRP members prior to the initial teleconference. These lists are designed to be preliminary in nature and to be used as a guide rather than as the final determinant of rankings, i.e. their purpose is to assist the panel in arriving at its final decisions regarding applicant rankings.

6.7.4 Process for teleconferences
Each panel will meet by teleconference to agree on a ranked list of applications for each category. During the teleconference:
1. The Chair will outline the format of the process.
2. Applications from Bioinformaticians, Biostatisticians and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health will be discussed.
3. With overall discussion being led by the Chair, the PRP should agree on a final ranked list of applications in each category (i.e. there will be a separate ranked list for each category).
   i. The 1SP and 2SP should be prepared to briefly summarise the applicant’s case to the rest of the panel ensuring they communicate any ‘relative to opportunity’ considerations highlighted in the application to the panel.
   ii. All discussion should be related directly to the application’s strengths and weaknesses against the selection criteria only. It is important that the PRP consider the merits of the application in relation to the selection criteria rather than whether the application is considered fundable.
   iii. PRP members should remember to take ALL selection criteria into consideration before changing a ranking.
   iv. If the panel decides to alter the ranking of an application a justification against a particular selection criterion or criteria should be provided. This justification will be noted by NHMRC staff. Additionally, the panel should also instruct NHMRC staff by how much to change a criterion score to reflect both the merits and desired rank of the application.

The panel will be sent the final ranked lists to confirm they reflect what was discussed at teleconference.

6.7.5 Final ranking
Where applications in a given category have been considered by multiple PRPs, NHMRC staff will use the final ranked lists from each PRP to create a ranked list of applications in each category. The panel-agreed scores will be used to integrate the ranked lists from related PRPs.

The Chairs may be sent the final ranked lists for confirmation.

The final ranked lists will be used in preparing the funding recommendations for Research Committee.

Those applications that are below the funding level will serve as the reserve placement listing.
6.7.6 Feedback reports for applicants
A feedback report will be required for all applicants. It will contain numerical information on the competitiveness of the application that will be drawn from the scores given by panel members. It should also include brief comments from the 1SP endorsed by the 2SP and Chair stating:

1. the strengths and weaknesses of the application against the selection criteria taking into account relative to opportunity considerations and career disruptions as well as comments provided by the Bioinformatics/Biostatistics/EME Advisors or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander External Assessor if applicable; and
2. suggestions on how the competitiveness of future applications could be improved, particularly if the application is unlikely to be funded.

6.8 Final funding recommendations
Approval for funding recommendations will be sought from the Minister for Health, following recommendations by Research Committee and Council.

6.9 Advising applicants of the outcomes
Applicants will be advised of the outcomes through the RAO at their Administering Institution following the Minister’s approval of the funding recommendations.

All applicants will be provided with a letter stating the outcome of their application and applicants will also receive a feedback report prepared by the PRP. Details of the successful applicants will also be posted on the NHMRC website following the announcement of the outcomes by the Minister for Health.

7. Applications requesting co-funding
After all ECF applications have been assessed and evaluated by NHMRC PRPs, those applications which nominated a co-funding partner(s) will be forwarded to the nominated partner organisation(s) for their own evaluation and review. Partner organisation(s) advise NHMRC on those applications they wish to co-fund.

The evaluation and ranking of an application by NHMRC is entirely independent of any assessment made by co-funding partners. Applications which have been forwarded to co-funding partners, whether or not they have been selected by the co-funder for co-funding, retain their status and ranking within the NHMRC peer review evaluation process.

Applications selected for co-funded fellowships are administered by NHMRC.

8. At the conclusion of the peer review process

8.1 Reimbursement
The vast majority of PRP members will be paid a sitting fee as determined by the Remuneration Tribunal. Exempt from payment are those PRP members employed by the Commonwealth, State or Territory public service on a full-time basis. NHMRC’s Travel and Corporate Services will process reimbursements, including sitting fees and travel allowance.

8.2 Retention of PRP documentation
PRP members are to retain their speaking notes and any other notes they make of the peer review process until December 2013.
Any additional confidential documentation associated with the application process is to be disposed as classified waste.
ATTACHMENT A – Managing Conflicts of Interest in NHMRC Peer Review

The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) defines a Conflict of Interest (CoI) as arising ‘…in any situation where personal, financial or other interest has the potential to compromise, or have the appearance of compromising, professional judgement and the ability to make unbiased decisions…’.

Introduction

(Source: Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, Section 7)

A CoI exists where there is a divergence between the individual interests of a person and their professional responsibilities such that an independent observer might reasonably conclude that the professional actions of that person are unduly influenced by their own interests.

Conflicts of Interest (CoI) in the research area are common and it is important that they are disclosed and dealt with properly. CoIs have the potential to compromise judgments and decisions that should be made impartially. Such compromise could undermine community trust in research.

Financial CoIs are foremost in the public mind but other conflicts of interest also occur in research, including personal, professional and institutional advantages.

The perception that a CoI exists is also a serious matter and raises concerns about the integrity of individuals or the management practices of the institution.

Researchers frequently have a conflict of interest that cannot be avoided. Decision making processes in research often need expert advice, and the pool of experts in a field can be so small that all the experts have some link with the matter under decision. An individual researcher should therefore expect to be conflicted from time to time, and be ready to acknowledge the conflict and make disclosures as appropriate.

Responsibilities of Peer Review Participants

For NHMRC peer review purposes, CoI may fall into the broad domains of:

- involvement with the application under review
- collaborations
- working relationships
- professional relationships and interest
- social relationships or interests
- teaching or supervisory relationships
- financial relationships or interests
- other interests or relationships

If you are invited to participate in a peer review process, you will be asked to declare any actual or perceived CoI you have. If you think that you may have a CoI with an application you have been asked to review, you should provide sufficient detail about the nature of the (perceived) conflict to enable NHMRC to promptly assess each case.
Your CoI declaration will enable NHMRC to determine:

(i) whether or not, after the conflict has been declared, you should be involved in the peer review process in relation to a particular application; and

(ii) if you are to be involved, the scope of such involvement (e.g. provide a score or report but not be involved in further discussion or the final scoring/ranking of an application).

**Failure to Declare Conflicts of Interest**

The NHMRC Act requires CoI to be identified and specifies the courses of action that apply when this requirement has not been met:

- *Section 42A* of the NHMRC Act requires members to disclose interests in matters being considered.
- *Section 44B(3)* requires the Minister or the CEO to terminate the appointment of a member for failing to comply with the requirements of the NHMRC Act.

It is therefore important for participants to inform the NHMRC of any circumstances which either constitute, may constitute, or could be seen to constitute a CoI.

**Potential Conflicts of Interest situations**

The following *Conflict of Interest Situations* table outlines matters that may need to be considered when deciding where potential conflicts lie and provides some examples of specific situations where CoI in the peer review process applies.

The table is intended to be for guidance only. It is representative of CoI situations rather than definitive, as each situation is different and needs to be considered on its merits. The table is provided to assist participants in the Peer Review process to identify the types of circumstances in which CoI might arise, but is not intended to be a checklist.
# Conflict of Interest Situations

**Please Note:** If you are uncertain about whether you have a CoI, please contact NHMRC secretariat immediately to seek their advice and guidance about your individual CoI issue.

In general the period to consider for these situations is whether they arose within the last five years. This would typically be the case for collaborative, working and professional situations, but you should also consider whether there is something that you *know* will be happening in the future that should be disclosed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situations</th>
<th>Explanations and Examples</th>
<th>Indicative Ruling¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1. Contribution to the application under review** | 1.1. Are you a named participant on the application under review?  
1.2. Have you had discussions or input into the design study or research proposal for this application? | Yes = High Conflict |
| **2. Collaborations**          | 2.1. Have you actively collaborated?  
• publications – co-authorship  
• pending applications  
• existing grants (both with the NHMRC, other organisations, or funding sources)  
2.2. Have you any indirect collaboration?  
• a co-worker who is collaborating with the applicant  
• member of a research /discussion group  
• published together as authors of a multiple-authorship paper where involvement was minimal  
• provided cells/animals to applicant(s) with/without financial gain/exchange  
2.3. Are you planning (or have been approached) to be involved in a future grant application or other future collaborative relationship with the applicant(s)? | Yes = Requires a ruling |
| **3. Working relationship**    | 3.1. Do you have the same employer/organisation?  
3.2. Are you working in the same department (or equivalent) within the organisation?  
3.3. Do you work in the same locality but for a different employer/organisation? | Yes = Usually a high conflict |

¹ Rulings are indicative only. Experienced NHMRC staff will exercise judgement when deciding the level of conflict and, in doing so, will consider the particular circumstance of each potential conflict.

*Early Career Fellowships Peer Review Guidelines for funding commencing in 2014*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situations</th>
<th>Explanations and Examples</th>
<th>Indicative Ruling¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 4. **Professional relationships and interests** | Consider things such as:  
• membership of scientific advisory or review boards, exam boards, trial committees  
• whether you, or your organisation are affiliated with the applicant(s) organisation (and vice versa)  
• whether you or your organisation have an affiliation/association with organisations such as pharmaceutical companies, tobacco companies, etc. | Yes = requires a ruling |
| 5. **Social relationship and/or interests**    | Consider relationships such as:  
• personal/social relationship between you, your partner or other member of your family and the applicant  
• you have a personal/social relationship with the applicant’s partner or other member of their family | Yes = Usually high conflict |
| 6. **Teaching or supervisory relationship**    | For undergraduate or post-graduate studies:  
• you taught or supervised the applicant(s)  
• you co-supervised or taught with the applicant(s)  
• your own research was supervised by the applicants(s) | Yes = High Conflict |
| 7. **Financial interest in the application**   | Consider such things such as:  
• patents pending  
• supply of goods and services  
• improved access to facilities  
• provision of cells/animals or similar to applicant(s) with financial gain/exchange  
• whether you receive research funding or other support from a company, and the research you have been asked to review by NHMRC may impact upon that company | Yes = Usually high conflict or need for a ruling |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situations</th>
<th>Explanations and Examples</th>
<th>Indicative Ruling¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 8. Medical Research Institute | Consider:  
  • employment at the same hospital or Medical Research Institute (eg: Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, Queensland Institute of Medical Research, and Garvan Institute etc.) | Yes = High Conflict |
| 9. Other interests or situations | Also consider:  
  • previous or pending disputes (may require consideration of events earlier than within the last five years) | Yes = High Conflict |
ATTACHMENT B – Criteria in Relation to Research into the Health of Indigenous Australians

Applicants are required to address the extent to which their application fulfils these criteria in relation to research into the health of Indigenous Australians including documentation and other relevant written evidence where appropriate.

The criteria are:

- Community engagement
- Benefit
- Sustainability and transferability
- Building capability
- Priority
- Significance

**Community engagement**

The proposal demonstrates how the project has had and will have relevant community engagement by individuals, communities and/or organisations in conceptualisation, development and approval, data collection and management, analysis, report writing and dissemination of results.

**Benefit**

The proposal demonstrates the potential health benefit of the project for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. Benefit need not necessarily be direct or immediate.

**Sustainability and transferability**

The proposal demonstrates how the results of the project have the potential to lead to achievable and effective contributions to health gain for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, beyond the life of the project. This may be through sustainability in the project setting and/or transferability to other settings. In considering this issue the proposal should address the relationship between costs and benefits.

**Building capability**

The proposal demonstrates how Aboriginal communities, researchers and others will develop relevant capabilities through participation in the project.

**Priority**

The research and potential outcomes are a priority for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities either at community, regional or national levels.

**Significance**

The research addresses an important public health issue for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.
Attachment C

Early Career Fellowships Scoring Matrix
Relative to Opportunity

All applicants will be assessed and ranked against the selection criteria listed below. All criteria are assessed relative to opportunity (see Funding Rules, Part 1, Section 3.6 Relative to Opportunity) and taking into account career disruptions where applicable.

### Part A – PERSON

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria:</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate / Honours / Other Degree</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Experience and Professional Skills</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential to succeed – Research Environment (justification for remaining in same research group to be assessed here)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prizes / Lectures / Conferences Organised / Courses (attended and/or conducted)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Part B – PROJECT

#### Criteria Component 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of Project and Potential Benefits</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Criteria Component 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supervisor / Institution</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Part C – RESEARCH OUTPUT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality and Quantity</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total 100 points**

* **Aims:** The aim of the four year ECF is to enable developing health and medical researchers of outstanding ability to undertake advanced training in health and medical research either in Australia or overseas. Awards are available for full-time research training in the biomedical, clinical, public health, health services and priority area of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health research fields.

While the bulk of Fellowships are for full-time training, part-time (30%-70%) opportunities are also available to provide training for awardees who wish to combine their professional career with an ECF in Australia.
Attachment D

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Fellowship
Scoring Matrix
Relative to Opportunity

All applicants will be assessed and ranked against the selection criteria listed below. All criteria are assessed relative to opportunity (see Funding Rules, Part 1, Section 3.6 Relative to Opportunity) and taking into account career disruptions where applicable.

**Part A – PERSON**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria:</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate / Honours / Other Degree</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research experience, work experience or professional/community experience relevant to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health (where applicable)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential to succeed – research environment (justification for remaining in same research group to be assessed here)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal commitment to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health research (where applicable)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prizes / Lectures / Conferences Organised / Courses (attended and/or conducted)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Part B – PROJECT**

**Criteria Component 1:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of Project and Potential Benefits</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevance of research proposal to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health (where applicable)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Criteria Component 2:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supervisor / Institution</th>
<th>Points</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
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</table>

**Part C – RESEARCH OUTPUT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria:</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality and Quantity</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total 100 points**

*Aims:* The aim of the four year ECF is to enable developing health and medical researchers of outstanding ability to undertake advanced training in health and medical research either in Australia or overseas. Awards are available for full-time research training in the biomedical, clinical, public health, health services and priority area of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health research fields.

While the bulk of Fellowships are for full-time training, part-time (30%-70%) opportunities are also available to provide training for awardees who wish to combine their professional career with an ECF in Australia.
ATTACHMENT E – Score Normalisation

The method used for normalising scores is as described below.

First, a z score is established:
- For each panel member, the Mean (m) and Standard Deviation (s) of their raw scores for all applications is calculated.
- For each panel member, a z score for each application based on the raw score (x) given by the panel member for that application using this formula is calculated:

\[ z = \frac{x - m}{s} \]

Second, the z score is converted to a re-centered score (X):
The scores are re-centered (or scaled) around a common mean (M) of 75 and Standard Deviation (S) using the derived z score with this formula:

\[ X = M + (z \times S) \]