



## **POSTGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIPS SCHEME**

### **2019 GUIDE FOR PEER REVIEWERS**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is responsible for managing the Australian Government's investment in health and medical research in a manner consistent with Commonwealth legislation and guidelines. NHMRC has a responsibility to ensure taxpayers' funds are invested appropriately to support the best health and medical research. Expert peer review assists us in fulfilling this responsibility.

This guide outlines the overarching principles and obligations under which the Postgraduate Scholarships (PGS) peer review process operates, including:

- obligations in accordance with legislation and guidelines
- how to declare and manage conflicts of interest
- standards and best practice for the conduct of peer review.

This guide should be read in conjunction with the *NHMRC Postgraduate Scholarships 2019 Guidelines* (the Guidelines), which set out the rules, objectives and other considerations relevant to NHMRC funding.

## 2. PRINCIPLES, CONDUCT AND OBLIGATIONS DURING PEER REVIEW

The peer review process requires all applications to be reviewed by individuals with appropriate expertise. This carries an obligation on the part of reviewers to act in good faith, in the best interests of NHMRC and the research community and in accordance with NHMRC policies (outlined below).

### 2.1 NHMRC's Principles of Peer Review

NHMRC's Principles of Peer Review (the Principles) are high-level, guiding statements that underpin all NHMRC's peer review processes, and include:

- **Fairness.** Peer review processes are fair and seen to be fair by all.
- **Transparency.** Applies to all stages of peer review.
- **Independence.** Peer reviewers provide independent advice. There is also independent oversight of peer review processes by independent Chairs and Observers.
- **Appropriateness and balance.** There is appropriate experience, expertise and representation of peer reviewers assessing applications.
- **Research community participation.** Persons holding taxpayer-funded grants should willingly make themselves available to participate in peer review processes, whenever possible.
- **Confidentiality.** Participants respect that confidentiality is important to the fairness and robustness of peer review.
- **Impartiality.** Peer review is objective and impartial, with appropriate processes in place to manage real and perceived conflicts of interest (CoI).
- **Quality and excellence.** NHMRC will continue to introduce evidence-based improvements into its processes to achieve the highest quality decision-making through peer review.

Additional details underpinning the Principles can be found at [Attachment A](#).

## 2.2 The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research<sup>1</sup>

The *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (the Code) requires researchers participating in peer review do so in a way that is 'fair, rigorous and timely and maintains the confidentiality of the content'. The Code can be found here: <https://nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/australian-code-responsible-conduct-research-2018>

## 2.3 Disclosure of Interests

NHMRC is committed to ensuring that interests<sup>2</sup> of any kind are dealt with consistently, transparently and with rigour, in accordance with Part 5, section 42A of the NHMRC Act, sections 16A and 16B of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014*<sup>3</sup> and the *NHMRC's Privacy Policy*.

This is to ensure that where a material personal interest arises, the individual will not be in a position to influence, or perceive to influence, the proper performance of the participant's responsibilities to NHMRC. The perception of an interest is as important as any actual interest.

### 2.3.1 What is a Conflict of Interest (Col)?

A Col 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.

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

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

Researchers frequently have a Col 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 consideration. An individual researcher should therefore expect to be conflicted from time to time, be ready to acknowledge the conflict and make disclosures as appropriate. An outline of potential Col situations is provided for peer reviewers at Attachment B.

### 2.3.2 Failure to Declare an Interest

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

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<sup>1</sup> The *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2018* was released in June 2018 and institutions are expected to meet the requirements of the 2018 Code no later than 1 July 2019.

<sup>2</sup> An "Interest" is defined in section 4 of the NHMRC Act as meaning "any direct or indirect, pecuniary or non-pecuniary, interest". Under section 29 of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act), "an official ... who has a material personal interest that relates to the affairs of the entity must disclose details of the interest".

<sup>3</sup> Made under subsection 29(2) of the PGPA Act.

- Section 42A of the NHMRC Act requires members to disclose interests in matters being considered.
- Paragraph Section 44B (3)(b) requires the Minister or the CEO to terminate the appointment of a member for failing to comply, without reasonable excuse, with the disclosure of interest requirements outlined in the NHMRC Act.

It is important for participants to inform NHMRC of any circumstances that may constitute an interest, at any point during the peer review process.

## 2.4 Research integrity issues

The scrutiny of an application during peer review can sometimes identify possible research integrity issues (e.g. concerns about possible plagiarism, inconsistencies in the presentation of data, inaccuracies in the presentation of track record information). Where such concerns arise, peer reviewers should raise these issues separately from the peer review process. Advice about how to do this is provided at [Attachment C](#).

Where a peer reviewer identifies possible issues about research integrity, these are managed by NHMRC through a separate process. Applications that are the subject of a research misconduct allegation will continue to progress through NHMRC peer review processes while any investigations are ongoing. NHMRC liaises with the institution regarding the outcome of any investigation, and, if necessary, will take action under the [NHMRC policy on misconduct related to NHMRC funding](#) (the Misconduct Policy).

### 2.4.1 Contact between peer reviewers and applicants

Reviewers directly engaged with the peer review of an application must not contact applicants about their application. Similarly, applicants are not allowed to make contact or attempt to influence anyone about their application who is directly engaged with its peer review. Where a reviewer contacts an applicant, the consequences may be removal of the reviewer from the process, and potential exclusion from future NHMRC peer review. Where an applicant contacts a reviewer, consequences could include exclusion of an application/s from consideration. In either case, contact between applicants and reviewers may raise concerns about research integrity and NHMRC may refer such concerns to the relevant Administering Institution.

## 2.5 Freedom of Information

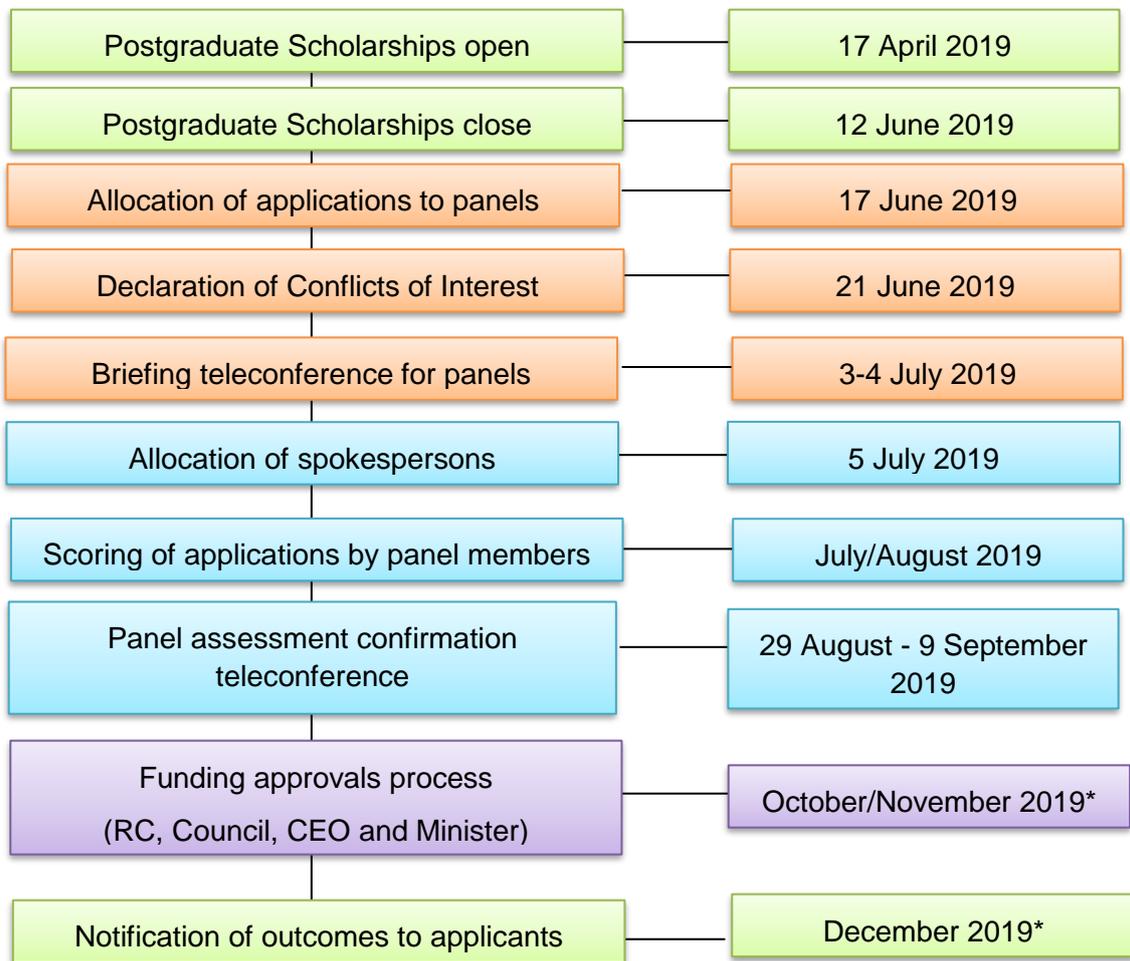
NHMRC is subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, which provides a statutory right for an individual to seek access to documents. If documents that deal with peer review fall within the scope of a request, there is a process for consultation and there are exemptions from release. NHMRC will endeavour to protect the identity of peer reviewers assigned to a particular application.

## 2.6 Complaints

NHMRC deals with any complaints, objections and requests for clarification on the peer review process that may be received from applicants. As part of these dealings, NHMRC may contact peer reviewers and/or Chairs involved to obtain additional information of particular application/s. Further information regarding the NHMRC complaints process can be found on the [NHMRC website](#).

### 3. POSTGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIPS PEER REVIEW PROCESS

#### 3.1 Overview of the Postgraduate Scholarships peer review process



\*Dates are indicative only and subject to change

### 3.2 Roles and responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of those participating in the Postgraduate Scholarships peer review process are identified in the table below:

**Postgraduate Scholarships Peer Review Participants Table**

Roles	Responsibilities
<p><b>Panel Chair (Chair)</b></p>	<p>The Chair's role is to ensure NHMRC's procedures are adhered to and that fair and equitable consideration is given to every application being discussed at the panel meeting.</p> <p>Chairs are independent of the review of applications, and must manage the process of peer review in accordance with this Guide.</p> <p>Prior to the panel meeting Chairs will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• familiarise themselves with this document and other material as identified by NHMRC staff</li> <li>• identify and advise NHMRC of all real or perceived CoIs they have with applications assigned to their panel</li> <li>• familiarise themselves with ALL the applications to be considered by their panel, excluding those for which they have declared a high CoI.</li> </ul> <p>During the panel meeting Chairs will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• take appropriate action for each declared CoI</li> <li>• keep discussions on time and focused</li> <li>• ensure NHMRC procedures are followed</li> <li>• assist Peer Review Panel (PRP) members with their duties and in understanding what is expected of them</li> <li>• promote good engagement by PRP members in all panel discussions</li> <li>• ensure that all peer reviewers consider 'relative to opportunity', including career disruptions, when discussing applications</li> <li>• ensure the discussion leads to an outcome where the applications are appropriately considered against the Postgraduate Scholarships Assessment Criteria (the assessment criteria) using the Postgraduate Scholarships Category Descriptors (category descriptors)</li> <li>• ensure the PRP consistently considers the assessment against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria for applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus</li> <li>• ensure peer reviewers are satisfied with the consistency and appropriateness of discussions for each application</li> <li>• record and notify NHMRC of any requests for clarification or advice.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Peer reviewers</b></p>	<p>Prior to the panel meeting peer reviewers will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• familiarise themselves with this Guide and other material as identified by NHMRC staff</li> <li>• identify and advise NHMRC of all real or perceived CoIs they have with applications assigned to their panel</li> <li>• provide a fair and impartial assessment against the PGS scheme assessment criteria for each non-conflicted application assigned, in a timely manner</li> </ul>

Roles	Responsibilities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assess track record by taking into consideration research achievements 'relative to opportunity', including any career disruptions, where applicable</li> <li>• consider the assessment against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria provided for applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus</li> <li>• nominate up to two applications for discussion at the panel assessment confirmation teleconference.</li> </ul> <p>During the panel meeting peer reviewers will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prepare for and participate in the discussion for each relevant application.</li> <li>• provide scores against the assessment criteria for all applications reviewed by the PRP (where a high Col does not exist)</li> <li>• prepare for and participate in panel discussion of nominated applications, paying particular attention to those applications for which they are 1SP or 2SP (see duties and responsibilities of 1SP and 2SP below).</li> </ul>
<b>Primary Spokesperson (1SP)</b>	<p>The primary duties and responsibilities of a 1SP in addition to that of a standard PRP member are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lead the PRP teleconference discussion on the competitiveness of the application with reference to the assessment criteria</li> <li>• ensure productivity 'relative to opportunity' considerations highlighted in the application, including career disruptions, are considered by the PRP members in any discussion of the application</li> <li>• if applicable, highlight comments from external advisor reports.</li> </ul>
<b>Secondary Spokesperson (2SP)</b>	<p>The primary duties and responsibilities of a 2SP in addition to that of a standard PRP member are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure productivity 'relative to opportunity' considerations highlighted in the application, including career disruptions, are considered by panel members in any discussion of the application</li> <li>• support the application discussion at the PRP teleconference on the competitiveness of the application with reference to the assessment criteria.</li> </ul>
<b>Senior NHMRC Staff</b>	<p>Senior NHMRC staff with appropriate expertise, including doctoral degrees or extensive research experience, may be involved in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reviewing allocation of applications and peer reviewers to panels</li> <li>• assisting and advising on the peer review process.</li> <li>• confirming Electromagnetic Energy Research (EME) applications comply with NHMRC/ ARPANSA requirements</li> <li>• establishing the peer review panels</li> </ul>
<b>NHMRC Staff</b>	<p>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, including:</p> <p>Prior to the panel meeting NHMRC staff will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• approach potential peer reviewers and Chairs</li> <li>• rule on level of declared Cols</li> <li>• act as the first point of contact for peer reviewers</li> <li>• provide briefings to peer reviewers</li> </ul>

Roles	Responsibilities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• determine eligibility of applications</li> <li>• assign applications and peer reviewers to the appropriate panel</li> <li>• prepare provisional ranked lists for assessor consideration.</li> </ul> <p>At the panel meeting NHMRC staff will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support the operation of RGMS</li> <li>• assist the Chair in running the discussions</li> <li>• manage the Col process, including maintaining accurate records, ensuring all participants (including community observers) are aware of all declared Cols</li> <li>• ensure that all peer reviewers are provided with the necessary information to review each application</li> <li>• maintain scoring records for each application</li> <li>• act as the first point of contact for peer reviewers and community observers</li> <li>• seek feedback from Chairs, peer reviewers and community observers on improvements for future processes.</li> <li>• act as an alternative independent Chair when the panel Chair has a Col with the application under consideration</li> <li>• provide the following administrative support and advice to the Chair and members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ facilitate use of RGMS</li> <li>○ provide policy advice to the PRP Chair and members including on the management of Cols</li> <li>○ provide advice on dealing with sensitive career disruptions.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Indigenous Health Research Peer reviewers</b>	<p>Indigenous Health Research Peer reviewers will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• review the relative strength of each application in terms of how well it addresses <i>NHMRC's Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria (Attachment D)</i>.</li> </ul>
<b>Community Observers</b>	<p>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.</p> <p>At the panel meeting observers will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify and advise the Chair of all real or perceived conflicts they have with applications to be discussed</li> <li>• monitor the procedural aspects of the meeting</li> <li>• provide feedback to NHMRC on the consistency of procedures across meetings</li> </ul> <p>Observers may raise issues of a general nature for advice or action as appropriate with NHMRC staff.</p>

### 3.3 Reviewing Postgraduate Scholarships applications

All Postgraduate Scholarships applications are assessed against the *PGS Scheme Assessment Criteria* and *Category Descriptors* as set out at [Attachment E](#). Applications that are accepted by NHMRC as relating to the improvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health (see section 3.3.2) are also assessed against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* as set out at [Attachment D](#).

### 3.3.1 Initial processing

NHMRC staff will verify that PGS applications meet eligibility criteria. Applicants will be advised if their application is ineligible. However, in some instances these applications will remain in the peer review process until their ineligibility is confirmed by NHMRC staff. Eligibility rulings may be made at any point in the peer review process (see Section 4 of the Guidelines).

### 3.3.2 Identification of applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus

Applications relating specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' health will be identified by information provided in the application. Researchers with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health expertise will confirm that these applications have at least 20% of their research effort and/or capacity building focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

### 3.3.3 Identification of CoIs and peer reviewer suitability

PRP members will be provided with an overview of applications within RGMS, and will declare their CoIs in accordance with the guidelines provided at Section 2.3 and [Attachment B](#).

Some PRP members may have a CoI for which they require a ruling. For these, NHMRC will assess the information in the declaration made by the assessor and specify a level of peer review participation in RGMS.

PRP members are required to include sufficient detail in their declaration to ensure an accurate CoI assessment can be made by NHMRC staff. If the Chair or a peer reviewer is uncomfortable with a ruling level, they can raise this with NHMRC staff and request a review.

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. Any reviewer who declares, or has a 'high' CoI ruling, will not be able to participate in the review of that application, but they can provide scientific advice, on request from the Chair, if required.

Taking into account CoIs and assessor suitability, peer reviewers will be assigned to applications. Peer reviewers are also required to select their level of assessor suitability for applications, based on the information available to them in the application summary. Applications are assigned to a PRP based on the category of PGS and/or fields of research chosen by applicants within their application, the supervisor's expertise and/or advice from the PRP.

### 3.3.4 Briefing teleconference

NHMRC will conduct panel briefing teleconference(s) to discuss panel member duties and responsibilities associated with the PGS peer review process. Any changes to the scheme for the current application round will also be highlighted and discussed as necessary.

### 3.3.5 Allocation of spokespersons

Taking into account CoIs 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, based on any CoIs declared.

### 3.3.6 Assessment of applications – initial scoring

PRP members will be given access to applications (with which they have no high CoIs) and will be required to review and subsequently enter their scores via RGMS. PRP members will refer to the PGS scheme assessment criteria and associated category descriptors (see [Attachment E](#)).

PRP members should not discuss applications with other members. This is to ensure PRP members provide completely independent scores.

A quorum of at least 50% of PRP members must be involved for an application to be reviewed and scored by a peer review panel.

The criterion scores from each peer reviewer will be combined to create a provisional ranked list of applications. This list will be accessed by PRP members in RGMS prior to the assessment confirmation teleconference for their review.

For all applications, the following should be considered during the review and subsequent scoring, where applicable:

#### 3.3.6.1 Relative to opportunity and career disruption

PRP members must take into account productivity relative to opportunity and, where applicable, career disruption considerations in the assessment of all applications. To assist PRP members with their assessment, further details regarding relative to opportunity and career disruptions are provided at [Attachment F](#).

#### 3.3.6.2 Industry-relevant experience

PRP members should appropriately recognise an applicant's industry-relevant experience and outputs. To assist PRP members with their assessment, a *Guide to Evaluating Industry-Relevant Experience* is available on the [NHMRC website](#).

#### 3.3.6.3 Use of Impact Factors and other metrics

PRP members 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 grant applicant, not just the standing of the journal in which those articles are published.

It is not appropriate to use publication metrics such as Journal Impact Factors or the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) Ranked Journal List when assessing applications.

The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DoRA) makes recommendations for improving the evaluation of research assessment. NHMRC is a signatory of DoRA and adheres to the recommendations, as outlined in [DoRA](#), for its peer review processes.

#### 3.3.6.4 Enhancing reproducibility and applicability of research outcomes

As outlined in the Code, PRP members are required to consider the general strengths and weaknesses of the experimental design of the proposal to ensure robust and unbiased results. Assessment of the experimental design should include consideration of the scientific premise of the proposed research (i.e. how rigorous were previous experimental designs that form the basis for this proposal), effect size and power calculations to determine the number of samples/subjects in the study, sex and gender elements of the research to maximise impact and any other considerations relevant to the field of research necessary to assess the rigour of the proposed design.

### 3.3.7 Nomination of applications for discussion at teleconference

PRP members will be given the opportunity to nominate up to two applications for discussion at the teleconference. It is expected that the main reason a particular application would be nominated for discussion be due to an anomaly in the scoring, which warrants discussion, by the panel.

PRP members will be required to submit their nominations to NHMRC at least three business days prior to the teleconference. NHMRC will circulate a list of applications nominated for discussion to the panel in advance of the teleconference. The list of nominated applications will be the only applications discussed by the panel at the teleconference and will be grouped to best cater for Cols.

If the panel is satisfied with the ranked list and no applications have been nominated for discussion the assessment confirmation teleconference will not be required. The panel Chair will confirm in writing that no assessment confirmation teleconference is required because the panel is satisfied with the final order of merit list.

### 3.3.8 Peer Review Panel assessment confirmation teleconference

Following the initial scoring of applications, the provision of the consolidated ranked list and the nomination of applications for discussion, each panel will meet via teleconference if required to confirm the scores of the applications nominated for discussion. The teleconference timing will be coordinated by NHMRC staff.

The process for the teleconference is as follows:

- The Chair will outline the format of the process for the teleconference.
- With overall discussion being led by the Chair, the PRP should consider the applications nominated for discussion:
  - Where a panel member has a high Col with an application(s), the panel member will be excluded from participating in the discussion of that application(s) and will be required to disconnect from the teleconference.
  - The panel member that nominated the application for discussion will be invited to put their case forward to the rest of the panel as to why they believe the scoring of that particular application should be revisited.
  - The 1SP will be invited to summarise the applicant's case to the rest of the panel ensuring they communicate any relative to opportunity considerations, including career disruptions, along with any additional areas of concern (e.g. level of independence, track record, applicant's potential for a future high level research career etc.). If applicable, the 1SP will outline comments received from the external assessor.
  - The 2SP will be invited to add any additional comments.
  - Other PRP members will then be invited to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the application against the assessment criteria only.
  - It is important that the PRP consider the merits of the application in relation to the assessment criteria rather than whether the application is considered fundable.

- The Chair will seek to determine whether or not the majority of the panel wishes to rescore that particular application. The scores of an application nominated for discussion should be altered only if the majority of scoring members agree that the score for that particular application should be altered.
- If the majority of the panel does not agree that the score should be altered, then the pre-teleconference scores for that application will remain.

### 3.3.9 Re-scoring of applications

Following the discussion of a nominated application, panel members will be given the opportunity to alter their score for each criterion in RGMS. Panel members can choose not to change their score during the re-scoring process.

It is important that panel members realise that by re-scoring an application, it may cause the application to move up or down in the list by multiple places. A final order of merit list will not be provided to the PRP members.

### 3.3.10 Principles for setting conditions of funding for NHMRC grants

Setting a condition of funding (CoF) on a grant through the peer review process is, and should be, a rare event. When this does occur, the panel will use the principles set out below to decide the CoF. These principles aim to achieve a consistent approach, minimise the number of conditions set and support conditions that are unambiguous and able to be assessed should a condition be necessary. CoFs relate to the awarding of funding, the continuation of funding or the level of funding. They do not relate to conditions that affect either eligibility to apply or subsequent peer review.

The principles are:

- NHMRC seeks to minimise the administrative burden on researchers and Administering Institutions.
- CoFs must not relate to the competitiveness of an application (e.g. project requires more community engagement); these issues should be considered during peer review, and be reflected in the scores for the application.
- Any CoFs must be clear and measurable, so that the condition can be readily assessed as having been met.

### 3.3.11 Panel documentation

Peer reviewers must retain their speaking notes and any other notes they make of the peer review process until the outcomes of the panel's deliberations are finalised. For panel meetings, this is when the final scores have been determined. After this time, notes both hard copy and electronic should be disposed of appropriately.

### 3.3.12 Funding recommendation

After the panel meeting/s, application scores from all panels are used to create a ranked list. This final ranked list will be used to prepare funding recommendations.

### 3.3.13 Notification of outcomes

Feedback will be provided to all applicants in the form of a letter through RGMS. CIAs whose applications are approved will have access to a letter of offer. Administering Institutions responsible for

administering approved applications will also have access to the letter of offer, and the Schedule of Funding Agreement through RGMS.

## 4. ATTACHMENTS

### Attachment A - Understanding the Principles of Peer Review

#### **Fairness**

- Peer review processes are designed to ensure that peer review is fair and seen to be fair by all involved.
- Peer reviewers have an obligation to ensure that each application is judged consistently and objectively on its own merits, against published assessment criteria. Peer reviewers must not introduce irrelevant issues into the assessment of an application.
- Applications will be subject to scrutiny and evaluation by individuals who have appropriate knowledge of the fields covered in the application.
- Peer reviewers should ensure that their assessments are accurate and honest and that all statements are capable of being verified.
- Complaints processes are outlined on the [NHMRC website](#). All complaints to NHMRC relating to the peer review process are dealt with independently and impartially.

#### **Transparency**

- NHMRC will publish key dates, all relevant material for applicants and peer reviewers, and grant announcements on its website or via [GrantConnect](#).
- NHMRC publicly recognises the contribution of participants in the peer review process, through publishing their names on the NHMRC website.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Independence**

- The order of merit determined by peer review panels is not altered by NHMRC. However, additional applications may be funded 'below the funding line' in priority or strategic areas.
- Panel Chairs are independent and are not involved in the peer review of any application before that panel. Chairs act to ensure that NHMRC's processes are followed for each scheme, including adherence to the principles of this Guide.

#### **Appropriateness and balance**

- Peer reviewers are selected to meet the program's objectives and to ensure adequate expertise to assess the applications received.
- NHMRC endeavours to ensure that panels are constituted to ensure an appropriate representation of gender, geography and large and small institutions.

#### **Confidentiality**

- Peer reviewers are bound to act in accordance with the provisions of the Privacy Act 1988 and the confidentiality requirements under section 80 of the NHMRC Act. They must act in confidence and must not disclose any matter regarding applications under review to people who are not part of the process.
- Any information or documents made available to peer reviewers are confidential and must not be used other than to fulfil their role.
- NHMRC is subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* which provides a statutory right for an individual to seek access to documents. If documents that deal with peer review fall within the scope of a request, there is a process for consultation and there are exemptions from release. NHMRC will endeavour to protect the identity of peer reviewers assigned to a

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<sup>4</sup> Such information will be in a form that prevents applicants determining which particular experts were involved in the review of their application.

particular application.

### **Impartiality**

- Peer reviewers must declare all interests and matters that may, or may be perceived to, affect their judgement on particular applications.
- Panel members must disclose relationships with other members of the panel, or with grants being reviewed by other panel members, including:
  - research collaborators
  - student, teacher or mentoring relationships
  - employment arrangements
  - any other relationship that may, or may be seen to, impair fair and impartial judgement.
- Conflicts of interest are managed to ensure that no one with a high conflict is involved in decision making on relevant applications.

### **Quality and Excellence**

- NHMRC will continue to introduce evidence-based improvements into its peer review processes.
- Any significant change will be developed in consultation with the research community and may involve piloting new processes in.
- NHMRC will strive to introduce new technologies that are demonstrated to maximise the benefits of peer review, and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the process while minimising individual workloads.
- NHMRC will undertake post-program assessment of all its schemes with feedback from the sector.
- NHMRC will provide advice, training and feedback for peer reviewers new to NHMRC peer review.
- Where NHMRC finds peer reviewers to be substandard in their performance, NHMRC may provide such feedback directly to the reviewer or their institution.

## Attachment B - Guidance for Declaring and Assessing Conflict of Interest

The following Col Situations and Additional Guidance for Work and Professional Col tables outline matters that may need to be considered when deciding the level of potential conflicts and provide some examples of specific situations where Cols in the peer review process apply.

The tables are intended to be for guidance only. They are representative of Col situations rather than definitive, as each situation is different and needs to be considered on its merits. The tables are provided to assist participants in the peer review process to identify the types of circumstances in which Cols might arise, but are not intended to be checklists.

Note that Cols relate to Chief Investigators – **not** Associate Investigators.

### Col situations requiring further clarification

Situation	Explanations and examples	Conflict level*
Application under review	You are a named participant on the application under review.	High
	You have had discussions/input into the study design or research proposal of this application.	High
Collaborations	You have actively collaborated re publications (co-authorship), pending applications, existing NHMRC or other grants.	High
	You have an indirect collaboration e.g. collaborating co-worker, member of a research or discussion group, co-author of a large multi-author paper where involvement was minimal, provided cells/animals etc. to applicants without financial gain or exchange.	Obtain a ruling from NHMRC
	You are planning, or have been approached to be involved in a future grant application or other future collaborative relationship with this applicant(s).	Obtain a ruling from NHMRC
Working relationship	Please refer to Additional Guidance table below.	
Professional relationships and interests	Please refer to Additional Guidance table below.	
Social relationship and/or interests	There is a personal/social relationship between you, your partner or other member of your family and the applicant.	Usually High, may need a ruling from NHMRC

Situation	Explanations and examples	Conflict level*
	You have a personal / social relationship with the applicant's partner or other member of their family.	Usually High, may need a ruling from NHMRC
Teaching or supervisory relationship	For either undergraduate or postgraduate studies, you have taught or supervised the applicant; you co-supervised the applicant; your own research was supervised by the applicant.	High
Financial interest in the application	You have an associated patent pending; supply goods and services; improved access to facilities; provide cells/animals or similar to the applicant.	Usually High, may need a ruling from NHMRC
	You receive research funding or other support from a company and the research to be reviewed may impact upon the company.	Usually High, may need a ruling from NHMRC
Other interests or situations	You have a previous or pending dispute (may require consideration of events earlier than the last five years).	High

\* 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.

#### Additional Guidance for Work and Professional Col

Situation	Explanations and examples	Conflict level*	
Working Relationship	You have the same employer or are part of the same organisation	Where an assessor and an applicant work at the same independent Medical Research Institute (e.g. Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute, The Garvan Institute of Medical Research etc.) or in the same University/ Hospital Department	High
		Where an assessor or applicant holds a position of influence within an organisation, or has a pecuniary interest, e.g. Dean of Faculty or School/ Institute Directors.	High
		Where an assessor and an applicant work for the same institution but at different campuses and do not know each other	Low
		Where an assessor and an applicant work in the same	Low

Situation	Explanations and examples		Conflict level*
		faculty but in different schools/departments and do not know each other.	
	You are working in the same department (or equivalent) within an organisation		High - in most situations due to perceived Col relating to potential financial benefit from showing favour towards application, and the likelihood that the assessor and applicant know each other.
	You work in the same locality but for a different organisation, i.e. Where an assessor works for a University and an applicant works for an affiliated Medical Research Institute (or vice versa), such as relationships between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The University of Melbourne and Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research (WEHI); or</li> <li>• The University of New South Wales and The George Institute for Global Health.</li> </ul>	When there is a direct association/collaboration between the assessor and applicant, where the assessor may have or may be perceived to have a vested interest in this research.	High
		Where two organisations are affiliated but there is no direct association/ collaboration between the assessor and applicant (e.g. researchers located at the University of Melbourne faculty that has no direct association/collaboration with applicant at WEHI).	Low
Professional relationships and interests	You are also a member of the same scientific advisory committee, review board, exam board, trial committee etc.	Where you hold a membership in which you may be perceived to have a vested interest, i.e. pecuniary or other direct interests with the proposed research, e.g. when another board/committee member is associated with the grant application (a member of the CI team or is Faculty/Department Head where the research is to be conducted.)	High
		You are a member of the same advisory board or committee but otherwise have no links or association that would constitute a High ruling.	Low

Situation	Explanations and examples		Conflict level*
	You or your organisation are affiliated with the applicant's organisation, i.e. where an assessor and an applicant work for different organisations that have active/ongoing collaborations or affiliations, such as affiliations between:	Where there is a direct link/collaboration between the applicant and assessor, in which the assessor may have or may be perceived to have a vested interest in this research.	High
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The University of Melbourne and Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research (WEHI), or</li> <li>• The University of New South Wales and The George Institute for Global Health, or</li> <li>• The Schools of Health Sciences at two or more different universities, as part of a research or teaching collaboration.</li> </ul>	Where two organisations are affiliated but there is no direct association/ collaboration between applicant and assessor (e.g. researcher located at the University of Melbourne and has no direct link/collaboration with individual at WEHI).	Low
	You or your organisation is affiliated or associated with organisations such as pharmaceutical companies, tobacco companies etc.	When you or your institution has an affiliation/association with the organisation(s) that may have or may be perceived to have vested interest in this research e.g. a pharmaceutical company that has provided drugs to the applicants for testing.	High
		When you or your institution has an indirect affiliation/ association with the organisation(s) that may have or may be perceived to have a vested interest in this research, e.g. you are employed at a large institution in an area distant from the organisation(s) in question.	Low

\* 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.

## Attachment C - Concerns Arising During Peer Review about Possible Research Misconduct

This advice is for researchers or others who have become concerned during NHMRC peer review assessment that research misconduct may have occurred. It helps peer reviewers understand the process for raising these concerns.

The [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#) (the Code) aims to promote high quality conduct in research and sets out responsibilities for institutions and staff when research misconduct occurs. You should already be familiar with Part A of the Code, which describes the principles and practices for encouraging responsible conduct for researchers and institutions

### Your role in peer review

Peer review is central to NHMRC's strategy of investing in high quality health and medical research, building research capacity and supporting the best research and researchers.

The Code describes peer review as the impartial and independent assessment of research by others in the same or a related field. The Code also notes that peer review may play a role in drawing attention to deviations from the principles of the Code. Section 6.2 of the Code identifies the responsibilities of peer reviewers.

### What should I do if I come across something that suggests research misconduct while reviewing a grant for NHMRC?

When you are undertaking peer review for NHMRC, you might have concerns, for example, about items in a publications list, or potentially false or misleading statements, diagrams or figures. You could also have concerns about the behaviour of other peer reviewers.

### Re-familiarise yourself with the Code

The first step should be to re-read the Code to make sure that you are clear about what you believe is wrong. Definitions of research misconduct can be found on page 10.1.

Part A of the Code provides advice on how to manage research data and materials, how to publish and disseminate research findings (including proper attribution of authorship), how to collaborate across institutions, how to manage conflicts of interest as well as obligations in peer review.

The second step should be to read NHMRC's Grant Guidelines that address issues about incomplete, false or misleading applications.

### How should I report my concerns if I believe research misconduct may have occurred?

If you believe research misconduct may have occurred you should raise your concerns with NHMRC. The process depends on the peer review stage the application is at when your concerns arise:

- If Peer Review Panel meetings have not yet begun, you should contact the relevant secretariat using the funding program or panel-specific email address.
- If Peer Review Panel meetings are underway, you should raise the issue in a side discussion with the panel Chair, secretariat and/or the director of the relevant funding program.

Where appropriate, the relevant NHMRC director will then refer the matter to NHMRC's Ethics and Integrity section, which will consider the concerns and, where appropriate, contact the research institution involved. It is important to note that NHMRC does not conduct its own investigation into allegations. As per the Code, this is the responsibility of the relevant institution. However, NHMRC will liaise with the institution regarding the outcome of any investigation and take any necessary precautionary or consequential actions under the [NHMRC Policy on Misconduct Related to NHMRC Funding](#).

It is important that you document your concerns clearly and precisely to assist NHMRC in providing specific information to the relevant research institution.

**Should I raise these issues in my assessment report or in panel discussion?**

As an assessor, your assessment report or contribution to panel discussions should not refer to any concerns related to research integrity. Assessment comments can and should comment on or seek clarification on all aspects of the application, without implying concerns with the integrity of the application or applicant. These concerns should be raised through a separate process while the application continues to progress through the peer review process. For example, as an assessor it would be appropriate to query statistics in an application that appear to be incorrect. This gives the applicant an opportunity to clarify or correct the matter in schemes that allow for rebuttal. However, it is not appropriate in assessment reports to suggest that an apparent error or inconsistency is indicative of research misconduct.

The [NHMRC Policy on Misconduct Related to NHMRC Funding](#) ensures that mechanisms are in place to consider any unresolved research misconduct allegations prior to the release of funding. For example, a condition could be placed on a grant preventing the commencement of funding until after the resolution of the matter, with funding potentially being withheld if research misconduct is proven. Since allegations are investigated by institutions, NHMRC may need to provide written material on the nature of the concerns. We will not reveal your identity to the institution without your consent and will strive to maintain the anonymity of peer reviewers.

**What if I am still not satisfied?**

If you do not believe your concerns have been adequately dealt with through this process, you can raise your concerns with the Ethics and Integrity Team by emailing [integrity@nhmrc.gov.au](mailto:integrity@nhmrc.gov.au) who can provide you with further advice.

## Attachment D - Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria

To qualify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, at least 20% of the research effort and/or capacity building must relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

Qualifying applications must address the NHMRC Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria as follows:

- Community engagement - the proposal demonstrates how the research and potential outcomes are a priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with 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 potential health benefit of the project is demonstrated by addressing an important public health issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This benefit can have a single focus or affect several areas, such as knowledge, finance and policy or quality of life. The benefit may be direct and immediate, or it can be indirect, gradual and considered.
- 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 Torres Strait Islander people, beyond the life of the project. This may be through sustainability in the project setting and/or transferability to other settings such as evidence based practice and/or policy. In considering this issue, the proposal should address the relationship between costs and benefits.
- Building capability - the proposal demonstrates how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and researchers will develop relevant capabilities through partnerships and participation in the project.

Panels will consider these in their overall assessment of the application together with the scheme-specific assessment criteria (refer to the scheme-specific guidelines).

## Attachment E – Postgraduate Scholarships Assessment Criteria and Category Descriptors

The following scoring descriptors are to be used as a guide to score an application against each of the assessment criteria. The category descriptors are indicative, rather than definitive or exhaustive. Evaluation of performance will take into account opportunity, research discipline and overall summation of research contribution.

Note: Applications that do not align with the Research Stream applied for should score a ‘1’ for the Criterion 3 – Research Project.

### Assessing Indigenous Contributions

It is recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants often make additional valuable contributions to policy development, clinical/public health leadership and/or service delivery, community activities and linkages, and are often representatives on key committees. If applicable, these contributions should be considered when assessing research output and track record.

Score	Criterion 1	Criterion 2	Criterion 3
	<b>Academic Record and Research Achievement – Relative to Opportunity 60%</b>	<b>Research Environment and Supervisor 20%</b>	<b>Research Project 20%</b>
<b>7 Exemplary</b> <i>An application which clearly and strongly supports the aims of the scheme and meets all the assessment criteria with no weaknesses. It is expected that the top 2% of applications would be ranked in this category.</i>	<b>Exemplary Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• academic record</li> <li>• medals, prizes and awards</li> <li>• quantity and quality of research publications in their field</li> <li>• presentations, including posters and seminars</li> <li>• postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience</li> <li>• broader community engagement.</li> </ul>	<b>The Research Environment And Supervisor:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are <b>extremely well matched</b> to the applicant’s proposed project</li> <li>• provide <b>exemplary</b> mentoring and training arrangements</li> <li>• include <b>extremely high quality</b> research support systems for the applicant</li> <li>• offer <b>exceptional</b> collaborative opportunities for the applicant</li> <li>• offer <b>exemplary</b> opportunity to extend the applicant’s knowledge and skills.</li> </ul>	<b>The Research Project:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is <b>aligned</b> with the Research stream applied for</li> <li>• has objectives that are <b>extremely well-defined</b></li> <li>• is <b>flawless</b> by design</li> <li>• will be achieved</li> <li>• will make an <b>exemplary</b> contribution to the applicant’s future career aspirations.</li> </ul>

Score	Criterion 1	Criterion 2	Criterion 3
	Academic Record and Research Achievement – Relative to Opportunity 60%	Research Environment and Supervisor 20%	Research Project 20%
<p><b>6 Outstanding</b></p> <p><i>An application which clearly and strongly supports the aims of the scheme and meets all the assessment criteria with negligible weaknesses.</i></p> <p><i>It is expected that the top 15% of applications would be ranked in this category or higher.</i></p>	<p><b>Outstanding Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• academic record</li> <li>• medals, prizes and awards</li> <li>• research achievement and productivity commensurate with authorship of research publications, book chapters and presentations</li> <li>• postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience</li> <li>• broader community engagement.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Research Environment And Supervisor:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are <b>very well matched</b> to the applicant’s proposed project</li> <li>• include <b>outstanding</b> mentoring and training arrangements</li> <li>• offer <b>very high quality</b> research support systems for the applicant</li> <li>• offer <b>outstanding</b> collaborative opportunities for the applicant</li> <li>• offer <b>outstanding</b> potential to extend the applicant’s knowledge and skills.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Research Project:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is <b>aligned</b> with the Research stream applied for</li> <li>• has objectives that are <b>very well-defined</b></li> <li>• is <b>nearly flawless</b> by design</li> <li>• is <b>highly feasible</b></li> <li>• will make an <b>outstanding</b> contribution to the applicant’s future career aspirations.</li> </ul>

Score	Criterion 1	Criterion 2	Criterion 3
	Academic Record and Research Achievement – Relative to Opportunity 60%	Research Environment and Supervisor 20%	Research Project 20%
<p><b>5 Excellent</b></p> <p><i>An application which supports the aims of the scheme and meets the assessment criteria with only some minor weaknesses.</i></p> <p><i>It is expected that the top 35% of applications would be ranked in this category or higher.</i></p>	<p><b>Excellent Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• academic record</li> <li>• medals, prizes and awards</li> <li>• research achievement and productivity commensurate with authorship of research publications, book chapters and presentations.</li> <li>• postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience</li> <li>• broader community engagement.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Research Environment And Supervisor:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are <b>well matched</b> to the applicant's proposed project</li> <li>• are <b>very well suited to</b> with the research stream applied for</li> <li>• Include <b>excellent</b> mentoring and training arrangements</li> <li>• offer <b>high quality</b> research support systems for the applicant</li> <li>• offer <b>excellent</b> collaborative opportunities for the applicant</li> <li>• offer <b>excellent</b> potential to extend the applicant's knowledge and skills.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Research Project:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is <b>aligned</b> with the Research stream applied for</li> <li>• has objectives that are <b>well-defined</b></li> <li>• is <b>very well designed</b></li> <li>• is <b>highly feasible</b></li> <li>• will make an <b>excellent</b> contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4 Very good</b></p> <p><i>An application which supports the aims of the scheme and meets the assessment criteria, but with numerous minor weaknesses</i></p> <p><i>It is expected that the top 65% of applications would be ranked in this category or higher.</i></p>	<p><b>Very Good Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• academic record</li> <li>• medals, prizes and awards</li> <li>• Research achievement and productivity commensurate with authorship of research publications, book chapters and presentations.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Research Environment And Supervisor:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are <b>suited</b> to the applicant's proposed project</li> <li>• are <b>well suited to</b> the research stream applied for</li> <li>• Includes <b>very good quality</b> mentoring and training arrangements</li> <li>• offer very <b>good quality</b> research support systems for the applicant</li> <li>• offer <b>very good</b> collaborative opportunities for the applicant</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Research Project:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is <b>aligned</b> with the Research stream applied for</li> <li>• has objectives that are <b>clear</b></li> <li>• is <b>well designed</b></li> <li>• is <b>feasible</b></li> <li>• will make a <b>very good</b> contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations.</li> </ul>

Score	Criterion 1	Criterion 2	Criterion 3
	Academic Record and Research Achievement – Relative to Opportunity 60%	Research Environment and Supervisor 20%	Research Project 20%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience</li> <li>• broader community engagement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• offer <b>very good</b> potential to extend the applicant's knowledge and skills.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>3 Good</b>  <i>An application which supports the aims of the scheme and meets the assessment criteria, but with at least one moderate weakness</i>  <i>It is expected that the bottom 35% of applications would be ranked in this category or lower.</i></p>	<p><b>Good Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• academic record</li> <li>• medals, prizes and awards</li> <li>• research achievement and productivity commensurate with authorship of research publications, book chapters and presentations.</li> <li>• postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience</li> <li>• broader community engagement.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Research Environment And Supervisor:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are <b>adequate</b> to the applicant's proposed project</li> <li>• are <b>suited</b> to the research stream applied for</li> <li>• includes <b>good quality</b> mentoring and training arrangements</li> <li>• offer <b>good quality</b> research support systems for the applicant</li> <li>• offer <b>good</b> collaborative opportunities for the applicant</li> <li>• offer <b>good</b> potential to extend the applicant's knowledge and skills.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Research Project:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is <b>aligned</b> with the Research stream applied for</li> <li>• has objectives that are <b>adequately defined</b></li> <li>• is <b>overall clear</b> in respects to design</li> <li>• is <b>likely to be achieved</b></li> <li>• will make a <b>good</b> contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations.</li> </ul>

Score	Criterion 1	Criterion 2	Criterion 3
	Academic Record and Research Achievement – Relative to Opportunity 60%	Research Environment and Supervisor 20%	Research Project 20%
<p><b>2 Satisfactory</b></p> <p><i>An application which partly meets the aims of the scheme or assessment criteria with noticeable deficiencies or shortcomings evident by some moderate weaknesses</i></p> <p><i>It is expected that the bottom 15% of applications would be ranked in this category or lower.</i></p>	<p><b>Sound Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• academic record</li> <li>• medals, prizes and awards</li> <li>• research achievement and productivity commensurate with authorship of research publications, book chapters and presentations.</li> <li>• postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience</li> <li>• broader community engagement.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Research Environment and Supervisor:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are <b>somewhat suited</b> to the applicant's proposed project</li> <li>• are <b>somewhat suited</b> to the research stream applied for</li> <li>• Includes <b>satisfactory</b> mentoring and training arrangements</li> <li>• offer <b>satisfactory</b> research support systems for the applicant</li> <li>• offer <b>satisfactory</b> collaborative opportunities for the applicant</li> <li>• offer <b>satisfactory</b> potential to extend the applicant's knowledge and skills.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Research Project:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is <b>aligned</b> with the Research stream applied for</li> <li>• has objectives that are <b>somewhat unclearly defined</b></li> <li>• <b>raises some concerns</b> with respect to research design</li> <li>• <b>raises some concerns</b> with respect to feasibility</li> <li>• will make a <b>satisfactory</b> contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>1 Weak</b></p> <p><i>An application which marginally meets the aims of the scheme or assessment criteria. Shortcomings or deficiencies against most criteria or aims predominate</i></p> <p><i>It is expected that the bottom 5% of applications would be ranked in this category.</i></p>	<p><b>Limited Academic Merit for Field/Discipline (e.g. MBBS, Public Health), signified by (for example):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• academic record</li> <li>• medals, prizes and awards</li> <li>• research achievement and productivity commensurate with authorship of research publications, book chapters and presentations.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Research Environment and Supervisor:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are <b>not ideal</b> to the applicant's proposed project</li> <li>• are <b>not suited</b> to the research stream applied for</li> <li>• Includes <b>limited</b> mentoring and training arrangements</li> <li>• offer <b>limited</b> research support systems for the applicant</li> <li>• offer <b>limited</b> collaborative opportunities for the applicant</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Research Project:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is <b>not aligned</b> with the Research stream applied for</li> <li>• has objectives that are <b>unclear</b></li> <li>• <b>raises major concerns</b> with respect to research design</li> <li>• <b>raises major concerns</b> with respect to feasibility</li> <li>• will make a <b>limited</b> contribution to the applicant's future career aspirations.</li> </ul>

Score	Criterion 1	Criterion 2	Criterion 3
	<b>Academic Record and Research Achievement – Relative to Opportunity 60%</b>	<b>Research Environment and Supervisor 20%</b>	<b>Research Project 20%</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• postgraduate/research training and/or research/professional experience</li> <li>• broader community engagement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• offer <b>limited</b> potential to extend the applicant’s knowledge and skills.</li> </ul>	

## Attachment F – NHMRC Relative to Opportunity and Career Disruption Policy

### Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline NHMRC's Relative to Opportunity Policy with respect to peer review and eligibility to apply for Emerging Leadership Investigator Grants. The audience is applicants and peer reviewers.

NHMRC's objective is to support the best Australian health and medical research and the best researchers, at all career stages. NHMRC seeks to ensure that researchers with a variety of career experiences and those who have experienced pregnancy or a major illness/injury or have caring responsibilities, are not disadvantaged in applying for NHMRC grants.

### Policy approach

NHMRC considers Relative to Opportunity to mean that assessment processes should accurately assess an applicant's track record and associated productivity relative to stage of career, including considering whether productivity and contribution are commensurate with the opportunities available to the applicant. It also means that applicants with career disruptions should not be disadvantaged (in terms of years since they received their PhD) when determining their eligibility for Emerging Leadership Investigator Grants and that their Career Disruptions should be considered when their applications are being peer reviewed.

In alignment with *NHMRC's Principles of Peer Review*, particularly the principles of fairness and transparency, the following additional principles further support this objective:

- **Research opportunity:** Researchers' outputs and outcomes should reflect their opportunities to advance their career and the research they conduct.
- **Fair access:** Researchers should have access to funding support available through NHMRC grant programs consistent with their experience and career stage.
- **Career diversity:** Researchers with career paths that include time spent outside of academia should not be disadvantaged. NHMRC recognises that time spent in sectors such as industry, may enhance research outcomes for both individuals and teams.

The above principles frame NHMRC's approach to the assessment of a researcher's track record during expert review of grant applications and eligibility of applicants applying for Emerging Leadership Investigator Grants. NHMRC expects that those who provide expert assessment during peer review will give clear and explicit attention to these principles to identify the highest quality research and researchers to be funded. NHMRC recognises that life circumstances can be very varied and therefore it is not possible to implement a formulaic approach to applying Relative to Opportunity and Career Disruption considerations during peer review.

### Relative to Opportunity considerations during peer review of applications for funding

During peer review of applications, circumstances considered under the Relative to Opportunity Policy are:

- amount of time spent as an active researcher
- available resources, including situations where research is being conducted in remote or isolated communities
- building relationships of trust with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities over long periods that can impact on track record and productivity
- clinical, administrative or teaching workload

- relocation of an applicant and his/her research laboratory or clinical practice setting or other similar circumstances that impact on research productivity
- for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants, community obligations including 'sorry business'
- the typical performance of researchers in the research field in question
- research outputs and productivity noting time employed in other sectors. For example there might be a reduction in publications when employed in sectors such as industry
- carer responsibilities (that do not come under the Career Disruption policy below).

### **Career Disruption considerations during peer review and eligibility to apply for Emerging Leadership Investigator Grants**

A Career Disruption is defined as a prolonged interruption to an applicant's capacity to work, due to:

- pregnancy
- major illness/injury
- carer responsibilities.

The period of career disruption may be used:

- to determine an applicant's eligibility for an Emerging Leadership Investigator Grant
- to allow for the inclusion of additional track record information for assessment of an application
- for consideration by peer reviewers

To be considered for the purposes of eligibility and peer review, a period of Career Disruption is defined as:

- a continuous absence from work for 90 calendar days or more, and/or
- continuous, long-term, part-time employment (with defined %FTE) due to circumstances classified as Career Disruption, with the absence amounting to a total of 90 calendar days or more.<sup>5</sup>

### **Career Disruption and eligibility to apply for Investigator Grants**

A Career Disruption can affect an applicant's eligibility to apply for an Emerging Leadership Investigator Grant. For such grants, the 10-year time limit on the number of years post-PhD may be extended commensurate with the period of the Career Disruption.

#### **Implementation**

Information on how applicants can demonstrate their track record, Relative to Opportunity, for the purposes of peer review is available in NHMRC's granting system and in NHMRC's *Guide to Peer Review*.

Information on how applicants can demonstrate that a Career Disruption(s) affects their eligibility to apply for an Emerging Leadership Investigator Grant is also available in NHMRC's granting system and in the Investigator Grant Guidelines.

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<sup>5</sup> For example, an applicant who is employed at 0.8 FTE due to childcare responsibilities would need to continue this for at least 450 calendar days to achieve a Career Disruption of 90 calendar days.