

Astronomy Grants Panel 2016

This is a brief, informal report to the community on the outcome of the 2016 round.

There was an unfortunate delay in the announcement of outcomes this year, due to the need within STFC to check the awards were affordable against a background of increasing pressure on the overall budget. The Office and the AGP worked hard to ensure that this delay was minimised and all applicants have now been contacted with details of their recommended awards. Nevertheless, we know that the delay and uncertainty was frustrating and that the outcomes are disappointing for some.

General comments: As in previous rounds, AGP saw a substantial rise in the number of applicants: there were 24% more this round than in the equivalent round three years ago. When combined with a flat cash budget, this growth in the size of the community means there is significant pressure on the limited funds available for exploitation. As a result AGP was unable to recommend support for a large number of high-quality projects and research-active investigators. STFC, UKSA and the Science Board are aware of this shortfall and AGP continue to press the case for protection and enhancement of the exploitation budget. We await the outcome in spring of the Balance of Programmes exercise being undertaken by Science Board to see if that echoes the need for both protection and, if possible enhancement, of the budgets for exploitation.

2016 Outcome: The two AGP calls this round received a total of 202 proposed projects from 204 applicants, who requested 196 RAs and technical posts. AGP were able to recommend support for 89 projects, comprising 74 PDRAs and technical posts and a total of 18.5 FTE years of staff fEC to 118 co-applicants. As in previous rounds, AGP is unable to recommend fEC support to *all* applicants who are judged to be research active. The total RA numbers and fEC support are comparable or slightly down on the same round three years ago. Once all awards have been accepted by PIs, a list of successful projects will be provided on the STFC website.

We reiterate that PIs retain the flexibility to employ the resources awarded on consolidated grants to support the work of *any* researchers working within the AGP area at their institute.

2017 Application process: The closing date for the 2017 Astronomy Grant Round is **2nd February 2017** and the call is now open.

The Guidelines for Applicants were revised in 2015. The major change at that time was a split of the AGP Call for Proposals into two separate Calls, one covering *Solar and Planetary Science* and the other *Observational and Theoretical Astronomy*. Institutions can submit a Consolidated Grant to one or both schemes, while individuals who apply as members of a Consortium Grant proposal will have to apply to a single call.

AGP would like to reiterate the guidance regarding expected fEC requests for applicants in different roles on projects. It is expected that an applicant who is intending to have a *major* involvement in a project will request 15-25% fEC associated with that activity, while more minor roles could involve requests for 5-10% fEC. In addition, applicants are not expected to request more than 30% fEC summed over *all* projects on a grant (and if appropriate over *all* grants submitted in a single round) without providing specific and compelling justification for exceeding this guideline.

More detailed guidance can be found in the Astronomy Grant Application Guidelines on the web. We remind both new and existing groups that the Office and members of AGP are willing to undertake site visits if the applicants feel that would be beneficial and all applicants should feel free to contact the Office for advice and guidance.

Pathways to Impact and Data Management Plans: Whilst the AGP continues to assess the proposals for Public Engagement and Knowledge Exchange (as part of the application's Pathways to Impact

plan), applicants should be aware that cases must be closely linked to the science outputs from the specific projects within the consolidated grant. More general plans are probably better directed to one of STFC's specific funding schemes. Similarly, requests for resources through the Data Management Plans need to make very clear the scientific return to the wider community that these requests will enable.

Gender balance: We have undertaken a comparison of the success rates of female and male applicants on consolidated and consortium grants. The average of the yearly success rates (the fraction of applicants, PIs and co-Is, who received *any* level of support) across the past six years of the scheme are consistent for women and men: 63+/-5% for women and 62+/-2% for men. We will continue to monitor the relative success rate in future rounds and work to ensure that we avoid unconscious bias.

Finally, I would like to thank the Office staff, the members of AGP and the external reviewers for all their efforts over the past year.

Ian Smail, AGP Chair – on behalf of the AGP.