

Astronomy Grant Round – 2011

Between May and September 2010, STFC reviewed its mechanisms for funding the exploitation of facilities and experiments in particle physics, astronomy, space and nuclear physics in universities and other research groups. The Review Panel (chaired by Prof James Stirling) produced a final report containing a number of recommendations to the STFC Executive. The report has been accepted by STFC and is available on the STFC website (<http://www.stfc.ac.uk/News%20and%20Events/20115.aspx>).

The Review Panel recommended that existing standard and rolling grant mechanisms be replaced by a single consolidated grant scheme containing core and non-core staff post funding.

Although STFC has accepted the Review Panel's recommendations, the report did not include the detail of how they should be implemented for each science community.

We have therefore established a working group which is looking at the most effective way to implement the changes. This group will consult with Grant Panel Chairs and other members of the research community at appropriate points throughout the process. Given the proximity of the NP and PP theory closing dates, some advance guidance has been sent to those communities, with the caveat that it might not be the final version.

This note aims to provide the community that commonly applies to Astronomy with some idea of where we are. Note this includes applications for the exploitation of space research, as this remains the responsibility of STFC rather than the new UK Space Agency. It does not include grants for projects related to the design and construction of instrumentation, other than blue skies technical R&D. These projects will continue to be reviewed by PPAN/PPRP and the PRD scheme.

Currently:

- We aim to implement the scheme for the next Astronomy Grants Round
- The 2011 Astronomy closing date is 7th April 2011. We aim to keep to this date if at all possible and will endeavour to provide as much information as we can by that date.
- The 'Astronomy Guidance for Applicants' will be revised to explain the new funding mechanism and provide information on page limits, structure of application etc. A note will be sent to the community as soon as the guidance has been prepared and can be made available.
- Departments currently holding Rolling Grants will be expected to submit a Consolidated Grant proposal as per their existing review date unless otherwise advised by the office.
- Departments that do not hold a Rolling Grant will be advised when to submit a Consolidated Grant Proposal. Such groups are advised to start thinking about the options detailed below.
- There is no longer a standard grant scheme – more detailed notes below.
- It is expected that the PATT travel grants will no longer exist as a separate scheme and should be incorporated as part of the consolidated proposals.

General Advice – Subject to final agreement

The scheme will use the current JeS system and will request similar information with regard to science case, and justification for support for staff and associated resources. It is expected that STFC grant applications will be administered by the Research Council's Shared Services Centre by the closing date for this round. More details on how this will affect applicants will be forwarded as it becomes available.

Consolidated Proposals

It is expected that each university department or similar organisational unit will submit one consolidated grant for its Astronomical Research Programme. If the appropriate grouping for this proposal is unclear then please seek advice from the office. The grants awarded are likely to be for a 4 year period.

- The office intends to provide guidance on the number of PDRA's / projects / themes that may be reasonable to request within a consolidated grant. It is in neither our nor the community's interest to apply for large numbers of posts that have very little hope of being supported.

Consortium Proposals

In instances where groups from different institutions are working collaboratively in the same well-defined research area, encouragement is given to apply jointly for a consolidated grant (e.g. as a consortium). In practice, this would require the submission of a single case for support, with either one Je-S form per institution or one Je-S form on behalf of the consortium. This would give members of such consortia the opportunity to bid for shared resources, particularly core expertise, that they might not be able to secure on their own, perhaps due to the size and/or scope of their activity.

In essence, consolidated consortium grants are akin to the more familiar concept of joint standard grants. The main difference is that the scope and scale of a consortium grant is likely to be broader/larger.

An individual would only be supported on a maximum of one consolidated grant. Therefore individuals in groups that apply as part of a consortium would be excluded from also applying as part of their individual university department application.

If considering submitting a consortium grant, applicants are required to discuss this with the office well in advance of submission to agree whether a consortium grant application would be appropriate. A brief written summary of the proposed consortium is likely to be requested as part of this process.

Core and Non-Core posts

Core posts are defined as underpinning support that is, to a great extent, not contingent on the specific details of the group's future programme of work. For instance a group may require a technician which will be needed regardless of which projects will be carried out over the grant period. This is the guiding principle of the assessment of core posts, although the detailed definition may vary slightly across different subject areas. It is not expected that RA posts would be defined as core posts. Ultimately, the grants panels will make judgements on a case-by-case basis, based on the requested support. Further information will be made available in due course

Current standard grants

We do not intend to terminate current standard grants for the purposes of moving to the new consolidated grants scheme. If a group has plans to continue working in the same area as a current standard grant and submits a new consolidated grant any existing standard grants will be subsumed into the new consolidated grant .

There is an enormous amount of work to be carried out in a relatively short time period. Please be assured that we are consulting with members of the Astronomy Grants Panel and will do our utmost to provide clear guidance as soon as possible. Should you have any queries then please contact any of the staff listed below.

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