

Astronomy Grants Panel 2014

The following provides a brief and informal report to the community on the outcome of the 2014 Astronomy Grants round and changes being made to the 2015 Calls.

General comments: We have seen continued growth in the astronomy community with AGP receiving proposals from new groups and new consortia in the 2014 round. This growth is faster than seen in STFC's other research areas and places additional stress on the limited budget available for exploitation. We continue to recommend support for the very best science proposals from the community, but there is a lot of excellent research which we are unable to recommend funding for without additional resource. STFC and the Science Board are aware of this shortfall.

The volume of proposals submitted to AGP is also inflated by the large number of projects submitted by some applicants, far in excess of the number likely to be awarded. Such large requests are frequently counterproductive as they spread the supportable science across too many projects, as a result of which fewer are judged to be individually compelling.

2014 Outcome: There were 234 proposed projects requesting 206 RAs from 262 applicants in the 2015 round. On the basis of its assessment, AGP recommended support for 77 PDRAs and 6 technical posts, two PhD studentships and a total of 22 FTE years of staff fEC to 144 co-applicants. This was awarded through 22 Consolidated grants, six consortium grants and three new applicant proposals. The total RA numbers and fEC support represent slight increases in funding levels from the same round three years ago. A list of successful projects is available at http://www.stfc.ac.uk/files/181/181_res_6.pdf

Applicants who do not receive fEC support: Due to the limited resources available, AGP is unable to recommend fEC support to all applicants who are judged to be research active. To mitigate the worst effects of this AGP proposed to STFC Science Board to allow research active co-applicants who are not awarded resource on the grant to be named on the award letter. However, this proposal was not supported by the Board. In addition, AGP recommended the award of small levels of fEC to a number of applicants on projects just below the funding cut-off for PDRA support who would otherwise not receive any support.

Finally, we stress 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.

2015 Application Process Changes: In response to the Heavens' review of the STFC Consolidated Grant scheme AGP have made a number of changes to their process for 2015. The closing date for the 2015 Astronomy Grant Round is **12th February 2015** and the call is now open.

The Guidelines for Applicants have been revised including the following changes:

1. The most significant change is splitting 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.
2. Details of all related grants held by the applicants which will run concurrently with the proposed consolidated or consortium grant need to be provided.
3. Management fEC is now a multiple of the FTE request, capped at 10%.
4. Changes to page limits for projects requesting technical support, New Applicant proposals and PhD studentship projects. We wish to stress for the latter that any proposals for PhD studentships have to make a very clear and compelling case why these cannot be supported from any existing STFC quota studentship award.

More detail about the process and these changes can be found in the Astronomy Grant Application Guidelines at <http://www.stfc.ac.uk/181.aspx>.

Gender balance: We have undertaken a comparison of the success rates of female and male applicants on consolidated and consortium grants over the four years of the scheme. The

average success rates (the fraction of applicants, PIs and co-Is, who received some level of support) were consistent for women and men: 64+/-7% for women and 61+/-3% for men. We will continue to monitor the relative success rate in future rounds.

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