

Managing Demand

“Safeguarding the Peer Review Process”



EPSRC

Engineering and Physical Sciences
Research Council

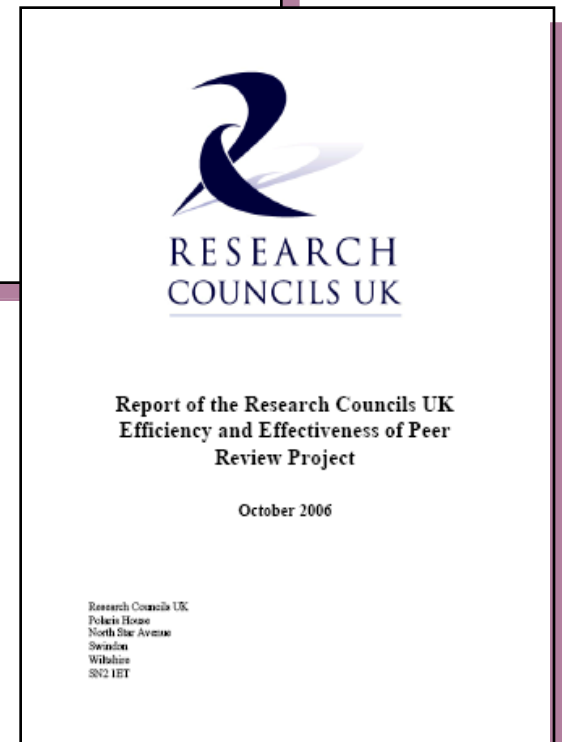
Why Now?

- Historically an “open-door” policy to all proposals....
-but strong feedback from the community on declining success rates
- Prudent to act now to underpin efficiency of the process
- ...and reduce burden of peer review on stakeholders

- OUR GOAL IS NOT TO MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE BEST RESEARCHERS TO APPLY FOR FUNDING FROM EPSRC
- OR INHIBIT CREATIVITY AND ADVENTURE IN THE PORTFOLIO

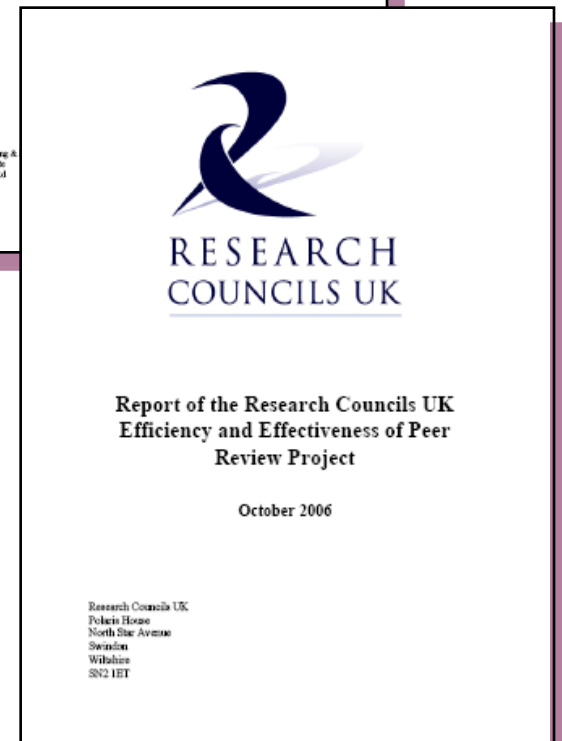
Context For Change

- 2006 RCUK Review into Effectiveness of Peer Review
- No. of proposals to Research Councils has doubled since 1988/89
- Review process becomes ineffective when Success Rates <10%
- DTZ External costs of peer review



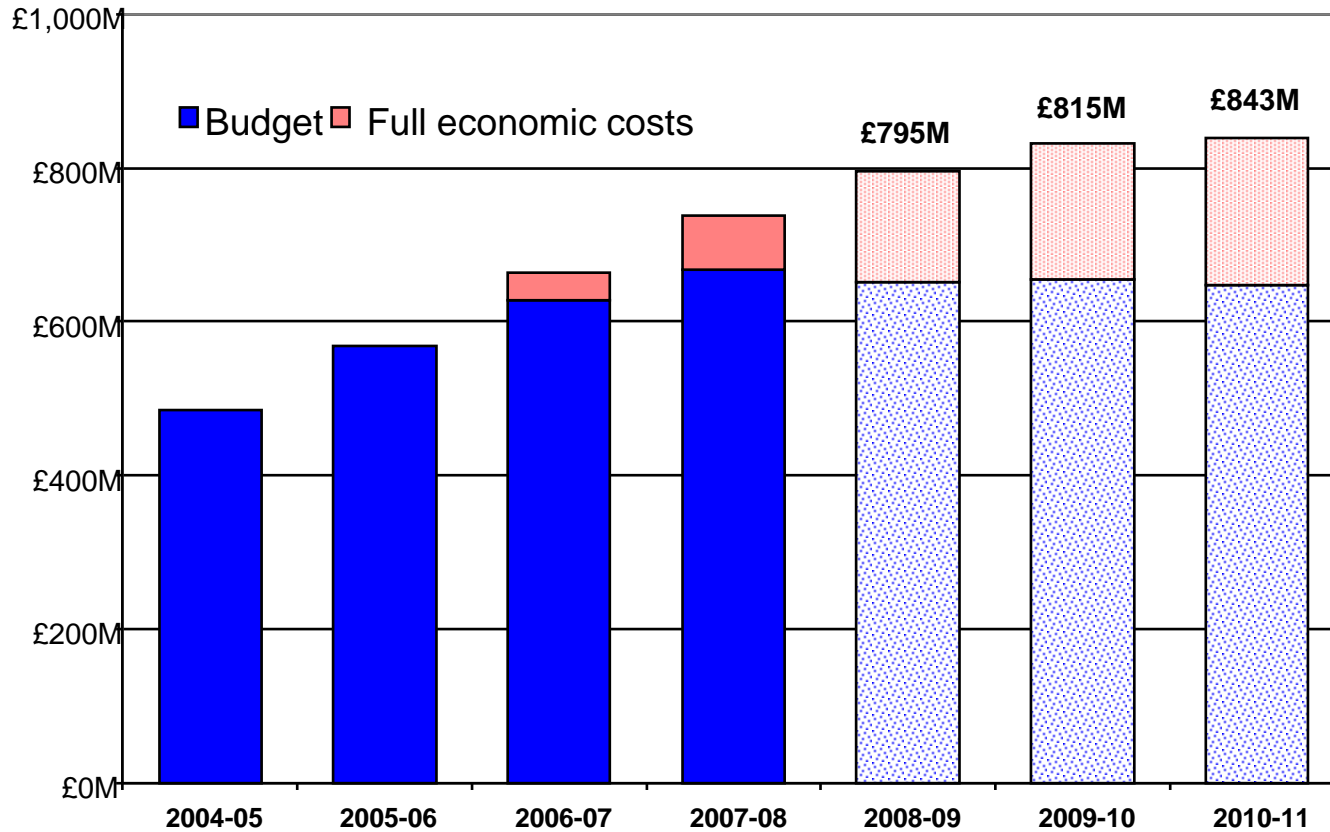
Context For Change (2)

- DTZ External costs of peer review
 - Significant support (75 per cent of respondents) for the option of allowing only invited resubmissions
 - Limited support for introducing disincentives to those applying if these were to be introduced generally but more support for specific targeting e.g. for those individuals who have large numbers of unsuccessful proposals.”
 - Contingency plans will be developed, which will include the introduction of selective disincentives, should other actions not prove effective



Context For Change (3)

EPSRC 2004-05 to 2010-11 Expenditure



Plans include:

- Our priority themes
- ETI
- Target for TSB collaboration
- RCUK priority themes

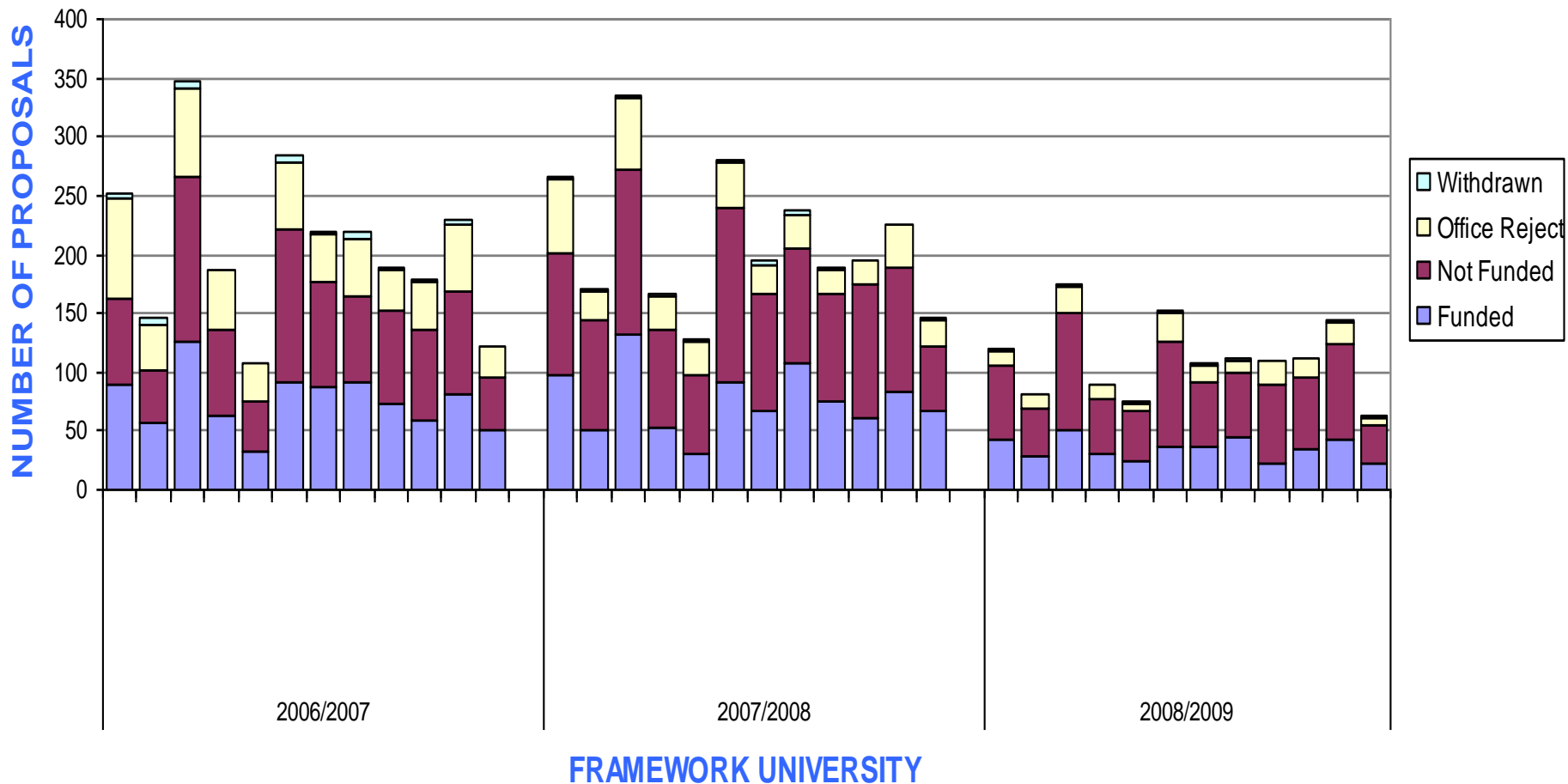
Key Facts

- Reduction of 5% in real terms following SR
- Council success rate at 28% overall and 22% in responsive mode
- Proposal demand consistently above 5000 proposals per annum
- ...whilst the best possible case will be made to Government the next settlement is likely to be even tighter...

Issues and Challenges

- Currently 2% of proposals are declared resubmissions – evidence shows this to be closer to 20%
- Some are genuinely improved, many are just recycled through the review process
- A small number of applicants make multiple submissions and are repeatedly unsuccessful
 - 206 applicants accounted for 1033 unsuccessful proposals in the last two years

FRAMEWORK UNIVERSITIES - OUTCOME OF PROPOSALS SUBMITTED TO EPSRC BY FY





The Primary Benefits

- A reduced burden of effort spent on assessing poor quality applications by the peer review community and a consequential increase in the amount of time and effort available to peer reviewers to spend on the consideration of high quality proposals.
- An increase in the efficiency of the current peer review process by a reduction in submission of uncompetitive applications.
- Increased scope to focus on pro-active communication concerning investments rather than reactive communication such as success rates.
- Better quality research, through fewer more considered proposals.



Options For Change

Four immediate options have been considered by Council:

- Addressing resubmission policy,
- providing best practice and guidance to institutions,
- Mentoring/pausing repeatedly unsuccessful applicants and
- enhancing transparency over review outcomes.

What are the aims of safeguarding peer review?

- The focus is to:
 - remove the lowest quality proposals from the peer review system
 - constrain repeatedly unsuccessful applicants
- Measures will be implemented over the next 12 months commencing April 2009
- Looking to make a substantive reduction in applications
- OUR GOAL IS NOT TO MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE BEST RESEARCHERS TO APPLY FOR FUNDING FROM EPSRC

What's Changing? – Resubmissions

- From the 1st of April 2009, we will no longer accept resubmitted proposals.
- Any resubmitted proposal, as confirmed by the Portfolio Manager, becomes an office reject and will count as unsuccessful.
- Resubmissions will only be invited by EPSRC, based on advice from peer review.
- Financial deferrals of proposals just below the funding cut-off will still be used for near-miss cases.
- We will NOT engage in discussions prior to the resubmission of proposals. This is for the PI to decide.

What's Changing? – Repeatedly Unsuccessful Applicants

- From April 2009, we will no longer accept submissions from a small number of applicants who have been repeatedly unsuccessful
- Applicants (*approx 200*) in this group will have made a high number of applications and have low personal success rates
- Individuals will be notified in writing
- We will ask an institution to appoint a mentor
- After a 12-month period further applications will be considered

Criteria

- Within any 2 year period **any PI** that :
 - Has at least 3 proposals ranked in the bottom half of a Rank Ordered List or that do not make panel.
 - **AND** has a personal success rate of less than 25%.
- Success rate will be calculated by number of proposals submitted not value
- Individuals one-away from satisfying criteria will be notified

What applications will NOT be considered?

- We will not be considering:

- **outline applications**

- rejection at this stage is often based on fit to call remit and not quality. – This will be monitored.

- Applications lead or peer reviewed by another body

- Training Grants

- “Institution-based Schemes” – e.g. S&I

Comment in the Community

- *“Want some more depressing news? Consider EPSRC's new policy.”*
- *“EPSRC have now changed the regulations so that researchers with a less than 25% rate on their applications get banned for applying for more funding for a year”*
- *“Almost everyone would be blacklisted, no? It's most certainly a "rich get richer" types scheme”*
- *“My only consolation is that it means that university departments will have to stop their relentless pressure on us to keep applying for lots of grants.....”*
- *“.....Fewer applications but higher quality will have to be the name of the game.”*

Best Practice / Greater Transparency of Outcomes

Work in Progress

- Re-launch of study days at universities/regionally or in Swindon to reinforce peer review training
- EPSRC will develop regular reports to universities to help manage submissions:
 - Institutional and departmental breakdowns
 - Sift rates, numbers of submissions etc...
- Applicants will be able to access data concerning their own personal success rate



Options For Change

Council dismissed three other options based on advice and discussion:

- Institutional Quotas - No
- Proposal Charging - No
- Extending Outlines - No

Two other options were identified where further work was needed

- Segmentation of applicant population
- Linkage of DTAs to success rate



In Summary

- OUR GOAL IS NOT TO MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE BEST RESEARCHERS TO APPLY FOR FUNDING FROM EPSRC
- but to act in response to community concerns and reduce some of the burden associated with the review process...
- We have developed measures in the spirit of the community advice we have received...*RCUK Review*
-by acting on resubmissions and repeatedly unsuccessful applicants



Thank you...

- We welcome your comments and feedback?