

EPSRC

Engineering and Physical Sciences
Research Council



Exchanging Knowledge | Extending Quality Life

Making the 'cut' – secrets of successful bid writing

Gail Mountain

Co-Director K-T EQUAL

g.a.mountain@sheffield.ac.uk



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

The aims of different funding bodies vary

- Taking the UK Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council as a case study.....

EPSRC criteria for peer review

1. Excellence;
 - novelty, relationship to context and timeliness
 - ambition, adventure, transformative effects
 - appropriateness of proposed methodologies
2. Impact;
 - relevance and appropriateness of any beneficiaries or collaborators
 - whether appropriate routes have been identified for dissemination and knowledge exchange

More EPSRC criteria for peer review

3. Applicants
 - appropriateness of the track record of the applicants
 - balance of skills in the team including academic collaborators
4. Resources and management
 - effectiveness of proposed planning and management and whether requested resources are appropriate
5. Overall assessment

Remember that other funders have different criteria and specific calls also have set criteria

Impact – a common agenda across funders

- Knowledge impact
- Societal impact
- Economic impact
- Impact for people

In the words of the EPSRC; don't waffle or over-egg the pudding

A great EQUAL project; the Future Bathroom



What makes it great?

- Contemporary and important topic – assistive technology and bathrooms
- Central involvement of older people as researchers as well as participants
- Many and varied outputs

<http://www.fastuk.org/research/projview.php?id=1322>

Another example: CIRCA



What makes it great?

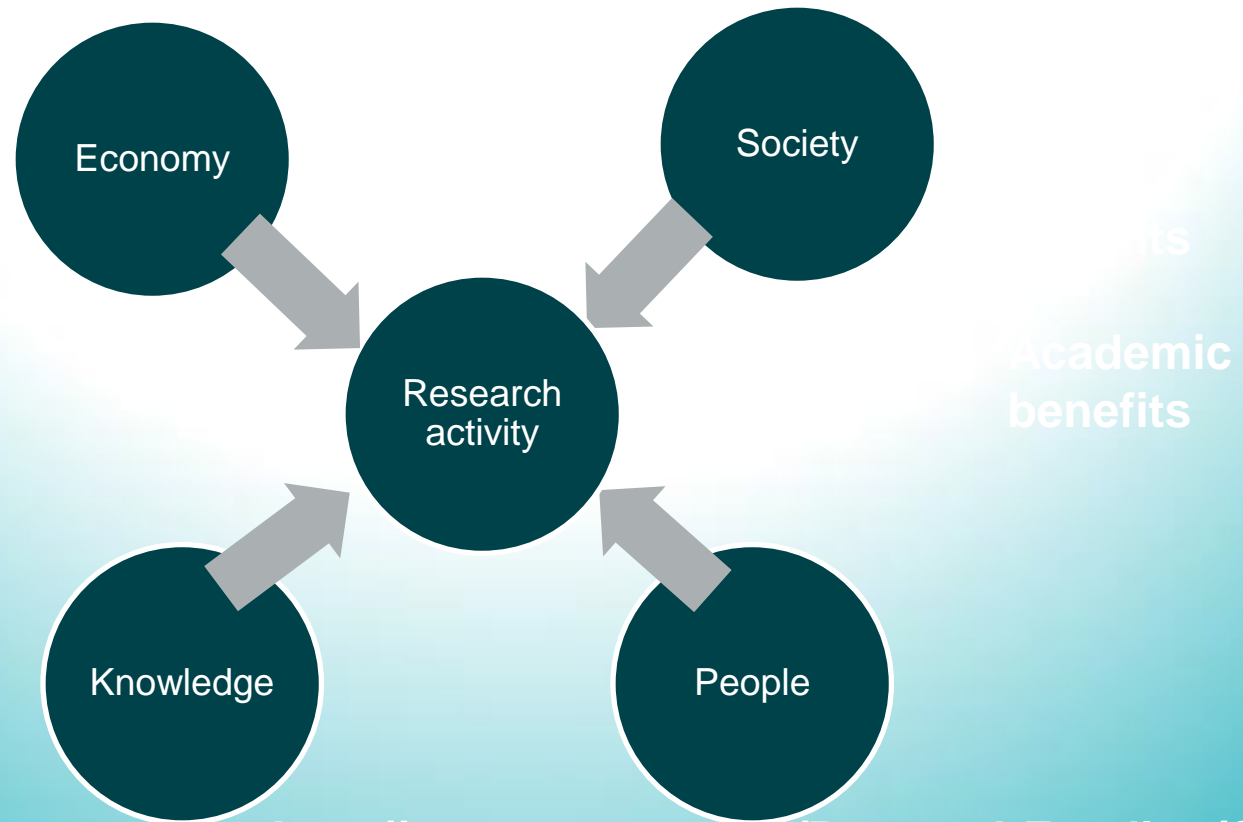
- Novel use of technology to provide reminiscence and enjoyment to older people with dementia
- The time is right for commercialisation after several years of remaining at prototype stage

A final example: workforce design for the older worker

- What makes it great?
- Important issue for policy makers
- Identified the many issues that facilitate or dissuade people from continuing in work



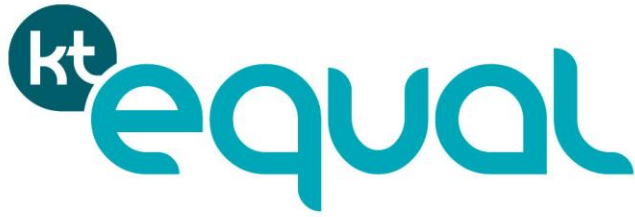
These three examples all have impact because...



<http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/ResearchFunding/Changes/EconomicImpact.htm>

Interdisciplinary research; another significant agenda

- Able to address complex questions which span different discipline areas
- Can avoid “reinventing the wheel”
- More likely to result in outcomes of value to end users



Exchanging Knowledge | Extending Quality Life

Examples of Interdisciplinary Collaborations through EQUAL

Design + Health + Engineering + Psychology

Humanities + Architecture + Social Science + Clinicians

Medical physics + Social Science + Researchers from voluntary sector + Industry

Thus it can be relevant to consider

- Value of interdisciplinary research in addressing the research question
- Maintaining the end user (older/ disabled person) at the core of proposed activity – both proposal development and involvement in subsequent research

Avoiding the slippery slope leading to rejection



Things that particularly irritate me when reviewing

Sin

- Lay summaries that are incomprehensible -5
- Proposals that have obviously been rushed – and therefore not adequately edited -4
- Unrealistic time line – ethics not taken into account -4
- Lots of reference to past glory rather than what the proposed project will achieve and how -3

Error rating



All reviewers will have their own lists; peer review is subjective

Things that give me confidence

Boosters

- Well written throughout; limited use of jargon and acronyms
- Aims and objectives and related work plan clear and achievable
- Credible science
- Team costed appropriately
- Faults can be fixed

Confidence rating

+5

+5

+4

+5

+3

+3



What needs to be thought through before you start building a proposal

- What you are hoping to achieve – aims of the project?
- Has anyone done this before – and if so is it worth repeating?
- Is your idea one that will create impact?

Specific calls for research; taking UK dementia initiative as an example.....

- Does your idea fit the scope of the call?
- Do you understand the call – how it came about?
- Who else do you need to involve – are you aware of the existing research community?
- Do you have sufficient time to submit a quality proposal?

For responsive mode proposals

- Has your idea got current policy/ practice relevance – will it have impact?
- Does it match the aims of the funding body you are targeting?
- Is the funding available sufficient to undertake what you want to do?

What next?

- Who should you work with – do the skills exist within your institution or do you need to look outside?
- Who do you need to consult with during the development of your proposal?
- How much staff time is required to realistically deliver your project?

Writing the proposal; a two track process

- Getting the science right
- Managing financial requirements/sign offs



Start both simultaneously

What next?

- Identify some critical friends to read and comment upon your draft document
- Ask them to be critical – peer review will not be gentle
- Get familiar with the requirements for submission; for example RCUK now use Jes for all submissions

Sometimes ideas take time to come to fruition....

‘Lifestyle Matters’ as a case example;
Translation of a US health promoting
intervention for older people into a UK context
and examination of effectiveness

A preventive health approach which focuses
on the benefits of activity

Is underpinned by the belief that what we do
on a day to day basis is central to our health
and wellbeing

Timeline for Lifestyle Matters

- 2001; idea for research and collaborator identified
- 2002/3; two unsuccessful applications for randomised controlled trial
- 2004; seedcorn funding obtained for pilot study
- 2008/9; two unsuccessful applications for randomised controlled trial
- 2011; trial funding obtained from the MRC

Actions for you

- Identify your question/ problem
- Find out if anyone else is interested in the same issue and if so decide on collaboration
- Get a critical friend/mentor to assist you with proposal preparation
- Find an appropriate funding source and check regulations regarding funding
- Make a realistic timetable for submission and stick to it
- Don't get dispirited if rejected – try again
- Be persistent

KT-EQUAL – a resource to assist with collaboration and idea generation

- Collaboration across 7 universities
- Commenced in January 2009 and substantively in October for four years
- Led by an interdisciplinary group of research leaders
- Recruited staff include research coordinators, a press officer and a lobbyist
- Get involved by registering at www.equal.ac.uk