General feedback about applications

The following information collates the features of high and lower scoring applications across the three programmes in order to give the Scottish medical education research community general feedback (beyond any specific feedback applicants have already received) in order to help people improve the quality of their applications for the 2015 round of grant applications.

Features of high scoring applications

- Recognition that the proposed study was part of programmatic research by the applicants

- Philosophical underpinnings of the research made clear

- Methodology/method clearly articulated and rigorous

- Original elements to the proposed work

- Proposed research is relevant to SMERC priority areas and to current and new policy initiatives in medical education (e.g. Shape of Training)

- Work thought to have significant potential for impact on educational policy and practice within Scotland and beyond (e.g. UK and Europe)

- Ambitious but realistic/achievable projects with clearly identified timelines

- Beneficial having proposed post-doctoral research fellow named as co-applicant

- Costs clearly articulated/itemised

- Good value for money particularly when applicants made clear the financial contribution of the administering institution to the project (by way of matched funding)

- Clear articulation of general ethical considerations and those specific to the project

- Experienced applicant teams with expertise relevant to the proposal including the necessary experience supervising Research Fellows and PhD students

- Good collaborations between multiple stakeholders within SMERC (including NES) and beyond Scotland

- Inclusion of broader national and international reference/advisory groups were welcomed

- Good reputation of institutions for carrying out medical education research and research relevant to the topic of inquiry.

Features of lower scoring applications

- Inadequate account of existing literature relevant to the research questions so queries around originality

- Insufficient account of method detail or flawed methods leading to queries about methodological rigor

- Queries around the impact of the work in terms of developing educational practice and/or educational policy

- Either limited ambition about the scope of the work within the specified timeframe or overly ambitious within the stated timeframe

- Some typographical and/or punctuation errors leading to queries about insufficient proof-reading of application

- Criticisms around the narrow focus of the work (e.g. focus on one stage of training only)[1]

- Criticisms around value for money with some items requested that assessors thought should/would be ineligible (e.g. software licenses and open access publications)[2]

- Insufficient articulation of ethical considerations beyond the very general issues (e.g. informed consent, data storage etc.)

- Limited collaboration within SMERC, beyond SMERC or lacking involvement of NES

- Assessors queried the reputation of some institutions for medical education research.

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1   Note that some of the successful applications had a narrow focus as well so having a narrow focus was also perceived by some assessors to be positive.

2   Note that the SMERC Management team does not agree with such assessor perceptions as software licenses and open access fees are legitimate expenditure items. For 2015, we will include a list of what is and what is not funded by the grants and make this available to the assessors as well as applicants.