Experienced Panellist Tips on the Panels Process

Preparing for Panels

Set aside sufficient time:

- Reviewing applications in detail and writing up the feedback always takes more time than initially planned – especially on your first panel.
- Spread out the reading of applications to break up intense reading periods.
- Reviewing an application usually takes between 3-4 hours, or more if you are a new panellist or if you are assessing a Gold or Silver application. This includes time to make notes, cross reference and write feedback.
- As an observer, if you can, prepare for the panel as though you are a panellist. You will get more out of the experience and it will make the day more interesting/relevant for you.

Word process/Clearly write your feedback:

- Make notes on the application – don’t just underline or highlight. What is good, raises queries, what is poor, what is incomplete, inaccurate etc. – make equivalent notes on the feedback form.
- It is always easier to have your comments typed up/written clearly in the feedback forms provided than to relying solely on notes annotated besides sections of the application. This will enable you to provide constructive and concise comments during the panel and will save time on the day. Ensure you fill in the recommended result, final comments and good practice before attending the panel.
- Putting page, table and figure numbers after comments is invaluable for your own review and for panel discussions.
- Critically review the application – don’t just read it. Question the analysis, interpretation and actions. Highlight the most significant points you want to raise and highlight them in bold or italics.

During the Panel

- As panellists raise issues or good practice identified, tick these off to prevent duplication in discussion.
- If you are concerned about something in an application, then say it – not all panel members notice everything, and often it will be important to discuss.
- Don’t give into the temptation to compare between applications. It’s not helpful, and it also takes up time that’s needed to fairly assess the applications.
Don’t read out large parts of text unless necessary to make a point. Stick to good points and suggestions for improvement.

Be clear about what points are minor and which are essential to understanding the application or making a judgement about an award.

Be realistic about what can be achieved in 10000 words. It is not always possible to give a full description – accept this and don’t have unrealistic expectations.

Call out assumptions/bias in the meeting – the chair is trained to do this – but all members need to be mindful that we all must stick to what is in front of us.

If you disagree with someone else’s view, say so and say why. Equally, say so if you agree without repeating detail.

Know the criteria

Things that you might ‘like to see’ or ‘don’t like’ are not what applicants are asked to demonstrate or evidence, therefore stick to the criteria.

Refer explicitly to the criteria and be clear why criteria have not been met, where relevant.

A good set of actions or progress against the actions does not make a Silver award. For Silver, focus on impact (even impact of what you might view as “common” or “routine” actions – remember, every department/institution is different – routine at yours might be very difficult for others to implement.)

Remember to look for examples of where criteria have been met – it is important to commend as well as identify areas for further consideration.

Be aware of your own bias when applying the criteria- just because you would expect a Department to be further ahead on their gender equality journey should not lead you to judge their application more robustly than another department at a different institution.

Be specific in your assessment of Action Plans- it is not sufficient to merely state in your assessment that ‘it is not SMART’ – list actions that are not SMART in your feedback and explain why they fall short. This will help you and fellow panel members have a more in-depth discussion about a very important element of the submission. Read actions as you come across them in the body of the application – this will let you assess whether the action is appropriate for the issue identified.

Key things to note in submissions:

Has there been consultation e.g. survey or workshops and is this data used where relevant? This is now a criteria and it should be analysed by gender. Otherwise, the SAT are presenting their impression of the culture of the department but this might not be how other people experience it.

Actions should address issues identified e.g. Unconscious Bias training is useful but if the recruitment data presented and analysed shows that the issue is with getting women to apply in the first place then it is not going to address the problem. Additional actions are needed.

Be aware that data is not usually provided by HR/Planning services as a cohort study – i.e. don’t try and track numbers/changes in the data to look for apparent inconsistencies. That is to say, because it looks like 3 women were hired at Lecturer in one year but the pipeline number does not reflect this exactly does not mean the data are wrong- people join, leave and move on via promotion or across the University and so you shouldn’t try and track individuals in the data.

Note the context provided in Section 2 (discipline specific information). This should inform your assessment of subsequent sections and the advice that you provide for further consideration.
Ensure that the action plan matches the commentary. It’s not so unusual that there is a miss-match.

Does the narrative answer the question? If not, list what is omitted.

Are the data provided and analysed appropriately? Are conclusions evidence-based or guess work?

Are actions included where necessary? Do the actions address the issues?

Is the action plan SMART? If you were presented with the action plan could you deliver it? If not, why not? If it isn’t SMART, which bit is missing? Is it the measurable – is it unrealistic to put a number on everything?

For responsible person, sometimes name and sometimes role is given. Providing one or the other is given, this is okay. If neither is given, the action is not SMART.

Do not make assumptions about content or about expectations from a particular university (related to unconscious bias).

What could be improved, what could be better, what is not clear?