Maximising the value of peer review and decision-making in research funding allocation

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Research on Research
Peer review and decision-making

Peer Review is integral to the decision-making process in funding allocation but what do we mean by peer review?
- External peer review
- Internal peer review
- Different types of peer reviewers

Peer review provides an independent assessment for quality, impact and return of investment. It is the gold standard, undisputed champion of decision-making.

However, peer review is complex and large bodies of evidence suggest challenges and uncertainties.
Despite the large body of evidence on peer review, there are a lack of studies identifying novel or innovative approaches:

- The evidence is limited
- Methodologically weak
- Lack of clarity to determine the components of an efficient decision-making system
- Lack of experimental studies to show what an effective decision-making system is

Key features of an optimal system are relatively unknown

“Researchers look to peer review to uphold research standards and promote the ‘best’ science, whilst politicians and funders use it to provide accountability for spending.” (Guthrie et al, 2018)
Aims and purpose

WHY IS THIS RESEARCH NEEDED? - There is a lack of evidence and a number of uncertainties around how to sustain an efficient decision-making system to support the allocation of research funding.

Peer review is only one aspect of a much larger system working towards fairness, reliability, and validity.

The whole research community would significantly benefit from a more open, fair and efficient decision-making process in the allocation of research funding.

To build the evidence base to maximise the value of peer review and its contribution to decision-making in research funding allocation (for funders, reviewers and researchers).
Methods

- Reviewing the literature
- Mixed methods
- Retrospective analysis
- Prospective analysis

Stage 1

- Peer Review and Decision Making
  - Realist synthesis (decision-making approaches to research grants funding allocation)
  - Secondary data analysis (Understanding expectations of the peer review process)
  - Observations of decision making (Qualitative study of funding committees)
  - Qualitative analysis of feedback to applicants

Stage 2

- eDelphi to identify alternative approaches
- Feasibility study of an alternative approach

Surveys
- Interviews
- Observations
Engagement with stakeholders is essential for the design and conduct of the research.

They are also participants in the research.

Why? Engagement with stakeholders will ensure ongoing relevance of the research AND the knowledge generated is useful to, and used by, stakeholders.
Outputs, Outcomes and Impact

Building the evidence base for strategies of decision-making for research funding that has international relevance.

How? Research outputs such as peer reviewed articles, reports, conference submissions.

Engagement activities to raise awareness of the work with all stakeholders including the research and funding communities. Promote key messages using webinars, blogs and social media such as Twitter.
Outputs, outcomes and Impact

To have proportionate research management processes for the allocation of funding – *not one size fits all*

Seek greater clarity and understanding around funders decision-making processes from a funders perspective

**Anticipated impact**
- Opportunities for funders to consider enhancements to the process,
- Enhanced transparency and openness around decision-making,
- Greater acceptability of streamlining processes,
- Reduction in duplication of effort (and cost),
- Improved quality of applications and
- Increasing the potential value of peer review for funders, reviewers and applicants (reducing burden).
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"Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."

*Henry Ford.*

NIHR RoR publications and blogs:
https://www.southampton.ac.uk/netscc/research/publications.page
https://www.nihr.ac.uk/blog/why-innovation-is-key-to-improving-peer-review-quality/22178
https://www.nihr.ac.uk/blogs/peer-review-can-we-do-it-better/20087
https://www.nihr.ac.uk/blogs/nihr-research-on-research-the-what-why-how-and-who/11358

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