Writing Proposals - there is no magic bullet

Prof Mike Chantler

Heriot-Watt University

Writing proposals
Mike's personal opinions

- There is no magic bullet

- It is a 'noisy' process – don't give up

- Learn from anyone who is willing to help

- Get folk to give you as much feedback as you can **before** submission

- You have to have an idea that excites you!

Preparation

- List all the sections of the proposal that you have to provide
- **Include** the JeS form narratives
- Reviewers focus on the cfs part II
- Speakers will focus on reviews and rebuttal
- Panel often skims JeS Summary and Objectives

Where to start

- Write the JeS Summary and Objectives
  - It's difficult
  - But, if you get it right then you have the proposal's 'golden thread'
  - If you can't write the summary then you don't have a proposal

What next

- Write cfs part II.

- Start with goals!

- End with short, sharp conclusion

- Yes – I know that this is not the 'normal' format

The ICT reviewing community is a wide and diverse community

- Write for **both** the ICT 'expert' and 'generalist'!
  - Hopefully reviewers will be experts
  - 1st speaker will be an ICT generalist
  - 2nd speaker will have expertise in your or a related area
  - Write your case-for-support for generalist and expert.
- Make good use of visual cues and signposting for the speed reader
- Reviewers will probably read all of the case for support and skim attachments
- Speakers will read reviews + rebuttal and only refer to proposal to resolve disputes
- Write your rebuttal for the speakers, not reviewers!

Excitement and Risk

- You must communicate **your** excitement to the reviewers and speakers

- Risk and scope: **shoot for the world**
  - Be ambitious
  - But make it clear in the work programme that you have fallbacks which will at least advance your case for world domination
  - Make the 'how' explicit: use 'methodology' and workplan
  - Keep the workplan simple

Clearly Communicate

Be **clear** about:

- What you are going to do
  - and how you will measure success
- Why it is important
  - what impact it will have
- Why you have the team to do the job
- Why you are excited about the potential of the work

Help your reader find information quickly

- Use headings and white space to help the speed reader navigate quickly
- Use signposting to reinforce and be explicit about 'novelty', timeliness etc
  - e.g. "A crucial research question that must be addressed in the near term is …."

Impact and Resources

- Do small pathways to impact activities **now**.
  - And refer to them in your proposal to add credibility to your proposed activities
- Resources: ask for what you **need** to do the project – no less, no more.
  - Asking for too much harms your credibility
  - Asking for too little brings into question your management skills

Internal Reviewing

- Get lots of 'formal' and 'informal' reviews prior to submission
- 30 min informal review
  - give your self 30m to read a colleague's part II and then talk to them about your immediate impressions
  - use a highlighter to trace your scan path, it can be illuminating!
  - get them to do the same for you.
- Formal review
  - Give them the full application (including the JeS form) + reviewer's proforma.
- NB
  - Do not nominate any of your informal reviewers on the JeS form

Other

- Timing
  - Do not delay submission
- Consider collaborating with a senior academic in your field
- Proofread lots
- List all the sections of the proposal that you have to provide – including the JeS form bits (they are very important for the speakers). Reviewres focus on the cfs)

Above all

- Keep going

- Keep generating ideas

- Keep submitting

- Don't stop talking to people