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). Reviewers focus on the cfs)
Above all

- Keep going
- Keep generating ideas
- Keep submitting
- Don’t stop talking to people