

*Operation of the Time Allocation Panel (TAP): Advice from the NMC*

1. The NMC's role is to specify the principles of the time allocation procedure (the TAP document) as well as provide specific additional guidance to the TAP (this document).

2. The TAP is independent of the NMC (although the TAP chair is a member of the NMC). The NMC receives a report from the TAP (the TAP chair is responsible for its drafting, but its content is to be agreed with all TAP members) after each meeting and also considers an analysis of the allocation (prepared by the facility manager) in order to inform its decisions concerning the procedure and guidelines (item 1).

3. The TAP is responsible for allocation of 80% of the available spectrometer time.

4. Item 4.2 of the TAP document states:

*During the meeting the TAP will categorise the proposals: "approved in full", "approved with a reduced allocation" and "not approved at this time". Where appropriate, this process will incorporate factors such as the quality of publications arising from previous allocations of time and whether the research is supported by peer reviewed grants or involves students funded by EPSRC or BBSRC. However, these factors will be subordinate to overall scientific merit.*

Specifically, the primary consideration in categorising projects is scientific merit.

Secondary factors to consider are:

- (i) reports by PIs from previous TAP allocations
- (ii) outputs (publications and talks) relating to previous TAP allocations
- (iii) peer-reviewed (from a research council or charitable organisation) or industrial funding

The TAP are advised that the wording above (item 4.2 of the TAP document) is a consequence of the specific grant condition (GSC3) as specified by EPSRC:

*"In assessing requests for time on the facility priority should be given to research supported by peer reviewed grants or research supported through studentships from the EPSRC and the BBSRC."*

Note that the amount of time allocated to a particular PI in a previous TAP round is NOT a factor that is to be considered (though the PI report(s) and outputs that demonstrate how any allocated time was used is a factor, as noted above).

5. The TAP should determine if each proposal is worthy of facility time, i.e., of high quality, describing good science and having sensible justification for use of the facility.

6. The TAP should carefully evaluate the time requested for an individual project in relation to its objectives. Whilst in general a recommended proposal should normally be granted the time requested, it may be necessary in some instances to reduce the time on the grounds that the proposed amount seems excessive or that a reduction in the aims of the project is suggested. On rare occasions it may be advisable to grant more time than requested. In this case, the TAP chair would contact the applicant after the TAP meeting and before the official announcements to clarify.

7. Brief feedback information should be supplied to applicants whose projects are rejected or significantly reduced in time allocation. The facility manager will draft such information, guided by the comments from the TAP. Reasons for rejecting a project may include (a) lack of sufficient information to make a judgement, (b) insufficient justification for high-field work, (c) experimental work not feasible with the facility equipment, (d) science not of appropriately high quality.

8. In some cases, applicants whose proposals are rejected may be informed that they can re-apply for time in the next allocation period for the same project but with better justification, or that they are recommended to make a fast-track application to support a revised future application.

9. For applications by TAP members, the applicant must not be present during the discussion of his/her application(s). To aid the discussion by the remaining two TAP members, in this case only, one or more external reviews of the applications must be requested before the TAP meeting (the identity of the reviewers is obviously not to be revealed to the applicant). The requesting of external reviews is the responsibility of the TAP chair, except for the case of applications by the TAP chair, where this will be done by the NMC chair, who will send the reviews received to the other two TAP members before the TAP meeting.

10. Appeals procedure: Applicants whose proposals are rejected or significantly reduced in time allocation may appeal directly to the NMC via its chairman. The IAP may be consulted if the NMC deems this to be appropriate. This is the only case where the NMC may alter a time allocation made by the TAP.

11. The TAP will be kept informed by the Facility Manager about fast-track applications (which may be preliminaries to a full application) and about industrial use of the facility.

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