

GREAT WESTERN RESEARCH

Theme Panel Chair Briefing

Version 1 – 14th November 2005

1 Introduction

This document is written for GWR Theme Panel Chairs, to summarise your responsibilities, to mention some of the issues that arise from your role, to remind you of some things you need to do, and to let you know where you can get help.

2 Responsibilities of the Theme Panel Chair

As a Theme Panel Chair, you have two main responsibilities:

- Firstly to bring together your Theme Panel and to act as an independent Chair for evaluating research proposals for GWR funding.
- Secondly to act as “Theme Leader” – helping researchers to come together to create a more dynamic and productive research environment in our region.

The sections below outline these responsibilities in more detail.

2.1 Theme Panel Chair

The Theme Panel Chair is responsible for convening the Theme Panel meetings and acting as chair. The GWR Administrator will support the Theme Panel Chair by acting as Secretary for the Theme Panel, but until the Administrator is appointed, the acting Director has asked one of the institution coordinators to undertake this role. The names of the Theme Panel Secretaries are in section 9 below. For the first call it is very important to move quickly to set up the panel. See the timetable in section 4.

2.1.1 Oversee Submission and Review Process for Proposals

The Theme Panel must determine the process it will use for submission and review of research proposals.

In general we expect the proposal submission and review process to be the same for all the themes, however each theme panel may add rules to promote certain research areas and to encourage certain types of consortia.

Once the submission and review process has been started, the Theme Panel Chair must ensure that the process is conducted in accordance with the rules for the Theme, that information is supplied to potential applicants and that proposals are reviewed by the Panel in a timely fashion. The GWR staff will provide administrative support for keeping track of proposals.

2.1.2 Act as an Independent Chair

The job of Theme Panel Chair will require sensitivity and tact if (as is probable) the Theme Chair is personally involved in submitting a proposal for the Theme. The Chair must be an impartial champion for the whole theme, while at the same time creating his or her own proposals.

2.1.3 Member of GWR Regional Research Board

The Theme Panel Chair will be a member of the GWR Regional Research Board, which is the final decision maker with regard to awarding studentships across all theme areas. The Regional Research board makes recommendations about

allocation of Fellowships to the Strategy and Management Board, which makes the final decisions.

2.2 Theme Leader

2.2.1 Create a Collaborative Research Environment

The Theme Chair will act as a figurehead for the theme inside and outside the HEI community.

The goal of GWR is to create lasting research collaborations between HEIs and to improve the connections between HEIs and external organisations. GWR will have failed unless new and lasting links are created inside and outside the academic world.

You need to think about your role in leading the process to create this collaborative research environment. You may want to act simply as a reference point for academics or you may want to organise events or activities to bring people into contact with each other. These might be seminars or workshops or visits to businesses. In some themes, innovative ideas may be needed to break down institutional barriers and to set the scene for new collaborations. In other themes, collaboration processes will already be understood by academic staff and business partners. GWR staff can help you in thinking about what sorts of events would be appropriate for your theme, and they will help to organise events.

2.2.2 Connections to Businesses

Businesses and other potential funders will need to be convinced that GWR projects will be a worthwhile investment. The Theme leader may be able to help consortia within the theme to get access to external partners by using his or her reputation to open doors.

You should encourage members of your theme to use the Business Support Teams in their institutions to help create and manage links to businesses. GWR staff will provide you and your panel members with generic information and publicity materials to inform businesses about GWR.

2.2.3 Tracking Business Connections

Everyone involved in generating applications should keep their institution GWR coordinators informed about what contacts they intend to make and have made with potential GWR external partners. The GWR Director will keep a database of all these links. This is to avoid situations where two groups of academics independently contact a business with competing GWR research theme proposals. It will also help us to build a database of business links in the South West.

2.2.4 Keep Track of Consortia

We expect HEIs and external organisations to join together to bid for GWR funding. We will call these groups “consortia” in this document. The smallest possible consortium will consist of 2 HEIs and one external funding partner bidding for a single PhD studentship. A large consortium might consist of several HEIs and businesses, proposing a research programme involving several Research Fellows and PhD students.

As Theme Leader, you should be approachable and should aim to have an overview of what consortia are being created and what sorts of research proposals they are likely to make. This will help to ensure that a balanced portfolio of proposals is being prepared. The Chair may help to put individuals in touch with each other in order to

generate proposals in theme areas that are likely to be under-represented, or where collaborations seem like a good idea.

Once successful proposals have been identified, the Theme Panel Chair should ensure, through a reporting mechanism to the Theme Panel, that project progress is satisfactory. The GWR staff will assist in this.

2.2.5 Summary

The Theme Leader should

- Ensure that information is disseminated.
- Lead and encourage meetings, workshops and events.
- Help others to establish links to external funding partners.
- Keep track of what is happening across the theme.

3 Responsibilities of the Theme Panel Members

Theme Panel Members will:

- Ensure that all researchers in the theme area in their own HEI are kept informed about GWR possibilities. Theme Panel members should work across department and research group boundaries in order to help all relevant researchers in their HEI to participate in GWR. The institution coordinator will help with this.
- Represent all researchers in the theme area within their own HEI.
- Participate in Theme Panel meetings, discussions and events.

4 Timetable for Review Process (First Call)

The first call for proposals will only ask for proposals for studentships. Fellowships will be included in the second call.

Before 30 th November	First Meeting of Theme Panels.
9 th December	Call for Proposals issued.
6 th February 2006	Submission deadline. (This gives the Theme Panel a week to review the proposals before their next meeting.)
Week of 13 th Feb 2006	Theme Panels meet to review applications and make recommendations to the Regional Research Board
Week of 27 th Feb 2006	Regional Research Board meets to identify successful projects.
6 th March 2006	Proposers Notified.
6 th September 2005	Final date for contracts to be signed by the project partners

There will be a second call for proposals at the end of March 2005.

5 Next Steps for the Theme Panel Chair

It is very important to convene the first Theme Panel meeting as soon as possible.

- Choose date and place and issue an invitation to the panel members. The Theme Secretary can help you organise the meeting.

- Circulate initial agenda and documents for the first meeting (see below for a list of documents).

You should also plan how you want to bring people together and encourage collaboration within the theme.

6 Initial Topics for Theme Panel Discussions

At the first meeting, the Theme Panel should focus on preparing a call for the Studentships. This is the first priority because it will take some time to raise interest in the studentships amongst business partners and to build HE collaborations, and we want to have as many PGR students in place by the RAE census date of 31 July 2007. Fellowships will be subject to a separate call and should be discussed at the next meeting. There is quite a lot for the Theme Panel to discuss (see list of discussion topics below). Please decide how you want to deal with each of the topics, for example:

- Email discussion before and after the first panel meeting.
- Discussion during the meeting, possibly based on a proposal.
- The Chair makes a strong recommendation for confirmation by the Panel.

We strongly recommend that the Panel should meet face-to-face. Electronic communication is no substitute for personal contact in forming relationships. You may want to arrange off-agenda activities, such as seminars or overviews of departmental activities, in conjunction with Panel meetings, in order to foster a collaborative research environment for the Panel members and others. A lot of time can be saved by sending documents to the panel members beforehand, outlining the issues to be addressed and suggesting possible solutions. There is a list below of available GWR documents.

6.1 Agenda for the First Theme Panel Meeting

1. Note overall GWR background and operational framework.
Questions arising about the overall GWR project.
(See Annexe A of this document for a description of GWR.)
2. Note process and overall rules for submitting and evaluating studentship proposals
 - Time plan (call for proposals, submissions, decisions)
 - Criteria for evaluating submissions
3. Review and clarify subject areas for the theme
The Theme Panel should review the subject areas for its theme, based on the Theme description in the GWR project proposal, and make sure that the panel members have a common understanding of the theme.
4. Decide what sorts of proposals will be encouraged and supported
(See Annexe B for a discussion of this topic.)

The theme panel may have preferences for the sorts of projects it will support and the sorts of consortia it would like to see proposals from:

- Is there a preference for big vs. small projects?
- Does the panel want to allocate PhD studentships in pairs, so that each institution will receive fees and RAE count for a student?
- Does the Theme Panel want to propose the formation of some consortia? It may want to suggest that a particular group of academics and external organisations should get together to make a proposal.

5. If there is time, discuss the role of the Theme Panel members in encouraging collaboration between HEIs and businesses in the South West
- How will the Theme Panel Chair and members play a role in encouraging collaboration between HEIs?
 - What sorts of events are needed? (Seminars, workshops, other events)

7 Some Guidance for Theme Panel Meetings

Here are some operational rules for the meetings:

The Panel Chair is responsible for calling the meeting, setting the agenda and acting as meeting chair.

A member of the GWR staff or nominee will act as secretary for the meeting.

A panel member may, in extremis, nominate a deputy to attend a meeting in their place. The nomination should be sent to the Panel Chair and the Secretary before the meeting.

The Theme Panel Chair is expected to attend all panel meetings in person. In an emergency, the Secretary will act as meeting chair.

Decisions will be made by majority voting of the panel members. The Panel Chair has the casting vote.

The panel members and the Theme Panel Chair are allowed to submit proposals to the panel for funding. Individuals will not be required to leave the panel meeting when applications from themselves or their institutions are being discussed.

8 Documents Available from the GWR staff

These documents are not all available as yet, but we will try to make sure that you have them when you need them. Once the GWR website is up and running, we will make them available for downloading.

The GWR Website will contain general information about GWR.

1. GWR Project Background and Operational Framework (Annexe A to this document)
2. GWR Theme descriptions
3. GWR Theme Chair Briefing (This document)
4. GWR Theme Panel Member Briefing
5. GWR Evaluation Process and Criteria
6. What Sorts of Proposals? (Annexe B to this document)
7. Guidance for the Regional Research Board
8. Draft Call for Proposals
9. Proposal submission forms for studentships and fellowships
10. GWR Objectives and Targets
11. Possible Theme HEI events and information activities
12. Business information pack

9 Where to get help

GWR will have a Director, a senior Administrator and a secretary, but these posts are still to be filled. There is an acting Director, and the Bath, Bristol and Exeter Institution Coordinators will provide administrative support, as well as your own Institution coordinator.

We are setting up a GWR website containing information and links. There will be a special section of this site containing information for Theme Panels.

If you need help or administrative support today, the best person to ask is your Theme Panel Secretary.

Acting Director:

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Theme Panel Secretary for Psychology,
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