

Starting to work as a portfolio manager at the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) is a scary experience. You're immediately surrounded by unfamiliar processes and procedures, and everyone seems to speak in jargon and acronyms. On top of this, you are thrust into looking after a research area you know absolutely nothing about so you don't introduce conflicts or biases to the funding process. It's challenging to go from being an expert in your field to starting all over from scratch.

To help make things a little easier, each new portfolio manager is assigned a more experienced "buddy" within their team, someone they can shadow on the job and ask questions. Having gone through this trial by fire myself as a new starter, I was all too happy to volunteer to help the next person who needed a buddy. It happened to be the new acoustics portfolio manager.

By working with her over the next few years, first as an official buddy and then as a friend, I had the opportunity to watch her develop from complete uncertainty about the research area ("What do they even mean by acoustics?!") to complete dedication ("Acoustics is important for everything!"). I have to admit her enthusiasm was contagious: while I like to think that I was helpful as a buddy, I ended up learning a lot myself by pitching in at events like the UKAN Summer School.

My friend and I have long since left EPSRC to do other things, but it's been a real pleasure to stay connected to the UK Acoustics Network through my business. Some of you know me from the Couch to £500K programme, where Professor Dan Allwood and I are going through the ins and outs of writing a competitive fellowship proposal. Beyond providing training courses, I also use my experience as an editor and a portfolio manager to be a different type of "buddy": I offer various services to help researchers with their proposals and papers.

UKAN+ is happy to support one-to-one writing help if you are wrapping up the final draft of a grant proposal or paper. For more information about what's involved and to learn how I can potentially help, please get in touch at hello@academic-smartcuts.com.

Many thanks to previous UKAN+ one-to-one participants for sharing their thoughts about my services:

"I found the one-to-one session that Elaine offered very helpful in generating ideas of how to spin my grant application. In addition to the insight into the structures of the EPSRC and the working of the various review panels, before the meeting I received very specific comments on my draft, which will helped me to improve the structure of my Case for Support as well as many detailed suggestions to improve the wording."

"I was commissioned a dissemination piece about an environmental topic by a UN agency, and the readership was supposed to be the general public. Admittedly I did not know where to start! She helped me getting out of my "box" and "academic mindset". Elaine and I went through my first draft during a one-to-one session, clearly she had read with attention the text I had shared in advance, so all of her comments during the session were spot on. With patience and knowledge she walked me through the critical points I had to address, helping me building my "story" and convey my message. The version I submitted after working on Elaine's suggestions received extremely positive feedback from my reviewers."

"Even though I already had experience with obtaining UKRI funding, Elaine's experience with EPSRC gave me additional insights into how to design the application and pitch it within the healthcare technology area. In particular, the points regarding EDI, outreach, and commercialization were extremely useful for my application. I would highly recommend Elaine as a consultant for the grant writing process."

"I recently used Academic Smartcuts and found the professional and friendly service invaluable. Elaine was able to provide a fresh view from which problems within the writing structure could be assessed. In the one-to-one, Elaine worked with me to clarify the intended meaning from ambiguous sentence structure and to produce meaningful text. Solutions were tailored to be appropriate to the intended audience of the work. This helped me to recast an old piece of writing for a new purpose. I would definitely recommend Academic Smartcuts in the future."