Reviewer’s report

Title: Using democracy to award research funding: an observational study

Version: 0 Date: 05 Jul 2017

Reviewer: Harvey Marcovitch

Reviewer’s report:

It is generally accepted that the adequacy of the peer review process for grant funding owes more to custom and practice than to evidence of effective outcome. Therefore, the authors are to be congratulated on thinking 'outside the box' to the extent that they make a preliminary attempt to test an alternative system.

Ultimately however, their conclusions are tentative and could scarcely be otherwise given the admitted bias in their sampling and the small response rate. Nonetheless, they provide some evidence that the system they test might have significant savings in total time allocated to peer review and obviously spreads that time over a much larger number of individuals.

Otherwise, the study relies on the opinions of the authors and/or the expressed free text comments by the participants to delineate the many possible advantages and disadvantages of the system they enquire into.

I consider it an interesting contribution to the debate on alternatives to traditional peer review, albeit that the conclusion can only be that 'more research is needed'. I question whether anything useful has been added by the expenditure of epidemiological and statistical expertise and time in conducting the pilot survey.

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An article of limited interest

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Acceptable

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