

# Research Grants Review Committee

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*Terms of Reference*

13/03/2024

Version: 1.6

*Terms of Reference should be reviewed once per annum*

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## **1. Background/Context**

The Cystic Fibrosis Trust is the UK's only national charity dealing with all aspects of cystic fibrosis (CF). Through the research it funds, the Trust supports and enables delivery of a broad and dynamic portfolio of world-class innovative research to help ensure that every person with CF in the UK can live a long and full life.

The Board of Trustees of the Cystic Fibrosis Trust is the body accountable for all aspects of the work of the Trust. The Board of Trustees are also the Members of the company as constituted in the Memorandum and Articles of Association.

The Research Grants Review Committee, previously the Strategy Implementation Board, is an independent committee that reports to the Board of Trustees, making recommendations regarding the funding of research through the Trust's core research funding mechanisms: the Strategic Research Centre (SRC) programme and the Venture Innovation Award (VIA) scheme.

## **2. Scope**

These Terms of Reference (ToR) set out the membership, structure, accountability, work-plan, confidentiality, and arrangements for conduct of the business of the Research Grants Review Committee.

## **3. Structure of partnerships**

The Research Grants Review Committee reports directly to the Board on an annual basis. All minutes of the Committee meetings will be made available to the Board of Trustees once reviewed by the Committee Chair.

## **4. Decision making and accountability**

A consensus recommendation should be reached wherever possible in the event of a disagreement occurring within the Board. The Chair will sum-up and explain why a decision has been reached. Decision-making will be inclusive, and timescales will be considered.

Where necessary there will be an out-of-meeting process for urgent decisions.

The Research Grants Review Committee may set up working groups, drawing in other expertise, as required. These working groups should be time limited and have clear terms of reference.

## **5. Confidentiality**

The business of the Research Grants Review Committee is confidential, unless otherwise stated by the Chair.

## 6. Conflicts of interest

It is the responsibility of each member to be aware of and to register any potential conflicts of interest between themselves and the Research Grants Review Committee. A conflict of interest is:

- A personal interest or interest in any other organisation which might clash with their role on the Research Grants Review Committee.
- Where the Research Grants Review Committee member finds themselves in a position where they or their family might personally benefit, financially or otherwise, or be perceived as personally benefiting, from their role as a committee member.
- Where the Research Grants Review Committee member allows their personal interests to influence or be seen to influence their recommendations or decisions taken as part of the committee's work.

Further details regarding conflict of interest, can be found in the separate 'Conflict of Interest Policy' document [here](#).

Each member should declare and make the Chair aware of any relevant interest at the start of a meeting or as soon as such conflict becomes evident to them.

Where an interest is declared that conflicts with, or may be perceived to conflict with, the interest of the Research Grants Review Committee, the member concerned may be asked to withdraw from the discussion any decisions on the relevant item on the agenda.

## 7. Role of the Research Grants Review Committee

The role of the Research Grant Review Committee is:

- To make recommendations to the Executive and the Board of Trustees as to which organisations and individuals should receive Cystic Fibrosis Trust SRC grants and/ or VIA awards, working to ensure the successful delivery of the Trust's Research Strategy
- To make funding recommendations through the use of agreed processes for the fair, open and transparent assessment of grant applications
- To receive and assess reports on the progress and outcome of the grant awards
- To support the development of the annual research impact report, demonstrating the value of the research funded by the Trust
- To support the Executive and the Board of Trustees in the development of a broad and dynamic portfolio of world-class, innovative research benefiting all people with CF
- To support the ongoing review and continuous improvement of processes and guidelines used by the Cystic Fibrosis Trust for grant making

The Research Grants Review Committee will work within the Research Strategy agreed by the Cystic Fibrosis Trust Board and will report on its work annually to the Trustee Board, including providing an overview of the grant awards made and how these support the aims set out in the Research Strategy as part of the research annual report.

The role of the Research Grants Review Committee is to advise the Executive Team and the Board of Trustees of the Cystic Fibrosis Trust in respect of the matters contained within these terms of reference. The Executive Team and the Board of Trustees seldom reject the advice and recommendations of advisory committees, although they have the right so to do and circumstances may exist when such action would be appropriate.

## **8. Review and Management of SRC Applications**

Two members of the Research Grants Review Committee will be appointed to lead on each application (Introducing Members). A member of the Review Committee cannot lead on any application on which they have a declared conflict of interest. The Research Grants Review Committee in session will look at all relevant documentation, including peer reviews and applicant rebuttal, led by the introducing members. Scoring of the applications will use the defined scoring criteria framework (see [Appendix 1](#)). The Review Committee will generate a rank-ordered list of the applications in order of merit and use this to make recommendations to the CFT executive and the Board of Trustees on which SRC grant applications meet the criteria to be awarded.

See [Appendix 2](#) for overview of SRC review process.

Successfully awarded SRCs are required to submit annual progress reports and final reports at the end of the funding period. Members of the Review Committee will review these reports and provide feedback to the CF Trust's Research (Awards) Team. The mid-term report is given both as a written report and also as a presentation at one of the Research Grants Review Committee meetings, giving the Committee an opportunity to ask questions. These reviews will support the ongoing management of the awards, as well the monitoring and reporting of impact of Trust funded research.

## **9. Review and Management of VIA Applications**

The Research Grants Review Committee will review applications and make recommendations for funding prioritisation using the defined scoring criteria framework (see [Appendix 1](#)). Funding outcome decisions will be provided to applicants within 4 – 8 weeks of application deadline. Funding recommendations by the Research Grants Review Committee will be made to the Executive, and decisions communicated to the applicants by the Research (Awards and Partnerships) Team. This process will support the prioritisation and strategic allocation of VIA funding by the Trust.

See [Appendix 3](#) for overview of VIA application review process.

Successfully awarded VIAs are required to submit annual progress reports and final reports if applicable on completion of the project. Where appropriate (i.e. where review and feedback is not provided by the external funding partner responsible for the management of this award), members of the Review Committee will review these reports and provide feedback to the CF Trust's Research (Awards) Team. These reviews will support the ongoing management of the awards, as well the monitoring and reporting of impact of Trust funded research.

## **10. Role of Individual Research Grants Review Committee Members**

The role of the individual members of Research Grants Review Committee includes:

- Contributing to the successful delivery of the Cystic Fibrosis Trust's research strategy by ensuring that research funded by the Trust aligns with the strategy and defined research priorities of all people with CF
- Ensuring that a broad portfolio of high-quality research is supported and enabled through recommendation and allocation of funding in a transparent and open manner
- Ensuring the impact of Trust-funded research is recognised and appropriately communicated
- Being a champion of the Trust and the research that it funds
- Having a broad understanding of the wider cystic fibrosis research landscape and environment
- Being committed to, and actively contributing to the delivery of the aims of Research Grants Review Committee
- Checking adherence to relevant standards of best practice, both within the organisation and in a wider context and driving the continuous improvement of the research governance processes within the Trust

## **11. Membership**

Twelve to fifteen members from fields related to the charity's research strategy, will be drawn from academia, clinicians, scientists, funding agencies, including at least 2 members from the CF community. Members will not be representatives of any sector but will contribute their own experience and strategic thinking to the committee. Only one member from any organisation will be permitted. Additional expertise may be brought into the review process if required to support the review of specific applications.

Members of the committee may apply for grants but must absent themselves from any meeting or process making decisions about that application. At all times the committee should endeavour to avoid a situation where most of the committee are in receipt of grants awarded by the same committee. The committee should aim to have a significant number of non-beneficiaries, recognising that due to its nature, CF has a relatively small pool of CF expertise to draw upon.

The Director of Research of the Cystic Fibrosis Trust will be member of the Research Grants Review Committee, and the CEO of the Cystic Fibrosis Trust will be invited to attend all meetings. The Chair of Trustees and the Chief Executive shall receive notice of each meeting and may attend and speak on relevant issues.

### **11.1. Chair**

The Chair will be a well-respected expert who has a clear understanding of the charity's mission and research strategy. The Chair and Vice-Chair may be suggested by existing members of Research Grants Review Committee. Nominations will then be voted on by the Research Grants Review Committee and this selection will be approved by the Cystic Fibrosis Trust's Board of Trustees. In the

absence of the Research Grants Review Committee Chair at any meeting, the position will be filled by the Vice-Chair. Should both Chair and Vice-Chair be absent, the Research Grants Review Committee shall choose one of their number to be Chair for that meeting. The Chair will have fixed, 3-year term of office, with the possibility of renewing for a second 3-year term.

The Chair may apply for grants but must absent themselves from any meeting or process making decisions about that application in line with our conflict of interest policy.

The Chair will be invited to attend appropriate Board of Trustees meeting to discuss recommendations for SRC funding.

The accountable officer shall ensure that minutes of all meetings are prepared in the format shown in [Appendix 4](#), and circulated to each member of the Research Grant Review Committee and CEO; these minutes shall also be open to inspection by any Trustee on request to the Chair of the Research Grant Review Committee, as shall be the agenda papers, except where there is a conflict of interest.

### **11.2. Accountable Officer**

The Accountable Officer is the senior representative of the Cystic Fibrosis Trust who acts as the permanent secretary to Research Grants Review Committee. The Trust's Director of Research will act as Accountable Officer, and their responsibilities, which may be delegated to the Head of Research, include:

- Liaison with the Chair to agree and arrange meeting calendar and agendas.
- Management of communications on behalf of the Chair to Research Grants Review Committee members
- Management of all other support to Research Grants Review Committee as required

### **11.3. End of membership**

Group members will cease to be a member of the group if they:

- Resign from the group
- Resign from their employment or role (Trust employees only)
- Fail to attend three consecutive meetings without providing apologies to the Chair
- Fail to respond to three consecutive requests for application reviews from CF Trust's Research (Awards) team
- Knowingly fail to declare a conflict of interest
- Breach confidentiality
- Reach the maximum membership term as set out below

Each member can be appointed for up to 3 years, with the possibility of renewal for a further three years. In exceptional circumstances, a further renewal for an additional 3 years, up to a maximum of nine years' total service may be permitted. Three years must elapse before a person is approached for re-appointment to membership of the committee.

To become a member of the Research Grants Review Committee when any opportunities arises, interested individuals will nominate themselves in response to advertisement of the opportunity. All applications will be reviewed by existing Research Grants Review Committee members, and the most suited nominees selected subject to approval by the Board of Trustees.

#### **11.4. Quorum**

A quorum shall consist of four members of Research Grants Review Committee, not including Cystic Fibrosis Trust employees.

### **12. Administration**

#### **12.1. Agenda Items**

An agenda, with attached meeting papers, will be distributed at least one week prior to the next scheduled meeting.

The Chair has the right to refuse to list an item on the formal agenda, but members may raise an item under 'Other Business' if necessary and as time permits.

#### **12.2. Frequency of Meetings**

The committee will meet as needed to assess applications in a timely fashion following specific calls. It is anticipated that this will be about twice a year. Additional meetings may be held with the agreement of the Chair of the Committee.

#### **12.3. Meeting location**

Where possible, meetings will be held at the Cystic Fibrosis Trust offices at One Aldgate, London, EC3N 1RE, or remotely via videoconferencing if appropriate.

In order to facilitate the engagement of people with Cystic Fibrosis, tele or videoconferencing facilities will be made available at all meetings.

- Approval date: May 2021
- Review date: May 2022
- Updated: March 2024



**Appendix 1: SRC & VIA Scoring Criteria Framework**

**SRC Assessment Criteria**

**1. Quality of Research Programme**

Some questions that could be considered before completing this section.

- Have the applicants presented a well-identified, important, and challenging problem strategically relevant to cystic fibrosis?
- Is the proposed research high quality, innovative and at the cutting-edge of the research domain with the potential for significant translational impact?
- What alternative research ideas compete with the application and what makes this proposal internationally competitive with regards to the Trust's investment?

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Tick box</b>
1 - Poor	Research question poorly defined. Methodologically weak. Not of strategic importance to people with CF and the Trust.	
2 - Fair	Methodically sound but research problem and strategic priority unclear.	
3 - Good	Robust study design and research problem of potential strategic importance to people with CF and the Trust but could be articulated better.	
4 - Very good	Innovative, original, well designed research of strategic importance to people with CF and the Trust.	
5 - Excellent	Highly innovative and original research of high strategic importance to people with CF and the Trust.	
Additional comments		

## 2. Impact and Value to People with Cystic Fibrosis

Some questions that could be considered before completing this section.

- Have the applicants presented a plausible description of the likely impact to benefit people with cystic fibrosis?
- Is the proposed research likely to deliver benefits to people with cystic fibrosis in the future?
- If successful, is the proposed research likely to lead to discoveries of international significance?

Rating	Description	Tick box
1 - Poor	No significant impact to benefit people with CF and unlikely to contribute to new knowledge generation for CF.	
2 - Fair	Contains useful ideas with potentially useful outcomes with only moderate likelihood of impact or benefit people with CF.	
3 - Good	Worthwhile scientific question or unmet need. Justifiable scientific resource with potential for reasonable impact for people with CF but key areas could be strengthened.	
4 - Very good	Addressing key scientific question or unmet need. Likely to have impact for people with cystic fibrosis.	
5 - Excellent	Addressing a crucial scientific question or priority unmet need with potential for significant impact for people with CF.	
Additional comments		

### 3. Quality of Investigators

Some questions that could be considered before completing this section.

- Does the lead investigator/s, collaborators and research team have the full skills/expertise necessary to achieve the research goals?
- Does any proposed collaboration add value to the research and potential to deliver impact/ benefit for people with CF?
- What makes the investigator and partners competitive with respect to international competitors?

Rating	Description	Tick box
1 - Poor	Highly improbable that the applicants will have the skills and expertise to achieve stated goals.	
2 - Fair	Applicants are lacking in too many areas of required expertise or experience to be able to adequately achieve stated goals.	
3 - Good	Applicants lacking in one or two critical aspects, good leadership and/or previous track record.	
4 - Very good	High quality applicants in nearly all respects, very good track record and prior collaborations.	
5 - Excellent	Outstanding applicants in all respects, excellent track record and prior collaborations.	
Additional comments		

#### 4. Budget and Leveraged Funds

Some questions that could be considered before completing this section.

- Is the budget appropriate/realistic?
- Are there components of the programme that could be removed without prejudicing the success of the goals?
- What leveraged funds/resources have the applicants accessed that are not being provided directly by the Trust?
- Are there other potential funding streams that could be accessed to improve the scope of this application?
- Is this application appropriate to and within scope of this funding scheme?

Rating	Description	Tick box
1 - Poor	The proposed budget is not appropriate or realistic.	
2 - Fair	The proposed budget is broadly appropriate.	
3 - Good	The proposed budget is appropriate/realistic however has one or two issues that need to be addressed.	
4 - Very good	The proposed budget is appropriate and realistic in nearly all aspects,	
5 - Excellent	The proposed budget is appropriate and realistic in all respects and includes leveraging of additional funds/resources alongside the Trust's proposed investment.	
Additional comments		

**Overall Grading and Comments**

Rating	Description	Tick box
1 - Poor	Proposal should not be considered for funding.	
2 - Fair	Proposal has serious deficiencies, and it is advised that this is not recommended for funding.	
3 - Good	Strong proposal lacking in one or two critical aspects: key issues need to be addressed, but it should be recommended for funding, providing these can be resolved.	
4 - Very good	High quality proposal in nearly all respects: should be recommended for funding.	
5 - Excellent	Outstanding in all respects: deserves highest priority for funding.	
Additional comments		

**VIA Assessment criteria:**

**1. Impact and Value to Patients with Cystic Fibrosis**

Some questions that could be considered before completing this section.

- Have the applicants presented a plausible description of the likely impact to benefit patients with cystic fibrosis?
- Is the proposed research likely to deliver benefits to people with cystic fibrosis in the future?
- If successful, is the proposed research likely to lead to discoveries of significance?

Rating	Description	Tick box
1 - Poor	No significant impact to benefit people with CF and unlikely to contribute to new knowledge generation for CF.	
2 - Fair	Contains potentially useful ideas with potentially useful outcomes with only moderate likelihood of impact or benefit people with CF.	
3 - Good	Worthwhile scientific question or unmet need. Justifiable scientific resource with potential for reasonable impact for people with CF but key areas could be strengthened.	
4 - Very good	Addressing key scientific question or unmet need. Likely to have impact for people cystic fibrosis.	
5 - Excellent	Addressing a crucial scientific question or priority unmet need with potential for significant impact for people with CF.	
Additional comments		

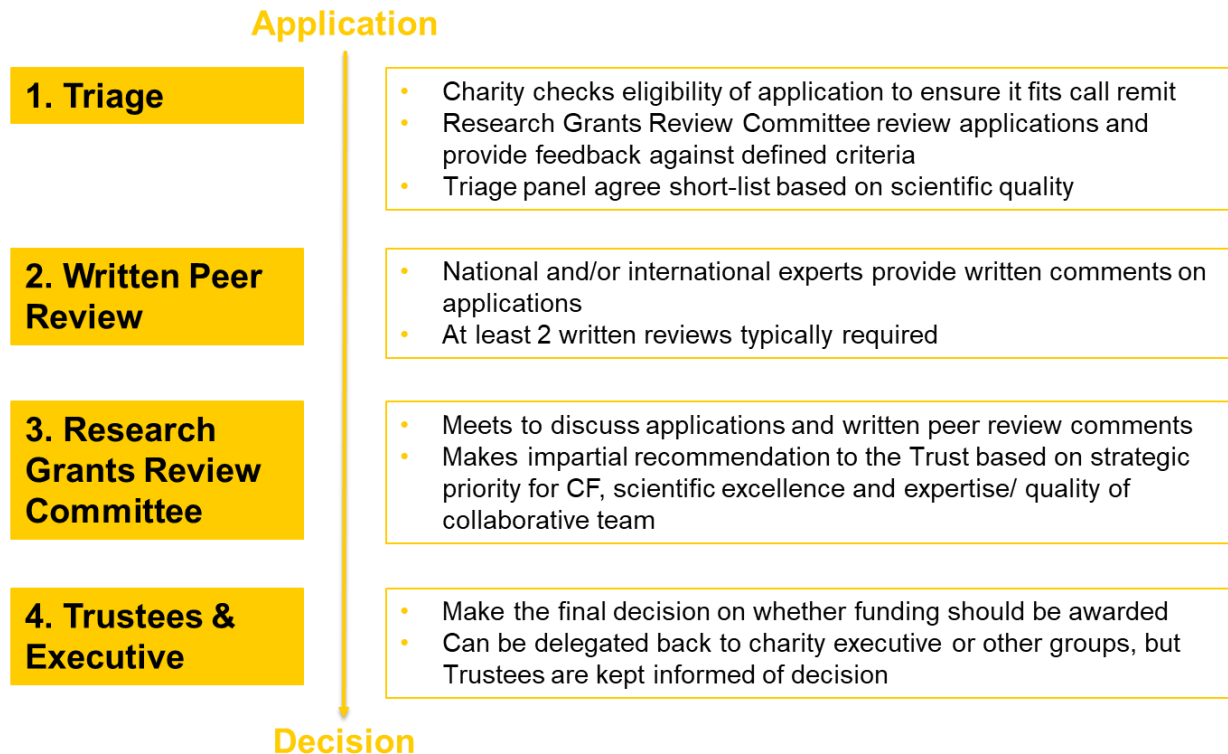
**2. Funding Recommendation**

Rating	Description	Tick box
1 - Poor	Proposal should not be considered for funding.	
2 - Fair	Proposal has serious deficiencies, and it is advised that this is not recommended for funding.	
3 - Good	Good proposal lacking in one or two aspects but it should be recommended for funding, providing these can be resolved.	
4 - Very good	High quality proposal. Should be recommended for funding.	
5 - Excellent	Outstanding proposal. Highly recommended for funding.	

**3. Additional Comments**

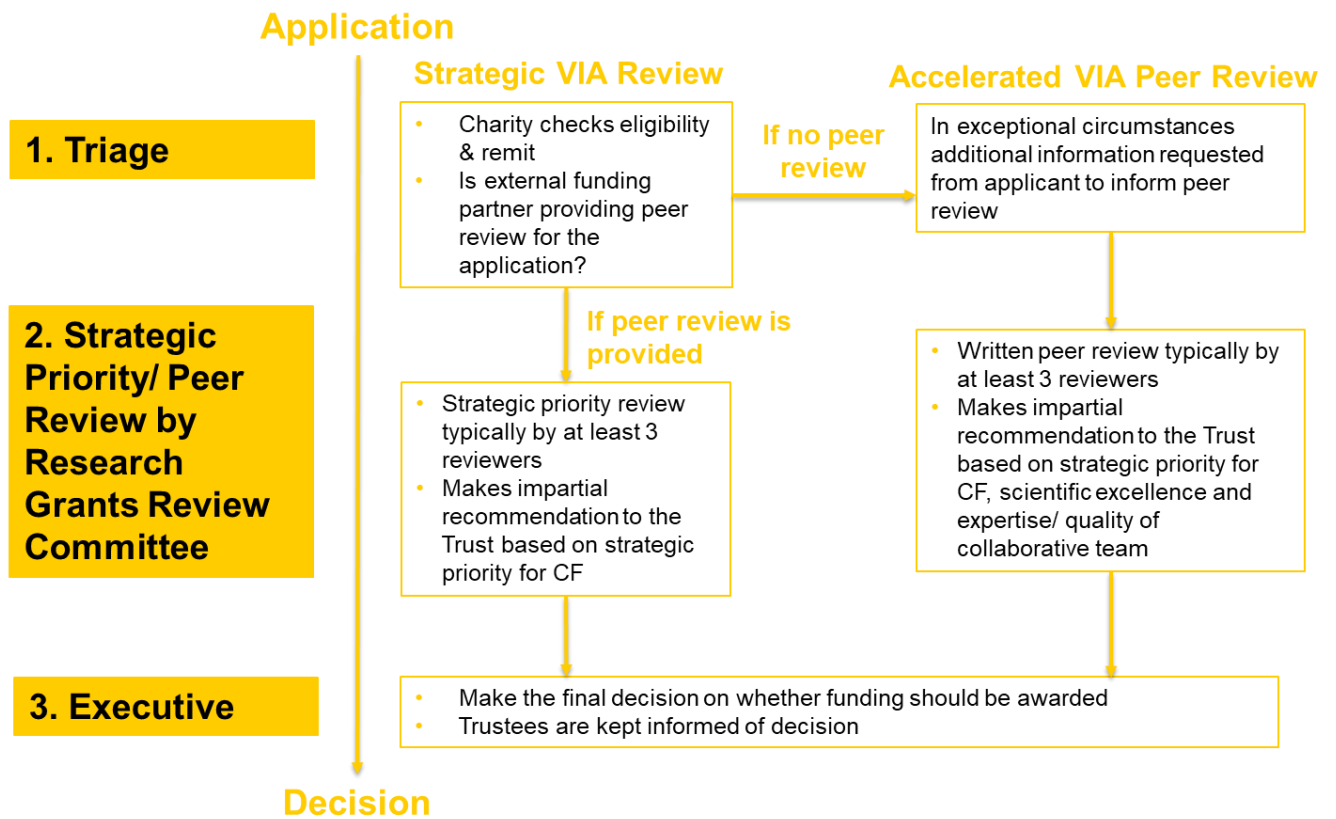
Additional comments

## Appendix 2: SRC Application Review Process





**Appendix 3: VIA Application Review Process**



**Appendix 4: Research Grants Review Committee Minutes Template**

**Research Grants Review Committee**

<b>DATE OF MEETING:</b>			
<b>HELD AT:</b>			
<b>THOSE PRESENT:</b>			
<b>IN ATTENDANCE:</b>			
<b>APOLOGIES:</b>			

<b>1</b>	<b>Apologies for absence / any new conflicts of interest – disclosure</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Minutes of the previous meeting</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Matters arising / Action log from previous meetings</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Business Item 1</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Business Item 2</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Business Item 3</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Business Item 4</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Business Item 5</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>AOB</b>