

Research Grants Review Committee

Terms of Reference

19/05/2026

Version: 1.8

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, Development Award (DA) 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, DA's 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 research goals 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 and DA 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 grant applications meet the criteria to be awarded.

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

Successfully awarded SRCs and DAs 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 and Partnerships) 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 condensed into the research goals 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 twenty members from fields related to the charity's research strategy, will be drawn from academia, clinicians, scientists, funding agencies, including at least 4 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 five 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 33 Creechurch Lane LONDON EC3A 5EB, or remotely via videoconferencing if appropriate.

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

- Original Approval date: May 2021
- Last review date: May 2025
- Updated: May 2026
- Next review date: May 2027

Appendix 1: SRC, DA & 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? Consider relevance to the identified Cystic Fibrosis research priorities: <https://www.cysticfibrosis.org.uk/research/your-cf-research-priorities>
- Is the proposed research innovative and at the cutting-edge of the research domain?
- Does the proposed research require a consortium or could the goals be achieved with a set of individual grants?
- Are the roles of the collaborators articulated and bringing added-value to the programme?
- What alternative research ideas compete with the application and what makes this proposal internationally competitive?

Scoring criteria:

High

- 1 - Exceptional - Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
- 2 - Outstanding - Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
- 3 - Excellent - Very strong with only some minor weaknesses

Medium

- 4 - Very Good - Strong but with numerous minor weaknesses
- 5 - Good - Strong but with at least one moderate weakness
- 6 - Satisfactory - Some strengths but also some moderate weaknesses

Low

- 7 - Fair - Some strengths but with at least one major weakness
- 8 - Marginal - A few strengths and a few major weaknesses
- 9 - Poor - Very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses

Minor Weakness: An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen impact

Moderate Weakness: A weakness that lessens impact

Major Weakness: A weakness that severely limits impact

2. Strategic Impact/ Value Of The Project 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 benefit cystic fibrosis at some point in the future?
- If successful, is the proposed research likely to lead to discoveries of international significance?
- Has Equity, Diversity and Inclusion been considered and addressed appropriately within the application?
- Does the proposal demonstrate potential for attracting further investments from sources outside the Cystic Fibrosis Trust?

Scoring criteria:

High

- 1 - Exceptional - Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
- 2 - Outstanding - Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
- 3 - Excellent - Very strong with only some minor weaknesses

Medium

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Moderate Weakness: A weakness that lessens impact

Major Weakness: A weakness that severely limits impact

3. Quality Of The Research Team

Some questions that could be considered before completing this section.

- Is this the best team that can be assembled to deliver the goals?
Does the research team have the full skills/expertise necessary to achieve the research goals?
- Does the lead PI have the necessary experience, leadership and vision? *Please note: The lead PI must have the necessary leadership and vision to coordinate a Strategic Research Centre, however they do not necessarily need to have expertise in the field of CF as long as the 'deputy'/first co-applicant has the required CF expertise.*
- What is the synergy/added value of bringing this group of researchers together?
- What makes the proposal team competitive with respect to international competitors?

Scoring criteria:

High

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Moderate Weakness: A weakness that lessens impact

Major Weakness: A weakness that severely limits impact

4. Training And Career Development

Some questions that could be considered before completing this section.

- Is the project likely to provide graduate students and early career researchers with a good training opportunity and a stimulating research environment?
- Has the student/trainee/early career researcher got the potential, through this proposal, to develop advanced research and transferable skills?
- Is the project sufficiently challenging and feasible in the timeframe proposed?
- Are there mechanisms to instil in trainees a long-lasting interest in cystic fibrosis? What mechanisms are in place for the individual student/early career researcher to be involved in the wider picture of the Strategic Research Centre?
- Are there robust mentoring and feedback arrangements for graduate students and early career researchers?
- For graduate studentships: Is student education an integral component of the proposed Strategic Research Centre?
- For graduate studentships: Does the programme have the potential to lead to a good PhD within the time frame of the grant?

Scoring criteria:

High

- 1 - Exceptional - Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
- 2 - Outstanding - Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
- 3 - Excellent - Very strong with only some minor weaknesses

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Major Weakness: A weakness that severely limits impact

5. Budget And Project Management (For Stage 2 only)

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 mechanisms are proposed to ensure the project is managed as a complete entity rather than a collection of individual grants?

Scoring criteria:

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Minor Weakness: An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen impact

Moderate Weakness: A weakness that lessens impact

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6. Overall Grading and Comments

Please provide an overall grade and comment for this application

Scoring criteria:

High

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Minor Weakness: An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen impact

Moderate Weakness: A weakness that lessens impact

Major Weakness: A weakness that severely limits impact

DA 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? Consider relevance to the identified Cystic Fibrosis research priorities: <https://www.cysticfibrosis.org.uk/research/your-cf-research-priorities>
- Is the proposed research high quality, innovative and at the cutting-edge of the research domain?

The expectation of the Development Award is for the applicants to develop preliminary data/expertise/build partnerships and collaborations etc – is this clearly explained in the application?

Scoring criteria:

High

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- 2 - Outstanding - Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
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Minor Weakness: An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen impact

Moderate Weakness: A weakness that lessens impact

Major Weakness: A weakness that severely limits impact

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?
- Has Equity, Diversity and Inclusion been considered and address appropriately within the application
- Is the proposed research likely to deliver benefits to people with cystic fibrosis in the future?

Scoring criteria:

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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?
- In the case of post-doctoral applicants, have they demonstrated support from mentors and institutions?
- Does any proposed collaboration add value to the research and potential to deliver impact/ benefit for people with CF?

Scoring criteria:

High

- 1 - Exceptional - Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
- 2 - Outstanding - Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
- 3 - Excellent - Very strong with only some minor weaknesses

Medium

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Minor Weakness: An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen impact

Moderate Weakness: A weakness that lessens impact

Major Weakness: A weakness that severely limits impact

4. Budget and Leveraged Funds (For Stage 2 only)

Some questions that could be considered before completing this section.

- Is the budget appropriate/realistic for a proposal of this size?
- What leveraged funds/resources have the applicants accessed that are not being provided directly by the Trust?
- Is this application appropriate to and within scope of this funding scheme?

Scoring criteria:

High

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- 2 - Outstanding - Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
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Moderate Weakness: A weakness that lessens impact

Major Weakness: A weakness that severely limits impact

Overall Grading and Comments

Scoring criteria:

High

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Minor Weakness: An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen impact

Moderate Weakness: A weakness that lessens impact

Major Weakness: A weakness that severely limits impact

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?

Scoring criteria:

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.

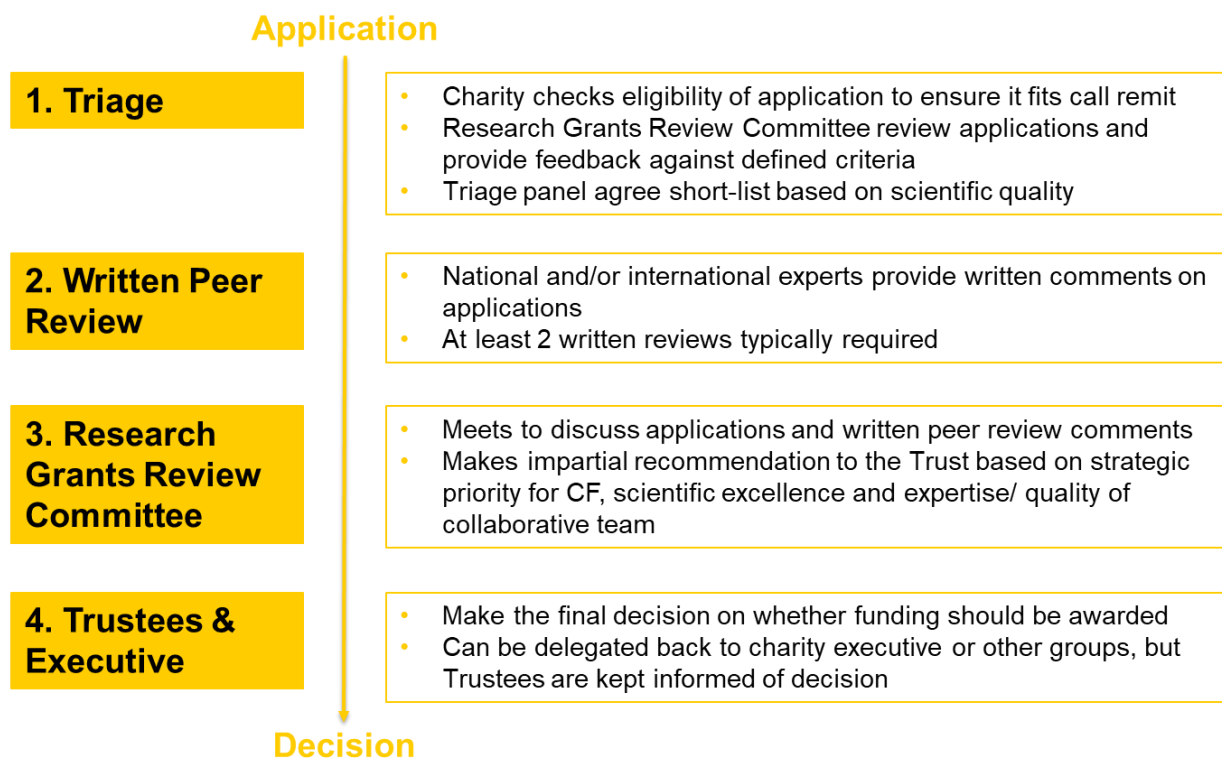
5 - Excellent Addressing a crucial scientific question or priority unmet need with potential for significant impact for people with CF.

2. Funding Recommendation

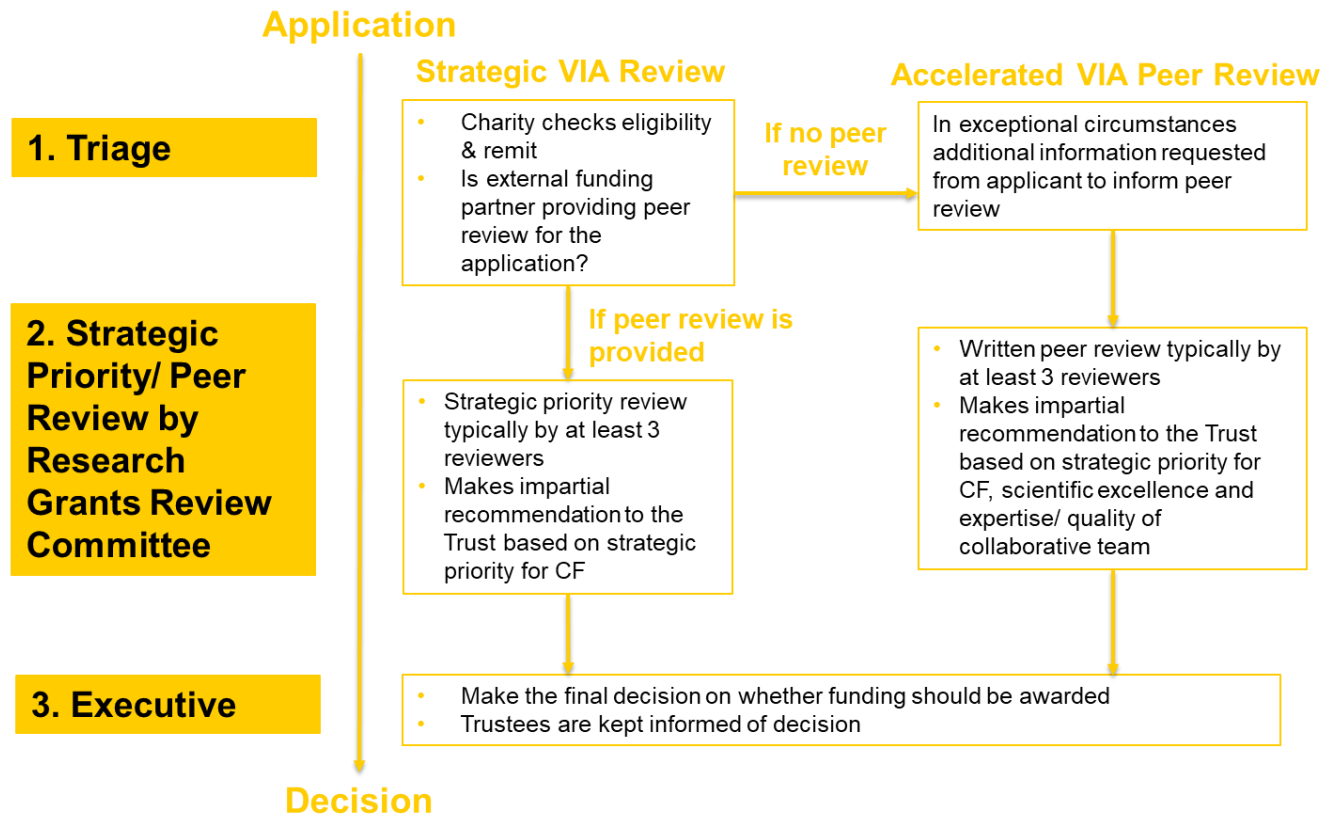
Scoring criteria:

- 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** 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.

Appendix 2: SRC and DA Application Review Process



Appendix 3: VIA Application Review Process



Appendix 4: Research Grants Review Committee Minutes Template

Research Grants Review Committee

DATE OF MEETING:			
HELD AT:			
THOSE PRESENT:			
IN ATTENDANCE:			
APOLOGIES:			

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