1 PURPOSE & SCOPE

Cancer Research UK has a duty to ensure that the assessment of applications for funding and the development of scientific policy are carried out objectively and impartially and reflect the highest standards of governance.

This Code of Practice is intended for the use of all Cancer Research UK peer reviewers, including:

- Funding Committees
- strategic review panels
- expert review panels, and
- other ad hoc advisory groups

(hereafter referred to collectively as committees and panels), as well as their chairs, individual members and Secretariats.

For the protection of other committee and panel members, and to ensure the impartiality of the scientific review process, if Cancer Research UK has reason to believe that a member of a committee or panel has breached this Code of Practice, then they may be asked to resign their membership.

2 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1 THE ROLE AND REMIT OF FUNDING COMMITTEES & STRATEGIC REVIEW PANELS

2.3.1. Cancer Research UK Funding Committees & Strategic Review Panels fulfil one or more of the following three functions:

(i) to make research grant or resource funding decisions (in the case of Funding Committees) and/or recommendations (in the case of Strategic Review Panels) in a manner consistent with CRUK’s research strategy;

(ii) to provide scientific advice which will inform Cancer Research UK’s research strategy; and

(iii) to advise on scientific policy decisions as required.

2.3.2. Cancer Research UK Funding Committees are accountable to SEB for the oversight, review, funding and management of a portfolio of awards. The specific funding responsibilities of each Committee are set out in that Committee’s Supplementary Terms of Reference. Strategic Review Panels, by contrast, are typically convened on an ad hoc basis and are accountable to SEB for the review of a particular funding arrangement (such
as a core-funded institute or the CRUK Centres & ECMCs network), and a recommendation as to whether and how it should be funded in future.

2.3.3. In fulfilment of their funding role, Funding Committees & Strategic Review Panels work with SEB and other Funding Committees to ensure co-ordination of research funding and the application of consistent standards of peer review.

2.3.4. The SEB is responsible for making scientific policy decisions. However, Funding Committees & Strategic Review Panels provide advice on the development of strategies and policy relevant to their remits.

2.3.5. The SEB may also ask Committees, or ad-hoc Working Groups, to provide advice on a wide range of issues affecting cancer research, including social and ethical issues and public and stakeholder concerns.

2.2. THE ROLE AND REMIT OF EXPERT REVIEW PANELS

The role of Expert Review Panels is to make recommendations about the scientific quality of the applications to their parent Funding Committee, who then makes a final funding decision or recommendation in light of the Panel’s recommendations and CRUK’s overall research strategy.

2.3. RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHAIRS OF FUNDING COMMITTEES AND PANELS

2.3.1. The SEB appoints a Chair to each Funding Committee and Panel. In some cases, a Vice Chair is also appointed. The Vice Chair may step in to act as Chair in relation to matters where the Chair has a conflict of interest or is otherwise unavailable.

2.3.2. Chairs of Funding Committees and Panels have responsibility for:

(i) **proper conduct of the meeting**: ensuring the operation and output of the Committee, including assessing the workload and ensuring that the volume of work does not compromise the rigour of the discussion;

(ii) **members’ opportunity to be heard**: ensuring that every member of the Committee or Panel has the opportunity to be heard and that no view is ignored or overlooked, using, where appropriate, a structured process which ensures that all views are captured and explored;

(iii) **effective participation of Patient Representatives**: ensuring that the role of any member who is a Patient Representative is understood by the Committee or Panel as a whole, that the Patient Representative has sufficient opportunity to provide specialist input and ask questions in relation to the matters before the Committee or Panel, and supports the Patient through provision of informal and formal feedback about how they are fulfilling their role;
(iv) **full range of scientific views** ensuring that the full range of scientific opinion, including unorthodox and contrary scientific views are appropriately taken into account, that significant diversity of opinion among members is fully explored and discussed and, if it cannot be reconciled, is accurately reflected in the minutes;

(v) **accuracy of minutes or report (as applicable)** ensuring that the Secretariat accurately documents the proceedings of the Committee or Panel so that there is a clear audit trail showing how the Committee or Panel reached its decisions;

(vi) **Chair’s actions** authorising appropriate actions affecting Committee or Panel business outside the normal meeting cycle;

(vii) **reporting** where appropriate, reporting the Committee or Panel’s advice to the SEB;

(viii) **adherence with Code of Practice** ensuring that the Committee or Panel acts in accordance with this Code of Practice.

2.4. **COMMITTEE & PANEL MEMBERS' RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

2.4.1. **Ambassadors for Cancer Research UK**. Members are asked to act as ambassadors for Cancer Research UK and its aims. Members are expected to abide by the Seven Principles of Public Life (or “Nolan Principles”) set out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (see Appendix A). If a Member acts in a manner that may bring Cancer Research UK into disrepute, that Member may be asked to step down from their role as a Committee or Panel Member.

2.4.2. **Objectivity**. Members must ensure that the assessment of applications for funding and the development of scientific policy and strategy are carried out objectively and impartially and must guard against introducing bias during the Committee's or Panel's deliberations.

2.4.3. **Expertise**. Members must ensure they understand why they are being appointed and in what capacity, and the role they are expected to play on the Committee or Panel. Members should understand the nature of any expertise that they are asked to bring. Members with a particular expertise have a responsibility to make the Committee or Panel aware of the full range of opinion within the discipline. Lay members must be clear about the capacity in which they have been appointed and the role they are expected to fulfil.

2.4.4. **Commitment and Attendance**. Members must confirm before accepting an invitation to serve on a Committee that they understand the period of appointment and that they can fulfil the required commitment in terms of meeting attendance, Committee business and preparation for meetings.

2.4.5. **Views of the individual member**. Unless specifically stated otherwise, members of Committees complying with this Code are appointed as individuals to fulfil the role of the Committee, not as representatives of their particular profession, employer or interest
group, and have a duty to act in the interests of Cancer Research UK. Where members declare an organisation’s views rather than a personal view, they must make that clear at the time of declaring that view.

2.4.6. Consideration and Participation in full range of matters before the Committee or Panel. A member’s role on the Committee must not be circumscribed by the expertise or perspective he or she was asked to bring to that Committee. Members should regard themselves as free to question and comment on the information provided or the views expressed by any of the other members, notwithstanding that the views or information do not relate to their own area of expertise. If members believe the Committee or Panel’s method of working is not rigorous or thorough enough they have the right to ask that any concerns they have be put on the record.

2.4.7. Scientific and strategic deliberations. All members should regard it as part of their role to:
   
   (i) examine, and challenge if necessary, the assumptions on which scientific advice is formulated and ask for explanations of any scientific terms and concepts which are not clear;

   (ii) ensure that the Committee or Panel has the opportunity to consider contrary scientific views and where appropriate the concerns and values of stakeholders before a decision is taken;

   (iii) share in the general responsibility to consider the wider relevance of their decisions to the field of cancer research and relation to Cancer Research UK’s Research Strategy.

2.4.8. Understanding the role of Patient Representatives. Where appointed, Patient Representatives are full members of the Committee or Panel and provide particular insight into the relevance, study design and study feasibility from the patient perspective. All Committee and Panel members should respect and take steps to increase their understanding of the role and perspective of any Patient Representatives on the Committee or Panel.

2.4.9. Confidentiality. Committee and Panel discussions, papers and correspondence relating to applications for funding and funding policy are strictly confidential, and therefore:

   (i) papers must not be disseminated or discussed outside or the Committee or Panel process;

   (ii) papers must be secure and be under absolute control of CRUK or the user at all times. Under no circumstances should this control be relinquished or compromised, e.g. using a web-based storage provider (Google Docs., DropBox etc), unless provided by CRUK.

   (iii) candidates for research funding must not be informed of the composition of an interview panel other than by Cancer Research UK staff, or details of other applicants;
(iv) no aspect of the deliberations or recommendations of Committees or Panels should be discussed with applicants, either in connection with their own application, or any other application. Any requests for such information must be referred to Cancer Research UK staff, who will provide feedback, verbal or written, as appropriate and according to current practice;

(v) when members are connected to an application and absent themselves from the meeting room during discussion of the application, they must not be informed of the outcome of the application by other Committee or Panel members, but will be informed by Cancer Research UK staff in due course;

(vi) members have a right to expect that their comments will be treated in confidence by both Cancer Research UK’s staff and other members of the Committee or Panel;

(vii) the identity of referees must be kept confidential at all times, even if they indicate a willingness for it to be made known to the applicants; and

(viii) members must not offer advice to members of the scientific community on Cancer Research UK’s policy and practices, for example on application procedures: all such enquiries should be directed to the offices of Cancer Research UK.

2.4.10. **Induction information.** As part of the appointment process, members joining Committees or Panels will be provided with all the information they require to familiarise themselves with their role as a Committee or Panel member. As a minimum this will include: details of their term of appointment and responsibilities as a member; the Terms of Reference of the Committee (for Committee Members); the role of the Secretariat; the rules governing potential conflicts of interest and details of honoraria (if any) and reimbursement of expenses.

2.4.11. **Expenses.** Members are entitled to fair and prompt repayment of legitimate expenses, provided that they follow the rules governing the submission of claims and their timing. Members are asked to be always mindful of the reasonableness of their expenses, in light of Cancer Research UK’s status as a charity funded purely by public donations.

2.5. **COMMITTEE AND PANEL SECRETARIATS**

2.5.1. The primary function of the Secretariat is to support committee or panel by assembling and analysing information, receiving and processing applications for funding and recording the decisions and recommendations of the Committee or Panel. The Secretariat will advise on procedure and bring to the attention of Chair’s and members emerging issues of concern so as to inform the deliberations. The Secretariat will arrange regular briefing meetings with the Chair.

2.5.2. The Secretariat will, as far as it is aware, identify all relevant and appropriate scientific information and ensure that it is made available to the Committee or Panel. In rare cases
the Secretariat may need to withhold information from the Committee or Panel on the grounds of confidentiality. When this is necessary, the Secretariat must make the Chair aware of the existence of any information that has been withheld.

2.5.3. The Secretariat will be impartial in representing the interests of Cancer Research UK. It must at all times respect the Committee or Panel’s independent role. It should guard against introducing bias during the preparation of papers, during meetings, or in the reporting of deliberations.

2.5.4. The Secretariat will ensure that the proceedings of the Committee or Panel are properly documented in the minutes of each meeting, following standard Cancer Research UK formats where required.

2.5.5. The Secretariat will communicate Cancer Research UK procedures for the handling of confidential material to suppliers of such information and will participate in the review of these procedures by Cancer Research UK as necessary.

2.6. ROLE OF OTHER OFFICIALS OR OBSERVERS

Committee and Panel members will be made aware of the role of other officials and advisers having contact with Committees or Panels and/or attending meetings, as observers or in any other capacity. Such officials must at all times respect the Committee or Panel’s independence. Secretariats must ensure that the balance between officials attending and members present is kept within reasonable limits.

3 COMMITTEE & PANEL PRACTICES & PROCEDURES

3.1. GENERAL WORKING PRACTICES

3.1.1. Openness and transparency. Committees and Panels must operate from a presumption of openness and must maintain high levels of transparency during routine business. The proceedings of the Committee should be as open as is compatible with the requirements of confidentiality (see also 4.4.8). In this regard, Members should be comfortable that their individual comments and views will not be shared or attributed but, by contrast, the view of the Committee or Panel as a whole will be shared.

3.1.2. Preparing for meetings in advance. To ensure that meetings run efficiently, and that decisions are fully and effectively considered, members should sufficient time to prepare for meetings by familiarising themselves with the meeting papers. For this purpose, the Secretariat should ensure that meeting papers are distributed at least three to four weeks in advance of the meeting.

3.1.3. Out-of-cycle Committee decisions. Where a funding decision demands a rapid response, certain Committee decisions may need to be made out-of-cycle with scheduled
meetings. On such occasions, the Secretariat shall ensure that at least three members are asked to consider the relevant decision on behalf of the Committee as a whole, and that the full Committee is informed of the decision that has been taken at its next regularly scheduled meeting.

3.1.4. **Reliability of information.** Committees must be able to assess or otherwise satisfy themselves as to the reliability of any research quoted or used in their decision making process.

3.2. **BALANCE OF EXPERTISE**

3.2.1. Chairs, senior CRUK Staff and Secretariats are responsible for ensuring that a Funding Committee or Panel has the relevant expertise to assess all applications that fall within its remit.

3.2.2. Where a lack in expertise has been identified, recommendations for potential Committee or Panel members must be proposed to the CRUK Research & Innovation Leadership Team or, alternatively, the experts may be co-opted or sub-groups established to include such people on an ad hoc, time-limited basis where appropriate.

3.3. **PROCEDURES FOR ARRIVING AT CONCLUSIONS**

3.4.1. Each Committee or Panel must ensure that it is comfortable with the mechanisms by which it reaches funding decisions or agrees its view.

3.4.2. Mechanisms for reaching funding decisions, including scoring systems, will wherever possible be consistent across Cancer Research UK Funding Committees & Panels.

3.4.3. Whatever mechanism is used to reach decisions, it is essential that the minutes of the meeting or panel report clearly set out the result of the discussion.

3.4.4. In reaching its funding decisions, Cancer Research UK seeks to apply peer review of the highest international standards and to engage the appropriate additional expertise in the assessment of applications and the evaluation of funded research programmes. Committees must adhere to current Cancer Research UK policy on peer review.

3.4. **DEALING WITH DISSENTING VIEWS**

When offering scientific advice, members must be clear about whether or not they are expected to reach a consensus on particular issues. Committees must not seek unanimity at the risk of failing to recognise different views on a subject.
3.5. **COMMITTEE MINUTES & PANEL REPORTS**

3.5.1. It is good practice for the Secretariat to prepare minutes within two to four weeks of the meeting. The Committee should formally approve minutes at the meeting following the one to which the minutes relate. Where meetings are infrequent, Committees must develop written procedures to ensure that the minutes can be agreed more expeditiously.

3.5.2. Minutes must show clearly how the Committee reached its decisions. The minutes must accurately reflect the proceedings of the Committee and any significant diversity of opinion among the members of the Committee will be accurately reflected. (In the case of Panel meetings, the same is true of the Panel Report).

3.5.3. Minutes of Funding Committees must include accurate financial details consistent with Cancer Research UK award letters and financial award schedules and presented in a manner acceptable to Cancer Research UK’s auditors.

3.5.4. The minutes of Cancer Research UK Funding Committees are confidential, but details of all projects awarded funding will be published on the Cancer Research UK website.

3.6. **INFORMATION EXCHANGE**

3.6.1. Committees and Panels will be told how the activities of other Cancer Research UK Committees and Panels might affect their business and have opportunities to exchange information with them where necessary. This might involve giving advance notice of significant decisions, copying relevant documents or sharing best practice through joint meetings.

3.6.2. Secretariats must ensure appropriate consideration of funding applications that have relevance to more than one Committee or Panel. Where beneficial, consideration will be given to setting up a system of cross-representation, or asking the SEB to consider doing so.

3.7. **DISCUSSION OF APPLICATIONS OUTSIDE MEETINGS**

3.7.1. Where Committee members feel it necessary to discuss an application prior to the meeting, this must be declared to the Chair.

3.7.2. If an individual is approached by an applicant for technical advice on an application in his or her area of specialisation, the individual may provide such advice but must disclose this fact to the Secretariat of any Committee of which he or she is a member and which is considering the application. The individual may be excluded from all or part of the meeting at which the application is considered.
4 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

4.1. UNDERSTANDING CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

4.1.1. In order for Cancer Research UK to make high quality funding decisions that have credibility with the research community and with donors, it is essential that those decisions are – and are seen to be – objective and free from bias.

4.1.2. A conflict of interest arises when a member of a Committee or Panel, or other expert reviewer, has an interest which could, actually or as a matter of perception, cast doubt over the objectivity or independence of a Cancer Research UK funding decision.

4.1.3. The procedures set out in this Code of Practice are intended to:

(i) assist reviewers and the Secretariat in the identification of potential conflicts of interest;

(ii) minimise the potential for conflicts of interest arising;

(iii) guide reviewers and the Secretariat in how to manage any conflicts of interest that do arise;

(iv) protect the reputation of both Cancer Research UK and its reviewers.

4.2. RELATIONSHIPS THAT CONSTITUTE A CONFLICT OF INTEREST

4.2.1. Automatic exclusions: An individual will automatically be deemed to have a conflict of interest in relation to a grant application if he or she:

(i) is the lead applicant, co-investigator or named collaborator on the grant application;

(ii) is, or has been within the last 12 months, a member or employee of the same university, or other research institution, as the lead applicant. (The University of London, for these purposes, is not regarded as a single institution);

(iii) has collaborated substantively with one of the lead applicants within the last three years (in the sense that they have provided intellectual input on a project/trial);

(iv) is a relative of one of the lead applicants, co-investigators or collaborators (“relative” for this purpose includes, but is not limited to, spouse or partner (current or past), children, siblings and parents);

(v) is business partner of a lead applicant, co-investigator or collaborator, or has a direct or indirect financial interest in the grant application; and/or

(vi) has had a supervisory relationship with the lead applicant within the last five years.
4.2.2. **Case-by-case exclusions** An individual will also have a conflict of interest in relation to a grant application if the individual has any other connection to the grant application (whether academic, scientific, financial, business, personal or otherwise) which could compromise, or cause a reasonable outsider to doubt, the objectivity of the evaluation of the grant application.

4.3. **IDENTIFICATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

4.3.1. **Annual declarations of interest** All members of Funding Committees or standing Expert Review Panels must submit a declaration of interests each year in line with the Cancer Research UK policy. Annual declarations of interest shall be reviewed by the Secretariat.

4.3.2. **Identification by the Secretariat** Before allocating and distributing meeting papers, the Secretariat will take reasonable steps to identify any grant applications or other matters in respect of which a member has a conflict of interest, based on the information available about that member, including via their annual declaration of interests.

4.3.3. **Identification by members** Members are also responsible for ensuring that they do not participate in the evaluation of any grant application or other matter in relation to which they have a conflict of interest. If a member becomes aware of any other matter that would reasonably be expected to give rise to, or be viewed as, a conflict of interest (whether academic, scientific, financial, personal or otherwise) then he or she must declare the matter to the Secretariat of the Committee before the meeting or, if not practicable, as soon as the potential conflict becomes apparent at the meeting.

4.4. **STEPS TO BE TAKEN WHERE A CONFLICT IS IDENTIFIED**

4.4.1. Where a member has a conflict of interest in relation to a grant application, that Member:

   (i) may not receive any papers relating to that grant application and, should they receive the papers in error, must immediately destroy them and notify the Secretariat;

   (ii) must absent themselves from the relevant part of any meeting where matters concerning that grant application are discussed; and

   (iii) may not take part in any decision in relation to that grant application.

4.4.2. The Secretariat must bring to the Chair’s attention all relevant information concerning any form of connection between an application and a member of the Committee or Panel.

4.4.3. The fact that a conflict of interest was identified must also be recorded in the minutes or report of the meeting.

4.4.4. In rare circumstances, declarations of interest may highlight major conflicts of interest that may not be compatible with continued membership of the Funding Committee or Panel. In such cases, the conflict will initially be discussed with the member by a senior
member of the Secretariat, in consultation with the Chair. The Chair and the Secretariat shall determine whether the declared interest is compatible with continued membership of the Committee. Where agreement is not possible, or where a member disputes the decision of the Chair and the Secretariat, the matter shall be referred to the Executive Director of R&I. The decision of the Executive Director shall be final.

4.5. CASES OF UNCERTAINTY

4.5.1. If an individual is in any doubt as to the relevance of an interest that he or she has, such interest must be disclosed to the Secretariat before the meeting or, if not practicable, as soon as the potential conflict becomes apparent at the meeting.

4.5.2. The Secretariat will consult as necessary with the Chair, or the Vice-Chair if the Chair is conflicted. If it is determined that the interest does give rise to a conflict of interest, then the rules in section 4.4 apply. If it is determined that the interest does not give rise to a conflict, the Secretariat and Chair may determine that the interest should nonetheless be disclosed to the Committee and/or Panel and that the individual should:

(i) be permitted to take a full part in the meeting;
(ii) be permitted to comment on the application and participate in discussions but not present the application to the Committee;
(iii) be permitted to comment on the application and participate in discussions but not take part in the decision; and/or
(iv) absent himself or herself from the relevant part of the meeting.

4.6. MATTERS OTHER THAN THOSE CONCERNING FUNDING DECISIONS

4.6.1. Where a Member has a conflict of interest in relation to a matter other than the assessment of a grant application, except to the extent permitted explicitly by any other part of this code, that Member must not:

(i) be present at any discussion concerning their interests; or
(ii) take part in any decisions relevant to such interests.
4.7. RAISING CONCERNS ABOUT THE CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS OF OTHER INDIVIDUALS

4.7.1. An individual who is concerned about another individual’s potential or actual conflicts of interest must raise the matter as set out below.

(i) Issues concerning a member of a Committee or Panel must be raised with the Chair or Secretariat of that Committee or Panel (or, where the Chair is conflicted, the Vice Chair).

(ii) Issues concerning Cancer Research UK staff must be raised with the Chair.

5 DEFINITIONS

Scientific Executive Board (SEB): The role of the SEB is to develop and implement the Cancer Research UK’s strategy and policy. The SEB meets regularly, with meetings chaired by the Chief Executive Officer of CRUK. Members of the scientific community are invited to attend SEB meetings to provide expert advice, and Chairs of our Funding Committees are invited to attend annually to discuss areas of particular importance to their committee’s remit.

Research & Innovation (R&I) Leadership Team (R&ILT): The R&I Leadership Team is made up of the Executive Director of R&I and the various Directors.

Funding Committees: Responsible for overseeing aspects of Cancer Research UK’s funding within a remit defined by R&ILT and included in the Funding Committee’s Supplementary Terms of Reference. It will comprise of expert scientists at the appropriate level, providing a broad range of scientific expertise essential for that committee.

Expert Review Panels: In some instances Funding Committees will use panels of experts in order to review applications and recommend a funding decision. These decisions will need to be confirmed by the relevant Funding Committee.

Papers: Within this Code of Practice the term ‘papers’ covers all documents containing information relating to, and regarding the activities of the funding committees, held in both paper and electronic forms.

6 RELATED DOCUMENTS & VERSION INFORMATION

6.1.1. General Funding Committees’ Terms of Reference

6.1.2. Individual Funding Committee Supplementary Terms of Reference: Available under the relevant funding committee area on the Cancer Research UK website:
6.1.3. Conflicts of Interest Policy

6.1.4. Version information

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http://science.cancerresearchuk.org/funding/funding-committees/
APPENDIX A

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE (NOLAN PRINCIPLES)

Selflessness
Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

Integrity
Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity
In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability
Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness
Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty
Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership
Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

These principles apply to all aspects of public life. The Committee has set these out here for the benefit of all who serve the public in any way.

(Extract from the first report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life)