**Research Awards Committee**

# Terms of Reference

## The Research Awards Committee (RAC) is the means by which the charity implements peer reviewed research awards policy conforming to AMRC guidelines. The RAC is independent of charity staff and Trustees, except that the lead Trustee for Research is a member of RAC. It is the responsibility of the Trustees to allocate funds for research and to decide on the research strategy and priorities of the charity. It is the role of the RAC to advise the Trustees on the recommended recipients of the charity’s research awards.

## All members of the RAC, and participants co-opted onto the RAC for particular awards, must sign a confidentiality agreement prior to serving on the RAC and agree to abide by AMRC’s Principles of Peer Review and by the Seven Principles of Public Life set out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (see appendix).

## Membership and Appointment

1. The members of the RAC are appointed for a fixed term of 3 years and renewable for a second term.
2. RAC members who have stepped down should wait for 3 years before becoming eligible to re-join.
3. The Chair of the RAC is appointed for a fixed term of 3 years, renewable for a second term. In exceptional circumstances the Chair may be invited for a third term.
4. The Chair of the RAC is appointed by the Trustees of Guts UK Charity, advised by existing members of the RAC. The Chair of the RAC should be from outside the field of Gastroenterology.
5. The expertise of the membership of the RAC reflects the range of conditions that are within the research remit of Guts UK Charity and of its research strategy. There will be no more than two members from any one institution, though exceptions can be made for members temporarily co-opted into the RAC for their expertise. Membership of the RAC should represent a fair balance of age, gender, ethnicity, and geographic location.
6. The Trustee for Research and the Chair of the RAC are responsible for inviting participants with appropriate expertise for specific grants. If necessary, that expertise could reside outside academia or medicine, for example from patients, regulators, industry experts and so on, where appropriate.
7. The Chair of the BSG Research Committee and the Guts UK Charity’s Trustee for Research are members of the RAC during their terms of office, though the duration of their RAC membership should not exceed the stipulated two terms.
8. Wherever possible, lay persons can participate on the RAC to contribute relevant expertise to the review of the applications.
9. The quorum for the RAC will be six voting members. The Chair does not carry a vote. Except in the case of a tie.

## Conflict of Interest

1. Members of the RAC are expected to declare any conflict of interest at the beginning of the review process for applications. Conflicts of interest are defined below, but RAC members should inform Guts UK Charity as soon as they become aware of any other conflict of interest with an application.
2. RAC members should not review applications that have been submitted from their employing institution, or from applicants with whom they have a personal relationship. The RAC member must not take part in the discussion of the relevant application and should leave the room during the discussion.
3. RAC members can apply for grants but no more than 50% of the members of the committee should be actively in receipt of grants from the charity. Trustees can also apply for grants, but if research funding is awarded to a Trustee of the charity, this must be done in accordance with the Charity Commission rules ([Conflicts of interest: a guide for charity trustees](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/manage-a-conflict-of-interest-in-your-charity)). RAC members, including Trustees, who apply for a grant whether as the main applicant, a co-applicant, or a collaborator, must not review that application, must not take part in the discussion of the relevant application and should leave the room during the discussion.
4. If a RAC member has co-authored with the applicant or joint co-applicant in the last five years, the RAC member should not review that application. This might require further discussion between the RAC member and the Chair, to clarify the degree of conflict.
5. A member of the RAC who is an applicant, co-applicant or collaborator on an application, should not see reviewers' reports on their application.
6. When the final decision regarding funding is not clear-cut, a member of the RAC who has a conflict of interest with one of the competing applications must not be in a position to influence the final decision. They should take no part in the discussion about selecting the winning applicant and their scores or comments on competing applications should not be considered.
7. The Chair of the RAC should not make an application for funding during his/her term of office.
8. RAC members should not discuss any applications outside the RAC meetings and should report to Guts UK Charity straightaway any attempt to contact them by an applicant. All queries relating to the application and/or the award process should be made via Guts UK Charity.

**Reviewing and Scoring Applications**

1. Reviewing and scoring of applications shall be undertaken according to the guidelines issued for each funding call.
2. Those guidelines will take into account the research strategy of Guts UK Charity and need to be approved by the Trustee for Research and the Chair of the RAC.
3. When awards are made jointly with other bodies, the strategy of the other bodies and any special purpose in funding the award should also be taken into account.

### External Reviewers

1. Applications will be scored initially by the RAC, or on occasions a subset of the RAC, to identify short-listed proposals that can be sent for external review, including international reviewers if possible. At least two external reviews will be sought for short-listed applications. Grants for less than £25,000 and under a year in duration do not need external peer review as per AMRC’s guidelines, though this can still be sought if appropriate expertise is not available within the RAC.
2. External reviewers will be identified by a variety of methods, such as suggested by the Trustee for Research, by the applicant, by the RAC member leading on the application or by other RAC members with suitable expertise, or by external reviewers suggested by the aforementioned methods that are unable to review the application at that time.
3. External reviewers will be asked to confirm that they do not have a conflict of interest with the applicants.
4. Only external reviewers who have not published in the last five years with the applicant or co-applicants will be asked to review.
5. Should reviews be received where a conflict of interest is later discovered RAC members will not take these reviews into consideration when making the awarding decision.

**Interviewing Short-listed Applicants**

1. Short-listed applicants may be interviewed where appropriate (e.g. for Fellowship applications or large grants).
2. Short-listed applicants will be advised of the composition of the RAC in advance of the interview and informed of the interview procedure.
3. At the interview, the Chair of the RAC will appoint one member to lead the questioning for each applicant, based on the main expertise of the RAC member.
4. Applicants must be informed of the outcome as soon as possible after the meeting. All applicants will be offered feedback on their applications including anonymised external review reports.

**Reports**

1. All awardees are expected to submit annual and final reports. Funding may be suspended if a report is not submitted. The final grant payment may be withheld until the final report is received.
2. The Trustee for Research will suggest two reviewers for each report, who can be members of the RAC.
3. The RAC will see the reports from awardees and the comments from reviewers.
4. If the reports or the comments from reviewers are unsatisfactory, the RAC can call for further investigations, either in writing, or by making site visits. In the first instance, the RAC should attempt to help the awardee deal with any short-comings identified. Ultimately the RAC can advise the Trustees to sanction the withdrawal of funding.

## APPENDIX

### AMRC Principles of Peer Review

AMRC has five principles of peer review, which must be implemented in member charities of all sizes, across funding for all types of medical and psychosocial research.

Principle 1 – Accountability: Charities are open and transparent about their peer review procedures and publish details online, including the names of the members of their research review committee or other decision-making bodies.

Principle 2 – Independence: The research review committee is independent of the charity’s administrative staff and trustees.

Principle 3 – Balance: The research review committee reflects a fair balance of experience and research disciplines.

Principle 4 – Rotation: Members of the research review committee have a fixed term of office.

Principle 5 – Impartiality: Research review committees comprise a significant number of experts who are not in receipt of charity research funding. There is a conflict-of-interest policy and those with a conflict are not in a position to influence funding decisions.

For more information on AMRC’s principles of peer review, visit:

<https://www.amrc.org.uk/principles-of-peer-review>

### The Seven Principles of Public Life (Nolan Principles)

The 7 principles of public life apply to anyone who works as a public office-holder. This includes people who are elected or appointed to public office, nationally and locally, and all people appointed to work in:

* the civil service
* local government
* the police
* the courts and probation services
* non-departmental public bodies
* health, education, social and care services

The principles also apply to all those in other sectors that deliver public services. They were first set out by Lord Nolan in 1995 and they are included in the Ministerial code.

**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.

More information on the Seven Principles of Public Life can be found on the GOV.UK website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life>