

## Peer Review Process

Bowel Research UK awards research grants on a competitive basis using a process called expert peer review which is performed by our Grants Committee.

Our processes have been passed by the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) peer review audit, a hallmark of quality recognised by government, universities and major funding bodies.

### 1.0 Six Principles of Peer Review

Bowel Research UK abide by the AMRC's six principles of peer review when awarding research funding:

- **Proportionality:** Charities must ensure the review process is 'fit for purpose' with reviews proportionate to both the size and scale of the award and the expertise sought sufficient and relevant to provide effective review. Charities must seek additional review for applications where there is a lack of expertise on a particular subject area on any research review committees or among in-depth reviewers used by the charity, or where the funding requested is substantial in relation to the charity's research spend.
- **Independence:** Charities must take account of advice provided by experts who are independent of the charity's administrative staff and trustees.
- **Diversity:** Charities must seek recommendations from a range of experts with relevant knowledge or experience, who appropriately reflect the views of a range of stakeholders. Charities must also consider the diversity of experts involved in the review process in terms of location, career stage, gender and ethnicity or other factors as appropriate.
- **Rotation:** Charities must rotate the experts involved in decision making to ensure they are regularly incorporating fresh ideas and new perspectives into their expert review processes. This allows charities to incorporate the views of a range of individuals, including those who may not have been otherwise represented. It also allows charities to change the membership of their research review committee(s) as appropriate and required to meet their research strategy.
- **Impartiality:** Charities must publish and adhere to a conflicts of interest policy, specific to research funding. This policy must clearly articulate the types of conflicts that may arise in research funding contexts and specify the actions that conflicted committee members should take, so that they are not able to influence funding decisions. Additionally, where research funding is awarded to trustees of the charity, this must be done according to the Charity Commission rules in Annex 1, AMRC's conflicts of interest guide, and the charity's governing documents (e.g. articles of association) must permit this.

- **Transparency:** Charities must publish their research strategy and expert review process online so that external audiences can see the rigorous methods used to make research funding decisions, including the names of the experts involved in the decision-making process. It is important that charity funders share transparently how and why animals are used in research. When funding research involving animals, charities must consider the 3Rs through expert review.

## 2.0 How Bowel Research UK implements the Six Principles of Peer Review

- **Proportionality:** The Grants Committee will be quorate when 5 or more members (including the chairperson of the Grants Committee) are present for full meetings. External peer reviewers who specialise in the area of the application but who do not have a conflict of interest and are not a member of the Grants Committee are asked to review applications that pass the preliminary review stage. Additional reviewers may also be invited where the funding requested is substantial in relation to the charity's research spend.
- **Independence:** The Grants Committee is independent of Bowel Research UK's administrative staff and trustees.
- **Diversity:** The Board of Trustees will appoint the chairperson of the Grants Committee by external and internal search. The appointed chairperson should be:
  - medically qualified
  - have a robust track record in clinical and research aspects of bowel disorders
  - a recognised international leader in the field

To ensure diversity, the Grants Committee will include members from a range of backgrounds and experiences, including:

- Clinicians
- Scientists
- Allied healthcare professionals
- People with lived experience selected from Bowel Research UK's People and Research Together Network
- Research & Grants Manager for Bowel Research UK
- Bowel Research UK's Early Career Researcher Ambassador

Bowel Research UK is fully committed to equality of opportunity and diversity to ensure that we reflect the full breadth of the people we aim to support.

- **Rotation:** Regular rotation ensures that new individuals with diverse expertise and perspectives are involved in decision making. Bowel Research UK takes the following steps to meet the principle of rotation:
  - Grants Committee members have a fixed term of office and serve for a term of three years. This may be extended by another three years following negotiation.
  - The composition and membership of the Grants Committee is reviewed annually.
  - Memberships are staggered to ensure a degree of continuity amongst the committee.

- **Impartiality:** All members of the Grants Committee must read Bowel Research UK's Conflict of Interest policy and complete a Declaration of Interests form prior to appointment. This should be updated on an annual basis. Members must also disclose all known or potential conflicts of interest at the beginning of every meeting, or as they arise. External expert peer reviewers must also read the Conflicts of Interest policy and declare any interests prior to reviewing an application.

Grants Committee members who are applicants or co-applicants on a grant application or could be seen as in direct competition with an applicant must declare an interest and will be managed in accordance with the Conflicts of Interests policy.

- **Transparency:** Bowel Research UK embraces transparency, openness and accountability, and publishes the following information online:
  - [Bowel Research UK research priorities](#)
  - [Grants Committee membership details](#)
  - [Research policies](#) (including Conflicts of Interest policy and Animals in Research policy)
  - [Information on research projects funded by Bowel Research UK](#) (including principal investigator, institution and value of award)

As a member of the AMRC, Bowel Research UK ask all peer reviewers to consider and comment on the [replacement, reduction and refinement \(3Rs\)](#) of animals in research applications. The Chairperson of Grants Committee leads on any grant applications/awards that use animals in research to ensure that the principles of the 3Rs are carried out.

Applications involving non-human primates, cats, dogs, or equines, are referred to the NC3Rs ([enquiries@nc3rs.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@nc3rs.org.uk)) for additional expert 3Rs review. The NC3Rs peer review and advice service provides guidance and support for applications using non-human primates, dogs, cats, and equines [here](#).

## 3.0 Bowel Research UK's Peer Review Process

### 3.1 Pre-peer review

Grants are awarded entirely on scientific merit in relation to Bowel Research UK's strategic research priorities and based on open competition. The quality of the application, quality of research proposed and applicants' experience in their field are the key determinants of outcome.

Research proposals are assigned to one or two Grants Committee members with relevant scientific/clinical expertise. Grants Committee members carry out a preliminary review of all applications. Grants Committee members identify those that should proceed to the next review stage, and those that do not offer a quality research project. This is discussed and agreed at one of our scheduled Grants Committee meetings. If we are not going to take an application any further, we will let the applicant(s) know within 4 weeks of the Grants Committee meeting.

### **3.2 Peer review**

If successful, applicants are told that their application will now be peer reviewed before returning to the next Grants Committee meeting for a final discussion.

Shortlisted applications are sent to at least two experts, who specialise in the area of the application, but who do not have a conflict of interest and are not a member of the Grants Committee. The comments made by the external reviewers, and the reviewers' scores, are then made available to Grants Committee members. External peer reviewers assessing applications must declare any conflict of interest before they can be granted access to the applications.

Each application is allocated to two Grants Committee members, based on their areas of expertise. The two members will present the application to the rest of the Grants Committee, including any relevant information from external reviews and their scores. A short discussion will follow before the Grants Committee members decide whom to award.

Applications for each grant scheme are ranked by their average score and recommendations for funding are made.

Those applications recommended for funding by the Grants Committee are presented to the trustees for final approval.

### **3.3 Post-peer review**

Following the application review process, applicants will be notified by e-mail as to whether they have been successful in obtaining funding.

Successful applicants will be issued an awards letter based on Bowel Research UK's Terms and Conditions of Award, along with information for new grant holders regarding the management of their grant.

The Grant Award Letter and the funding of the grant along with the Terms and Conditions of Award establish the basis on which the grant is made by Bowel Research UK to the host institution and grant holder. These conditions are relevant to applicants for and holders of Bowel Research UK grants, to heads of institutions or departments applying for or receiving a new grant, to those responsible for the organisation and financial administration of a grant. I

It is particularly important for the grant holder and those taking administrative responsibility for a grant to read and understand our grant conditions and retain them for reference during the tenure of the grant.

Any amendments to the grant post-award must be made to the chairperson of the Grants Committee who will present this to the Grants Committee for authorisation.

#### **4.0 Conditions for Peer Reviewers**

As a condition of participation, all information relating to applications and the identity of external peer reviewers must be kept confidential and must not be discussed with individuals outside of the grants review process.

All applications and related documents (both electronic and paper copies) must be kept secure and destroyed promptly after completing the review. Information or ideas contained within applications must not be used for any purpose other than completing the review.