



Principles of Peer Review

Sarcoma UK is an Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) member charity and adheres to the principle of peer review as set out by the AMRC; the guidance document can be found both as an appendix to the Sarcoma UK Research management handbook and the AMRC website

http://www.amrc.org.uk/sites/default/files/doc_lib/Principles-of-peer-review-May-2014.pdf.

All peer review is carried out by Sarcoma UK in line with the following principles:

Accountability: Charities are open and transparent about their peer review procedures and publish details of the process, including the names of the members of scientific advisory committees or other decision making bodies.

Balance: Scientific advisory committees reflect a fair balance of experience and scientific disciplines.

Independent decision making: The scientific advisory committee is independent of the charity's administrative staff and trustees.

Rotation of scientific advisers: Scientific advisory committee members have a fixed term of office.

Impartiality: Scientific advisory committees should include a significant number of non-beneficiaries of research grants. There is a conflict of interest policy and potential beneficiaries to research funding are not present when decisions are made.

1. External and internal reviewers

- a. All competitive research applications will be peer reviewed by either an internal or external reviewer. For these purposes, the Research Advisory Committee (RAC) and its constituent members are classified as internal reviewers and external are the wider research and clinical community.
- b. In line with the AMRC guidelines, any research application with a financial value over £25,000 per annum will be assessed by external reviewers before being reviewed by the RAC. The external peer reviewer's comments will be used by the RAC in any decision making process.
- c. The RAC is a panel comprised of independent experts who have agreed to meet on behalf of Sarcoma UK, please see the document relating to the

RAC: Terms of Reference, Membership and Tenure and Code of Practice. The RAC meeting timetable is in line with the research grant cycle to assess applications and make recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

- d. All research applications with a financial value under £25,000 per year will be assessed by a RAC member in line with Sarcoma UK's peer review process. If an application is received and there is no appropriate RAC member in that field to peer review, the Chair of the RAC and Head of Research for Sarcoma UK will agree a list of potential external peer reviewers to contact.
- e. All research applications over £25,000 per year will be peer reviewed by at least two external reviewers, preferably three. Where possible, the Chair of the RAC will not undertake any peer review to remain impartial. However, in a small medical field, the Chair of the RAC may be the most appropriate reviewer for the subject, in this instance, the Chair of the RAC will absent themselves for the RAC meeting and the Deputy Chair of the RAC will assume the Chair duties.

2. Accountability

- a. Sarcoma UK embraces openness, transparency and accountability. We use the Sarcoma UK website to publish the following information around our research portfolio:
 - RAC member's details
 - Sarcoma UK Conflict of Interest policy
 - Research funded by Sarcoma UK including details of Principal Investigator (PI's), institution, value of award and lay summary.
 - Research calls which are open
- b. Feedback and success rates are provided to all applicants at the end of the process, the peer reviewers' details are anonymised.
- c. As an AMRC member charity, we ask all peer reviewers, internal and external to assess and comment on the replacement, refinement and reduction (3Rs) of animals in research applications. The guidance for peer reviewers contains resources to support this. All research applications which involve non-human primates, cats, dogs and equine species are referred to the National Centres for 3R's for special review.

3. Balance

- a. Sarcoma UK is committed to ensuring a fair balance of experience and scientific disciplines. We aim to ensure the RAC is comprised of a range of experts across all disciplines in sarcoma (medical, surgical, diagnostic and scientific). We seek to avoid discrimination to the RAC on the basis of age, gender, ethnicity or geographical spread.
- b. RAC members and external peer reviewers are sought from the field of sarcoma, or overlapping disciplines. We seek to identify experts using a range of methods; working alongside specialists in the field, recommendations from current members or experts in the field and research grant applicants.

- c. In line with the Association of Medical Research Charity (AMRC) best practice guidance, the RAC must be comprised of at least five members, including the Chair, we aim to ensure there is cover across all scientific disciplines. The tenure and rotation of RAC members and the need to ensure cover across disciplines may mean there may be periods when the RAC has an increase in members, this is not an issue as long as a balance is maintained.
- d. All RAC appointments must be approved by the Board of Trustees (the Board).

4. Independent decision making

- a. The RAC is an independent committee from the Board. All research funding decisions and recommendations are made by the RAC. Sarcoma UK staff are involved in: the administration research grant round process, to provide secretariat and ensure compliance with Sarcoma UK's research management procedures.
- b. Research applications are submitted by Principal Investigators (PI's) to a deadline date. All applications received are acknowledged and assigned an internal research reference number. They are initially triaged by Sarcoma UK's head of research (or other staff member) against the eligibility criteria. Any applications which do not meet the eligibility criteria will be returned to the PI and host institution with an explanation of where the application was ineligible.
- c. Eligible applications will then be assigned to peer reviewers, either internal or external, the head of research will liaise with the Chair of the RAC over appropriate reviewers.
- d. Any individual who is a member of the RAC cannot be a member of the Board for Sarcoma UK, the RAC must remain an independent body. The RAC may invite a member of the Board as an observer to the decision making meeting where research applications are reviewed and discussed. Should an RAC member decide to join the Board, they must step down from the RAC (or vice versa).
- e. The decision making meeting of the RAC must have at least three members of the RAC (permanent or co-opted) to be quorate. When arranging the RAC meeting, as much notice as possible must be given as members may have clinical, teaching or academic commitments. The meeting may need to be delayed if no suitable date can be found.
- f. Following the decision making meeting of the RAC, the Chair of the RAC will present the recommendations of the meeting to the Board for approval.

5. Rotation of Members of the RAC

- a. RAC members are appointed for a specific period of office. Please refer to the RAC Terms of Reference for details, a summary of rotation is as follows:
 - i. Inaugural Chair will serve for a maximum of five years

- ii. Term of office for each member is three years, a second consecutive term of up to three years can be granted
- iii. It is necessary to have a staggered membership dates to ensure a degree of continuity for the committee.
- iv. Previous RAC members who have stood down from the RAC must have at least a three period of absence from the RAC before re-joining.

6. Impartiality

- a. No more than 50% of the RAC can hold current open grants during their tenure on the RAC.
- b. Each RAC member is required to sign the Conflict of Interest Policy and update this annually.
- c. External peer reviewers will be sent the Conflict of Interest Policy and asked to declare any interest before committing to review a project.
- d. RAC members who are connected to a grant proposal, must declare a Conflict of Interest. The RAC member must absent themselves from the relevant part of any meeting where matters concerning a grant proposal with which they are connected are discussed. They may not take part in any decisions taken in relation to such a grant proposal, and under certain circumstances may not receive any papers relating to it. An individual is deemed to have such a connection when they are:
 - i. the sole applicant
 - ii. a joint applicant or a named collaborator
 - iii. a relative of one of the grant applicants
 - iv. a business partner of one of the applicants
 - v. a member or employee of the same university or institution as one of the grant applicants
- e. Sarcoma UK's discretion may exclude RAC members from discussion when:
 - i. They are a direct competitor of the applicant.
 - ii. They have acted as an external referee or served on another Committee in respect of a proposal when it was considered by another funding body.
- f. In the event of the Chair of the RAC applying for funding, they must absent themselves from the whole research grant round and the Deputy Chair will take on the duties of the Chair.

7. Long term funding and block grants

- a. Sarcoma UK does not fund block grants or offer long term funding support at present.