Peer Reviewing Policy

Peer Reviewing Policy for all research proposals being considered for funding by Myeloma UK.

Overview

Myeloma UK is a member of the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) and adheres to the principle of peer review as set out by the AMRC. The guidance document can be found on the AMRC website: https://www.amrc.org.uk/principles-of-peer-review

Myeloma UK funds research in a broad range of areas and has a Research Advisory Group (RAG) that is set up in line with the following AMRC principles:

Principle	Description
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 which are relevant to the research area.
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.
Independent decision making	The scientific advisory committee is independent of the charity's administrative staff and trustees.
Rotation of scientific advisors	Scientific advisory committee members have a fixed term of office.

Accountability

Myeloma UK embraces openness, transparency and accountability. We publish the following information on our funded research portfolio:

- RAG membership details
- Myeloma UK conflict of interest policy
- Research funded by Myeloma UK including
    - Principal Investigator
    - Institution
    - Value of award
    - Lay summary

Feedback and success rate are provided to all applicants at the end of the process. Peer reviewers' details are anonymised.

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 3Rs for special review.

The guidance document regarding the use of animals in research can be found on the AMRC website: https://www.amrc.org.uk/Listing/Category/the-use-of-animals-in-research

Balance

Myeloma UK is committed to ensuring a fair balance of experience and scientific disciplines on its RAG. We aim to ensure that the RAG is comprised of a range of relevant experts. We seek to avoid discrimination on any panel on the basis of age, gender, ethnicity or geographical spread. RAG members and external peer reviewers are sought from the field of myeloma or aligned disciplines. We seek to identify experts using a range of methods, working alongside specialists in the field, receiving recommendations from current members and through identifying membership of professional bodies.

In line with AMRC best practice guidance, the RAG must be comprised of at least five members. We aim to ensure appropriate cover across all disciplines and breadth of research we support and will appoint temporary members to the RAG to bring in specific expertise for specific tasks if required. The RAG makes recommendations to the Research, Clinical and Access Sub-Committee (RCA) of the Board of Trustees.

Impartiality

No more than 50% of RAG members can hold current open grants from Myeloma UK during their tenure on the RAG. Each RAG member is required to declare any conflict of interest in accordance with the Myeloma UK conflict of interest policy upon joining and members will be asked to update this annually. Peer reviewers are sent the conflict of interest policy and asked to read it and to raise any issues before committing to review a project.

RAG members who are connected to a grant proposal, must declare a conflict of interest which will be managed in accordance with the conflicts of interest policy.

Independent decision making

The RAG is an independent committee from the RCA and Board of Trustees. No Trustee member can be a member of the RAG.

The RAG may invite a member of the Board of Trustees as an observer to the decision-making meeting where research applications are reviewed and discussed.

Should a RAG member decide to join the Board of Trustees, they must step down from the RAG (or vice versa).

All research funding recommendations are made by the RAG. Myeloma UK staff provide a secretariat function and ensure compliance with Myeloma UK's research management procedures, AMRC requirements and overall good practice.

For research review committee decisions to be valid, five members or more than 50% of the committee, must be present (whichever figure is higher).

Rotation of members of the RAG

Research Advisory Group members are appointed for a specific period of office.

- The term of office for each member is three years
- A second consecutive term of up to three years may be offered for both the Chair and members.
- It is necessary to have staggered membership dates to ensure a degree of continuity for the committee.
- Previous RAG members who have either completed their term of office or have stood down must have at least a three-year period of absence before re-joining.

Myeloma UK is improving the diversity of our research. We are making an active effort to recruit people from a range of backgrounds and expertise to our Research Advisory Group and peer review roles to ensure that diverse voices are represented. We collect and review data on characteristics including race, disability, geography, and career stage to consider if additional targets are necessary.

Peer Review process

Pre-peer review

All competitive research applications will be peer reviewed.

Applications submitted undergo triage by the Myeloma UK secretariat for completeness, eligibility of the Principal Investigator and remit against the funding call. Applications submitted that are incomplete or outside the call remit will be referred to Chair of the RAG who will decide if the application will progress to peer review.

Meaningful and thorough peer review

We aim for our peer review process to be appropriate to the value of the funding, meaningful to the subject and to reflect our broad spectrum of research. In line with AMRC recommendations, we abide by their principles of expert review (https://www.amrc.org.uk/listing/category/amrcs-principles-of-expert-review).

Applications are sent to a minimum of TWO professional peer reviewers who specialise in the area of the research project and ONE lay peer reviewer for all applications with a financial value in excess of £25,000. However, we aim to send applications to up to six experts in the field to warrant that all applications are rigorously reviewed. Following external peer review, the applications are further peer reviewed by members of the RAG.

Myeloma UK aims to ensure that, through the process of researching and selecting these expert peer reviewers, there are no conflicts of interest.

Research applications with a financial value of less than £25,000 will be discussed with the Chair of the RAG for a decision on whether external peer review is required. Applications with a value of less than £25,000 will be peer reviewed by members of the RAG only as standard,

with external peer review sought only when expertise not represented in the RAG membership is required. Applications with a value of less than £25,000 will still receive a minimum of TWO professional and ONE lay peer review.

Post-peer review

Myeloma UK will convene the RAG meeting relevant to the grant round and in line with our Conflicts of Interest policy.

After their review, we share the external reviewers' comments and any scientific updates from the applicant with the RAG. If agreed with the expert peer reviewer in question, anonymised feedback from him/her will also be sent to the unsuccessful grant applicants.

Emails thanking the external peer reviewer are sent along with the outcome of the funding application he/she reviewed. This is accompanied by a request to ensure that the peer reviewer is happy to be approached again in the future should any similar applications be received by the organisation.

Conditions for peer reviewers

General

The identity of external peer reviewers will be kept strictly confidential and will not be disclosed by Myeloma UK and the members of its RAG without the peer reviewer's prior written consent.

Where comments may be shared with applicants, this will be made explicit on the peer review form. As a peer reviewer, you should inform Myeloma UK in writing if your comments should not be shared.

Obligations of peer reviewing

All information relating to applications is confidential. In order to ensure this confidentiality, the peer reviewer agrees to:

- Keep applications secure and destroy all electronic and paper copies of applications (including any attachments and notes relating to applications) promptly after completing the review
- Not disclose to any third parties, including applicants, that you are reviewing applications
- Not discuss applications with any third parties without the prior permission of Myeloma UK
- Not contact applicants to discuss any issues you identify in their applications without the prior permission of Myeloma UK
- Not copy applications in whole or in part other than is necessary for the purposes of your review
- Not use any information or ideas contained in applications for any purpose other than your review of such applications on behalf of Myeloma UK

If a peer reviewer is approached for reviewing purposes and he/she has any conflict of interest in relation to an application (for example, if they have recently worked with the applicant), Myeloma UK must be informed immediately in line with our conflicts of interest policy.