



**MESOTHELIOMA UK**

## **Peer Review Policy**

**This document sets out the Peer Review Policy for Mesothelioma UK.**

## 1. Principles of Peer Review

1.1 The Peer Review Process (PRP) adheres to the Association of Medical Research Charities Five Principles of:

- **Accountability:** Transparent and openly accessible peer review processes.
- **Balance:** The Committee has a balance of experience and expertise.
- **Independence:** The research review committee is independent of the charity's administrative staff and trustees.
- **Rotation:** Members of the Committee have a fixed term in office.
- **Impartiality:** No one on the Committee is in receipt of charity research funding and has no conflict of interest.

## 2. Research and Audit Scientific Committee (RASC)

2.1 The RASC is responsible for overseeing all Mesothelioma UK audit and research activity to support a balance of enquiry and evidence across the mesothelioma pathway. The committee oversees the:

- Advertising of grant opportunities,
- Managing applications,
- Ensures appropriate peer review processes are followed,
- Monitors grants awarded and
- Reports on audit and research activity to the trustees and Mesothelioma UK supporters.

2.2 And in addition, the scope of activities includes:

- Review Mesothelioma UK performance against its pledge to achieve a spend of one third of income on audit and research.
- Work with Mesothelioma UK team to identifying audit and research priority subject areas that support a balance of research across the mesothelioma pathway and experience
- Decide on topic areas for grants ensuring a broad portfolio of audit and research to maximise patient benefit.
- Review Mesothelioma UK's Audit and Research Expenditure against awarded grants.
- Advertise Grants
- Review applications
- Convene appropriate External Peer Review panels
- Monitor audit and research grant holders' expenditure
- Monitor and review grant holders progress, their communication updates and expenditure.
- Review communication with co-funding partner organisations
- Report all audit and research activity to the trustees

2.3 The RASC is Chaired by a trustee and meets approximately 2-3 times per year face to face or in person, s as required in between. RASC membership includes: -

- Two Representatives from the Advisory Board
  - Nurse(s)
  - Clinical Doctor
  - 2-4 External Academics
  - Research Officer (to provide admin support and co-ordinate the meetings)
- 2.4 The RASC Chair is responsible for summarising the RASC activity at each Board of Trustee Meeting. A summary of the annual activity will provide the basis for the audit and research section in the charity's annual report. Additionally, if staff are unsure about the appropriateness of any applications (following an enquiry from a potential applicant), they will refer to the Chair for advice.
- 2.5 The Chair can apply for research grants but if they do so, they must remove themselves from this grant process and appoint a deputy Chair. The same principle applies to any other members of the RASC.
- 2.6 The Chair and RASC members will have a three-year term, with the possibility of renewing for a second three-year term. At the two-year point, the Chair and Committee Members will seek to appoint a new Chair who may be asked to join the Committee as an observer to allow for a smooth transition. Where possible, terms of office will be staggered to allow for a smooth continuation of the RASC.
- 2.7 RASC committee members will not discuss applications with applicants external to the committee meeting. All enquiries must be through the charity.

### 3. Peer Review Process

3.1 The Peer Review Process will follow a staged approach:

**Stage 1:** An internal triage process will be undertaken to check the eligibility of the application. Applicants will have been asked to provide Form A: A Lay Summary and Scientific Abstract and Form B: a full application form. At this stage only Form A will be used to assess applications for continuing to the next stage.

Triage will be based on eligibility, strategic fit and completeness of the application. This process will be undertaken by the Research Officer and subset of the RASC.

Those applications deemed unsuitable for Mesothelioma UK support after stage one will not be sent out for external review and will therefore not be considered for funding. Applicants will be notified of this decision and will receive anonymised feedback.

**Stage 2:** Applications that progress to stage two will be reviewed by an independent, external peer review panel. This panel will review the scientific quality of the applications. Each application may be reviewed by one or two external reviewers depending on the value and complexity of the grant award. A written report and score will be provided by the external reviewers.

If the grant is under £27,000 an Internal Reviewer(s) will be used so as not to add greater burden the research community. The Internal Expert Reviewer(s) will be from the RASC, and additional expert guidance will be requested if necessary. If the grant is over £27,00, external expert reviewers will be approached to review each study.

The application review will be based on, whether the research application

- fits within the remit of the grant,
- the quality of the science, including a clear well thought out idea which is relevant and has some originality
- is relevant and important to patient, carer, and families
- is achievable within the time remit and level of funding available
- is supported by a quality research team which may include interdisciplinary collaborations
- the potential impact of the research
- demonstrates value for money

**Stage 3:** All external reviews and scores will be presented and discussed when The Research and Audit Scientific Committee (RASC) meet to discuss applications. The RASC will re-score the grant applications. The grants are then ranked from highest to lowest, and those that the RASC deem suitable for funding are then recommended to the Board of Trustees. The Chair of the RASC or Deputy will attend the Trustee meeting to report on any recommendations or at least provide a written summary outlining their funding recommendations. The Board of Trustees will make the final decision on whether funding will be awarded. The decision taken by the Board of Trustees is final.

**3.2** Applications will not be blinded, to enable the RASC to assess the expertise of the researchers and the appropriateness and quality of the departmental and institutional environment.

#### **4. External reviewers**

4.1 The charity will seek to have a wide pool of external reviewers to call upon. Reviewers may come from different disciplines, including scientists, healthcare professionals and lay people. Reviewers should be experts in their field and come from an academic or healthcare institution and ideally, have published in their field of expertise.

4.2 Depending on the size of the grant award we may ask applicants to nominate an external reviewer. The Reviewer will be contacted by the research team at the charity who will need to ensure that there is no conflict of interest. There will be no commitment on behalf of the charity to use the nominated external reviewer.

4.3 If external reviewers are used, we will limit the number of applications we invite them to review in a 12-month period to two or three.

4.4 If external reviewers are approached from overseas, they will not be expected to comment on the costs of the grant application as there may be wide variations in terms of what is acceptable.

4.5 The RASC will assist the Chair in approaching External Reviewers when appropriate to do so. A research assistant will work with the Chair to contact and approach external reviewers.

4.6 Forms, including a report form, scoring sheet, and research application form will be sent via email to each external reviewer. If the reviewer has a conflict of interest, they must declare this to the designated person and return all documentation. The external reviewers will be asked to return their completed reviews and forms via a designated password protected approach to the charity.

4.7 External reviewers will not be paid for their time, but we will thank them formally in a report or annual review to demonstrate their contribution.

4.8 A two week turn around period will be given for external reviewers to comment on any research applications. If they find this difficult to achieve, due to other competing demands we will ask if they can recommend approaching a colleague with similar expertise.

## **5. Scoring of applications**

5.1 A scoring system will be agreed upon by the RASC and will be used by all reviewers and a guidance sheet will be provided to ensure everyone is scoring applications based on a clear methodology.

5.2 Lay members will be asked to score on the importance of the research project, the practicalities of doing the research, patient and public involvement in the planning of the research and whether the research is likely to make a positive difference or change.

5.3 Academic reviewers will be asked to score on the originality of the research, scientific quality, expertise of the research team and access to the relevant infrastructure.

[See Document Peer Review Guidance: A detailed guide for reviewers, 2020)

## **6. Committee Meetings**

6.1 Committee meetings will be planned in advance to ensure the maximum number of committee members are able to attend. A quorum will be 50% of the RASC or more.

6.2 The length of time for each committee meeting will be negotiated with the Committee Chair. There may need to be some flexibility, depending on how many grant applications are under review. Additionally, how long the committee plan to spend on each application will be negotiated with the Committee Chair.

6.3 RASC members will receive the applications in advance of each meeting. If a committee member is unable to attend the meeting, they must submit written comments before the meeting so that they can be shared and included in meeting discussions.

6.4 For grants under £27,000 each member of the RASC will be expected to read the grant application and score it. But it is expected that each grant application will be reviewed by one or two members of the RASC who will be allocated grants to review in more detail. The two reviewers will report back to the RASC and lead the discussion on this grant application.

For grants over £27,000 external expert reviewers will provide detailed reviews on each grant. Again, one or two members of the RASC will be asked to lead the discussion on each grant and will discuss the external reviewer feedback along with their own feedback.

They will be asked to present a thorough review in the meeting. To enable them to do this, they must have copies of all the written reviewer's reports and lay panel comments well before the meeting. This will ensure the committee meeting runs more smoothly and time efficiently on the day.

## **7. Conflict of Interests**

7.1 All RASC members must sign a copy of the Conflict of Interest Policy when they join the Committee and either re-sign or be reminded of the policy yearly, whilst active members.

7.2 If a RASC committee member has a conflict of interest with a research application they must disclose this and must not be present in the discussion or scoring of an application. Conflict of interest must be ascertained by the research assistant when initial review processes commence.

## **8. Communicating the Outcome to Applicants and others**

8.1 Ideally, applicants will be informed of the likely date when they will receive notification of the grant award when applying for the grant.

8.2 Ideally, the RASC Committee meeting will be held shortly before the next Trustee Board meeting when the research can be signed off. A formal letter will be sent out to all applications following this decision-making process. The RASC will not enter into a formal discussion or provide detail of the decision-making process.

8.3 When awarding the Grant, the host institution must confirm that they agree to support this research and research team and are willing to comply with our Grant Terms and Conditions (which will have been included with the grant application documents and available on the website). Additional signatures may be required at this stage and formal contracts agreed.

8.4 Constructive feedback will be shared with unsuccessful applications, to help them improve on future applications or understand why their research has not be funded on this occasion. A summary of the RASC meeting and external reviewer (if applicable) comments will be provided in a letter. The external reviewer will not be identifiable in any correspondence with the applicant.

8.5 Any correspondence will be produced by the research assistant/manager, or Chair of the RASC and signed by the Chair or designated person of the RASC.

8.6 The RASC will determine with external reviewers if they would like to be notified of the outcome of the review process. This may help cement good working relationships.

8.7 The outcome of research grants, will be communicated via the research pages on Mesothelioma UK's research pages and updates provided in any charity communications/newsletters. Charity staff will also receive notifications of new studies along with a brief lay summary of the research.

Policy Approved on date:	Signed by Chair of RASC:
Policy to be reviewed on date: August 2021	

Appendix 1

Flow chart of Peer Review Process

