



# Research Advisory Committee: Terms of Reference

The involvement of Research Advisory Committee (RAC) members in our funding schemes is a crucial part of our review process. The input they provide is critical to us achieving the ambitions set out in our research strategy and funding truly impactful research that will result in benefit for men. Prostate Cancer UK thanks RAC members for their time and commitment.

## 1 Purpose

- 1.1 The primary purpose of the RAC is to make recommendations for funding of research proposals that are primarily submitted to our Research Innovation Awards funding call, to the Board of Trustees.
- 1.2 The RAC will consider applications received for research funding and, following a rigorous peer review process managed by the Research Team at Prostate Cancer UK, will make recommendations to the Board of Trustees on which applications should be funded by Prostate Cancer UK. Recommendations should be in line with the goals and requirements of the charity's [research strategy](#), to best serve the needs of men with prostate cancer, and within agreed budgetary limits.

## 2 Scope

- 2.1 These Terms of Reference are applicable to all members of the RAC and should be referred to for every grant-funding meeting.
- 2.2 All RAC members should be thorough and impartial in their assessment of applications submitted to Prostate Cancer UK for funding. If members of the RAC are unable to adhere to the terms outlined in this document throughout their membership, they may be asked to resign or re-consider their membership by Research Team staff at Prostate Cancer UK.

## 3 Membership and Terms of Office

- 3.1 The RAC shall consist of a group of members who shall be selected for their specialist knowledge and expertise across the broad range of topic areas in which Prostate Cancer UK funds research.
- 3.2 Members shall be appointed by the Director or Assistant Director of Research with approval from the Chair of the RAC.
- 3.3 Members may be in receipt of an award from Prostate Cancer UK and are not prohibited from

submitting applications to any of the grant rounds during their appointment. However, all members must abide by the Conflicts of Interest Code of Practice outlined in section 5 below.

- 3.4 Trustees shall not be members of the RAC but shall be entitled to attend its meetings as observers, subject to our conflicts of interest policy.
- 3.5 Members may be appointed for an initial trial or co-opted in for a one-off meeting in the first instance where it is thought that additional expertise is required. Some members may then be invited to join the RAC full time.
- 3.6 The tenure for all RAC members will be for a term of three years, renewable only once for a maximum period of a further three years. Past RAC members may be invited to re-join the committee after a minimum period of three years after the end of their previous tenure.
  - 3.6.1 If a RAC member has a leave of absence for example for parental leave or illness, this time away will not count against their tenure on the RAC.
- 3.7 If members of the RAC are repeatedly unable to attend meetings throughout their membership, they will be asked by Research Team staff at Prostate Cancer UK to review whether they have sufficient capacity to serve on the Committee and may be asked to resign their position.
- 3.8 A list of active members of the RAC will be posted on the Prostate Cancer UK website.
- 3.9 A minimum of 50% of the RAC membership, inclusive of the Chair, must be in attendance at any given meeting. The quorum for any funding recommendations made by the RAC shall be five members, exclusive of the Chair of the RAC. Other meetings may consist of a smaller number of RAC members, and may require other experts within a particular specialist field co-opted onto the panel where necessary.
- 3.10 A maximum of three members of the RAC may be from the same institute.
- 3.11 The RAC shall have the power to recommend additional expertise, to attend either for a complete meeting or for the discussion of one grant application only. This may be for future rounds or for the second stage meeting following shortlisting of Expressions of Interest. Additional experts may also be sought by the Research Team at Prostate Cancer UK where necessary; however, all co-opted members must be approved by the Chair of the RAC. Any additional experts co-opted onto the committee shall be granted temporary membership to the RAC (and can therefore participate in the review and scoring of applications), as long as they have read and agreed to the 'Prostate Cancer UK Research Advisory Committee Terms of Reference' in advance of the meeting.
- 3.12 Members should be respectful of other committee members and their views at all times and maintain appropriate decorum during meetings. Members must be aware of and adhere to our [code of conduct](#) when carrying out the duties of the RAC or acting on behalf of the Charity

## 4 Operating Procedures

- 4.1 The RAC shall normally meet as a whole to consider grant applications biannually, and it is our expectation that members participate at both meetings each year. In addition, various RAC members may on occasion be asked to join ad hoc funding meetings and interview panels throughout the year to support the process of recommending funding for fellowships, strategic and other such awards.

- 4.2 Members of the RAC shall be invited to score grant applications assigned to them in accordance with the criteria provided. Applications will be assigned to committee members based on their expertise and experience; however, on occasion members may be asked to look at proposals outside of their immediate area of expertise.
- 4.3 Where a triage of applications is necessary (for instance, to shortlist Expressions of Interest to a Second Stage application), at least 2, but usually 3, RAC members must review each application and individually provide both a score and adequate written comments which may be used for feedback to the applicants. Following the committee meeting, shortlisted applicants will be invited to a Second Stage following the RAC recommendations.
- 4.4 Second/Full Stage applications will be subject to assessment from at least 3 external peer reviewers. Applications will also be allocated to at least 2, but usually 3, RAC members to review, and all applications will be discussed at the corresponding committee meeting. Where possible, applications will be allocated to at least 2 of the RAC members who originally assessed the corresponding Expression of Interest proposal, however applications may be reassigned in order to ensure a reasonable workload across RAC members. Applications will be scored and ranked in order to inform funding recommendations.
- 4.5 Written comments for each assigned application should be submitted using the online grants management system ([Symplectic Grant Tracker](#)) alongside the score by the required date.
- 4.6 RAC members are encouraged to read as many of the applications under consideration as possible, not just the proposals to which they have been assigned to assess.
- 4.7 All RAC members who have been allocated applications for a funding meeting should ensure they attend the meeting (exceptions to this will only be acceptable under extenuating circumstances because absence from the meeting at short notice impacts on the fairness of the assessment process for some applications). If for any reason a RAC member can no longer attend a meeting, they should make this known to the Prostate Cancer UK Research Team at the earliest opportunity. RAC members must actively participate in the committee meeting and should not be working on business that is unrelated to the committee during the meeting (there will be opportunities during the designated breaks to check emails, send messages etc.).
- 4.8 RAC members agree to attend the whole meeting (unless otherwise agreed in advance of the meeting with the Research Team at Prostate Cancer UK). This is to ensure a fair assessment process for all applications, and that a quorum is present at all times during the meeting.
- 4.9 RAC members should not disclose any details about the applications to others outside of the meeting. As some RAC members may have a connection to the applications being assessed, during the meeting committee members should not discuss individual proposals during the designated breaks, whilst out of the meeting due to a conflict of interest, and/or in the chat function on video calls.
- 4.10 During the discussion of an application, RAC members should refrain from referring/comparing to any other application also under consideration (as there may be individuals present with a connection to the other application(s)).
- 4.11 An average score will be taken from the allocated committee members and funding recommendations will be based upon the ranking of these scores. The possible outcomes for applications are: Fund; Conditional Fund; Resubmission or Unsuccessful:
- 4.11.1 A recommendation for Fund is for the applications of the highest calibre, which do not require

any amendments or points of clarification.

- 4.11.2 In the event that the RAC requests small changes or the clarification/provision of further information, the applicant may be offered a Conditional Award. Applications offered a Conditional Award will require a detailed response from the applicants to address the feedback from the committee and may require further approval from the RAC (depending on the nature of the feedback, to be decided by the Research Team at Prostate Cancer UK). Where further RAC assessment is required, approval will be sought from two or more RAC members (usually the corresponding assigned committee members) and responses should be provided within the stipulated timeframe.
- 4.11.3 In the event that more significant changes are required, the RAC may recommend that the applicant take on board their recommendations and amend their application to re-submit in a future round. Resubmissions will only be at the request of the RAC and the application may then skip the Expression of Interest stage of the subsequent grant round (where applicable).
- 4.11.4 Unsuccessful applications will be provided detailed feedback but shall not be eligible to resubmit without substantial revision, or unless substantial new evidence has since emerged to support the rationale for the proposal.
- 4.12 In addition to grant application review, RAC members may be asked to review change requests for current (awarded) grants outside the normal meeting schedule. Where possible, such requests will be allocated to the RAC members who originally reviewed the corresponding Full Stage application. These requests may need to be reassigned to other RAC members where the originally allocated reviewer is no longer serving on the Committee.

## 5 Conflicts of Interest Code of Practice

- 5.1 All members of the RAC must actively adhere to and support this Conflicts of Interest Code of Practice.
- 5.2 The Prostate Cancer UK Research Team will endeavour to identify potential conflicts of interest prior to allocation of applications to RAC members and will notify all RAC members of their conflicts in advance of the meeting. The aim of circulating conflicts in advance is to give RAC members an opportunity to discuss any conflicts of interest that they believe to be incorrect well before the RAC meeting. Any disputes about the conflicts of interest identified must be raised with the Research Team no later than 4 weeks after this list is circulated. Members must disclose any additional conflict of interests (not identified by the Research Team) in advance of the RAC meeting at which the application in question is to be considered, or as soon as the member's interest in the application becomes apparent. Any declaration of interest in a grant application by an RAC member shall be duly recorded in the minutes of the relevant committee meeting.
- 5.3 Where a conflict of interest exists, the RAC member will not have access to any of the documentation for that application, nor will they be permitted to participate in the discussion, scoring or final outcome of the application. The RAC member will be required to leave the meeting while discussion and scoring takes place.
- 5.4 A RAC member may attend and participate at a meeting when a grant application they have submitted, or are involved in as a co-applicant, is to be considered. Any such member shall, however, be required to leave the meeting during the consideration of their grant application and shall not participate in the scoring or final outcome of their application. The same shall apply to RAC members for meetings at which a grant application is to be considered upon which they are considered to have any other type of conflict of interest (as outlined below in 'Definition of a Conflict

of Interest’).

- 5.5 The Chair of the RAC shall be independent, but in the event of any of the circumstances outlined below applying to the Chair, they will be subject to the same Code of Practice.

**5.6 Definition of a Conflict of Interest:**

Prostate Cancer UK considers a Conflict of Interest to arise under the following circumstances:

- If an RAC member is a named party on the grant application, either as PI, co-applicant, collaborator, mentor, referee or Head of Department.
- If an RAC member has a recent collaboration with any of the grant applicants (excluding collaborators): a recent collaboration is defined as an active funded grant, joint publication or other active working collaboration normally during the previous 5 years. Co-authorship on publications resulting from a large consortium (in excess of 20 authors) will not be considered a conflict of interest as collaboration between the two parties is considered to be minimal unless specified otherwise by the RAC member.
- If an RAC member has a personal relationship with any of the named parties on a grant application, such as spouse, family member or close friendship.
- If an RAC member is at the same Research Institute as the lead applicant(s) or co-applicants of the grant application.
- If an RAC member could personally gain (financially or otherwise) in relation to an application under consideration.
- If an RAC member is at the same Research Institute as a collaborator on the grant it is not consider to be a significant conflict of interest. However, we will take into consideration individual cases if raised by an RAC member.

Please note, Prostate Cancer UK may consider relaxing certain conflicts of interest if the fair assessment of an application is jeopardised by a significantly reduced number of members involved in the discussion.

## 6 Secretary to the RAC

- 6.1 The Research Team at Prostate Cancer UK shall provide secretariat support to the RAC. This will include, but not be limited to, managing conflicts, preparation of accurate scientific minutes and applicant feedback.
- 6.2 The secretary will be a non-voting member of RAC.

## 7 The Chair: Role and Responsibilities

- 7.1 The Board shall appoint an independent Chair of the RAC. The appointment shall be made initially on a one year trial basis followed by a full term of up to three years, renewable only once for a maximum period of a further three years.
- 7.2 The Chair shall not be permitted to submit a grant application for consideration by the RAC, nor

have an interest in any such grant application (e.g. as a co-applicant or collaborator).

- 7.3 The Chair of the RAC shall not score grant applications.
- 7.4 If the Chair is to be absent for all or part of a meeting of the RAC, the Secretary to the RAC shall, in advance of the meeting, appoint an acting Chair.
- 7.5 The Chair has responsibility for the operation and output of the committee. The duties of the Chair include, but is not limited to, the following (some of the duties below may become the responsibility of the acting Chair in the Chair's absence):
  - 7.5.1 To approve or reject any new appointments (permanent or temporary) onto the RAC and to approve who is present for any given committee meeting.
  - 7.5.2 To assist the Research Team at Prostate Cancer UK during any triage stage, and with support from the rest of the RAC, to decide upon an appropriate cut-off point for shortlisting applications (if applicable).
  - 7.5.3 To support and actively implement the Conflicts of Interest Code of Practice by ensuring the RAC members also adhere to this Code of Practice.
  - 7.5.4 To ensure that every member of the committee has the opportunity to be heard and that no opinion is ignored.
  - 7.5.5 To ensure that the views of the Patient and Public Involvement Representatives are appropriately taken into account, and that any of the queries or concerns they raise are suitably acknowledged and addressed.
  - 7.5.6 To ensure that the full range of scientific opinion is taken into account.
  - 7.5.7 To ensure any significant diversity of opinion is fully explored and discussed, and if it cannot be reconciled, is accurately reflected in the minutes.
  - 7.5.8 To ensure that sufficient explanation is provided from RAC members for applications not selected for funding, in order to provide adequate feedback to the applicant(s).
  - 7.5.9 To ensure that the minutes produced by the research team are an accurate reflection of the discussion at the meeting and provide a clear audit trail of the decision-making process.

## 8 Confidentiality

- 8.1 Committee members agree to not disclose any confidential information with any third parties. Confidential information may include (but is not limited to) information provided in research grant applications and progress reports, committee funding recommendations, information provided by peer reviewers, and any discussions about Prostate Cancer UK's strategy, active portfolio or funding decisions.
- 8.2 Any materials provided by Prostate Cancer UK (including electronic and paper copies) are done so in confidence and must be appropriately destroyed after the corresponding meeting or when the materials are no longer required.
- 8.3 RAC members must not input any content from Prostate Cancer UK funding applications, associated peer reviews or applicants' responses into generative AI tools to develop or refine their



review comments.

- 8.4 Prostate Cancer UK should be notified of any possible breach of confidentiality as soon as possible.

## 9 Expenses

- 9.1 Whilst meetings will be predominantly virtual using video conferencing facilities, Prostate Cancer UK will reimburse committee members for any reasonable travel, accommodation and subsistence costs incurred from attending in-person committee meetings.
- 9.2 If travelling by car, the mileage rate is 45 pence per mile. If using public transport, the full cost of travel will be reimbursed upon production of a corresponding receipt. Members should book travel well in advance to take advantage of the cheapest available fares where possible, and reimbursement will only be made for standard/economy travel fares (unless other fares are cheaper and and/or where this has been agreed in advance of booking with the Research Team at Prostate Cancer UK). Excessive travel costs will not be reimbursed by the charity.
- 9.3 Meetings will be held virtually in the first instance, however if meetings are to be held in-person, meals and refreshments will be provided where suitable. However, for those travelling significant distances to attend our meetings, it is permissible to request reimbursement for food and drink. Where appropriate, the charity will provide a copy of the expenses policy which sets out the agreed maximum limit that Prostate Cancer UK will contribute to meal costs. Prostate Cancer UK will not reimburse the cost of alcohol under any circumstances.
- 9.4 If an overnight stay is required to attend a meeting, The Research Team at Prostate Cancer UK will book and pay for the accommodation directly. Requests for accommodation must be made to the Research Team at Prostate Cancer UK well in advance of the meeting.
- 9.5 In order to claim expenses, members are required to fill out an Expenses Claim Form and provide corresponding receipts, tickets or booking confirmation as proof of purchase. Please note that individual costs not supported by a receipt will be reimbursed only in exceptional circumstances and submission of claims without receipts could result in delays in payment.

## 10 Agreement

- 10.1 I understand and hereby agree to adhere to the above terms of reference as a member of the Prostate Cancer UK Research Advisory Committee. I shall raise any potential conflicts of interest with the Research Team at Prostate Cancer UK in advance of any meeting, and any confidential or sensitive information I am privy to through my involvement in the RAC shall be treated confidentially and not discussed with non-committee members or committee members who are not privy to the same information.