Principles of peer review

CCLG is in the process of applying to become a member of the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) and adheres to the principles of peer review as set out by the AMRC.

Accountability
Charities are open and transparent about their peer review procedures and publish details, 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.

Internal and external reviewers

1. All competitive research applications will be peer reviewed by either internal and/or external reviewers. For these purposes, the CCLG Research Advisory Group (RAG) and its constituent members (who may or may not also be CCLG members) are classified as internal reviewers, and the wider research and clinical community (who may or may not be CCLG members) are external reviewers.

2. In line with AMRC guidelines, any research applications with a financial value over £25,000 per annum will be assessed by external reviewers before being reviewed by the RAG.
   • The external peer reviewers’ comments will be used by the RAG in any decision making process. A minimum of two external reviewers shall be used, one of whom, if appropriate, will be the Chair of the relevant CCLG Special Interest Group, or their nominated deputy if there is either a conflict of interest or they are a member of the RAG.
   • External reviewers, in line with AMRC guidelines, will be asked to give detailed written feedback. This will be used by the RAG to enrich their assessment of the applications.
   • A minimum of three internal reviewers will review applications.
   • Collated scoring and comments will be provided to a full meeting of the RAG to make a final recommendation.

3. All research applications with a financial value of £25,000 per annum and under will be assessed by a minimum of two internal reviewers. Where appropriate, an external review will also be sought from the Chair of the relevant CCLG Special Interest Group, or their nominated deputy. If further expertise is required, a further external reviewer may also be sought.

4. Where possible, the Chair of the RAG will not undertake any review to remain impartial. However, there may be occasions when the Chair of the RAG is the most appropriate person to review. In this instance, the vice-chair of the RAG will assume the duties of the Chair.

Accountability

• Information about CCLG’s research portfolio is available online, including relevant policies, details of our RAG members, research we have funded, and research calls which are currently open.

• In line with AMRC guidelines, we ask all peer reviewers, internal and external, to assess and comment on the replacement, refinement and reductions (3Rs) of animals in research applications. Members will be provided with suitable resources to support this.

Balance

• CCLG aims to ensure the RAG us comprised of a range of experts across all disciplines in childhood cancer and week seek to avoid discrimination.
on the grounds of age, gender, ethnicity or geographical spread.

- We seek to identify internal and external reviewers using a range of methods, including using the expertise of the CCLG membership, working alongside specialists in the field, recommendations from current members and from research grant applicants.

Independent decision making

- The RAG is independent of CCLG’s board of Trustees. Decisions on scientific quality and recommendations for funding are made by the RAG. CCLG staff are involved in the administration of the grant process, providing secretariat and ensuring compliance with our policies and standards.

- Research applications are submitted by Principal Investigators (PIs) to a deadline date. All applications received are acknowledged and assigned an internal reference number. They are initially triaged by the Executive Director (or other appropriate staff member) against the eligibility criteria. Any applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria will be returned to the PI with an explanation of why the application was ineligible.

- Eligible applications will then be assigned to peer reviewers. The Executive Director and RAG Chair will liaise over appropriate reviewers.

- The RAG must remain independent of the CCLG trustees (or the trustees of a charity that CCLG is managing research funding for) and therefore trustees of CCLG or other involved charities may not be members of the RAG.

- The quorum for the RAG is a minimum of four members.

- The recommendations of the RAG will be presented to the CCLG Executive / Board of Trustees / funding charity’s Board of Trustees by the RAG Chair / Executive Director.

Rotation of members of the RAG

- RAG members are appointed for a fixed term of office, outlined in the RAG terms of reference. This is currently three years, with a second term of three years. Members may not re-join for three years after retiring from the RAG.

- Initially it will be necessary to have staggered membership dates to ensure a degree of continuity for the RAG. Therefore, at the discretion of the Executive, some initial appointments may be made for four or five years, with a second term of three years. The maximum term of office will be eight years.

Impartiality

- No more than 50% of the RAG may be active grant holders.

- All members of the RAG will sign the CCLG conflicts of interest policy, so they are aware of their responsibilities. External reviewers should be given an opportunity to declare a conflict of interest before committing to review applications.

- Would-be beneficiaries are not present at RAG meetings where their applications are discussed or when funding decisions are made. If a RAG or decision-making committee member has an involvement in an application, they must declare a conflict of interest.

CCLG Tissue Bank and Biological Studies Steering Group

CCLG’s Biological Studies Steering Group (BSSG) is a long-established working group with responsibility for governance of the CCLG Tissue Bank and for review of biological studies wishing to access the bank. The BSSG has established processes for peer review of applications to the bank, to reach decisions on whether applications should be approved and be able to access materials from the Bank.

The majority of applications to the BSSG are externally funded (ie not funded by CCLG) and therefore the peer review process of the BSSG is not about making funding recommendations.

However, over the past three years, CCLG has funded a series of pilot projects (maximum value £10,000) to promote the CCLG Tissue Bank, where a stipulation of funding is that the project must use materials from the Bank. These applications have been reviewed by the BSSG for both approval as biological studies, and for awarding of funding with funding recommendations made to the CCLG Executive for a final decision.

In future, where CCLG offers research funding that stipulates projects must use materials from the CCLG Tissue Bank, the BSSG may be asked to undertake peer review on behalf of the RAG, adhering to the principles described above. Calls for applications will make clear which group will be responsible for reviewing applications. The Chairs of the RAG and BSSG should liaise where an application is received that requires a funding recommendation from the RAG and approval as a biological study from the BSSG to ensure that appropriate peer review is carried out in line with the above principles, but to avoid duplication of effort where appropriate.

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