

# Code of Practice for Membership of the Research Awards Pool (RAP)



## 1. Introduction to the Research Awards Pool

The Research Awards Pool (RAP) is a group of researchers with expertise spanning the field of stroke research. Members of the RAP work closely with the Stroke Association research team to adjudicate on research funding applications. Stroke Association staff will ask RAP members to be involved with the adjudication process for the Stroke Association's funding awards according to the expertise required to assess the applications submitted to that round.

## 2. Scope

This Code of Practice sets out the role, responsibility and integrity that is required of all members of the RAP by the Stroke Association, and is applicable to every Panel meeting, interview Panel and any other process set out for research funding adjudication.

The Stroke Association requires all research funding recommendations to be reached with rigour and with the impartiality of all the Panel members. Panel members must ensure they and their fellow members are acting responsibly and in the best interest of the Stroke Association and its beneficiaries at all times.

If members of the RAP do not adhere to this Code of Practice throughout their membership, their membership of the RAP will be terminated with immediate effect.

## 3. Responsibilities of RAP Members:

### 3.1 General

It is the responsibility of each RAP member to:

- Act within research governance and research management best practice, and be familiar with the [AMRC's Principles of Peer Review](#).
- Act in the best interests of the Stroke Association and people affected by stroke. At all times RAP members must act with impartiality of their own research interests, consider what is best for the organisation and its beneficiaries and avoid bringing it into disrepute.
- Manage Conflicts of Interest responsibly and effectively by self-declaration of any Conflicts of Interest, or potential Conflicts of Interest, throughout the research adjudication process and at the earliest time this becomes known to them.

- Have a sound and up-to-date knowledge of the [Stroke Association Research Strategy](#) and any additional priorities, policies or restrictions around the research that the organisation will and will not fund.
- Make themselves available to attend at least one funding meeting or interview panel per year, as requested by Stroke Association research team. Attendance comprises of submitting scores and written review comments in advance of the meeting and attending in person for the entire meeting duration. This plays a critical role in the funding adjudication process; Panel members should only commit to being on a funding/interview Panel if they have sufficient time to both complete the reviews required and attend the Panel meeting.
- Book travel to attend meetings at least one month in advance of the Panel meeting to ensure travel claims made to the Stroke Association are reasonable, and at the best rate possible. Travel tickets must be standard class tickets only. No reimbursement of Open Return rail tickets purchased on the day of travel will be made by the Stroke Association. Domestic flight costs will only be paid where the RAP member has booked one month in advance and can demonstrate (excepting travel from Northern Ireland/mainland Europe) that the cost is equivalent or cheaper compared with other forms of travel.
- Ensure when attending Panel meetings that they are available to commit to the day in full, allowing for full participation right from the start time until the finish time of the meeting, as per the agenda.

### 3.2 Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for the RAP is in [Annexe One](#) at the back of this document.

### 3.3 Confidentiality and Conflicts of Interest

All RAP members will be required to sign the Stroke Association's Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Policy for RAP members, which can be found in [Annexe Two](#) at the back of this document. Members must commit to take responsibility for their own impartiality and integrity. Self-declaration of any Conflict of Interest or potential Conflict of Interest is a key requirement, as soon as it becomes known within the adjudication process. The definition of a Conflict of Interest can be found in the Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Policy.

- The Stroke Association research staff will endeavour to identify all potential Conflicts of Interest prior to RAP review of applications.
- RAP members must self-declare any known Conflicts of Interest to the Stroke Association research team in advance, and must review the Conflicts of Interest identified by members of the Stroke Association research team.

- RAP members may wish to dispute any Conflicts of Interest proposed within good reason. The final decision will be agreed by the Head of Research Awards.
- RAP members who have submitted an application for an award, as either the main or co-applicant, will not normally attend the adjudication meeting as they would be considered to have a Conflict of Interest.
- A RAP member may attend a meeting when they have a Conflict of Interest on a grant application **other** than as Applicant or Co-Applicant. In this circumstance, they will be required to leave the meeting during the consideration of any grant application on which they have a Conflict of Interest and will not be permitted to score or comment on the final outcome of the application.
- At Panel meetings, once the discussion is complete and the Chair of the panel has dismissed all panel members, no further discussion of any of the applications considered should take place, either within or outside of the meeting room.
- Stroke Association research staff and the Chair of the panel will not enter into any further discussion or debate about any particular application following the close of a meeting, and RAP members shall not attempt to enter into any such discussion.
- RAP members must abide by the Stroke Association's Confidentiality and Conflicts of Interest Policy, and as such, should not disclose any of the meeting content and discussion, scores or the final outcome with any other party following the meeting.

### 3.4 Adjudication of Applications

Panel members will be drawn from RAP membership for each adjudication/interview panel as required to judge the applications to be considered. Once a call for applications for a funding scheme has closed, a member of the Stroke Association research team will contact RAP members to determine their availability to be involved in the funding/interview Panel stage of the adjudication process. Following this, the Research Awards Officer or Head of Research Awards will formally invite members of the RAP to be part of a funding/interview Panel. One RAP member will also be invited to Chair the Panel.

Members of a funding/interview Panel will be required to review applications assigned to them by the Stroke Association research team, usually with two Panel

members taking the role of Lead reviewers for each application. This may vary for Fellowship or Lectureship applications which are awarded via interview, whereby Panel members will be asked to review each application and lead on certain aspects of the interview. More detail is provided in section 3.4.2 below. Timescales for review will be specified by the research team for each adjudication process.

- Panel members will be sent a link to their allocated applications, and should notify Stroke Association research staff immediately of any potential Conflicts of Interest or any other problems affecting their ability to impartially complete a review of each of their assigned applications. Suggestions of suitable peer reviewers will also be requested by Stroke Association staff at this early stage.
- A triage prior to external peer review may take place; in this instance RAP members are requested to complete their reviews as quickly as possible, and within the time period specified by Stroke Association research staff in order to remove uncompetitive applications.
- Panel members should ensure they read and score their reviews within the allocated time frame and supply an adequate written summary of their review, as requested in the review forms supplied.
- Panel members should endeavour to read as many applications as possible in addition to the ones they have been assigned. This allows for a richer and more balanced discussion to take place at the Panel meeting, and is essential if the RAP member is invited to join a Fellowship or Lectureship interview panel.
- All RAP members who have been allocated applications for a funding meeting should ensure they attend the meeting. Attendance comprises of submitting scores and written review comments in advance of the meeting and attending in person for the entire meeting duration. Should circumstances change and a Panel member is no longer able to attend the meeting they should let the SA research team know as soon as is possible.

#### 3.4.1 Adjudication of Project Grants

- At the adjudication panel meeting, the two Lead reviewers will be invited by the Chair of the panel to summarise their review of an application as well as provide a summary of the external reviewer comments and scores. This should be a short summary of no more than 5 minutes (or a time specified by the Chair), indicating the overall opinion as a summary of the written comments previously provided.

- The Chair will then invite the Stroke Voices in Research representative to comment on the application as outlined in section 4 below.
- Other panel members will then be invited to add any further comments if they have read the application. Panel members may not comment upon, or score any application which they have not read in advance of the meeting.
- Lead reviewers, the lead Stroke Voices in Research reviewer, and other panel members who have read the application shall provide a view on whether or not each application should be funded during the discussion of each application.
- The Chair of the panel will ensure that all opinions are considered whilst keeping the meeting to time.
- The Chair will summarise the scientific and lay reviewer contributions and will gain a consensus from the Panel on the fundability of each application based on the discussion that has taken place.
- In the final discussion the Chair will gain a consensus on ranking the applications which have previously been considered fundable by the Panel. Each member of the panel will be asked to rank the applications considered funding based on their preference for funding (except for applications where they have a Conflict of Interest).
- In the event that an application is potentially fundable pending significant amendments, the panel may advise that an applicant take on board recommendations and re-submit the application in future. In this instance, the Lead panel members for that application must agree on the feedback in the meeting, or approve comments from Stroke Association research staff via email after the meeting.
- Where re-submitted applications are discussed in a meeting, the Panel must consider previous feedback and recommendations provided to the applicant by reviewers.
- In the event that the Panel requests small changes or the clarification/provision of further information, an applicant may be offered a Conditional Award. Where a Conditional Award is recommended by the panel, the response or resubmission from the applicants must be approved by two or more panel members who took this decision in the meeting. The award cannot be made until the resubmission or response to the panel's request has been received and approved.

- Panel members may be asked by the Chair or Stroke Association research staff to clarify or repeat a point during, or sometimes after, the meeting in order to ensure adequate records of decision-making processes and feedback for applicants. The meeting may be recorded to assist with this, and in this instance the permission of all Panel members present will always be sought at the start of the meeting.
- The Panel's final ranking for each grant application shall be duly recorded for each meeting, and will be used to select awards for funding at the end of the meeting.

### 3.4.2 Adjudication of Fellowship and Lectureship Awards

- Panel members will be asked to review applications prior to shortlisting, at the same time as external peer review is taking place.
- Applications will be shortlisted by the Chair of the interview Panel based on external peer review and Panel member reviews and scores.
- Where applications are removed following shortlisting, invited Panel members may be asked to step down should none of their assigned applications progress to interview.
- No Stroke Voices in Research scores or comments will be used for these meetings.
- Interview Panel members must ensure they have read all applications and are available to fully participate in the selection process of suitable candidates for an award.
- Interview Panel members must submit review comments and scores in advance of shortlisting, within a timeframe as requested by Stroke Association research staff and may be asked to participate in a teleconference to discuss their scores and agree on short-list with other members of the interview Panel.
- Interview Panel members must agree to follow any protocol laid out for the interview by the Chair or the Stroke Association research staff, and will agree the areas they will lead questions upon.
- After the interviews the panel members must discuss candidates interviewed, and agree with the rest of the panel the candidates appropriate for funding.

Where limited funds are available, this will involve agreeing the highest scoring and highest performing candidates with other panel members before leaving the meeting.

### 3.4.3 Role and Responsibilities of the Panel Chair

An independent Chair of each Panel will be appointed following submission of applications. The Chair must be impartial and independent, and not conflicted with any of the applications under review.

The panel Chair shall not score grant applications. If the Chair is to be absent for all or part of a funding or interview panel meeting, a Vice or Acting Chair will be appointed in advance of the meeting.

The Chair has responsibility for the operation and output of the Panel. The role of Chair is to ensure the following practices are followed:

- Panel members act appropriately and impartially throughout the meeting.
- Adherence to and active implementation of the Stroke Association's Confidentiality and Conflicts of Interest Policy.
- Panel members abide by this Code of Practice for the duration of any adjudication of awards process.
- The full range of opinion is taken into account.
- Sufficient explanation is provided from Panel members for applications not selected for funding, in order to provide adequate feedback to the applicant(s).
- Every member of the Panel has the opportunity to be heard and no opinion is ignored.
- The views of Stroke Voices in Research representatives are valued as equal to those of RAP Panel members, and are part of the final funding decisions.
- Any significant diversity of opinion is fully explored and discussed, and even in cases where it cannot be resolved, it should be accurately recorded.
- The proceedings of the panel meeting are accurately minuted to provide a clear and detailed record of the meeting and the decisions made.

## 4. Role of Stroke Voices in Research

The Stroke Association is committed to involving people affected by stroke (stroke survivors, carers and family members) in all of its work. People affected by stroke are involved in the Stroke Association's research, and in recommending what research the charity funds, through Stroke Voices in Research (SViR), the Stroke Association's Patient and Public Involvement in research (PPI) group.

SViR are currently only involved in review and adjudication of Project Grants

SViR members are asked to review each application that has been shortlisted following external peer review. Reviewers are asked to answer a number of questions and provide comments. Each reviewer is asked to score applications from 1-6 (1: unsuitable for funding, 6: funding recommended). The average score is calculated for each application and comments are compiled.

Up to four SViR members will be invited to attend panel meetings – there will be no fewer than two SViR members at each eligible panel meeting. Each SViR member will be assigned as the Lead for a number of the applications to be discussed during the meeting. It will be the responsibility of the Lead to present the views of other SViR members who reviewed the application.

When the Lead panel members for each application have presented the scientific/clinical view of the application, the Panel Chair will invite the SViR Lead to present the view of people affected by stroke on the application. SViR members will also have the opportunity to pose questions to the panel members for the purposes of clarity and further understanding.

SViR panel members will be part of discussions on fundability and ranking of each application, and their views and opinions will be considered as equal to those of other Panel members.

SViR Panel members will be asked for approval of any conditional awards along with RAP Panel members.

## ANNEXE 1

### TERMS OF REFERENCE OF RAP

#### 1. **Background & Purpose**

The Stroke Association makes research awards under multiple programmes. Each programme requires an adjudication panel of relevant experts to make funding recommendations. The adjudication panels are set out in section 5 below.

The panels will be convened as required from a pool of experts known as the Research Awards Pool (RAP). The RAP is a wide pool of individuals as selected by the Stroke Association Research team with expertise relevant to each of the adjudication panels. RAP members selected for an adjudication panel will perform operational activities in accordance with the Code of Practice for RAP. RAP members will be selected for an adjudication panel where they have no or a minimal conflict of interest.

The adjudication panels will recommend funding awards having assessed, discussed and ranked applications in order of quality and eligibility for funding based on criteria set out in the review forms or other documentation provided by the Research team and/or the panel Chair.

#### 2. **RAP Membership and Terms of Office**

##### **Terms of Office**

All members are appointed for a term of three years, extendable by a maximum one further term. Retiring members may be reselected after a period of three years.

##### **Secretary**

The secretary will be the Head of Research Awards or a designated member of the Research Awards team

##### **Members appointed by**

RAP members are appointed by the research awards team

##### **Membership includes**

RAP membership will include: clinicians, methodologists, statisticians, trialists, allied health professionals, nurses and other expertise as necessary and appropriate to review the content of the applications in each awards round.

**Additional/temporary membership**

Where the research team identifies the need for expertise not available in the RAP, additional/temporary Panel members may be invited.

**Maximum membership**

No maximum

**Minimum membership**

15 members

**5. Adjudication Panels**

RAP members will be selected for the following award adjudication panels:

- Postgraduate Fellowships
- Postdoctoral Fellowships
- Lectureships
- Project Grants (Pre-Clinical, Acute Care and Prevention)
- Project Grants (Rehabilitation and Long Term Care)
- Co-option onto adjudication panels or committees of funding partners

Adjudication panels are convened as needed for each funding round to consider relevant grant applications. Research Awards are recommended to the Stroke Association's Financial Performance Committee in accordance with the Stroke Association's governance procedures.

## ANNEXE 2

### Confidentiality and Conflicts of Interest Policy for Research Awards Pool (RAP) Panel members

All members of the RAP must sign and adhere to this Confidentiality and Conflicts of Interest Policy. We expect RAP members to act with honesty and professional integrity to support our rigorous and impartial peer review process.

- All application forms, peer reviews, Panel member comments and other documents, materials and associated information and scores made available to Panel members during the awards adjudication process must be treated as strictly confidential and shall not be shared, disclosed to or discussed with any other parties.
- The names of any applicants and external referees are strictly confidential and should not be discussed with persons outside of the adjudication process.
- Panel members shall declare any known Conflicts of Interest (definition below) to Stroke Association research staff in advance of the grant application deadline by emailing [research@stroke.org.uk](mailto:research@stroke.org.uk).
- Once in receipt of applications and review documents, Panel members must take responsibility to disclose any additional Conflicts of Interest or potential Conflicts of Interest (not identified by Stroke Association research staff) as soon as such conflict of interest becomes known.
- Any declaration of interest in a grant application by an RAP member shall be duly recorded in the minutes and records of the relevant Panel meeting.
- Discussions of an application between members of the Panel which occur outside of the meeting should be declared to the Chair.
- Discussion of applications with other Panel members may only take place during the designated meeting time as permitted by the Chair of the meeting, until the close of such meeting.
- No further discussion or debate of individual applications shall be entered into with other Panel members, Stroke Association research staff or any other external party once the Chair of the Panel has closed the meeting.

- All comments provided during the Panel meeting shall be verified with Stroke Association research staff upon request for the purpose of providing feedback to the applicants.
- Under no circumstances should any personal use be made of any information, documents and other materials made available as part of the award adjudication process.

### **Definition of a Conflict of Interest:**

The Stroke Association considers a Panel member to have a Conflict of Interest under the following circumstances:

- The Panel member is a named party on the grant application, either as applicant, co-applicant, collaborator, reference or named on a support letter, nominating manager, supervisor or the Head of Department.
- The Panel member has a recent collaboration with any of the grant applicants. This includes the following: a grant application, a jointly funded grant, publication in the same field as the proposal or any other active working collaboration in stroke research or the subject of the application in question during the last five years.
- The Panel member has a personal relationship with any of the named parties on a grant application, such as partner, family member or close friendship.
- The Panel member is at the same Research Institute as the lead applicant or, co-applicant of the grant application.
- The Panel member is in the same research department as a named collaborator or referee on an application.

A declaration of a Conflict of Interest will be verified by the Research team at the Stroke Association, and if confirmed, the appropriate management of this Conflict of Interest will follow.

The Head of Research Awards will resolve and make the final decision over any disagreement or dispute related to the definition and presence of a Conflict of Interest.

### **Acceptance**

I confirm I agree to abide by this Code of Practice and Confidentiality and Conflicts of Interest Policy for the Research Awards Pool.

Position and Research Institute.....

Print Name.....

Signed.....

Date.....