

Leukaemia UK's Independent Scientific and Medical Panel Conflict of Interest Policy

Overview

Leukaemia UK's Conflict of Interest policy relates to peer reviewers and any Scientific and Medical Panel or review committee set up to assess proposals for funding. Members of Leukaemia UK's Board of Trustees adhere to the same principles, which are embodied in the governance of the charity. A register of interests is kept and signed by all those concerned; it is updated annually and/or more regularly, as required. The matter of declaration of interests is a standing item on the agenda of every relevant meeting of Trustees and also of their scientific advisers.

The purpose of this document is to minimise the potential for conflicts of interest arising and to protect the charity and those who work for it from any perception, real or otherwise, that the external interests and affiliations of its committee members might interfere with their ability to work towards the pursuit of the charity's objectives.

Peer review of funding applications is carried out by members of Leukaemia UK's Independent Scientific and Medical Panel in accordance with approved terms of reference for the panel and a code of conduct that states how panel members should behave, including declaring vested interests.

Peer review process

Leukaemia UK aims to ensure that all research proposals are assessed impartially and objectively. All applications are reviewed by an external independent panel of scientific experts, consisting of at least three members. As part of its commitment to the impartiality and integrity of the review process Leukaemia UK has set down a code of conduct, as listed below.

If Leukaemia UK has reason to believe that a member of the review panel has breached the code of conduct they may be asked to step down as a panel member.

Code of conduct

As a condition of participation reviewers agree that documents and correspondence relating to applications for funds and funding are strictly confidential and therefore:

- Should not be discussed with anyone else during review, or either before or after the review/decision meeting. No discussion should occur between panel members except during the decision meeting.
- Should a reviewer have a vested interest (organisational, collaborative, personal or other) in the outcome of a grant application they should declare it. The reviewer must not assess the application or take part in any discussions with regard to a funding decision.
- Feedback to candidates (successful or unsuccessful) will be provided by Leukaemia UK only to avoid confusion. Scientific and Medical Panel members should not, under any circumstances, provide feedback directly to the candidate.
- Should not be disseminated.
- Any printouts should be kept secure and disposed of securely after the decision has been reached.
- Reviewers have a right to expect that their comments will be treated in confidence by both Leukaemia UK staff and other members of the review panel.
- Grant applicants will receive anonymised feedback.
- While membership of Leukaemia UK's Scientific and Medical Panel will be publicly available, the identity of reviewers in relation to specific grants will be kept confidential.

Managing conflicts of interest

- If a Scientific and Medical Panel member is an applicant or co-applicant on a grant application, he or she must declare an interest and withdraw from any consideration of that application. That member will not receive documents relating to the application. The member must retire from the meeting when the application is discussed. This also applies to trustees should they serve as panel members and are applicants for funding.
- If the Chair of the Scientific and Medical Panel is an applicant or co-applicant on a funding proposal, he or she must declare a vested interest and should not be involved in the review meetings and discussions. A vice chair will be appointed to chair the meeting to prevent any impartiality and undue influence.

- Scientific and Medical Panel members who could be deemed to be a direct competitor of an applicant (e.g. they are funded or applying for funding on a similar project to the funding proposal under discussion) or have collaborated or published with the proposed applicant within the past three years, or work in the same institution, should declare a vested interest. He or she may request to withdraw from any discussions or meetings for that particular application, or may be allowed to stay, but not vote on the outcome of the application.

Resolving conflicts of interest

- Leukaemia UK recognises that the majority of conflicts or potential conflicts will relate to a particular issue and as such will not present any long term restrictions on an individual's ability to work for the charity or to sit on its funding review committees.
- In a small number of cases, major conflicts of interest may arise which compromise an individual's ability to continue in their position within Leukaemia UK. Where such a situation relates to a member of the Scientific and Medical Panel, the matter will be discussed by the Chair of the panel together with a Leukaemia UK staff member. In cases where agreement cannot be reached through this means, the case will be referred to the Scientific and Medical Panel as a whole, whose decision should be taken as final.
- In cases where an individual is uncertain as to whether a conflict of interest exists or not, they should report this to Leukaemia UK. Leukaemia UK shall discuss the matter with the individual as necessary and report to the Chair, who will decide on a course of action.
- If an individual is concerned about a possible conflict of interest involving another member of the review committee, then he or she should raise the matter with the Chair of the Scientific and Medical Panel.

Updating the policy

Leukaemia UK will endeavour to review this policy, if necessary, every two years in consultation with the Board of Trustees that approves the policy.