EPILEPSY RESEARCH INSTITUTE UK

SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

Context

The Epilepsy Research Institute serves as the central hub for the epilepsy research community. Our mission is to radically advance research into epilepsy for the 1 in 100 people living with the condition. You can read more about our strategy here.

Vision: A life free from epilepsy

Mission: To radically advance research into epilepsy

Values:

Integrity	We are open and transparent about all aspects of our work and employ the utmost candour in our focus to *radically advance research into epilepsy.*
Collaborative	We appreciate that it is only by working together we will achieve our vision of *a life free from epilepsy.* Our teamwork and partnerships reflect our integrity, professional approach, and trustworthiness.
Honesty	We expect a high standard of excellence, supporting the best sciences with our systematic and rigorous approach to all of our work.
Innovative	We are courageous and ambitious to enable ground-breaking research and welcome innovation and creative ideas.
Diversity & Inclusion	We are respectful of all the people working with, and for us, including people living with epilepsy, researchers, collaborators, and our supporters, fostering teams across diverse cultures and backgrounds and valuing their views and input.

Purpose and scope of the Scientific Advisory Committee
The Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) will bring broad strategic perspective and expertise to support the development and delivery of the Institute's strategic vision, mission and priorities. The SAC will provide the following to the Institute's Board of Trustees:

1) Recommendations for funding, based on a rigorous process of peer-review and Scientific Advisory Committee meetings. The recommendations are presented by the Chair of the SAC to the Board of Trustees, who then make the final funding decisions.
2) Analysis and monitoring of the impact and success of ongoing funded research, and any areas of concern.
3) Advice on policies relating to research funding.
4) Prioritise areas for future rounds, opportunities for partnerships and investments for the Trustees consideration.
5) Recommendations for creating a thriving and sustainable research community that seizes opportunities within the Institute and international contexts.

Membership
The Scientific Advisory Committee is made up of a non-executive Chair, a vice-chair and up to 15 members. Membership will reflect broad scientific expertise and a diversity of talent across the Institute's priorities and portfolio.

Additional experts may be invited to participate as required for specific activities, topics, or meetings. Members from the Epilepsy Research Institute's Research team will also attend the meetings to provide secretariat support.

Conflicts of Interest
A conflict of interest is defined as any financial, personal, professional, or institutional interest or connection which may, if undeclared, introduce bias or inappropriate influence in the peer review or assessment of applications and reports, funding recommendations, or scientific advice given to the Epilepsy Research Institute.

It is the responsibility of each member to decide whether a conflict of interest could exist and, if so, to declare the conflict. If in any doubt when deciding on such matters, individuals should err on the side of caution, declaring an interest if there is any possibility that a conflict of interest may exist.

If an SAC member is an applicant or co-applicant on a proposal submitted to the Institute, they will not be permitted to see, review, or score any applications within that funding stream and would be excluded from all discussions about the relevant funding stream. If the Chair is applying for funding, they will be excluded from all SAC activity for that year and the vice chair will take over proceedings.

If an SAC member works in the same institution as an applicant on a proposal submitted to the Institute, they will not be permitted to see, review or score that application. They will also be asked to leave the room whilst this application is being discussed.

Other examples of conflicts:

- Financial conflict: anyone who has a direct or indirect financial interest with a grant application submitted to the Institute.
- Collaborator(s) conflict: anyone listed as a collaborator or having collaborated within the last five years with a main applicant and/or co-applicant(s) on research publications or grant applications submitted to the Institute or other funder.

The above list is not exhaustive and other conflicts may arise. Conflicts will be considered by the SAC Chair, Vice Chair and the Institute's Director/Head of Research to decide a suitable course of action. Dependent on the type of conflict, a conflicted individual may:

- Be asked to comment on the application and take part in discussions, but not score an application.
- Not have access to a certain application and withdraw from the relevant part of the meeting.
- Withdraw from the entire meeting/call round.

If a member of the SAC is approached by an applicant for advice on an application, the member may provide general advice but must disclose this fact to the Institute. The individual may be excluded from all or part of the meeting at which the application is considered.

Code of conduct
This section sets out the standards and proper practices for members of the SAC, so that members clearly know what is expected in their role.

General

- To be fully committed to the values, mission, and purpose of the Institute and to champion these.
- To act reasonably and prudently in all matters relating to their role on the SAC.
- To read and abide by any relevant policies and procedures of the Institute.
- To be an active member of the SAC and engage in all SAC activities as fully as possible.
- To accept the duty of confidentiality and to delete all applications and related documents immediately after use for the intended purposes.
- To use the Institute's resources responsibly, and when claiming expenses, to do so in line with the expense policy.

Managing interests

- Members will not gain materially or financially from their involvement with the Institute.
- To accept the duty to act in the best interests of the Institute and not as a representative of any group – considering what is best for the Institute and its beneficiaries.

- To not take part in any activity that directly conflicts with the objectives or might damage the reputation of the Institute.

Review of research grant applications and SAC meetings

- To take an active role in reviewing research grant applications at all stages and adhere to the review timelines.
- To attend meetings as appropriate to discuss research grant applications or give apologies.
- To prepare fully for meetings by reading papers, thinking through issues and completing tasks assigned, and to actively engage in discussion, debate, and scoring prior to and during meetings.
- To contribute in a considered and constructive way, listening carefully, challenging sensitively, and take steps to mitigate unconscious bias.
- To always refer to/comment on reviewer comments with respect, understanding that they may be from a fellow SAC member.
- To act as a collective SAC to reach majority decisions.
- Feedback to candidates (successful or unsuccessful) will be provided by the Institute. External reviewers and review Panel members should not, under any circumstances, provide feedback directly to the candidate.
- To not input application contents into generative AI tools or use these tools for completion of reviews.

Appointment of members and terms of office

Members will normally be appointed for a 3-year period, with the option to extend by a further 2 years, by mutual agreement.

SAC members are appointed by the SAC Chair, or Vice Chair in their absence, taking account experience, knowledge gaps, and best practice in equality, diversity and inclusion.

Members of the SAC are required to provide impartial advice, so cannot be appointed to other roles within the Institute, such as Theme Leads.

The Chair of the SAC is selected through an election process. SAC members nominate themselves to be considered as Chair and provide a pitching document. SAC members will then vote for their preferred Chair. Upon appointment, the Chair or Vice Chair's term of office is 'reset'. However, no member can serve on the SAC for more than 9 years at a time.

The Institute reserves the right to revoke the appointment of any individual on the SAC whose conduct or behaviour is deemed inconsistent with its values, standards, and expectations.

Ways of working

The SAC will meet three times a year in a regular programme. Additional meetings may be organised when required.

Members will commit time to attend regular meetings, read meeting papers, consider issues outside of meetings, and represent the Institute. The total time commitment for SAC members is expected to be up to 8 days each year.

The quorum for a SAC meeting is at least half the number of its members one of whom must be the Chair and/or Vice Chair. Members can be deemed to be in attendance via live tele or video conferencing as appropriate. Proceedings will not have any effect for any part or whole of a meeting that was not quorate.

Membership of the SAC is undertaken on a voluntary basis without remuneration for time. The Institute will cover travel, accommodation and subsistence expenses occurred when taking part in SAC activities, in line with the expenses policy.

All application information shared with SAC members is strictly confidential and must not be disclosed or discussed with anyone outside of SAC. All communications with grant applicants must be conducted by the

Epilepsy Research Institute, this includes the dissemination of feedback and discussions relating to further applications.

Reporting & engagement

To facilitate reporting and engagement with the Institute's Board of Trustees, the SAC Chair will attend Board meetings as an observer to deliver updates and recommendations on behalf of the SAC as required.

The Institute's Research team will facilitate business planning and engagement between the SAC, the Board of Trustees and the Theme Leads. From time to time the SAC will also engage with other Institute staff responsible for relevant business areas, such as policies, budgets and investments.

This Terms of Reference document will be reviewed regularly, taking into account the Institute's governance, policy, strategy, vision, mission, priorities and funding opportunities.