



Conflict of Interest Policy for RESCOM

MANAGING CONFLICTS OF INTEREST OR POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

October 2019

Policy aims and objectives

The TSA is a registered Charity number 1039549 (England & Wales) SC042780 (Scotland). TSA's RESCOM must act in the best interests of the Charity when advising the Board on all research-associated matters.

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 RESCOM members might interfere with their ability to work towards the furtherance of the charity's objectives.

The existence of such a policy is in accordance with the membership conditions of the Association of Medical Research Charities, of which TSA is a member, and the stipulations stated within this policy are derived directly from the AMRC's recommendations for such a policy from April 2008 onwards. This policy should be adhered to in conjunction with the organisation conflict of interest policy.

Discussion of proposals

- a) Details of applications, meeting papers and related correspondence and the names of peer reviewers and lay reviewers are strictly confidential and should not be discussed with persons outside the review process.
- b) Discussions of a proposal between members of the funding committee that take place outside of a RESCOM meeting or other similar discussion, and which are not pre-arranged as part of the review process, should be declared to the Chair of RESCOM and/or the Research team.
- c) If a committee member is approached by an applicant for technical advice on an application prior to submission then he or she may provide advice but must report this to the Chair and Research team. They may subsequently be asked by the Chair to absent themselves from a review or discussion of the application concerned.

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d) If the advice sought by an applicant is on administrative grounds or to seek information on the status of their proposal, the committee member should refer the applicant to the relevant member of the charity's staff.

Resolution of conflicts of interest

a) The Charity recognises that the majority of conflicts arising are unlikely to present any long-term restrictions on an individual's ability to work for the charity or to sit on its committees.

b) In a small number of cases, major conflicts of interest may arise which compromise an individual's ability to continue in their position within the charity. Where such a situation relates to a member of a funding committee, the matter will be discussed by the Chair of RESCOM together with members of the Research team. In cases where agreement cannot be reached through this means, the case will be referred to the Chief Executive who will make a recommendation to the Board of Trustees regarding the action that should be taken, and the decision of Board should be taken as final.

c) Members of funding committee are expected to declare any potential conflicts of interest relating to individual funding decisions to the committee secretariat before the meeting wherein they will be discussed, or during the meeting as soon as the existence of a conflict becomes apparent. The Chair will then make a decision, having regard to paragraphs d) and e).

d) Automatic exclusion from participation in a funding decision

An individual should be automatically excluded from participation in a funding decision in cases where that individual has a direct interest in the funding proposal under discussion. A direct interest applies to any of the following situations:

- The individual concerned is an applicant, co-applicant or collaborator on the funding proposal
- The individual concerned has a personal or working relationship with an applicant, co-applicant or collaborator on the funding proposal
- A relative¹ of the individual is an applicant, co-applicant or collaborator on the funding proposal

¹ For the purposes of this document, 'relative' includes, but is not limited to, a spouse (current or past), children, siblings and parents.



- An applicant, co-applicant or collaborator on the proposal is a business partner of the individual
- An applicant, co-applicant or collaborator on the proposal is a member or employee of the same institution² as the individual concerned.

Where an individual is excluded from a funding decision on this basis, he or she should absent themselves from the meeting while the proposal concerned is being discussed. He or she should not receive the application itself or any related papers, including the review forms from the peer reviewers and lay reviewers.

If there are cases where the Chair has a direct interest in the funding proposal under discussion, they should absent themselves from the meeting and the delegate the responsibility to another member of the committee (likely the lead reviewer for the specific funding proposal) will chair the discussion for that proposal.

e) **Exclusion at the charity's discretion**

In certain situations, an individual may be excluded from discussion of a proposal at the discretion of the charity. Examples of such situations include:

- The individual concerned can be seen as a direct competitor of the applicant i.e. they are currently being funded or are currently applying for funding on a project of a similar nature to the proposal under discussion, or are currently carrying out research in a similar area
- If the individual concerned has declared that they have acted as an external reviewer, or on a funding panel/committee, in respect of the proposal under discussion at a time when the proposal was being discussed by another funding body
- The individual has collaborated or published with the proposal applicant within the past three years
- The individual is aware of any other issue that might reasonably be expected to give rise to, or give rise to the perception of, a conflict of interest.

² For the purposes of this document, federated institutions (e.g. the University of Wales or the University of London) should not be regarded as a single institution.



In any of these cases, the particular situation will be discussed by the Chair, Research team and/or the Chief Executive, who will decide on one of the following options:

- The individual is allowed to participate fully in the funding decision
- The individual is allowed to discuss and vote on the proposal but may not present the proposal to the committee
- The individual may comment on the proposal but not take part in any funding decisions
- The individual absents himself from the meeting while the proposal is being discussed.

If an agreement cannot be reached between the Chair, Research team and/or Chief Executive, the individual must absent himself from proceedings while the proposal is being discussed.

f) In cases where an individual is uncertain as to whether a conflict of interest exists or not, they should report this to the committee secretariat. The secretariat shall discuss the matter with the individual as necessary and report to the Chair, who will make a decision with regard to the provisions of paragraphs 4 d) and e).

g) If an individual is concerned about a possible conflict of interest involving another member of RESCOM, then he or she should raise the matter with the Chair.

Updating the policy

The charity will endeavour to review this policy, if necessary, every two years, in consultation with the Board of Trustees.

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