

The Stroke Association Expert Reviewer Pool Terms of Reference

Part A: General

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Stroke Association launched its new five-year Research Strategy in November 2025. Through this strategy the aim is to accelerate discovery, grow capacity, drive innovation and close the gap between stroke research and everyday care. To support this, the Stroke Association has established an Expert Reviewer Pool, which is formed of scientific experts from all areas of stroke research.
- 1.2 This document outlines the Stroke Association's Terms of Reference for members of the Expert Reviewer Pool when participating in any review process linked to the charity's research funding programme.
- 1.3 These Terms of Reference should be read alongside the Expert Reviewer Pool Code of Practice (see Appendix A).

2. Purpose and scope

- 2.1 The purpose of the Expert Reviewer Pool is to be our expert, trusted independent source of scientific review, and to make funding recommendations for all research awards in the context of the Stroke Association's Research Strategy. Members of the Research Funding Review Panels for each funding scheme will be drawn from the Expert Reviewer Pool as required.
- 2.2 The current funding schemes are:
 - Postgraduate Fellowships
 - Postdoctoral Fellowships
 - Lectureships
 - Project Grants
 - Partnership awards (see section 9)

- 2.3 The Research Funding Review Panels will consider all applications received for research funding. For Project Grants they will consider Stage 1 outline proposals to decide which should proceed to the full application stage and Stage 2 full applications; for fellowships and lectureships they will shortlist candidates for interview.
- 2.4 Following a rigorous expert review process, managed by the Stroke Association Research Team, the Research Funding Review Panel will make recommendations on which applications should be funded, which are then approved by the Stroke Association Medical Director supported by Executive Director representation and the Associate Director of Systems Engagement.

3. Expert Reviewer Pool membership

3.1 Term of office

- 3.1.1 Expert Reviewer Pool members will be appointed either as:
 - a) A standing member for an initial term of three years, with an option to extend for one further term. An individual can serve a maximum of two consecutive terms (6 years) after which they will be asked to step down and cannot be re-invited for a period of 3 years;
 - b) An ad hoc member invited for a specific call according to the range of grant applications to be considered in a particular funding round.
- 3.1.2 The Research Team will monitor the frequency and duration of expert reviewer service to ensure rotation and promote diversity within the Expert Reviewer Pool over time.
- 3.1.3 An Expert Reviewer Pool member may resign at any time, without requirement for advance notice, by informing the Stroke Association Research Team in writing.
- 3.1.4 Individuals who fail to perform the duties required of Expert Reviewer Pool members to the expected standards will be removed from the Pool. These decisions will be made by the Stroke Association Medical Director and Associate Director for Systems Engagement supported by the Stroke Association Research Team.

3.2 Composition

- 3.2.1 Membership will include experts in fields relevant to the activity and other specialisations including health care professionals, policy, public-sector and industry as appropriate.
- 3.2.2 In accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and the principles of the Public Sector Equality Duty, the Expert Reviewer Pool will, where practicable, include members

representing a range of protected characteristics and professional backgrounds to ensure fair and inclusive decision-making. The balance between protected characteristics, scientific discipline and geographic representation of each Research Funding Review Panel will be considered annually by the Research Team.

3.3 Recruitment of Expert Reviewer Pool members

- 3.3.1 A call for Expressions of Interest in joining the inaugural Expert Reviewer Pool will be issued through the Stroke Association research newsletter, and any other appropriate channels. Applicants can also indicate if they wish to be considered for Chair of Research Funding Review Panel roles. When positions subsequently become vacant the call for Expressions of Interest will be re-opened.
- 3.3.2 The Stroke Association will assess Expressions of Interest and invite selected applicants to become members of the Expert Reviewer Pool.
- 3.3.3 Where gaps in specific research skill sets on the Expert Reviewer Pool are identified, for example in animal-based research, the Stroke Association may specifically approach relevant individuals for recruitment into the Pool.

Part B: Research Funding Review Panels

1. General

- 1.1 It is the responsibility of each Expert Reviewer Pool member to make themselves available to participate in at least one funding call per year. Participation comprises of submitting scores and written review comments in advance of the Research Funding Review Panel meeting and/or attending the meeting for the full duration.
- 1.2 The Research Funding Review Panels will vary in size according to the nature of the review expectation. The minimum membership for each Research Funding Review Panel is ten members including the Chair and Stroke Voices in Research members.

Members of the Research Funding Review Panels excepting the Chair will be selected from the Expert Reviewer Pool following submission of applications for the relevant funding scheme. The composition of each Research Funding Review Panel will be selected to ensure diversity, considering a range of reviewer backgrounds appropriate for the applications received, disciplines, career stages, and types of institution. Anticipated conflicts of interest, based on institution and named supervisors or co-applicants will also be taken into account.

- 1.3 The Stroke Association will abide by and apply the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) [principles of expert review](#) for our processes for awarding research funding.
- 1.4 It is an AMRC requirement that the names of grant assessment panel members are shared. Therefore, the names of Research Funding Review Panel members, and for scientific members a link to their details on their institution webpage, will be published on the Stroke Association website.

2. Recruitment of the Chairs of the Research Funding Review Panels

- 2.1 An independent Chair of each Research Funding Review Panel will be appointed following the consideration of Expressions of Interest to join the Expert Reviewer Pool (see Part A section 3.3.1). Chairs of Research Funding Review Panels will be appointed for a term of three years.
- 2.2 When the position of Chair becomes vacant, the Stroke Association will invite expressions of interest from the Expert Reviewer pool, which will then be assessed by the Stroke Association Research Team.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 The Research Funding Review Panel Chair

- 3.1.1 The Chair has responsibility for ensuring that:
- Conduct is of the highest standard, and Panel members act in accordance with these Terms of Reference and the Code of Practice.
 - Each Expert Reviewer Pool member requested to attend Research Funding Review Panel meetings has the opportunity to be heard and that no view is ignored or overlooked.
 - The views of the Stroke Voices in Research representatives are appropriately taken into account, and that any of the queries or concerns they raise are suitably acknowledged and addressed.
 - The full range of scientific and lay opinion, including unorthodox and contrary views, is taken into account.
 - Any significant diversity of opinion among Research Funding Review Panel members is fully explored and discussed and if it cannot be reconciled is accurately reflected in the notes of the meeting.
 - Sufficient explanation is provided from Panel members for applications not selected for funding, in order to provide adequate feedback to the applicant(s).

- The notes produced by the Research Team are an accurate reflection of the discussion at the meeting and provide a clear audit trail of the decision-making process.
- 3.1.2 If the Chair is to be absent for all or part of a funding or interview panel meeting, a Vice-Chair will be appointed in advance of the meeting.

3.2 Role of Stroke Voices in Research

- 3.2.1 The Stroke Association is committed to involving people affected by stroke (stroke survivors, carers and family members) in all 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, the Stroke Association's Patient and Public Involvement in research (PPI) group.
- 3.2.2 At least two Stroke Voices in Research members will be invited to attend Research Funding Review Panel meetings. Each Stroke Voices in Research member will be assigned as the Lead for a number of the applications to be discussed during the meeting.
- 3.2.3 Stroke Voices in Research Panel members will be part of discussions on fundability and scoring of each application, and their views and opinions will be considered as equal to those of other Panel members.

3.3 Research Funding Review Panel scientific members

- 3.3.1 Research Funding Review Panel scientific members will be expected to review individual grant applications (outline proposal and/or full applications) and provide written comments. They may also be asked to attend Panel meetings or interviews, and to take an active role in discussions on each application and provide feedback for applicants.
- 3.3.2 Scientific members must consider the views of people affected by stroke, as reported by the Stroke Voices in Research reviewers, in all discussions about research award applications.

4. Governance and accountability

4.1 Ratification

- 4.1.1 Research Awards recommended for funding will be discussed in a meeting chaired by the Stroke Association Medical Director supported by Executive Director representation and the Associate Director of Systems Engagement. Funding decisions will be made in accordance with the Stroke Association's Research Award Governance Policy.

4.2 Animal Research

- 4.2.1 The Stroke Association will fund proposals that include research with animals **only** where there is no alternative and where they fully comply with the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. We support [AMRC's statement on the use of animals in research](#).
- 4.2.2 Research Funding Review Panels must give careful consideration, during expert review, only to recommend for funding proposals that support the guiding principles of the 3Rs (refine, reduce and replace) for the ethical use of animals in research. Please see our policy on using animals in research for further details: <https://www.stroke.org.uk/about-us/our-policy-positions/research-policies/animal-research>

5. Meetings and operations

5.1 Quorum

- 5.1.1 A minimum of five members of each Research Funding Review Panel, inclusive of the Chair, must be in attendance at any given meeting, and eligible to participate in scoring, and shall form the quorum for any funding recommendations. Quorum must be maintained throughout the duration of the meeting.

5.2 Frequency of meetings

- 5.2.1 Each Research Funding Review Panel shall normally meet once a year to consider research award applications. The meetings will usually be held online, although in-person meetings may, in some cases, be required.
- 5.2.2 Dates for Research Funding Review Panel meetings will be set as far in advance as possible. This includes the periods for reviewing grant applications and attending meetings or interviews.

5.3 Agenda and notes

- 5.3.1 The agenda for a meeting, all applications, completed reviews, and other supporting documents will be available at least two weeks in advance. All grant applications that Research Funding Review Panel members have been requested to review will be available to download from the Stroke Association's online grants application system (<https://strokeassociation.flexigrant.com>).
- 5.3.2 Panel members should notify the Stroke Association Research Team 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.

- 5.3.3 In the absence of the appointed Chair or Vice-Chair, an alternate Chair will be elected for the duration of the meeting.

5.4 Secretary to the Panel

- 5.4.1 The Research Team at the Stroke Association shall provide secretariat support to the Research Funding Review Panel. This will include but not be limited to managing conflicts, preparation of accurate notes of the meeting and applicant feedback.
- 5.4.2 The Secretary will be a non-voting member of the Research Funding Review Panel.

6. Decision-making process

6.1 Triage stage

- 6.1.1 An initial eligibility check will be completed by the Stroke Association Research Team prior to an application being circulated to the Research Funding Review Panel membership, including the completeness of the application, and supporting documents.

6.2 Shortlisting stage

- 6.2.1 Members of the Research Funding Review Panel shall be invited to score grant applications assigned to them by the Stroke Association Research Team. Each application will receive at least two in-depth reviews and scores that will be submitted by expert reviewers. Applications will be assigned to scientific Panel members based on their expertise and experience; however, on occasion members may be asked to look at proposals outside of their immediate area of expertise.
- 6.2.2 Written comments for each assigned application should be submitted independently using the online grants management system (Flexigrant) alongside the score within a pre-defined time period.
- 6.2.3 The scoring criteria for scientific reviewers are set out in Appendix B. The mean average percentage score from all reviewers is calculated for each application and comments are compiled.
- 6.2.4 The ranking using the mean average scores is considered by the Chair of the relevant Research Funding Review Panel to determine which applications should proceed to interview (for fellowships and lectureships) and to the full application stage (for project grants) within the time period specified by Stroke Association.

- 6.2.5 Depending upon the number of applications received and their disciplinary background not all shortlisting expert reviewers will be required to attend Research Funding Review Panel meetings for full applications or interview panels. Once the shortlisting stage has concluded the Research Team will contact those Research Funding Review Panel members selected to be part of a Funding/Interview Panel.
- 6.2.6 All Research Funding Review Panel members who have been invited to take part of a Funding/Interview Panel should ensure they attend the Panel meeting (unless otherwise agreed in advance of the meeting with the Research Team at the Stroke Association). This is to ensure a fair assessment process for all applications, and that quoracy is maintained at all times during the meeting.

6.3 Panel meetings - Project grants

- 6.3.1 Research Funding Review Panel meeting members should read all applications under consideration at the Panel meeting, not just the proposals to which they have been assigned to assess. This allows for a richer and more balanced discussion to take place at the Panel meeting.
- 6.3.2 At the Research Funding Review Panel meeting, the 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 expert reviewer comments and scores. Conflicted Panel members will withdraw at this point.
- 6.3.3 The Chair will then invite the Stroke Voices in Research Lead to present the view of people affected by stroke on the application. Stroke Voices in Research members will also have the opportunity to pose questions to the Panel members for the purposes of clarity and further understanding. The discussions will then be opened up to other Panel members.
- 6.3.4 The Chair will facilitate the voting process by asking members to indicate whether an application should be funded and to submit scores based on the discussion that has taken place. The highest mean score will inform the outcome decision. If there is no clear majority for a specific outcome, the Chair will endeavour to achieve a consensus in the decision outcome by attempting to address the points raised. The Panel's final ranking will be used to recommend awards for funding at the end of the meeting.
- 6.3.5 In the event that the Panel requests small changes or the clarification/provision of further information, an applicant may be offered a Conditional Award. The applicant will be responsible for responding to and implementing, where applicable, the Panel's conditions. The response or resubmission from the applicant(s) must be approved by the Chair and lead scientific Panel members.

6.4 Interview Panel - Fellowships and Lectureships

- 6.4.1 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.
- 6.4.2 Interview Panel members must agree to follow any protocol laid out for the interview by the Stroke Association Research Team and will agree the areas they will lead questions upon. Panel members should withdraw from interviews and subsequent discussions where they have a conflict of interest.
- 6.4.3 After the interviews the Panel members should discuss candidates interviewed and agree with the rest of the Panel the candidates recommended for funding.

7 Funding decisions

7.1 Recording and communicating decisions

- 7.1.1 Recommendations will be formally recorded in the notes of each Research Funding Review Panel meeting.
- 7.1.2 When reporting the outcome of funding rounds, care must be taken to protect confidentiality. This means not disclosing the contributions of individual Research Funding Review Panel members during discussions, upholding the principle that decisions are the collective responsibility of the whole Panel, and preserving the anonymity of all reviewers. Research Funding Review Panel members must also decline any requests for information or explanations about how a decision was reached.
- 7.1.3 Only authorised members of the Stroke Association Research Team may communicate funding recommendations.
- 7.1.4 Research Awards recommended for funding will be discussed in a meeting chaired by the Stroke Association Medical Director supported by Executive Director representation and the Associate Director of Systems Engagement. Funding decisions will be made in accordance with the Stroke Association's Research Award Governance Policy. Following approval, the Research Team will make the formal offer of a grant to applicants and will contact unsuccessful applicants.
- 7.1.5 Where applicants are not satisfied with a funding decision made by the Research Funding Review Panel, they can submit an appeal in writing to the Stroke Association Research Team setting out the grounds of the appeal. All appeals will be reviewed by the Chair of the Research Funding Review Panel and a Research Team manager, to ensure that assessment procedures were correctly followed.

- 7.1.6 The final funding decisions from each grant round will be circulated by email to all Research Funding Review Panel members once approved.
- 7.1.7 In the event that the Research Funding Review Panel requests small changes or the clarification/provision of further information, an applicant may be offered a Conditional Award. The applicant will be responsible for responding to and implementing, where applicable, the Panel's conditions. The response or resubmission from the applicant(s) must be approved by the Chair and lead scientific Panel members.

7.2 Feedback to applicants

- 7.2.1 Feedback will be provided to applicants in written format. This will include comments from reviewers (where applicable) and the Research Funding Review Panel. The Stroke Association will not release reviewers or Research Funding Review Panel members' names in connection with any specific comments that are released under the General Data and Protection Regulation (GDPR) without first obtaining permission to do so.

8. Confidentiality and Conflicts of Interest

8.1 Conflicts of Interest

- 8.1.1 All Research Funding Review Panel members, including ad hoc expert reviewers, must formally acknowledge that they have read and agreed to abide by the Conflict of Interest policy before they first review a funding application and following a break of more than two years from providing reviews for the Stroke Association.
- 8.1.2 In order to document their consideration of actual or potential conflicts of interest, all Research Funding Review Panel members will be asked to complete a Conflicts of Interest form in advance of considering and/or discussing any research proposal. The purpose of this is to ensure that members identify and declare any situation in which their personal or professional interests, or duties which they owe to another body, influence (or appear to influence) their decision making. The definition of a conflict of interest can be found in the [Confidentiality and Conflicts of Interest Policy](#) (Appendix C to this document).
- 8.1.3 Any potential conflicts of interest will be reviewed by the Research Team, and if confirmed, the appropriate management of this conflict of interest will follow.
- 8.1.4 Where a conflict of interest is confirmed, a Research Funding Review Panel member will not take part in the review process of the application, will not receive the scientific or lay reviews, and will leave the meeting or interview during any discussion relating to the application. It is the responsibility of the Chair to ensure that this procedure is followed.

- 8.1.5 If the Chair has a conflict of interest on an identified application, they will leave the meeting or interview whilst that application is being discussed, and the Vice-Chair will chair.
- 8.1.6 Where the Chair of a particular Research Funding Review Panel is named on a grant application for consideration by that Research Funding Review Panel, they should not be involved in selecting reviewers and will need to absent themselves from the whole meeting. A nominated Vice-Chair will chair the meeting instead. This applies regardless of the type of applicant they are listed as (e.g. lead or joint lead applicant, coinvestigator, collaborator etc).
- 8.1.7 The notes of a meeting will record decisions about conflicts of interests and any withdrawals for particular items.

8.2 Confidentiality

- 8.2.1 The Research Funding Review Panel application reviews, discussions, scores and decision making are confidential to allow free and transparent expression of opinions. Panel members must agree to treat as confidential all correspondence and documents sent by the Stroke Association in both electronic and printed format.
- 8.2.2 The Stroke Association Research Team should be notified of any possible breach of confidentiality as soon as possible.
- 8.2.3 Research Funding Review Panel members must not input any content from the Stroke Association funding applications or associated expert reviews into generative AI tools to develop or refine their review comments.
- 8.2.4 Panel members will not, without written consent from both the Stroke Association and the applicant, disclose the fact that an applicant has applied to the charity for support.
- 8.2.5 Grant applications, reviews and notes for the meeting must not be circulated or discussed by expert reviewers or Research Funding Review Panel members outside of the review process and should be kept secure and appropriately disposed of immediately after the review process is complete (electronic files should be deleted securely and any paper copies shredded).
- 8.2.6 The Stroke Association will not use comments provided by Research Funding Review Panel members for any purpose other than is necessary for the funding allocation process and will not disclose them to any person except as is required for the funding process or as is required under the General Data and Protection Regulation (GDPR).

- 8.2.7 A list of Research Funding Review Panel members and professional affiliations (where applicable) is publicly available on the Stroke Association's website. Further details of Research Funding Review Panel members will only be provided following permission from the member.

9. Partnership awards

- 9.1 The Stroke Association is committed to maximising opportunities to work in partnership with other research funders to support initiatives that strengthen stroke research capacity, capability and delivery.
- 9.2 Where such opportunities arise, members of the Expert Reviewer Pool may be invited to contribute to a Partnership Award panel. These panels will be convened with an appointed Chair and will provide expert advice to inform funding recommendations to the Stroke Association.
- 9.3 Partnership Award panels will operate in accordance with the core principles and standards set out in these Terms of Reference, including those relating to independence, confidentiality, conflicts of interest and robust decision-making.
- 9.4 The specific processes and arrangements for Partnership Award panels may be adapted as appropriate to reflect the nature of the partnership, the requirements of co-funders and the scale and scope of the funding opportunity.

10. Expenses

- 10.1 Whilst meetings will be predominantly virtual using video conferencing facilities, the Stroke Association will reimburse Research Funding Review Panel members for any reasonable travel, accommodation and subsistence costs incurred from attending in-person Panel meetings.
- 10.2 Members are expected to take reasonable steps to minimise expenses - for example booking travel in advance to take advantage of discounted fares. The Stroke Association does not allow reimbursement for first or business class travel.

11. Review of these Terms of Reference

- 11.1 The Stroke Association will revise these Terms of reference on a regular basis and notify Expert Reviewer Pool members of amendments.

12. Agreement

I understand and hereby agree to adhere to the above terms of reference as a member of the Stroke Association Expert Reviewer Pool. I shall raise any potential conflicts of interest with the Research Team at the Stroke Association in advance of any meeting, and any confidential or sensitive information I am privy to through my involvement in the Research Funding Review Panel shall be treated confidentially and not discussed with non-Panel members or Panel members who are not privy to the same information.

Print Name.....

Position and Institution.....

Signed.....

Date.....

Document information

Version	1.0
Approved by	Associate Director of Systems Engagement
Last approved	June 2026
Next scheduled review date	June 2027
Document owner	Stroke Association Research Team
Schedule of amendments	n/a

Appendix A: Code of Practice for the Expert Reviewer Pool

1. The Expert Reviewer Pool is expected to ensure its recommendations have a direct benefit to people affected by stroke and make effective use of charitable funds.

2. The Expert Reviewer Pool will 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.

Members will act within research governance and research management best practice and be familiar with the AMRC's [Principles of Expert Review](#).

3. Expert Reviewer Pool members must at all times observe the highest standards of propriety involving impartiality, integrity and objectivity within the context of the seven Nolan Principles of Public Life (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life>).

4. Expert Reviewer Pool members have a duty to bring an independent judgement when reviewing grant applications at every stage of submission and on all issues considered at virtual and in-person Research Funding Review Panel meetings. On appointment, they must comply at all times with the Code of Practice, Terms of Reference for the Expert Reviewer Pool and Conflicts of Interest Policy, and act in good faith and in the best interests of the Stroke Association.

5. Unless specifically stated otherwise, Expert Reviewer Pool members are appointed as individuals to fulfil the duties of the Pool, not as representatives of their profession, employer or interest group, and have a duty to act in the interests of the Stroke Association. Where members declare an organisation's views rather than a personal view, they should make that clear at the time of declaring that view.

Members must manage conflicts of interest responsibly and effectively by self-declaration of any conflicts of interest, or potential conflicts of interest, throughout the award review process and at the earliest time this becomes known to them.

6. The Expert Reviewer Pool role should not be circumscribed by the expertise or perspective they were asked to bring to the grants review process. Members should regard themselves as free to question and comment on the information provided or the views expressed by any of the other members, notwithstanding that the views or information do not relate to their own area of expertise. If members believe the Expert Reviewer Pool's method of working is not rigorous or thorough enough, they have the right to ask that any remaining concerns they have be put on the record.

7. All Expert Reviewer Pool members should regard it as part of their role to:
 - examine and challenge, if necessary, the assumptions on which scientific advice is formulated and ask for explanations of any scientific terms and concepts which are not clear.
 - ensure that the Research Funding Review Panels have the opportunity to consider contrary scientific views and where appropriate the concerns and values of stakeholders before a decision is taken.
 - identify and take action to mitigate the impact of their own and other Expert Reviewer Pool members' unconscious / implicit bias when evaluating applications.
 - share in the general responsibility to consider the wider relevance of their decisions to the field of stroke research.
8. Expert Reviewer Pool members are expected to complete a survey in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion as requested by the Stroke Association.

Appendix B

Application assessment process for individual awards

The key task of the Research Funding Review Panel is to make recommendations for funding. Research Funding Review Panels can recommend that a proposal is:

- Funded
- Funded subject to the acceptance of conditions
- Rejected

1.1 Eligibility Checks

Eligibility checks are conducted by the Stroke Association Research Team to ensure that applications are complete and in scope of the funding call.

The purpose of the process is to reject applications that do not align with the Stroke Association's research priorities, as set out in the Guidance for Applicants for the relevant scheme, or where the lead applicant or organisation does not meet the eligibility requirements for the scheme.

Applications that have been flagged as potentially ineligible are reviewed by the Stroke Association's Senior Research Advisor, supported by the Associate Director of Systems Engagement and the Medical Director. The final decision will be made by the Medical Director.

1.2 Scrutiny notification and feedback

Generic feedback is provided for rejected applicants, with approval from the Panel Chair. Rejected applicants are notified as soon as possible by the Stroke Association Research Team. Applicants that are proceeding to the next stage of assessment do not receive a notification.

1.3 Reviewer Allocation

Following eligibility checks, all members of the Research Funding Review Panel must declare any conflicts of interest, in line with the Stroke Association's Conflict of Interest policy. Three Lead Reviewers are assigned to each application for in-depth reviews and scores. Lead Reviewers can be any expert Panel member (excluding the Chair). For the Panel meetings, the reviewers from the shortlisting stage are retained where possible, while Lead Reviewer 3 must be a lived-experience expert from the Stroke Voices in Research group.

1.4 Scoring criteria

Scoring range for individual awards

All proposals will be scored using the range **1-6**. In assigning individual scores Research Funding Review Panel members should take into account:

1) The person:

- Narrative CV - does the person have relevant research experience?
- Personal statement – does the person have suitable career aspirations and potential to become a stroke research leader in the future?
- Training and development plans (for the individual and team, where applicable) – are they appropriate for the proposed award?

2) The environment:

- Are the proposed supervisors and mentors (where applicable) likely to provide sufficient support and guidance throughout the award?
- Is the host institution likely to provide the required support throughout the award?

3) The research:

- The potential for impact on health, social, and community care for people affected by stroke.
- The scientific quality of the proposal.
- The rationale for the proposed research.
- The appropriateness of the proposed methodologies.
- The appropriateness of the proposed participation plans.
- The quality of involvement and engagement of people affected by stroke in developing and supporting the research.
- Evidence of attention to issues of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).
- The potential for deliverability of the proposed research.
- The value for money provided by the proposal; in assessing the value for money Research Funding Review Panel members should pay attention to the NHS support costs and treatment costs (where applicable), even though these are not funded through the Stroke Association.

Scoring criteria indications:

Score	Definition
1	Not fundable – multiple major weaknesses with few strengths
2	Not fundable – multiple major weaknesses with some strengths
3	Not fundable – at least 1 major weakness or excessive minor weaknesses with some strengths
4	Fundable – some minor weaknesses with moderate strengths
5	Fundable – some minor weaknesses with multiple strengths
6	Fundable – few minor weaknesses with multiple strengths

Minor weaknesses

Minor weaknesses are issues which would not require a wholesale redesign of the proposal in order to rectify. Research Funding Review Panel members should be confident that these weaknesses can be addressed by the candidate at interview.

Some examples of minor weaknesses:

- There is a lack of detail or clarity in some aspect(s) of the proposal.
- Some aspect(s) of the proposal is not adequately justified.
- The plain English summary contains jargon.
- The proposed participation plans could be overly burdensome for participants.

If an excessive number of minor weaknesses occur this should be considered as a major weakness.

Major weaknesses

Major weaknesses are issues that are unlikely to be addressed at interview and would severely impact the deliverability of the proposal.

Some examples of major weaknesses:

- The candidate has no relevant experience, minimal aspirations, or inappropriate training and development plans.
- The proposed supervisors, mentors, or host institution will not be able to support the candidate.
- The proposed research is unoriginal, and other research has been undertaken or is underway that addresses the same or a similar research question.
- The proposed methodology is not suitable to address the proposed research question.

The reviewers are asked to:

- Submit their scores and comments on time and avoid middle-range scores (i.e., 3 or 4) as much as possible. Please note that the scores submitted are not shared with the applicants but are used to rank the applications only to ensure that only the highest quality applications are discussed at the Panel interview.
- Inform the Stroke Association Research Team as soon as possible if they would not be able to submit scores on time, so the application is reallocated to an alternative Reviewer.

2. Shortlisting process

2.1 Ranking

The shortlisting process involves ranking applications according to mean Reviewer score and determining a threshold below which applications will be rejected prior to the Panel interview. The purpose of the process is to reduce the number of uncompetitive applications assessed by the Panel and to reserve as much time as possible for the assessment of competitive applications.

2.2 Feedback for rejected applicants

The Stroke Association Research Team use the Reviewers' comments previously submitted via Flexigrant to compose the feedback points for each unsuccessful applicant. The feedback is approved by the Chair.

Shortlisting outcomes are sent at the same time as the applications which are invited to interview at the Panel meeting.

2.3 Feedback for applicants invited to interview

The Stroke Association Research Team use the Reviewers' comments to outline the major strengths and weaknesses of the application in the outcome letter for applicants invited for interview. The applicants will also receive the pre-set interview questions in advance of the interview.

3. Panel Meeting Assessment

3.1 Panel meeting assessment process

Panel interviews will be conducted using Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

Panel members will comprise scientific experts and lived experience experts from the Stroke Voices in Research group that reviewed shortlisted applications.

Each application will be assigned with three Lead Reviewers, with Lead Reviewer 3 being a lived experience expert. Where possible, these will be members of the panel who reviewed the application at shortlisting stage.

All Panel members are expected to be at least familiar with each application being assessed, even if they are not designated as Lead Reviewers.

Each application will be assessed for one hour:

0-15 minutes

- The Chair reads out the application reference number, title, and opens the application discussions with a very brief introduction and then invites the Lead Reviewers to comment.
- Lead Reviewer 1 comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the application and makes a case for why the application should or should not be recommended for funding.
- Lead Reviewer 2 notes down the discussion points. They are invited to but are not obliged to add further comments.
- Lead Reviewer 3 is invited to, but not obliged to, add further comments on the key areas relevant to patients and the public.
- The discussion is opened up to the Panel for further comments.
- The Panel agree any additional questions, to the pre-set questions, that the lead reviewers will pose in the interview.

15-45 minutes

- The lead applicant enters and is invited by the Chair to give a five-minute oral summary of their application.
- The Chair then invites the Lead Reviewers to ask the pre-set questions.
- The Chair then invites the Lead Reviewers to ask the additional questions agreed by the Panel.

45-60 minutes

- The Chair opens the assessment discussion by summarising their opinion of the quality of the interview and inviting the Lead Reviewers to comment.
- The discussion is opened to the Panel for further comments.
- The Chair invites the Panel to score the application using the criteria in Appendix C: Guidance on scoring criteria.

Once all the applications have been discussed and scored, the applications are ranked by mean score, and a final decision is made on which applications to recommend for funding.

3.2 Notification and feedback

Panel members assigned as Lead Reviewer 2 on an application are required to complete a Panel consensus feedback sheet for each of those applications detailing the Panel's feedback points for applicants. The Stroke Association Research Team utilise the feedback sheets to compose the feedback points for each application. The feedback is incorporated into the notes of each Research Funding Review Panel meeting which the Panel has the opportunity to review and approve.

4. Ratification

Research awards recommended for funding are discussed in a meeting chaired by the Stroke Association Medical Director including the Executive Director for Influencing and Research, Executive Director of Finance and Associate Director for Systems Engagement, and funding decisions are made in accordance with the Stroke Association's Research Award Governance Policy. Once a final decision is made, applicants are notified with feedback, and projects that have been ratified are progressed to contract negotiations.

Appendix C

Confidentiality and Conflicts of Interest Policy for Expert Reviewers

The application form and all documents, materials and associated information made available to expert reviewers regarding this application must be treated as strictly confidential and shall not be shared, disclosed to or discussed with any other parties, and no personal use shall be made of any information, documents or materials made available as part of the review process.

Reviewers must not use generative artificial intelligence (“AI”) tools in any activities related to the expert review process. Specifically, reviewers should not:

- Enter any content from funding applications provided by the Stroke Association into generative AI tools.
- Use generative AI tools to draft, formulate, or edit expert review assessments requested by the Stroke Association.

Any potential conflicts of interest with the applicants, co-applicants or collaborators on this application must be declared immediately to the Research Team at the Stroke Association.

A conflict of interest applies if the reviewer fits any of the following criteria:

- Is directly involved in the work the applicants propose to carry out, and/or has assisted the applicant with their application for funding e.g. by being named as a lead or co-applicant or providing constructive feedback on applications prior to submission.
- Is working closely with the lead applicant or co-applicant(s) (for example on a research collaboration, as a co-author or PhD supervisor) or has done so within the last three years.
- Has a commercial or financial/pecuniary interest in a grant application, for example, if the reviewer is a member of an organisation that may benefit financially, directly or indirectly from any decision made.
- Has a close friendship, personal or familial relationship with any of the named parties on a grant application
- Is currently employed in the same department as the lead applicant, co-applicant or collaborators in the proposed research team for the project. This includes honorary positions and contracts.

A declaration of a conflict of interest will be verified by the Research Team at the Stroke Association, and if confirmed, your invitation to participate in the review of this application will be withdrawn. We expect reviewers to act with honesty and professional integrity to support our rigorous and impartial expert review process.

By accepting this invitation to expert review, reviewers hereby agree that they will abide by this Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Policy for Reviewers. Any reviewer found to be in breach of this policy will have their review dismissed from the awards expert review process by the Stroke Association.