

## Scientific Advisory Panel/Expert reviewer Conflict of Interest Procedure and Non-disclosure statement

This policy applies to members of the Scientific Advisory Panel (SAP) and Peer reviewers of grant applications made to MND Scotland. Henceforth referred to as 'Reviewers'. It also applies to MND Scotland staff.

### Why Have A Procedure?

MND Scotland reviewers and staff have an obligation to act in the best interests of MND Scotland and in accordance with guidelines outlined by the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC). MND Scotland expects those involved in our research processes to contribute in a way that is fair, unbiased and respects the privacy and confidence placed in us by research grant applicants.

In our research processes, conflicts of interests may arise where an individual's professional, personal or family interests and/or loyalties introduce bias and thereby:

- Inhibit free discussion,
- Result in decisions or actions that may be unfair, biased, and not in the interests of MND Scotland, our stakeholders and the applicants,
- Risk decisions being made that are discriminatory or unlawful,
- Risk the impression that MND Scotland has acted improperly and puts the organisation in legal jeopardy

The aim of this policy is to protect both the organisation and the individuals involved in our research processes from any bias or appearance thereof.

In order to ensure a non-biased process, MND Scotland require all reviewers to declare all interests in connection with their role. Interests can be declared through a Declaration of Interest (DoI) or informing us of a Conflict of Interest (CoI). Both are outlined in this document. This must be done in a timely fashion **prior** to each SAP meeting, alerting the MND Scotland Director of Research (DoR) or Research Lead (RL) within 3 weeks of allocation to an application or circulation of an agenda, if not previously brought to their attention.

### Declaration of Interests

A DoI is required when an individual working for, or in association with MND Scotland is associated with a proposal or procedure in such a way that may appear biased but is not sufficient to be a Conflict of Interest. Examples of these are:

- Having worked with an applicant for a grant proposal >10 years ago with no collaboration since,

- Belonging to the same research institution as the lead or co-applicants of a grant but not knowing them professionally or personally,
- Being a member of another board or professional body with the lead or co-applicants of a grant application with no professional or personal collaboration or interests.

To be effective, the Dols must be considered and stated early in each grant round and with each discussion of research initiatives and strategies. Each DoI will be assessed by MND Scotland research staff to establish whether it is best treated as a DoI or Col. If you are not sure what to declare, please discuss your position with a member of the MND Scotland research team: DoR or RL.

### Conflict of Interest

Cols occur where someone is involved in a decision-making process, whilst having a personal or professional association with someone who will benefit from those decisions. For example:

- Being a close friend of a grant lead or co-applicant,
- Having a significant collaboration with a lead or co-applicant within the past 10 years on a research, engagement or other project,
- Being the past supervisor of an applicant.

Cols **must** be declared and in a timely fashion as, under AMRC guidelines, the conflicted reviewers and MND Scotland staff are not permitted access to, or participation in, any of the documentation, discussion or activities regarding that applicant, partner or stakeholder. In the case of Peer Reviewers, Cols must be declared via e-mail as soon as possible after invitation to review and prior to allocation of the full grant application on our application portal. Other reviewers' Cols must be reported prior to each SAP meeting to the MND Scotland DoR or RL **immediately and no later than 2 weeks** after allocation to an application if the full details of the application were not previously visible for SAP members.

If reviewers fail to declare an interest that is known to the Chair of the SAP, the Chair will declare that interest. SAP members who continue to withhold Col declarations within the stated timeframes will be invited to step down from the panel.

### Actions taken when a reviewer or Member of Staff has an Interest:

Actions taken when a reviewer or staff member has a DoI:

- The reviewer or staff member must declare the interest immediately to the MND Scotland research team. This will be presented to the chair of the SAP if they believe it may be a Col,
- If SAP chair agrees that the DoI is not a Col, the reporting individual will be permitted access to the application documents and will be invited to remain within the room and participate in discussion, permission to score the application will be at the discretion of the SAP chair,

- Peer reviewers with a DoI will be permitted to complete the full peer review process though the DoI will be considered by the SAP in the discussion,
- All reported Dols will be recorded by MND Scotland and those within the SAP will be recorded within the meeting minutes and agenda.

Actions taken when a reviewer or staff member has a Col:

- The reviewer or staff member must declare the interest immediately to the chair of the SAP and the MND Scotland research team,
- The individual with the Col will not be permitted access to the application documents of the conflicting proposal, they will be asked to leave the meeting during conversations regarding that application, and will not be permitted to vote on the score for that application,
- Peer reviewers with Col will not be permitted to complete a review and an alternative reviewer must be found,
- MND Scotland Staff members with a Col will not be permitted to participate in any checking or scoring of that application and will not be permitted to be present during the discussion of that application.

### Actions taken when a member of the SAP applies for funding

Where a member of the committee is applying for funding from that same committee, they should leave the room for the discussion of their application. If the committee chair is applying for funding, they should absent themselves from the whole meeting and should not appoint any reviewers. This should be the case regardless of the type of applicant they are listed as (e.g. lead or joint lead applicant, coinvestigator, collaborator etc.). If the chair must absent themselves, a committee vice-chair should take over chair responsibilities for that round.

### Data Protection

The DoI and Col information provided will be processed in accordance with data protection principles as set out in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Data will be processed only to ensure that reviewers and staff act in the best interests of MND Scotland. The information provided will not be used for any other purpose.

### Confidentiality in our research processes

MND Scotland acknowledges that research project applications submitted to us are done so with the expectation that they will undergo a rigorous and fair process conducted in complete confidentiality. This is a responsibility that MND Scotland do not take lightly. To ensure that each applicant is treated without bias during our review process, MND Scotland require that all members of the SAP sign a non-disclosure statement. This is an agreement with MND Scotland that for the duration of appointment as a member of the SAP, any information regarding the content, review, discussion or

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**Founders: John and Peigi Macleod** **Royal Patron: HRH The Princess Royal**

outcomes of research grant rounds will not be discussed outside of the SAP. The details of peer review or grant award outcomes must not be discussed with applicants both during and after the grant round outcomes have been announced. This ensures vital impartiality within our process and avoids the appearance of favouritism by members of the SAP and upholds the reputation of MND Scotland as an impartial organisation. Breach of confidentiality by members of the SAP will result in them being invited to step down from the panel.

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|-------------------|--|
| <b>Name:</b>      |  |
| <b>Signature:</b> |  |
| <b>Date:</b>      |  |

I accept the terms stated in the conflict of interest (Col) procedure and understand what constitutes a Col and declaration of interest (DoI). I understand the circumstances that would necessitate a Col or DoI and accept the consequences were I not to comply with the requirements to declare my interests within the stated timeframes.

Please return this signed form to [research@mndscotland.org.uk](mailto:research@mndscotland.org.uk).