

PEER REVIEWER GUIDELINES



NATIONAL
CHILDREN'S
RESEARCH
CENTRE

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1 INTRODUCTION

Established to improve the lives and health of children through research, for over 50 years the [National Children's Research Centre \(NCRC\)](#) has been at the heart of paediatric research in Ireland. Based on the grounds of Children's Health Ireland (CHI) at Crumlin, formerly Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin, the NCRC is the largest paediatric research centre in the country. The NCRC is a registered charity funded by donations to the [Children's Health Foundation](#) (formally the Children's Medical and Research Foundation).

The purpose of the NCRC is to enable, grow, and sustain a paediatric research community in Ireland and we do this by providing a framework of supports around which research and researchers can flourish.

Our Vision: To be the National Centre for paediatric research and research education in Ireland, and to be recognised nationally and internationally for the quality of our research, our contribution to the advancement of paediatric medicine, and as a driver of the global paediatric research agenda.

Our Mission: To support internationally competitive, high quality research that has a real and lasting impact on child health

Through our competitive research grants, state of the art laboratory, and Children's Clinical Research Unit, we facilitate the conduct of high-quality research by academic researchers, clinicians, nurses, and allied health care professionals working in paediatrics.

While the NCRC funds research across the clinical spectrum, priority is given to a number of key areas in child health. These include cardiology and vascular biology, childhood cancer, and immunity and infection.

The NCRC currently provides two basic type of awards for which International Peer Review is sought:

- The Paediatric Research Project Grant, which supports clinical and translational research projects for up to 3 years.
- The Clinical Research Fellowship, which supports clinicians, nurse and allied health professionals interested in pursuing a PhD, MD, or MSc in paediatric medicine.

2 NCRC PEER REVIEW

The NCRC offer substantive support through a range of competitive funding schemes, all of which are assessed and reviewed in accordance with international best practice to ensure quality. The cornerstone of this process, which is managed by the NCRC, is international peer review. Effective international peer review of research underpins the NCRC's core values of independence, integrity, competition, excellence, and value for money.

2.1 PRINCIPLES OF NCRC PEER REVIEW

Peer review at the NCRC is governed by three fundamental principles:

- Anonymity – To support the open and honest exchange of views, reviewers’ identities are never shared with applicants;
- Confidentiality – To ensure that the sensitive information provided in the application form is protected appropriately, reviewers, by agreeing the [Peer Reviewer Code of Conduct](#), commit to abide by our confidentiality policy;
- Integrity – The integrity of the peer review process is of paramount importance. The personal interests of a reviewer must never influence the outcome, and the reviewers must comply with our policy on the declaration of interests (Please see [Appendix 1 Peer Reviewer Code of Conduct](#))

2.2 THE TWO-PHASE REVIEW PROCESS

2.2.1 Phase 1 – International Peer Review

To ensure that only the highest quality research is funded, all eligible applications are subjected to independent, international peer review. Experts, each with a significant international reputation in a suitable field of research, are invited by the NCRC to review each application. A minimum of three reviewers are required per application, and in order to proceed for consideration by the NCRC Scientific Advisory Committee, they must receive an average score of 70%.

The assessment process is anonymous and confidential. In addition, reviewers are asked to declare any potential conflicts of interests prior to assessing an application (Please see [2.1 Principles of NCRC Peer Review](#)).

2.2.2 Phase 2 – The Scientific Advisory Committee

The second stage of the review process is an assessment of the highest ranked internationally peer reviewed applications by the [Scientific Advisory Committee \(SAC\)](#). This committee provides an expert, constructive, and objective critique of the applications under consideration. Applications are judged based on defined criteria, including:

- compliance with NCRC priorities, and alignment with the NCRC strategy,
- whether the application meets the full requirements and objectives of the funding call, and
- the applicant(s) track record from previous grants.

For the Paediatric Research Project Grant, the applicant(s) also have the right to respond to peer reviewer comments, and this is considered by the SAC. Please note that while applicants to this scheme will be given the opportunity to respond to reviewers’ comments, reviewers’ identities will **never** be shared with applicants.

In the case of the Clinical Research Fellowship scheme, the review process involves an interview with the candidate by members of the SAC, as this award is a personal fellowship.

Following SAC review, the projects are ranked, with the highest-ranking projects recommended for funding to the NCRC Board. The most significant contribution to this ranking is the external peer reviewer’s score.

3 PARTICIPATING IN INTERNATIONAL PEER REVIEW

You will receive an email inviting you to participate in the NCRC international peer review process. This email will contain high-level information regarding the application to be reviewed, together with a link which you will be asked to follow. This link will bring you directly to the NCRC Reviewer Portal, and from here you will be able to view a summary of the application together with key information regarding the applicant team. You will also be able to accept the invitation, reject the invitation, or tentatively accept the invitation from the Reviewer Portal. With regards the latter, this allows you to indicate that you may be willing to accept the invitation to review the application, but that you do have some concerns; if this option is chosen, a member of the research grants team will be in contact with you to discuss options. If you accept the invitation and confirm, via a checkbox, that you are not aware of any potential conflicts of interest that would preclude your participation in the review process, you will then receive a second email containing a link to both the full application form and our short online application assessment form.

3.1 ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Each of the funding schemes we operate will have a unique set of assessment criteria. Further information on the criteria for the scheme you have been asked to review will be provided.

In general, the assessment of all our research proposals will be based on the following core criteria:

- the scientific excellence of the research plan,
- the strength of the research team,
- whether the proposal represents value for money,
- the communication and dissemination plan, and
- the potential for consolidation and growth.

3.2 TIMEFRAME

You will be given approximately 4 weeks to complete your review. If you cannot complete your review in the suggested timeframe, please contact us at grants@ncrc.ie immediately so that we can discuss an extension, or consider another reviewer.

4 OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 EQUALITY IN THE PEER REVIEW PROCESS

The NCRC is committed to ensuring that our processes are fair, and do not discriminate against any groups. Further to this, we ask reviewers to be aware of the potential for unconscious bias¹ to impact on their assessments.

¹¹ If you are interested in learning more about unconscious bias, please see [this short video](#) created by the [Royal Society](#) aimed at raising awareness of potential biases that can arise when making judgements or decisions.

4.2 ETHICAL ISSUES

Research funded through the NCRC must adhere to the highest ethical standards, and independent ethical approval is required for all research involving human participants, human material, or animals. While independent ethical review is a condition of funding for our applicants, we do ask that if reviewers believe that there are ethical issues around a proposal that have not been adequately addressed, that they raise these in their review.

5 USEFUL CONTACTS

If you have any queries about the review process, please contact

Dr Karl Egan
Research Grants Manager
National Children's Research Centre
E: grants@ncrc.ie

6 APPENDIX 1

6.1 NCRC PEER REVIEWER CODE OF CONDUCT

Background

The mission of the National Children’s Research Centre (NCRC) is to support internationally competitive, high quality research that has a real and lasting impact on child health. Central to this is our commitment to ensuring that all funding applications are evaluated on a fair, equitable and timely basis. Effective peer review of research underpins the NCRC’s evaluation process and ensures that proposals are scrutinised by experts who specialise in the areas of research covered in the proposal. Peer reviewers are chosen independently by the NCRC based on their expertise, international publication record, and scientific and/or clinical reputation.

Code of Conduct

1. Peer reviewers engaged by the NCRC are required to operate in a confidential and independent manner. By agreeing to this Code of Conduct, peer reviewers commit to:
 - a. keep strictly confidential all aspects of the proposal, including any ideas, concepts or unpublished data that may be contained within.
 - b. refrain from delegating or sub-contracting the assessment, or any part thereof, to their graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, research associates, or any third parties.
 - c. respect the intellectual property of the applicants, and to refrain from appropriating any ideas, concepts or unpublished data contained within the proposal.
 - d. keep confidential the name of the applicant(s) and the contents of their evaluation.
 - e. refrain from discussing any aspect of the scoring or assessment process with the applicant(s) or any of their colleagues.
2. The integrity of the peer review process is of paramount importance. The personal interests of a reviewer must never influence the outcome, and the reviewers must declare any **potential conflicts of interest** prior to carrying out any assessments. A conflict of interest will be deemed to exist if
 - a. the peer reviewer is, or has been, involved in a collaboration with the applicant.
 - b. the peer reviewer has supervised, or been supervised by, the applicant in the last 5 years.
 - c. the peer reviewer has a personal relationship with the applicant.
 - d. the peer reviewer has a financial interest in organisations involved in, or likely to benefit from, the proposed research.
 - e. the peer reviewer is aware of any other reason as to why they might be unable to provide a fair and impartial review.

If a peer reviewer is in doubt as to whether there is a conflict of interests, they should contact the NCRC at grant@ncrc.ie as soon as possible.

3. Peer reviewers must only agree to evaluate proposals for which they have the necessary expertise to provide a fair and comprehensive assessment.

4. Peer reviewers must assess their assigned proposal with due care and attention, and in a timely manner. Should a peer reviewer find themselves unable to complete their review for any reason, they must immediately contact the NCRC.
5. Peer reviewers must be objective, fair, and impartial in their assessments. Further to this, peer reviewers should be cognisant of the potential for unconscious bias to affect their review, and as such should take special care to ensure that their assessment are not influenced by the gender, nationality, or other any other characteristic of the applicant(s).
6. Peer reviewers must not make derogatory personal comments, or be deliberately inflammatory or hostile, in their feedback.