

Guidance document for the review of Translational Research Award Stage 1 and Stage 2 applications

This document provides guidance to the members of the Research Advisory Board (RAB) (and co-opted members) to carry out the process of reviewing and evaluating Stage 1 and Stage 2 applications.

Stages of review

1. Stage 1 applications are received and validated by the SRUK Grants Team.
2. RAB members are allocated Stage 1 applications for triaging.
3. RAB members provide a score with a brief justification of their score (200 words max.), and their assessment of the project's [Translational Readiness Level \(TRL\)](#).
4. The SRUK Grants Team review and aggregate all scores and prepare a recommendation to the Chair for invitations to Stage 2.
5. The SRUK Grants Team provides feedback on the Stage 1 applications to all applicants and invites the successful ones to submit a Stage 2 application.
6. Stage 2 applications are received six weeks later.
7. The SRUK Grants Team seeks external expert peer reviews.
8. The SRUK Grants Team sends anonymised reviews to the applicants, and applicants provide a rebuttal to the comments received.
9. RAB members review applications, the peer reviews and the applicants' rebuttal ahead of the meeting – any additional significant queries may be passed to applicants for comment ahead of the meeting. Each application is allocated to a RAB member who will present that application at the Stage 2 application review meeting.
10. A Stage 2 application review meeting is held, where funding recommendations are made to the SRUK Board of Trustees.
11. The SRUK Board of Trustees meets and makes awards considering the RAB's guidance and the charity's financial capacity.
12. Once the awards are approved, the SRUK Grants Team provides feedback to all applicants and issues letter of awards to the new grant holders.

The following guidance encompasses steps 6 to 10.

6. **Stage 2 applications received**
Following Stage 1 assessment, applicants invited to submit Stage 2 applications are provided with feedback where appropriate and given 6 weeks to address the feedback within a Stage 2 application.

7. **Review of Stage 2 applications: external peer review**
Invited Stage 2 applications allow the applicants to go into more detail in the application, enabling a comprehensive peer review. This review includes assessment of the proposals by both researchers who are expert in the field of ophthalmology and from experts in neighbouring fields with a particular focus on translational research expertise.

8. **Rebuttal**
Applicants whose Stage 2 application is going forward to the meeting will be asked to respond to the comments and questions put forward by their external reviewers as well as any office comments. Applicants can also highlight how they will alter their approach and/or application in response to the reviewers' comments.

9. **Preparation ahead of RAB meeting**
Approximately four weeks in advance of the annual RAB meeting, all applications, reviews, and rebuttals (accounting for conflicts) will be made available to RAB members and all other persons included in the meeting. You will be informed by email which applications you have been allocated to present at the RAB meeting. Where possible we will ask RAB members to lead on the same Stage 2 application as the outline they reviewed. This however is not always possible, given that some will have been rejected at outline stage. Please note therefore that you may be asked to consider an application that you have not seen before.

Please check the applicant details for any potential conflicts of interest and notify the SRUK Grants Team as soon as possible so that the application can be re-allocated.

Reasons for conflicts are typically due to the fact that the RAB member:

- is based at the same institution as the applicant or a co-applicant.
- is a co-applicant or collaborator.
- has published with the applicant or co-applicant in the last three years.
- has been a co-applicant on a previous Sight Research UK grant in the last three years.

You should be prepared to provide a verbal account of external peer reviewers comments, applicant rebuttals and your own reflections of the application focusing on strengths and weaknesses and whether the applicant has successfully addressed concerns and/or enhanced their application from the outline.

The SRUK Grants Team would be grateful if you could send your own notes and observations to grants@sightresearchuk.org following the meeting as this will help in providing feedback to the applicants. Feedback will be anonymised unless you provide explicit permission to share your name with the applicant.

10. [RAB annual meeting](#)

RAB will meet annually (via MS Teams) to discuss applications and agree which applications should be recommended to the SRUK Board for funding.

During the meeting, members will be assigned to a virtual breakout room if they are conflicted with the application being discussed.

As each application is being discussed, the Chair will invite the RAB member leading on the discussion of a specific application to:

- a. Briefly summarise why the clinical unmet need the application aims to address is important and how they plan to address it (2-3 mins – lead member only).
- b. Briefly summarise the peer reviews and the applicant's rebuttal – highlighting insights from reviewers that are considered important to RAB when making recommendations. In particular, whether the research project described in the application has genuinely realistic chances of progressing towards Phase 1 clinical trials within 8 years from the start of the project. (2-3 mins).
- c. Provide a verbal summary of the relevant points in the application, having read and considered reviews and rebuttals – focusing on the aspects that are particularly positive/negative and any remaining unanswered questions. (2-3 mins).

The Chair will open the discussion up to the whole RAB.

Following discussion, the Chair will summarise/agree key points for consideration and assess the consensus as to whether the application is fundable or not. You will be asked to score each application based on these [MRC Score Indicators](#).

You will also be asked to assess the [Translational Readiness Level \(TRL\)](#) of the application, and only applications deemed to be at TRL 5 or above will be considered for funding.

Once all the applications have been discussed, scores from all RAB members are collected, averaged, and ranked. It is unlikely that applications averaging less than 3 will be recommended for funding.

11. [Next steps](#)

Applications that are recommended for funding are discussed at the SRUK Board of Trustees meeting which follows the RAB meeting in the charity's governance calendar.

Once applications have been approved by the SRUK Board of Trustees, successful applicants will be informed of the outcome and issued a letter of award. All applicants will receive feedback.

In some instances, applicants may be asked to make amendments to their application. In these cases, the RAB members who suggested the changes may be contacted by email to both clarify the amendments required and to comment on whether the changes have been made satisfactorily once received back from the applicant. The Chair will have final approval of any such changes.