

5. RESEARCH GRANT APPLICATIONS: KEY GOVERNANCE PROCESSES

This section provides an overview of the arrangements in place for managing key requirements relating to the development of research proposals and funding applications. These include:

- Peer Review – including the arrangements in place for peer review under the University's Peer Review Policy Framework;
- Signing Authority on Research Grant Applications - including the requirements in place for approval of research grant applications prior to submission to relevant funder;
- Registration of Research Projects - provides details on the requirements in place for registration of research projects.

5.1 University Peer Review Framework for Research Grant Applications

The University of Aberdeen recognises internal peer review of research proposals for grant applications as essential for achieving best practice, for enhancing the quality and success rates of research grant applications, and for facilitating the early career development of research staff. Internal peer review will be carried out across the University where required and where practicable.

5.1.1 Basic Conditions for Peer Review

The University has internal peer review procedures for grant applications in place, which vary according to specific conditions, including:

- The value of research grant, fellowship, studentship or equipment application. The threshold after which peer review must take place differs according to broad research area;
- The experience of applicants: all applications made by first time applicants will be peer reviewed across the University, with variations after that applied by broad research area;
- The requirements of funders, for example where an institutional quota for the number of applications is in place, or where sanctions for researchers or institutions apply for repeatedly submitting unsuccessful applications.

5.1.2 Key Principles Underpinning Peer Review

The key principles which underpin the University position on internal peer review are as follows:

- **Opportunity for Peer Review for All Staff:** internal support must be available to all applicants in order to aid personal improvement and the improvement of success rates for applications. In some cases, such as where applicants are relatively inexperienced, peer review will be a requirement.
- **Support for Unsuccessful Applicants:** in order to improve application success rates and to enhance the early career development of research staff, there should be support mechanisms in place for unsuccessful applicants, geared towards improvement and consideration of other possible funders.

The University expects the risk of rejection to be reduced by the development of support mechanisms and a cultural shift towards sharing feedback, which will make easier the provision of additional support where appropriate.

- **Light Touch Peer Review Processes:** peer review processes should be administratively “light touch” in order to best facilitate implementation as a norm as part of the relevant application processes. An appropriate level of stringency must be maintained in order for the peer review process to be suitably effective.
- **Transparency and Sharing of Best Practice:** peer review processes should be open and transparent, though should remain confidential where appropriate. A transparent process is expected to facilitate the sharing of best practice.

5.1.3 Summary of Peer Review Process Common Elements

Support for applicants for external funding is managed through the institutional [Grants Academy](#). The Grants Academy is a framework of structured support for researchers, providing guidance and supporting good practice, and access to relevant professional support for research projects during all stages of the research life cycle. Researchers are encouraged to discuss prospective applications with their Business Development Officer in Research & Innovation at an early stage. The key elements of the peer review processes for applicants are summarised below:

- **Grant Categories:** all grant applications will undergo peer review if they fall within a set of broadly defined categories. Categories are based on: the application value, the level of experience of the Principal Investigator, and the funding body to which the application is to be submitted. Applications to certain funders, including all applications to UK Research & Innovation (UKRI), have to follow a process of early notification of intention to submit, peer review and approval prior to submission. Details of the process can be accessed [here](#).
- **Peer Review Processes:** For all managed grant applications, and for all applications to UKRI (and others, as advised), applicants will be required to notify their intention to submit an application and engage with the University internal review process in a timely manner. This is likely to include review of an early-stage application by an internal panel of reviewers with relevant expertise. The review process and panel will be facilitated by colleagues in Research & Innovation under the auspices of the Grants Academy.

5.1.4 Training and Guidance

Best practice guidelines for applicants and reviewers, which will be incorporated in training sessions and made available to all colleagues, are available through the Grants Academy.

5.2 Signing Authority for Research Grant Applications

All applicants to external funders (including industry and other funders of research) must complete the internal approvals process, regardless of the funding body to which the application will be submitted.

The Approval requirements are available [here](#).

All research areas:

- All applications that involve the use of facilities will require approval by the facility manager.
- All applications that involve the NHSG costs require signature by the NHS R&D officer.
- Higher value applications are referred to the Finance Director and Senior Vice-Principal (if significant institutional contributions may be required).

- Applications which involve more than one School require sign-off by relevant parties within each School involved (e.g. an application above a certain financial value might require sign-off by the Head of every School involved in the application).
- Irrespective of value, if there is an institutional commitment required, then the Head of School as budget holder must approve the application.

The approval process for grant applications also requires confirmation of the following:

- That risks related to data handling and data sharing have been considered, and appropriate mitigations are planned for in the project design;
- That the relevant internal peer review and mentoring processes have been followed;
- That the application, including all required components, has been completed according to funders' guidelines;
- That requirements for ethical review have been considered, and arrangements made as appropriate;
- That the application has been appropriately costed, in accordance with the requirements of the study and the funders' rules regarding eligible costs;
- That any shortfall between the cost incurred and the cost recovered will be underwritten by the School or another identified source;
- That requirements for insurance are considered.

5.3 Facilities, Equipment and Risk Assessment

The University has procedures in place to ensure that adequate resources and facilities are available for research. This includes a requirement to carry out risk assessments on all research grant applications to external funding bodies prior to their submission.

The University requires that insurance policies are in place for all facilities and equipment as required, and that Standard Operating Procedures are in place where appropriate (e.g. for handling samples, reagents and other materials). Access restrictions and security measures are in place for a number of facilities across the Institution.

Maintenance of facilities and equipment is managed locally and some items may be covered by service contracts. It is the requirement of Schools and Institutes to identify and report faults in hardware or software and any maintenance requirements to the appropriate support services.

5.4 Research Sponsorship

The University will act as a Research Sponsor for projects, involving students and/or staff, which are conducted in the Health Service or Community Service, subject to undertaking a risk assessment and confirming sponsorship. The University will act as either a single sponsor or as part of a co-sponsorship agreement with another organisation, often the NHS. For further information please visit the [Research Governance for Clinical Research](#) webpage.

The research sponsor(s) in any project take responsibility for securing the arrangements to initiate, manage, monitor and finance a research project. Certain types of research projects e.g. studies involving drugs and or devices may also have legal requirements to consider. For further information please visit the Research Governance for Clinical Research webpage as given above.