

DIABETES UK RESEARCH COMMITTEE GUIDELINES

Table of Contents

BACKGROUND	2
Research Committee	2
Grants Advisory Panel of people living with diabetes.....	2
PRE-COMMITTEE PROCESSES	3
Peer review process.....	3
Pre-selection process	3
SELECTION CRITERIA	3
Project and strategic grants	4
Early-career small grants	4
Fellowships	4
PhD Studentships	4
Black Leaders in Diabetes PhD Studentships.....	4
RESEARCH COMMITTEE MEETING PROCESS	5
POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN ASSESSING EACH APPLICATION	6
Project/strategic grant applications.....	6
Early-career small grant applications	7
Fellowships and PhD Studentship applications	8

BACKGROUND

Research Committee

The [Diabetes UK Research Committee](#) is made up of 25-30 scientists and clinicians plus the Chair - Professor Helen McShane. The Research Committee meet:

- twice a year to discuss and make a funding recommendation on applications for [project grants](#).
- three times a year (as part of a small virtual sub-panel) to discuss and make funding recommendations on applications for the [early-career small grants](#).
- three times a year (as part of a small virtual interview panel) to discuss, interview and make funding recommendations on applications for the [RD Lawrence](#), [Sir George Alberti](#) and [Harry Keen Clinical Fellowships](#).
- once a year (as part of a virtual sub-panel) to discuss and make funding recommendations on applications for the [PhD Studentships](#).
- ad-hoc (as part of a small virtual sub-panel) to discuss and make funding recommendations on applications for any [strategic funding calls](#).

The Committee is constituted to ensure that it has the breadth of scientific expertise necessary to make a recommendation on the wide range of applications submitted to Diabetes UK. We get around 25-40 applications in each project grant round, 3-6 applications in each early-career small grant round, 5-10 applications in each fellowship round, and around 20-30 applications to the PhD studentship round.

The Director of Research is the Secretary, and a non-scoring member of the Committee. The Head of Research Funding is the Scientific Secretary and is not a member of the Committee.

Grants Advisory Panel of people living with diabetes

The [Diabetes UK Grants Advisory Panel \(GAP\)](#) was formed in 2009 and is made up of around 20-25 people. They meet:

- twice a year before the Research Committee meeting to discuss the pre-selected **project grants** and score each application from the perspective of people living with diabetes. The GAP group is split into three groups and each group discuss around 1/3 of the applications. GAP then come together as a whole group to discuss and finalise the feedback and scores. Three GAP representatives will attend and give the group's feedback and scores at the Research Committee meeting.
- three times a year (as part of a small virtual sub-panel) to discuss the **early-career small grants** and score each application from the perspective of people living with diabetes. Up to two members of the sub-panel will attend and give the feedback and scores at the early-career small grant panel meeting.

- three times a year (as part of a small virtual sub-panel) to discuss the **RD Lawrence, Sir George Alberti and Harry Keen Clinical Fellowships** and score each application from the perspective of people living with diabetes. One member of the sub-panel will attend the fellowship interviews and score candidates.
- ad-hoc once a year (as part of a small virtual sub-panel) to discuss any **strategic funding calls** and score each application from the perspective of people living with diabetes. Up to two members of the sub-panel will attend and give the feedback and scores at the strategic call panel meeting.

The group is constituted to ensure that it is representative of people living with type 1 and type 2 diabetes, and parents of children with diabetes, as well as taking into account special category data such as ethnicity, age and social economic drivers. The meeting is chaired by the Head of Research Funding or the Senior Research Funding Manager. GAP use the same scoring range as the Research Committee but focus on assessing the plain English summary and evidence of involving people living with diabetes in the research proposal.

PRE-COMMITTEE PROCESSES

Peer review process

The peer review process only applies to project grant, fellowship, and strategic call applications. Early-career small grants and PhD studentships are reviewed by a sub-panel of the Research Committee.

Prior to the Research Committee meeting, each application will undergo a process of peer review by independent external researchers. This includes a statistical review whereby we call upon a pool of statisticians. The peer reviewers will comment on the relevance, originality and quality of the science and will assign a score between 0-6. A score of 4 and above indicates that the project is in the fundable range.

Pre-selection process

The pre-selection process only applies to project grant applications. On occasions, we will also apply pre-selection processes to strategic calls.

Due to the high number of applications received by Diabetes UK, it is not possible to take forward all applications to the Research Committee meeting for discussion on the day. Therefore, following external peer review and rebuttal, applications undergo a pre-selection process. This process is undertaken by the Chair of the Research Committee and Diabetes UK, who will make a recommendation on whether an application is strong enough to be taken forward to the Research Committee meeting for further discussion. This is based on the external peer review comments and scores, and the response to the reviewers' comments. The recommendations are ratified by the Research Committee members designated to speak to that application. At this point, the Research Committee members will have the opportunity to dispute any recommendations.

SELECTION CRITERIA

The selection criteria for Diabetes UK's research grants differ by funding scheme:

Project and strategic grants

- Potential difference the research will make to the lives of people living with diabetes
- Scientific excellence
- Track record of the applicants
- Value for money

Early-career small grants

- Potential difference the research will make to the lives of people living with diabetes
- Scientific excellence
- Track record of the applicants
- Value for money
- The potential for obtaining future funding resulting from the proposed research

Fellowships

- Quality of the proposal and its relevance to people with diabetes
- Track record of the applicant
- Applicant's leadership potential
- Quality of research environment and support
- Performance at interview

PhD Studentships

- Relevance of project to diabetes
- Supervisor's training record
- Suitability of project for PhD training
- Scientific quality of proposed project

Black Leaders in Diabetes PhD Studentships

- As above for PhD studentships
- Additional criteria:
 - Additional support provided to students from a Black background
 - Potential project outputs and outcomes for the student from a Black background
 - Management plan for supervising the student from a Black background

SCORING CRITERIA

In October 2024, a new scoring criterion for Project Grants and Highlight Notices was trialed with a range of 1 to 6. The new criteria are as follows:

1	Poor- Reject	Very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses; weak rebuttal
2	Marginal - Reject	A few strengths and a few major weaknesses; weak rebuttal.

3	Fair - Reject	Some strengths but with at least one major weakness; rebuttal addresses only the minor reviewer concerns.
4	Good - Fund	Some strengths but also some moderate weaknesses; rebuttal addresses several of the reviewer concerns.
4.5	Very Good - Fund	Strong but with at least one moderate weakness; rebuttal addresses the reviewer concerns adequately.
<i>A score of 5 is reserved for grants that are internationally competitive and address a crucial scientific question/knowledge gap.</i>		
5	Excellent- Fund	Very strong with only some minor weaknesses; rebuttal addresses all reviewer concerns.
<i>Scores 5.5 and 6 must be internationally competitive, address a crucial scientific question/knowledge gap and be of high strategic importance.</i>		
5.5	Outstanding Fund	- Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses; minor reviewer concerns raised, and all addressed in rebuttal.
6	Exceptional Fund	- Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses.

For all other grant schemes, the previous scoring criteria of 0-6 is still in use. This is:

- 0 No support
- 1 Little support
- 2 Weak support
- 3 Support
- 4 Clear support
- 5 Strong support
- 6 Very strong support

Only those applications with an average score of **4 or above** will be considered as suitable for funding.

RESEARCH COMMITTEE MEETING PROCESS

A Grants Advisory Panel (GAP) member, First Designated Committee Member (DCM1), Second Designated Committee Member (DCM2) and a Statistician, have been allocated to each grant application.

The **GAP member** will open the discussion by providing GAP feedback about the application and highlight any outstanding questions the members have about the application from a user perspective for the scientific members to consider. The GAP member will provide the collective GAP score for the application.

The **First Designated Committee Member (DCM1)** should aim to spend no more than 5 minutes reviewing the application and discussing the positive and negative aspects using the 'points' listed in the final section of this document for guidance. There is no need to provide an extensive review of the proposal. The Committee member then scores the allocated application from a score scale (scoring criteria given above).

The **Second Designated Committee Member (DCM2)** will then give their assessment of the proposal. If DCM1 has covered all relevant points and DCM2 agrees, there is no need to add anything and DCM2 need only indicate that this is the case and provide their score (from a score scale of 0-6). However, DCM2 may wish to add some points not already covered or may disagree with DCM1 and should do so as per the guidance given below (final section of this document). Again, DCM2 should spend no more than 5 minutes reviewing the application.

The **Statistician** will be given the opportunity to comment on the application, who may want to add comments based on the statistics within the application*.

The other Committee Members will then be invited to add their own comments if they have not been covered by the Designated Committee Members.

The Chair will ensure that all opinions are considered whilst keeping the meeting to time. At the end of the discussion of each application, the Chair will ask DCM1 and DCM2 to provide a score based on the scoring system above. The Chair will ask the rest of the Committee members to score the application based on the comments made, using an online anonymous poll. Applicants who have gained a strong support from the Committee Members but need to revise their application in response to the Committee's feedback can be invited for a resubmission for a future grant round. There is no guarantee that the resubmitted application will be funded at a future grant round.

At the end of the meeting, the applications will be ranked (by median score) in order and according to the available budget as many applications that have scored 4 or above would be funded. Where it is not possible to fund all applications scoring 4 or above, the GAP priority will be used to determine which applications will be raised into the fundable category.

A detailed discussion will take place for those grants where GAP have scored highly but the study is not scientifically fundable, to ensure the group are satisfied with the justification provided.

Research Committee members who have a conflict of interest on a specific application (identified by the office or self-reported) will leave the Committee meeting room before the application is discussed.

During the Committee meeting, the Research Funding Team will take minutes of the discussion which will be circulated after the meeting. These minutes will also be used as the basis of the feedback given to the applicants.

Please note that there are separate guidelines available for the Fellowship and PhD Studentship Panel meetings.

POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN ASSESSING EACH APPLICATION

Project/strategic grant applications

When assessing **project or strategic grant applications** we would ask you to do so considering the following points:

- Will the outcomes of the proposed research make a real difference to people with diabetes in the short, medium or long term?
- Is the science proposed of the highest quality?
- Is the proposal nationally and/or internationally competitive?

- Are there major/minor flaws in the project which are remediable?
- Are the referees' opinions valid? If you disagree with the referees' opinions, please state to what extent and why you disagree.
- Are the applicants, co-applicants and collaborators the most appropriate people to do this research?
- Is the proposed research achievable with the resources requested and in the proposed timescale? If not, are more resources and/or time needed or could the resources requested and/or time requested be reduced?
- Is the appropriate methodology been used? As the research landscape evolves, so have the methodologies needed to study different types of projects. Have methods been justified by the applicants?
- Has the applicant considered the 3Rs policy (replacement, refinement and reduction) for animal use in their project? Diabetes UK's expectations for responsible animal use are set out in the document *Responsibility in the use of animals in bioscience research* <https://www.nc3rs.org.uk/3rs-resources/responsibility-use-animals-bioscience-research>
- For studies recruiting participants, have the applicants considered how their study recruitment plans may impact generalisability, and how the study has been designed to promote equity, inclusion and diversity. If not, has a suitable rationale been provided? The INCLUDE initiative from the National Institute of Health Research provides guidance for ensuring research is inclusive, as well as free online courses: <https://sites.google.com/nihr.ac.uk/include/home>.
- For interventions, including pilot studies, have the applicants considered how they might be implemented in the future, and who might need to be involved?
- We encourage applicants to include patient and public involvement (PPI) costs in their applications. This includes incentivisation, co-creation research aims/methods (where appropriate), consultation, and/or dissemination of results at engagement events (specific to PPI). Has the applicant adequately costed patient and public involvement activities into the application?
- Your overall score of the application, in light of your own expertise, those of the GAP representatives and the referees' comments and scores.

Early-career small grant applications

When assessing **early-career small grant applications**, we ask Scientific Panel members to do so considering the following points:

- Will the outcomes of the proposed research make a real difference to people with diabetes in the short, medium or long term?
- Track record of applicant as an early-career researcher
- Track record of their mentor
- Support environment where the research will take place
- Is the research novel?
- Is the proposed research achievable with the resources requested and in the proposed timescale?
- For studies recruiting participants, have the applicants considered how their study

recruitment plans may impact generalisability, and how the study has been designed to promote equity, inclusion and diversity. If not, has a suitable rationale been provided? The INCLUDE initiative from the National Institute of Health Research provides guidance for ensuring research is inclusive, as well as free online courses: <https://sites.google.com/nihr.ac.uk/include/home>.

- Has the applicant considered the 3Rs policy (replacement, refinement and reduction) for animal use in their project? Diabetes UK's expectations for responsible animal use are set out in the document *Responsibility in the use of animals in bioscience research* <https://www.nc3rs.org.uk/3rs-resources/responsible-use-animals-bioscience-research>
- Is the plan of investigation appropriate?
- What is the potential for follow on funding?

Fellowships and PhD Studentship applications

When assessing **Fellowship/PhD studentships** we ask Scientific Panel members to do so considering the following points:

- Will the outcomes of the proposed research make a real difference to people with diabetes in the short, medium or long term?
- Track record of applicant/supervisor
- Leadership potential of the applicant (where relevant)
- Support environment where the research will take place
 - For the Black Leaders in Diabetes PhD:
 - Can the Supervisor provide any additional support provided to students from a Black background?
 - Have they identified potential project outputs and outcomes for the student from a Black background?
 - Is there a management plan for supervising the student from a Black background?
- Is the research novel?
- Is the proposed research achievable with the resources requested and in the proposed timescale? If not, are more resources and/or time needed, or could the resources requested and/or time requested be reduced?
- Is the plan of investigation appropriate?
- Is the appropriate methodology been used? As the research landscape evolves, so have the methodologies needed to study different types of projects. Have methods been justified by the applicants?
- Has the applicant considered the 3Rs policy (replacement, refinement and reduction) for animal use in their project? Diabetes UK's expectations for responsible animal use are set out in the document *Responsibility in the use of animals in bioscience research* <https://www.nc3rs.org.uk/3rs-resources/responsible-use-animals-bioscience-research>
- For studies recruiting participants, have the applicants considered how their study recruitment plans may impact generalisability, and how the study has been designed to promote equity, inclusion and diversity. If not, has a suitable rationale been provided? The INCLUDE initiative from the National Institute of Health Research provides guidance for ensuring research is inclusive, as well as free online courses: <https://sites.google.com/nihr.ac.uk/include/home>.
- For interventions, including pilot studies, have the applicants considered how they might be implemented in the future, and who might need to be involved?
- We encourage applicants to include patient and public involvement (PPI) costs in their

applications. This includes incentivisation, co-creation research aims/methods (where appropriate), consultation, and/or dissemination of results at engagement events (specific to PPI). Has the applicant adequately costed patient and public involvement activities into the application?

- What is the potential for follow on funding?
- Performance at interview, where relevant.

Version	Changes	Effective date	Author	Approver	Next review date
1.0	n/a	01/03/2015	Anna Morris (Head of Research Funding)	Alasdair Rankin (Director of Research)	01/08/2015
2.0	n/a	01/03/2018	Kamini Shah (Head of Research Funding)	Elizabeth Robertson (Director of Research)	01/03/2019
3.0	n/a	15/02/2021	Kamini Shah (Head of Research Funding)	Elizabeth Robertson (Director of Research)	15/02/2022
4.0	n/a	15/07/2021	Kamini Shah (Head of Research Funding)	Elizabeth Robertson (Director of Research)	15/02/2022
5.0	n/a	20/1/2022	Kamini Shah (Head of Research Funding)	Elizabeth Robertson (Director of Research)	01/01/2023
6.0	Additional information provided about review process and criteria for all funding schemes.	15/3/2023	Kamini Shah (Head of Research Funding)	Elizabeth Robertson (Director of Research)	01/03/2025
7.0	Updates to Research Committee membership added	08/05/2024	Elena Ahmed (Research Funding Officer)	Kamini Shah (Head of Research Funding)	01/03/2025
8.0	Added Table of Contents. New scoring criteria for Project Grants added	18/10/2024	Elena Ahmed (Research Funding Officer)	Kamini Shah (Head of Research Funding)	