DIABETES UK

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RESEARCH COMMITTEE GUIDELINES:

EARLY CAREER SMALL GRANTS FOR BASIC SCIENTISTS AND HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS (INCL AHPS)

CONTENTS

BACKGROUND

Early career small grants for basic scientists and healthcare professionals (including AHPs)

The Early Career Small Grants Scheme supports early-career basic scientists and healthcare professionals to undertake small, innovative research projects or pilot studies in diabetes. Offering up to £15,000 for up to 12 months, the scheme is designed to help researchers at the beginning of their careers test new ideas, build skills, and establish a platform for securing larger, follow-on funding. It acts as a springboard for career progression, helping applicants navigate key transition points and develop the experience needed to become future research leaders.

Research Committee

The Diabetes UK Research Committee is made up of 25-30 scientists and clinicians plus the Chair - Professor Helen McShane. **A sub-panel** of the Research Committee meet:

- Two times a year to discuss and make funding recommendations on applications for the Early Career Small Grants.

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. **Members have delegated authority from the Diabetes UK Board of Trustees to make funding decisions.**

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 2007 and is made up of around 20-25 people with lived experience of diabetes. They meet as a **sub-panel**:

- Twice a year 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.

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 considering special category data such as ethnicity, age, gender and social economic drivers.

The meeting is chaired by a member of the Research Funding Team.

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.

Members act as advisors and are not decision-making, though their input influences final funding decisions.

ASSESSMENT & SCORING CRITERIA

Early Career Small Grants are not subject to peer review or rebuttal. The scientific sub-panel receives all submitted applications to review and is expected to provide a summary at the sub-panel meeting. No written reviews are provided prior to the meeting.

The **scientific selection criteria** for Early Career Small Grants:

The potential difference the research will make to the lives of people with diabetes.

- Scientific excellence & originality
- Applicant potential
- Training environment and mentorship
- Funding requested
- The potential for obtaining further funding resulting from the proposed research
- Use of animals (3Rs)
- Diversity and inclusion for applications recruiting participants

The **Grants Advisory Panel** selection criteria for the Early Career Small Grants:

- Relevance to people with diabetes and its potential impact
- The timescale on which the project could make a difference to people living with and at risk of diabetes
- The extent of involvement of people with diabetes in the development and the management of the study

Scoring criteria

The **scientific scoring criteria** are outlined below, with comprehensive descriptors available in **Appendix 1.**

1	Poor- Reject	Numerous major weaknesses
2	Weak - Reject	Partially met some criteria, but still several major weaknesses.
3	Inadequate- Reject	Some strengths but with at least one major weakness.
4	Good - Fund	Strong but also some minor weaknesses, which can be addressed.

5	Excellent- Fund	Very strong with only one minor weakness, that can be addressed.
6	Exceptional - Fund	Exceptionally strong with no weaknesses.

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

SUB-PANEL MEETING PROCESS

The steps below outline the process at the Early Career Small Grants Sub-Panel meeting where final funding decisions are made.

1. A Grants Advisory Panel (GAP) member, First Designated Committee Member (DCM1) and Second Designated Committee Member (DCM2), will be allocated to each grant application.

2. The **GAP member** will initiate the discussion by presenting GAP feedback regarding the application, emphasising any unresolved questions from the lived experience perspective for consideration by the scientific members. Additionally, the GAP member will provide the consolidated GAP score for the application.

3. The **First Designated Committee Member (DCM1)** should aim to spend no more than 5 minutes providing a summary of the project. They should articulate their assessment of the positive and negative aspects using the 'key factors' listed below of this document for guidance. The Committee member then provides an indicative score for the allocated application from a score criteria and scale.

4. 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 indicative score. 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. Again, DCM2 should spend no more than 5 minutes reviewing the application.

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

6. The Chair will ensure that all opinions are considered whilst keeping the meeting on time. At the end of the discussion of each application, the Chair will ask the rest of the Committee members to score the application based on the comments made, using an online anonymous poll.

7. At the end of the meeting, the applications will be ranked (by median score) first by the Research Committee Score, and secondly by the GAP score. Applications scoring 4 or above will be deemed fundable, and the Office will fund as many projects as possible in ranking order within the budget available. 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.

8. 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.

9. Applicants who have gained 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.

10. 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.

11. 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.

APPENDIX: DIABETES UK SCORING CRITERIA: EARLY CAREER SMALL GRANTS

Our Early-Career Small Grant scheme supports early-career basic scientists and members of Allied Health Professions to undertake small research projects related to diabetes. The scheme will enable scientists at an early stage in their career to develop their work and go on to obtain additional grant funding from Diabetes UK or other organisations.

The sub-set of Research Committee are asked to review applications based on the applicant's track record, strengths and weaknesses of project and the likelihood the study will lead to a larger award. The criteria for scoring are divided into:

- **Scientific excellence & originality**
- **Applicant potential**
- **Training environment and mentorship**
- **Funding requested**
- **The potential for obtaining further funding resulting from the proposed research**

Other criteria that need to be considered, if applicable (not scored):

- **Use of animals (3Rs)**
- **Diversity and inclusion for applications recruiting participants**

Early Career Small Grants		
1	**Poor - Reject**	*Numerous major weaknesses* **Scientific excellence & originality** • No clear hypothesis or objectives • Methodology is inappropriate • No preliminary data or evidence of feasibility • Lacks novelty **Applicant potential** • Applicant lacks relevant skills or experience **Training environment & mentorship** • Lacks evidence of mentorship, support and resources for the applicant **Funding requested** • Costs are unrealistic, no justification provided **The potential for obtaining further funding resulting from the proposed research** • No evidence that the proposed research will lead to further funding • No plan for leveraging results to obtain future funding • No plan for the applicant's career progression

2	**Weak - Reject**	*Partially met some criteria, but still several major weaknesses* **Scientific excellence & originality** • Hypothesis or objectives are weak • Methodology has significant flaws • Limited preliminary data or evidence of feasibility • Lacks novelty **Applicant potential** • Applicant has some relevant skills or experience **Training environment and mentorship** • Limited evidence of mentorship, support and resources for the applicant **Funding requested** • Some costs are reasonable, with weak justification **The potential for obtaining further funding resulting from the proposed research.** • Limited evidence that the proposed research will lead to further funding • Minimal plan for leveraging results to obtain future funding • Minimal plan for the applicant's career progression

3	**Inadequate - Reject**	*Some strengths but with at least one major weakness* **Scientific excellence & originality** • Hypothesis or objectives are adequate • Methodology is not rigorous to address the hypothesis and/or meet the objectives • Some preliminary data or evidence of feasibility • Some level of novelty **Applicant potential** • Applicant has adequate relevant skills and experience **Training environment and mentorship** • Some evidence of mentorship, support and resources for the applicant **Funding requested** • Most costs are reasonable and necessary, with justification **The potential for obtaining further funding resulting from the proposed research** • Some evidence that the proposed research may lead to further funding • Basic plan for leveraging results to obtain future funding • Basic plan for the applicant's career progression

4	**Good - Fund**	*Strong but also some minor weaknesses, which can be addressed* **Scientific excellence & originality** • Clear hypothesis and objectives • Some methodology is appropriate • Satisfactory preliminary data or evidence of feasibility • Moderate level of novelty **Applicant potential** • Applicant has satisfactory relevant skills and experience **Training environment and mentorship** • Good evidence of mentorship, support and resources for the applicant **Funding requested** • All costs are reasonable and necessary, with justification **The potential for obtaining further funding resulting from the proposed research** • Good evidence that the proposed research will lead to further funding • Clear plan for leveraging results to obtain future funding • Clear plan for the applicant's career progression

5	**Excellent - Fund**	*Very strong with only one minor weakness, that can be addressed* **Scientific excellence & originality** • Strong hypothesis and objectives • Methodology is robust and well-defined • Good preliminary data or evidence of feasibility • Moderate level of novelty **Track record of the applicants** • Applicant has excellent relevant skills and experience • Excellent track record of research achievements **Training environment and mentorship** • Excellent evidence of mentorship, support and resources for the applicant **Funding requested** • All costs are reasonable and necessary, with justification **The potential for obtaining further funding resulting from the proposed research** • Excellent evidence that the proposed research will lead to further funding • Comprehensive plan for leveraging results to obtain future funding • Comprehensive plan for the applicant's career progression

6	**Exceptional - Fund**	*Exceptionally strong with no weaknesses* **Scientific excellence & originality** • Strong hypothesis and objectives • Methodology is robust and well-defined • Strong preliminary data or evidence of feasibility • High level of novelty **Track record of the applicants** • Applicant has exceptional relevant skills and experience • Exceptional track record of research achievements **Training environment and mentorship** • Exceptional evidence of mentorship, support and resources for the applicant **Funding requested** • All costs are reasonable and necessary, with justification **The potential for obtaining further funding resulting from the proposed research.** • Exceptional evidence that the proposed research will lead to further funding • Exemplary plan for leveraging results to obtain future funding • Exemplary plan for the applicant's career progression

Version	Changes	Effective date	Author	Approver	Next review date
9.0	Revised guidance to reflect each scheme and criteria	20/01/2026	Kamini Shah (Head of Research Funding)	Anna Morris (Assis. Director of Research	01/03/2027