

The Expert Review Network (TERN)

Terms of Reference

Let's stop MS together

February 2020

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1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of The Expert Review Network (TERN) is to be the expert, trusted independent source of scientific and lay review and funding recommendations, in the context of the Research Strategy, for all response-mode research awards made by the MS Society.

2. Background

- 2.1 The <u>Board of Trustees</u> help decide on our strategy and monitor our performance. With advice from our <u>Research Strategy Committee</u>, the Board agrees our <u>Research Strategy</u> and is responsible for all research funding decisions.
- 2.2 TERN was set up in 2020 for our open, response-mode grant funding processes. It is comprised of people affected by MS and people with scientific and other expertise across MS research.
- 2.3 The MS Society is committed to a modern, proportionate approach to application review. As such, the TERN approach is intended to help us achieve our organisational vision of a world free from the effects of MS by:
 - Having a pool of trusted, expert reviewers who are familiar with our Research Strategy therefore ensuring we fund the research with the greatest potential for benefitting people with MS
 - Reducing the burden of application review on reviewers and MS Society staff
 - Providing a forum for both MS researchers and people affected by MS to come together to recommend the highest quality and most relevant research for funding.

3. Terms of Reference

- 3.1 To provide review and recommendations to the MS Society as to whether individual research grant applications merit MS Society funding. To do this TERN members will be expected to review individual research applications, to attend meetings, teleconferences and/or interviews as reasonably requested, and if so, take an active role in discussions on each application and provide written comments and feedback. This is done to ensure that recommendations and feedback reflect issues of concern to researchers and people affected by MS.
- 3.2 To recommend, where appropriate, alternative sources of funding for research projects which are only indirectly linked to MS and may be equally eligible for funding by other health charities or grant-making organisations.
- 3.3 To provide advice to the MS Society on funding procedures, types of award and refinement of our research funding processes.
- 3.4 TERN members are expected to ensure its recommendations have potential for direct benefit to people affected by MS and make effective use of charitable funds.
- 3.5 The MS Society will operate with a "no surprises" approach, such that TERN will be kept informed of all funding decisions made.
- 3.6 TERN members will, at all times, work within the MS Society's policies, plans and budgets, and are expected to at all times observe the highest standards of

impartiality, integrity and objectivity, and in accordance with the MS Society's Code of Conduct for Research Application Review (see Annex 1).

- 3.7 TERN members have a duty to independently judge applications at every stage of review and on all issues considered at virtual and face-to-face panel meetings.
- 3.8 On appointment, TERN members must comply at all times with these Terms of Reference, and act in good faith and in the best interest of the MS Society.
- 3.9 Unless otherwise stated, TERN members are appointed as individuals to fulfil the duties of TERN, not as representatives of their profession, employer or interest group, and have a duty to act in the interests of the MS Society. Where members declare an organisation's views rather than a personal view, they should make that clear at the time of declaring that view.
- 3.10 The role of members of TERN should not be circumscribed by the expertise or perspective he or she was asked to bring to the application review process. Members should regard themselves as free to question and comment on the information provided or the views expressed by any of the other members, notwithstanding that the views or information do not relate to their own area of expertise.
- 3.11 All members of TERN should:
 - examine and challenge, if necessary, the assumptions on which scientific advice is formulated and ask for explanations of any scientific terms and concepts which are not clear
 - ensure that the panels have the opportunity to consider contrary scientific views, and where appropriate, the concerns and values of stakeholders before a decision is taken
 - share in the general responsibility to consider the wider relevance of their decisions to the field of MS research

4.TERN Member Involvement in Research Grant Application Review

- 4.1 Dates for the periods in which TERN members may be requested to review grant applications or attend meetings, videoconferences or interviews will be set as far in advance as possible (in consultation with the Chair(s)).
- 4.2 Requests for review by TERN members will only made where an application received falls within the TERN members' area of expertise (and the member is suitably available and free from any conflicts of interest). No TERN member will be overburdened with requests to review, as by agreement with the Secretariat.
- 4.3 Application documents to review will be made available to allocated TERN members using the MS Society's online grants management system CC Grant Tracker: (<u>https://research.mssociety.org.uk/</u>). Full instructions will be given for access. Paper copies will only be provided with satisfactory justification.
- 4.4 TERN members will be requested to provide independent electronic review and scoring on allocated applications within a pre-defined time period.
- 4.5 Where shortlisting of reviewed applications is appropriate, this will be done by the MS Society based on the mean TERN member review score.
- 4.6 Shortlisted applications will be taken forward to a review panel meeting or interview (if appropriate) to determine recommendations for funding. TERN members who

originally reviewed the shortlisted applications may be specifically invited to join the review panel meeting.

- 4.7 The agenda for each meeting, videoconference or interview, all application documents along with written review comments, and relevant documentation will be made available to all members of TERN who are attending the review panel meeting in advance.
- 4.8 Recommendations for funding will be based on the mean score for each application, which has been submitted anonymously from attending members of TERN. Only in the event of a tie will the Chair have a casting vote.
- 4.9 All funding recommendations, conditions of funding and feedback to applicants will be agreed at the panel meeting. Where necessary the Secretariat will ask for clarification of points or consideration of applicant responses from attendees following the panel meeting to aid funding recommendations. The Chair will retain responsibility for final funding recommendations.
- 4.10 In exceptional circumstances, to review progress or change requests for active research projects (such as costed-extensions) outside of the advertised review timings.
- 4.11 From time to time, the MS Society may also convene separate review panels to review ad-hoc, large or strategically important research applications or in the instance where the majority of TERN members have conflicts of interest.

5. Communication of Decisions

- 5.1 Only the CEO, or MS Society staff authorised to act on his/her behalf, may communicate funding recommendations and decisions.
- 5.2 In reporting the outcome of funding rounds, any part played in discussion by individual members of TERN will be kept confidential. This will be done to ensure the maintenance of the convention that any decision is viewed as the collective responsibility of each entire panel, in conjunction with safeguarding the anonymity of any referees.
- 5.3 Members of TERN should resist any request for information from an applicant or for explanation concerning how a specific funding recommendation/decision was made.
- 5.4 For transparency, the final funding decisions and awards made from each funding round will be made available to all members of TERN.

6. TERN Member Recruitment, Profile and Term

6.1 Recruitment of TERN Members

- 6.1.1 The MS Society will be responsible for the recruitment of TERN members.
- 6.1.2 Open calls for membership will be advertised on the MS website and any other communications platform that the MS Society deems appropriate, for example among our Research Network for lay members of TERN.
- 6.1.3 Where gaps in specific scientific skill sets in TERN are identified or the number of TERN members with conflicts of interest would otherwise preclude sufficient

review, the MS Society may specifically approach relevant individuals for recruitment into TERN.

6.2 **Profile of scientific TERN Members**

- 6.2.1 TERN Members will be expected to fulfil the following criteria:
 - Ongoing commitment to the aims and values of the MS Society.
 - Willingness to devote the necessary time and effort.
 - Extensive research experience either in clinical practice (including the allied health professions), or in a university where they have gained an in-depth knowledge in their specific research field.
 - At least a five-year publication record that can demonstrate an impact has been made in their field of research.
 - Ideally, they should have prior experience in reviewing funding applications and research manuscripts which have been submitted for publication in medical journals or on-line open access publication portals.
 - Success in obtaining and running effective research grants/awards.

6.3 **Profile of Lay Members of TERN**

- 6.3.1 In order to ensure that people affected by MS remain at the forefront of the MS Society's funding recommendations, Lay people who are experts by their experience of living with MS will assess all applications to ensure research funding is relevant to their needs.
- 6.3.2 Qualities, skills and experience of Lay Members of TERN may include:
 - Willingness to devote the necessary time and effort.
 - An understanding of MS with appreciation of the day-to-day challenges of living with the condition.
 - Commitment to the aims and values of the MS Society.
 - Confidence in public speaking, with the ability to represent your views in balanced and impartial manner.
 - Experience of patient and public involvement (PPI) in research.

6.4 Term Length of TERN Membership

- 6.4.1 Individuals will be invited to be members of TERN for a term of three years. This can be extended for up to three years upon agreement between the MS Society, the Chair of the Grant Review Panel and the individual concerned, to ensure a rolling turn-over of Grant Review Panel members.
- 6.4.2 Following resignation from the panel after two consecutive terms, TERN members are eligible to apply for membership to TERN after a period of absence of three years. Individuals who fail to perform the duties required of a member of TERN to the standards expected will be removed from TERN. Such decisions will be made by the Chair(s) and the Executive Director of Research and External Affairs.

7. TERN Chair(s) Recruitment, Profile and Responsibilities and Term

7.1 Recruitment of Chair(s)

- 7.1.1 It is envisaged that up to three separate TERN Chairs will oversee funding types, with one Chair per award type.
- 7.1.2 When the position of a Chair becomes vacant, the MS Society will invite applications from suitable candidates. Applications will be assessed by the Executive Director of Research and External Affairs, or an alternative deemed appropriate by the above.
- 7.1.3 The Chair is precluded from applying to the MS Society for research funding as a Lead Applicant for the duration of their term of office.
- 7.1.4 Vice Chair(s) will be appointed by the Executive Director of Research and External Affairs and the Chair of the relevant round(s), to take over if the Chair is unavailable or has a conflict of interest with an application. He or she will be eligible to apply for MS Society funding, either as a lead or co- applicant. In the case of a Chair being unable to attend the Review Panel meeting and a Vice Chair being an applicant or co-applicant on a grant submitted to the Grant Review Panel an interim Chair will be appointed by the MS Society.

7.2 **Profile of TERN Chair(s)**

- 7.2.1 The Chairs will be expected to fulfil the following criteria:
 - Commitment to understanding our organisational and research strategies and helping us deliver on them.
 - Research experience either in clinical practice (including allied health professionals) or in a university.
 - At least a seven-year publication record.
 - Success in obtaining research grants/awards.
 - Experience of chairing groups or demonstrable chairing skills.
 - Broad experience of peer review and the work of research funding panels.
 - Good leadership, communication and interpersonal skills.
 - Willingness and availability to devote the necessary time and effort.
 - Evidence of previous patient and public involvement.

7.3 **Responsibilities of TERN Chair(s)**

- 7.3.1 The Chairs have responsibility for ensuring that TERN members are effective and accountable, as well as providing strategic leadership in matters such as:
 - Ensuring that each member of TERN requested to attend panel meetings has the opportunity to be heard, and that no view is discounted or ignored.
 - Ensuring that the full range of opinions, especially those of people affected by MS, and including unorthodox and contrary views are appropriately considered.
 - Ensuring decorum is of the highest standard, and panel members act in accordance with these Terms of Reference.
 - Ensuring that any significant diversity of opinion among panel members is fully explored and discussed, while reflecting any inability to reconcile said differences accurately in the minutes.

• Ensuring that where a decision cannot be reached between applications of comparable scientific merit, and where both cannot be funded due to budget constraints, the panel will refer back to the mean lay score.

7.4 **Term Length of TERN Chairs terms**

- 7.4.1 Chair(s) will be invited for an initial term of three years, irrespective of previous time served as a regular member of TERN (if any). The term can be extended for up to three years upon agreement with the MS Society.
- 7.4.2 Chairs who fail to perform the duties to the standards expected will be removed from TERN. Such decisions will be made by the Executive Director of Research and External Affairs.

8 Conflicts of Interest

- 8.1 The MS Society strives to uphold high standards of integrity, and therefore members of the charity and wider public require TERN members to avoid situations in which their duties and other interest conflict or where there could be a suspicion of conflict.
- 8.2 Briefly, *absolute* conflicts of interest where the individual should decline to review or comment, is when a member of TERN is:
 - A close friend, patient or relative of the applicant(s).
 - Directly involved in the work the applicant proposes to carry out and/or have assisted the applicant with their application for funding, such as being names as a co-applicant.
 - Located at the same department as the applicant(s), co-applicant(s) or project partner(s).
 - Are currently employed at the same research organisation, or other institution as the applicant(s), co-applicant(s) or project partner(s).
 - Have been approached or agreed to be a member of a committee connected with the research project, for example an advisory group or steering committee (including PPI advisory groups).
 - Worked closely with the applicant(s) e.g. as a co-author or PhD supervisor or has done so within the last five years.
 - Have a commercial or financial/pecuniary interest that may see you benefit financially, directly or indirectly from any decision made.
- 8.3 A full description of our Conflicts of Interest policy including examples of conditional conflicts is available in Annex 2 and <u>here.</u>

9. Confidentiality

9.1 Any review of applications, deliberations and decision-making made by members of TERN are confidential to allow free and frank expression of opinions and individuals, in conjunction with avoiding premature disclosure of intentions. As such, members of TERN must agree to treat all correspondence and documents sent by the MS Society in both electronic and printed format as confidential. This

may include members of TERN receiving pre-publication or confidential information or proprietary information owned by the applicants.

- 9.2 'Confidential information' refers to any information contained in the documents and applications in printed and electronic format. This includes pre-publication information or confidential information or proprietary information owned by the applicants.
- 9.3 Such 'confidential information' should be used solely for assessing and making recommendations for research funding on behalf of the MS Society.
- 9.4 TERN members will not, without written consent from both the MS Society and the applicant, disclose the fact that an applicant has applied to the Society for support.
- 9.5 TERN members will not, without written consent from both the MS Society and the applicant, either disclose confidential information to any third party or use confidential information for any purpose other than the purpose described above. In this context a third party means any party other than an employee from the MS Society or a fellow panel member and specifically includes others in a panel member's place of work.
- 9.6 It is understood that the foregoing restrictions on the use and disclosure shall not apply to information which:
 - was in the public domain or which subsequently becomes part of the public domain by publication or otherwise, except by your wrongful act
 - was in a panel member's possession and was not acquired directly or indirectly from the MS Society or the applicant
 - was received by a panel member from a third party who did not acquire the same directly or indirectly from the MS Society or the applicant and who did not require you to hold the same in confidence
- 9.7 Papers and minutes in any media format must not be disseminated or discussed outside of the review process and should be kept secure and appropriately disposed of after the review process is complete (electronic files should be deleted securely, and paper copies shredded and recycled).
- 9.8 The MS Society will not use comments provided by TERN members for any purpose other than is necessary for the review / funding process and will not disclose them to any person except as is required for the peer review / funding process or as is required under the Data Protection Act 1998 (or any other law or regulation to which the MS Society is or may become subject).
- 9.9 The MS Society will only release anonymised comments made by TERN members to applicants. The MS Society will not release TERN members' names in connection with any specific comments that are released under the Data Protection Act 1998 without first obtaining permission to do so.
- 9.10 A list of TERN members and professional affiliations (where applicable) is publicly available on the MS Society's website. Further details of panel members will only be provided following permission from the member.

10. Expenses

10.1 It is expected that where possible all meetings involving TERN will be virtual. However when physical attendance is requested, the MS Society will reimburse reasonable expenses for attendance at Panel meetings – for example the cost of standard class travel and if necessary overnight accommodation.

- **10.2** Members are expected to take all reasonable steps to minimise expenses of charitable funds, for example booking travel well in advance to take advantage of discounted fares or asking the Secretariat to book directly. Please contact the Secretariat for assistance in booking travel and accommodation.
- **10.3** For full details see Annex 3: MS Society Expense Guidelines.

11. Secretariat

- **11.1** Secretariat to the group will be provided by staff from the MS Society Research team.
- **11.2** For enquiries the first point of contact will be:

MS Society Research Team

Multiple Sclerosis Society

372 Edgware Road

London

NW2 6ND

Tel: 0208 4380 822

Email: research@mssociety.org.uk

Annex 1: MS Society Research Application Review Code of Conduct

<u>Background</u>

The MS Society aims to ensure that research proposals are assessed objectively and impartially. Review by an appropriately constituted group is seen as an essential element of the decision making process. The Board of Trustees relies heavily on the willingness of members of the MS community to give time to participate in review groups and appreciates their willingness to do so.

Members should be aware that the role of reviewers is advisory. As part of its commitment to impartiality and the integrity of the review process, the Society has set down the Code of Conduct printed below.

Reviewers are also subject to the MS Society's Policy Position Statement 17: Managing conflicts of interest or potential conflicts of interest. You can find full details of this policy <u>here</u>.

If the Society has reason to believe that a reviewer has breached this Code of Conduct, then he or she may be asked to step down.

Code of Conduct

As a condition of participation, reviewers agree that documents and correspondence relating to applications for funds and funding are strictly confidential and therefore:

- Should not be discussed with anyone else during review, or either before or after any meeting associated with Grant Rounds. No specific discussion with regards to the applications should occur between reviewers except during the business of the meeting.
- Feedback to candidates (successful or unsuccessful) will be provided by the MS Society alone, to avoid confusion. No feedback will, under any circumstances come directly from reviewers.
- Should not be disseminated
- Any printouts should be kept secure and disposed of securely after the decision has been reached
- Should a reviewers have a vested interest (organisational, collaborative, personal or other) in the outcome of a grant application they should declare it using the MS Society's Conflict of Interest Form (copies can be obtained from research@mssociety.org.uk)
- If asked to review, reviewers have a right to expect that their comments will be treated in confidence by both the MS Society's staff, in conjunction with other members.
- Grant applicants will receive anonymised feedback from the MS Society.
- While membership of grant review panels will be made publicly available, the identity of reviewers in relation to specific grants will be kept confidential.
- When a reviewers is connected with an application, they must declare an interest and withdraw from any consideration of that application. That member does not receive documents pertaining to the application, learn the identity of its referees or receive its referees' reports, and does not score the application. They must retire from the meeting when the application is assessed. Details of discussion of that application are expurgated from any papers the member receives.

Annex 2: MS Society Research Application Review Conflict of Interest Policy

- i. The MS Society strives to uphold high standards of integrity, and therefore members of the charity and wider public require reviewers to avoid situations in which their duties and other interest conflict or where there could be a suspicion of conflict. Following the request to review a proposal, reviewers must consider whether there are any potential conflicts of interest, and if so must inform the MS Society as soon as possible. This is not exclusively limited to conflicts of interests between reviewers and applicants, but also concerning circumstances that might give the impression of a conflict of interest. Please note that reviewers should not consider a conflict of interest as unethical, but must ensure that this is recognised and dealt with accordingly.
- ii. The MS Society accepts that prescribing a comprehensive set of rules on interests is not feasible. As such, individuals remain the best equipped to know their duties and where these might conflict. Further clarification may be offered when asking oneself: "Will I benefit either directly or indirectly if this grant is awarded or not awarded?" If this does not address member concerns, they should be discussed with the Chair or Research Staff at the MS Society.
- iii. Before each meeting/teleconference, or when asked to review an application. Research directorate staff will ask Panel Members to declare conflicts of interest.
- iv. Where a conflict of interest exists, reviewers will not take part in the review process of the application, will not receive the peer reviews, and will leave the room or teleconference during any discussion relating to the application.
- v. If the Chair has a conflict of interest on an identified application, they will leave the room or teleconference whilst that application is being discussed and the Vice Chair will chair.
- vi. Conflicted reviewers will not contribute to recommendations or decisions affecting the application during ranking.
- vii. Decisions about conflicts of interest and any withdrawals for particular items will be recorded in the minutes of meeting. The Chair will be responsible for ensuring that this procedure is adhered to.
- viii. An individual who is concerned about another's potential or actual conflicts of interest should raise the issues with the Chair (in private, if possible); including issues concerning MS Society staff. Such issues could arise from:
 - Close links with, or interest in, an institution form which a grant or other funding proposal is being considered (e.g. employment or academic collaborations).
 - A commercial or pecuniary interest (e.g. where a member or an organisation with which an individual is involved may benefit financially, directly or indirectly, from a decision made).
 - A non-pecuniary interest where a member has other interests that might be thought to influence them, either knowingly or unknowingly.
 - Personal or family interest with regard to both the pecuniary (e.g. from connections with bodies which have a direct financial interest, or from being a business partner, or being employed by a person with such an interest) and non-pecuniary interests (e.g. any benefit or favour in kind including rising from membership of clubs or other organisations.

Annex 3: MS Society Expenses Policy

You will be reimbursed for any reasonable out of pocket expenses, in line with the MS Society expenses policy.

Our expenses policy and HMRC require receipts are presented when any expenses claim is made.

<u>Travel</u>

Using your own car

If you use your own car on MS Society business you can claim the maximum allowed by HM Revenue Customs. This mileage rate covers the cost of fuel, wear and tear on your vehicle, depreciation, vehicle tax and insurance costs. The exact journey undertaken needs to be entered onto the claim form and, if a diversion has been taken, details of the route.

It is recommended that public transport is used for journeys over 150 miles round trip. If you have to use your own car on a journey over 150 miles on MS Society business then please give the reason why on the expense claim form and get approval beforehand from the branch committee or MS Society contact.

- The Society will reimburse any reasonable parking costs and congestion charge (where this cannot be avoided).
- The Society is not able to reimburse parking fines or late payment fines for the congestion charge.

Using Public Transport – trains and buses

You should obtain the lowest possible standard class fare for the journey you need to make (where possible make use of cheap advance fares).

Using your Oyster Card

In order for this to be quick and easy, we require you to register your oyster card so that any journeys using this can be tracked and therefore correctly reimbursed. You can obtain a copy of your journey statement by logging into your online oyster account.

- If you use a contactless card instead of an oyster card, you will need to send your redacted bank statement to us. With both the oyster card and contactless card, please highlight the relevant journeys.
- To reclaim the cost of journeys from an oyster card, a TFL statement should be provided which details the journeys undertaken. We are unable to reimburse day travel cards as it is difficult to pinpoint the exact cost of one journey.

Using taxis

Taxi costs will be reimbursed in the following circumstances:

- Where there are access issues with public transport.
- Where a location has only limited public transport and/or safety considerations.
- The cost is cheaper than using public transport (which might be the case if there are a number people using the taxi).
- Where you need to carry equipment or other luggage.

Food/Drink and Accommodation

You will need to be away from home for more than 4 hours to reclaim food and drink expenses. You can reclaim up to the following amounts:

- Breakfast up to £7.00
- Lunch up to £12.70
- Evening meal up to £31.75

For other non-alcoholic drinks & snacks purchased there is a limit of £5 per day. Claims for alcohol will not be reimbursed.

Please be clear on the expenses claim why these expenses have been incurred.

Accommodation

Overnight accommodation should not exceed \pounds 100 per night (\pounds 110 per night where breakfast is included).

Incidental expenses whilst staying at overnight accommodation must not amount to more than ± 5 .

Expense form

Expense Forms along with a Bank Details form will be provided before each Panel Meeting.

- Please fill out the form correctly (referring to the checklist below) to prevent any delays.
- Once your expenses form has been correctly completed and approved, it shall be processed and the money will be sent to your account.
- In order to process your expenses claim as quickly as possible, it is important that your expenses form is filled out correctly.

When filling out the form, please follow the checklist below.

- 1. Write your name and home address at the top of the page
- 2. Write each claim in the boxes below with the date, what you are claiming for and the meeting you were attending.
- 3. Add up all claims and write the total in the box at the bottom of the page.
- 4. Print, sign and date the form (located at the bottom right of the page).

Electronic expense form submission

If you are submitting your expenses electronically please ensure that you have also attached a copy of all relevant receipts. You should also include the following wording in your accompanying email:

"I confirm that these expenses were incurred on behalf of MS Society business attending xxxx meeting on dd/mm/year and are accurate.

We're the MS Society.

Our community is here for you through the highs, lows and everything in between. We understand what life's like with MS.

Together, we are strong enough to stop MS.

mssociety.org.uk



Contact us

MS National Centre 020 8438 0700 info@mssociety.org.uk

MS Helpline Freephone 0808 800 8000 (weekdays 9am-9pm) helpline@mssociety.org.uk

Online mssociety.org.uk www. facebook.com/MSSociety twitter.com/mssocietyuk

MS Society Scotland

0131 335 4050 msscotland@mssociety.org.uk

MS Society Northern Ireland

028 9080 2802 nireception@mssociety.org.uk

MS Society Cymru

mscymru@mssociety.org.uk

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