

CSO Standing Committees

CSO has a duty to ensure that applications for funding are assessed expertly, objectively and impartially; review by an appropriately constituted body is therefore seen as an essential element of CSO's decision-making process. CSO relies heavily on the willingness of members of the scientific community to give their time to sit on these committees and to undertake expert peer review, and is most grateful to them for the vital role they play in the grant-giving process.

CSO also recognises the need to protect and preserve the integrity of the grant-giving processes, and is concerned that committee members may be placed under pressure to breach confidentiality and provide information on committee discussions and recommendations. To assist committee members in these situations, CSO has set down a code of conduct for those who serve on its advisory committees.

For the protection of other committee members and referees, and to ensure the impartiality of the peer-review process, if CSO has reason to believe that a member of an advisory body has breached the following code of conduct, then he/she may be asked to resign his/her membership.

The points below set out the requirements for committee members of the following committees: Health Services Research Committee (HSRC); Biomedical & Therapeutic Research Committee (BTRC); Research Training Fellowship Committee; Postgraduate Studentship Committee and Clinical Academic Training Fellowship Committee. This does not extend to members of committees providing strategic advice such as the Portfolio Steering Groups, Chief Scientist Committee and Public Involvement Group.

Code of conduct

1. Committee members should be aware that:
 - 1.1 they are covered by the CSO Policy on Conflicts of Interest and are required to declare any interests that could give rise to a conflict of interest with their CSO role(s)
 - 1.2 they should not offer advice to members of the scientific community on CSO policy and practices, for example on application procedures - all such enquiries should be directed to the staff of CSO.
2. The following are strictly confidential:
 - 2.1 advisory committee's discussions (including the reasons for recommendations to fund or not to fund).
 - 2.2 the contents of papers and correspondence relating to applications for funds, funding policy, interview panels and site visits.
3. Committee members and referees also have a right to expect that their comments will be treated in confidence, by both CSO staff and other members of the committees. For that reason:
 - 3.1 papers must be kept secure and not disseminated to anyone
 - 3.2 applications must not be discussed with anyone else (including colleagues based at the member's host institution and referees) without prior permission from CSO
 - 3.3 members of committees who are connected¹ in any way with an application must absent themselves from the meeting room during discussion of the application, and must not be informed of the outcome of the application by other members - they will be informed by CSO staff in due course
 - 3.4 no aspect of the deliberations or recommendations regarding an application should be discussed with applicants, either in connection with their own application, or any other application. Feedback will be provided as appropriate by CSO staff, in accordance with CSO current practice. Members should refuse any requests for information or for an explanation of how a particular decision was reached - all such requests must be referred to the staff of CSO
 - 3.6 the identity of referees must be kept confidential at all times.

¹ An individual will be connected with a grant application if he/she is: an applicant or a named collaborator; a relative of one of the applicants (including but not limited to spouse, partner, sibling, parent or child); a business partner of one of the applicants; a member of a department which would benefit financially from any award. In the event that sufficient expertise may not be available to make sound recommendations, discretion may be taken by the Chair. In this case, any potential conflict of interest will be noted, expert advice will be offered but the committee member will not score the application.

Terms of Office

The period of service for committee members is four years, renewable for a further term of four years. Membership is reviewed annually by the Chair and CSO to ensure the committee has good coverage in terms of expertise and representation across Scotland. Those wishing to apply to be a committee member can do so. Details are available on the CSO web site. CSO continuously collects both nominations and applications to serve as committee members. Appointment of committee members is internally-managed by CSO.

The committee Chair is appointed by the Chief Scientist and will usually have previously served as a member of the committee. The Chair serves a five-year term and elects a Deputy Chair. The Chair of BTRC also chairs the Clinical Academic Training Fellowships Committee, whilst the Chair of HSRC also chairs the CSO Research Training Fellowships Committee. Both of these Chairs provide strategic advice to CSO primarily through the Chief Scientist Committee.

Declaration of competing interests

CSO is committed to open declaration of competing interests in all its activities. Accordingly, all persons involved in the work of CSO Committees are required to declare all competing interests. These forms are held within CSO. The policy on competing interests is available from the CSO web site.