

Versus Arthritis

Management of interests policy

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to minimise the potential for conflicts of interest to arise and to protect Versus Arthritis and those who work for it from any perception, real or otherwise, that the external interests and affiliations of members of the subcommittees, supporting panels, external reviewers, groups and networks might interfere with their ability to work towards the furtherance of Versus Arthritis' objectives.

The registration of interests safeguards against inadvertent omission of any declaration of any relevant interest at the time when contributing to funding and strategy discussions and considerations.

Applicability

This policy relates to:

- i. All areas of business and to all members (permanent and guest) of the charity's committees, subcommittees, and college of experts.
- ii. Research Advisory Group chairs and members of the Advisory groups.
- iii. The management of conflicts of interests of external reviewers (who are non-subcommittee members) providing written reviews.

General

Versus Arthritis aims to identify members and reviewers of appropriate expertise and experience to operate in an independent manner who are not conflicted on a broad basis.

Versus Arthritis will, where practical, address conflicts of interest with individual members at the stage of member or reviewer invitation.

Disclosed interests by subcommittee members are formally captured and held in a register of interests, kept up to date by Versus Arthritis.

Disclosed interests for peer reviewers are recorded within the application peer review process and are not held in the register of interests.

If an individual is concerned about a possible conflict of interest involving another member of a subcommittee, then he or she should raise the matter with Versus Arthritis staff or subcommittee chair as soon as possible.

Versus Arthritis will review this policy every two years.

Categories of interests

In relation to subcommittee, panel and other research advisory group membership

1. Interests which should be disclosed for the register of interests are defined below and include any held by the members' spouse or partner and children:

1.1 Remunerated interests

- Equity interests (if worth £10,000 or more, or more than 1% of the total issued capital) in enterprises with involvement in pharmaceuticals, healthcare, biotech or related areas, or in any other enterprise that may have a real or perceived interest in the work of Versus Arthritis. Third party investments (e.g. ISAs) are exempt from this.
- Received either as compensation for work undertaken for a commercial organisation, or in consideration of the transfer of intellectual property
- Cash employment, honoraria, pensions, etc.
- Consultancies, directorships, membership, partnerships or trusteeships in commercial organisations.

1.2 Unremunerated interests

- Consultancies, directorships, membership, partnerships or trusteeships in commercial organisations.

1.3 Academic interests

- Major academic collaborations (national and international).

1.4 Members should also declare other interests which they feel may be a source of conflict, or which might be perceived to be a conflict, with the interests of Versus Arthritis.

2. Interests which should be disclosed by a subcommittee member:

- Interest as a Lead applicant or co-applicant
- Interest as a Head of department on a grant application
- Interest as a sponsor on a fellowship application
- Collaboration with the lead applicant or co-applicants within the last three years.
- Publication with the lead applicant or co-applicants within the last three years.
- Work in the same institution as the lead applicant or co-applicants.
- Circumstances or activities that may be regarded as being in direct competition of the applicant.

Disclosure of registerable interests

In relation to subcommittee, panel and other research advisory group membership

Members should capture their interests by completing a Disclosure of Interest form. The nature of the interest and the name of the relevant organisation should be disclosed. Recent (within last three years), current and planned interests should be declared. Financial amounts of salary, fee, share-holding grant etc. need not be disclosed. Individual members should give the required information, each being ultimately responsible for his or her entry.

In cases where an individual is uncertain as to whether a conflict of interest exists or not, they should report this to the relevant Versus Arthritis staff. Versus Arthritis staff will discuss the matter with the individual as necessary and report to the relevant chair and together will decide on a course of action.

The chair of the relevant meeting will seek fresh declarations of interests at the start of meetings. Members should highlight to the chair, prior to any discussion, the exact nature of the interest. Declarations should be summarised within the minutes of the relevant meeting and updated in the individual's disclosure form.

Members, guests or external reviewers of funding subcommittees are expected to declare any potential conflicts of interest relating to individual funding decisions to the relevant Versus Arthritis staff or meeting chair as soon as the existence of a conflict becomes apparent.

Assessment of disclosed interests

Interests are assessed on the basis of there being opportunity for the individual to influence the recommendations for personal or institutional gain. Interests are assessed either in relation to distinct aspects of the business of the meeting or in broad terms.

Declared interests may be assessed as being (i) conflicting interests or (ii) non-conflicting interests. Interests are viewed as non-conflicting if there is no opportunity for the individual to influence the business of the meeting for personal or institutional gain.

The Versus Arthritis staff and meeting chair or vice chair will decide whether the declared interest has bearing on any aspect of the meeting business. The chair or vice chair may seek the opinion of fellow members to assure an appropriate judgement.

Management of interests

Registered interests assessed as being non-conflicting require no further action other than maintenance in the register of disclosed interests.

Registered interests assessed as being conflicting in relation to a distinct aspect of meeting business require further action. In such cases members should be excluded from the relevant discussions and should absent themselves while the aspect is being discussed.

In relation to the subcommittee chair

- i. Chairs of subcommittees are permitted to apply for Versus Arthritis funding. If this arises, they should absent themselves from the whole meeting and not appoint any written peer reviewers if they are a lead applicant, co-applicant or collaborator on a funding application to the same subcommittee that they chair. The vice-chair will take over the meeting under these circumstances.
- ii. Should the chair have other conflicts of interest not related to funding (e.g. institutional, co-authorship, personal or professional relationships), they should declare these interests upfront and leave the room for the specific item(s) when they are discussed, as per the requirement for other committee members. The vice-chair should take over for these specific items.

In relation to subcommittee members

Where any of the conflicts of interest set out below are identified, Versus Arthritis will not distribute documents pertaining to the application or peer review to this member and they will be required to absent

themselves from the room when this application is under discussion. Details of discussion of the application will be deleted from any papers the member receives.

- i. Members of subcommittees are permitted to apply for Versus Arthritis funding. However, where they are lead applicant, co-applicant or head of department, they will not be approached to provide peer or panel review of funding applications from the round in which they applied and will be required to absent themselves from the whole panel meeting where outline applications are under review. They may be permitted to attend the full application review at the discretion of the Versus Arthritis staff and subcommittee chair or vice-chair.
- ii. Subcommittee members will not be approached to provide peer review of funding applications if they have published with the applicants (including co-applicants) within the last three years. If the publication is the product of a large consortium or committee, this may be considered as not being a conflict.
- iii. Subcommittee members will not be approached to provide peer review of funding applications if they have held an active Versus Arthritis grant with the applicants (including co-applicants) within the last three years. If the grant is a large consortium or committee this may be considered as not being a conflict
- iv. Subcommittee members will not be approached to provide peer review of funding applications if they work at the same institution as the applicants (including co-applicants).
- v. Where other circumstances or activities exist such that a member could be regarded as being in direct competition with the applicant or have a vested interest in the success or failure of the application, including but not limited to; if a member is funded or applying for funding on a similar project, they have a personal relationship with the applicants (including co-applicants), they must state for the record the situation and may be allowed to remain in the meeting at the discretion of the Versus Arthritis staff and subcommittee chair or vice-chair, but may not vote on the application.

In relation to external (non-subcommittee) peer reviewers

Where any of the conflicts of interest set out below are identified, individuals will not be approached by Versus Arthritis to provide external (non-subcommittee) peer reviewer.

- i. External (non-subcommittee) peer reviewers will not be approached to provide peer review of funding applications if they have published with the applicants within the last three years. If the publication is the product of a large consortium or committee this may be considered as not being a conflict.
- ii. External (non-subcommittee) peer reviewers will not be approached to provide peer review of funding applications if they have held an active Versus Arthritis grant with the applicants (including co-applicants) within the last three years. If the grant is a large consortium or committee this may be considered as not being a conflict.
- iii. External (non-subcommittee) peer reviewers will not be approached to provide peer review of funding applications if they work at the same institution as the applicants (including co-applicants).
- iv. Where other circumstances or activities exist such that an external (non-subcommittee) peer reviewer could be regarded as being in direct competition with the applicant or have a vested interest in the success or failure of the application, including but not limited to; if a member is funded or applying for funding on a similar project, they have a personal relationship with the applicants (including co-applicants), they must state for the record the situation and the request for peer review will be withdrawn.

- v. If, following approach for a peer review of a funding application, an interest is noted that is regarded as a conflict on the basis of the principles laid out in this policy that review shall be discarded and not form part of the assessment of that application.