

## **A guide to your role as an NIHR reviewer**

### **Information for professional contributors joining the NIHR reviewer community**

#### **The role of the NIHR and our reviewers**

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) funds health, social care and public health research and translates discoveries into practical products, treatments, devices and procedures. NIHR funding programmes identify the highest impact questions to UK health and involve patients and the public in all our work.

Our research provides the evidence to support decision making by professionals, policy makers and patients, makes this evidence available, and encourages its uptake and use.

NIHR reviewers make a significant contribution to the NHS, social care and public health by shaping the research we fund and improving practice.

#### **What is expert review?**

Expert review is the process through which research briefs, research proposals and final reports are critically assessed by independent relevant individuals unconnected to both the decision making body and those who have prepared the material being assessed.

The practice of peer review is very commonly used to inform decision making for scientific publications and grant funding. Peer review involves an assessment by colleagues in a relevant field of expertise.

In using the term expert review, we are acknowledging the broad spectrum of knowledge, skills and experience needed to provide a well-rounded assessment. We seek comments from patients, members of the public, academics, subject experts, clinical staff, service managers and public health professionals.

This guide focusses on the role of the reviewer for people commenting on the basis of their professional knowledge and expertise.

Guidance about reviewing is also available for reviewers commenting on the basis of their lived experience as a patient, carer or member of the public

<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/patients-and-public/>

## Why is expert review important?

Expert review is an essential process that ensures only the highest quality research is funded and published by the NIHR. It does this by providing assessment of the importance, scientific quality and cost effectiveness of the research by individuals independent of the teams undertaking the research and making funding decisions.

## What is the NIHR expert reviewer community?

Our expert reviewer community includes thousands of individuals who have agreed to undertake reviews for the NIHR, and who have provided us with information about their knowledge, skills and experience that enables us to match them to reviewing tasks.

## What do NIHR reviewers do?

NIHR reviewers are invited to read, critically assess and comment on the content of briefing papers, proposals for research, and final reports to help ensure that they:

- are of high quality
- are scientifically robust
- answer the questions set
- represent good value for money
- meet the needs of patients, the NHS and the wider public

We also ask reviewers to consider other aspects of the research, such as the potential impact it may have, ethical issues, methodology and experimental design, if these are areas in which they have relevant knowledge.

Reviewers are invited to review based on their expertise in a particular health or methodological area. Their comments are then used by board or panel members to help inform their assessment of the research.

As we seek reviews from a very wide range of individuals, we accept that not all reviewers are able to answer every question as some areas may be outside their area of knowledge or expertise. We therefore ask that reviewers only comment on those areas where they have the appropriate knowledge, skills and experience to do so.

## What we ask from our reviewers

We ask our reviewers to:

- Undertake critical review of research briefs, research applications or final reports and provide feedback from a professional or work-based perspective
- Declare any potential or perceived conflicts of interest
- Maintain the confidentiality of research briefs, proposals for research and final reports, and other reviewers comments
- Submit reviews by a given deadline via our online system
- Inform us of any changes to contact details to keep profile information up to date

## Skills reviewers may need to carry out a review

To be confident carrying out a review from a professional perspective it is helpful to have:

### Knowledge

- ✓ Work-based or professional knowledge that is relevant to the remit of NIHR research programmes
- ✓ An active interest in current affairs relating to health and well-being, public health, social care and health research e.g. via TV, radio and newspapers
- ✓ An understanding of the importance of, and need for, health, social care and public health research
- ✓ It may also be helpful to have knowledge of the peer-review process and its contribution to high-quality science.

### Skills

- ✓ Confident use of e-mail, internet and word processing packages
- ✓ It may also be helpful to have experience of using web-based peer review systems

### Experience

- ✓ An ability to read and critically assess complex and formal written documents
- ✓ Experience of assimilating a large volume of written information into a succinct and critical appraisal of the information provided
- ✓ An ability to provide constructive feedback
- ✓ Have completed relevant professional training, are appropriately qualified or experienced in field of expertise, where applicable
- ✓ It is also helpful to have:
  - ✓ Experience of undertaking research
  - ✓ Experience of undertaking peer-review
  - ✓ Experience of writing research proposals or applications for funding

## Duration of role

There are no limitations to the length of time anyone can be a member of our community of reviewers, however we do ask that members are current in their areas of expertise. We therefore ask that reviewers notify us when they retire from their professional role so we can discuss how best they can continue to support the work of the NIHR, if they wish to do so.

## Payment

Professional contributors who undertake reviews are not normally paid.

## Support for reviewers

If required, support when undertaking a review will be available from the relevant research programme staff. A detailed guidance note will be provided on acceptance of a review to support reviewers in completing the review task.

## **Declarations of interests/conflict of interest**

To make the best funding decisions, we need to know about any competing interests that reviewers may have. We conduct our own checks for any departmental or institutional conflicts (for example, if the applicant or co-applicants and the reviewer are based at the same organisation and in the same department). However, it is difficult for us to know about complex professional and interpersonal relationships between individuals working in a similar field of interest.

A useful definition from the BMJ is that a competing interest exists when a professional judgement concerning a primary interest (such as patients' welfare or the validity of research) may be influenced by a secondary interest (such as financial gain or personal rivalry).

Where there is a concern about a potential conflict of interest, reviewers should contact us for further advice prior to completing a review task.

## **Continued Professional Development**

In discussion with their professional body, reviewers may be able to claim Continued Professional Development (CPD) points for completing a review. Where appropriate, we provide written confirmation of reviewing tasks.

## **Acknowledging reviewers**

As a gesture of our appreciation, reviewers may be acknowledged on our website, where particular programmes publish a list of individuals who have completed reviews during the past year. This acknowledgment is optional and can be opted out of at any time.