



**SAMANTHA DICKSON
BRAIN TUMOUR TRUST**

Head to head with brain tumours

RESEARCH GRANT DECISION-MAKING OVERVIEW

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1 Introduction

Samantha Dickson Brain Tumour Trust was set up in 1996 by Neil and Angela Dickson, following the death of their daughter Samantha from a brain tumour. Since this time funding has been awarded for over 50 projects investing over £7million in total into the highest quality research.

SDBTT takes great care over the selection of research grants for funding, and uses a rigorous peer review process to do so. It is important that we do this so that donors know that their money is well spent; so that we can make a real difference for patients now and in the future; and so that applicants can have confidence that their application is treated fairly and objectively.

We are a member of the Association of Medical Research Charities and adhere to its principles of peer review - in 2011, we were awarded their Certificate of Best Practice in Research Peer Review for a second time.

This document outlines the process that is used for assessing grant applications and choosing which to fund. The process involves external academic reviewers, our own Grant Review and Monitoring committee (which includes academic and lay members) and the charity's Trustees.

2 Grant Review and Monitoring committee (GRAM)

The GRAM was established in 2009 to oversee the review of grant applications received through SDBTT's grant rounds and to monitor the progress of projects that we are funding.

The GRAM is responsible for the assessment and rating of applications for research funding, and makes recommendations to the Board of Trustees of SDBTT based upon its considerations. The Board of Trustees of SDBTT is responsible for allocation of funding and for making a formal offer of funding to applicants.

The GRAM is formed of 10-13 academic members and 2 lay members. The academic members consist of around five individuals with expertise specifically in brain tumours, including at least two international members. The remaining academic members are individuals with interests relevant to brain tumours but who do not primarily work on brain tumours themselves. The two lay positions were openly recruited through advertisement in the SDBTT newsletter and website. Members are rotated, with each standing for a maximum of 7 years.

The current membership is as follows.

Name	Institution/lay member
Professor Dame Ingrid Allen (Chair)	Queens University Belfast
Professor Steven Clifford	Newcastle University
Professor V Peter Collins	Cambridge University
Dr Stephen Falk	Bristol Oncology Centre
Dr Michelle Garrett	Royal Marsden Institute of Cancer Research
Dr Jacques Grill	Institut Gustave Roussy, France
Mr Steven Jones	Lay member
Dr John Mason	University of Edinburgh
Professor Monica Nister	Karolinska Institutet, Sweden
Mrs Clare Normand	Lay member
Professor Roy Rampling	Glasgow and Western Infirmary
Professor Richard Wise	Cardiff University

3 Process for review of grant applications

3.1 Grant round publicity

Samantha Dickson Brain Tumour Trust holds a call for applications at intervals of around 2 years. Each grant round is announced and widely publicised: for example, in relevant journals; on the SDBTT website and other external websites and databases,

and by contacting academics on the charity's mailing list. Any academic can be added to the mailing list by contacting research@sdbtt.co.uk. The call for applications will provide details about the type and size of grant awards available as well as further details about how to apply.

3.2 Outline application stage

Applicants submit short applications outlining their research proposals.

3.2.1 Outline applications received are checked for eligibility

Applications received by the grant deadline are checked for eligibility: for example, that they conform to the type and size of awards available. Material arriving after the deadline date will not be considered. We usually receive many applications and there is very strong competition for funding. Our grant round in 2009/10 had 47 eligible applications.

3.2.2 Peer review – internal

Each outline application is reviewed in detail by three academic GRAM members. For outline applications, review is primarily on the basis of: suitability of applicants and institution (expertise, environment and resources); scientific/clinical content and methodology; relevance to and potential impact for brain tumours.

3.2.3 Triage sub-committee meeting

After all the internal reviews for the outline applications have been received, a sub-committee comprised of the Chair and Vice-Chair of GRAM and facilitated by the Head of Research meet to consider the comments on the applications and decide which to invite to submit a full application.

3.3 Full application stage

Applicants who are selected at the outline application stage are invited to submit a more detailed full application.

3.3.1 Full applications received are checked for eligibility

Applications received by the grant deadline are checked for eligibility.

3.3.2 Peer review – internal

Each full application is reviewed in detail by three academic GRAM members and one lay GRAM member. Review is primarily on the basis of similar but more extensive criteria than are used to assess the outline applications: relevance and potential impact for brain tumours; relevance to the SDBTT research strategy; originality and importance; feasibility and methodology; suitability of team and environment; appropriateness of support requested; value for money and ethics.

3.3.3 Peer review – external

In addition to internal review, each full application is reviewed by three external peer reviewers who are academics with expertise in the topic covered by the application.

SDBTT identifies academics with relevant expertise based on information online and on relevant databases, and invite them to peer review the application. These individuals will be experts from around the world and will be asked to formally assess the application on the same basis as the GRAM.

Sometimes an individual reviewer will have expertise relevant to more than one application, but we usually don't ask a reviewer to assess more than three applications in any one grant round. Some applicants make suggestions for peer reviewers, these will be taken into account but the charity is not bound by them.

3.3.4 Applicants respond to peer reviews

After all the internal and external reviews have been received, the external peer review reports are sent to the applicants, in an anonymised form. This is to provide an opportunity for applicants to respond; understand the reasons for any decisions; and to provide feedback to improve future grant applications.

3.3.5 Grant Review and Monitoring committee meeting

After all the applicant responses to the peer reviews have been received, GRAM meets to consider the comments on the applications.

The GRAM members receive all the applications, all the internal and external reviews, and applicants' responses to reviews before the GRAM meeting (except where they have a conflict of interest – see section 4.2). One academic GRAM member will be assigned to lead the discussion on each application, and one lay member will lead on lay input. At the meeting, the applications are discussed and scored, and some further queries may be raised that the applicant may need to be asked about before final funding decisions are made.

3.3.6 Trustee meeting

The SDBTT trustees meet to approve grant awards based on: GRAM recommendations; research strategy; restricted funding; matched funding from the host institution or other funder. The quality of the grant proposal as judged by GRAM is considered paramount, as SDBTT will only fund top-quality projects. Merit on the basis of strategic factors, matched funding from the institution or other funder or restricted funding at SDBTT are secondary to this. Following the meeting, the outcomes are communicated to the applicants.

4 Confidentiality, conflicts of interest and disputes

4.1 Confidentiality

All information contained in applications, internal and external reviews and committee discussions is strictly confidential. GRAM members must not discuss with applicants or reviewers any information relating to the review of a specific application or offer opinions on the chances of success or failure. All requests for information on an application or a reviewer report should be referred to the SDBTT staff members responsible for research administration.

4.2 Conflict of interest

SDBTT makes every effort to ensure that its decisions are fair, objective and transparent. We have conflict of interest policies affecting external and internal reviews, GRAM members and Trustees.

Reviewers

For both external and internal reviews, a conflict of interest policy is in place to seek to avoid the involvement of individuals with a conflict of interest in relation to an application throughout its review. Individuals who are applicants or co-applicants in the grant round are excluded from acting as external reviewers for any of the applications. GRAM members from the same institution as an applicant will not act as internal reviewers on these applications.

When any internal or external individual is invited or assigned to review an application, they are asked to declare whether they have a conflict of interest. Where a potential conflict is declared, they will usually be asked not to undertake the review depending on the nature of the conflict. Such conflicts of interest might include previous collaboration with one of the applicants or co-applicants, being related to an applicant or co-applicant, or financial interests such as shares relevant to the application.

GRAM members

GRAM members are required to complete a conflict of interest declaration when they become a member of the committee, and annually thereafter, in which they must declare any interests which may potentially cause a conflict in the course of fulfilling their duties and responsibilities as a committee member.

No GRAM member with a conflict of interest with a particular application may participate in the review of that application. As a result, GRAM members who have an application under consideration will not receive any of the reviewers' comments on that application and shall absent themselves from the room when that application is up for review. In cases where the potential for conflict is uncertain, the Chair of the GRAM shall judge whether the individual should be excluded from the discussions.

Trustees

Trustees are required to complete a conflict of interest declaration annually, in which they must declare any interests which may potentially cause a conflict in the course of fulfilling their duties and responsibilities as a Trustee. Trustees with a conflict of interest shall absent themselves from the room for discussions where the conflict exists. In cases where the potential for conflict is uncertain, the Chair of Trustees shall judge whether the individual should be excluded from the discussions.

4.3 **Disputes**

SDBTT makes every effort to ensure that its decisions are reached in a fair and objective manner. Occasionally, applicants may feel that this has not been the case. Any challenges to the process and the outcome should be directed to the Research Team at SDBTT, who will consult the Chair of the GRAM, the Chair of Trustees and the CEO to establish the best course of action.