

Fight for Sight Research Strategy October 2007

1st Floor
36-38 Botolph Lane
London EC3R 8DE

Tel 020 7929 7755

Fax 020 7929 4341

info@fightforsight.org.uk

www.fightforsight.org.uk

Objectives

The charity's mission is to fund world class research into the prevention and treatment of blindness and eye disease.

Background to Fight for Sight's Research

In 2005 Fight for Sight and the British Eye Research Foundation (formerly the Iris Fund for the Prevention of Blindness) merged to form the new Fight for Sight. Both of the charities have been funding medical research into blindness and eye disease for over 40 years.

In this time the charities have supported a wide variety of different research areas. These include molecular and cell biology, immunology, gene therapy and stem cell biology. A wide variety of clinical studies have also been supported. Research groups funded are based in the UK at a wide range of different institutions. The research undertaken has primarily been in the UK but some research has also been carried out overseas.

Funding has been provided for a range of grants including programme grants, project grants, clinical fellowships, equipment grants and the funding of PhD Studentships.

The merger of the two charities represents a significant step in consolidating the efforts of charitable funding for eye research in the UK. The new Fight for Sight is the largest dedicated charitable funder of eye research in the UK. Other funders in the UK include government agencies (eg the Medical Research Council (UK)), charitable foundations that fund a wide range of medical research (eg the Wellcome Trust) and other charities dedicated to funding eye research. These are all part of a worldwide effort to advance medical science and bring real benefit to those experiencing eye disease and vision loss.

Patron: HRH The Duke of York KCVO ADC KG President: The Right Hon Baroness Boothroyd PC

British Eye Research Foundation operating as Fight for Sight is a company limited by guarantee registered in England (Company Number: 05525503) and a charity registered in England by the Charity Commission for England and Wales (Number: 1111438) whose registered office is at 1st Floor, 36-38 Botolph Lane, London EC3R 8DE

Fight for Sight recognises that it has a key role to play in this effort. The research strategy set out in this paper represents the strategy for the merged charity and builds on the work of the two previous charities.

Fight for Sight's Research Strategy

Fight for Sight aims to fund world class research into the prevention and treatment of blindness and eye disease. The charity will consider any applications within this area.

Research can include basic laboratory research investigating disease mechanisms, preclinical experimental studies and genotyping and phenotypic investigation of patient populations as a prelude to clinical trials. The charity will also consider participating in the funding of clinical trials.

As part of its strategy Fight for Sight aims to encourage the dissemination of research results both nationally and internationally to a wide audience. Fight for Sight is keen to ensure that research results are applied to providing clinical benefit.

The main stream of funding provided by Fight for Sight is an annual round of grants. Details of these rounds and the detailed timetables are published in appropriate publications and advertised on the charity's website. Whilst the focus may change slightly year on year the charity will consider funding a range of grants which may include:

- PhD Studentships
- project grants
- programme grants
- clinical fellowships

Applications in the annual round are subject to an internal peer review process and also to an external peer review process. For certain categories of grant a shortlisting process may occur before the external peer review stage. Further details of this are set out below.

Whilst it is envisaged that the annual round will provide the main stream of funding for research by Fight for Sight, the charity may from time to time decide to run further grants programmes or consider other funding outside of the annual grants round. Such instances may occur when donations are made to the charity specifically for such purpose and the programmes fall within the aims of the charity. Fight for Sight will also consider proposals to co-fund research in partnership with other funding bodies. In these circumstances appropriate peer review processes will be applied.

Research priorities

Fight for Sight will consider funding any applications that fall within its Research Strategy as set out above. The evaluation process of each grant application will consider whether the proposed research represents a strategic fit with the aims of the charity.

It is expected however that the significant majority of research funded by Fight for Sight will be able to demonstrate clinical benefit to people experiencing eye disease within the short to medium term. This is normally considered to be within 5 years from the end of the grant. Some grants will be funded where research is at an early stage but is deemed potentially significant.

Restrictions on Research Applications

Fight for Sight's grant funding will be allocated to research teams based in the UK and attached to recognised academic or medical institutions. The charity may however fund UK based teams undertaking research in other parts of the world.

Fight for Sight Research Processes and Administration

The Trustees of Fight for Sight determine the budget available for grant making and are ultimately responsible for the research strategy of the charity and for grant making. To assist them in these responsibilities the following panels have been formed:

The Research Strategy Advisory Group ("RSAG") – this group exists to advise the Trustees on their overall strategy for funding research and the framework for assessment of grant applications. The RSAG is also responsible for advising Trustees on research matters, including the structure of research in the UK, that relate to the charity's activities.

The Grants Allocation Panel ("GAP") – this group exists to assess the applications received as part of the annual round of grants. Within a pre-determined budget the GAP is responsible for recommending projects of scientific merit to the Trustees of Fight for Sight.

The terms of reference for these committees are attached to this document.

It is envisaged that the annual round will provide the main stream of funding for research. The Trustees may however appoint other committees separate from the GAP to assist in assessing further grants programmes or in assessing other funding outside of the annual grants round.

The Trustees will also ensure the appointment of a Senior Medical Adviser to the charity who acts as the spokesman for the charity on medical and research matters.

The staff of Fight for Sight are responsible for the day-to-day administration of the charity's grants programme. They are not involved in assessing the scientific merits of individual grants. The staff of the charity will also be helped on a day to day basis by the Senior Medical Adviser.

Peer Review

Fight for Sight aims to fund high quality medical research. In order to assist the charity in assessing grant applications a peer review process is used. This conforms to the guidelines issued by The Association of Medical Research Charities entitled "The Implementation of Peer Review" dated August 2005 and the "AMRC Principles of Peer Review" revised (draft) 2006.

The process of peer review is divided into two parts:

- 1) an expert advisory panel appointed by the charity which meets to consider applications for funding. The GAP provides this for Fight for Sight's annual grants round
- 2) the opinions of external experts (ordinarily those not on a Fight for Sight panel) which are sought in writing on research proposals

Fight for Sight uses this two part process for its annual grants round. However for certain of the grants a shortlisting process will occur before the external peer review stage.

When undertaking external peer review, Fight for Sight aims to receive three written reviews from independent experts. These include experts based outside of the UK. Fight for Sight believes that it is important for applicants to see the comments made by external reviewers. The charity endeavours to send these on an anonymous basis to applicants for their responses ahead of decisions on funding.

All outcomes of funding decisions will be communicated to applicants in a timely fashion and feedback is available to applicants regarding their application.

**Fight for Sight
Research Strategy Advisory Group
Terms of Reference**

Remit

1. To advise the Trustees of Fight for Sight (the “Trustees”) on their overall strategy for funding research and to regularly review the charity’s research strategy
2. To advise the Trustees on the framework for assessment of grant applications
3. To review the charity’s documentation relating to grant applications
4. To provide advice to the Trustees concerning any research governance issues relating to research funded by Fight for Sight
5. To make recommendations to the Trustees of Fight for Sight on the selection of members for the Grants Allocation Panel
6. To review and assess progress reports from funded projects and where necessary undertake a site visit
7. To assist and support the Fight for Sight office in matters relating to grant administration where a scientific input is required.
8. To respond to requests from the Trustees regarding research funding

Membership

1. All RSAG members will be appointed by the Board of Trustees.
2. The membership will be:
 - a Chairman who is a scientist or a clinician and may be a member of the Board of Trustees
 - at least 4 other members who are leading clinicians and/or scientists with wide research experience and who represent a range of areas of expertise
3. The Chairman will be appointed for a period of 5 years renewable for a further period of up to 2 years.
4. Members will be appointed for a period of up to 5 years renewable for a further period of up to 2 years
5. Members may also serve on another Fight for Sight committee or panel
6. The Chairman and any members who are Trustees may not apply for grant funding from Fight for Sight whilst members of the RSAG
7. Ordinarily, no more than half of the members should be in receipt of grants from Fight for Sight

Meetings

1. It is expected that the RSAG will meet 4 times a year. The need and frequency of meetings will be kept under review.
2. Minutes of each meeting will be taken and presented to the subsequent meeting
3. The RSAG will operate mechanisms for recording members’ interests and for dealing with potential conflicts of interest during the conduct of its business

**Fight for Sight
Grants Allocation Panel
Terms of Reference**

Remit

1. Within Fight for Sight's annual round of grants:
 - to assess and score abstract grant applications at the shortlisting stage, if appropriate
 - to suggest suitable external peer reviewers for grant applications
 - to meet and assess full grant applications which have been externally peer reviewed
 - to make recommendations to the Trustees of Fight for Sight concerning the scientific merit of applications
2. To feedback through the Chairman any comments relating to Fight for Sight's grant programme.

Membership

1. All GAP members will be appointed by the Board of Trustees.
2. The membership will be:
 - a Chairman who is a scientist or a clinician and may be a member of the Board of Trustees
 - a Deputy Chairman who is a scientist or a clinician and may be a member of the Board of Trustees
 - at least 10 other members who are leading clinicians and/or scientists involved in research in ophthalmology and visual science and who represent a range of areas of expertise
3. The Chairman will be appointed for a period of 5 years renewable for a further period of up to 2 years.
4. Members will be appointed for a period of up to 3 years renewable for a further period of up to 2 years
5. Members may also serve on another Fight for Sight committee or panel
6. The Chairman and any members who are Trustees may not apply for grant funding from Fight for Sight whilst members of the GAP
7. No more than half of the members should be in receipt of grants from Fight for Sight

Meetings

1. It is expected that the GAP will meet twice a year. The need and frequency of meetings will be kept under review.
2. Each meeting of the GAP will be attended by a lay member. This will normally be a lay Trustee of Fight for Sight
3. Fight for Sight will record the recommendations of the GAP and present these to the Trustees of Fight for Sight or another such committee or sub-committee as the Trustees may determine
4. The GAP will operate mechanisms for recording members' interests and for dealing with potential conflicts of interest during the conduct of its business