

Children's Cancer Research Fund (CCRF)

Research Strategy

Why the charity funds research

- Aims, objectives and priorities
 - CCRF aims focus on providing “pump-priming” funds of one or two years to research and clinical investigators who are addressing pediatric cancers. The goal is to provide funds that will lever major longer-term funding from established funders (CRUK, Leukemia UK, MRC, ESRC etc). Some priority is given to promising young investigators at the beginning of their careers. Generally funding is directed to support post-doctoral research fellows for one or a maximum of two years.
 - Objectives are to fill a gap of funding where solid preliminary results of novel approaches are required in grant applications to lever major and longer term funding. If possible, publication of this work should also be a goal.
 - Priorities are defined by annual consultation with a scientific and medical advisory board (see below).
- The unique role of the charity in the research landscape and how it adds value
 - In the geographical area that it functions (the Northwest of England, see below) there are six universities, two of which are in the major “Russell Group”, with associated medical schools and children's' hospitals. There is a major UK cancer research institute in Manchester. All are competing for fiercely competitive funding to support innovative research ideas that could improve the lives of children with cancer and potentially extend their survival. CCRF is unique in its focus on pediatric cancer and it has the ability to substantially fund pump-priming grants (explained further here). CCRF funding “levers” national and international peer-reviewed funds into an important UK hub of cancer research, so increasing the quality of research and medicine in the Northwest (a population of almost eight million people).

What research/scientific policy issues have been identified and why

- The types of research, scientific and medical areas the charity intends to support in pediatric oncology are determined by an independent CCRF UK scientific and medical advisory board (SAB). This is constituted of three MD or MD/PhD pediatric oncologists working outside of the geographical area where grants are awarded. Current funding priorities are in Annex 1. The SAB is chaired by an Emeritus Professor (PhD, DSc) from outside the region. All grant applications are refereed by two independent experts chosen by the SAB. These experts are either national or international (eg USA). Grants are scored and prioritized according to fixed criteria (score sheet, Annex 2).
- Policy issues highlighted the need to fund innovative projects at the stage where preliminary results require confirmation and consolidation in order that they could attract substantial and longer-term national or international funding (“pump-priming”) through grant applications. A gap in funding to obtain solid preliminary

results to support high quality grant applications was identified by CCRF and is particularly relevant to early career scientists and clinicians.

- Although “strategic fit” (see Annex 1) plays an important role in determining funding direction, the SAB is sensitive, in awarding funds, to the need to support innovative areas where risk may be higher. That risk is offset by the track record of the applicant.

How the charity plans to fund research

- The types of grants
 - Funds of up to (currently) £70k are available for **one year**. Exceptional renewal for a **second year**, after an approved first year report, requires approval by the SAB. The funds cover the employment, through the University or Hospital, of suitably qualified staff to ensure the proper realization of the proposed work. Generally, these funds support a post-doctoral fellow or a research assistant. Provision is made for consumable costs. A limited travel budget to conferences may be requested. Small items of equipment may be considered for funding. Major capital expenditure on equipment is not within the scope of CCRF funding.
 - To date partnerships have not been forged as CCRF covers a niche funding area of pump-priming research grants in pediatric oncology.

Who the charity will fund

- CCRF funds academic researchers and clinicians with tenure or fellowships of five years or longer, who already have high quality records of scientific or clinical research. Funding is in universities, research institutes and teaching hospitals.
- Qualifications are: PhDs, MD-PhDs or MDs.

Where the charity will fund research

- CCRF funds research in universities, hospitals and research institutions *with substantial research infrastructure*. The charity has strong geographical links with the North West of England, including the University of Manchester and its associated hospitals, Salford University, Manchester Metropolitan University, Liverpool University and its associated hospitals, Liverpool John Moore’s University, Lancaster University and associated hospitals. However, grant awards are not restricted to this region or these institutions.

When the grant will be awarded

- Awards are normally made on an annual basis, according to available funds. An annual call for funds is targeted to the institutions named above. Grant applications are received, assessed by the SAB which suggests appropriate evaluation (see Annex 2) by external referees. The SAB reviews external referee reports and decides on priorities for funding. This process takes a maximum time of 12 weeks. Anonymous criticism by external referees of applications for funding is fed back to all applicants, successful or not.

- Funded applicants are followed after the termination of their CCRF grant to determine the impact of “pump-priming” on their subsequent grant funding and publication record. Normally, second awards to the same individual are unusual and must be for a novel project.
- The SAB reviews research strategy in terms of scientific priorities and medical needs (Annex 1) every three years. However, it is unlikely that the principle of funding “pump-priming” grants will evolve radically in the future.

Annex 1

Research priorities 2025 CCRF Scientific Advisory Board

- Methods to rapidly screen / sequence tumours to identify targetable mutations, activated pathways in pediatric tumours including detection of potentially actionable translocations in tumours with low mutational loads
- Early detection of relapse through liquid biopsy methods, particularly ctDNA
- Understanding the mechanisms of failure of immunotherapy in pediatric cancer
- Immunotherapy – especially combinations of chemotherapy / immunotherapy or radiotherapy / immunotherapy.
- Role of metabolism in pediatric cancers
- Targeting cancers with poor outcome (DRSCT, alveolar RMS, rhabdoid etc.)

Reviewer Number #
Friends of Rosie Grant Round 2025



Grant Appraisal Form for Peer Reviewers

Principal Applicant:	
Project title:	

1. How valid, sound and appropriate is the plan of investigation and does it satisfy the criteria of being a “pump-priming” project?

(Please also comment its novelty and merit, whether the objectives are likely to be achieved in the time frame suggested and highlight any risks to the work. Your critique will be provided anonymously to the applicant)

2. Please comment on whether the proposal provides value for money. Could the planned work be reduced, or undertaken in stages, if only part funding were available?

(If appropriate, please suggest where reductions could be made)

3. Are the benefits to the treatment and diagnosis of children with cancer realistic?

4. Are you aware of this or similar research being supported elsewhere?

(If yes, please state where)

5. Do you have any conflict of interest with this proposal? Yes/No:

6. If animal work is proposed does the proposal follow NC3rs guidelines?

<https://www.nc3rs.org.uk/the-3rs>

7. Overall opinion and rating for this proposal:

Outstanding 5	Excellent 4	Very Good 3	Good 2	Mediocre 1	Unfundable 0

8. Any confidential comments for the Scientific and Clinical Advisory Committee?

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