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ICVI Research Strategy 2023 – 2027

Executive Summary

There is an urgent need to develop new effective treatments for cancer patients, and to carry out the underpinning research to achieve this.

Access to immunotherapy has improved in the past decade but innovative thinking and new approaches are always required and existing treatments need to be applied more effectively.

Since 2000 the ICVI has been funding research into the use of vaccines and immunotherapy for the treatment of all types of cancer. Our vision is that cancer vaccines and immunotherapy will become a standard treatment and improve survival rates and patients' quality of life for a wide range of cancers. Our Principal, Professor Angus Dalgleish and his team at St George's University of London have been working to achieve this. We are now in a position to award outside grants via open competition.

This research strategy describes how we aim to engage and empower scientists and clinicians to achieve this goal. ICVI recognises that many new treatment approaches, new targets and drugs need to be discovered and translated to patient benefit.

We understand that the probability of a scientific breakthrough and achievement of our stated goals will improve if we broaden the base of the research we fund.

We are committed to the goals of health resource equality and understand that the resources of the National Health Service are finite and would encourage research that aims to reduce the cost of cancer treatment in the long term for the patients in the UK, primarily, but also around the world.

Targeting with a single drug or treatment currently does not cure the disease. Multiple treatments may need to be integrated for the treatment of a single cancer patient. We are therefore committed to co-operating with other organisations to combine approaches, to support single outstanding projects, and to promote the careers of young scientists, who can carry the research forward with ever increasing improvements in advancement of knowledge and technologies. We are committed to continually researching and reviewing at which stage scientists find it hardest to get funding, and to considering how to adjust our strategy to improve impact across the sector.

We are committed to ethically conducted research, a robust but rapid process of scientific peer review, allowing support to be quickly directed to innovative projects with fewer non-essential or administrative encumbrances.

Our Scientific Approach

ICVI is dedicated to funding immunotherapy research in order to improve the lives of cancer patients.

Funding by ICVI

Our ambition is to fund excellent scientists and clinicians in the field of immunotherapy for a variety of different types of cancer. ICVI funded scientists will be expected to continue the work began at SGUL.

In assessing the scientific rigour of a proposal we follow AMRC guidelines and the norms of the sector. Areas of investigation should span one or more of the fields outlined here.

All funded teams, whatever their location, are considered to be part of the core ICVI group. ICVI grantees are expected to work as part of a collegial academic group combining resources to target immunotherapy research. Over the next three years we will work on new ways to support scientists funded by ICVI. New grantees will be required to develop strategically important areas of research, to build solid links to existing groups, and to add new expertise.

We know that objective peer review in reputable scientific journals is the life blood of any research activity. We are also committed to the Open Access philosophy adopted by all established research funders in the UK and elsewhere and also by the Research Excellence Framework in the UK.

Assessing research proposals

Each research proposal will be assessed by a Peer Review Committee, incorporating a broad range of experts in immunotherapy. Three main criteria will be used. First, scientific merit as judged against our Research Strategy. Secondly, collaboration with others supported by ICVI. Thirdly, intellectual innovation and translational research.

Peer Review Committee (PRC)

Peer reviewers are scientific experts, with knowledge specific to the applications they are asked to assess. Peer reviewers are independent of the charity, and they score applications based on scientific quality. They consider whether the applicant can deliver the promised project, the technical strengths and weaknesses of the project idea and the methodology that will be used, and its likely impact.

We are applying to become a member charity of the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC), and we currently operate according to the AMRC's Principles of peer review.

We ask for "lay abstracts" – short project descriptions written in everyday language – to be included on all funding proposals. These are circulated to our board of trustees and our supporters if the project is awarded funding by ICVI.

The PRC consists of worldwide research scientists who are leading authorities in immunotherapy as a treatment for cancer. They review funding proposals and monitor the progress of currently funded projects.

The current Committee consists of:

Paul M. Sondel, PhD, MD University of Wisconsin – Madison

Dr John Maher Clinical Senior Lecturer in Immunology Kings College London

Jörg Wischhusen PhD, Professor of Experimental Tumor Immunology

University of Würzburg School of Medicine Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics

Prof. Viktor Umansky, PhD, Clinical Cooperation Unit Dermato-Oncology

German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ)

Theresa L. Whiteside, PhD, Professor of Pathology, Immunology, and Otolaryngology

University of Pittsburgh

Michael Shurin, MD, PhD, Professor of Pathology

University of Pittsburgh

Brendon Coventry, MBBS PhD FRACS FACS FRSM, Associate Professor Adelaide Medical School

Dr. Samir Khleif, MD Biomedical Scholar Professor, Georgetown University

Current Interests

Repurposing existing drugs as cancer immunotherapeutics.

Utility of non-classical T-cell approaches as cancer immunotherapies.

Improvement in the efficacy and safety of immune checkpoint inhibitor immunotherapy.

Funding our research

ICVI intends to fund research using funds raised through various fundraising activities, including events, trusts and foundations, major donors and companies.

ICVI intends to provide grants for research projects which are typically 3 years in duration.

Grants can include salary support, on costs and consumables. ICVI will also be prepared to fund and support collaborations and conferences for its researchers. Additional support could be provided to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the initial grant.

We will hold regular networking events for our grantees in order to facilitate collaboration.

Who ICVI will fund

ICVI intends to fund research at highly-rated research institutions. This is assessed primarily through the Research Excellence Framework (“REF”), a periodic measurement of research quality in universities and other higher education institutions in the UK against international standards of excellence.

Applicants for major grants should at least have a PhD qualification and the support of a senior researcher at their institution.

ICVI intends to focus its resources on funding research in the UK.

How ICVI awards its grants

Candidates will be asked to submit a full application which will be peer reviewed by international reviewers. Based on this, the Peer Review Committee will award points to applicants according to who is most eligible for funding in their opinion. The candidates with the highest scores will be awarded funding. Further specific information will be provided as we launch specific funding calls.

If you have any questions, or to be kept up to date on our funding opportunities, email marie@icvi.org.uk