

## Scientific Audit Committee

**POL007**

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**Distribution**

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## 1. Background

The EORTC Scientific Audit Committee (SAC) has been created to give independent advice to the EORTC Board regarding the activities of all divisions and groups of the EORTC.

SAC Reviews are the method by which the EORTC is able to evaluate the effectiveness of the research programmes conducted by its groups. Each research group carrying the EORTC name should be reviewed every four to five years unless the EORTC Board asks for an exception for groups with specific problems.

The SAC acts as an independent group of experts who can advise the EORTC Board on scientific quality and make suggestions about changes (if any) that would be appropriate to strengthen the groups and the overall functioning of the EORTC.

The EORTC Board wishes to ensure that the financial management of the groups is handled according to EORTC policies and strategies. SAC Reviews will need to ensure that the structure and financial management of the groups are carried out according to EORTC policies.

The SAC consists of a panel of experts assembling together to discuss and review both the group's past work in the last five years and also their future research strategy proposals for the next quinquennium.

The composition of SAC is crucial. However, it is somewhat difficult for oncologists who are not familiar with EORTC policies to perceive conformity or non conformity with EORTC structure, policies and strategies. Members of the SAC should represent a cross section of opinion and expertise. About 50% of members should not have current extensive EORTC activities (officer of a group for example). The choice of EORTC and non-EORTC members must be approved by the Board.

Members are committed for a three-year term which is renewable. The Chairman of SAC reviews the composition of the SAC after his/her appointment and makes a proposal of new members to the EORTC Board. A turnover of two-three members is recommended to avoid lack of continuity in SAC reviews i.e. not all members should be renewed at the time of change of chairman. SAC consists of ten members plus two ex-officio members i.e. the EORTC Director General and the Director of the EORTC Data Center.

## 2. Responsibilities

The SAC provides a scientific assessment of the achievements (including publications), ongoing activities and future plans of the groups. The SAC also agrees on a set of recommendations with regards to the strategy of the group. The report of the review together with the recommendations are then discussed at the next EORTC Executive Committee and Board meetings as well as forwarded by the EORTC President to the chairmen of the groups reviewed. The reply from the chairman of the group is circulated to the EORTC Executive Committee and to the SAC members.

The SAC Secretary is in charge of the preparation of the minutes of the SAC meetings. The EORTC Director General's Office is in charge of the logistics and administrative aspects of the review (hotel bookings, circulation of documents, reminders ...). The EORTC Data Center helps the chairmen with data and relevant information concerning groups functioning (accrual – quality of data, compliance with EORTC policies...)

The chairmen of EORTC QAC (via QAU) and PRC are asked to provide relevant information to the SAC Chairman (via EORTC Data Center and Director General's Office) prior to the review of each group. These reports should be distributed by the Director General's Office to the rapporteur at least four weeks prior to the meeting.

The rapporteur should have all documents relevant to his review at least four weeks prior to the meeting. It should be mandatory that all documents supplied for the SAC review by groups, data center representatives and external experts are submitted in electronic form. Reminders should be sent to participating members and group chairmen from the Director General's Office to respect these deadlines.

### **3. Process of organising an EORTC group review**

The groups to be reviewed will be chosen by SAC from a list produced by the SAC Secretary with the help of the Director General's Office, mentioning the last review of all groups. All EORTC groups should be reviewed on a four to five-year basis unless specific problems require more frequent reviews. This list will also include any groups causing concern to the Board. This will enable more efficient planning of how long each review will take in the future as it was realised that more in depth reviews may be necessary for some groups than others.

A rapporteur is designated among SAC members for each group. The name of the rapporteur is made known to the group to be reviewed. The rapporteur will prepare a report on his/her review and forward it to all SAC members (via the Director General's Office) at least 2 weeks prior to the SAC meeting. When necessary, an external review and report will be organized if the designated rapporteur feels that he/she does not have relevant expertise in the field.

Schedule and dates for the SAC are set about one year in advance by the SAC.

A letter is sent by the Director General's Office to the groups' chairmen to agree on the date (at least 8 months in advance) and the EORTC Director General's Office informs the EORTC Data Center Director and the EORTC QAC Chairman about the groups to be reviewed and the schedule at least six months in advance.

SAC Chairman proposes one (and up to three) external expert(s) in the specific field of the group to be reviewed (if such expertise is not available, within SAC). In some circumstances, a selection of external referees might be required to provide written comments for the review.

The EORTC Director General's Office circulates the questionnaire designed by SAC "EORTC SAC: questionnaire to chairmen of EORTC groups (ref.: FO5301 and FO5302) to the groups' chairmen at least six months prior to the review and requests a reply to the questionnaire and sent a schedule of events within three months.

The response of the group should arrive at the EORTC Director General's Office at least three months before the review (the EORTC Director General's Office sends the necessary reminders).

The Director General's Office distributes:

- the completed questionnaires to the SAC members (and external experts if any) at least eight to ten weeks prior to the review.
- papers sent out to external referees along with two copies of a confidentiality agreement at least eight weeks before the SAC meeting.

SAC members provide questions/suggestions to be transmitted to the SAC or group's chairman by the Director General's Office at least four weeks prior to the review.

The Director General's Office sends fax/tel reminders for referees' comments if not received three weeks prior to the meeting.

The documents to be circulated at least two weeks prior to the meeting to all SAC members include:

- conclusions and SAC recommendations of the previous review for each group being reviewed;
- letter sent by the EORTC President to the Chairmen of groups/task forces and response from the Chairmen.
- the rapporteurs' comments;
- the review by the Data Center.

Draft programme of the day's events is prepared by the SAC Secretary and sent by the EORTC Director General's Office to groups' chairmen (taking into account starting time, i.e. people arriving/leaving) at least one month in advance.

#### **4. Review at the EORTC headquarters**

There will be sufficient time for feedback of the previous meeting and, subsequently, up to four groups could be reviewed.

If needed and if problems are anticipated, fewer groups will be reviewed to guarantee in depth discussions.

The group's chairman will be asked to withdraw following his/her presentation and discussion with SAC members. Closed discussion among members of the SAC will occur and recommendations will be formulated. The group chairman will then be invited back to hear these recommendations and any serious concerns or errors of interpretation or facts can be provided.

The SAC secretary prepares the draft minutes within 14 days, which are circulated among all SAC members asking for comments. The members of the SAC including the SAC chairman have 7 days to review the draft and submit their comments and suggestions to the SAC secretary. If no comments are received within this period of time the SAC membership agrees with the contents of the minutes and the secretary submits the final version to the EORTC Director General's Office.

The EORTC Director General's Office sends SAC members and the EORTC President (and the Executive Committee) the final version of the minutes within 14 days.

These final minutes are discussed at an Executive Committee following the SAC meeting. The Final SAC minutes/recommendations are then sent by the Director General's Office on behalf of the EORTC President, to the reviewed chairmen asking for feedback to be sent to the President.

This feedback is sought from chairmen (with a timetable of actions) within one month after having received the minutes and SAC recommendations.

The EORTC Director General's Office circulates the chairmen's response to the SAC members and to the Executive Committee.

The SAC Chairman presents and discusses his/her report including review, recommendations and feedback from the chairmen to the following EORTC Board. In case of major problems or emergencies, the SAC Chairman is invited by the EORTC President to the Executive Committee.

The SAC members receive a final copy of the extract of the minutes of the EORTC Board related to the reviewed groups.

## **5. Selecting an external reviewer**

There are two important issues to take into account when selecting an external reviewer:

- Is the proposed person too close to the group to be reviewed?
- Is the individual concerned in conflict with the group to be reviewed?