Peer review handbook

Network grant and exploratory workshop
Educational sciences, 2024

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Foreword

I warmly welcome you as a member of this year's review period in educational sciences at the Swedish Research Council!

Educational science research sheds light on assessment and knowledge results, multimodal learning, inclusion and equality, digital technologies in education, multilingualism, organisational policies as well as many other aspects of education and learning. The research is conducted in several different scientific disciplines and contributes to knowledge development and strengthens the scientific basis for education.

The chair and reviewers of the panels carry out a very important task within the Swedish Research Council's assignment to support research of highest scientific quality. Researchers jointly review and assess the scientific quality of applications that deal with learning, teaching and education, and contribute to knowledge development in the field.

This peer review handbook includes information on the Swedish Research Council's principles and guidelines. Please read the instructions carefully as they will help you in the work that awaits you.

We are grateful and happy that you have taken on this important mission and are looking forward to collaborating with you. Once again very warm welcome to the Swedish Research Council. We hope you will find the review work rewarding.

Pernilla Nilsson

Secretary General, Committee for Educational Sciences

Introduction

This handbook is written for reviewers in the panel that assess applications for network grants and exploratory workshops within educational sciences. The handbook is designed to reflect the review process step by step. The intention is to make it easier for you as a panel member to find the information you need for the tasks to be carried out.

New features in the review process 2024

Additional information regarding the applicant's competence and merits

A new contextualising part has been introduced in the application, which should be seen as a complement to the other parts of the application that deal with the applicant's competence. In this new part, the applicant must describe how the merits that has been indicated in the CV and under "Publications and other research output" show the competence to carry out the proposed research.

Publications and other research outputs

The list of publications in the application is now called "Publications and other research outputs." It consists of two parts where the applicant must separate between publications and research outputs that are peer-reviewed and that are not peer-reviewed.

AI in the assessment of applications

Generative AI tools (ChatGPT or similar) must not be used in the scientific assessment of the applications. The assessment is a task that must be carried out by a specialist researcher who has been recruited based on their expertise in the area. On the other hand, there is no prohibition against using digital AI tools for tasks such as improving the language in written statements on applications, as long as this does not entail factual contents or the applicant's personal data being disseminated.

AI in applications

There is no prohibition against the applicant to use generative AI or other tools (digital or of another type) when they draw up the application. At present, applicants do not need to state whether they have used AI. Read the guidelines for the use of AI tools.

Important starting points and principles

Peer review

The Swedish Research Council regards peer review as a guarantor that our support goes to research of the highest scientific quality in all scientific fields. The Board of the Swedish Research Council has formulated guidelines for peer review based on eight principles. Read the guidelines for peer review.

Conflict of interest

To avoid any conflict of interest situation, we have established strict guidelines. Read the Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy and guidelines for managing conflicts of interest.

If you have a conflict of interest, you must not take part in the handling or assessment of that application during any part of the process. The following applies for panel members:

- Any application where you are the applicant or co-applicant must not be reviewed by your review panel.
- Any application where a close relative of yours is the applicant (does not apply to co-applicants) must not be reviewed by your review panel.

You are obliged to notify any conflict of interest for all applications handled by your review panel.

Gender equality

The Swedish Research Council aims to ensure that women and men have the same success rates and receive the same average grant amounts, taking into account the nature of the research and the form of support. Read the Swedish Research Council's policy for gender mainstreaming and guidelines for gender equality in the research funding process.

Confidentiality and integrity

Handle the applications and the review of them in a confidential manner:

- Do not disseminate documents that you get access to.
- Delete documents that relate to the review work after completing the task.
- Do not speak to outsiders about what was discussed during the review.
- Do not use information in the application for personal gain.
- Let the Swedish Research Council personnel manage all communications with applicants.

Roles in the review process

Chair and vice chair

The role of the chair is to lead and coordinate the work of the panel. The vice chair's task is to stand in for the chair of the review panel in situations where the

chair cannot or should not take part, such as when the chair has a conflict of interest.

Panel member

As a panel member, you may be a reviewer or a rapporteur. In both roles, you should read and grade the applications ahead of the review panel meeting. As rapporteur, you are responsible for starting the discussion of the application at the meeting, and for writing a final statement on the application after the meeting.

Swedish Research Council personnel

Swedish Research Council personnel ensure that the rules and procedure are complied with. They also support the chair and panel members in the review process.

Committee for Educational Sciences

The Committee for Educational Sciences decides which calls are to be made within educational sciences. They also appoint members to the review panels and decide on which applications will be awarded grants.

Observer

An observer from the Committee for Educational Sciences will monitor and safeguard the quality of the review panel's work. The observer reports back to the committee after the review.

Secretary General for the Committee for Educational Sciences

The Secretary General has overall responsibility for the review process and for questions of a scientific nature. The secretary general also handles any complaints following the grant decision.

Preparations

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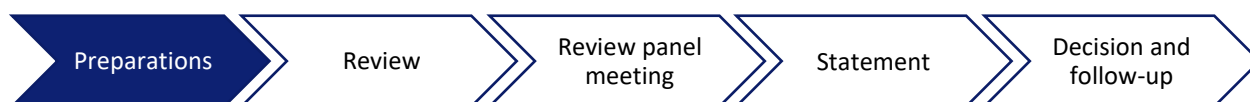
Prisma

As a reviewer, you work in the web-based system Prisma. The first thing to do is to create an account in Prisma, if you do not already have one. Make sure all your account information and personal data are correct. You must also decide whether or not you want to receive remuneration for your review work. Follow the instructions in Prisma's user manual.

If you have any technical questions and cannot find the answer in Prisma's user manual, please contact the research officer responsible.

Reporting any conflict of interest

Once you have been notified that the applications are accessible in Prisma, you must report any conflict of interest. You should therefore check who the project leader and participating researchers are for all applications allocated to the review panel. Please contact the Swedish Research Council personnel and/or the review panel chair if you have any questions about conflict of interest. If you discover later on in the process that you have a conflict of interest, this must be reported as soon as possible to the chair and the administrator responsible.

Allocation of applications

When panel members have reported any conflict of interest, the chair will allocate the applications to members. Each application shall be read by at least three reviewers, one of which is given the role of rapporteur. The rapporteur is responsible for presenting the application for discussion at the meeting. As rapporteur, you are also responsible for summarising the review panel's statement on the application after the meeting.

Technical preparations

The review panel meeting will be held via the digital platform Zoom. Download Zoom Desktop client to your computer before the meeting.

Make sure you have access to a stable network connection. Your computer also needs to have a built-in or external camera and microphone. We strongly recommend that you use a headset with a microphone, as this provides the best sound, both for yourself and for other participants. If you do not have access to

one, you may buy one at the Swedish Research Council's expense, at a maximum cost of 50 EUR or equivalent. We also recommend that you use a large screen next to your laptop computer, if possible.

Preparations: summary

What you need to do	When
☐ Provide account information in Prisma.	Before the first digital meeting
☐ Download Zoom and check your technical equipment.	Before the first digital meeting
☐ Reporting any conflict of interest.	Before the deadline in Prisma

Review

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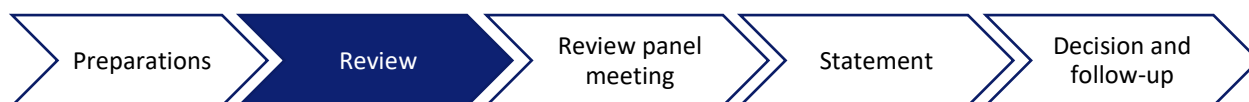
During the review period, you shall:
- read the applications allocated to you,
- write assessments and preliminary statements,
- grade the applications you have reviewed.

Once the review process has ended, you will get access to all members' assessments in Prisma. Prepare for the review panel meeting discussion by reading the other panel members' assessments.

Individual review

Each application is reviewed and graded by at least three members of the review panel: one rapporteur and two further reviewers. If you are the rapporteur, you shall write a *preliminary statement.* This shall consist of a numerical grade and detailed written comments on all evaluation criteria. The comments shall highlight strengths and weaknesses in the project described.

In the role as reviewer, you shall write an *assessment*. The assessment shall consist of a numerical grade and written comments, but the comments do not have to be detailed. Your notes will be a support in the discussion during the review panel meeting, and also after the meeting, when the rapporteur writes the statement. You should therefore get used to ending your review of each application by listing the strengths and weaknesses that your assessment is based on.

Deviations in the application

If you suspect that the content of an application does not follow good research practice, please inform the Swedish Research Council personnel as soon as possible. Continue with the review unless we notify otherwise. The Swedish Research Council is responsible for further investigation in cases of deviations in the application.

Irrelevant information

Base your assessment only on the contents of the application itself. Irrelevant information must not impact on the assessment. Disregard facts that you believe you know despite them not being included in the application.

Ask for advice from others only in exceptional cases

You must not disseminate information about the applications or applicants outside the review panel. Only in exceptional cases may it be justified to ask a

colleague about any specific information, for example relating to the use of statistics or new research findings, on condition that you do not show them the application itself.

Ethical aspects

For the network grant, the applicant shall state whether there are any requirements for permits and approvals for the research planned. If there are such requirements, the applicant shall also describe how the permits and approvals will be obtained. If parts of the research will be conducted abroad, the applicant must be able to describe how this may affect any requirements for permits or approvals. Necessary permits and approvals must be in place when the research begins. The assessment of legal and formal requirements is a part of the feasibility criterion.

The assessment of ethical aspects also includes examining how applicants reflect on ethical considerations. The evaluation of ethical considerations is part of the criterion for the scientific quality of the project.

Sex and gender perspectives

The assessment of scientific quality includes scrutinising how sex and gender perspectives are included in the applications. The applicant shall justify their answer, irrespective of whether it is relevant or not. Read the instructions for applicants.

Evaluation criteria and grading scales: network grant

The aim of the network grant is to support internationalisation and mobility through the development of long-term research collaboration in educational sciences between Swedish research teams and research teams in other countries. The grant should provide opportunities to establish or further develop a network around a specific research area, where both senior and junior researchers from the research environments involved participate. One purpose may be to investigate the opportunities for writing applications and applying for international funding.

The assessment of the scientific quality of the applications is made based on four basic criteria: Scientific quality of the proposed research, Novelty and originality, Merits of the applicant and Feasibility. In addition to the basic criteria, the applications are also assessed using the criterion Relevance to the call.

A seven-grade scale is used to evaluate the scientific quality of the project, novelty and originality and the merits of the applicant:

Grade	Definition
7	Outstanding Exceptionally strong application with negligible weaknesses
6	Excellent Very strong application with negligible weaknesses
5	Very good to excellent Very strong application with minor weaknesses
4	Very good Strong application with minor weaknesses
3	Good Some strengths, but also moderate weaknesses
2	Weak A few strengths, but also at least one major weakness or several minor weaknesses
1	Poor Very few strengths, and numerous major weaknesses

Feasibility and relevance to the call is evaluated on a three-grade scale:

Grade	Definition
3	Feasible/Relevant
2	Partly feasible/Partly relevant
1	Not feasible/Not relevant

For all criteria, you can also mark "Insufficient", if you consider that the application lacks sufficient information to allow you to make a reasonable assessment of the criterion. Please note that any such mark should only be used in the individual review before the review panel meeting, and not in the final grade.

Please use the guiding questions we have produced for each criterion to support the assessment of the application.

Scientific quality of the proposed research (1–7)

Guiding questions:

- To what degree are the purpose and long-term goal of the network clarified and well justified?
- Are the joint research bases of the participating HEIs/research environments described clearly (theme, theory, method etc.)?
- To what degree do the collaboration projects contribute to research of high scientific quality?
- To what degree do the collaboration projects contribute to internationalisation and mobility?
- Are the planned results from the network collaboration sufficient and adequate?
- Are the ethical considerations for the proposed project properly described and addressed? Does the applicant adequately consider risk/value /suffering for humans, animals, nature and/or society?
- How are issues relating to sex and gender perspectives justified and handled in the research plan?

Novelty and originality (1–7)

Guiding questions:

- To what degree can the concrete collaboration projects contribute to innovative research?
- To what degree does the network contribute scientific added value to research?

Merits of the applicant (1–7)

The assessment relates to both the project leader and the participating researchers who carry out the main scientific work. Merits are assessed in relation to the applicant's career age and to the research task. Only take into account the "active research years" years when assessing the scope of scientific production. Time off for parental leave, sick leave, or similar circumstances should be deducted. The applicant's merits in the application (publications and other outputs, and CV information) shall primarily confirm the competence to carry out the research described.

Guiding questions:

- To what degree does the applicant have good merits within the subject area and in terms of leading major international collaboration projects?
- To what degree do the participating researchers have good merits for the research theme?

Feasibility (1–3)

Guiding questions:

- To what degree does the network have a clear organisation for collaboration and leadership?
- In what way do the roles of the participating parties contribute to the implementation?
- What plans have been made for participation by junior and senior researchers?
- Are the planned activities clearly specified and fit for the purpose?
- Are the costs reasonable and well justified in view of the purpose and design of the project?
- Does the applicant adequately consider relevant legal and formal requirements for the proposed research, such as ethical permits and guidelines?

Relevance to the call (1–3)

Guiding questions:

- To what degree does the application concern a network within educational sciences?
- To what degree is the application relevant to the call in other respects?

Overall grade (1–7)

The above subsidiary criteria are weighed together into an overall grade (1-7). Normally, the scientific quality of the application should be given the most weight in the overall assessment. The criteria novelty and originality and merits may only in exceptional cases outweigh weaknesses in scientific quality, and then only minor weaknesses. It is a prerequisite for being awarded a grant within educational science that the proposal is feasible, and that the applicant has a solid and relevant competence for the purpose.

Evaluation criteria and grading scales: exploratory workshops

The purpose of the exploratory workshop grant is to support research into possible innovative research areas and creative research ideas in educational sciences. The grant may be used for research collaboration to test new research questions, methods, analyses, perspectives, data material, and to develop opportunities to write applications and apply for international funding, etc.

The assessment of the scientific quality is made with the help two criteria: Scientific quality of the proposed research and Relevance to the call.
The criteria are assessed on a three-grade scale and they are intended to reflect an application's "quality profile".

Grade	Definition
3	Very high scientific quality, proposed to be funded/Relevant to the call
2	High scientific quality, proposed to be funded if there is any funding left in the budget/Partly relevant to the call
1	Insufficient scientific quality, proposed to be rejected, no funding/Not relevant to the call (cannot be funded)

Scientific quality of the proposed research (1–3)

Guiding questions:

- Are the purpose and aims of the workshop clear and well justified?
- Is the research idea for the workshop clear and well justified?
- Is the exploratory feature described clearly?
- How are issues relating to sex and gender perspectives justified and handled in the research plan?

Relevance to the call (1–3)

Guiding questions:

- To what degree does the application relate to an exploratory workshop within educational sciences?
- To what degree is the application relevant to the call in other respects?

External reviewers

External review may come into question if the scientific character of an application means that the joint competency of the review panel is not sufficient for a thorough review, or if the conflict of interest situation within the panel makes an application difficult to evaluate. The administrator responsible at the Swedish Research Council will contact external reviewers.

Review: summary

What you need to do	When
☐ Grade and write detailed comments (preliminary statement) on all applications for which you are the rapporteur.	Before the deadline
☐ Grade and write comments (assessment) on all applications for which you are a reviewer.	Before the deadline

What you need to do	When
☐ Prepare for the meeting by reading other panel members' comments and any external assessments.	Before the meeting
☐ Prepare a brief presentation of strengths and weaknesses in the applications for which you are the rapporteur.	Before the meeting
☐ Contact the Swedish Research Council personnel and the chair if you discover during the review that you do, after all, have a conflict of interest with any of the applications, or if you discover any problem with an application.	As soon as possible
☐ Contact the Swedish Research Council personnel if you suspect any deviation from ethical guidelines or good research practice.	As soon as possible

Review panel meeting

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Discussion of applications

The chair leads the discussion of the applications. The rapporteur begins by presenting an application's strengths and weaknesses. Thereafter, the other members give their assessments. The chair is responsible for ensuring any external assessments are included in the discussion.

For each application discussed at the meeting, the panel shall agree on subsidiary grades and an overall grade. The rapporteur shall take notes to support the wording of the panel's statement.

All applications shall be treated equally

The review panel is responsible for ensuring each application is assessed on its own merits.

- Irrelevant information shall not be discussed.
- The panel's applications shall compete with each other on equal terms.
- No application shall be given a higher or lower grade because it belongs within a certain subject area.
- The panel shall not carry out any quota-based allocation between the scientific disciplines included in the panel.
- An application is guaranteed a new assessment under each call – even if it has been submitted in conjunction with previous calls.
- A balance shall be found in the time the panel allocates to each application.

Conflict of interest during the review meeting

Persons who have a conflict of interest in relation to an application shall leave the room or the digital meeting while the application is discussed. A person who has a conflict of interest in relation to an application shall not take part in the discussion of that particular application. If you discover any possible conflict of interest (your own or another's) during the meeting, you should bring this up with the chair and the Swedish Research Council personnel in private.

Prioritising

Once all applications have been discussed, and the panel has agreed on a joint grade for each application, a prioritisation shall be carried out of the applications with the highest scientific quality. This prioritisation shall conclude with the

panel's proposal for applications to be awarded grants within the panel's budgetary framework. A prioritisation list with reserves shall also be produced.

The goal is to have the same success rates for women and men within an area. When applications of equivalent quality are compared during the prioritisation of applications within a review panel, the application that results in a more even outcome of the success rate shall therefore be prioritised. The chair and the Swedish Research Council personnel are responsible for monitoring the gender distribution among the prioritised applications. Read the Swedish Research Council's policy for gender mainstreaming and guidelines for gender equality in the research funding process.

Priority list: exploratory workshop

Lottery is applied on those occasions when the allocated budget is not sufficient to grant all applications with, firstly, a grade of 3 and in the second place a grade of 2 on the criterion of Scientific quality of the proposed research.

If the allocated budget is not sufficient for all applications with a grade 3 on the criterion Scientific quality of the proposed research, a draw will take place to decide which of the applications is to be approved.

Should the allocated budget be sufficient for more applications than those that have received grade 3, it is decided which applications are proposed to be granted by drawing lots among the applications that have received grade 2 on the criterion Scientific quality of the proposed research and grade 3 on the criterion Relevance for the call. Thereafter, applications with a grade of 2 on both of the two criteria can be considered for a lottery if the evaluation group deems it reasonable.

Applications with a grade of 1 on any of the criteria are not funded.

Review panel meeting: summary

What you need to do	When
☐ Agree on subsidiary grades and an overall grade for each application discussed.	At the review panel meeting
☐ Agree on a proposal for the applications to be awarded funding within the review panel's budgetary framework.	At the review panel meeting
☐ Agree on a prioritisation list with reserves.	At the review panel meeting

Final statement

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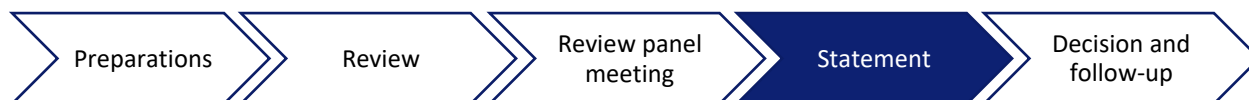
The rapporteur writes a final statement

The discussion at the review panel meeting forms the basis for the review panel's joint statement. The final statement is the end product of the review process to which each application is submitted. It forms the Swedish Research Council's basis for decision-making in the matter, and is also sent to the applicant in conjunction with the grant decision being published.

You are responsible for writing statements on the applications for which you have been the rapporteur. After the meeting, you shall modify the *preliminary statement* that you drew up before the meeting so that it reflects the review panel's joint assessment of the application. You usually have one week in which to write statements following the end of the review panel meeting.

The chair reviews all statements

Once the statements are completed, they are checked by the chair and by the Swedish Research Council personnel. The chair is responsible for ensuring the statements on the applications discussed at the review panel meeting reflect the panel's discussion, and that the written justifications correspond to the grades. You may be asked to supplement or adjust a statement.

General advice and recommendations on statements

The statement shall reflect the review panel's joint and overall assessment, including any external assessments.

Completing the statements, you must
- focus on describing the main strengths and weaknesses of the application.
- ensure the written justifications correspond to the grading – feel free to use the definitions in the grading scale in your written comments.
- consider the guiding questions for the different assessment criteria.
- write concisely, but not too briefly – the content is more important than the length of the text.
- comment on whether the review panel has weighed in deviations from the Swedish Research Council's general instructions in the assessment of the application.
- be constructive and factual in your comments.

Completing the statements, you must not

- make a long summary of the contents of the application or the merits of the applicant.
- introduce personal comments – the statement shall constitute the review panel's joint assessment.
- state quantifiable data.
- state any personal information about the applicant.
- write any recommendation whether to refuse or approve an application in the statement.
- comment on whether an application belongs in the review panel, as all the applications allocated to the panel shall be assessed.

Statement: summary

What you need to do	When
☐ Write the review panel's statement in Prisma on the applications for which you are the rapporteur.	One week after the review panel meeting
☐ Supplement statements following review by the chair if you have been asked to do so.	After the review panel meeting

Decision and follow-up

Preparations	Review	Review panel meeting	Statement	Decision and follow-up
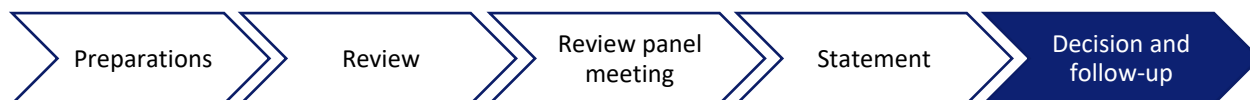
Decision

The Committee for Educational Sciences decide on which applications to grant funding based on: the priority lists (including reserves) arrived at by the review panels; any justifications from the chairs; and the review panels' statements. The decision is published shortly thereafter on vr.se and in Prisma. The applicants are informed about the outcome.

Follow-up

Following each review, internal follow-up is also carried out of the process and the outcome. An important starting point for this follow-up is the feedback you provide as a panel member in conjunction with the review panel meeting. We also produce statistics of various kinds.

Complaints and questions

If you as a review panel member receive any question about the assessment of an individual application, you must refer this to us. The Swedish Research Council personnel make sure that all complaints or requests for clarification are registered and handled by the secretary general responsible in consultation with the chair of the review panel. The chair will contact you as necessary.

Decision and follow-up: summary

What you need to do	When
☐ Refer any questions about the assessment of individual applications to the Swedish Research Council personnel.	As they arise
☐ Be prepared to assist the chair and the secretary general responsible in the event of any questions.	As they arise