



Peer review handbook

Project grant
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
The Swedish Research Council

Introduction

The purpose of the project grant is to give researchers the freedom to formulate their own research concept, method and implementation, and to solve a specific research task within a limited period.

This handbook is designed to reflect the review process step by step. We want to make it easy for you as a panel member to find the information you need for the tasks to be carried out in each step.

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.

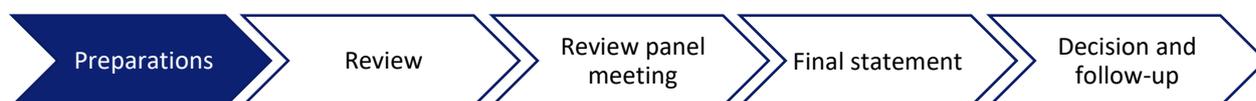
Observer

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



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.

How we allocate applications to review panels

Once the call has closed, the applications are allocated to the review panels. Usually, each application is allocated to the group the applicant has listed as their first choice. However, if the chair considers that an application should be reviewed by another panel, it might be moved. An application may also be moved due to a conflict of interest.

Reporting any conflict of interest

When 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 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.

Reviewers and rapporteurs

When all the re-allocations between review panels have been completed and all review panel members have reported any conflict of interest, the chair will allocate the applications to members of the review panel. 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

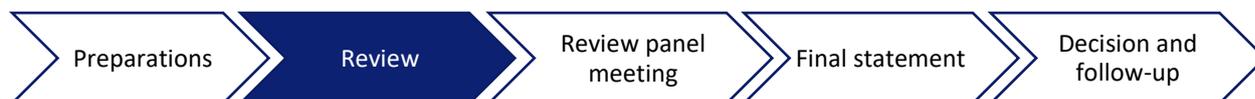
The review panel meeting will be held via the digital platform Zoom. [Download Zoom Desktop client to your computer before the meeting.](#)

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
<input type="checkbox"/> Provide account information in Prisma.	Before the first digital meeting
<input type="checkbox"/> Download Zoom and check your technical equipment.	Before the first digital meeting
<input type="checkbox"/> Report any conflict of interest.	Before the deadline in Prisma

Review



During the review period, you shall:

- read the applications allocated to you,
- write assessments and preliminary statements,
- grade and rank 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

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 assessing 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.](#)

Assessment criteria

You shall assess the scientific quality of the application based on four basic criteria:

- Scientific quality of the project
- Novelty and originality
- Merits of the applicant
- Feasibility

The purpose of using several basic criteria is to achieve a multi-faceted assessment. The criteria are evaluated on a seven-degree or a three-degree scale.

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

Guiding questions

Scientific quality of the project (1–7)

- To what extent is the proposed project clear, well-justified, and established on the national and international research frontier?
- To what level of quality are the research summary, problem definition, and design implemented/described?
- To what extent are the choices of theory, data/material, analysis method, infrastructure, equipment, and field work suitable for answering the questions?

- 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)

- To what extent does the project have the potential to generate new fundamental questions, new knowledge, and new focuses for research?
- To what extent does the project show signs of innovative application of existing methods/techniques?
- To what extent does the project show signs of use of new techniques, methods, and ways of analysing data?

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.

- Do the project leader and the participating researchers have the academic qualifications and merits to implement the proposed project?
- In what way is there relevant expertise within the project team to implement all parts of the project? Is there any other relevant expertise in the project team, over and above the project leader and the participating researchers?
- Publication merits – how do the most relevant and important publications relate to the project applied for?

Feasibility (1–3)

- Is the project practically and technically feasible? Is the time plan realistic?
- Does the project have access to personnel, infrastructure, and other necessary resources?
- Is the project budget realistic in relation to the project's purpose and design?
- Does the applicant adequately consider relevant legal and formal requirements for the proposed research, such as ethical permits and guidelines?

Please note that it is important that the project budget in relation to the project's purpose and design is weighed into the assessment of feasibility.

Overall grade (1–7)

The various subsidiary criteria shall be weighed together into an overall grade according to the seven-grade scale. A rule of thumb is that the subsidiary criterion for scientific quality shall be allocated the greatest weight. The

subsidiary criteria novelty and originality or the applicants' merits can only in exceptional circumstances balance out weaknesses in scientific quality when weighed together, and in such a case only minor weaknesses. It is a prerequisite for being awarded a grant in educational sciences that the proposal is relevant and feasible, and that the applicant has solid and relevant competence for the purpose.

Grading scales

The assessment of the scientific quality of the application, novelty and originality, merits of the applicant is done on a seven-degree scale.

Grade	Explanation
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

The assessment of feasibility is done on a three-degree scale.

Grade	Explanation
3	Feasible
2	Partly feasible
1	Not feasible

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.

Ranking applications

Rank every application in relation to the other applications you have reviewed. The ranking is a supplement to the grading when the review panel's applications are compared with each other. You shall rank all the applications you have been allocated, both those that you are rapporteur for, and the other ones you have reviewed. Ahead of the review panel meeting, the individual rankings of all the reviewers are weighed together into a preliminary ranking factor for each application. For instructions, please [see Prisma's user manual](#).

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 the external reviewers.

Sifting

In order to enable more in-depth discussions of applications that have a reasonable chance of being awarded a grant, a sifting process is used. This means that a certain proportion of the applications that receive the lowest grades are not discussed at the panel meeting. The chair and the vice-chair produce a proposal for the applications to be sifted out with the help of Swedish Research Council personnel. The proposal should be based on the preliminary joint ranking for each application, summarised from the individual ranking by each reviewer compiled from their applications. The chair should identify a break-off point on the list, where the applications below have received such low rankings that it is not reasonable to assume that the application will be awarded funding.

The proposed list of applications to be sifted and the proposed grades are made available to all panel members ahead of the meeting. As a panel member, you always have the opportunity to ask for an application to be brought up for discussion at the meeting, even if it has been proposed that it is sifted ahead of the meeting.

In normal cases, around 50 per cent of the applications should be sifted before the panel meeting, but the exact percentage may vary from call to call. A rule of thumb is that a maximum of 40 applications are discussed at the panel meeting. The chair identifies any application that, despite having a low ranking, should still be discussed at the meeting. This could be the case when applications have considerable differences in grading or ranking among the reviewers. The sifting should be carried out with the gender distribution of the applicants in mind, in order to ensure that the process is not applied differentially for women and for men.

Review: summary

What you need to do	When
<input type="checkbox"/> Grade and write detailed comments (preliminary statement) on all applications for which you are the rapporteur.	Before the deadline
<input type="checkbox"/> Grade and write comments (assessment) on all applications for which you are a reviewer.	Before the deadline
<input type="checkbox"/> Rank all applications allocated to you.	Before the deadline
<input type="checkbox"/> Prepare for the meeting by reading other panel members' comments and any external assessments.	Before the meeting
<input type="checkbox"/> Prepare a brief presentation of strengths and weaknesses in the applications for which you are the rapporteur.	Before the meeting
<input type="checkbox"/> Check the list of sifted applications and decide whether any of the sifted applications should be brought up for discussion at the meeting.	Before the meeting
<input type="checkbox"/> 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
<input type="checkbox"/> 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



Sifted applications

At the start of the review panel meeting, you as a member have the opportunity to bring up applications that have been sifted, so that they are included among those discussed at the meeting. Decisions on the grading of sifted applications are made during the review panel meeting.

Discussion of applications

The chair leads the discussion of the applications that have not been sifted. 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 digital meeting and 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.

Prioritisation

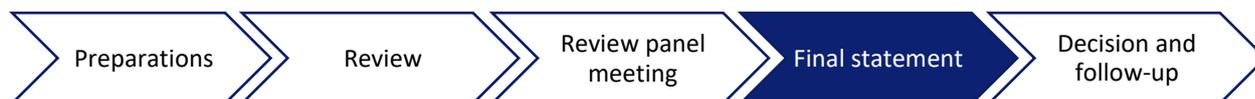
Once all applications have been discussed, and the panel has agreed on a joint grade for each application, a prioritisation shall be carried out of the applications with the highest scientific quality. This prioritisation shall conclude with the panel's proposal for applications to be awarded grants 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.](#)

Review panel meeting: summary

What you need to do	When
<input type="checkbox"/> Agree on grades for sifted applications.	At the review panel meeting
<input type="checkbox"/> Agree on subsidiary grades and an overall grade for each application discussed.	At the review panel meeting
<input type="checkbox"/> Agree on a proposal for the applications to be awarded funding within the panel's budgetary framework.	At the review panel meeting
<input type="checkbox"/> Agree on a prioritisation list with reserves.	At the review panel meeting

Final statement



The rapporteur writes a final statement

The discussion at the review panel meeting is 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 when the grant decision is 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.

Only applications that have been the subject of discussion at the meeting receive a full statement. The sifted applications are instead handled by the Swedish Research Council personnel. These applications receive a standard statement describing the sifting process and gradings for the subsidiary criteria and a summarising grade.

The chair reviews all final 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.

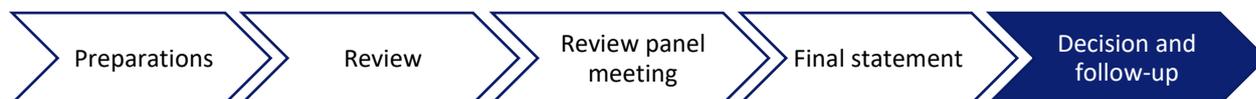
Completing the statements, you must not

- 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
<input type="checkbox"/> Write the review panel's statement in Prisma on the applications for which you are the rapporteur.	One week after the review panel meeting
<input type="checkbox"/> Supplement statements following review by the chair if you have been asked to do so.	After the review panel meeting

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
<input type="checkbox"/> Refer any questions about the assessment of individual applications to the Swedish Research Council personnel.	As they arise
<input type="checkbox"/> Be prepared to assist the chair and the secretary general responsible in the event of any questions.	As they arise