Peer review handbook

Medicine and health 2025

Contents

Foreword

Welcome as an expert reviewer for the Swedish Research Council's peer review process in Medicine and Health for 2025 and our calls for project grants, starting grants, consolidator grants, grants for research time and network grants. Your assignment as a member of one of our review panels is an important position of trust and the evaluation of research applications constitutes the foundation for the work of the Swedish Research Council. Your work is very important and I hope you realize how much we and all the scientists that are applying for funding this year appreciate your efforts.

This handbook has been written to assist you in your forthcoming work and describes the review process step by step. The purpose is to make it easy to find the information that is relevant for the tasks to be carried out. It contains important practical instructions on the grading of applications as well as how the final statements for the applicants shall be written. In addition, you can find information on the Swedish Research Council's general guidelines and on our conflict of interest policy and gender equality strategy.

Please read the instructions carefully, so that you are well prepared for your review work.

Thank you for your efforts and welcome as a reviewer for the Swedish Research Council!

Madeleine Durbeej-Hjalt

Secretary General, Medicine and health

Introduction

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 2025

Additional call

This year we have an additional call for Network grants for collaboration with the USA in cancer research. Network grants aim to give researchers the opportunity to create or develop networks, for example around a research area, for a limited period.

Subfocus areas

In addition to the general budget for undirected grants in medicine and health, we have this year earmarked funding for the specific subfocus areas precision medicine, pharmaceutical sciences and women's health and diseases. The applicants are asked to state if the proposed research is relevant for the area or not. If they have ticked “Yes”, and the application is nominated/ranked, the panel should decide if the relevance is sufficient for being granted funds earmarked for this type of research. There are relevance texts and specific guiding questions to facilitate this step (see Appendix 2, page 29).

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:

- You are not allowed to be a panel member of panels MH-01A - MH-14B if you are applying to an undirected project or career grant within medicine and health or to a network grant for collaboration with the USA in cancer research.
- You are not allowed to be a panel member of the MH-3R panel if you are applying to a project grant for development of methods to replace, reduce and refine animal experiments (3R).
- Any application where you are the participating researcher must not be reviewed by your review panel.
- Any application where a close relative of yours is the applicant (does not apply to participating researchers) 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. Before the review panel agrees on the priority list, the approval rate shall be calculated for women and men respectively. When ranking applications of equal quality, applicants from the under-represented gender should be prioritised. Any differences in the final approval rates must be commented on by the review panel. Read our policy and our guidelines concerning gender equality.

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. If you are contacted by an applicant with questions or complaints, please refer them to your research officer.

AI in the assessment of applications

Generative AI tools (ChatGPT or similar) must not be used in the scientific assessment of the applications. There is however 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.

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 they cannot or should not take part, such as when the chair has a conflict of interest. A supplement to this handbook, made available to all chairs and vice chairs, describes their tasks in detail.

Panel member

As a panel member, you may be a reviewer or a rapporteur. In both roles, you shall read, grade and rank the applications ahead of the review panel meeting. The rapporteur is also responsible for presenting the application for discussion at the meeting and for summarising the review panel's final statement on the application after the meeting.

Observer

An observer from the scientific council for medicine and health will monitor and safeguard the quality of the review panel's work. The observer reports back to the scientific council and the secretary general after the review.

Swedish Research Council personnel

The research officer and senior research officer ensure that the rules and procedure established for the process are complied with. They also support the chair and panel members in the review process.

Secretary general for medicine and health

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

Call and preparations

The call

The major call in Medicine and Health 2025 contains six separate calls:

Call	Reviewed by panel
Project grant within medicine and health	MH-01A through MH-14B
Project grant for development of methods to replace, reduce and refine animal experiments (3R)	MH-3R
Network grants for collaboration with the USA in cancer research	MH-01A through MH-14B
Starting grant within medicine and health	MH-01A through MH-14B
Consolidator grant within medicine and health	MH-01A through MH-14B
Grant for research time in a clinical environment	MH-01A through MH-14B

Clicking on any of the grants listed above will bring up the call text. You can also find the call texts on the bulletin board in Prisma.

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.

Allocation of applications

Once the call has closed, the applications are allocated to the review panels. Preferably, each application should be allocated to the group the applicant has listed as their first choice (or a parallel group when applicable). 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 conflict of interest.

When all the re-allocations between review panels have been completed the chair will allocate the applications to members of the review panel. Each application is normally read by at least five reviewers, one of which is given the role of rapporteur. The aim is to allocate the applications to the panel members with the most suitable scientific background, especially when it comes to the rapporteur. Most panel members will however be allocated some applications that are outside of their main area of expertise.

If specific expertise is missing in the panel, external reviewers will be asked to review these applications, in addition to the five reviewers from the panel. You may be asked to serve as an external reviewer for applications that are reviewed by another panel if your expertise is needed for this particular application. External reviewers only provide a written evaluation in Prisma, they do not participate in the panel meeting.

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 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 Swedish Research Council personnel. Read the Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy and guidelines for managing conflicts of interest.

Chair meeting

The panel chairs are invited to a physical chair meeting on 24 April 2025 in Stockholm. The purpose of this meeting is to communicate the guidelines of the Swedish Research Council and the scientific council for medicine and health regarding the review process, to discuss the assessment criteria and the role of the chair, etc. At the chair meeting, there will also be time for exchange of experiences from the review panel work and for discussing re-allocation of applications between the panels.

Workshop for reviewers

A digital workshop for all reviewers will be organised for each panel separately during May. The workshop is mandatory for new reviewers and it is strongly

recommended that everyone participates. The purpose is to discuss the review process and to give the reviewers a chance to ask questions and to (digitally) meet their fellow panel members.

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 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.

Call and preparations: summary

What you need to do	When
☐ Provide account information in Prisma.	Before the deadline in Prisma
☐ Download Zoom and check your technical equipment.	Before the first digital meeting
☐ Report any conflict of interest (before and after the final allocations of the applications to the panels).	Before the deadlines in Prisma
☐ Participate in digital workshop for reviewers	May

Review

During the review period, you shall:

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

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

Individual review

Each application is normally reviewed and graded by at least five members of the review panel: one rapporteur and four additional reviewers.

If you are the rapporteur, you shall write a *preliminary statement.* This shall consist of numerical grades 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 numerical grades and written comments in the form of strengths and weaknesses of the proposed project. However, the comments can be less detailed compared to the preliminary statement. Your notes will be a support in the discussion during the review panel meeting, and also after the meeting; they are very helpful when the rapporteur writes the final statement.

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. **Please do not wait until the review panel meeting.** This also includes if you think that there is incorrect information in the application. 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 any rumours or unsubstantiated information that you believe you know and instead contact the Swedish Research Council personnel as soon as possible if you have any questions or think that something is wrong with an application.

Do not disseminate information about the application

You must not disseminate information about the applications or applicants outside of the review panel. Only in exceptional cases, and on condition that you do not show the application itself, it may be justified to ask a colleague about for example the use of specific methods or new research findings.

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 dimensions

The assessment of scientific quality includes scrutinising how the sex and gender dimensions are included in the applications, when relevant to the research. Read the instructions for how applicants shall consider sex and gender dimensions in research.

Assessment criteria

Please note that the Swedish Research Council funds various types of research and that the applications to medicine and health may include different types of studies (preclinical, translational, clinical etc.). It is the quality of the research that should be assessed, and no type of study should be prioritised over another.

For all types of grants except for the network grants, 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. In addition to the four basic criteria, applications to the 3R project grants are also assessed based on Relevance for the call. The applications to the network grants are assessed based on two criteria: Scientific quality of the proposed research and Relevance for the call. The criteria are evaluated on a seven-degree, three-degree or two-degree grading scale, as specified below.

Please use the guiding questions listed for each criterion to support the assessment of the application.

Guiding questions

Scientific quality of the project (1–7)

Assess the quality of the project's research question and method, and also its potential for future research.

- Is the research proposal relevant for medical research? (**Not relevant for 3R project grant applications**)
- Is the definition of the problems and proposed solutions clear and compelling?
- Do the study design, research questions and hypotheses meet the standard of the highest scientific quality?
- Are the hypotheses clearly defined and based on the appropriate literature and/or preliminary data?
- Are potential problems and alternative strategies identified and presented?
- Are methods, including data analysis and statistics, appropriate for the project and well described?
- Are the ethical considerations for the proposed project described and addressed properly? Does the applicant adequately consider risk/value/suffering for humans, animals, nature and/or society?
- If sex and gender is described as relevant to the research project, has the applicant considered sex and gender in the description of the proposed work, for instance as part of preliminary data, the choice of samples or study population, or data analyses?

Especially for Starting grants:

- Does the applicant demonstrate the ability to formulate scientific questions that are clearly independent of the research the applicant performed as a doctoral student and postdoc, and the research of former advisors?

Novelty and originality (1–7)

Assess how well the applicant develops and implements new theories, concepts, methods, and questions.

- Does the project extend or challenge current understanding, opinion or practice in its field?
- Is the project built on a unique combination of ideas, preliminary data, and different methodologies to create novel approaches to address the question at hand?
- Is there potential for creation of new knowledge, novel technologies, or new directions for research and advancement of the field?
- Will completion of the aims improve scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice?

- Does the researcher propose a line of research that has the potential to significantly advance current knowledge in the field or is he/she simply adding details to existing knowledge?

Merits of the applicant (1–7)

Merits are assessed in relation to the applicant's career age and to the research task. The main focus should be on the applicant's ability to carry out the proposed research, not just an evaluation of the applicant's overall achievements as a researcher. 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.

- Does the applicant have sufficient research experience, expertise, level of independence and scientific network for implementation of the proposed project?
- How do the applicant's academic qualifications and achievements relate to his or her career age?
- Does the applicant have a documented independent line of investigation?
- Does the publication record suggest a coherent line of investigation? Does the applicant report publications as senior author? Focus is on the most relevant and important publications and reports, with emphasis on quality rather than quantity.
- To what extent has the applicant previously demonstrated that he or she can successfully execute a research project?

Especially for Starting grants:

- Has the applicant shown the ability to work independently of former doctoral advisors?
- Has the applicant shown the ability to work in new (international) research environments, for instance during postdoctoral work?

Especially for Consolidator grants:

- How significant is the applicant's scientific productivity, impact and other merits in a national and international perspective, in relation to the research area?
- Is the researcher internationally recognized and a leader in her/his research field, or show the potential to become so?
- Has the applicant shown the ability to work in new (international) research environments, for instance during postdoctoral work?
- Does the researcher have the ability to establish a creative research environment through her/his research leadership?

Feasibility (1–3)

Assess the feasibility of the proposed project. Please note that you should not assess the budget part of the application. An application must be graded as 2 or 3 for feasibility in order to be funded. A grade below 3 must be explained in the final statement.

- Considering the project as a whole, including participating researchers, does the applicant or project group have sufficient competence for completion of the project?
- Is the project leader's level of activity within the project sufficient with regard to the proposed research plan?
- Is the general design, including the time-frame, realistic for implementing the proposed project?
- Are the materials, methods (including statistics and/or power calculations), experimental models, and when appropriate patient/study cohorts adequate and well adapted to the hypothesis or research question?
- Does the applicant adequately consider relevant legal and formal requirements for the proposed research, such as ethical permits and guidelines?

Overall assessment (1–7)

Weigh together the above subsidiary criteria into an overall grade that reflects the application's scientific quality. For Project grants, Consolidator grants and Starting grants, "Scientific quality of the project" should be given more weight in the overall grade. For Grants for research time, "Merits of the applicant" should be given more weight in the overall grade.

Additional assessment criterion used in the 3R review panel

The additional criterion of "relevance" is used by the 3R review panel for applications related to the development of methods for replacing, reducing and/or refining animal experiments. A seven-point grading scale shall be used for this criterion. The "relevance"-criterion must not be weighed into the overall grade. Instead, it is to be weighed into an application's ranking in relation to others. Thus, an application can be of high relevance, but low scientific quality (or vice versa).

Relevance (1-7)

- To what extent will the proposal lead to significant replacement/reduction or refinement of animal use?
- Will the proposal refine a severe/moderate procedure (even if the number of animals affected is low) OR refine a mild procedure where animal numbers are high?
- Could the outcomes be applicable to other models/research areas?
- To what extent has the applicant presented a convincing plan to promote dissemination of the results and uptake of the new method(s) by the research community? (**New question 2025**)

Assessment criteria and guiding questions for the network grants for collaboration with the USA in cancer research

This is a new call, and the assessment of these applications will be discussed at the reviewer workshop in May. Briefly, the applications to the network grants will be assessed based on two criteria: Scientific quality of the proposed research and Relevance for the call. An application can be of high relevance, but low

scientific quality (or vice versa). An application must have grade 2 in relevance and at least grade 2 in scientific quality in order to be funded. A randomization procedure may be applied in the event that the allocated budget is insufficient to grant all applications that have received the same grade for scientific quality.

Scientific quality of the proposed research (1-3)

- To what degree is the collaboration likely to contribute to research of the highest scientific quality?
- To what degree can the collaboration contribute to innovative research in the cancer field?
- Do the collaborative partners have competence and sufficient research experience for implementation of the proposed project?
- Do the collaborative partners have unique complementary expertise with potential of creating synergy and added scientific value?
- Are the ethical considerations for the proposed project described and addressed properly? Does the applicant adequately consider risk/value/suffering for humans, animals, nature and/or society?
- Does the applicant adequately consider relevant legal and formal requirements for the proposed research, such as ethical permits and guidelines?
- If sex and gender is described as relevant to the research project, has the applicant considered sex and gender in the description of the proposed work, for instance as part of preliminary data, the choice of samples or study population, or data analyses?

Relevance (1-2)

- Is the proposal relevant for medical research in cancer?
- Are the network activities relevant for the call in other respects?

Grading scales

A seven-grade scale is used for the criteria the scientific quality of the project, novelty and originality, merits of the applicant and the overall grade.

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

Grade	Explanation
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

Please note that the grading scale is an ordinal scale, where it is not possible to specify distances between the different values.

A three-grade scale is used for the assessment of feasibility.

Grade	Explanation
3	Feasible
2	Partly feasible
1	Not feasible

For all criteria, you can also mark “Insufficient (0)”, 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 may 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 of the same grant type that you have reviewed, both as reviewer and as rapporteur. The ranking is a supplement to the grading when the review panel’s applications are compared with each other and is essential for preparing the sifting proposal: The individual rankings of all the reviewers are weighed together into a preliminary ranking factor for each application. The applications are then sorted based on this ranking factor and this list is used as a starting point for the sifting proposal. **Thus, it is very important that all reviewers complete the ranking before the deadline, in order to be able to continue with the sifting process.** Instructions for ranking in the Prisma user manual.

External reviewers

External review may be used if the joint competency of the review panel is not sufficient for a thorough review or in a conflict of interest situation. Applications from members of the board or the scientific council for medicine health are always reviewed by two external reviewers. The review panel chair should identify applications that require external review and propose external reviewers. In normal cases, the research officer will contact the suggested 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
☐ Rank all applications allocated to you.	Before the deadline
☐ 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

Sifting and review

Sifting

A proportion of the applications are sifted which means that they are not discussed in detail at the review panel meeting, and therefore do not receive any specific written comments on the grades. This enables more in-depth discussion of the applications that have a reasonable chance of being funded.

The chair, with assistance from the Swedish Research Council staff, produces a proposed list of the applications to be sifted. The proposal is based on the review panel's joint preliminary ranking of the applications and the panel members' individual assessments. The applications that are proposed to be sifted are those where the majority of the panel members agree that they are of lower quality and where it is reasonable to assume that they cannot be considered for funding. For calls with a relevance criterium, applications with high scientific quality can be sifted due to low relevance for the call. At least 40 per cent of the applications should be discussed at the panel meeting (if relevant for the call).

The applications that are listed for discussion at the review panel meeting shall include both women and men to such an extent that there is a good chance of achieving a gender-equal outcome in relation to the number of applications received.

Ahead of the meeting, you as a panel member will be asked to consider the sifting proposal, including the proposed grades, and it is important that all panel members do this. You will be asked to confirm if you agree with the proposal. If you do not agree, you can demand that a sifted application is brought up for discussion at the meeting. **This should be communicated to the research officer within two days after the sifting proposal is made available.**

All reviewers read all applications remaining after sifting and give overall grades

In order to enhance the discussions at the meeting, the scientific council of medicine and health has decided that all applications that have not been sifted should be read by all reviewers before the meeting (except in case of conflict of interest). After the sifting process is complete, you need to **read and set an overall grade for each remaining application that you have not previously evaluated**. The grading will not be performed in Prisma, instead you will write the grades in an Excel document found on the bulletin board in Prisma or provided by the research officer.

Prepare for the meeting

Before the meeting, you should prepare brief presentations of strengths and weaknesses of the applications for which you are the rapporteur. If there are any external reviewers, their assessments should also be presented. The presentation should be brief and to the point, power point presentations are not needed.

Please also prepare for the meeting by reading other panel members' comments. They become available in Prisma when the system closes for editing.

Sifting and review: summary

What you need to do	When
☐ Check the list of sifted applications and decide whether any of the sifted applications should be brought up for discussion at the meeting.	Before deadline
☐ Read and give overall grades for those applications remaining after sifting that you have not already reviewed.	Before deadline
☐ 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

Sifted applications

At the start of the review panel meeting, the sifting proposal, including the suggested grades for the sifted applications, is officially confirmed.

Discussion of applications

The chair leads the discussions of the applications that have not been sifted. The grading and ranking done by you and the other panel members are the starting point for the discussion and are not communicated to the applicants. Instead, for each application discussed at the meeting, the panel shall agree on subsidiary grades and an overall grade.

The applications are discussed in the order of the ranking factor, starting with the highest, one grant type at the time. The rapporteur begins by presenting the application's strengths and weaknesses and also presents the views of any external reviewers. Thereafter, the other assigned reviewers give their assessments and the remaining panel members have a chance to comment on the application. The chair is responsible for ensuring that any external assessments are included in the discussion. The rapporteur shall take notes during the discussion to be able to formulate the panel's final written statement to the applicant.

All applications shall be treated equally

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

- Irrelevant information shall not be discussed. This includes e.g. the applicant's age or sex.
- 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 scientific disciplines.
- An application is guaranteed a new assessment under each call – even if similar applications have been submitted in conjunction with previous calls. For this reason, the review panel will not have access to any previous applications or assessments.
- Be aware that the meeting time is limited, with many applications to be discussed. It is therefore important to try to find a balance in the time

allocated to each application. The chair and the Swedish Research Council personnel will keep track of the time.

Conflict of interest during the review panel meeting

Persons who have a conflict of interest in relation to an application shall not take part in the discussion of that particular application. They will be temporarily put in a digital waiting room while the application is discussed.

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 within a specific call have been discussed, and the panel has agreed on the joint grades for each application, a prioritisation shall be carried out of the applications with the highest scientific quality. The prioritisation step for the different grant types are detailed below. Please note that network grant applications are only graded and do not have to be prioritised by the panel.

In the prioritisation step, the review panel shall take into account the approval rate for women and for men and as necessary prioritise applications from applicants of the under-represented gender when applications are deemed to be of equivalent quality.

The panel shall also identify applications which qualify for earmarked funding for special initiatives, so called subfocus areas, as outlined in Appendix 2 (page 29). Only applications where the applicant has checked "yes" for relevance for the subfocus areas can be considered. The relevance texts and guiding questions in Appendix 2 are meant to aid the discussions at the panel meeting. This year, the subfocus areas are precision medicine, pharmaceutical sciences and women's health and diseases. Please note that there is no grade for the relevance. Instead, the panel should decide (Yes or No) if ranked or nominated applications, where the applicant has checked the box, do indeed belong to this subfocus area.

Project grants

For the research project grants, the panel shall carry out a prioritisation of the applications with the highest scientific quality. This prioritisation should conclude with the review panel's proposal for applications to be awarded grants within the panel's budgetary framework and some reserves.

For the Project grants within medicine and health, maximum 30 per cent of the applications can be prioritised, if the panel thinks that they are all fundable. Please note that the top 15 per cent do not have to be ranked in relation to one another, since they are all more or less guaranteed to get funding. However, the reserves do have to be ranked.

For the project grants within 3R, the top ten applications all have to be ranked if considered fundable.

Starting and Consolidator grants

Each panel can nominate up to 20 per cent of the Starting grant applications and up to 20 per cent of the Consolidator grant applications within the panel to the second step of the evaluation, i.e. the review by the MH-CAREER panel. All nominated applications must have an overall grade of at least 5 for Starting grants and at least 6 for Consolidator grants. If there are truly excellent applications (overall grade of at least 6) that the panel wishes to nominate in addition to the top 20 per cent, this can be discussed with the secretary general.

The MH-CAREER panel then assesses the nominated applications and gives recommendations on which applications to fund by presenting priority lists with reserves. This recommendation is the basis for the scientific council for medicine and health's funding decision.

Grant for research time in a clinical environment

The panels nominate excellent high-quality applications to the second step of the evaluation, i.e. to evaluation by the appointment panel. The overall grade for nominated applications should be at least a strong 5. If more than one application is nominated, they should be ranked. The appointment panel then recommends funding for three to four applications and presents a priority list with reserves. This recommendation is the basis for the scientific council of medicine and health's funding decision.

Network grants for collaboration with the USA in cancer research

To simplify the review process for this minor grant, the panel only has to agree on the grading of these applications, not rank them. Applications with grade 1 for either scientific quality or relevance cannot be funded. Maximum 8 grants can be funded in total and randomisation may be applied if the budget for the call is not sufficient to grant funding to all applications that have received the same grade for scientific quality.

Feedback

In conjunction with the review panel meeting, the panel members are encouraged to provide feedback on the review work carried out. We will ask for comments on various aspects of the process. Comments about the quality of the applications will be considered when the scientific council of medicine and health decides on the allocation of the grants. A web-based questionnaire will also be sent out after the panel meetings, with questions and room for comments. Your feedback on the process is very valuable and highly appreciated.

Review panel meeting: summary

What you need to do	When
☐ Agree on grades for sifted applications.	At the review panel meeting
☐ 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
☐ Contribute with feedback on the review process.	At the review panel meeting

Final statement

The rapporteur writes the final statement

The discussion at the review panel meeting forms the basis for the review panel's joint final statement. The final statement is the end product of the review process. 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 final statements on the non-sifted 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. Please check your notes from the meeting, the assessments from the other reviewers in Prisma and make sure that the main strengths and weaknesses in the application that motivate the grades are included. You usually have one week in which to write final statements following the end of the review panel meeting. Please note that the statements for the nominated career grants (Starting grants, Consolidator grants and Grants for research time in a clinical environment) should be completed first so that they reach the secondary panels in time.

Only applications that have been the subject of discussion at the meeting receive a full final statement. The sifted applications are instead handled by the Swedish Research Council personnel. These applications receive a standard final statement describing the sifting process and including the grades confirmed by the panel.

The chair reviews all final statements

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

General advice and recommendations on final statements

The final statement shall reflect the review panel's joint and overall assessment, including any external assessments. Make sure that it reflects the

discussions at the panel meeting, not only the preliminary statement written before the meeting.

Write the statement for each grade as bullet points and use the headings "Strengths" and "Weaknesses". The bullet points under these two headings should reflect the definition of the grade. For example, higher grades should be motivated by more strengths and fewer weaknesses/less severe weaknesses and vice versa for the lower grades. We recommend using the definitions of the grading scale in your written comments. Examples of how to write final statements will be available.

Completing the final statements, you must

- focus on describing the main strengths and weaknesses of the application.
- ensure the written justifications correspond to the grading.
- 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.

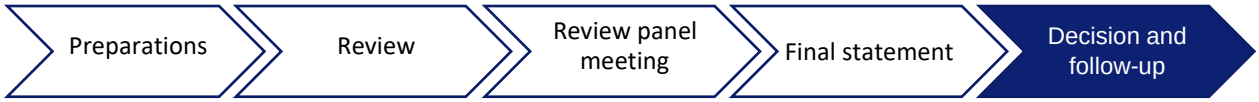
Completing the final statements, you must not

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

Final statement: summary

What you need to do	When
☐ Write the review panel's final statement in Prisma on the applications for which you are the rapporteur.	One week after the review panel meeting
☐ Supplement final 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 Board of the Swedish Research Council has delegated to the scientific council for medicine and health the decision on grants in this field. The scientific council's decision is based on: the priority lists (including reserves) arrived at by the review panels; any justifications from the chairs; and the review panels' final statements. The decision is published shortly thereafter on vr.se and in Prisma. In conjunction with the publication, 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 handled by the secretary general responsible in consultation with the chair of the review panel. The chair will contact you as necessary.

Appendix 1: Contact information Swedish Research Council

Contact information for the Research Officer and Senior Research Officer is communicated to each panel separately.

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Appendix 2. Relevance for subfocus areas

In addition to the general budget, we have specific funding for one subfocus area and the applicants are asked to state if the proposed research is relevant for this area or not. If they have ticked “Yes”, and the application is nominated/ranked at the review panel meeting, the panel should decide if the relevance is sufficient for being granted funds earmarked for this type of research. The relevance texts and guiding questions below are meant to aid the discussions at the panel meeting. Please note that there is no grade for the relevance. Instead, the panel should decide (Yes or No) if ranked or nominated applications, where the applicant has checked a box for a subfocus area, do indeed belong to this subfocus area. Please note that a majority of the guiding questions should be met to warrant a Yes. For women's health and diseases all guiding questions should be met to warrant a Yes.

For applications in precision medicine

Precision medicine refers to a development towards ever more individually adapted care within Swedish health and medical care. New opportunities for precision medicine are based on advances in recent years in areas such as molecular biosciences and bioinformatics, as well as the emergence of new high-resolution imaging techniques. The area covers research that can contribute basic knowledge of disease conditions, as well as knowledge of how these various conditions differ at the molecular level. The research may, for example, relate to how genes and biomarkers are combined with knowledge about lifestyle and other factors linked to disease progression and therapy outcomes, which may lead to ever more tailored therapies. In this context, precision medicine refers to diagnostic methods and therapies for individually adapted investigation, prevention and treatment in all disease areas, including rare diseases and health conditions. As basic research in the area is very closely linked to application, research carried out in collaboration between researchers in higher education and health and medical care or the business sector is particularly relevant.

Guiding questions:

- Does the research have potential to lead to more individually adapted health care and medical care?
- Is the research closely linked to an application?

For applications in women's health and diseases

Knowledge about girls’ and women’s health and diseases needs to be increased, to make healthcare more accessible, person-centred, and gender equal. The focus only includes research into diseases and conditions that are unique to, or more common, among women, such as endometriosis, menopausal problems, migraine, breast cancer, cervical cancer, ovarian cancer, some of the diseases of

the autoimmune system and locomotor organs, as well as the health of pregnant women and equal access to childbirth care, including aftercare. Both basic research and practice-based research are included, and preferably research from a lifespan perspective, including longitudinal studies, collaboration with other actors and target groups, and research that is interdisciplinary and has a gender equality perspective.

Guiding questions:

- Is the research focusing on diseases and conditions that are exclusive for or more common among women?
- Is the research likely to address knowledge gaps concerning women's health?

For applications in pharmaceutical sciences

Research within pharmaceutics covers a broad field. One task of pharmaceutical research is to develop principles and strategies for formulating and manufacturing innovative preparations forms for established and potential pharmaceutical substances (Galenic pharmaceutics). Another is to deepen the knowledge about the importance of chemical and physical characteristics of established and potential pharmaceutical substances, formulation factors, as well as individual-related factors for the absorption and conversion of pharmaceuticals (biopharmaceutics). Yet another significant area is the development of mathematical models for describing pharmacokinetic and pharmacodynamic processes, and pharmacokinetic–pharmacodynamic relationships (pharmacometrics). One further significant research task is to develop strategies for safeguarding good use of pharmaceuticals from an individual and societal perspective, and the importance of the professional activities of pharmacists (societal/social pharmaceutics and clinical pharmaceutics). Pharmaceutics as a subject has interfaces with medical, natural and engineering sciences, as well as with social sciences.

Guiding questions:

- Will the proposal aid the development of Swedish research within the field of pharmaceutical sciences?
- Is this a strategically important area within the field of pharmaceutical sciences?
- Could the outcomes be broadly applicable in the field of pharmaceutical sciences?