



Peer review handbook

Grants for research within Primary Care 2021

Swedish
Research
Council

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Foreword

Welcome as an expert reviewer for the Swedish Research Council's peer review process of the calls for Grants for research time within Primary Care and Project grant for research within Primary Care. Your assignment as a member of our review panel 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 both the instructions and the appendices 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. The intention is to make it easier for you as a panel member to find the information you need to carry out all tasks during each step. At the end of each section, there is a summary of the tasks to be carried out, and, if applicable, the date by which each task must be completed. Page 8 contains a summary in form of a checklist of the various tasks you have to complete during the different stages of the process.

In this first section of the handbook, you will find information on some starting points and the principles that permeate the entire review work, as well as a brief description of the various roles used in the process.



General starting points and principles

There are certain guidelines and principles which apply during all steps in the review work, and which are important for you to know about as a reviewer.

Peer review

The instructions to the Swedish Research Council establish that “*the Swedish Research Council shall give support to basic research of the highest scientific quality within all fields of science*”. The fundamental principle for assessing scientific quality is the peer review process of applications for research grants that is carried out by the review panel.

In order to provide a basis for the scientific review, the board of the Research Council has formulated guidelines for peer review process based on eight principles (see Appendix 1).

Conflict of interest

A process involving peer review means that the evaluation of applications is executed by researchers who are themselves part of the collective of researchers applying for grants. This creates a particular risk for conflicts of interest. In order to avoid any situation involving a conflict of interest, and to maintain public confidence, the Swedish Research Council has established strict internal guidelines (see Appendix 2, the Swedish Research Council’s conflict of interest policy).

The Swedish Research Council has decided that an application in which a member of the review panel is the applicant or a participating researcher should not be reviewed in the member's review panel. The same applies to any application from a third party who is related to a member of the review panel.

For other types of conflict of interest (e.g. joint scientific publications not more than five years ago) the panel member has to leave the meeting while that application is discussed. A reviewer should not participate in the handling, assessment or discussion of the application or the applicant during any part of the process. As a panel member, you are obliged to report any conflict of interest in relation to the applications you will be reviewing. In case of doubt, please confer with the chair of your panel and the Swedish Research Council personnel. Ultimately, the responsibility lies with the Swedish Research Council. In case a conflict of interest arises, another reviewer will be appointed.

Gender equality

The Swedish Research Council shall promote gender equality within its area of activities. For this reason, the Swedish Research Council’s board has decided on a gender equality strategy (see Appendix 3). One of

the operational goals for the gender equality strategy is to “ensure that women and men have the same success rates and receive the same average grant amount, taking into account the nature of the research and the type of grant”. For all the grants in medicine and health, gender equality is used as a borderline condition, and when ranking applications of equal quality, applicants from the under-represented gender shall be prioritised. Also, before finalizing the prioritisation list, the review panel shall take into account the equality goal and work out the success rate, and if necessary, comment the outcome.

Confidentiality

Throughout the review process, applications and the review of applications shall be treated confidentially. You must not spread documents that you have access to as a panel member, and you must delete them after the assignment has been completed. Nor shall any third party be informed of what was discussed at the meeting, or of the views of any reviewer in the ongoing review process. All communications between the applicants and the Swedish Research Council concerning the review process or the grounds on which decisions are made shall be carried out via the responsible research officer.

Rejecting applications on formal grounds

An application may be rejected based on formal grounds. This entails rejection from further evaluation without being assessed for quality or being graded. When this happens, the application is no longer shown in Prisma. Rejection of an application on formal grounds requires a decision by the Swedish Research Council. The Scientific Council or a review panel cannot decide to reject an application on formal grounds. However, if, during an assessment, a reviewer identifies a reason for an application to be rejected on formal grounds, he or she is responsible for informing the review panel’s research officer. The research officer then takes over the responsibility for the matter.

Prisma

All the review work is carried out in the web-based system Prisma. In order to carry out the review work in Prisma, you must register as a user in the system – further information on this is available in the [Prisma User Manual](#). If you have any questions concerning the system and cannot find the answer in the Prisma User Manual, please contact the responsible research officer.

Roles in the review process

Chair and vice-chair

The role of the chair is to lead and coordinate the work of the panel, and to ensure, in collaboration with the Swedish Research Council personnel, that rules and policies are being followed.

The chair is actively involved in the recruitment process of the review panel as well as in the allocation of the applications between reviewers. The chair is also responsible for identifying any need for external reviewers and for ensuring that the final statements issued by the review panel reflect the panel’s discussion and assessments. The chair does not review applications but shall read all applications reviewed by the panel.

The vice chair is appointed by the chair of the panel, in consultation with the Swedish Research Council personnel. In addition to supporting the chair actively throughout the entire review process, the vice chair’s task is to substitute the chair of the review panel in situations where she or he cannot or should not take part, such as when the chair has a conflict of interest.

Panel member

The tasks of panel members are to review, grade and rank the applications received by the review panel. The review panel shall also discuss applications during the review panel meeting, and give written

feedback to applicants whose applications have been discussed in the form of final statements. External reviewers only provide a written assessment, they do not participate in the review meeting for that panel.

Observer

An observer is appointed to a review panel by the Scientific council. The observer acts as a link to the Scientific council and fills an important role, together with the Swedish Research Council personnel, in upholding the quality of the review process. Observers provide feedback to the Scientific council and the Secretary General after each review period, but do not themselves take part in the review process.

Patient participation

Representatives from different patient organisations will be invited to read applications that remain after sifting. They will provide feedback to the chair, who will convey their opinion at the panel meeting.

Swedish Research Council personnel

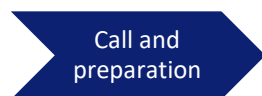
In addition to their roles as administrators for the review panel, the research officer and senior research officer ensure that the rules and procedures established for the process are being followed, and they communicate the board's guidelines and policies for the review process. The Swedish Research Council personnel does not participate in the review work.

Secretary General

The Secretary General has the overall responsibility for the review process and for all questions of scientific nature. The Secretary General is also the person who deals with any complaints following the grant decision.

Checklist

Below you find a summary of the various tasks during the different stages of the process:



- State bank account information in Prisma.
- Participate in the introduction for reviewers (date 18 of August or 23 of August).
- Report any conflict of interest in Prisma.
- Prepare for the digital meeting.



- Grade and write detailed comments (preliminary statement) on all applications for which you are the rapporteur.
- Grade and write comments (assessment) on all applications for which you are a reviewer.
- Rank all applications allocated to you (as rapporteur or reviewer).
- Please contact the Swedish Research Council personnel and the panel chair if you, during your review process, discover that you have a conflict of interest with any of the applications you are reviewing, or if you discover any problem with an application.




- Check the list of sifted applications on the bulletin board in Prisma to decide whether any of these applications should be brought up for discussion at the meeting.
- Read and give Overall grades for those applications remaining after sifting that have been allocated to you and that you have yet not reviewed.
 - Prepare for the meeting by reading other panel members' comments, and by preparing a brief presentation of strengths and weaknesses of the application for which you are the rapporteur.
 - Please 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 you are to review, or if you discover any problem with an application.
 - Contact the Swedish Research Council immediately if you suspect any divergence from ethical guidelines or good research practice, or any scientific misconduct.



- Approve the sifting proposal.
- Agree on subsidiary grades and an overall grade for each application discussed.
- Agree on a priority list including reserves.
- Contribute with feedback on the review process.



- Write the review panel's final statement in Prisma on the applications for which you have been the rapporteur. The final statement shall be submitted to Prisma no later than one week after the review panel meeting (refer to Prisma for the exact date).
 - If necessary, adjust the final statements.
 - Submit receipts for any expenses to the panel's research officer.
-



Decision and
follow-up

- Refer questions on the evaluation of individual applications to the Swedish Research Council's personnel.
 - Be prepared to assist the chair and the responsible Secretary General in case of questions.
-

1. Call and preparation



The first period covers everything that occurs before the panel members start the reviewing process. The panel members are recruited, the call is formulated and published, the review panel meeting is planned etc.

Creating an account in Prisma

During this step, you as a panel member must log on to Prisma (or create an account if you do not already have one), and ensure that the account and personal contact details is correct. It is important that your personal contact details are up-to-date, so that the Swedish Research Council personnel and the panel chair can contact you easily. Throughout the review process, you will receive instructions via email for the various steps of the review work. It is also important that we can contact you by phone, in case there are technical problems during the digital meetings.

You must also decide whether you want to receive remuneration for your review work. Ensure that you have filled in the correct payment information under the tab *Review*. There are detailed instructions on how to do this in the [Prisma User Manual](#).

Reporting any conflict of interest

Once the call is closed and the applications are checked by the staff at the Swedish Research Council, the applications will become available in Prisma. You must report your conflicts of interest in Prisma as soon as possible after applications are available. The applications cannot be allocated until all panel members have reported their conflicts of interest. If you discover a conflict of interest later on during the process, you must report this as soon as possible to the panel chair and the responsible research officer.

Allocation of applications to reviewers

Each application is allocated to between three and five reviewers, one of them being the rapporteur. The rapporteur is the reviewer who is responsible for presenting the application for discussion at the meeting, and for summarising the review panel's final statement following the meeting. 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 reviewers from the panel. External reviewers only provide a written evaluation in Prisma, they do not participate in the panel meeting.

Workshop for reviewers

A digital introduction will be organised for all reviewers, the 18th of August or 23rd of August. The introduction is not mandatory but it is 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.

Planning and preparation ahead of the review panel meeting

The evaluation group meeting is held over the digital platform Zoom. You can download the Zoom Desktop client to your computer (<https://zoom.us/download>) before the meeting. You will receive a link to the meeting via email along with the agenda a few days before the meeting.

Make sure you have a computer with a computer camera (built-in or external) and a microphone, plus access to a stable network connection. 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 our expense, however at a maximum cost of 50 EUR or equivalent. If you are able to use a large screen in addition to your laptop, we recommend that you do so.

The panel meeting is scheduled for October 27-28, 2021.

Summary of your tasks

- State bank account information in Prisma.
 - Participate in the introduction for reviewers (August 18 or August 23).
 - Report any conflict of interest in Prisma.
 - Prepare for the digital meeting.
-

2. Review



The review period lasts from the time you get access to the applications to be reviewed by you in Prisma, until approximately two weeks before the review panel meeting. During this period, you shall read all applications allocated to you, write evaluations (assessment or preliminary statement), grade and rank the applications reviewed by you. Thereafter, Prisma is closed for editing and, at the same time, the system opens for reading. You as a panel member can now prepare yourself for the discussions held at the review panel meeting by reading the evaluations of the other reviewers.

Individual review

Each application shall be reviewed and graded by three to five members of the review panel, with one serving as rapporteur. You shall write a *preliminary statement* for the applications that you have been assigned to as rapporteur. The preliminary statement shall consist of a numerical grade and detailed written comments on all evaluation criteria where strengths and weaknesses of the project are pointed out. In the role as reviewer, you write an *assessment*, which also consists of a numerical grade and written comments. This work is carried out in Prisma.

Your review shall be based on the content of the applications. Information that is irrelevant to the review should not be considered. Examples of irrelevant information are details of the applicant's private life, various types of rumour, such as lack of research ethics or assumptions that someone else might have written the application.

The information about the applicant shall not be shared with others during the review process. Sometimes the question arises whether it is acceptable to consult with a colleague on certain parts of the content of a research plan. This may be justified as long as the application is not shared with third parties, and the consultation is limited to specific questions, such as the use of statistics or new research findings. It is your task as a reviewer to assess the application in its entirety.

You must contact the Swedish Research Council immediately if you suspect any deviation from ethical guidelines or good research practice, or if you suspect scientific misconduct. The Swedish Research Council will ensure that the matter is further investigated.

Evaluation criteria and grading scales

Your review shall be based on four evaluation criteria – the scientific quality, novelty and originality of the proposed research, the merits of the applicant and the feasibility of the project. These four criteria are the Swedish Research Council's basic criteria for evaluating the overall quality of the application. The criteria are evaluated against a seven- or three-point grading scale (as detailed below), and are intended to reflect the application's "quality profile". In addition to the basic criteria, the application shall also be evaluated using the criterion "relevance" to the call on a three-point grading scale.

To facilitate the application of the various criteria, there are also a number of guiding questions to be considered in the evaluation work.

Please observe that the grading scale is an ordinal scale, where it is not possible to specify differences or distances between the values.

The assessment of the application's scientific quality includes assessing how sex and gender perspectives are considered in the research, if relevant. The applicants are requested to declare whether sex and gender perspectives are relevant to the research (Yes or No) and, if so, in what way they will be applied.

To include sex and gender perspectives in research can concern anything from including and analysing both women and men in the study material (sex perspective) to applying a problematising and reflecting attitude to how gender affiliations are created and understood (gender perspective). Please observe that a gender perspective in the content of the research should not be confused with an even distribution of women and men in the research team or gender equality in assessment of applications. You can read more about this on [our website](#).

Guiding questions

Scientific quality of the proposed research (1–7)

- Will the project, if successful, significantly advance our understanding of the field?
- Is the research proposal relevant for medical research?
- 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?
- 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?

Novelty and originality (1–7)

- 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)

- 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.
- Has the applicant shown the ability to work independently of former advisors?

Overall grade (1–7)

The above subsidiary criteria are weighed together into an overall grade, which reflects the review panel's joint evaluation of the application's scientific quality.

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

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

Feasibility (1–3)

- Considering the project as a whole, 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?

A three-point grading scale is used:

Feasible	3
Partly feasible	2
Not feasible	1

For all criteria, you can choose “insufficient” if you cannot provide a reasonable evaluation for that criterion.

Overall grade

Finally, you shall weigh together the various subsidiary criteria into an overall grade according to the seven-point grading scale above. The overall grade is not the same as an average grade or a summary of the subsidiary evaluations; instead, it shall reflect the scientific quality of the application as a whole. It is not a condition that the quality concept covers all aspects of the various criteria, nor that they have the same relative weight for all applications. In normal cases, however, a strongly positive evaluation of only one criterion cannot outweigh other weaknesses of an application when weighed together.

Additional criterion (Relevance)

In addition to the basic criteria, the application shall also be evaluated using an additional criterion (relevance) on a three-point grading scale. From the call texts:

The purpose of the grant for research time within primary care is to give persons working in primary care the opportunity to conduct research and to establish themselves as independent researchers in parallel with developing their professional competence. The focus of this call is on long-term research into diseases and disease conditions that are diagnosed and treated within and referred from primary care.

The purpose of the project grant for research within primary care is to give researchers the freedom to formulate their own research idea, method and implementation, and to solve a specific research task within a limited period. The focus of this call is on long-term research into diseases and disease conditions that are diagnosed and treated within and referred from primary care.

Relevance for primary care (1-3)

- Does the research have a close connection to primary care?
- Does the project have the potential to contribute to the development of new pharmaceuticals, prevention, diagnostics, medical devices, therapies or digitalisation?
- Will the project contribute to the inclusion of results in primary care?

A three-point grading scale is used:

Relevant	3
Partly relevant	2
Not relevant	1

Ranking of applications

You shall also rank each application against all the other applications you have reviewed within the specific type of grant. This is also done in Prisma. The ranking shall be a supplement to the grading result when the review panel’s applications are compared with each other. You must rank all the applications you have been allocated (both those for which you are the rapporteur, and those for which you are a reviewer). Ahead of the review panel meeting, all individual rankings of all the reviewers are weighed together into a preliminary joint ranking for each application. For more detailed instructions, please refer to the [Prisma User Manual](#).

It is very important to complete the ranking in time as some of the applications will be sifted before the panel meeting. We recommend to rank the applications towards the end of your review work and not too

early as it might happen that you are allocated further applications to review at a late stage (for instance, if a conflict of interest is discovered late during the process).

External reviewers

The panel chair shall identify applications that require external review and shall propose possible external reviewers. An external review may be appropriate 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 group makes an application difficult to evaluate. In normal cases, the responsible research officer at the Swedish Research Council will contact the external reviewers.

Summary of your tasks

	to be completed
<input type="checkbox"/> Grade and write detailed comments (preliminary statement) on all applications for which you are the rapporteur	see deadline for your panel in Prisma
<input type="checkbox"/> Grade and write comments (assessment) on all applications for which you are a reviewer	see deadline for your panel in Prisma
<input type="checkbox"/> Rank all applications allocated to you (as rapporteur and reviewer)	see deadline for your panel in Prisma
<input type="checkbox"/> Please contact the Swedish Research Council personnel and the panel chair if you, during your review process, discover that you have a conflict of interest with any of the applications you are reviewing, or if you discover any problem with an application.	as soon as possible

3. Sifting and review



Sifting

In order to allow more time for discussing the applications that are considered to have a reasonable chance of being awarded funding, the Swedish Research Council has decided on a sifting process, where the applications that receive the lowest grading and ranking from the individual review are screened out before the review panel meeting.

Following the individual review period, the Swedish Research Council personnel proposes a suggestion on which applications that could be sifted and therefore not be discussed at the panel meeting. The proposal is based on the preliminary joint ranking for each application. A breaking point is identified in the list, where applications below have received such low rankings that chances for funding are considered negligible. No more than 50 per cent of the applications can be sifted. In this sifting suggestion, the gender distribution of the applicants is considered. In addition, an application with large deviations between the reviewers' grades will not be sifted. For the sifted applications, the personnel propose subsidiary grades and an overall grade of 4 or less. Applications with an overall grade of 5 or higher should not be sifted, unless the grade for the relevance for the call is low.

The proposed list of applications to be sifted will then be sent to the chair and discussed at a sifting meeting with the chair. After the meeting, the list is made available to all panel members on the bulletin board in Prisma. The panel members have two days to object, then the sifted applications are hidden in Prisma. However, any panel member can suggest bringing a sifted application back into the process up until the review meeting. The sifted applications will not be discussed at the panel meeting.

All reviewers read additional applications remaining after sifting and give Overall grades

In order to benefit the discussions at the meeting, the applications that have not been sifted should be read by all reviewers before the meeting. After the sifting process is complete, you need to read and set an Overall grade for each additional application assigned to you. The grading will, however, not be performed in Prisma. Instead, you will write the grades in an Excel document provided by the research officer or the senior research officer.

Prepare for the meeting

Please prepare for the meeting by reading other panel members' comments, and by preparing a brief presentation of strengths and weaknesses of the application for which you are the rapporteur. The presentation should be brief and to the point, power point presentations are not needed.

Summary of your tasks

- Check the list of the sifted applications on the bulletin board in Prisma to determine whether any of the screened-out applications should be brought up for discussion at the meeting

to be completed

before the meeting, deadline for your panel will be communicated

-
- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Read and give Overall grades for those applications remaining after sifting that you have not already reviewed. | before the meeting, deadline for your panel will be communicated |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare for the meeting by reading other panel members' comments, and by preparing a brief presentation of strengths and weaknesses of the application for which you are the rapporteur. | before the meeting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contact the Swedish Research Council immediately if you suspect any divergence from ethical guidelines or good research practice, or any scientific misconduct. | as soon as possible |
-

4. Review panel meeting



At the review panel meeting, the applications are presented and discussed, using the grading and ranking done by you and the other panel members as the starting point. The review panel shall then work out a joint grade for the subsidiary criteria of each application, and an overall grade for scientific quality, and also draw up a priority list in which the panel lists the applications proposed for a grant award within the given budgetary framework, including a number of reserves. During the review panel meeting, panel members are also encouraged to provide feedback on the review process.

Sifted applications

The proposed list of applications to be sifted needs to be formally approved at the beginning of the panel meeting. Any panel member may at this point suggest bringing a sifted application back. Otherwise, the sifted applications will not be discussed further at the meeting. The suggested grades for the sifted applications will not be formally approved until the end of the meeting, in case adjustments are needed when comparing to the grades for the applications that were discussed at the meeting.

Discussion of applications

The applications are discussed based on the individual review, considering the five different criteria used in the review. For each application, the chair leads the discussion. It starts with the rapporteur presenting his/her assessment focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the application, which is followed by the other reviewers presenting their assessments. Finally, all reviewers that have read the applications and given an Overall grade are asked for their input. The rapporteur is responsible for including any review from external reviewers. For each application, the panel shall agree on the grades for each criterion and on an overall grade. The rapporteur must take notes in order to be able to finalize a comprehensive final statement.

The reviewer of an application should prepare for the discussion by reading the assessments and grades given by the other reviewers. As time is limited at the meeting and all applications need to be discussed, it is important 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.

The review panel has equal responsibility for each application reviewed by the panel, and each one shall be evaluated based on its own merits and irrelevant information shall not be discussed. At the same time, the panel's applications shall compete with each other on equal terms. No application may therefore be given a higher or lower grade because it belongs within a certain subject area. Nor shall the panel carry out any quota-based allocation between the scientific disciplines included in the panel.

Occasionally questions are raised from panel members to the possibility to gain access to applications or assessments from previous years in order to compare progress and content of an application. However, it is important to stress that an application/applicant needs to receive a new assessment each time he/she applies to the Swedish Research Council. For that reason, the review panel will not have access to any previous applications or assessments.

If you discover any possible conflict of interest (your own or another's) during the meeting, please bring this to attention to the chair and the Swedish Research Council personnel, and not in front of the entire panel.

Prioritisation of applications

Once all applications have been discussed, and the panel has agreed on the grades for each application, the panel shall identify the applications with the highest scientific quality. The panel shall define a priority list containing the applications proposed for a grant award and this recommendation is the basis for the Scientific Council of Medicine and Health's funding decision.

Special conditions

Gender equality shall be a special condition for prioritising applications of equivalent scientific quality. This means that in conjunction with the overall prioritisation, the review panel shall consider the success rate of women and men, and if necessary prioritise applications from applicants of the under-represented gender when applications are judged to be of equivalent quality.

Feedback

In conjunction with the review panel meeting, the panel is encouraged to provide feedback on the review work, the quality of the applications and various aspects of the process. Questions about the quality of the applications will be considered when the The Scientific Council for Medicine and Health decides on the allocation of the grants. The feedback session is usually a concluding item on the meeting agenda.

Summary of the tasks of the review panel

- Approve the sifting proposal.**
 - Agree on subsidiary grades and an overall grade for each application discussed.
 - Agree on a priority list or nominations, depending on grant type, including reserves.
 - Contribute with feedback on the review process.
-

5. Final statement



Following the review panel meeting, the rapporteur writes the panel’s final statement for the applications discussed at the meeting. It is then the task of the chair to check the final statements and to ensure they reflect the discussion by the review panel. As rapporteur, you may be asked to complement the final statement.

The rapporteur writes a final statement

The discussion at the review panel meeting forms the basis for the review panel’s final statement, which is the end product of the review process. The final statement is sent to the applicant in conjunction with the grant decision being published. The final statement is therefore a central document, and it is important that the final statement corresponds to the grades, and describes objectively the main strengths and weaknesses of the application, and also includes any necessary clarifications.

You are responsible for writing the final statements for all applications for which you have been the rapporteur that were discussed at the meeting. The preliminary statement you have submitted in Prisma ahead of the review panel meeting can form the basis for the final statement. The preliminary statement shall, however, be modified to reflect the review panel’s joint overall evaluation of the application. You should therefore go back over your notes of what was discussed at the meeting, so that the final statement includes the joint opinion. As rapporteur, you have one week in which to submit your final statements in Prisma following the review panel 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, a very high grade like 6 or 7 should have more strengths and fewer weaknesses. In contrary, a grade of 4 or 5 should have fewer strengths and more weaknesses.

Please note that you do not write a final statement for sifted applications as they will receive a standard final statement explaining the sifting process. These final statements are produced by the Swedish Research Council personnel.

The chair reviews all final statements

Once the final statements have been submitted in Prisma, the chair will, with help of the senior research officer, check all statements to ensure that they reflect the panel’s discussion, and that the written motivations correspond to the grades. It is not the task of the chair to carry out comprehensive editing. As a rapporteur, you may therefore be asked to adjust the final statement.

General advice and recommendations on final statements

The final statement shall reflect the review panel’s joint overall evaluation, including any external assessments. The final statement is the basis for the final decision and shall help the applicant understand the grounds for the review panel’s quality assessment. It is therefore very important that it is of high quality and that it is based on the discussions at the panel meeting.

When completing your final statements, you should consider the following:

Do

- Do focus on describing both the main strengths and weaknesses of the application. Try to emphasise relevant conceptual, structural and/or methodological issues as discussed at the review panel meeting.
- Do make sure that the written comments correspond to the grades. It is helpful to use the definitions of the grading scale in the justifications (Outstanding, Excellent, Very good to excellent, Very good, Good, Weak, and Poor). For example, if a grade of 4 is given, the justification should contain both strengths and minor weaknesses in line with the definition of this grade.
- Do consider the guiding questions for the different criteria when you formulate the final statement.
- Do write concisely but do not be too brief. The content rather than the length of the text is of significance. However, too brief justifications may counteract the aim, which is to help the applicant understand the grounds for the decision.
- Do comment on whether any divergence from the general instructions on how to write an application has been weighed into the assessment of the application.
- Do use a language that is constructive and objective.
- The final statement should be written in English.

Do not

- Do not include a long summary of the applicant or the research described in the application. The focus should be the assessment of the application, not a description of the project.
- Do not state any individual comments (such as “I think” or “In my view”). The final statement represents the collective review panel.
- Do not include quantifiable data, such as the exact number of publications, or bibliometric data.
- Do not include personal details (such as gender or age).
- Do not include any recommendation on whether to refuse or grant an application.
- Do not state that an application does not belong to or is unsuitable for the review panel, or for the Swedish Research Council. The review panel is obliged to review all applications in the panel.

Summary of your tasks

- Write the review panel’s final statement in Prisma on the applications for which you have been the rapporteur. The final statement shall be submitted in Prisma no later than one week after the review panel meeting (refer to Prisma for the exact date).
 - If necessary, adjust the final statements.
 - Submit receipts for any expenses to the panel’s research officer.
-

6. Decision and follow-up



Decision

The board of the Swedish Research Council has delegated the decision on grants to the Scientific Council of Medicine and Health. The decision will be based on the priority lists from the review panel, comments from the chair regarding the priority lists, as well as the review panels' final statements. The decision is published shortly thereafter on vr.se and in Prisma, and the applicants are informed on the final decision.

Follow-up

Following the review of all calls, an internal follow-up of the process and the outcome is carried out. An important starting point for this follow-up is the feedback you provide as a panel member in connection with the review panel meeting. In addition, the review process and its outcome are summarised statistically.

Questions and complaints

If you as a panel member receive questions about the evaluation of an individual application, you must refer this to the Swedish Research Council's personnel. All complaints or questions shall be registered and then handled by the Secretary General for Medicine and Health in consultation with the chair and senior research officer. In this case, the chair may contact you as a panel member.

Summary of your tasks

- Refer questions about the evaluation of individual applications to the Swedish Research Council's personnel.
 - Be prepared to assist the chair and the responsible Secretary General with any questions.
-

Appendix 1:

Principles and guidelines for peer review at the Swedish Research Council

The guidelines are based on eight principles

This document contains guidelines for the Swedish Research Council's peer review. The guidelines are based on the Swedish Research Council's eight principles for peer review of funding for research. The principles are intended to ensure that the scientific assessment is made by competent subject experts, based on relevant documentation and clear quality criteria, within the framework for good assessment culture. The guidelines shall provide concrete guidance on how the principles shall be complied with.

The guidelines for peer review of applications for research funding are arranged according to the eight principles. Please note, however, that when applying a particular guideline, several principles may need to be considered. The Board's decision to adopt the principles states clearly that: *"The principles should be read together. They may conflict with each other and therefore need to be balanced against each other. How the principles are balanced against each other must be discussed in each individual case."* The principles and their practical implementation should therefore be brought up regularly in the review work.

The character of the guidelines

The guidelines relate to peer review of applications for research funding at the Swedish Research Council. While they are general, there is room for variation justified by factors such as differences between calls and/or research areas, or variation justified by testing new ways of working. This means that different guidelines differ in character to some extent. The various types of guidelines are differentiated through the use of terminology.

1. **"Shall" guidelines:** These consist of clarifications of legislation or other mandatory regulations, or follow from requirements for the review work adopted by the Board. The guidelines must be complied with. If deviations from such guidelines are nevertheless noted, they should be followed up.
2. **"Should" guidelines:** These are of the type "comply or explain". This means that those responsible do not have to comply with each guideline at all times, but can instead choose other solutions that are considered to suit the circumstances better in the individual case – provided that those responsible for the call or the research area in question openly account for each such deviation, describe the solution chosen instead, and state the reasons for this.
3. **Call-specific guidelines:** These guidelines state that those responsible for each call or area shall formulate instructions or justify choices made specifically for the peer review of a specific call or a certain subject area. In these cases, the guidelines do not provide detailed directions for what is to be done, but request a system for and documentation of the process.

The Swedish Research Council's Principles and Guidelines for Peer Review of Research Funding

- Excerpt from Director General decision No GD-2019-186, Reg. No 2.4-2016-7045

1. Expertise in the assessment

The assessment of applications shall be carried out by experts with a documented high level of scientific¹ competence within the research field/s or discipline/s the application relates to, and the scientific peer review shall be based on clear quality criteria. Reviewers shall be appointed according to clear criteria in a systematically documented process.

- 1.1 The Swedish Research Council's peer review shall be conducted by review panels with scientific expertise of the breadth and depth relevant to the applications to be assessed.
- 1.2 Review panel meetings shall constitute a central element of the review process.
- 1.3 Scientific assessment and prioritising of applications should be separated from decisions on grants.
- 1.4 The expertise to recruit review panel members and external reviewers shall be in place.
- 1.5 For each call, there shall be documented instructions for:
 - a. who is recruiting
 - b. what specific merits and experience shall be represented on the review panel
 - c. any requirements on the composition of the review panel, such as subject area competence, limits on the number of members and gradual replacement of members between calls for the same form of grant
 - d. percentage of international members of the review panel.
- 1.6 The maximum mandate period for a review panel member shall be six years on the same review panel. After this, a waiting period of minimum three years shall apply.
- 1.7 The maximum period as chair is three years, as part of the overall mandate period of six years on a review panel. After this, a waiting period of minimum three years shall apply. An exception may be made for one-off reviews where continuity is considered particularly important.
- 1.8 The composition of the review panel shall comply with the Swedish Research Council's gender equality strategy in terms of gender (numerical gender equality).
- 1.9 Members of review panels shall be appointed according to the Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy and guidelines for managing conflicts of interest.

2 Objectivity and equal treatment

All assessments shall be carried out in an equivalent manner and be based on the quality of the research planned and executed and on the merits of the applicant, irrespective of the applicant's origin or identity. To avoid any conflict of interest or partiality, assessments shall be based on clear quality criteria and formalised processes.

- 2.1 Ahead of each call, instructions shall be in place concerning the assessment criteria to be used. The application and weighting of grading criteria shall be reflected in the instructions for designing the applications.
- 2.2 The instructions for the project plan, CV and publication list shall be designed to optimise the documentation for review within each research area and grant format.
- 2.3 Bibliometrics shall be used with caution in the review, and only as part of an overall assessment of the merits carried out by reviewers with expertise in the area in question. Bibliometrical data gathered in conjunction with the application shall be relevant to the research area and the grant form the call relates to.
- 2.4 The basis for assessment shall be the application, which is assessed using the reviewers' scientific competence and judgment. Irrelevant information shall not be used in the assessment.

¹ Or artistic competence when relevant.

- 2.5 The assessment criteria shall be defined through guiding questions, so that it is clear what is to be assessed. The assessment criteria decided by the Director General shall be used, and additional criteria and guiding questions shall be adapted to the research area and call in question.
- 2.6 All assessments shall be conducted according to the Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy and guidelines for managing conflicts of interest, and according to the Swedish Research Council's gender equality strategy.

3. Promoting good research practice

The assessment assumes an ethical approach and a high level of integrity. The subject experts shall not carry out any preliminary ethical review, but should take into account how the applicant discusses and problematises the research question with regard to good research practice. If an application includes research that clearly breaches ethical rules and/or clearly contravenes Swedish or international law, this should be reflected in the assessment of the quality and/or feasibility of the research.

- 3.1 The call text shall include instructions for how the applicant shall describe the ethical considerations that are relevant to the research project in question, and whether the research project may entail potential risks to humans or the natural environment. It shall also include instructions for how experts shall assess this description in relation to the quality of the application. Part of this entails taking into consideration whether the applicant is complying with legal and formal requirements, for example relating to ethical review, that apply to the proposed research project.
- 3.2 Instructions shall be included for how deviations from ethical guidelines and good research practice as well as misconduct in research shall be managed in the peer review, and also how such deviations shall impact on the assessment.

4. Openness and transparency

The assessment shall be based on and justified by the documentation requested by the Swedish Research Council, which is typically an application for grant funding. The assessment of the documentation shall be made based on rules and guidelines set in advance and publicly known.

- 4.1 Information on significant steps in the review process shall be available to the applicants, the reviewers and other researchers.
- 4.2 Information on the members of the review panel should be publicly available before the call in question opens.
- 4.3 The reviewers shall base their assessment on the current application and not have access to previous assessments or applications. If a specific review process requires access to previous applications or assessments, this shall be made clear in the call text in question, and in the instructions to the reviewers.
- 4.4 There shall be instructions for how final statements should be written and what they should include.

5. Appropriateness for purpose

The peer review process shall be adapted to the call and the research area, and shall be proportional to the size and complexity of the call without neglecting the rule of law.

- 5.1 At least three panel members shall read each application ahead of the review panel's collective prioritising.
- 5.2 The decision on the composition of the review panel shall be justified by the panel's adaptation to the nature of the task and the number of applications the panel is to assess.

- 5.3 If applications are to be screened out, instructions for the review panel's screening procedure shall be included.
- 5.4 There shall be instructions for how consultation between panels or external reviewers shall be used in the assessment.

6. Efficiency

The total resources used in the application and assessment, in terms of both time used and cost shall be minimised for all involved, i.e. applicants, subject experts and Swedish Research Council personnel, with consideration for maintaining quality, objectivity, transparency and appropriateness for purpose.

- 6.1. For each decision about a call or review, we shall take into account what can be done to minimise the time spent and resources used (for applicants, review panel members, external subject experts and Swedish Research Council personnel) during the process from call to decision.
- 6.2. The call, application and review processes shall be predictable, and changes to the processes shall be implemented with a long-term perspective.

7. Integrity

All participants in the assessment process shall respect the integrity of the process and shall not disclose to any third party what has been discussed at the meeting or the opinions of other reviewers in the ongoing processing of applications. The final assessment shall always be documented and published once a decision has been made.

- 7.1. All communications between applicants and the Swedish Research Council concerning the review process, including the grounds for decisions, shall be carried out via the personnel responsible at the Swedish Research Council.
- 7.2. Reviewers shall not have contacts with individual applicants regarding the application or the review, either during or after the review process.
- 7.3. The starting point for peer review is always that the factual content of applications and information about applicants must not be disseminated during the assessment process. If a reviewer needs to consult a colleague with questions about part of an application, this shall be done with respect for the integrity of the applicant and the process.

8. The peer review shall be prepared and followed up in a structured manner

Review processes and reviewers shall be prepared and followed up according to clear criteria. All reviewers shall have access to the same type of background documentation for the review.

- 8.1 Review panel members and the review panel chair, as well as external reviewers, shall receive training at an early stage of the review process in:
 - a. how the assessment shall be made and what is to be assessed
 - b. the application of conflict of interest rules, and the Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy and guidelines for managing conflicts of interest
 - c. the application of the Swedish Research Council's gender equality strategy in the review of applications
 - d. how conscious and unconscious bias can impact on decisions
 - e. how aspects relating to good research practice and issues of research ethics shall be managed in the assessment
 - f. how final statements shall be worded

- g. rules for communication among reviewers and between reviewers and applicants
- 8.2 The chair shall also receive training in all the stages of the review, including the recruitment practice when relevant, and the design and group dynamics of the review panel meeting.
- 8.3 There shall be written job descriptions for the tasks of the chair, panel members, and observers (if participating).
- 8.4 The peer review shall always be followed up systematically in order to continuously improve the review processes.
- 8.5 The follow-up of a call shall include the overall number of persons asked to participate in a review panel or, if any, as external reviewers, and a summary description of the reasons given for why panel members and external reviewers have declined to participate.
- 8.6 There shall be instructions relating to the handling of feedback and complaints from applicants.

Appendix 2:

The Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy (1) and guidelines for the management of conflicts of interest (2)

Part 1:

The Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy²

- Reg. No: 1.2.4-2019-00077

According to the constitutional objectivity principle, the Swedish Research Council shall observe objectivity and impartiality, and respect everybody's equality before the law. The administrative Procedure Act (Förvaltningslagen SFS 2017:900) contains conflict of interest provisions (disqualifications) aimed at guaranteeing the impact of the principle. This conflict of interest policy has been drawn up to ensure the Swedish Research Council lives up to these legal requirements and to prevent representatives of the Council from having conflicts of interest where the objectivity of the representatives may be questioned.³

The following applies at the Swedish Research Council:

- All forms of participation in the handling of matters at the Swedish Research Council shall be characterised by objectivity and impartiality.
- The Swedish Research Council shall work actively and continuously to ensure the Swedish Research Council's representatives do not end up in conflicts of interest that may cause the objectivity of the representatives or the trust in the Swedish Research Council to be questioned.
- The Swedish Research Council shall manage conflict of interest situations arising according to applicable law.
- The Swedish Research Council shall decide on guidelines for managing conflicts of interest. The guidelines shall be followed up and evaluated continuously.
- The Swedish Research Council shall work to ensure all persons representing the Swedish Research Council have good knowledge about conflict of interest issues, and have read and understood the conflict of interest policy and the guidelines for managing conflicts of interest.
- Conflict of interest issues shall be communicated and discussed on an ongoing basis within the operation.
- Responsibility for ensuring compliance with the conflict of interest policy and the guidelines for managing conflicts of interest lies with the Swedish Research Council and all who take part in the handling of the Swedish Research Council's matters. This means that the Swedish Research Council's employees, appointed reviewers and elected members shall know and follow the conflict of interest policy and the guidelines for managing conflicts of interest.

² This is a translation of the adopted Swedish version of the conflict of interest policy. In the event of conflict between the Swedish version and this English version, the former shall take precedence.

³ Representatives of the Swedish Research Council refers to the Council's employees, appointed reviewers and elected members of the board, scientific councils, councils and committees.

This conflict of interest policy was adopted by the Board of the Swedish Research Council on 30 January 2019 and is valid until further notice. The policy replaces previously adopted conflict of interest policies in their entirety.

Part 2:

The Swedish Research Council's guidelines for managing conflicts of interest⁴

- Reg. No:1.2.4-2019-00139

1. Starting points

A characteristic of the organisation and decision-making formats of the Swedish Research Council is that the majority of the members in the Council's decision-making and reviewing bodies are active researchers and part of the research community, which in turn is directly affected by the Council's allocation of research funds.

The handling of matters relating to research funds include a number of steps that can potentially affect the outcome of the matters. Among these are the control of formal requirements, decisions to screen out applications, the distribution of applications among the review panels and reviewers, assessments made by individual reviewers and by the review panels, decisions to approve or reject applications and the implementation of decisions..

The Swedish Research Council also carries out evaluations, appoints representatives to external bodies, carries out strategic work, responds to referrals and consultations and participates in communication activities. The Council also works on a daily basis on issues relating to direction and coordination, finance, personnel administration, IT, law, archiving and registration and operational support.

Issues regarding conflicts of interest may arise in all types of matters occurring at the Swedish Research Council. According to the Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy, the Council shall itself decide on guidelines for the management of conflicts of interest. The following guidelines aim to realise the conflict of interest policy, and shall constitute support in the handling of matters at the Swedish Research Council. In addition to the guidelines, there are also specific control documents for conflicts of interest in certain types of matters.

2. Legal provisions regulating conflicts of interest

Provisions regulating disqualifying conflicts of interest can be found in Sections 16–18 of the Swedish Administrative Procedure Act, (Förvaltningslagen, SFS 2017:900, "FL"). In its capacity as an administrative government agency, the Swedish Research Council shall comply with these provisions when handling matters.

Various conflict of interest situations (Section 16 FL)

The act states that persons who take part on behalf of a public agency in handling in a way that may affect the agency's decision in a matter has a disqualifying conflict of interest in situations such as the following:

- If he or she or any closely related person is party to the matter, or otherwise can be assumed to be affected by the decision to a not insignificant extent

⁴ This is a translation of the adopted Swedish version of the conflict of interest policy. In the event of conflict between the Swedish version and this English version, the former shall take precedence.

- If he or she or any closely related person is or has been the representative or agent for a party to the matter, or for anyone else who can be assumed to be affected by the decision to a not insignificant extent
- If there is any other specific circumstance that means his or her impartiality in the matter can be questioned.

Only if it is clear that the issue of impartiality lacks any importance shall the agency disregard any disqualifying conflict of interest. It must then be a question of matters where the person who will be part of the handling lacks any opportunity to influence or become influenced by any irrelevant circumstances, such as registration matters.

Consequences and managing of conflict of interest (Sections 17–18 FL)

The consequences of a conflict of interest are regulated as follows:

- A person with a disqualifying conflict of interest must not take part in the handling of the matter.
- A person with a disqualifying conflict of interest must not be present when the matter is decided on.
- A person with a disqualifying conflict of interest may, however, carry out such tasks that cannot be carried out by someone else without significant delay of the handling.

The managing of conflict of interest is regulated as follows:

- A person who is aware of a circumstance that could be assumed to cause him or her to have a disqualifying conflict of interest is obliged to report this immediately to the agency.
- The agency shall examine issues regarding conflict of interest as soon as possible.
- The person who has a disqualifying conflict of interest may take part in the examination of the issue of conflict only if this is required for the agency to be competent to act and any replacement cannot be called in without delaying the examination significantly.

3. Preventing conflict of interest situations

The following applies in order to prevent disqualifying conflict of interest situations at the Swedish Research Council.

Information on conflict of interest circumstances

- A person who is aware of any circumstance that may mean he or she has a disqualifying conflict of interest shall voluntarily and immediately inform the Swedish Research Council of this circumstance.
- Employees of the Swedish Research Council should provide information regarding disqualifying conflict of interest circumstances to their immediate superior. When handling applications for research funding, the information should instead be given to the administrative officer responsible.
- Appointed reviewers and elected review panel members should in the first instance inform about disqualifying conflict of interest circumstances to the administrative officer responsible, and in the second instance to the chair of the review panel, or the chair of the scientific council, council or committee.

Specifically regarding matters relating to applications for research funding

- All who take part in the handling of applications for research funding shall provide information on any disqualifying conflict of interest circumstances relating to applicants and participating researchers listed in an application. In addition, and as far as possible, information should also be provided on disqualifying conflict of interest situations relating to any other person who will participate in the research according to the application.
- Applications should be made available at an early stage to members of the relevant scientific councils, councils and committees and review panels, with a request to report any disqualifying conflicts of interest.
- When review panel members are appointed and when the applications are allocated, conflict of interest issues should be recognised so that disqualifying conflict of interest situations can be avoided.
- Applications for research funding from members of the board, scientific councils, councils and committees and review panels shall not be reviewed by the panel where the member is the chair, a member or an observer. This applies irrespective of whether the member is the applicant or a participating researcher listed in the application.
- When several matters are handled in parallel, for example when a scientific council, council or committee decides on a large number of applications at once on the basis of a list of priorities established by a review panel, potential disqualifying conflicts of interest must be considered as far as possible.

Specifically for cases relating to research infrastructure

- When making decisions to appoint members or delegates to work on research infrastructure issues, any links to national infrastructures and the strategic work on infrastructure issues at administrating organisations shall be considered.

Specifically for cases relating to national and international collaboration

- When making decisions to appoint representatives to external boards and committees and other decision-making or advisory bodies, any disqualifying conflict of interest circumstances shall be considered. This also applies when deciding on an extension to a previously appointed representative's mandate.

4. Assessment of conflicts of interest exists

The following shall be used to support an assessment of whether a disqualifying conflict of interest exists.

An assessment of whether a disqualifying conflict of interest exists shall always be carried out based on the conflict of interest provisions of the Swedish Administrative Procedure Act. The provisions cover all persons who take part in the handling of a matter on behalf of the Swedish Research Council. It is not the position designation or the job description but the actions in the individual matter that determine whether the provisions are applicable. This means that employed administrators, appointed reviewers and elected members are all covered by the provisions when they take part in the handling of matters.

In some situations, disqualifying conflict of interest issues are clear. Examples are when the person taking part in the handling

- is party to the matter
- is closely related to a party
- otherwise can be assumed to be affected by the decision to a not insignificant extent
-
- Other situations may be perceived to be more unclear or difficult to assess. This applies in particular to cases in which ones impartiality in the matter can be questioned, even though the person is not a party, related to a party or can be assumed to be affected by the decision to a not insignificant extent. It is important that all potential conflict of interest situations are handled and assessed based on the circumstances of the individual case, and that the nature, scope and duration of the circumstances that

can be assumed to constitute a conflict of interest are considered.

Examples of situations where a disqualifying conflict of interest typically exists

Examples of situations where a disqualifying conflict of interest typically exists are:

- When an economic or other dependency circumstance exists. Examples of the latter are situations where an applicant or participating researcher has an assignment to evaluate the competence, application, department or subject of the person taking part in the handling of the matter.
- When an ongoing or recently terminated close collaboration exists, such as a teacher-student relationship, or a joint research project. The relationship between a doctoral student and his/her supervisor is considered a conflict of interest regardless of how long ago the collaboration occurred.
- When there is evident friendship, enmity or difference of opinion.
- When there is a manager-employee relationship.
- When the person taking part in the handling in another context has handled an issue the matter relates to, for example as a representative of another public agency or organisation.

Examples of situations where there is a risk of a disqualifying conflict of interest

Examples of situations where there is a risk of a disqualifying conflict of interest are:

- When there exists co-authorship of books or articles. As a rule, taking part in the handling of a matter should be avoided where research collaboration and co-authorship has occurred during the last 5 years. A joint article or a joint chapter in an edited book may be enough to establish co-authorship. Co-authorship that occurred more than 5 years ago can also constitute disqualifying conflict of interest. The determining factor will be whether or not it was the result of close collaboration, and must be assessed from case to case.
- When a person taking part in the handling of a matter belongs to the same institution (particularly small and medium-sized ones) or a similar financially independent entity as an applicant or participant.
- When the nature of a person's involvement in the matter easily arouses suspicion that the basis for impartial assessment is compromised.

5. Management of conflict of interest situations

The following applies for the management of conflict of interest situations at the Swedish Research Council.

All types of matters

- A person with a disqualifying conflict of interest must not be present when the matter is decided on, or otherwise participate in the handling of the matter.
- Conflict of interest situations, both in cases where it exists and where it has been examined and found not to exist, must be documented throughout the handling process.
- If a question of conflict of interest has been raised by an outside party, or if the conflict of interest issue relates to a person who does not consider themselves as having a disqualifying conflict of interest, or differing opinions exist otherwise whether the person has a disqualifying conflict of interest, the examination of the conflict of interest issue shall immediately be passed to the Swedish Research Council for determination.

Specifically for matters relating to applications for research funding

When handling applications for research funding, it is not always possible to prevent conflict of interest situations from arising. This is the case, for example, when a member of a scientific council, council or committee or of the board applies for research funding. In such cases, written statements on the application must be obtained from at least two external experts.

6. Communication and information about conflict of interest issues

As questions and discussions about conflict of interest arise throughout the activities of the Swedish Research Council, all persons taking part in the handling of cases must know and understand the contents of the Council's conflict of interest policy, and the guidelines for handling a conflict of interest. To ensure this, the following applies:

- All employees shall be informed of the conflict of interest policy and the guidelines for the managing conflicts of interest.
- All new employees shall have the opportunity to discuss the meaning of the conflict of interest policy and guidelines as part of their work introduction.
- Administrative officers involved in the review of applications shall be given the opportunity to discuss conflicts of interest and the current procedures for managing such conflicts before and after the application review, in order to raise suggestions for ways to improve the work.
- The conflict of interest policy should be included in the reviewer handbooks.
- The conflict of interest policy and the guidelines shall be communicated to the scientific councils, councils and committees, and to review panel chairs and review panel members.
- The Chief Legal Officer shall have overall responsibility for the Swedish Research Council's management of conflict of interest issues.

Appendix 3: The Swedish Research Council's gender equality strategy

Goals for achieving gender equality at the Swedish Research Council

In compliance with its instruction, the Swedish Research Council promotes gender equality throughout its sphere of activities. The strategy for achieving this aim is to strive for gender equality throughout the organisation. Hence, the Swedish Research Council has established the following operational goals:

The Swedish Research Council shall:

1. achieve and maintain an equal gender distribution in its review panels;
2. ensure that the percentages of female and male applicants for grants from the Swedish Research Council correspond to the percentages of women and men among the potential research grant applicants;
3. ensure that women and men have the same success rates⁵ and receive the same average grant amounts, taking into account the nature of the research and the type of grant⁶;
4. include a gender equality perspective in each analysis and evaluation, where possible;
5. integrate a gender equality perspective in the Research Council's external communication.

The Board has the responsibility for implementation of the Swedish Research Council's strategy.

Achieving the goals requires the involvement of the entire agency, including the Scientific Councils and other Councils and Committees (SCCCs)⁷.

Unless otherwise specified, the Director General is responsible for advancing the efforts towards achieving equality.

Introduction

This strategy applies to the Swedish Research Council as a research funding body. A special equal opportunities plan addresses the work of achieving equality within the Swedish Research Council as a public agency.

The primary objective of the Swedish Research Council is to allocate funding to research of the highest scientific quality and that best promotes innovation. Achieving this objective requires impartial assessment of grant applications. Impartial assessment implies gender neutrality; the Swedish Research Council shall support the best researchers, regardless of gender.

The Swedish Research Council assumes that research capacity exists to the same extent in both sexes. Moreover, the Swedish Research Council assumes that research is benefited when both genders participate and apply their expertise and experience.

Gender equality is also a matter of justice. Women and men should have equal opportunities to conduct research and develop professional careers as researchers.

Achieving gender equality throughout the Swedish Research Council's spheres of activity requires persistent, long-term effort and continuous attention to assure that the ground gained towards equality is not lost. The agency must continually monitor and analyse its activities from an equality perspective and take

⁵Attainment of the goal must of course be assessed in the context of a sufficiently large number of decisions.

⁶Success rates for women and men refer to the percentage of applications approved among total applications received from women and men respectively.

⁷These include the Scientific Council for Humanities and Social Sciences, the Scientific Council for Medicine and Health, the Scientific Council for Natural and Engineering Sciences, the Council for Research Infrastructures, the Educational Sciences Committee, the Committee for Artistic Research, the Committee for Development Research and the Committee for Clinical Treatment Research.

necessary steps based on the results. The Swedish Research Council should also inform others about its actions in gender equality.

Moreover, the Swedish Research Council must consider how the results of gender research might contribute towards improving equality throughout the Research Council's sphere of activity.

Laws, ordinances, and appropriation directions

Equality between women and men is addressed by a body of laws and regulations, such as the Instrument of Government Chapter 1, Section 2, the Discrimination Act (2008:567), the Higher Education Act (1992:1434) and the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100).

The objective of the governmental gender equality policy is that women and men are to have the same power to shape society and their own lives⁴. This overall objective has four interim objectives: (i) equal division of power and influence; (ii) economic equality; (iii) equal distribution of unpaid housework and provision of care; (iv) men's violence against women must stop. The operations and gender equality strategy of the Swedish Research Council relate primarily to the first two interim objectives.

According to the Swedish Research Council's Instructions Ordinance (2009:975) Section 1 Item 14, the Swedish Research Council must promote equality between women and men within its sphere of activity. In accordance with the requirements established by its government directive, the goals achieved must be presented in the annual reports of the Swedish Research Council.

Processes for achieving goals

The Swedish Research Council must analyse its activities from a perspective of gender equality and follow up on the extent to which the goals have been achieved. This should be done annually in conjunction with the presentation to the Board regarding the outcome of the year's general call and in conjunction with producing the annual report. Equality issues must be discussed by the Board and by other parts of the organisation, and necessary actions must be taken. Furthermore, a comprehensive analysis of gender equality must be conducted at the end of the Board's three-year term of office. When a new Board takes office, it must review the gender equality strategy and where necessary decide on changes to the strategy. The following points describe how the operational goals should be achieved.

1. Equal gender distribution in Swedish Research Council review panels

"The Swedish Research Council should achieve and maintain an equal gender distribution in its review panels." (Goal 1)

In this context, equal gender distribution is considered to exist in a panel when neither of the sexes comprises less than 40 % of the panel members.

Gender distribution should be considered before appointing review panels, not least with respect to the chair positions. Work involving equality should take a long-term perspective. This means, for example, that in certain areas where women or men are greatly underrepresented among teachers and researchers at higher education institutions, the Swedish Research Council must be observant not to over-utilise those few women or men.

If the composition of a review panel, or review panel chair proposed to a Scientific Council, Council or Committee falls outside of the 40 % to 60 % range, this must be specified in the documentation prepared for the decision. This documentation must also include a justification for the deviation and describe the actions taken to achieve an equal gender distribution.

Gender equality aspects should also be considered when appointing participants to other groups and when making decisions concerning Swedish Research Council representation on external (national and international) bodies.

2. Grant application rates by women and men

“The Swedish Research Council should ensure that the percentages of female and male applicants for grants from the Swedish Research Council correspond to the percentages of women and men among the potential research grant applicants.” (Goal 2).

Currently, women and men are applying for research grants from the Swedish Research Council at rates corresponding to their proportion in the potential pool of research grant applicants. Should this situation change in the future, the Swedish Research Council would actively recruit more applications from the underrepresented gender.

3. Same success rates for women and men

“The Swedish Research Council should ensure that women and men have the same success rates⁴ and receive the same average size of grants, taking into account the nature of the research and the type of grant.”⁸ (Goal 3).

Before the Swedish Research Council decides to introduce a new type of grant or makes a new research investment the effects on gender equality must be analysed and consideration given to whether any special measures are necessary. The analysis should address gender equality at the total level and also be according to the different types of grants and subject areas.

The task of the Swedish Research Council to promote gender equality throughout its sphere of activities, as well as gender equality as a factor for raising quality should be emphasized. The texts of calls, evaluation criteria and review formats should be considered from an equality perspective.

Members of Scientific Councils and other Councils and Committees and the members of review panels must be informed about the Swedish Research Council’s gender equality strategy. The review panels shall be instructed on gender equality issues during the information meetings prior to the review work. Other experts involved must also be informed of the strategy (available in Swedish and English).

The Swedish Research Council’s review handbooks must include written instructions for the review panels, giving attention to the following:

that all evaluation criteria must be clear and explicit. When the call is issued, the criteria and the instructions for applicants must be published on the Swedish Research Council’s website; *that* only “active research years” should be considered in evaluating the extent of scientific productivity, i.e. time off for parental leave, sick leave, or similar circumstances should be deducted.

Prior to each new review batch, the research officers at the Swedish Research Council must discuss the above instructions with the review panels.

Before a review panel submits its proposal for allocating research grants, it must calculate the proposed success rates and average size of grants for women and men, respectively.

The secretaries general must present the review panels’ grant allocation proposals, from an equality perspective, to the respective Scientific Council, other Council or Committee (SCCC), commenting on possible gender disparities in success rates and average grant amounts. These presentations must be delivered before the SCCCs make their decisions. The respective SCCCs must attach to their decision a collective assessment of the results in relation to the Swedish Research Council’s gender equality strategy. These assessments should include comments by the SCCCs concerning possible disparities, as mentioned above, and a plan/strategy to rectify them. A written consensus opinion from each of the SCCCs must be forwarded to the board.

In conjunction with the Director General’s and the SCCCs’ presentation to the Board regarding the outcome of the annual calls for proposals, the success rates for women and men must be presented for each SCCC and each grant type. The average grant amount must also be reported by gender. A summary of the results shall be included in the Swedish Research Council’s annual report. Presentations by the SCCCs to

⁸ See Note 1.

the Board must include comments on possible disparities as regards the matters mentioned above, and a plan to rectify any disparities.

4. Gender equality perspective in analyses and evaluations

“The Swedish Research Council should include a gender equality perspective in each analysis and evaluation, where possible” (Goal 4).

A gender equality perspective should be included in every analysis and evaluation in so far as possible. This should also apply to memoranda, responses to consultations, documentation for discussion and decision-making, where relevant and possible. Direct and eventual indirect consequences for gender balance should be discussed in each analysis and evaluation. In those cases where a gender equality perspective has been deemed not possible or relevant, a specific justification should be given.

Gender balance should always be strived for in review panels and where external authors or experts are used. A statement of how the Research Council has fulfilled this objective should be provided annually to the Board.

5. A gender equality perspective in external communications

“The Swedish Research Council shall integrate a gender equality perspective in its external communication” (Goal 5).

A gender equality perspective shall be integrated in the Research Council’s external communications in all communication channels; it should also be clear in relevant contexts that the Swedish Research Council works to attain gender equality. The external image conveyed by the Swedish Research Council shall be gender-neutral in other respects too, and not reinforce gender stereotypes of, for example, researchers or subject areas.

A statement of how the Research Council has fulfilled this objective should be provided annually to the Board, at the latest when the annual report is submitted to the Government.

Appendix 4:

Ethics Principles: Permits/Approvals, and Good Research Practice

The administrative organisation⁹ has the responsibility to ensure that the research project complies with the terms and conditions established by Swedish law.

Permits and approvals

The applicant (project leader) has the responsibility to acquire all necessary permits and approvals for the research that receives a grant from the Swedish Research Council; these should be in place before the project is started.

- Research involving animal experiments requires approval from the Ethical Committee on Animal Experiments, in accordance with the Swedish Animal Welfare Act (1988:534).
- Research concerning humans and biological material from humans, and which falls under the Act on Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans (2003:460), requires review and approval from an ethical review board.
- Some research may require additional permits e.g. research involving pharmaceuticals, genetically modified organisms, and ionizing radiation.

The Swedish Research Council assumes that the necessary permits and approvals have been obtained for the research covered by a grant application to the Swedish Research Council.

Good research practise and ethical considerations

The Swedish Research Council assumes that research conducted with funding from the Swedish Research Council adheres to good research practice. The applicant must in the application present the ethical issues associated with the research and describe how they will be addressed during the research project.

For applications to the Swedish Research Council the following applies

- Approvals should not be sent to the Swedish Research Council.
- The applicant and the administrative organisation confirms by signing the application that necessary permits and approvals are in place when the research begins and that all other conditions that apply to the grant will be complied with.
- The content of the application is correct. This is verified by the project leader and the administrating organization when signing the application.

If a reviewer detects discrepancies

- If a reviewer suspects that an application contains deviations from the Swedish Research Council's guidelines or good research practice, these must be notified to the Swedish Research Council as soon as possible. The review task shall continue without effect as long as the Swedish Research Council does not announce anything else.

⁹ Administrative entity: A state agency or physical or legal person within whose organisation the research is conducted. Universities or higher education institutions often serve as the administrative entity for research conducted with funding from the Swedish Research Council.

- The Swedish Research Council applies the internal guidelines “Handling discrepancies from ethical guidelines and good research practice in expert assessment of applications for research funding” to assess whether and, if so, how such case should be handled.

Appendix 5: Swedish Research Council in brief

The Swedish Research Council is Sweden's largest governmental research funding body and provides support for research of the highest scientific quality in all fields of science. Most of this relates to basic research.

A large part of the funding provided by the Swedish Research Council consists of support of scientific projects for which the researchers, themselves, have formulated the research topics and project aims, and developed methods to arrive at conclusions. In order to facilitate career development for researchers and make it easier for them to gain broader experience of the research community, the Council offers career and mobility support. In addition, it provides funding for research infrastructures, research environments, graduate schools, various forms of collaboration, and Swedish membership in a host of international organisations and major research facilities.

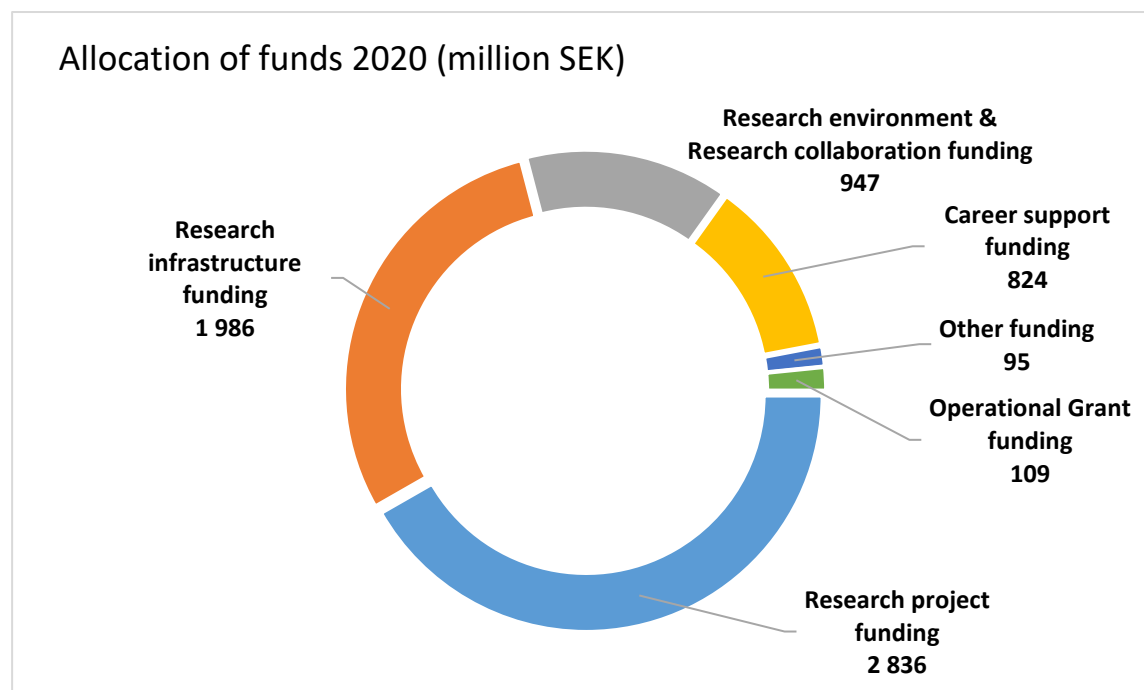
In addition to funding research, the Swedish Research Council is also responsible for communication about research and research results. The Council is also tasked with preparing analyses relating to research policy, acting an advisor to the Government on research policy issues evaluating research and supporting and developing the conditions of clinical studies.

The vision of the Swedish Research Council is to play a leading role in developing Swedish research of the highest scientific quality, and thereby contribute to the development of society.

In 2020, the Swedish Research Council paid SEK 6.7 billion in funding, mostly to basic research in all areas of science and research infrastructures.

A large part of the research funding went to projects that were proposed by the researchers themselves (researcher-initiated research). The Swedish Research Council has in total prepared 5 449 applications during 2020. Of these, 949 applications have been granted.

The diagram below shows allocation of funds based on support forms 2020 (million SEK).



Peer review

The Swedish Research Council recommends peer review as the best method of assessing scientific quality. The confidence of the research community in the Swedish Research Council is premised on the review being conducted by a knowledgeable, objective, impartial and transparent manner.

A total of 870 researchers served as members of review panels in 2020, with 48 per cent of the members of the review panels being associated with higher education institutions outside of Sweden.

Administration and organisation of the Swedish Research Council

The Swedish Research Council is a government agency within the Ministry of Education. The Council is headed by a Board and a Director-General, who is the head of the agency.

The Board of the Research Council has overall responsibility for operations as a whole, and makes decisions on general and strategic research issues according to the directives and guidelines adopted by the Parliament and Government. Six of the members are elected by an assembly of electors, which, in turn, are appointed by the higher education institutions in Sweden. The Chairperson and the remaining two members of the Board are appointed by the Government.

Under the Board, there are the scientific councils for humanities and social sciences, medicine and health, and natural and engineering sciences, the council for research infrastructures, as well as the committees for educational sciences, artistic research, and development research. Finally, there are committees for clinical therapy research and the national coordination of clinical studies.

The majority of the members of scientific councils, councils and committees are selected by the research community. As in the case of the election of the members of the Board, these are elected by electors. Some of the members are appointed by the Board of the Swedish Research Council, while several additional members are appointed by the Government.

The Director-General is responsible to the Board for ensuring that operations are conducted in accordance with the directives and guidelines decided by the Board. The Swedish Research Council has about 250 employees, and is divided into six departments – the departments for research funding, research policy, research infrastructure, communication, administration and the department of Sunet and associated services.

Appendix 6:

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