Peer review handbook 1

Project outlines - Clinical Therapy Research 2021

Research Environment Grants

Swedish
Research
Council

Content

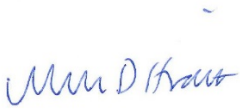
Foreword

Welcome as an expert reviewer for the Swedish Research Council's peer review process in Clinical Therapy Research for 2020 and our call for research environment grants – project outline stage. Your assignment as a member of one of our review panels is an important position of trust and the evaluation of research applications constitutes the foundation for the work of the Swedish Research Council. Your work is very important and I hope you realize how much we and all the scientists that are applying for funding this year appreciate your efforts.

This handbook has been written to assist you in your forthcoming work and describes the review process step by step. The purpose is to make it easy to find the information that is relevant for the tasks to be carried out. It contains important practical instructions on the assessment of applications as well as how final statements to be sent to 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.



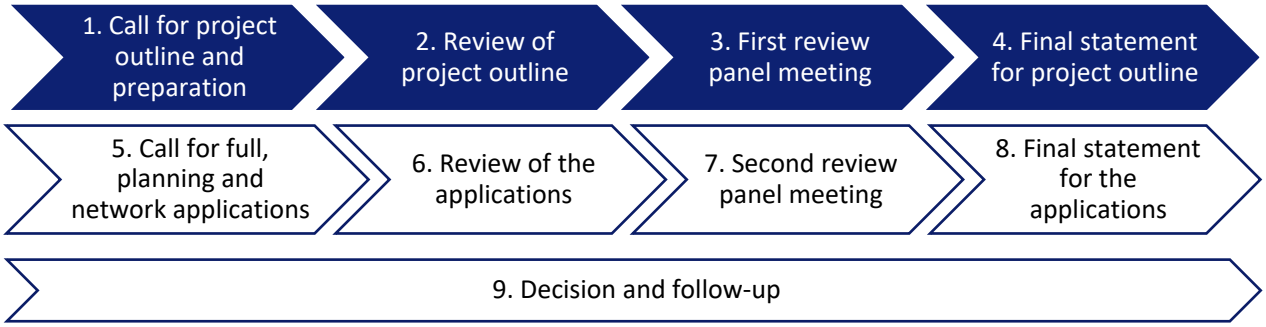
Madeleine Durbeej-Hjalt
Secretary General for Medicine and Health, and Clinical Therapy Research

Introduction

This handbook is designed to give panel members a stepvise overview of the review process. Each section ends with a summary of your tasks, and if applicable the date by which each task must be completed. Please see also p. 7 for a checklist summarising the various tasks you have during the different steps of the process.

Applications for research environment grants within Clinical Therapy Research are submitted in a two-stage process. In stage one applicants submit a project outline for evaluation and upon approval receives an invitation to submit a full application in stage two.

The process of reviewing project outlines (steps 1-4) is the focus of this handbook (Peer review handbook 1). The remaining steps (5-9) are covered in the Peer review handbook 2.



News this and previous years

- Since 2020 the Committee for Clinical Therapy Research decided to recruit Swedish chairs for the panel meetings. The Swedish chairs are responsible for leading the meeting but will not review the applications in order to secure an impartial review process and reduce any bias.

- The three review panels initially were merged into one large panel for panel discussions of full applications (approximately 25 reviewers where everyone reads all applications). Since 2020 the three panels work separately at the autumn meeting. The purpose is to better follow-up on project outlines and to favor the discussions of the full applications. This will also enable the panels to have time to review the two smaller calls, planning and network grants, in the autumn.

- The Committee has invited members of patient organisations to assess the end-user perspective in their role as observers at the panel meeting.

- In 2019 a new Government's instruction to include sex and gender equality perspectives in assessments of research funding appointed the Swedish Research Council, How sex and gender perspectives are managed in research, when relevant, forms part of the assessment of scientific quality in the applications we receive. We consider this aspect of the research to strengthen the quality. You can read more on our website.

For the 2021 review of the project outlines the Committee for Clinical Therapy Research has emphesised the guiding questions related to Patient value and how this should be assessed.

- New for this year is also a request for the applicants to include information about previous experience in conducting and leading clinical studies.

- In the instructions for applicants, the instructions related to statistics has been shorted. A loger version of the instructions, asking for more details, will be included in the full application.

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 portal paragraph to the Swedish Research Council's Instruction Ordinance establishes 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 of applications for research grants that is carried out by the various review panels within each subject area. In order to provide a basis for the scientific review, the board of the Research Council has formulated guidelines for peer review based on eight principles (see Appendix 1). Some guidelines have already been implemented, while some will be implemented in the future.

Conflict of interest

- A process involving peer review means that the evaluation of applications is carried out by researchers who are themselves part of the collective of researchers applying for grants. This creates a particular risk of conflicts of interest. In order to avoid any situation involving a conflict of interest, the Swedish Research Council has established strict internal guidelines (see Appendix 2, the Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy). Anyone who has a conflict of interest may not attend when the application is discussed and should not participate in the handling, assessment or discussion of the application or the applicant during any part of the process. In order to prevent the occurrence of conflict situations and to maintain public confidence, the Swedish Research Council has also made the standpoint that an application where a member is an applicant or a participating researcher should not be reviewed in the member's review panel. The same applies if a related party is an applicant (not participating researcher) on an application to the review panel.
- As a panel member, you are obliged as applicable to report any conflict of interest in relation to the applications you will be reviewing. In the event of any doubt, please confer with the chair and the Research Council personnel. Ultimately, the responsibility rests with the Research Council. Where a conflict of interest exists, another reviewer will be appointed.

Gender equality

The Swedish Research Council shall promote gender equality within its area of activities. For this reason, the 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". Against this background, before adopting its proposal for allocation of grants, review panels shall consider the gender equality goal and work out the success rate in its proposal, as well as considering and if necessary commenting on the outcome.

Note:

For the research environment grant within Clinical Therapy Research, gender equality is used as a borderline condition, thus when ranking applications of equal quality, applicants from the under-represented gender shall be prioritised.

Confidentiality

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

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

Roles in the review process

For the evaluation of project outlines, each review panel is composed of clinical experts, a statistical expert, an advisory expert on clinical study design (from SBU, the Swedish Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Assessment of Social Services) and on user involvement (from the patient organisation).

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 complied with. The chair allocates applications between reviewers, and is responsible for identifying any need for external reviewers. The chair is also responsible for ensuring the final statements issued by the review panel reflect the panel's discussion and assessments. The chair does not review any applications her-/himself, but shall read all the applications reviewed by the panel.

The vice chair is appointed by the committee. The vice chair's task is to stand in for 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 members

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 feedback to applicants whose applications have been discussed.

Observer

Members of the Committee for Clinical Therapy Research participate as observers in the review panel but do not take part in the review process. The observers act as a link between review panel and the decision-making body (the Committee) and provide feedback to the Committee after each review period. Together with the Swedish Research Council personnel, the observers are part of our continuous quality assurance process for evaluations.

Swedish Research Council personnel

In addition to their roles as administrators for the review panel, the research officer and senior research officer also have the task of ensuring that the rules and procedure established for the process are complied with, and to pass on the board's intentions for the review. 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 questions of a scientific nature. The Secretary General is also the person who deals with any complaints following the grant decision.

Coordinator of the Evaluation process and Coordinator of the Committee

The Coordinator of the Evaluation process and the Coordinator of the Committee assist the Secretary General and coordinate (internally and externally) the practical aspects of the review process.

Checklist

Below is a summary of the various tasks you have during the different stages of the process.

Call for project outline and preparation

- ☐ State account information in Prisma.
- ☐ Report any conflict of interest.

Review of project outline

- ☐ (i) Report recommendation (in Prisma) and write preliminary statement on all project outlines for which you are the rapporteur (using the Word template for preliminary statements, provided by the research officer).
  (ii) Send the preliminary statements to the research officer via email.
- ☐ (i) Write a statement on the report for previously awarded research grant for those project outlines where you are the rapporteur (using the Word template for statements on previously awarded research grant, provided by the research officer).
  (ii) email the statements to the research officer.
- ☐ Report recommendation (in Prisma) for all assigned project outlines.
- ☐ Contact the Swedish Research Council personnel and the chair in case issues of conflict of interest or other issues arise in relation to assigned applications.
- ☐ Contact the Swedish Research Council immediately if you suspect any deviation from ethical guidelines or good research practice, or if you suspect scientific misconduct.

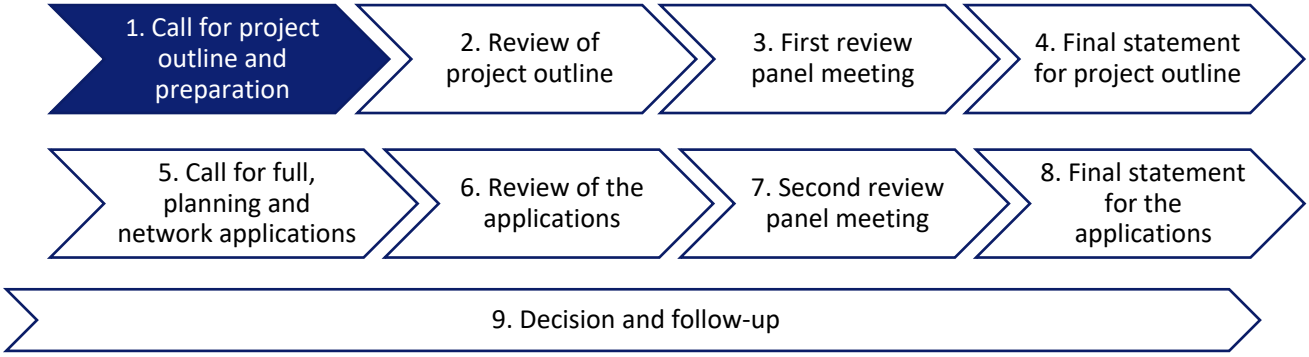
First review panel meeting

- ☐ Agree on initial recommendation for each project outline discussed.
- ☐ Agree on a consensus decision on final recommendations to the Committee.
- ☐ Contribute with feedback on the review process.

Final statement for project outline

- ☐ (i) Write the review panel's final statement on the project outlines for which you have been the rapporteur (using the same template as for the preliminary statements).
  (ii) Email final statements to the chair and senior research officer.l.
- ☐ Submit receipts for any expenses to the research officer.

1. Call for the project outline and preparation



The first period covers issues that occur before panel members start the assessment. 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 into Prisma (or create an account if you do not already have one), and ensure that the account and personal data is correct. You must also decide whether or not you want to receive remuneration for your review work. There are detailed instructions in the Prisma's User Manual.

Allocation of project outlines to review panels

Upon closure of the call, the project outlines are checked and allocated to the appropriate review panel (for specifics on the panels, see Appendix 6). In general outlines are allocated to panels according to the choice of the applicant. The chair could consider another panel to be more appropriate and in this case the application is moved.

Reporting any conflict of interest

Start by monitoring assigned outlines and report any conflict of interest in Prisma as soon as possible. The rapporteur will be appointed when all panel members finalized their conflict of interest report.
Questions or issues regarding conflict of interest or competence prior or during review should be directly addressed to the chair or the Swedish Research Council.
For contact information on the Swedish Research Council personnel, see Appendix 7.

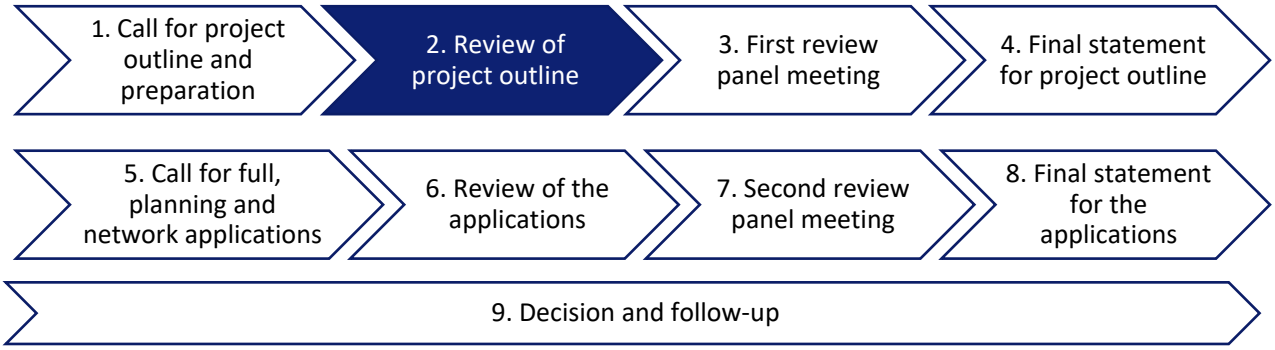
Assigning a rapporteur for each project outline

Each project outline is evaluated by all members of the review panel. One of the clinical experts is given the role of 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.

Summary of your tasks

- ☐ State account information in Prisma.
- ☐
- ☐ Report any conflict of interest.

2. Review of project outline



The review period lasts from the time you get access to the project outlines in Prisma, until approximately 10 days before the review panel meeting. During this period, you need to carry out the assessment (for details, see below). Thereafter, Prisma is closed for editing.

For the call text follow the link: Research environment grant within clinical therapy research.

Starting points for the review

Your review shall be based on the application contents. Information that is irrelevant to the review should not be used. Irrelevant information can sometimes be difficult to distinguish from expertise in the field. 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 starting point for the evaluation is that the content of an application and the information about the applicant shall not be shared with others during the review process. Sometimes questions arise 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.

Individual review

Each project outline shall be reviewed by all members of the review panel. For the project outlines where you are the rapporteur, you shall write a *preliminary statement* consisting of detailed written comments on all evaluation criteria where strengths and weaknesses of the project are pointed out. Your preliminary statements shall be written in a Word template provided by the research officer.
If a project leader of an application already has a previously awarded Clinical Therapy Research grant (from 2014 – 2020), the rapporteur assesses the report of the previous grant and write a separate statement in a template provided by the research officer. The statement assists the Committee to evaluate if there is an overlap between the ongoing project and the new proposal but will not be part of the general review process. To facilitate the assessment of the report, see guiding questions "Report for previously awarded research grant" below.

Evaluation criteria

Your assessment is based on five evaluation criteria – Scientific quality of the proposed research, Patient value - benefit of the research, Novelty and originality, Merits of the applicants and Feasibility. The focus of the assessment is on the criteria Scientific quality of the proposed research and Patient value - benefit of the research. Only project outlines that have been assessed to have high Scientific quality and Patient value will be asked to submit a full application. Due to the nature of clinical therapy research, the Novelty and originality should be weighted lower than the other criteria.

No grading will however be done for the project outlines. Each project outline is evaluated with regard to whether it should be recommended

(i) to be approved and invited to file a full application,
(ii) to be discussed at the panel meeting or
(iii) not approved.

The recommendations shall be reported in Prisma. The recommendation "not approved" does not exclude a project outline from the discussion at the panel meeting, as well as the recommendation "to be approved and invited to file a full application" does not mean that the application will automatically move on to the full application. The recommendations simply offer a basis for the discussion at the panel meeting.

As of this year, the assessment of scientific quality includes assessing how sex and gender perspectives are treated in the research, when 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, or to motivate why they choose not to include it.

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 and gender equality in assessment of applications. You can read more.on our website

To facilitate the evaluation of the various criteria, there are a number of guiding questions to be considered in the evaluation work (for details, see "Guiding questions" below).

Guiding questions

Scientific quality of the proposed research

- Is the project design sufficiently described according to the guidelines for the application?
- Is the main research question(s) motivated and specified?
- Is the primary outcome(s) and endpoint(s) well defined and the most appropriate?
- Is the proposed project design adequately designed? Would an alternative study design have increased efficiency?
- If any, which are the limitations of the project design?
- Are the variables and measurements/assessments, power calculations, sample size and patient selection convincingly described?
- Has the project a clear statistical analysis design that is linked to the research question?
- Is the project nationally coordinated? Please refer to the call text indicating that collaboration and/or patient recruitment from a minimum of four Swedish regions is a prerequisite to apply. Exemption may be possible for National Specialised Medical Care or diseases of relevance to few regions.
- Is there a need of more research in this area in accordance to existing systematic reviews, national and international guidelines and/or identified knowledge gaps? Have similar studies been conducted before?
- Will the results of the project fill an existing knowledge gap in the clinic?
- Have the applicants described if and how sex and gender are relevant to the research question?
- If sex and gender is described as relevant to the research question, have the applicants considered sex and gender in their description of the proposed work, including choice of study population, design, analyses, and implementation?
- If sex and gender is not considered in the description of the proposed work, including choice of study population, design, analyses, and implementation, have the applicants justified why this is the case?

Patient value - benefit of the research

- May the results of the study be directly implementable into clinical practice within a relatively near future (2-10 years after the end of the project)?
- Have the target groups (patient groups, patient organizations, significant others and others who may benefit from the research findings) been consulted in the planning of the study, when designing the primary and secondary outcome variables and the choice of endpoints? Are target groups involved in the continuation planning, evaluation and implementation of the study?
- May the results of the study contribute to a significantly increased clinical benefits and/or less harms for the individual? Assessed clinical value can be influenced by prevalence, severity of the disease or social costs.

May the results of the study contribute to a better use of healthcare resources?

Novelty and originality

- Is there a need of more research in this area in accordance to existing systematic reviews, national and international guidelines and/or identified knowledge gaps?
- Have similar studies been conducted before?
- Will the results of the project fill an existing knowledge gap in the clinic?

- Does the project have the potential to deliver implementable results beneficial to patients and society?

Merits of the applicant(s)

- Do the team (applicant and the participating researchers) have sufficient research experience, expertise, and scientific network for performing the proposed project?
- Based on previous publications and other scientific achievements, does the team show a track record of high quality and ability to successfully disseminate research findings? (focus should be given to the most relevant and important publications and reports with emphasis on quality rather than quantity)
- Is there appropriateness of the team, if applicable, in terms of availability and complementarities of all the relevant expertise, and in how the different roles and responsibilities are distinguished?
- Do the applicants and the team as a whole have the experience, know-how and clinical resources to facilitate and conduct a clinical study?
- Has the applicant and/or any of the participating researchers been involved in critical evaluation of clinical studies or guideline establishment?

Feasibility

- Is the recruitment of patients into the study feasible within the time frame of the project – have drop-outs and loss of enrollment in the recruitment due to holidays been taken into account?
- Does the project include the availability and accessibility of relevant personnel, including statistician, skills, equipment, facilities/ infrastructures and other necessary resources?
- Is the team composition and its environment suitable for carrying out the proposed research?
- Is there involvement of a clinical trials unit or any trial staff (if applicable)?
- Is it clear who is responsible for the data management?
- Is the time schedule optimal to carry out the proposed project within the timeframe of four years plus one year of availability period, totally five years?

Report for previously awarded research grant

These guiding questions are only to be used for those project outlines where the project leader holds a grant in Clinical Therapy Research (subject to disbursements from the Swedish Research Council from 2014 up to and including 2020) and to guide the assessment of the preliminary scientific and financial report.

- Is there any relation between the ongoing project and the new proposal?
- If there is overlap, is a new approach presented in the current proposal? Is the new approach novel and justified?
- In what way will the envisaged project deliver reliable and implementable results that can offer large benefits to patients and society that the previously funded project has failed to do?
- Has the funding for the ongoing project been used according to the presented budget?
- Are there research resources not yet spent?

External reviewers

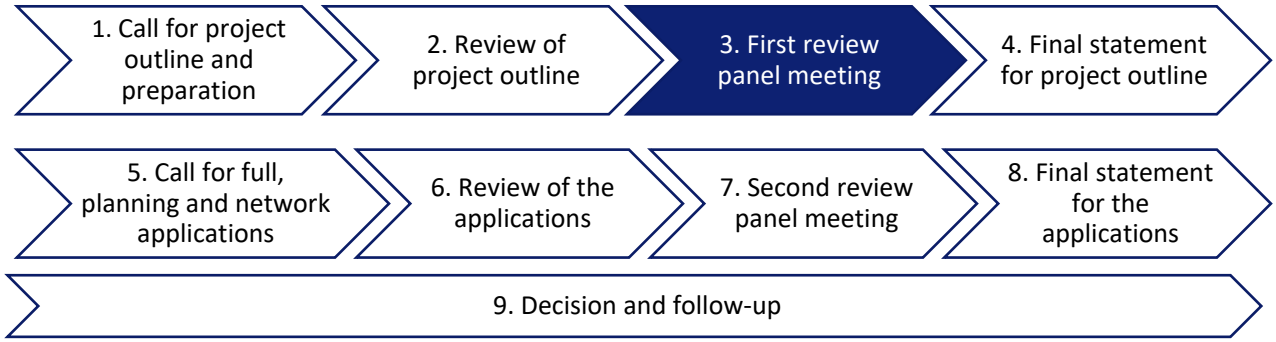
It is the panel chair's responsibility to identify any project outlines that requires external review. The Coordinator of the Evaluation process will assist the chair, and shall propose reviewers in consultation with the Secretary General. External review may be justified if the scientific character of a project outline does not correlate with the joint competence of the review panel, or in case of substantial conflict of interest within the review panel. In most cases, the research officer responsible at the Swedish Research Council will contact the proposed external reviewers.

Summary of your tasks

	Shall be completed
☐ Report recommendation[1] (in Prisma) and write preliminary statement on all assigned project outlines (using the Word template for preliminary statements, provided by the research officer). ☐ Email preliminary statements to the research officer	29 April
☐ Write a statement on the report for previously awarded research grant for those project outlines where you are the rapporteur (using the Word template for statements on previously awarded research grant, provided by the research officer). ☐ Email the statements to the research officer	29 April
☐ Report recommendation[1] (in Prisma) for all project outlines for which you are a reviewer.	29 April
☐ 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 or other issues to the assigned project outlines	As soon as possible
☐ Contact the Swedish Research Council immediately if you suspect any deviation from ethical guidelines or good research practice, or if you suspect scientific misconduct.	As soon as possible

[1] Called priority in Prisma.

3. First review panel meeting



Discussion on project outlines

The project outlines are discussed on the basis of the individual assessment, considering the five subsidiary criteria used for the evaluation. The chair leads the discussion, starting with the rapporteur presenting the strengths and weaknesses of the project outline in question. Following the advisory statement on clinical study design by the SBU personnel, the statistical assessment by the statistician, and the user involvement assessment by the patient representative expert evaluators presents their view on the project outline. The chair is responsible for including any assessments from external reviewers in the discussion. The rapporteurs take notes during the discussion and formulate the panel's final statementThe panel shall agree on an *initial* recommendation of respective project outline:

(i) recommended for full application or
(ii) rejected.

Members of the review panel have equal responsibility for the assessment of the outlines, to be evaluated based on its own merits, competing on equal terms. Irrelevant information shall not be discussed. Project outlines must not be recommended/rejected based on subject area, nor shall the panel carry out any quota-based allocation between the scientific disciplines included in the panel.
Resended applications or recurring applicants must receive equal review as other application/applicants. For this reason, the panel will not have access to previous applications or assessments.
If you discover any possible conflict of interest (yours or others) during the meeting, please do not address this at the panel meeting but bring this directly to the chair and the Swedish Research Council in private.

Consensus decision on final recommendations

In each call, up to 40 project outlines in total will proceed to the full application step. The number of project outlines invited to submit a full application per panel is dependent on the number of project outlines received by the panel. At the meeting, the research officer will provide the share that applies to each panel for the 2021 call. An equal share of the received outlines per panel will be invited to the next step; however, the panels' chairs may decide to recommend a larger share from one panel due to higher scientific quality.

Once all project outlines have been discussed, the chair leads the discussion into a consensus decision on *final* recommendation for each project outline. Those with the highest scientific quality and patient value will be recommended to proceed to the next stage. The decision is taken by the Committee for Clinical Therapy Research based on the panel recommendations.

Special conditions – gender equality

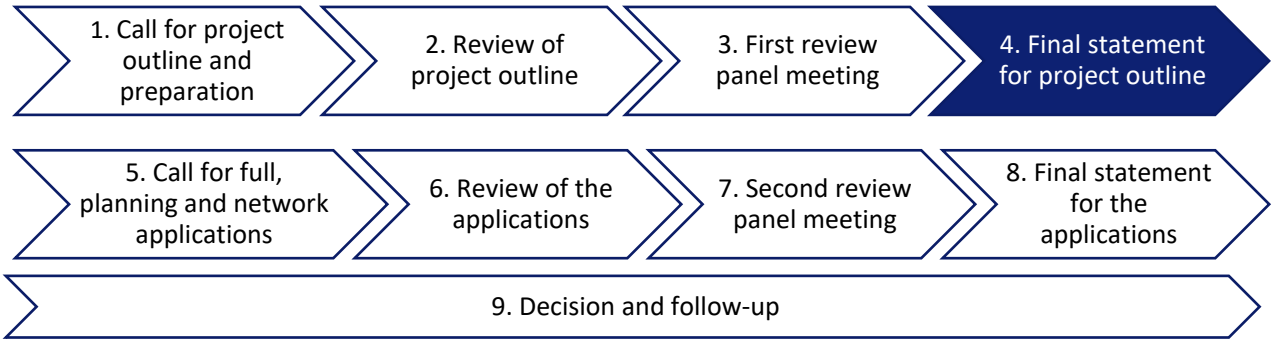
In accordance with the Strategy for gender equality at the Swedish Research Council, gender equality is used as a special condition when recommending applications of equivalent scientific quality. This means that in conjunction with the overall recommendation, the review panel shall consider the success rate of women and men, and if necessary prioritise outlines from applicants of the under-represented gender when applications are considered to be of equivalent quality. Special conditions shall not be applied by individual reviewers in their work ahead of the review panel meeting.

Feedback to the Swedish Research Council

In conjunction with the review panel meeting, the panel is encouraged to provide feedback on the review work carried out, by commenting in the various aspects of the process. This is usually a concluding item on the meeting agenda.

Summary of the tasks of the review panel	Shall be completed
☐ Agree on initial recommendation for each project outline discussed.	At the panel meeting
☐ Agree on a consensus decision on final recommendations to the Committee	At the panel meeting
☐ Contribute with feedback on the review process.	At the panel meeting

4. Final statement for project outline



The rapporteur writes a final statement

Following the review panel meeting, you need to finalize the panel's statements for those project outlines for which you have been the rapporteur. The preliminary statement you have written (in the Word template provided by the research officer ahead of the review panel meeting) will form the basis for the final statement. You need to modify the preliminary statement (using the same template) so that it reflects the panel's joint overall evaluation of the project outline.
Since the final statement is sent to the applicant, it is important that it corresponds to the final recommendation, thus describing the application's main strengths and weaknesses as well as including any necessary clarifications and suggestions for improvements.

As rapporteur, you usually have one week after the review panel meeting to complete your final statements and send them via email to the chair and the senior research officer.

The chair reviews all final statements

The chair,with help of the senior research officer, screen all statements to ensure that they reflect the discussion by the review panel. 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

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

- **Focus on describing both the main strengths and weaknesses of the project outline.** Try to emphasise relevant conceptual, structural and/or methodological issues as discussed at the review panel meeting, including suggestions for improvements.
- Make sure that the written comments correspond to the final recommendation.
- **Consider the guiding questions for the different criteria** (see pp. **11-13**) when you formulate the final statement.
- Write concisely; the content rather than the length of the text is of significance. However, do not be too brief; the final statement should contain sufficient information to help the applicant understand the grounds for the assessment.

- Comment on if divergence from the general instructions for the project outline has been weighed into the assessment of the outline.
- Use a language that is constructive and objective.
- The final statement must be written in English.

In the statements, you should avoid the following:

- Do not include a long summary about 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 is from the review panel collectively.
- Exclude quantifiable data, such as the exact number of publications, or bibliometric data.
- Exclude personal details (such as gender or age).
- Do not include any recommendations 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 obligated to review all applications in the panel.

Summary of the tasks of the review panel

	Shall be completed
☐ Write the review panel’s final statement on the project outlines for which you have been the rapporteur (using the same template as for the preliminary statements).	29 April
☐ Send the final statements to the chair and the senior research officer via email.	29 April

Appendix 1:
The Swedish Research Council´s principles and guidelines for peer review

The Board of the Swedish Research Council has adopted eight principles for peer review at the Swedish Research Council. The purpose of the principles is to provide a basis for safeguarding the scientific assessment, based on clear quality criteria with competent reviewers, within the framework of a sound peer review culture and good research practice. This document contains guidelines for the Swedish Research Council's peer review. The guidelines are based on the eight principles, and provide concrete guidelines for how the principles for peer review shall be complied with. The guidelines relate to peer review of research funding.

The guidelines for peer review of applications fall under the principles and under the brief preambles adopted by the Board, where the principles are clarified. The principles are numbered from 1 to 8. It should, however, be noted that when applying a 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. Implementing the principles in practice needs to be the subject of an ongoing discussion. The principles should therefore be recurrently raised in the review work."

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. Some guidelines consist mostly of clarifications of legislation or other mandatory regulations, or follow from requirements for the review work adopted by the Board. These guidelines must be complied with, and follow-up should be carried out in the event deviations from such guidelines are nevertheless noted. Other guidelines are of the character "comply or explain". A further type of guideline states that the person responsible for each call or area shall formulate instructions or justify choices made specifically for a call or a subject area.

The three types of guidelines are differentiated using terminology. In the first case, the word "*shall*" is part of the wording of the guideline. In the second case, the word "*should*" is used. In the third case, the guidelines state that the person responsible for the call shall formulate instructions for, or specifically justify aspects of the peer review.

The guidelines are currently in the process of being implemented, which means that some measures based on these have been implemented, while other guidelines will be implemented in the future.

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

Excerpt from the Board Minutes dated 15 November 2015.

1. Expertise in the review

The assessment of applications shall be carried out by reviewers with documented high scientific[1]*competence within the research area or areas or the subject area or areas to which the application relates and the scientific review shall be based on clear quality criteria. Reviewers shall be appointed according to clear criteria in a systematically documented process.*

Guidelines:

1. The Swedish Research Council's peer review shall be conducted with the help of review panels with broad and deep scientific expertise of relevance to the grant format to be reviewed.
2. Review panel meetings shall constitute a central feature of the review.
3. Scientific assessment and prioritising of applications should be separated from decisions on grants.
4. Expertise is required to recruit review panel members and external reviewers.
5. For each call, there shall be documented instructions for:
   - who is recruiting,
   - what merits shall be represented on the review panel,
   - any requirements on the composition of the review panel, such as subject area competency, limits on the number of members and gradual replacement of members between calls for the same grant format,
   - percentage of international members of the review panel.
6. The maximum mandate period for a review panel member shall be six years on the same review panel. After this, a qualifying period of minimum three years shall apply.
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 qualifying period of minimum three years shall apply.
8. Review panels shall comply with the Swedish Research Council's gender equality strategy and have numerical equality (i.e. minimum 40% of each gender).
9. Appointments to review panels shall comply with the Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy.

2. Objectivity and equal treatment

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

[1] Or artistic competence when relevant.

Guidelines:

1. Ahead of each call, instructions shall be drawn up for the grading criteria to be applied and prioritised. The application and prioritising between grading criteria shall be reflected in the instructions for completing an application.
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.
3. Bibliometric data shall be used restrictively in the review, and only as part of an overall assessment of merit carried out by experts within the area in question. The bibliometrics imported in conjunction with the application shall be relevant to the research area and the grant format applicable to the call.
4. The documentation for assessment shall consist of the application, which is reviewed using the subject experts' scientific competency and judgment. Information that is not relevant to the assessment shall not be used.
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 always be used, and additional criteria and guiding questions shall be adapted to each research area and grant format.
6. All assessments shall comply with the Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy.

3. Ethical considerations

The assessment assumes an ethical approach and high level of integrity. The subject experts shall not carry out any preliminary ethical review, but should take into account how the applicant discusses the research and formulates 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.

Guidelines:

1. There shall be clear instructions for how applicants shall account for and subject experts shall assess the description of which ethical considerations are relevant to the research project in question, and whether the research project may entail potential risks to humans or the natural environment.
2. The assessment shall pay attention to the requirement for ethical review of research relating to humans or animals.
3. Instructions shall be drawn up in conjunction with the call for how divergences from ethical guidelines and good research practice as well as dishonesty in research shall be managed in the peer review, and how such divergences 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 in a typical case is an application for grant funding. The assessment of the documentation shall be made based on rules and guidelines set in advance and publicly known.

Guidelines:

1. All steps in the review process shall be known to the applicants, the reviewers and other researchers.
2. Information on the members of the review panel should be publicly available before the call in question opens.
3. The subject experts shall base their assessment on the current application and not have access to previous assessments, and should only exceptionally refer to previous applications. In the event the review process requires access to previous applications, this shall be made clear in the instructions for the call in question.
4. For each call, there shall be instructions for how 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.

Guidelines:

1. At least three members shall read each application ahead of the review panel's joint prioritising.
2. When deciding on the composition of the review panel, the adaptation of the group to the nature of the task and the number of applications the panel has to assess shall be justified.
3. For each call where applicable, there shall be instructions for how applications are sifted.
4. There shall be instructions for how consultation 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.

Guidelines:

1. For each decision about a call or review, consideration shall be paid to what can be done in order to minimise the time taken and resources used (for applicants, review panel members, external subject experts and Swedish Research Council personnel) during the process from call to decision.
2. The call, application and review processes shall be predictable and changes to the process 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 opinion of other reviewers in the ongoing processing of applications. The final assessment shall always be documented and published once a decision has been made.

Guidelines:

1. The review work shall be carried out with great integrity. Reviewers shall not have contacts with individual applicants regarding the application or the review, either during or after the review process.
2. All communications with applicants and the Swedish Research Council concerning the review process, including the grounds on which decisions are made, shall be carried out via the personnel responsible at the Swedish Research Council.
3. There shall be instructions for how reviewers shall deal with problems in reviewing parts of the subject content of an application.

8. The expert assessment 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.

Guidelines:

1. Review panel members and the review panel chair, as well as other subject experts, shall receive training at an early stage of the review process in:
   - how the assessment shall be made and what is to be assessed,
   - application of conflict of interest rules and the Swedish Research Council's conflict of interest policy,
   - the application of the Swedish Research Council's gender equality strategy in the review of applications,
   - how prejudices can affect opinions,
   - good research practice and ethical considerations,
   - how statements shall be worded, rules for communication between subject experts and between subject experts and applicants,
   - the chair shall also receive training in all the stages of the review, including recruitment practices and the design and group dynamics of the review panel meeting.
2. There shall be job descriptions for the chair, panel members and observers (if any participate).
3. The peer review shall always be followed up in a systematic way in order to continuously improve the review processes.
4. The follow-up of a call shall include the overall number of persons asked to participate in a review panel and, as applicable, as external subject experts, and a summary description of the reasons given for why members and external subject experts have declined.
5. There shall be instructions relating to the management 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 policy[2]

- 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.

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[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.

- 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.

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 interest[4]

- 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)

[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.

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
- 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 rates[5] and receive the same average grant amounts, taking into account the nature of the research and the type of grant[6];
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.

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[5]Attainment of the goal must of course be assessed in the context of a sufficiently large number of decisions.
[6]Success rates for women and men refer to the percentage of applications approved among total applications received from women and men respectively.
[7]These 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.

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 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.

1.1 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. 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;

[8] See Note 1.

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 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 organisation[9] has the responsibility to ensure that the research project complies with the terms and conditions established by Swedish law.

4.1 1.1 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.

4.2 1.2 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.

4.3 1.3 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.

[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.

4.4 1.4 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.
- 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.

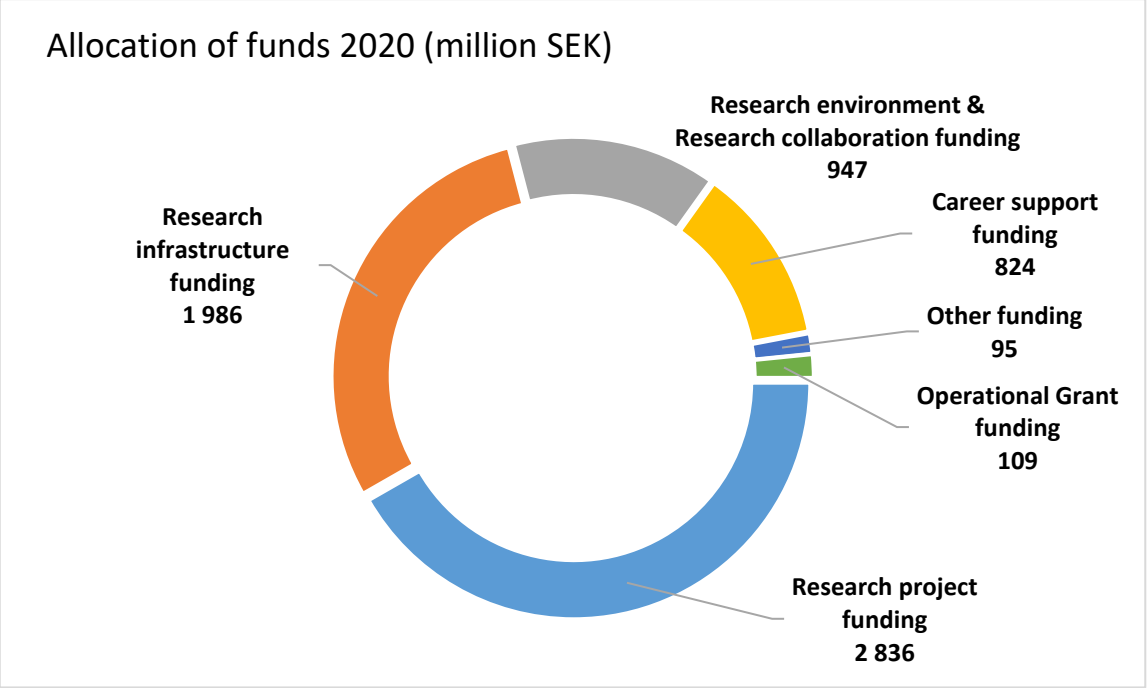
In addition to funding research, the Swedish Research Council is also responsible for communication about research and research results. The Council is also tasked with preparing analyses relating to research policy, acting an advisor to the Government on research policy issues evaluating research and 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 a 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:
Review panels for project outline

Review Panels and their members

KBF-1: Cardiology / Diabetes / Endocrinology / Geriatrics / Nephrology / Neurology / Psychiatry / Sensory organ

Member	University	Country
Ewa Roos, chair	University of Southern Denmark	Denmark
Daniela Galimberti	University of Milan	Italy
Bente Jespersen	Aarhus University	Denmark
Tor Ole Klemsdal	Oslo University Hospital	Norway
Lars Vedel Kessing	University of Copenhagen	Denmark
Anne Pitkäranta	University of Helsinki	Finland
Rebecca Reynolds	University of Edinburgh	UK
Karin Källén	Lund University	Sweden
Kristina Niemi	The Swedish Neurology Association	Sweden

KBF-2: Childhood cancer / Clinical oncology / Hematology / Surgery

Member	University	Country
Kjell Asplund, chair	Umeå University	Sweden
Judith Bliss	The Institute of Cancer Research	UK
Els Nieveen van Dijkum	Amsterdam UMC, University Medical Centers	Netherlands
Eigil Kjeldsen	Aarhus University	Denmark
Marc Peeters	University of Antwerp	Belgium
Kjeld Schmiegelow	Rigshospitalet	Denmark
Staffan Nilsson	University of Gothenburg	Sweden
Britta Berglund	The Swedish Association of Rare Disorders	Sweden

KBF-3: Anesthetics and intensive care / Infection / Inflammation / Obstetrics and gynecology / Odontology / Orthopedics / Pediatrics / Physiotherapy / Pulmonary medicine and allergy / Rheumatology

Member	University	Country
Anna Sarkadi, chair	Uppsala university	Sweden
Torstein Baade Rø	Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)	Norway
Merete Bakke	University of Copenhagen	Denmark
Sita Bierma-Zeinstra	Erasmus MC, University Medical Center Rotterdam	Netherlands
Sten Rasmussen	Aalborg University Hospital	Denmark
Øjvind Lindegaard	University of Copenhagen	Denmark
Charlotte Suppli Ulrik	University of Copenhagen	Denmark
Jaana Vuopio	University of Helsinki	Finland
Nicola Walsh	University of the West of England	UK
Philippe Wagner	Uppsala universitet	Sweden

Appendix 7:
Contact information for Swedish Research Council personnel

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