Peer review handbook

Grant for planning of Clinical Therapy Research 2021

Swedish
Research
Council

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Foreword

Welcome as an expert reviewer for the Swedish Research Council's peer review process in Clinical Therapy Research for 2021 and our call for Grant for planning of clinical studies in therapy research.
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.

News

- 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 were initially merged into one large panel for panel discussions of full applications (approximately 25 reviewers with everyone reading all applications). Since 2020 the three panels work separately at the autumn meeting. The purpose is to enable better follow-up of project outlines and to favor the discussions of the full applications. In addition, there will be more time available to review applications within the call for research project grant for planning of clinical therapy research. 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 Grant for planning of clinical studies in 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

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.

About this call

The purpose of the grant for planning of clinical therapy research is to create opportunities for a constellation of researchers within academia and health and medical care to collaborate with other actors ahead of a future application for a research environment grant. The goal of the planning grant should be to submit an application to the Swedish Research Council for the call of research environment grant within clinical therapy research within 1-2 years.

The applicant can apply for the planning grant to complete the planning and subsequent work ahead of an application for a research environment grant within clinical therapy research. The

proposal should map whether a future well-defined research project can be implemented. The planning work could for example include:

- a plan for national recruitment of patients, or (if the patient base is limited), formulate how an expansion of the number of patients and participating clinics/centres can be implemented
- obtaining ethical and medical approval, starting the procurement of trial medicines to be used in the research project or obtaining a quote for a placebo
- performing a pilot study if relevant
- developing a national network that joins together competences within research, health and medical care, business and users in order to strengthen the national collaboration in the project
- performing a systematic review of the research field if systematic reviews are lacking for the research area
- involvement of users to enable inclusion of active user involvement in the future application.

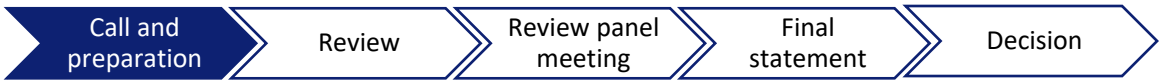
For the call text of the planning grant, follow the link: Grant for planning of clinical therapy research.

Checklist

Call and preparation	☐ State account information in Prisma. ☐ Report any conflict of interest.
Review of application	☐ Report recommendation (in Prisma) for all assigned projects. ☐ 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	☐ Write the review panel's final statement on the applications for which you have been the rapporteur. ☐ Submit receipts for any expenses to the research officer.

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

Call for the applications 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 applications to review panels

Upon closure of the call, the Grant for planning of clinical studies in therapy research are checked and allocated to the appropriate review panel (for specifics on the panels, see Appendix 6). In general Grant for planning of clinical studies in therapy research 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.

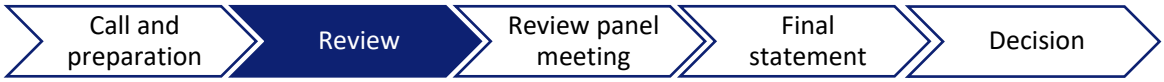
Assigning a rapporteur for applications

Allocated applications are evaluated by 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

Review of application



The review period lasts from the time you get access to the project Grant for planning of clinical studies in therapy research 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: Grant for planning of clinical studies in 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 application shall be reviewed by all members of the review panel. For the applications 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 Prisma.

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 applications that have been assessed to have high Scientific quality and Patient value will be recommended. Due to the nature of clinical therapy research, the Novelty and originality should be weighted lower than the other criteria.

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 (1–7)

- Is the main research question motivated and specified?
- Are the purpose and the plan for how the proposal will lead to an application for a research environment grant within clinical therapy research clarified and well justified?
    - Are the planned activities clearly specified and fit for purpose, for example how to work on regulatory issues topical for the project, such as approval from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority, permits from the Swedish Medical Products Agency, etc.
    - make an inventory of the patient material – number of patients possible to include in the study
    - obtain medicine approval for the research project
    - start the procurement of trial medicines to be used in the research project
    - obtain a quote for a placebo
    - optimize the study design and include a statistical analysis plan
    - meet the requirement on national collaboration
    - gather necessary expertise and actors to create a network that can lead to a future application for research environment grant within clinical therapy research
    - perform a systematic review of the research field if systematic reviews are lacking for the research area
    - If an intervention study is proposed: Will the inclusion process be sufficient to reach the included number of patients in the described period of time? For other study designs: Is the target study population defined and sufficiently large?
    - Is there a well worked-out plan for how both junior and senior researchers will participate in the network?

Patient value – benefit of the research (1–7)

- Is there a well worked-out plan for how to include users (that is to say patients, patient organisations and relatives) in the planning of the study and the choice of endpoints?
- May the results of the planned clinical therapy study contribute to a better use of the resources in the healthcare sector? Factors such as prevalence, the severity of the disease, the current burden on the health care system, and social costs should be weighed in the assessment of clinical relevance.

Novelty and originality (1–7)

- Have similar studies been conducted before? If so, why is the proposed one needed?
- Does the planned study have the potential to deliver implementable results beneficial to patients and society?

Merits of the applicant (1–7)

- Does the team have a track record in carrying out research within the subject area?
- Has any team member been involved in critical assessments or guideline establishment?
- If an intervention study is planned: Is there any involvement of a clinical trials unit or any trial staff (if applicable)?
- Does the application contain a plan for statistical competence and feasibility?
- Does the main applicant have documented experience of leading major collaboration projects? If not, is there a clear description for how senior members in the project group will provide this competence to the governance of the project?

Feasibility (1–3)

- Has the proposed project potential to result in an application for a research environment grant within clinical therapy research within 1-2 years?
- Is the planned preliminary work, including the time-frame, realistic for the proposed project?
- Are the study design, statistical methods and patient cohorts adequate and well adapted to the research question?
- Are the costs reasonable and well justified?

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-grade scale is used to evaluate the criteria Scientific quality of the proposed research, Patient value - benefit of the research, Novelty and originality and Merits of the applicants:

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**

A three-grade scale is used to evaluate the criterion Feasibility:

Feasible	**3**
Partly feasible	**2**
Not feasible	**1**

For each criterion, you can also mark “Insufficient”, if you consider that the application lacks sufficient information to allow a reasonable evaluation of the criterion

Overall grade

After grading the individual criteria, you need to weigh them together into an overall grade for the application according to the seven-grade scale above. Due to the nature of clinical therapy research, the Novelty and originality should be weighted lower than the other criteria. The focus of the assessment should be given on the criteria Scientific quality of the proposed research and Patient value - benefit of the research.

The overall grade is not the same as an average grade or a summary of the grades for the individual criteria; instead, it should 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

Summary of your tasks

		Shall be completed
☐	Grade and write preliminary statements (in Prisma) on all applications for which you are the rapporteur.	16 October
☐	Grade and write comments on all applications (in Prisma) for which you are a reviewer.	27 October
☐	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

Review panel meeting

Discussion and applications

The applications 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 application in question.
Each application is reviewed by all panel members and discussed on the basis of the individual assessments. After all applications have been discussed, and the panel has agreed on an overall grade on each application, the panel shall carry out a prioritisation (ranking) of the applications with the highest scientific quality.
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 statement.

Members of the review panel have equal responsibility for the assessment of the applications, to be evaluated based on its own merits, competing on equal terms. Irrelevant information shall not be discussed. Applications 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.

Prioritising (Ranking)

Once all applications have been discussed, and the panel has agreed on an overall grade for each application, the panel shall carry out a prioritisation of the applications with the highest scientific quality, proposing two priority lists; one on the applications to be awarded grants and the other on the reserves.

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.

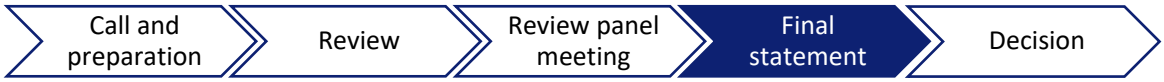
Feedback to the Swedish Research Council

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 your tasks

		To be completed
☐	Agree on grades for each individual criterion and an overall grade for each application.	At the meeting
☐	Agree on a priority list for the applications to be awarded funding within the review panel's budgetary framework.	At the meeting
☐	Agree on a priority list with reserves, covering the applications that fall immediately outside the panel's budgetary framework.	At the meeting

Final Statement



The rapporteur writes a final statement

Following the review panel meeting, you need to finalize the panel's statements for those applications for which you have been the rapporteur. The preliminary statement you have entered into Prisma ahead of the review panel meeting will form the basis for the final statement. You need to modify the preliminary statement so that it reflects the panel's joint overall evaluation of the application.

Since the final statement is sent to the applicant, it is important that it corresponds to the final grades, 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 enter your final statements in Prisma.

The chair reviews all final statements

The chair will 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.

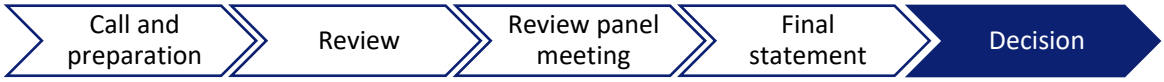
In the statements, you should avoid the following:

- 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 your tasks

	Shall be completed
☐ Write the review panel’s final statement in Prisma on the applications for which you have been the rapporteur.	

Decision



This decision of the Committee for Clinical Therapy Research on grants is based on the priority lists (including reserves) from the review panel, along with the review panels' final statements and any justifications from the chair regarding the priority lists.

Summary of your tasks

- ☐ Refer any questions about the evaluation of individual applications to the Swedish Research Council's personnel.
- ☐ Be prepared to assist the chair and the Secretary General responsible in the event of 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 scientific[1] 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.

[1] Or artistic competence when relevant.

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.

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 make 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 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.
- Conflict of interest issues shall be communicated and discussed on an ongoing basis within the operation.

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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.

- 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)

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:

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[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 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. 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).

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[8] See Note 1.

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 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.

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.

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[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 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.
- 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.

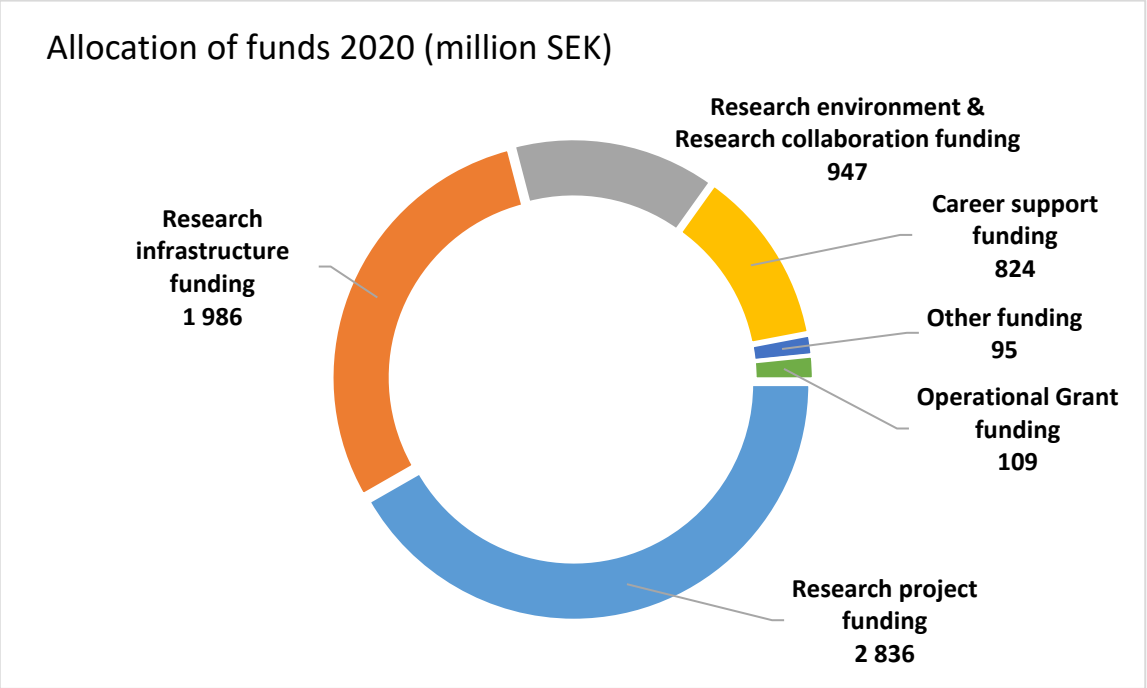
In addition to funding research, the Swedish Research Council is also responsible for communication about research and research results. The Council is also tasked with preparing analyses relating to research policy, acting an advisor to the Government on research policy issues evaluating research and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

Review Panels and their members

KBF-1: Nervous system diseases; Geriatrics; Psychiatry; Sensory organ; Cardiovascular diseases; Nephrology; Endocrinology/Metabolic diseases and Diabetes

Member	University	Country
Ewa Roos, chair	University of Southern Denmark	Denmark
Tor Ole Klemsdal	Oslo University Hospital	Norway
Merete Nordentoft	niversity of Copenhagen	Denmark
Rebecca Reynolds	University of Edinburgh	UK
Lars Vedel Kessing	University of Copenhagen	Denmark
Bente Jespersen	Aarhus University	Denmark
Anne Pitkäranta	University of Helsinki	Finland

KBF-2: Surgery; Clinical oncology; Haematology; Childhood cancer

Member	University	Country
Kjell Asplund, chair	Umeå University	Sweden
Els Nieveen van Dijkum	Amsterdam UMC, University Medical Centers	Netherlands
Judith Bliss	The Institute of Cancer Research	UK
Marc Peeters	University of Antwerp	Belgium
Eigil Kjeldsen	Aarhus University Hospital	Denmark
Kjeld Schmiegelow	Rigshospitalet	Denmark

KBF-3: Orthopedics; Rheumatology; Infections; Inflammations; Puliminary medicine and Allergy; Obstetrics and Gynecology; Pediatrics; Odontology; Anaesthestics and Intensive care; Physiotherapy

Member	University	Country
Anna Sarkadi, chair	Uppsala University	Sweden
Øjvind Lidegaard	University of Copenhagen	Denmark
Sten Rasmussen	Aalborg University Hospital	Denmark
Jaana Vuopio	University of Helsinki	Finland
Charlotte Suppli Ulrik	University of Copenhagen	Denmark
Torstein Baade Rø	Norwegian University of Science and Technology	Norway
Sita Bierma-Zeinstra	Erasmus University Medical Center	Netherlands
Nicola Walsh	University of the West of England	UK

Appendix 7:
Contact information for Swedish Research Council personnel

Madeleine Durbeej-Hjalt, Secretary General, Medicine and Health
Phone: +46 73 6407263
Email: Madeleine.Durbeej-Hjalt@vr.se

Tanja Nilsson, Coordinator, Clinical Therapy Research
Phone: 08-546 44 156
Email: tanja.nilsson@vr.se

Isabel Dellacasa Lindberg, Coordinator Evaluation Process/Senior Research Officer, Clinical Therapy Research
Phone +46-8-546 44 08
Email: isabel.dellacasa.lindberg@vr.se

Elisabeth Tehler, Research Officer, Clinical Therapy Research
Phone: +46 08-546 44 229
Email: elisabeth.tehler@vr.se