



Instructions for reviewing applications - terms of reference

Doctoral education pilot projects 2024-2027



Research Council of Finland

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1. Aims of the funding instrument

Between 2024 and 2027, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture will fund a pilot programme to test new practices in doctoral education in Finland. The programme will start in 2024, and the doctoral researchers are expected to graduate in 3–4 years.

Objectives:

1. increase the number of PhDs in Finland, taking into account the supply of new knowledge
2. test a more flexible process and content for doctoral education
3. increase the mobility of doctoral researchers between universities, companies, research institutes and other organisations and encourage new PhDs to pursue diverse research careers
4. provide information on doctoral training processes and collect data on the possible need for regulation of third-cycle studies
5. develop guidance practices and the integration of scientific and artistic postgraduate studies with previous studies (incl. the possibility to complete a master's degree during doctoral studies)
6. increase the employment of PhDs in a wide range of sectors in society.

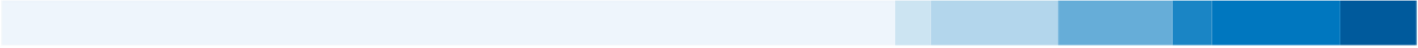
2. Review

The applications submitted by universities will be reviewed by an international panel. Experts recruited to the panel must have extensive experience and understanding of the higher education sector. Based on the panel's review, the decisions on funding will be made by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

In addition to the applications submitted, the review panel has access to a **background material document**.

The panel meeting will be organised as an online meeting.

The panel members are asked to familiarise themselves with the applications and the background material. Each application will be assigned to two panel members for preliminary evaluation, and the panel members will be asked to write **draft reviews** before the panel meeting (10–12 draft reviews/panel member). These draft reviews form the basis of the working material for the actual review in the panel meeting. The panel members will also be asked to read a few other applications in order to discuss them during the meeting. The panel will finalise **the review reports, ratings, and application rankings** during the panel meeting.



The review questions that will be applied in reviewing applications submitted to this call are listed below.

2.1. Review questions

1 Implementation

1.1 Feasibility and plausibility of the action plan regarding measures, schedule, resources, follow-up of implementation and risk management, including aspects of responsible science (e.g. human resources, equality, nondiscrimination)

1.2 To what extent the action plan benefits from the high-quality scientific basis of the Finnish Flagship/the research field

1.3 To what extent the action plan supports doctoral education in the research field

2 Collaboration

2.1 How viable are the arrangements for collaboration with other universities and organisations participating in the pilot (e.g. complementarity, research-related added value, infrastructures and data sharing)?

2.2 How feasible are the plans to promote working-life connections during doctoral education?

3 Societal impact

3.1 What is the potential significance of this proposal with regard to reforming doctoral education in Finland?

4 Overall assessment

4.1 Main strengths and weaknesses

4.2 Other remarks (if any)

5 Overall rating

2.2. Rating scale

6 Outstanding

The action plan includes viable, significant and very concrete research and educational measures that clearly promote doctoral education within the research field and contribute significantly to reforming doctoral education in Finland.

5 Excellent

The action plan includes viable, significant and very concrete research and educational measures that promote doctoral education within the

research field and contribute to reforming doctoral education in Finland.

4 Good

The action plan includes viable and concrete research and educational measures. The proposed doctoral education measures should be more extensive to reach the target and contribute to reforming doctoral education in Finland.

3 Fair

The action plan includes moderate doctoral education measures. For instance, the action plan measures should be more extensive or viable.

2 Poor

The action plan is not viable in its present form.

1 Insufficient

The action plan is out of scope.

3. Secrecy and integrity in the review process

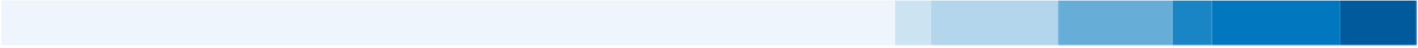
According to the Finnish Act on the Openness of Government Activities, research plans, abstracts, progress reports and review reports are secret documents. Application documents should therefore be handled and stored with due care and confidentiality.

The Research Council of Finland is committed to following the [Finnish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and Procedures for Handling Alleged Violations of Research Integrity in Finland \(PDF\)](#).

All reviews must be handled confidentially, competently and impartially, based on the criteria set for the review process. Care must be taken to ensure that the review complies with general stipulations about conflicts of interest. Prior notice must be given if a reviewer has economic or other affiliations or significantly different schools of thought in relation to the applicant under review. This is a way to avoid conflicts of interest.

As a reviewer, you are not allowed to disclose any information concerning application documents or reviews to outsiders. This also applies to entering this information in AI tools such as ChatGPT (see also the [European research integrity guidelines \(PDF\)](#) on the use of AI tools in research or review). In addition, you are not allowed to use secret information to your own benefit or anyone else's benefit or disadvantage.

You may not reveal to outsiders that you are assessing the research plan of a particular researcher.



If you are contacted by anyone, including the applicant, who has questions about the application or reviews, please advise them to contact the Research Council of Finland. Disclosing the contents of research plans to third parties or contacting applicants personally without explicit agreement to do so are regarded as instances of inappropriate behaviour on the part of reviewers.

Once the review has been completed, you are required to destroy all application documents and any copies made of them. In addition, the Finnish Criminal Code provides for the punishability of breaches of the obligation to maintain the secrecy of a 4 (8) document kept secret under the Act on the Openness of Government Activities and breaches of the nondisclosure obligation and the prohibition of use.

Reviewers are guilty of research misconduct if they misappropriate information from applications. This also includes copying any part of an application. The quality of the review is not a research-ethical issue unless the review has been conducted carelessly, which may give an appearance of a review that deliberately either underrates or overrates the applicants under review.

The composition of the panel and the positive funding decisions will be shown on website after the decisions have been made. By request, applications, panel reviews, rating and ranking and the names of reviewers giving the preliminary reports are public.

Confidentiality must also be maintained after the review process has been completed.

4. Reviewer's declaration

Please acknowledge that by accepting the task of reviewer you guarantee not to disclose the information you receive and not to use it for anybody's benefit or disadvantage. Further, you affirm that you will immediately notify the Research Council if you have a conflict of interest in one or more applications.

5. Conflict of interest

Reviewers are required to declare any personal interests according to the following criteria:

You must disqualify yourself if you or a close person to you (e.g. a family member, relative or a close friend) can in any way benefit or suffer specific loss from the approval or rejection of the proposal. You must also disqualify yourself if you are or a close person to you is a member of a governing organ of an applicant or in other position that might compromise your impartiality.

You are also disqualified to review the application if your impartiality may otherwise be endangered, or if you feel that you have a conflict of interest.

If you identify any conflicts of interest, please notify us as soon as possible.

6. Responsible science

6.1. Research ethics

The Research Council of Finland requires that the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity guidelines [Responsible conduct of research and procedures for handling allegations of misconduct in Finland \(PDF\)](#) are followed in all research funded by the Research Council.

We also require that researchers follow ALLEA's (All European Academies) [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity \(PDF\)](#) when engaging in international collaboration. The same guidelines also oblige researchers in their work abroad.

6.2. Equality and nondiscrimination

The Research Council of Finland promotes equality and nondiscrimination as part of responsible science. To secure responsible reviews and decision-making, we are, in accordance with our [Equality and Nondiscrimination Plan](#), committed to defining the means to support combining work and family life and the research careers of women in all funding opportunities.

The Research Council requires that all funded research promotes gender equality and nondiscrimination. Our reviews and decision-making emphasise the importance of promoting equality and nondiscrimination either in the suggested project or in the wider society. Gender is not part of the information in the applications under review.

6.3. Open science

The Research Council of Finland is committed to promoting the principles and practices of open science to improve the quality, responsibility and social impact of science. The goal is to make all outputs produced and used in research (research publications, data, methods and metadata) widely available for reuse.

The principles of open science must be pursued with due attention to good scientific practice and law. The degrees of data openness may justifiably vary, ranging from fully open to strictly confidential. Read

more about the [Research Council of Finland's open science policy](#) on our website.

7. Quick guide to the online services

Finding your review requests and all applications

- Go to the 'Reviews' tab on the welcome screen (Desktop menu). You will find both your open (not submitted) and submitted reviews under the 'Reviews' menu, on respective tabs.
- To read all applications, click on 'Download ZIP file of all applications'. The application PDF files are saved in a single compressed ZIP file.
- To read general documents for the panel members, click the document link in the file list.

Writing and editing the review

- Click on 'Edit review' in your list of reviews to open the form with which you enter the review.
- Click on 'View application' if you want to open the application to read, print or save it (can be saved as a PDF file). Click the 'Save' button every now and then as the connection will be closed automatically after 30 minutes of inactivity. After saving, you can safely 'Log out' to enter the review later.

Submitting the review

- Click on the 'Submit' button on the review.
- After submitting, you cannot edit the review unless you request it from the Research Council's science adviser.
- The staff of the Research Council will provide all technical assistance for the panel during the online meeting. We will provide more details closer to the meeting.