



Instructions for reviewing CoE mid-term applications – panel

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1 Research Council of Finland and the Centre of Excellence Programme

The Research Council of Finland's (RCF) mission is to open up new avenues for excellent, responsible and high-impact research. Our objectives are to advance new scientific breakthroughs and solutions for the benefit of society; the capacity of research for renewal and reform; and better and higher-impact skills and competence. Our funding is based on open competition, independent peer review and responsible science. We grant funding to researchers and research teams as well as to the most promising early-career researchers through different funding instruments.

A Centre of Excellence (CoE) is a research community that is striving for or already at the international forefront of research in its field. CoEs may consist of one or more particularly accomplished research teams working closely together under a joint research plan. The units granted CoE funding by the RCF are scientifically first-rate research communities that have capacity for renewal and high societal impact. CoE programmes contribute to the renewal of science by supplying new research topics, new methods and approaches, and new research teams. In addition, CoEs are expected to demonstrate strong activity in applying for and attracting EU-funding. Thanks to the long-term funding provided in collaboration with CoE host



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organisations, the funding instrument effectively works as an incentive for scientific risk-taking and new initiatives in research. The eight-year CoE term is split into two parts (5 + 3 years).

According to the principles of the CoE programmes, the CoEs are evaluated after the first four years of operation. The outcome of the evaluation will inform decisions on the level of funding for the last three years of the CoE term – the level of funding may increase, remain the same, or decrease. The RCF may also decide to cease funding entirely after the first five years, if the CoE has failed to achieve the objectives set in the research plan.

2 Role of experts and the RCF

Experts are invited to review the quality of the applications. The experts are esteemed, international researchers in the field of the applications. The review of applications follows a two-stage process. In the first stage, experts are asked to give at least two individual reviews on each application. In the second stage, the applications proceed to be reviewed by a panel. The funding decisions are made by the [RCF's General Subcommittee](#).

2.1 Panel chair

The panel is assigned a chair and a vice chair. The duties of the chair are to chair the panel meeting via an online platform (Teams), lead the discussion and ensure that all applications are reviewed in a responsible and fair manner. The chair may also have duties as a panel member. After the panel meeting, the chair is expected to deliver a brief memorandum including feedback on the review process and the panel meeting.

2.2 RCF officials

The RCF's officials invite the panel members, and, if needed, additional external individual reviewers to support the panel, provide instructions on the review process and organise a pre-panel meeting for the chair and the vice chair. The officials also take care of the practical arrangements in the panel meeting and follow that the review process is carried out according to established RCF procedures.

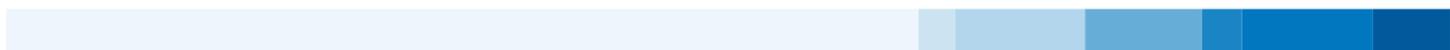
2.3 Decision-making bodies

After receiving the review reports, the RCF's [General Subcommittee](#) makes the final funding decisions. The decisions are based on the results of the peer review, but factors related to science policy may also influence the decisions.

3 Review

3.1 Review criteria and rating scale

The criteria in the review are as follows:





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- how the CoE has achieved its goals and the objectives of the CoE programme in relation to quality, innovativeness, novelty and impact, renewal and added value during the first four years
- CoE's goals for the remaining three-year period in terms of quality of research, feasibility, complementary expertise of the PIs involved, collaborations, and quality of research environments
- equality and nondiscrimination aspects related to the compositions of the research groups
- consideration of gender equality and nondiscrimination, research ethics and good scientific practice, open access to research publications and data, data management, and sustainable development
- CoE's plan for activity in applying for EU funding
- CoE's plan after the funding period (exit plan) and involvement of the host organisation(s).

The review material will include the following documents:

- mid-term application
- interim report by the CoE
- reports written by Scientific Advisory Board
- original research plan.

Written reviews:

Written reviews play a crucial role in aiding the decision-making bodies. In addition, they provide important feedback to applicants.

Reviewers should therefore:

- write evaluative comments and give justifications using full sentences
- avoid descriptive comments and copying text directly from the application
- write comments under each sub-item (however, item 'Review panel's summary assessment' will be developed and finalised during the panel meeting)
- maintain coherence throughout their comments and give constructive feedback.



Numerical rating: The consistency between the numerical rating and the written comments is particularly important. The rating scale ranges from 6 (outstanding) to 4 (good).

Rating	Description
6 (outstanding)	Outstanding in global comparison
5 (excellent)	Very good in international comparison – contains no significant elements to be improved
4 (good)	Is in general sound but contains some elements that could be improved

3.2 Individual review

Each application is assigned to at least two individual reviewers. The reviewers write individual reviews, using specified sections in the review forms, and give overall ratings to the applications. All individual review reports will be made available to the panel members one week before the meeting. However, please note that these review reports can only be made available to panel members once all individual review reports have been submitted to the RCF, and therefore the given deadline for the individual reviews is strict. The individual review reports will be given to the applicants as is, including the names of the reviewers.

3.3 Review panel meeting (online)

The panel members have access to all applications assigned to the panel, with exceptions in the case of conflicts of interest (see [RCF review principles](#), section 1.3). Also, individual reviews will be available to all panel members.

At the panel meeting, the panel discusses each application. The individual reviewers appointed to the application will present their opinion on the application and, typically, a third panel member (read-only/reader) may be assigned to read the application to form an additional view of it. The review panel's summary assessment will be written for each application during the panel meeting by a dedicated summariser (a panel member). The summary is based on the discussions and the individual reviews. The panel decides the final overall rating for each application.

3.4 How to review applications in the RCF's online services

Please use the [RCF online services](#) (link takes you to the online services via our website) to review applications. You will find the review instructions and offline versions of the review form under [Guides for reviewers](#) on our website. Both individual reviews and panel's summary assessments are completed in the online services. You can access the research plan and other



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sections in the application form directly from the review form questions. However, we do expect you to read the whole application.

4 Expert fees

There will be a modest compensation for participation, EUR 550 (EUR 700 for panel chair and vice chair) per panel day (taxed as per your national taxation rules). This compensation also covers participation in a short pre-meeting. Furthermore, EUR 150 will be paid for each individual review. To claim your remuneration, please enter your own personal banking details in the online services. The remuneration will be paid into your personal bank account. Please notice that IBAN is mandatory for bank accounts in Europe. Also fill in the BIC/SWIFT code/clearing code/routing number. Make sure that you have entered your personal details correctly in the online services to avoid any unnecessary delays in the payment. The payslip will be sent to your home address.

