Panels in September 2019 call

The Research Council for Biosciences and Environment and the Research Council for Health

ACADEMY OF FINLAND

Contents

1. Overview 3
2. Scientific quality 3
3. Competence, collaboration and mobility 4
4. Other feedback 4

1. Overview

The Research Council of Biosciences, Health and Environment of the Academy of Finland received 961 applications in the 2019 September Call. These were reviewed by 280 experts in 23 different panels. The Research Council of Biosciences, Health and Environment organised 16 of these expert panels in January – March of 2020 and received comments and suggestions from members of those panels.

In the 2019 Call the council received applications in 5 different instruments; Academy Professor (preliminary applications of intent), Academy Projects, Academy Research Fellows, Post-Doctoral Researchers and Clinical Researchers. Almost every panel had applications from all instruments.

The clear majority of the panels thought that the range of applications reviewed in the panel were very well covered by the panels' expertise. There were no panels, which thought that there was not enough expertise to appropriately review all the applications in the panel, but some which thought that the panel work could have benefitted from additional expertise in some fields, especially bioinformatics and biostatics – although these subjects were well covered by external experts, it would have been even better to have the experts included in the panel discussion.

2. Scientific quality

The Research Council of Biosciences, Health and Environment panels thought that the scientific quality of the applications in all September 2019 calls was generally at an excellent level, and there were outstanding applications in all categories. Several panels commented that overall, the standard of applications quality was generally seen to be a bit higher than on many previous years. The level of applications was again also seen generally being competitive on a very good international level.

However, there were some small differences between instruments. The Academy Professor applications especially were seen to be at an outstanding level throughout the panels, and most panels thought that the Academy Project applications were also on a very high international level but there was a bit more variation in other instruments. Some panels thought that there was some variation of quality in Academy Research Fellow's and the Post-Doctoral applications. There were many outstanding and excellent applications, but also some which were not at the top level.

In some panels there was criticism towards some younger applicant's home organisations and supervisors for possibly not offering enough support or guidance in preparation of the applications and designing the projects, and this being a possible reason that some applications were not at highest scientific level. Still, the overall scientific quality was on a very high level in

general also in younger scientists' Academy Research Fellow and Post-Doctoral applications.

3. Competence, collaboration and mobility

Generally, panels were very happy about the applicant's level of competence. Again, the level was considered especially high in Academy Professor applicants, where most applicants were either outstanding or excellent. The group leaders in Academy Projects were also seen to be at very high level of competence and many have excellent international and national collaborations already ongoing. Also, there were a lot of applications from younger scientists in Projects which were seen to be on a very high level and were reviewed accordingly with high scores.

The case for younger scientists was a bit more varied, as expected, since many of them are only at the very beginning of their individual careers and not all are in the position yet to show their independence properly. As mentioned already at the chapter about scientific quality, there was, however, some discussion about the possible lack of support and guidance offered to younger scientists in some places and research institutions and groups. This was also connected to the mobility issue that was mentioned in many panels; there was concern in some panels, that there seems not to be too many chances for younger scientists to gain experience abroad before starting to move towards independence. There was also some discussion about how important the mobility should be when evaluating young scientists.

Another slight criticism that was mentioned often, was the lack of modern bioinformatics expertise in the plans, and this was a general phenomenon, which was seen in many applications in all instruments. The panels wished to see more precise information and plans about data science, especially the plans for power calculations were seen missing from many applications where they could have been very useful. This would also require more investment in data science and probably more collaboration with data scientists.

4. Other feedback

There were mentions about the absence of invitation letters from collaborators that state the plans for the collaboration clearly. Several panels feel that these would be very helpful in deciding what kind of role the collaborations really play in the research plan (in the September call 2020, there is now a possibility to include a letter of commitment from key national and international collaborators).

Also, some panels discussed, that it would be good if the Academy Research Fellow applicants could shed a little more light on their plans for their path for independence.