Roles and tasks of Academy of Finland research council members from 2019

Academy of Finland research council members have a unique vantage point on the world of Finnish science and research. Their role involves reading and assessing funding applications from a wide range of disciplines that come under their respective domains; reviewing reports prepared on those applications; and collegially making funding decisions. Research council members also engage in a diverse range of science policy activities and contribute to setting the agenda for debate on all issues surrounding science and research. Involvement in the work of Academy research councils offers a unique perspective on research, and council members have the opportunity to shape the future of research conducted in Finland.

As an expert organisation in science and research, the Academy of Finland comes under the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Its role is to facilitate and support scientific research and to further practical application through the provision of funding and through international cooperation. The Academy has an expert role in science policy development and implementation. In addition, the Academy provides other expert services as laid down by government decree or as prescribed by the Ministry.

The research councils work alongside a number of other decision-making bodies within the Academy, that is, the Academy Board, subcommittees, the Finnish Research Infrastructure Committee and the Strategic Research Council. The Board allocates annual appropriations to the research councils, subcommittees and the FIRI Committee for different purposes.

Research council tasks

The research councils’ role is to provide funding for scientific research and for the development and use of research facilities; to monitor the impact and effectiveness of funding; and to develop research funding and other promotion strategies together with other Academy bodies.

The Academy is committed to serving the best interests of science by providing funding for high-quality research, and it has a prominent role as a source of peer-reviewed competitive funding. The scientific merits of all applications received are assessed by international experts. The research council’s role is make informed decisions that reflect both these scientific reviews and the Academy’s science policy objectives. It is paramount that research council members have diverse and profound scientific expertise as well as a broad and thorough knowledge of the fields that come under their respective research council’s domain.

The research council members’ most important task are as follows:
• development of research council’s science policy orientations, operational planning
• decision-making on research funding and monitoring funding performance
• foresighting developments in research fields
• involvement in Academy working groups, Academy Programme steering groups and the FIRI Committee
• cooperation with national and international funders and stakeholders.

The Academy of Finland awards research funding worth around 400 million euros a year. It accounts for some 20 per cent of Finnish universities’ research spending and for some 10 per cent of research institutes’ funding. Research councils play a significant role not only through their funding, but also through their contribution to overall development in their respective fields.

Practical work

During the year, research councils have from six to eight decision meetings and the same number of various preparatory and planning meetings, some of which are held remotely online. However, most of the work is done independently. Research council duties take up about one day of members’ weekly working hours. Currently, the workload tends to be higher in the spring, when each research council’s funding decisions and action plans are under preparation. The Academy’s Administration Office is available for assistance with all aspects of research council duties. Expert officials are at hand to support the research councils and other decision-making bodies by overseeing the processing of applications and by preparing and implementing funding decisions.

Research council members are appointed for one three-year term, assuming that Parliament passes an amendment to the Act on the Academy of Finland in accordance with the government proposal. A person may be appointed for two successive terms if in either term they chair the research council.

Good governance as well as clear and transparent procedures are essential to ensure the Academy of Finland delivers a fair, consistent and reliable operation. Research council members are not granted Academy research funding during their term. The Academy observes the disqualification provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act in order to ensure the objectivity and impartiality of individuals exercising public authority. Research council members may not be a party to or be present at proceedings if they are disqualified.

Research council members are paid a monthly remuneration as determined by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Travel expenses are also compensated.

The Academy’s administrative language is Finnish, but when necessary the working language of meetings is English.

The Academy’s research councils have been revamped and restructured, and they will start work in their new format in 2019. The chairs and members of the new research councils for 2019–2021 will be appointed by the Government on the nomination of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.