



**DANMARKS FRIE  
FORSKNINGSFOND**  
INDEPENDENT RESEARCH  
FUND DENMARK

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# **Panel Review Guidelines 2025**

**Instructions for  
the international review panels  
under supervision of  
Independent Research Fund Denmark**

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# 1. Independent Research Fund Denmark

Independent Research Fund Denmark (DFF) is a public, governmental advisory and independent research funding body. The main tasks of the fund are to:

- Support and promote the most original ideas and initiatives within Danish research based on researchers' own initiatives
- Improve the quality and internationalization of Danish research by awarding grants through open competition and with scientific excellence as the overarching criteria
- Support the growth layer and the continued development within independent, researcher-initiated research
- Strengthen the dissemination and application of research findings

The total budget for 2024 is 258,6 million Euro.

You can find more information about DFF [here](#)

DFF consists of a Board of Directors and five scientific research councils:

DFF   Medical Sciences	18 members
DFF   Natural Sciences	15 members
DFF   Humanities	12 members
DFF   Technology and Production Sciences	18 members
DFF   Social Sciences	12 members

All applications for the instruments Sapere Aude: DFF-Starting Grant and DFF: Research Project2 will, to the extent possible, be submitted for assessment in external panels.

When applying to the instruments Sapere Aude: DFF-Starting Grant and DFF-Research Project2, the applicant must select the relevant scientific panel among the panels, which are offered by the research council to which the applicant has applied.

## **The DFF-panels for S2024-F2025 are listed below:**

- Geology, Geophysics, Physical Geography, Atmospheric Science, Climate
- Biochemistry, Physiology, Metabolism, Nutrition, Bioinformatics, Molecular and Structural Biology, Cell Biology, Biophysics, Neuroscience and Biotechnology
- Mathematics, Statistics
- Computer and Data Sciences, Human-Computer Interaction
- Genetics, Evolutionary Biology, Microbiology, Paleontology, Geobiology
- Physics, Photonics, Materials, Quantum Technologies, Astronomy, Energy, Space Technology, Aerospace Engineering
- Chemistry and Chemical Engineering, Energy and Resources
- Mechanics, Materials, Energy, Robotics, Civil Engineering, Geological Engineering, Complex System Science, Infrastructure
- Electronic and Biomedical Engineering
- Food Science, Nutrition, One Health, Animal Science, Veterinary Sciences, Human Microbiome Studies
- Soil Science, Plant Science, Agricultural Sciences, Environmental Sciences, Biodiversity Conservation, Eco Systems Science
- Basic Cancer, Stem Cells, Cell Biology
- Psychiatry, Neuroscience
- Epidemiology, Public Health
- Immunology, Microbiology, Inflammation, Vaccines
- Pharmacology, Medical Chemistry, Drug Delivery, Metabolism, Physiology
- Clinical Science

- Economics and Business
- Sociology and Related Social Sciences
- Political Science and Legal Science
- Anthropology, Ethnology, Archaeology
- Digital Studies, Human Centered Informatics, Languages, Philology
- Art, Architecture, Design, History, Religion, Theology
- Philosophy, History of Ideas, Media, Communication, Literature
- Educational Studies, Psychology

If this year's number of applications is very low within one or more of these panels, the applications in question may instead be sent for individual external review.

## 2. Core Principles for the International Peer Review by DFF

DFF is committed to include international peer review as an integral part of its assessment procedure.

- The scientific research councils are performing their own review of the applications. Panel assessments serve as a very important contribution to the council's final decision regarding funding.
- The panel receives information about the funding decision by the council and significant deviations from the panel's advice will be explained and presented to the board of directors.
- Panels are used for the funding instruments DFF-Research Project2 and Sapere Aude: DFF-Starting Grant. Applications from council members are reviewed outside the panels by individual expert reviewers

## 3. Appointment and Composition of the Review Panels

The five scientific research councils are responsible for appointing the members and the chairs of the review panels. Members of the panels are international senior scientists with work place outside Denmark.

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*The composition of the panels, including names and institutions will be published on DFF's website.*

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Please note that panel members are not chosen as specialist reviewers within a narrow scientific field, but are expected to cover broader scientific fields and to be open to assess applications that are interdisciplinary and may fall outside their specific fields of research. In continuing panels, members can serve up to three consecutive years. Appointments are decided on an annual basis based upon decisions in the scientific councils.

The Panel Chair is responsible for:

- Coordination of the assessment process in cooperation with the office of DFF
- Allocation of the applications to members of the panel
- Chairing the panel meeting
- Coordination of the approval of the final assessments e.g. ensuring that the grading is justified and consistent with the comments made

## 4. Assessment Process

### **Preparation for the panel meetings**

Panel members get access to the applications and performance assessments via the fund's web-based evaluation platform, e-grant.

#### Conflicts of interest

All members of review panels must respect the rules concerning confidentiality and conflicts of interest (Appendix 1). As soon as the panel has access to the applications, panel members must check if they have any conflicts of interest in respect of any of the applications. Preferences, if any, are also reported to the Chair.

#### Draft assessments

Each application is assigned to two assessors by the Chair. If a panel member does not feel comfortable with the distribution of the applications, e.g. due to lack of expertise in a specific research area, the panel member should contact the Chair and the office of DFF in order to ask for a reassignment of the application.

Independently of each other, each assessor hereafter prepare a draft assessment to be discussed at the panel meeting.

The panels are only expected to assess that part of the application which falls within the scientific field of the panel.

The panel is expected to prepare its assessments primarily on the basis of the project description, the CVs and publication lists of the applicant and the project participants. Please note that budget information should not be taken into consideration.

#### Deadline for draft assessments

The deadline for the draft assessments (two for each application) is usually a few weeks before the panel meeting. At least one week before the panel meeting, the panel members get access to the final meeting package including all the draft assessments.

### **During the panel meeting**

The panel members meet in person in Copenhagen and discuss the applications. However, if the total number of applications to be assessed is 15 or less, the panel meeting will be held as a virtual meeting which DFF will facilitate. Virtual meeting may also be considered in case of travel restrictions.

#### Discussion of proposals

Before the panels discuss the applications, the panel approves the conflicts of interest registered before the panel meeting.

At the panel meeting, all applications are discussed individually. Usually the two assessors present their findings after which the remaining panel members are expected to contribute to the discussion in order to reach a consensus with regard to **the final grading** of the applications. It is important that the Chair and the panel members ensure that there is a mutual understanding of the interpretation of the grading scale (see Grading Scale Chapter 6).

*Please note that it is expected that panel members have read all applications and the draft assessments in depth in order to contribute to the panel discussions.*

The panels are expected to assess the scientific quality and may comment upon the qualifications of the applicant(s) (see assessment criteria Chapter 5).

#### Final assessments

The consensus grading and the discussion at the meeting should lead to the preparation of one final assessment for each application – if possible at the end of the panel meeting. In coordination with the second assessor, the first assessor will (usually) be responsible for drafting the final assessment based on the discussions at the meeting.

### **After the panel meeting**

If the final assessments have not been drafted at the end of the meeting, the deadline for the first assessors' completion of these will be approximately one week after the panel meeting. Hereafter, the Chair approves the final assessments e.g. ensuring that the final grading is justified by and consistent with the comments made. The Chair may add minor editorial/semantic corrections to the final assessments.

### Consultation procedure

The final assessment approved by the Chair will be submitted to the applicant for comments. The applicants are only allowed to correct factual errors or misunderstandings that they may detect in the assessments of their applications. The review panel will not be involved in this process or in any feedback from or to the applicants – the only exception being a possible conflict of interest which would require further clarification by the office of DFF in order to handle the issue.

The composition of the panels will be disclosed to the applicants and the names of any panel members who have not participated in the discussion and grading of specific applications due to a conflict of interest in relation to such application will be explicitly stated. As the final assessments are the work of the entire panel, the applicant will not receive information about the identity of the first and second assessor.

### Final decision by the council

The five scientific research councils will convene in April/May 2025 to discuss the applications based on the panel assessments, comments, if any, from the applicants as well as the councils' own assessments.

Included in the assessment by the council are criteria which are not part of the panels' review process e.g. considerations with regard to costs/scientific output, the budget/proposed activities, benefit for Danish research, researcher mobility and the amount of research education.

It is also of importance that each panel does not have a "budget" within the council. All applications in a certain council are in competition with each other. Some have been reviewed by different panels and some have been reviewed by individual, external reviewers (in case council members are involved).

The council may therefore decide differently from the panel's advice. The panel will receive information about the decision by the council and significant deviations from the panel's advice will be explained.

## 5. The Assessment Criteria

We ask you to assess the applications according to our assessment criteria below and to provide a short overall conclusion. We ask you only to assess the scientific quality of the project and provide a grade ranging from "Not Recommended" to "Highly Recommended" (Please see Chapter 6 for more information) and written comments addressing the strengths and weaknesses for the scientific quality of the project. However, should there be comments on the qualifications of the applicant(s), we ask you to state these in the box "Potential comments on the Qualifications of the Applicant(s)". Please be aware that potential comments on the qualifications of the applicant(s) should be made according to our assessment criteria.

### Scientific Quality

- Does the project description render it probable that the project contains potential for scientific progress, innovation and originality (theoretical, methodical and empirical)?
- Does the project display innovative research as opposed to expanding on already ongoing research?
- Does the project description render it probable that the project contributes to internationalization of Danish research?
- Does the project description include:
  - A clear and well-defined research question and objective?
  - A description of the state of the art and/or the scientific challenges within the project's research area and the project's potentially related contribution hereto?
  - Consistent and suitable hypotheses?
  - An account of the theoretical and/or methodological foundation including argumentation for the relevance of proposed activities in relation to this foundation?
- If relevant to the project, does the project description include argumentation for the correlation between the project's hypothesis, theory and method?
- If relevant to the project, is there a sufficient description of the project's empirical material or data foundation including any pilot projects and/or any preliminary data?
- If relevant, does sufficient synergy between the individual parts of the project exist?

### Qualifications of the Applicant(s)

Should you have comments on the qualifications of the applicant(s), please be aware that these should be made according to our assessment criteria listed below:

- Does the applicant possess documented:
  - Scientific qualifications to an extent that is necessary for the project's completion?
  - Scientific qualifications at a level corresponding to the target group for the funding instrument applied to?
  - Scientific production at a level corresponding to the applicant's career path and seniority?
  - Qualifications as a research leader at a level corresponding to the applicant's career path and seniority?
- Have the other project participants documented scientific qualifications at a level corresponding to their career paths and seniority, and do they possess the qualifications that are necessary for the project's completion?
- Are relevant local and international researchers contributing and if relevant, is there sufficient contribution from public institutions or business partners?
- Is there a strategy for the organisation and management of the project, including an account of the division of labour between the researchers involved
- Are potential PhD students or postdoctoral candidates an integral part of the project and do they have a clear function?

## 6. Grading Scale

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Highly recommended</b>	The application is excellent and stands out with exceptional novelty, quality and innovativeness. The application addresses all relevant aspects of the criteria. Shortcomings are not present, or only very minor.
<b>Recommended</b>	A very good application demonstrating good quality. The application addresses the criteria well. A number of shortcomings are present.
<b>Less recommended</b>	A good application that broadly addresses the criteria, but with a number of significant weaknesses
<b>Not recommended</b>	The application does not address the criteria adequately or not at all, and there are a number of serious inherent weaknesses and flaws.

## 7. General Guidelines for Writing the Assessments

It is very important that the reviewers provide substantial written comments on each of the criteria. It is also very important that the panel ensures that the grading is justified by and consistent with the comments made. Please note that the assessment form contains instructions on the preferred amount of text for each of the criteria.

The assessment should always be well argued and avoid repetition of the project proposal.

Reviewers should furthermore:

- Provide an impartial, objective, fair and analytical assessment of the application
- Always provide arguments to support observations
- Assess the application only according to the criteria listed below
- Make sure that a clear assessment of strengths and weaknesses of the application can be made from the comments in the assessment form
- Acquaint themselves with the grading scale and make sure it is used in a consistent way
- Ensure that the grading is justified by and consistent with the comments made
- Always treat resubmitted applications as completely new applications

Reviewers should refrain from:

- Overly negative or personal phrasing
- Taking other assessment criteria into consideration than the ones in the assessment form
- Commenting on budget aspects
- Commenting on gender aspects, e.g. the gender composition of the research team
- Offering direct recommendations/advice or suggestions for e.g. references to the applicant
- Personal comments and references to "I", but should instead formulate the assessment on behalf of the panel

## 8. Appendices

### Appendix 1: Legal framework

The peer review process must be carried out in accordance with the following principles:

#### **Anonymity, confidentiality and openness**

According to Danish legislation for public funds, the joint panel assessments must be sent to the applicants as part of a right of reply process. In this process, the composition of the panel will be disclosed to the applicants. Therefore, please note that you cannot be anonymous as a panel reviewer for DFF.

Research plans and the personal data included in the applications are confidential and should not be accessible for others than the reviewer and must be disposed of immediately after the assessment process has been completed. Confidentiality must also be maintained after the assessment process has been completed.

The public can request access to all documents of the public sector. However, there are some limitations in this respect and each request for access to documents will be specifically reviewed by the office of DFF.

#### **Conflicts of interest and impartiality**

DFF follows (adhere to) rather strict guidelines for conflicts of interest in order to make sure (ensure) that the assessment is carried out without and cannot be suspected of bias. According to the Danish Public Administration Act (see the extract below), reviewers must not have any vested interests in relation to the applications or applicants that they are asked to assess.

Members of the panel are therefore asked to declare any specific interests they may have – be it personal, financial or professional, in the (outcome of the) application – including informing DFF if they have recently worked closely and published with the applicant or any member of the research group comprised by the application. Being disqualified in connection with one application does not imply that a panel member cannot participate in the panel as such. In general, the panel member will be able to participate in the assessment and rating of all other applications under review by the panel. However, special rules apply if the number of applications assessed by the panel is less than ten. If needed, the office of DFF will assist with additional guidance and directions in respect of the relevant Danish legislation.



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**Extract from the Danish Public Administration Act**

*Pursuant to Section 3 (1) of the Danish Public Administration Act, a conflict of interest exists where:*

1. The person concerned has a particular personal or financial interest in the outcome of the case or is currently representing or has previously represented someone in the case with such an interest
2. The spouse, relative or person-in-law of the person concerned in the direct line of ascent or descent or in the financial interest in the outcome of the case or represents any person with such an interest
3. The person concerned participates in the management of or is closely related to a company, an association or another private legal person who has a special interest in the outcome of the case
4. The case relates to a complaint of or the exercise of control or supervision of another public authority and the person concerned has previously participated in the decision with the relevant authority or in the carrying out of measures relating to the case or
5. Other circumstances exist that are likely to lead to any doubt about such person's impartiality.

No person disqualified in respect of any specific case will be allowed to decide, to take part in the decision-making or to otherwise assist in the consideration of the case in question. The relevant person must leave the conference room during the consideration of the case and may not extend any consultancy services to the persons participating in the consideration of the case or parts of the consideration of the case.

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## **Appendix 2: Remuneration, travel arrangements, accommodation and reimbursement**

For the fund to be able to pay your remuneration, book travel arrangements etc. it is important that you declare the following information in your e-grant profile ([link](#)):

1. Full name (Exactly as stated in passport)
2. Bank account details
3. Address
4. Date of birth
5. Gender

### **Remuneration**

- A basic remuneration of 300 Euro for assisting as panel member
- Plus 30 Euro for each application assessed by the panel
- Plus an additional 40 Euro for each application where the specific panel member is first or second assessor
- Additionally the Chair of the panel will receive a fee of 600 Euro (0-20 applications) or 750 Euro (more than 20 applications)

Please be advised that it is not possible for the fund to pay out remuneration to any other entity than panel members themselves. As a panel member you serve the panel in your personal capacity and not as an employee or member of any particular organization.

### **Travel arrangements**

[Travels by flight](#) will be paid for and must be booked by our travel department. Based on the information you write in the meeting attendance form provided by the office of DFF, the travel department will contact you to ensure the proper planning and booking of your travel. The travel department is obligated to select the most expedient and economical mode of travel. As a general rule, economy class must be used.

[Travel by train](#) can be booked and paid for by yourself for future reimbursement. Assistance from our travel department is also possible. Train tickets must be booked on Economy Class.

After having been in contact with you, the travel department will book and send you the time schedule and tickets by e-mail. If the travel department cannot find a trip that complies with your request, you will be contacted for the purpose of accepting another travel schedule. If you need to change the booking or if other issues occur during your journey, please contact the agency's travel agent Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CWT) 24h service on phone number +45 3363 7777.

### **Accommodation**

Accommodation will be booked and paid for by the office of DFF. It is possible to make the following reservations:

- 1-day meeting: 2 nights (one night before the meeting and one night after the meeting day – depending on travel options for your arrival and departure)
- 1½-day meeting: 2 nights (one night before the meeting and one night between the meeting days – depending on travel options for your arrival and departure)
- 2-day meeting: 3 nights (one night before the meeting, one night between the meeting days and one night after the second meeting day – depending on travel options for your arrival and departure)
- 3-day meeting: 4 nights (one night before the meeting, two nights between meeting days and one night after the third meeting day – depending on travel options for your arrival and departure)
- Extra nights will be at your own expense.

As a rule, the travel department will arrange your travels (arrival and departure) as close as possible to the time of the meeting.

### **Reimbursement**

All officials shall be entitled to the reimbursement of their travel expenses from the address of the official's authority to the place of the exchange (i.e. the address of the host authority), by the most appropriate means of transport given the distance involved.

Expenses in connection with the official travel will be reimbursed on the basis of the receipts/documentation provided. As the office of DFF as a general rule pays for accommodation, overall transport, meals in connection with the panel meeting and related activities, eligible expenses for the purpose of reimbursement cover:

- Local transport to/from the airport of departure and from/to Copenhagen Airport (bus or taxi)
- Light meals during travel and stay (up to an amount of 50 Euro in total)
- Train tickets (for the overall transport) in case our travel department has not been involved
- Travel by own car where this has been rendered better suitable than public transport will be reimbursed by a mileage allowance according to current regulations (2,23 DKK per kilometer in 2024)

For reimbursement, the documentation must be sent as a PDF file to the travel department [rejser@ufm.dk](mailto:rejser@ufm.dk) no more than **14 days after end of the journey**. If your employer has initially paid the journey, an electronic invoice should be sent to the travel department [rejser@ufm.dk](mailto:rejser@ufm.dk) for reimbursement.

Please note that the travel department **is not able to pay invoices from third parties**, i.e. invoices from your own travel agency that are sent to you or your institution and forwarded to the travel department or sent directly from your travel agency to our travel department.

The office of DFF will process the payment separately from the reimbursement of travel expenses. Reimbursement will be transferred at the daily exchange rate. The Ministry will not cover possible differences. Bank charges may vary between countries. The Ministry will not cover these charges.

### **Independent Research Fund Denmark**

July 2024

#### **Uddannelses- og Forskningsstyrelsen**

Forskningsfinansiering

Asylgade 7  
5000 Odense C  
Tel. +45 7231 8200  
Mail [ufs@ufm.dk](mailto:ufs@ufm.dk)  
Web [www.ufm.dk](http://www.ufm.dk)

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