The Use of Peer Review in The Danish Research Counselling System

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Focus on

- Criteria for evaluation
- Consultation with applicants
- Reasons, when applications are rejected
- Pro and con anonymity
Two kinds of peer review

- Internal peer review by members of the councils
- External peer review requested by the councils

And

- The process of the amendments to the Act on Research Advisory System
The Danish Research Counselling System, 2005.

The Danish Council for Independent Research
- The Danish Medical Research Council
- The Danish Research Council for the Humanities
- The Danish Social Science Research Council

The Danish Council for Technology and Production Sciences
- The Danish Natural Science Research Council

The Danish Research Coordination Committee
- The Danish Research Training Committee

The Danish Council for Strategic Research
- Programme Commission on Non-ionizing Radiation
- Programme Commission on Energy and Environment
- Programme Commission on Food and Health
- Programme Commission on Nanoscience, Biotechnology and IT (NABIIT)
- Programme Commission on Young Researchers

The Danish Committees on Scientific Dishonesty
- Social Science and the Humanities
- Natural Science, Agricultural and Veterinary and Technical Science
- Medical Science
The Danish Councils for Independent Research and The Danish Council for Strategic Research handled in 2005:

More than 3000 Applications applied for 870 mio. EURO
and gave more than 1000 Grants at a total amount of 150 mio. EURO

Rate of success 17 %
Characteristics of the scientific research councils

• 15-20 members of each council
• Highly estimated and respected researchers
• Members of the councils are known to the public
• The Councils are multi-disciplinary review panels
• Applications are processed internally
• Internal review procedure
• Every member is responsible for the councils decisions
• Applicants' has a right to access information
• No anonymity
• Strict rules of impartiality
Impartiality

Regulated by the Danish Public Administration Act and specified by The Danish Research Coordination Committee:

• close personal relations
• close scientific cooperation (incl. common publications)
• personal and/or scientific animosity
• personal (economic) interest
• managerial relationships with application (manager/employee)
• relationship to board members / Vice chancellors / Deans
• other circumstances that may cause doubt about the impartiality
Typical application procedure

Call for proposals → deadline / check → admin. processing (project plan, budget, appendices etc.) → check of conflicts of interest → decision on external review → Council review and decision → Submitting grant/rejection
Strength from the perspective of the system

• The extensive use of Council members in the review process ensures a high degree of continuity and stability
• Effects that the process is coherent, qualified and close to the users.
• Characterised by a high degree of legitimacy and transparency
• Consistent and uniform evaluation criteria
Strength from the perspective of the applicants – efficiency and transparency

• From deadline to decision: max. 4 months
• Well known whom the evaluators are in the councils
• If an application is turned down, a reason must be given…and elaborated if requested
• Grants are published on the Agency's homepage: www.fist.dk
• Complaint handling procedures for administrative matters, not academic evaluations
Weakness from the perspective of the system – workload/fatigue

- Council members are full time professors/researchers
- Only symbolic compensation
- The workload is substantial
- Each member must cover a vast academic area
Weakness from the perspective of the applicants

• Decision-making involves only 15-20 persons
• Small rate of success
• Small scientific environments
• Strict rules for disqualification
Summary – internal peer review

- Effective – maximum 4 months from deadline to decision
- Inexpensive – only symbolic compensation
- Respected – transparency in evaluation criteria
- Rejected applicants are treated properly
External peer review

The Councils use several hundreds of requested external peer reviews per year.

Conditions formulated by The Danish Research Coordination Committee:

- Lack of expertise in the Scientific Research Councils
- Member is applicant or co-applicant
- The applied amount exceeds 1.3 mio. EURO.
• Two peers for each application
• Applicant is informed of external peers identity
• Applicant has an opportunity to respond to the external peers evaluation before the council makes a decision
Strengths

• From the perspective of the applicant:
  – Transparency

• From the perspective of the councils:
  – Well-documented basis for decision
    …sometimes
Weakness

- Approximately 60% says no when asked
- Lack of proper international evaluation
- Time pressure
- No basis for comparison
- Risk of baffled applicants
Summary – external peer review

- Time consuming – finding peers, obtain evaluation, obtain applicants comments
- Expensive – 250 EURO for each evaluation
- Varied quality of evaluation – useless for the councils, baffled applicants, lack of respect for councils decisions
The amendments to the Act on Research Advisory System

• Draft for proposed amendments included anonymity for external peers
• Public hearing procedure
• Introduction of the amendments without anonymity for external peers
Arguments for anonymity for external peers from The Danish Research Coordination Committee:

- Well known principle internationally
- Improve quality of evaluations and the basis for the councils decisions
- Ensure that the best external expects accept to evaluate the applications
- Still possible for applicant to respond
Arguments from The Parliaments Committee of Science and Technology

• Transparency

The Committee will look at the issue later on this year