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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



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Two kinds of peer review

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

And

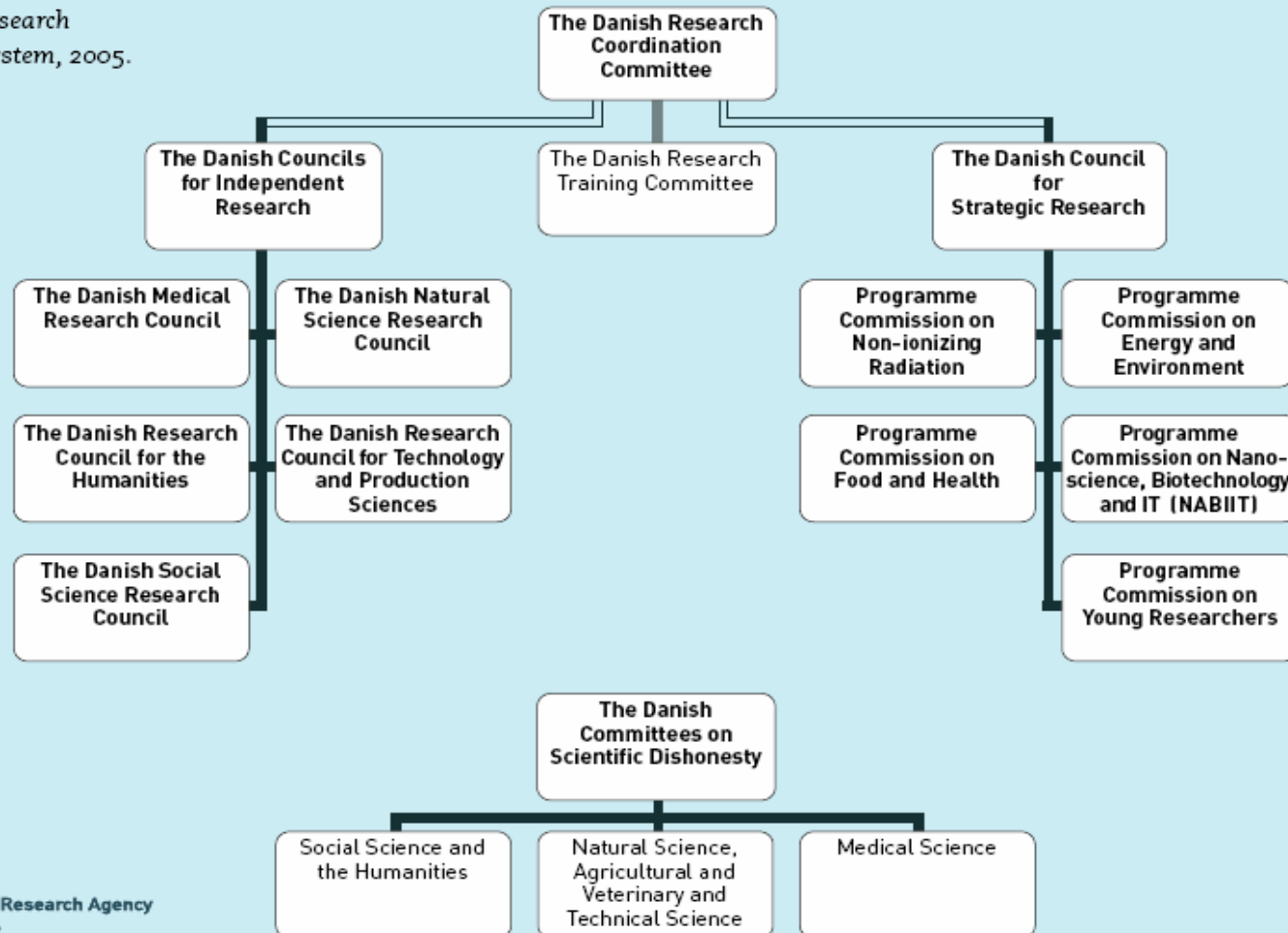
- The process of the amendments to the Act on Research Advisory System



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The Danish Research
Counselling System, 2005.



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**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 %





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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



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Impartiality

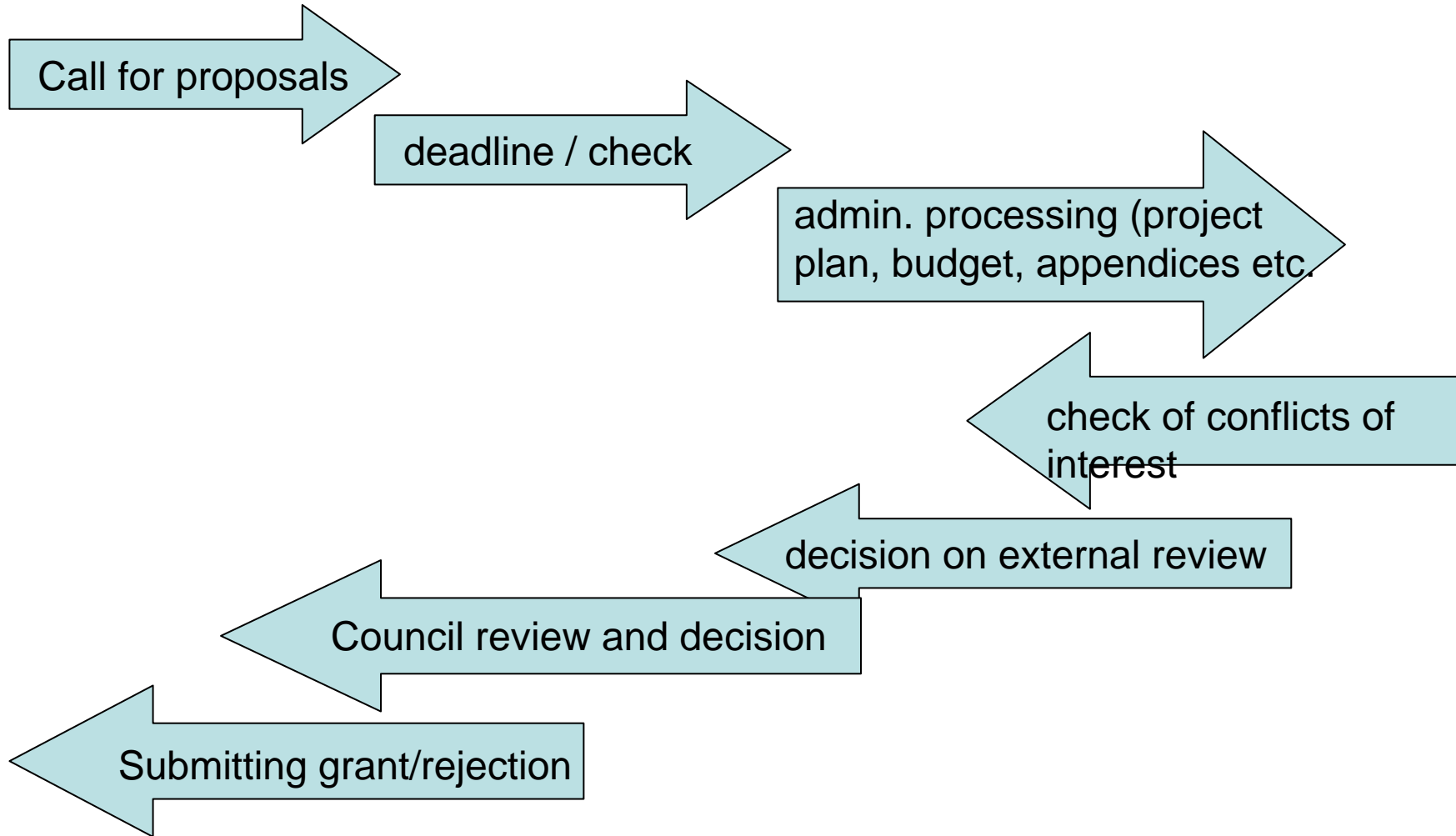
Regulated by the Danish Public Administration Act and specified by The Danish Research Coordination Committee:

- **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**



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Typical application procedure





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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



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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



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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



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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



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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



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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.



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- 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



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Strengths

- From the perspective of the applicant:
 - Transparency
- From the perspective of the councils:
 - Well-documented basis for decision
...sometimes



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Weakness

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



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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



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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



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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 experts accept to evaluate the applications
- Still possible for applicant to respond



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Arguments from The Parliaments Committee of Science and Technology

- Transparency

The Committee will look at the issue later on
this year