

## **Special Research Programmes (SFB)**

### **Differences from the General Principles of Decision-making Procedures**

Introductory remarks: The review process for SFB takes place in two stages, in which the quality of the consortium and of the application is evaluated. The “concept” (first stage) is submitted by the Speaker and subjected to a written review. The “full application” (second stage) is reviewed by means of a hearing with international experts. Applications for an SFB must contain a pre-contract between the Speaker and the research institution in addition to the written application. Among other things this pre-contract should specify the financial support to be offered by the research institution or university. The review procedure – from submission of concept to decision on the full application – lasts a minimum of 14 months.

### **Handling of the “Concept”**

#### **Submission of applications:**

Fundamentally as described in “General principles of the decision-making procedure”. Applications for support by means of the programmes listed above must conform to the current “Guidelines for submitting concepts to the FWF”.

The FWF guarantees that all applications placed by 30th of September (the date of the postmark) will be considered for funding by November of the following year. Post hoc improvements / changes to the content of the application are permitted on the basis of a list of deficiencies provided by the FWF to the applicants within 10 days (running days) after the notification via Email through the FWF. If the problems are not rectified within this period of time, the FWF will reject the application without review.

Nevertheless, with the prior agreement of the FWF office it is possible to send “formal” supporting documents (e.g. original signatures) after the deadline for submission of applications. Applications will be assigned to one “Reporter in Charge” and two additional reporters. In some cases more than three members of the Board may be involved with an application.

#### **Initiation of international review:**

Fundamentally as described in “General principles of the decision-making procedure”.

#### **Minimum number of reviews:**

For a positive decision on a particular application a minimum of 3 reviews are required. If it is clear from the reviews that the decision will be negative, a decision may be based on fewer reviews. If an application impinges on several scientific disciplines the number of reviews required may be increased.

## Structure of reviews

A review must comprise a written statement in which the reviewers are asked to address specific questions (see Annex 1) in relation to the proposal. At the same time, reviewers are asked to provide an overall formal assessment (i.e. rating) for each specific question<sup>1</sup> using the five-point scale shown below.

The FWF provides the reviewers with a brief explanation of the quality standards that should form the basis for the formal ratings:

<p><b>Excellent = funding with highest priority</b> The proposed research project is among the best 5% in the field worldwide. It is potentially ground-breaking and/or makes a major contribution to knowledge. The applicant and the researchers involved possess – relative to their academic age – exceptional qualifications by international standards.</p>
<p><b>Very Good = funding with high priority</b> The proposed research project is among the best 15% in the field worldwide. It is at the forefront internationally, but minor improvements could be made. The applicant and the researchers involved possess – relative to their academic age – high qualifications by international standards.</p>
<p><b>Good = resubmission with some revisions</b> The proposed research project is internationally competitive but has some weaknesses, and/or the applicant and the researchers involved possess – relative to their academic age – good qualifications by international standards.</p>
<p><b>Average = resubmission with major revisions</b> The proposed research project will provide some new insights but has significant weaknesses and/or the applicant and the researchers involved possess – relative to their academic age – fair qualifications by international standards.</p>
<p><b>Poor = rejection</b> The proposed research project is weak and/or the applicant and the researchers involved lack sufficient qualifications by international standards.</p>

In cases where a review is not sufficiently well argued, it is not taken into account in the decision-making procedure. Reviewers are required to declare any possible conflicts of interest. In

<sup>1</sup> (a) The questions for reviewers can vary according to the relevant funding programme and its objectives; questions are generally included in the appendix to the programme's application guidelines. (b) Wittgenstein Award nominations, outline proposals for Priority Research Programmes and DK Programme proposals require only written reviews, i.e. no overall ratings are required.  
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cases where bias or a conflict of interest is identified at a later stage, the review is likewise disregarded.

#### **Funding decision:**

Fundamentally as described in “General principles of the decision-making procedure”. Speakers of concepts that are “approved” as a result of the referees’ reports are invited to submit full applications. They are given information relating to the content of the full application during the subsequent “Proposers’ Day”.

#### **Resubmissions:**

Concepts that are not approved may be revised and resubmitted. In the case of a resubmission it is the general practice to contact some of the referees of the rejected version as well as new referees. It is thus important to draw attention to any changes made in response to explicit suggestions from the referees.

#### **Proposal bans**

Applications that are rejected for reason "C5" will be barred from resubmission for at least 12 months from the date of the decision and cannot be resubmitted during that period. Application that are revised and resubmitted twice and are rejected again upon the third submission will also be barred from resubmission for at least 12 months from the date of the decision, except in the case of applications that are rejected a third time for reason "C1" or "C2".

## **Handling of the “Full Application”**

#### **Submission of applications:**

Submission of a full application is only possible after approval of a concept. Applications for support by means of the programmes listed above must conform to the current “Guidelines for submitting full applications to the FWF”. Applicants are generally allowed 8 weeks to prepare a full application. Full applications are assigned to the same “Reporter in Charge” and additional reporters who were responsible for handling the concept.

#### **Initiation of international review:**

The referees will represent a mixture of referees who reviewed the concept and additional experts. The review will take the form of a hearing in Vienna.

#### **Minimum number of reviews:**

A minimum of five referees are generally required before the Board may make a positive decision on funding. The referees assess the quality of the application by means of a one-day hearing. If an application impinges on several disciplines, the number of referees may be increased. For each hearing the FWF will attempt to invite at least 2 female referees to participate.

#### **Structure of a review:**

Before a hearing, the referees are requested to provide the FWF with written statements on the full application. These statements will be made available to the FWF representatives and permit the reporters handling the application to form a preliminary impression of the application’s quality. The

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applicants will receive the written statements after the finale decision has been taken by the Board of the FWF.

Within the hearing the referees have the opportunity to discuss the application with the applicants and to resolve any open questions and in this way to assess the application and to evaluate the applicants' scientific qualifications.

The extent of scientific collaboration, in other words the so-called "added value" of the large-scale project, will be taken into consideration.

After the hearing the FWF representatives discuss individual aspects of the project together with the referees in a "closed session". The referees' comments will be noted by the FWF and will be summarized – without attributing particular comments to individual referees – in the form of the hearings' minutes.

After the FWF Board reaches its decision, the minutes will be transmitted to the applicants. In addition, the referees assign ratings to the overall application and to various aspects of it. These ratings are not forwarded to the applicants.

### **Funding decision:**

Funding decisions for these projects are taken in the final Board meeting of each calendar year. The decisions are based on the contents of the written statements and the minutes of the closed session as well as the numerical ratings assigned by the referees. The FWF Reporters summarize the referees' views, describing the referees' overall opinion as reflected in the minutes of the "closed session". A positive funding decision on an SFB is always subject to a condition: the pre-contract concluded between the Speaker and the research institution and submitted together with the full application must be converted to a valid contract and sent to the FWF before any financial support may be provided.

Remark: The project has to start the latest by March 1st of the following year. The next possible starting date is the 1st of January the year after.

### **Resubmissions:**

If a full application is rejected, the applicants may generally restart the procedure by submitting a fresh concept. In such cases, the FWF normally contacts referees, who were involved with the previous versions as well as involving new referees. It is thus important to draw attention to any changes made in response to explicit suggestions from the referees.

## **Annex 1:**

### **Guidelines for the evaluation of a draft proposal for Special Research Programmes (SFB)**

#### **Qualität des SFB Forschungsprogramms:**

- Qualität der Forschung, auf der der SFB aufbaut (internationale Konkurrenzfähigkeit und wissenschaftliches Innovationspotenzial, ethische Aspekte)
- thematische Kohärenz und zu erwartender Mehrwert durch den SFB
- Reflexionen/ Konzeptionen zur gendergerechte Ausrichtung der Forschungsansätze sofern thematisch relevant

#### **Qualität und Zusammensetzung des Forschungsteams:**

- Teilprojekt-LeiterInnen: Wissenschaftliches Potenzial (Qualität und internationale Reputation), verfügbare Forschungskapazität
- Einbindung von wissenschaftlichem Nachwuchs
- Geschlechterverhältnis

#### **Weiterreichende Effekte**

- Disseminationsstrategien inkl. einer geeigneten Open Access Policy und Wissenschaftskommunikation: Qualität der Maßnahmen im Hinblick auf Sichtbarkeit des SFB in jeder Hinsicht, auch über den wissenschaftlichen Bereich hinaus (Beitrag zur „Public Awareness“ für Wissenschaft)

#### **Organisation und Finanzierung**

- Qualität des organisatorischen Konzeptes, vor allem im Hinblick auf die Organisation der internen Kohärenz, der Kooperationen im SFB und die Konsistenz mit geplanter Laufzeit (kurz- und langfristige Arbeitsplanung)
- Qualität der Netzwerkstrukturen (Kommunikations- und Informationswege) und des formalen Rahmens

## **Guidelines for the evaluation of a full proposal for Special Research Programmes (SFB)**

### **Written Statements**

The Review Panel will be asked to comment on the following aspects providing their written statements. These statements will be prepared on the basis of the written application and will be forwarded to the applicants after the decision of the board has been taken

### **Overall evaluation of the SFB**

#### **Scientific quality of the proposed project judged by prevailing international standards**

Including aspects of topicality, innovation, competitiveness, gender relevance, ethical aspects (if appropriate) – does this application belong to the best 5% you have reviewed within the last years

#### **Scientific quality of the research team**

Including aspects of international competitiveness, international co-operations and attractiveness to other top researchers, visibility, gender balance

#### **Quality of the network structure**

Internal coherence, forms of cooperation, quality of the network, appropriateness of the relation between short-term and long-term perspectives, dissemination strategy,

#### **Quality of the financial structure**

Quality of work and time plan, financial planning, organisational structure of the SFB

#### **Quality of the commitment of the university**

Degree of financial and organisational support

#### **Overall Evaluation - Open Questions – Recommendations**

Additional aspects that should have been addressed in the proposal. Recommendations to increase the success of the project

### **Evaluation of the Single Subproject**

#### **Scientific quality of the proposed project judged by prevailing international standards**

Importance and quality of the project for the scientific community – innovative aspects, impact of the expected results on the discipline, clarity of the hypothesis and goals, appropriateness of the methods and dissemination strategy, gender relevance of the research questions addressed appropriately, if relevant

#### **Scientific quality of the research team**

International competitiveness, quality of the cooperation, track record, impact on the career development of the researchers involved

#### **Quality of the network structure**

Forms of cooperation, position within the network and impact on the network, appropriateness of the relation between short-term and long-term perspectives

#### **Quality of the financial structure**

Quality of work and time plan, financial planning

#### **Single Project Part - Open Questions – Recommendations**

Additional aspects that should have been addressed in the proposal. Recommendations to increase the success of the project

## **Closed Session in the Course of the Hearing**

The Review Panel will be asked to comment on the following aspects in the course of the closed session of the evaluation hearing. A final overall evaluation form, as well as an evaluation form for each sub-project will be provided at the hearing.

### **1. THE SFB PROJECT AS A WHOLE**

#### **1) Research Programme**

- 1.1. Is the programme innovative and internationally competitive by addressing topical questions? Does it belong to the best 5% of the discipline? Are there any comparable programmes or competitors?
- 1.2. Are the overall research questions appropriate and is the long term perspective feasible?
- 1.3. Are there gender specific aspects in the research programme that are relevant? If yes, what are they and do the applicants / does the applicant address those appropriately?
- 1.4. Is the programme well focused, coherent and will it produce added value (=is the sum of the parts more than the individual parts?)

#### **2. Human Resources**

- 2.1. Is the group of researchers & scholars well prepared to implement an internationally visible centre of excellence (e.g. all relevant competences included etc.)? Is the gender balance of the group appropriate?
- 2.2. How would you rate the plans to integrate early stage researchers?

#### **3. Potential additional aspects**

- 3.1. Is the actual institution hosting the SFB proposal and its infrastructure appropriate?
- 3.2. Are the strategies for science communication of the SFB appropriate to make the programme internationally visible?

#### **4. Organisation of the SFB**

- 4.1. How well is the project organised internally in terms of scientific management, communication structures and information exchange?
- 4.2. Are presented measures to support equal opportunities for female and male researchers appropriate?

### **2. THE INDIVIDUAL SUBPROJECTS**

#### **Project Part – Research Goals**

- How important is the project for the scientific community and to which extent will it break new scientific grounds?
- Are the goals of the project part well defined and is the conceptual / theoretical and methodological approach innovative and appropriate?
- How important is the project in scientific terms for the SFB network?

#### **Project Part Leader**

- How would you describe the scientific qualification and potential of the project part leader based on his or her track record and international visibility?