Guidelines
for Reviewing Renewal Proposals for
Research Training Groups or
International Research Training Groups

Disclaimer: The English translation of this document is provided for informational purposes. In the event of a discrepancy between the English and the German versions, the German text takes precedence.
I  General Information

Renewal proposals for Research Training Groups and International Research Training Groups are evaluated by a review panel during a generally two-day review session, on the basis of the proposal and a progress report from the first funding period. Information on proposal preparation and on-site reviews can be found in the Proposal Instructions for Research Training Groups or International Research Training Groups (Renewal Proposals) (DFG form 54.07).

www.dfg.de/formulare/54_07

In the review, we ask that you evaluate the group’s achievements to date as well as the proposal for the second funding period on the basis of the criteria for research and training specified below.

Your comments and assessments will be recorded in writing and form the basis of the decision of the Grants Committee on Research Training Groups. We ask that you also rate the criteria for research using “excellent”, “very good”, “good”, “satisfactory”, or “unsatisfactory or not assessable”, and the criteria for training using “exemplary”, “very convincing”, “convincing”, “satisfactory”, or “inadequate or not assessable”. These ratings are intended to support the Grants Committee in its task of assessing and comparing proposals and review outcomes from a wide range of subject areas. In addition, we ask that you comment on the requested funding amounts. The main criteria are whether the requested amounts have been conclusively justified and whether they will permit optimum research that is geared towards the objectives of the Research Training Group. For International Research Training Groups, in which the partner institution is expected to contribute equally to the group, you should also assess whether the foreign partner institution participates to an adequate extent.

After the Grants Committee has decided on the proposal, the meeting minutes along with the funding decision will be submitted to the spokesperson of the proposed Research Training Group and the applicant university.

II  Review Criteria

The review follows the criteria below, which arise from the objectives of the programme as specified in the Guidelines on Research Training Groups and International Research Training Groups (DFG form 50.07).

www.dfg.de/formulare/50_07

Please note that the overall objectives of a Research Training Group
• promoting high-quality research and early independence of doctoral researchers,
• international orientation and integration of the Research Training Group and its doctoral researchers, and
• promoting diversity and gender equality in the research system and work-life balance

each concern several aspects of a Research Training Group; therefore we ask that you always take them into consideration when evaluating the different criteria.

The criteria apply to the review of renewal proposals as well as to the review of the results of the first funding period. In International Research Training Groups, the respective partner institution must also be reviewed. If reviewer comments were given in the establishment phase, please describe whether and how these have been implemented.
1 Research Criteria

1.1 Participating researchers and institutions

- Academic qualification and supervisory experience of the participating researchers
- Group composition and internal collaboration
- Quality and suitability of the host institutions and existing equipment

1.2 Research programme

- Quality and originality of the research programme
- Disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary value added
- Appropriateness and coherence with respect to the objectives of a Research Training Group
- Integration into the research profile of the location

2 Training Criteria

2.1 Supervision and training strategy

- Recruiting and supervision strategy
- Training and interaction within the Research Training Group
- Doctoral record of the Research Training Group and achievements of its doctoral researchers
- Organisation

2.2 University integration and collaboration

- Integration into general doctoral training programmes, if available
- Integration into the university’s academic structure and early-career support
- Value added by collaboration with other institutions (in terms of doctoral training)
III Additional Aspects of the Review

1 Confidentiality

All proposals submitted to the DFG, the correspondence with reviewers, the reviews and the identity of the reviewers and participating review board members must be treated confidentially.

The scientific content of a proposal you review may not be exploited for your own and/or others' scientific purposes.

2 Obligation to Observe the Principles of Good Scientific Practice

The principles of good scientific practice must also be observed during the review process. A violation of these principles can result in a charge of scientific misconduct. In particular, any infringement against the principles set out in “Guideline 16: Confidentiality and neutrality of review processes and discussions” is considered scientific misconduct.

3 Conflicts of Interest

The DFG Head Office is not able to investigate all circumstances that could be interpreted as a conflict of interest. The DFG therefore relies on your assistance to determine whether your participation in the review meeting would be appropriate and to enable us to contact another reviewer early on if necessary.

Should circumstances exist that may be interpreted as conflict of interest, please inform the responsible DFG staff before participating in a review meeting. If you participate in a DFG meeting without first having contacted the DFG regarding a possible conflict of interest, the DFG Head Office will assume that, to the best of your knowledge, no apparent conflict of interest exists. If you realise during or after a meeting that there may be or may have been an apparent conflict of interest, you should also contact the DFG Head Office immediately.

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1 The principles of good scientific practice are presented in detail in the DFG Code of Conduct Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice.
The DFG Guidelines on Avoiding Conflicts of Interest (DFG form 10.201) can be found on the DFG website.

www.dfg.de/formulare/10_201

4 Diversity and Equal Opportunities in Research

In all of its funding programmes, the DFG actively promotes equal opportunities and diversity in German science and academia. Proposal reviews should not disadvantage applicants due to academically irrelevant criteria, such as age, gender or disability. Consider the applicant’s scientific career development rather than the applicant’s age. You may compensate in your evaluation for certain extra-scientific disadvantages. Unavoidable delays in an applicant’s scientific career (for example longer training periods, publication gaps or less time spent abroad as a result of childcare responsibilities) should be given adequate consideration.

Further information on diversity and equal opportunities in research can be found at:

www.dfg.de/diversity/en

5 Important Information on Data Protection

The DFG takes the protection of your personal data very seriously. The proposal documents on which your review is based regularly contain personal data that is protected by data protection laws, particularly by the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). In order to protect this data, we therefore request that you observe the following guidelines on the confidential handling of personal data when preparing your review.

Data protection law stipulates that personal data must be protected by sufficient security measures to prevent any access by unauthorised parties as well as accidental loss. Please take the necessary measures to comply with data protection law, for example by choosing secure passwords, securing PCs, etc. We also ask that you take measures to protect the proposal documents in your home workplace against access by other persons in your household or by other third parties.

If you are working outside the DFG systems (elan), for example saving the proposal documents onto a local end device, please make sure to delete personal data immediately or to securely destroy it when it is no longer required. This should be done in a secure manner
(in the case of printed documents, by not disposing of them in a wastepaper basket but by using a paper shredder).

Please help us to recognise and remedy any data privacy incidents, and report all technical difficulties or irregularities to us when using DFG systems (elan), as well as any (potentially) unauthorised access to personal data contained in the proposal documents. Examples of such incidents include:

- Unauthorised use of your elan login data
- Cyberattacks leading to access to personal data contained in the proposal documents by unauthorised parties
- If documents containing personal data relating to the proposal are stolen or read in the event of a break-in
- If USB sticks, mobile phones or laptops containing unencrypted personal data in connection with a proposal document are lost or stolen

In such cases, please contact: datenschutz@dfg.de.

With regard to your own personal data, please take note of the DFG’s data protection notice for reviewers, which can be viewed and downloaded at www.dfg.de/privacy_policy. By taking up your duties as reviewer, you hereby confirm acknowledgement of this data protection notice.

www.dfg.de/privacy_policy