

# Guidelines

## for Reviewing Proposals to Establish Research Training Groups or International Research Training Groups

### I. General

Proposals to establish Research Training Groups (RTG) and International Research Training Groups (IRTG) are evaluated during a one-day on-site visit to the host university, on the basis of a written proposal. Information on planning and carrying out on-site reviews is included in Appendix 2 of the programme guidelines (for RTGs please refer to DFG form 1.30, which is available in German only; for IRTGs please refer to DFG form 1.301, in German, or 1.301e, in English).

Please assess the proposal according to the criteria below. Additional criteria for reviewing Research Training Groups with multiple domestic locations and International Research Training Groups have been underlined.

The explanations and questions for each criterion are illustrative.

At the end of each meeting, reviewers will be asked to grade the criteria below, with 5 = “excellent”, 4 = “very good”, 3 = “good”, 2 = “satisfactory”, 1 = “insufficient”, 0 = “not reviewable”, and to provide a funding recommendation. These marks serve as an orientation for the Grants Committee on Research Training Groups. The decision will be based on the reviewers’ comments as noted in the minutes of the review session. The DFG’s Head Office will forward an anonymised copy of the minutes and the Grants Committee’s funding recommendation to the RTG’s spokesperson.

## II. Review Criteria

### 1. Qualifications of participating researchers

- Please comment on the scientific credentials of the participating researchers.
  - To what extent have they distinguished themselves in their research activities and publications to date?
  - How would you assess their individual expertise with regard to the proposed main topic or research idea?
  
  - To what extent are the participating researchers experienced in training young researchers?
  - For International Research Training Groups: Please also assess the qualifications of foreign partners.
  
- Please comment on the scientific composition of the team of applicants and their proposed cooperation with regard to the research and qualification programmes. For International Research Training Groups, please also consider the international partners.
  - To what extent does the researcher team combine the subject-matter expertise necessary to successfully carry out the research and qualification programmes?
  - Have the members of the team taught or carried out research together in the past?
  - Is the participation of young researchers in the Research Training Group planned or expected?
  - For Research Training Groups with multiple domestic locations: To what extent does the successful realisation of the Research Training Group depend on the participation of researchers working at different locations?
  - For International Research Training Groups: What specifically constitutes the added value of the joint Research Training Group?

### 2. Research programme

- Please assess the quality and originality of the Research Training Group's main research topic or research idea. In what way do you consider it forward-looking to establish a Research Training Group with this focus, considering that the key mission of such a group is to promote young researchers?

- Please assess the quality and novelty of the research programme in international comparison. Is the proposed realisation plan convincing? If applicable: Has the interdisciplinary approach been chosen constructively and has it been implemented effectively?
- Please assess whether the research programme justifies the expectation that the main topic will be explored appropriately in projects and theses. Has substantial preliminary work been carried out? Can ambitious doctoral projects be expected?
- Is the research programme adequately focused and coherent? Are its individual areas sufficiently interconnected, or are there marginalised areas? Do the thematic focus areas encourage exchange and collaboration among doctoral researchers? What synergic effects are to be expected under the research programme?
- For Research Training Groups with multiple domestic locations and International Research Training Groups: How does the research programme ensure the integration of the participating locations (e.g. through joint supervision of projects by researchers at various locations)?

### **3. Qualification programme**

- Please evaluate the quality of the qualification programme and of the other qualification measures. Do the programme and the relevant preliminary work justify the expectation that young researchers will be trained successfully? What conditions ensure that the Research Training Group's doctoral researchers will qualify for the international academic and non-academic job market?
- Is the qualification programme tailored to the research programme such that it efficiently supports doctoral thesis work? For example, does it reflect the Training Group's interdisciplinary approach?
- How will doctoral researchers be acquainted with expertise beyond their individual specialties in order to foster collaboration within the RTG and to provide broader scientific qualification? Will they be trained in the rules of good scientific practice?
- To what extent does the qualification programme encourage exchange between members of the Research Training Group and especially between its doctoral researchers?

- Is the scope of the qualification programme such that doctoral researchers will have sufficient time to work on their projects?
- For Research Training Groups with multiple domestic locations and International Research Training Groups: What specific measures does the qualification programme include to promote lively exchange between doctoral researchers at different locations? Does it take the geographical arrangement into consideration? For International Research Training Groups: Are longer-term, coordinated and reciprocal research visits to the respective partner location planned? Do these follow from the research programme in a scientifically logical way?

#### **4. Supervision and career advancement, gender equality, organisation and quality management**

- How would you assess the proposed announcement and selection procedure? Is it suited to attract highly qualified doctoral researchers at the international level?
- Please evaluate the supervision strategy.
  - To what extent does the proposal incorporate supervisory structures that promote systematic, transparent, and speedy doctoral training?
  - Do the periodic progress checks have the appropriate scope and intensity?
  - Does the strategy achieve a healthy balance between supervision and the encouragement of independence?
  - Is there an effective strategy to motivate doctoral researchers to publish their findings early on and to attend international conferences?
  - If funds are being requested for start-up funding for first-time applicants: Does a convincing strategy exist to use these funds to further the scientific careers of the RTG's doctoral researchers following their completion of the programme?
- Please comment on measures for promoting gender equality and work/family compatibility.
  - Are the proposed measures constructive?
  - Is the Research Training Group's strategy in line with measures already undertaken by the host university?

- To what extent will the proposed management and coordination strategies help the Research Training Group attain its objectives? Are the roles, rights and responsibilities of the members of the RTG clearly defined?
- Please comment on the quality management strategy.
  - Is it suited to guarantee the desired high standard of quality in research and qualification throughout the duration of the Research Training Group?
  - What enables quality-oriented management of research and qualification?
  - Will relevant data be documented and used to initiate improvements?
  - Does the proposal include convincing criteria and standards of comparison that can serve as a basis for evaluating the success of the Research Training Group (e.g. criteria for scientific success in an international context, researchers' further career development)?

## 5. Environment

- To what extent does the Research Training Group fit into the research environment and medium-term scientific priorities of the university?
- How would you assess the regional non-university research environment? What national cooperative arrangements are relevant to the Research Training Group? Will the Research Training Group leverage existing options to reach its goals?
- How is the Research Training Group scientifically unique compared to other local research projects? Is the RTG's research programme in line with the topics of these research projects and/or clearly differentiated from them? In case of existing or expired Research Training Groups: Does the research programme of the proposed Research Training Group investigate *new* scientific problems?

Since it is possible to propose a “module for structured doctoral training” as part of the Collaborative Research Centre programme, parallel funding will no longer be available to Collaborative Research Centres and Research Training Groups that are based at the same location and have largely overlapping topics. The goal is to increase efficiency through a concentration of the funding for closely related research projects. The usual procedural rules regarding delimitation from other projects apply. A thematic overlap is acceptable if the Research Training Group's topic and/or structure is suffi-

ciently unique. For instance, the establishment of an International Research Training Group may be considered to deliver added value.

- How is the Research Training Group positioning itself in relation to the existing academic structures at this location? What is the added value of the Research Training Group compared to other forms of doctoral training and/or structured doctoral programmes at the respective location? Is there a convincing strategy that enables these institutions to work together in a mutually beneficial way? For example, is there a graduate school into which the Research Training Group can be integrated?
- In terms of people, methodology and technology, what makes this location's infrastructure especially well suited for a Research Training Group with this thematic focus? What additional resources will the university provide for the Research Training Group?
- What additional support will the university provide to help the Research Training Group succeed (e.g. reduction of the teaching load of participating professors, simplification of doctoral procedures for interdisciplinary projects, cross-departmental degree regulations, family-friendly doctoral training, support for foreign doctoral researchers)?

## **6. Internationality**

- Are any international cooperative arrangements, whether individual or institutionalised, currently in place that will be used for the Research Training Group?
- Are the measures intended to integrate the Research Training Group into the international research community convincing (e.g. exchange of doctoral researchers, visiting researcher programme, international conference participation)?
- Does it appear that the international visibility of the research findings will be ensured?

## **7. Funding**

- Is the proposed budget justified? Will it enable the group to operate in an optimum way and to fulfil its mission according to the objectives of the Research Training Group programme?

- If applicable: Does the proposal present a convincing strategy for integrating postdoctoral researchers, qualifying fellows, and/or research students?
- For International Research Training Groups: The partner institution is expected to make an equivalent contribution to the Research Training Group. Is the contribution of the foreign partner of sufficient scope?

### **III. Diversity and Equal Opportunities in Science and Academia**

The DFG actively encourages equal opportunities and diversity in all of its funding programmes. Funding reviews may not disadvantage applicants due to extra-scientific reasons, such as age, gender or state of health. For example, in assessing proposals from young researchers, considerations should not be based on the applicants' actual age but instead on the individual circumstances relating to the duration of their scientific careers and previous research achievements.

In promoting diversity and equal opportunities in research, it is possible to compensate for certain, extra-scientific disadvantages. For example, in order to evaluate the scientific achievements of applicants appropriately, their individual situations need to be taken into account. Equal opportunity therefore includes taking into consideration unavoidable delays in the scientific careers of applicants (for example longer periods of qualification, gaps in publications, or less time spent abroad due to family reasons).