



A proposal from National Junior Faculty for improvements of the Consolidator grant

Following the National Junior Faculty (NJF) open letter dated 5th of December 2015 ("Letter to Medicine and Health, Swedish Research Council"), encouraging the establishment of a consolidator stage project grant, we truly appreciate that such a scheme has been initiated. This strategic funding is invaluable at a career stage when most young investigators experience a significant slump in funding, with sometimes grave consequences for long-term career planning and employment. While we thus applaud VR's initiation of the consolidator grant, three concerns about its current implementation have been raised by our members that we would like to bring to your attention.

Concern 1: unequal competition

Currently, the consolidator grant is announced every other year and has an eligibility window of 5 years (7 to 12 years post PhD). This combination creates an unequal competition among applicants in terms of both the number of times a researcher can apply and their scientific ages post PhD at the moments of application. For example, an applicant with a PhD obtained in January 2009 can apply for the consolidator grant three times (in 2016, 2018, and 2020, i.e., 7, 9 and 11 years post PhD), while someone who obtained their PhD in January 2010 can apply only twice (in 2018 and 2020, i.e., 8 and 10 years post PhD). To resolve this inequality, NJF recommends announcing the grant annually.

Concern 2: unnecessarily fierce competition

As stated in our original letter, we believe that the consolidator grant should be a bridging grant for young researchers and not an elite grant to a restricted number of researchers. In its current implementation, however, the consolidator grant funds on average only 10 researchers per year across all disciplines and had an approval rate (beviljandegrad) of merely 6,5% in 2016. This means that the vast majority of young researchers are still highly dependent on project grants, for which they have to compete with researchers who are in general more senior and often highly established. NJF has two recommendations to make the consolidator grant available to a broader share of talented young researchers and bring its approval rate more in line with that of project grants (14,6% in 2016): 1) to consider increasing the total budget allocated to consolidator grants, which is currently less than 3% of the total budget allocated to project grants; 2) to consider lowering the amount of funding awarded per consolidator grant (currently 12M SEK).

Concern 3: unequal opportunities across scientific disciplines

Currently, applicants in the humanities and social sciences are allowed to use the grant to cover up to 50% of their own salary, while researchers in the other disciplines are excluded from this option. NJF would strongly recommend to allow all applicants, regardless of their discipline, to use the grant to cover up to 50% of their salary.

In summary, NJF encourages VR to consider the following three changes in their implementation of the consolidator grant to minimize inequalities in opportunities and make it available to a broader share of young researchers:

- to announce consolidator funding on a yearly basis;
- to align the grant's approval rate with that of project grants, by increasing the allocated budget and/or lower the amount per awarded grant;
- to allow a certain percentage in all research fields to be used for applicants' salary.

Thank you for your consideration.

On behalf of National Junior Faculty,

Sara Hägg, Chair