

Policy for research applications from non-tenured researchers at MMK

Type of document	Policy
Approved by	The Board of MMK
Date	2018-09-13
Dnr	
Valid date	From now until further notice

Description:

Applications for external research funding from independently financed researchers at MMK

Background

Researchers make up an important category of employee at the Department of Materials and Environmental Chemistry (MMK). They may be employed on temporary contracts (maximum two years) or be permanently employed. Permanently employed researchers can be divided into three categories: (i) those having their own funding and the ambition to become independent researchers, (ii) application specialists, and (iii) researchers that are part of larger research groups. Researchers in all of these categories are important for MMK.

MMK is very positive to provide opportunities for those young researchers who are willing to develop their academic career and have research profiles that fit into the long-term strategy of the Department. The first step is to build up qualifications required to apply for an Assistant Professor position at MMK or elsewhere. Young researchers often have new and exciting ideas on various scientific questions. It is important that they get the opportunity to develop these ideas as well as their independence as researchers. We believe that it is also necessary that their research programs fit with the research direction and infrastructure at MMK. The Department wants to provide these researchers opportunity to establish themselves as independent researchers with their own funding and to build up a strong CV. However, a number of factors, many of which are outside the control of the young researchers, must come together for this to succeed. In most cases, the future career is outside academia, where there is a great need for talented researchers, teachers, and experts, and where career opportunities are many and attractive.

It is important to note that the number of assistant professor positions at MMK is very limited; a new position opens approximately every two to three years. Stockholm University recruits teachers based on broad open calls in order to find the candidates best suited to an academic career.

MMK may sometimes recruit a researcher as a department-financed application specialist when there is a need. Such recruitments also occur via open calls; to date, such recruitment has occurred approximately every 3–4 years.

MMK has two types of financial resources: those from the faculty for teaching and research, and external grants received by competitions. Although MMK has a responsibility to help young researchers to develop a strong CV, it is important to clarify that MMK will spend most of the faculty funding resources on recruited teachers (i.e. assistant professor, lectures, and professors). Therefore, young researchers must finance their research with external funding, as MMK can only offer limited support.

Young researchers are at the beginning of their career paths, and every decision is of strategic importance for the future. These decisions are also important for the researcher's personal economy, as their employment at MMK must be terminated if they no longer have external funding. In practice, the process of terminating an employment takes 12–18 months, and therefore must be initiated well before external funding ends, as MMK is not able to finance this notice period for all of the externally funded researchers it currently employs.

With this policy document, MMK clarifies the situation regarding applications for external research funding from young researchers and other independently financed researchers. It is important to note that the Department Board at MMK must approve all permanent employments. This means that there is no guarantee that MMK accepts to be the host of a successful research grant application. The Department Board must be included in the application process and actively decide to offer a researcher permanent employment.

Procedure

MMK looks positively upon applications from young researchers for research grants in areas that are strategically relevant to the department, so that the department can provide the young researchers the best possible conditions to qualify themselves and establish their own research group. It is important that the young researcher consults with a senior researcher at MMK at very early stage of the process in the preparation of their grant application in order to discuss how the proposed research fits into MMK's long-term strategy. The senior researcher will then act as a mentor to the younger research and, when needed, contribute some funding, but the young researcher's independence shall be protected.

Project grants from VR, Formas and other funding agencies

The percentage of the researcher's own salary that can be financed by these grants varies from call to call. The part that is not covered by the applied grant shall primarily be financed by other external funding. The project grant must also include project drift costs in addition to the researcher's salary, such as instrument fees and travel expenses for Ph.D. students and postdocs. MMK provides appropriate working space (rent), access to good research

infrastructure and the university's common invoice system, co-financing of Ph.D. students, and time for the researcher to supervise the Ph.D. students, as well as some teaching. The latter is primarily aimed to provide teaching experience, as MMK currently has an excess of teaching capacity among its lecturers. The availability of teaching assignments must be agreed upon well before a grant application is submitted. The researcher's employment can be terminated within the appropriate time before the end of the project grant.

Initial evaluation of the applicant and the project

A young researcher who wishes to apply for project grant from VR or similar funding agencies must, at least three months before the last day of a funding call, submit a pre-application (CV, publication list, and one-A4-page summary of the proposed research application, as well as a letter of support from a senior researcher) to the Head of the Department. The pre-application will be evaluated by MMK's Strategy Group who will ensure that the proposed research fits with the long-term strategy of the Department, and that MMK can provide the appropriate facilities and equipment. An application can be denied due to lack of available research space. The Head of Department will then decide whether or not MMK can administrate the grant.

Continuation of projects

It is possible to apply for continued external grants after a (VR or similar) grant has ended. This can occur if the Head of Department, after consultation with the Strategy Group, determines that it is in the interest of the Department, and that MMK can provide the applicant with good conditions for success. The applicant must provide a plan for how his/her salary will be covered for 12 months after the end of the initial grant in the event that no new funding is obtained. This rule is needed in order to allow MMK to have a positive view of continuing research applications while assuring that researchers have the resources they need to be successful. It is positive to have some support from other senior researchers at MMK, but the researcher's independence must be protected. It is also important that the researcher has some form of funding during their period of notice of termination in the event that they no longer have research funding.

Senior researchers with permanent employment

As stated above, researchers at MMK can be divided into three categories: (i) those having their own funding and the ambition to become independent researchers, (ii) application specialists, and (iii) researchers that are part of larger research groups. MMK has a positive view toward research applications from more senior researchers, if the project fits within the long-term strategic plan of the Department. The researcher must show how they can finance their salary for 18 months in the event that their funding application is not successful. This allows MMK to have a positive view of continuing research applications while assuring that researchers have the resources they need to be successful. It is also required in order to allow the researcher to perform research during their period of notice of termination, if necessary. We feel that it is positive to have some support and collaboration with other research groups at MMK. If the research grant is awarded, it is also possible to use this support to finance a Ph.D. student. The Head of Department can reject an application if it does not fit into MMK's long-term strategy. In this case, the Strategy Group will be consulted.

MMK is positive to an application specialist seeking research funding as long as this has been approved by the Head of Department, and the research can be combined with the roll as an application specialist.

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Head of Department
