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# Academy Programme for Sport Science and Physical Activity ACTIVE

## Programme memorandum



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## **1 Background**

Since 2013, an agreement has been in place between the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Research Council of Finland (RCF) on reviewing applications for government grants for sport science research projects. Under this agreement, the scientific standard of sport science research projects funded by the Ministry has been reviewed by international panels organised by the RCF.

Under the Finnish Act on the Promotion of Sports and Physical Activity, the state budget shall include an annual appropriation for the purpose of granting aid and stipends for research and development in the field of sport and health sciences. Under an amendment to this Act that entered into force in February 2023, the RCF may serve as a government grant authority in the context of awarding such grants.

As a result of this amendment, the Ministry and the RCF concluded in May 2023 an agreement on transferring the application, review and award processes of sport science research projects to the RCF for the period 2024–2027. Under this agreement, the RCF will serve as a government grant authority in the context of granting funding for sports science research. The RCF has launched a research programme titled Academy Programme for Sport Science and Physical Activity (ACTIVE) for processing the research appropriations. The RCF and the Ministry will continue to work together on the funding of sport science research and development within the framework of this programme.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture sets out the thematic areas and criteria for sport science research supported with government grants for the years to come in its Strategy Document for Research in Sports Science. The present programme memorandum is based on the Strategy Document published in June 2024 (Appendix 1). The memorandum describes the objectives and thematic areas of the programme as well as the criteria and principles to be followed when reviewing and making decisions on applications. This memorandum only concerns research funding granted under the ACTIVE programme. The Research Council of Finland also funds sport science research through its other funding instruments, including Academy Projects and Academy Research Fellows. These funding schemes are open to all fields of research with no limitations as to their themes.

The tasks of the National Sports Council are laid down in the Government Decree on the Promotion of Sports and Physical Activity. Under this Decree, the Council's tasks include issuing an opinion on grants awarded for research and information dissemination related to sports science and sports science activities. The National Sports Council will issue its opinion on this programme memorandum in August 2024.



## 2 Objectives and impact of the programme

The ACTIVE programme will improve the quality, advance the renewal and enhance the impact of research related to physical activity, exercise and sport. It will offer evidence-based information that helps to increase understanding of and seek solutions for societal and public health challenges related to physical activity, exercise and sport.

In addition to a high scientific standard, research funded under the programme should demonstrate novelty value and innovativeness as well as scientific and societal impact. The research funded under the programme should additionally have applicability value for planning and decision-making on physical activity, exercise and sport as well as on the promotion of physical activity in practice, either in the short or long term. Applicability may be demonstrated at different levels of society or in communities.

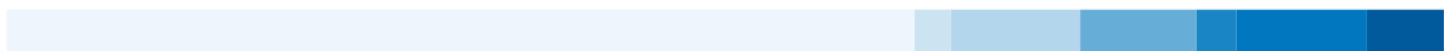
The key objective of the programme is to promote impact, accountability and sustainable development in sport science research targeting different population groups and various forms of sport and physical activity at both amateur and high-performance levels. The aims of the programme also include building up competence and multifaceted cooperation in sport science research. In order to achieve these objectives, the programme will pay particular attention to the following viewpoints:

- added value created by a multidisciplinary research design for understanding complex sports science phenomena and for solving challenges
- added value created by cooperation within sports sciences and with other disciplines nationally and internationally
- significance of a changing society and importance of drivers of change, including societal, political, environmental, economic or technological drivers, in sports science research
- interaction with actors who play a key role in using research findings at different stages of the research project life cycle to improve the feasibility and quality of research.

## 3 Thematic areas of research projects to be funded

In its Strategy Document for Research in Sports Science, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture defines some thematic areas for sports science research funding (Appendix 1). These thematic areas were derived from the societal impact goals set for the sports sector.

The thematic areas for funding research projects are:





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1. physically active lifestyle and physical fitness as well as the effects and impact mechanisms of exercise and physical activity
2. equitable access to sports, physical activity and exercise, inclusion, sense of community, accountability and environmental sustainability
3. achieving results and ethics in competitive and performance sports.

Research projects funded under the ACTIVE programme are expected to be relevant to one or several of these thematic areas. The researcher must identify the thematic area the research concerns and the new information the project will produce to promote this theme. The focus areas of the thematic areas can be specified in calls for applications published by the Research Council of Finland.

## 4 Programme implementation

### 4.1 Calls for applications

The ACTIVE programme will regularly launch calls for applications for the government grants provided by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. In these calls, funding will be granted to individual research groups and consortia formed by two or more groups. The parties in the consortia may represent one or more research organisations.

The application schedules, maximum funding granted to projects, duration of the funding period and other instructions are provided separately in the calls published by the Research Council of Finland.

### 4.2 Review of applications

Applications received in ACTIVE calls will be reviewed by international panels. The Research Council of Finland will apply the following criteria to the scientific review of applications:

- compatibility of the research project described in the research plan with the specific objectives of the ACTIVE programme (incl. societal impact)
- scientific standard, innovativeness and novelty value of the research project and its impact in the scientific community
- feasibility of the research plan (including responsible science)
- competence of the applicant/research team to implement the project and possible researcher training



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- quality of the research environment and cooperation networks (including any researcher mobility).

For more information on the scientific review, see the RCF website: [How applications are reviewed.](#)

### 4.3 Decision-making

Following the scientific review, the ACTIVE programme steering group will examine both the applications and the review results and, on this basis, draw up a proposal on the projects to be funded. When selecting projects to be funded, the aim is to create a project package that optimally contributes to the objectives of the programme.

The funding decisions are based on applications and review statements issued on them as well as a ranking of applications produced by the panel. In addition, research projects funded under the ACTIVE programme must meet the following criteria:

- responding to the objectives set out in this memorandum
- promoting one or several of the programme's thematic areas
- demonstrating the wider societal impact of the research
- demonstrating applicability to planning and decision-making on physical activity, exercise and sport, and to promoting physical activity in practice.

The steering group consists of members of the RCF's decision-making bodies, representatives appointed by the Ministry, the Research and Evaluation Section of the National Sports Council, and possible expert members. The funding decisions are made by the RCF's Subcommittee for Academy Programme for Sports Science and Physical Activity, which consists of representatives of the RCF's decision-making bodies who are members of the ACTIVE programme's steering group.

### 4.4 Programme coordination

The Research Council of Finland and the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture work together on sports research and development funding within the framework of the ACTIVE programme to enable the optimal achievement of the sports policy objectives set by Parliament in the government grant process for sports research.

The ACTIVE programme is coordinated by its steering group and the RCF's experts, whose task is to promote the achievement of the programme's objectives together with



research projects. The steering group's task is to draw up a proposal on projects to be funded, to submit proposals for any additional calls for applications, to produce a final evaluation of the programme, and to promote the use of research findings obtained in the programme. Among other things, the steering group will monitor the progress of the programme by participating in programme events. In addition, RCF experts will regularly inform the steering group of progress made with the programme. The steering group will meet 3–4 times a year. The steering group's term of office coincides with that of the RCF's decision-making bodies and extends to 31 December 2024. A new steering group will be appointed for 1 January 2025–31 December 2027.

RCF experts will be responsible for the practical activities of ACTIVE programme coordination, including arrangements for calls for applications, project management, communication and evaluation. Coordination of the Academy Programme will help collate the research projects into a coherent programme through active exchange of information, cooperation and various coordination activities. These activities will include annual seminars, workshops, researcher training, meetings with decision-makers and stakeholders, promotion of national and international networking, and communication.

It is hoped that, thanks to programme coordination, the funded projects will bolster each other and that the programme will generate new types of multidisciplinary research evidence. This is why the leaders of projects selected for the programme are expected to commit to the programme objectives and collaborate actively during the programme. The accountable project leaders selected for the programme should:

- ensure that they and their research team members participate in events organised by programme coordination and promote information flows and collaboration between the programme's research teams
- contribute to the production of the programme's information material and actively share information on the programme's progress and results in public and scientific forums.

During the programme, the research projects will participate in events organised with the users of the research findings and in other actions aimed at disseminating research evidence to stakeholders.

#### **4.5 National and international cooperation, interaction and communication**

Networking, interaction, communication and dissemination of research evidence will play a key role in ACTIVE. The programme will promote national and international



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research and stakeholder cooperation as well as dialogue between researchers and decision-makers by organising various programme events. The projects selected for the programme will be encouraged to communicate about their findings to different target audiences and to otherwise interact with actors who play a key role in using the research evidence at different stages of the project life cycle.

### 4.6 Final evaluation

A researcher who has received funding will report on their research project to the Research Council of Finland at the end of the funding period. The final reports of research projects will be essential for assessing and demonstrating the impact of research funding.

As part of the ACTIVE programme, summaries of research project final reports will be produced to demonstrate effectiveness and impact. The steering group will make separate decisions on other possible data collections and evaluation activities.

## 5 Instructions for applicants

The call for applications in the ACTIVE programme is a single-stage process. Instructions for preparing and submitting applications can be found in a separate call text to be published by the Research Council of Finland. For more detailed instructions for submitting an application, see the RCF website at [How to apply for funding.](#)

### More information

- Sara Illman, Senior Science Adviser

Our email addresses are in the format `firstname.lastname(at)aka.fi`.

[www.aka.fi/en/active](http://www.aka.fi/en/active)

**Appendix 1:** [Strategy Document for Research in Sports Science](#), Ministry of Education and Culture publications 2024:27