

## Assessment of grant application submitted to the Research Council of Norway

### Grant application

Project number	275579
Project title	REACH: Center for interdisciplinary research for qualities in Early Childhood Education and Care.
Project manager	Haldar, Marit
Project Owner	HØGSKOLEN I OSLO OG AKERSHUS
Programme/Activity	Forskning og innovasjon i utda
Case officer	Gunnlaug Daugstad

### Confirmation

By completing and submitting this form, I / we confirm the following (applies for the individual referee or the referee panel):

- I am /We are qualified to assess this application. See Regulations on Impartiality and Confidence in the Research Council of Norway.	Yes
- I/We have read and understood both the criteria I/we have been asked to use for assessing the application and the description of the scale of marks. The scale of marks is to be applied as an absolute scale, i.e. marks are to be determined for each grant application independently and not relative to other applications that the panel/referee is assessing.	Yes
- I/We understand and accept the guidelines for assessing applications for the Research Council of Norway. See Guidelines for referees/panels who assess applications for the Research Council of Norway.	Yes
- I am/We are qualified to conduct this assessment.	Yes

## Summary of marks

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Criterion	Mark
Scientific merit	6
The project manager and project group	6
Implementation plan and resource parameters	A
International cooperation	A
National cooperation	A
Strategic basis and importance	A
Dissemination and communication of results	A
Overall assessment of the referee/panel	6

Special points to consider	Answer
Ethical perspectives	Yes

## Criteria

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### Scientific merit

How would you rank the project's scientific merit?

This criterion gives an indication of the essential, fundamental aspects of the research project. The scientific merit of a project will be assessed in relation to the following points:

- \* Originality in the form of scientific innovation and/or the development of new knowledge.
- \* Whether the research questions, hypotheses and objectives have been clearly and adequately specified.
- \* The strength of the theoretical approach, operationalisation and use of scientific methods.
- \* Documented knowledge about the research front.
- \* The degree to which the scientific basis of the project is realistic.
- \* The scientific scope in terms of a multi- and interdisciplinary approach, when relevant.

Excellent application, the research proposed is innovative and comprehensive and very much in line with the FINNUT framework and the Centre is highly likely to reach the goals set out there. The REACH project is very cohesive. Its research activities are theoretically connected to each other and so they form united paradigm for the centre. In addition to improve the quality of ECEC by high quality research its emphasizes creating an innovative project structure.

The application takes into consideration a multitude of perspectives and approaches to understanding the complexities of early childhood education in a rapidly changing national and global societal context. The applicants move from a universalist (and highly problematic) understanding of early childhood 'quality' towards a more complex conceptualization of a possible multiplicity of 'qualities'. The proposal makes an excellent case for multidisciplinary and collaborative approaches to an increasingly complex and diverse environment.

The panel noted that some of the individual research activities listed in the proposal appear to be grounded in rather traditional paradigms. For example:

- the initial exploration of 'quality' in Norwegian ECEC shifting and developing over time relies on data gathered through standardized and decontextualised instruments (e.g. ECERS-R / ITERS-R)
- development and ability (e.g. language) appears to be approached from a deficit perspective ('delays')
- Societal reality ('diversity') appears to be framed in an implicitly negative way ('coping with...')

While the overall proposal presents an interesting and highly relevant range of projects, the panel thought an even stronger case could have been made for the combined innovative value of the approach: how are individual research activities supposed to inform and influence each other? The panel felt that making that case more strongly would strengthen the inter- and trans-disciplinary profile of the centre.

Selected mark : 6 - Excellent

The project's objectives, research questions and hypotheses are very clearly presented and are based on an excellently formulated and highly original project concept. The project is in the forefront of its field and will contribute to scientific innovation as well as generate important new knowledge. The project is of excellent quality, with no significant weak points. Publications in leading scientific journals in the field are highly likely.



## The project manager and project group

How would you rank the qualifications of the project manager and project group?

This criterion gives an indication of the qualifications of the project manager and project group. The project manager and project group will be assessed in relation to the following points:

- \* Project management
- \* Expertise and experience within the field of research
- \* Publication record
- \* Experience with national and international collaboration on projects
- \* Experience with supervision of students and younger researchers
- \* The degree to which the project manager and project group are part of a research environment that has the competence and resources needed to ensure the success of the project

Professor Haldar is an experienced leader in academia and in addition Professor Hernes is listed as assistant leader which is a good idea given the scope of the project. The proposed research team combines high levels of expertise with national and international recognition and excellent connections in the Norwegian ECEC sector.

Selected mark : 6 - Excellent

The project manager and/or research/project group is/are qualified at a high international level, has/have contacts within the foremost national and international research environments and will be able to play an important role in ensuring the success of the project.

## Implementation plan and resource parameters

How well-suited are the implementation plan and resource parameters in relation to the project?

This criterion gives an indication of whether the plan for project implementation is satisfactory, and whether the planned use of resources in the project is well-suited for the tasks in the project, based on assessment of the following elements:

- \* Plans for project implementation, including breakdown into work packages/sub-projects, milestones and deliverables.
- \* Need for personnel resources, as listed in terms of work time distributed by work packages, sub-projects or milestones.
- \* Need for other resources (such as equipment, data collection, field work), distributed by work packages/sub-projects or milestones.

The assessment is not to be linked to any scientific risk.

Excellent implementation plan where the three research strands as well as the projects are well outlined and how the scholars contribute to different projects is clearly described. Hence the overall project plan and the timeline appear feasible. However, the panel would have liked to see specific milestones for individual research activities specified.

Selected mark : A - Very good

The project plan and planned use of resources are very clearly described and

are well-suited to the tasks in the project.

## International cooperation

How would you rank the international cooperation set out for the project?

This criterion gives an indication of the extent and quality of the international cooperation activities set out for the project.

There is a strong emphasis on international collaboration, based on existing networks and projects. International co-operation is already institutionalized with highly ranked international communities and the project will harvest the existing contacts and possibilities. This appears to be an excellent basis for the development of future joint activities. An International Advisory Board is already established. Furthermore the international scholars will be invited to participate in the Research Academy of the Centre.

Selected mark : A - Very good

The international cooperation activities set out for the project have a wide scope and are of high quality.

## National cooperation

To what degree will the project promote national cooperation?

This criterion gives an indication of the extent to which the project will make use of national research expertise and help to promote national network-building.

The application emphasises national co-operation both with stakeholders and other Universities. The Research Academy will invite researchers from different universities and colleges to stay for a period of 1-2 months at REACH. NORD University, University of Oslo, The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities and Private Barnehagers Landsforbund, Norwegian Centre for Science Education, Statped, Oslo Municipality are co-operating and the applicants appear well connected to all levels of the Norwegian early childhood sector. Furthermore it is excellent to see that 'user' groups will be encouraged to 'formulate research needs' rather than being recipients of the centre's activities and findings.

Selected mark : A - Very good

The project will make comprehensive use of national research expertise and will contribute greatly to promoting national network-building.

## Strategic basis and importance

How would you rank the project's strategic basis and importance?

This criterion gives an indication of how the project incorporates, and the role it will play in relation to, the project owner's and partners' strategic objectives and plans, as well as the relevant research challenges (e.g. subject-specific evaluations, research agendas and technology roadmaps, strategic activities and business plans).

Excellent and well argued for, this proposal addresses highly relevant questions in potentially innovative ways. It is well grounded and supported by the applicant institutions' expertise and track records.

Selected mark : A - Very good

The project strongly incorporates the strategic framework of, and will be of great importance to, both the project owner and the partners.

## Dissemination and communication of results

How would you rank the quality of the dissemination and communication plans?

This criterion gives an indication of the quality of the dissemination and communication plans for the project.

Dissemination and communication of results will be assessed in relation to the following points:

- \* Plans for scholarly publication, dissemination and other communication activities.
- \* Plans for popular science dissemination and communication activities vis-à-vis the general public as well as users of the project results, including planned use of channels and measures.
- \* Plans for ensuring that important users (in industry, community life and public administration) are incorporated into/take part in dissemination activities for the project.

When assessing dissemination and communication plans, importance should be attached to the level of detail provided and how realistic the plans are.

The strength of the proposed dissemination strategy is that it is based on the recognition of the diversity of its audiences. Proposals for scholarly dissemination appear feasible and sufficiently specific. PhD output is ambitious but achievable considering the combined supervisory competence of the team. In addition to the Research Academy, the REACH will build a pool with ECEC relevant data (open data) enhancing interdisciplinary cooperation inside the REACH, between REACH and other research communities in Norway and abroad. A digital platform with interactive tools will be made so that the public and non-academic audience can follow the work of REACH, including a web-based teaching and learning resources (MOOC). It is good to see proposals for multiple communication channels for dissemination to non-academic audiences.

Selected mark : A - Very good

The project's dissemination and communication plans provide a thorough level of detail and are of high relevance.



## Overall assessment of the referee/panel

How does the project rank in terms of the referee's/panel's overall assessment?

This criterion indicates the overall view of the referee/panel, based on the specific criteria which they have been asked to assess.

This proposal addresses highly relevant questions and has excellent innovative potential. A very good application that fulfils very well the FINNUT requirements. The proposal should be first priority for funding

Selected mark : 6 - Excellent

A project at a very high international level and of great national and international interest. Publications in leading journals are expected. The researchers are among the leaders in their field.

## Special points to consider

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Special points to consider	Answer
Ethical perspectives	Yes

### Comments to special points to consider

Ethical considerations are addressed adequately, showing the solid research experience of the applicants. However, it would have been good to see indication of further critical consideration of implications of researching complex and value-laden social, cultural or political contexts.