



FORTE:

Swedish Research Council for
Health, Working Life and Welfare

STRATEGIC RESEARCH AGENDA

for the national applied welfare
research programme

Printing: Holmbergs, Malmö 2019
Photography: Scandinav, Anders Andersson, Emma Bourne,
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ISBN: 978-91-88561-17-6

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Foreword

The Applied Welfare Research programme is a national ten-year research programme carried out by Forte in consultation with the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet) and Formas. The research programme is part of the government's efforts for managing major social challenges through research and innovation.

The roadmap for the research programme is a strategic research agenda. This agenda describes the vision and objectives of the programme along with the prioritised topics for funding. Types of funding, terms for research funding calls and other types of activity relevant to achieving the aims of the programme are also presented. This publication is an abbreviated version of the strategic research agenda.



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*The complete strategic
research agenda can be
found at www.forte.se*



Why we need a programme for applied welfare research

Publicly-funded social services are an important part of the Swedish welfare system, and costs more than SEK 150 billion per year. Each year, approximately 800,000 people receive help from the municipal social services, which can include care for the elderly, individual or family care, and support for people with disabilities.

SEVERAL AREAS within the social services lack scientific knowledge. For example, in many cases, knowledge is lacking about which methods of assessment and intervention that are most appropriate, and which methods should be avoided.

Access to scientific knowledge is important in order for the welfare system to be able to invest its limited resources into the safest and most efficient efforts for the users.

Sometimes, the scientific knowledge is available, but is not applied because it has not reached as far as the practical work itself.

In order to address the needs for knowledge, investing in research is necessary to improve the knowledge base and contribute to the development of a more research-based social services.

IN 2017 the Swedish government decided to invest in seven ten-year national research programmes to create opportunities for research that meets various challenges in society. The seven programmes are all

intended to establish synergies between various stakeholders, interdisciplinary collaborations, and to function as a platform for ongoing research.

The programmes are also intended to form a link to international research programmes, initiate studies within identified and prioritised fields of research, and contribute to increasing the impact of research results in practice.

THE APPLIED WELFARE RESEARCH PROGRAMME

The programme will finance client-and-practice-oriented research in the social services sector. The initiative also aims to increase knowledge in the areas of mental illness and long-term sick leave.

The budget was set by the Swedish Parliament (Riksdag) at SEK 40 million for 2018, 70 million for 2019 and 100 million for 2020.

What is client-and-practice-oriented research in social services?

- The purpose of applied research is for the knowledge to be applied outside of the research environment. An example of this could be research in the way social services function and its results and effects from a client and user perspective, which can be used in further developing social services.
- The research is based on issues that are relevant to the needs of the social services and clients and can be beneficial and useful for those clients, the work of social services and society in general.
- The research is conducted in close contact with the social services.
- The target group for the research results is the workers and clients of social services and those close to them, but the results can also be important for local politicians and officials in charge of social services.

The programme includes funding PhD studies for social workers

RESEARCH FINANCED by the programme must meet high quality standards and must involve several different scientific disciplines and competencies.

The complex situations that people can face with regards to school, the job market, drug and alcohol abuse, crime etc. require collaboration between different research disciplines.

THE PROGRAMME may also include research in the interfaces between social services, schools, healthcare, the police, correctional centres and non-profit organisations, as well as research on the role of social services in preventative social work and general population-oriented social work.

It is important that research conducted within the programme considers the challenges for social services and society, such as increasing inequality and the varying circumstances across the country.

The programme includes funding of PhD studies for social workers, with the aim of contributing to the long-term building of knowledge within the social services sector and its link to research.

THE PHD STUDIES are run by Lund University and Malmö University in partnership with the University of Gothenburg and Linnaeus University. The training is conducted part-time for four years and aims to result in a licentiate degree.



Programme vision and objectives

The programme will use research to contribute to a more evidence-based social services that is better able to meet the challenges in society, within the social services sector itself and for the individuals affected by the efforts of social services, along with those close to these individuals.

We shall:

- Establish high-quality client-and-practice-oriented research that can be applied in social services in order to develop and improve the work as well as the life situation and circumstances of the users.
- Increase the proportion of professionals in social services who are trained in research and who can contribute with these skills to building knowledge within the social services sector.
- Increase research collaboration between researchers, professions, users and relatives.



Strategies

To achieve the programme's vision and objectives, the programme will operate according to the following strategies:

- 1.** Regular calls for funding with clear goals and directions in line with the prioritised topics of research presented in the agenda.
- 2.** Use types of grants and terms in the research funding calls that help reach the programme's objectives.
- 3.** Fund, organise and evaluate PhD studies for social services professionals. Collaborate with other research funders to create synergies through joint calls and announcements etc.
- 4.** Develop structures and methods for identifying and prioritising research needs and collaboration with relevant stakeholders. The research needs form the basis for research funding calls.
- 5.** Support networks for researchers, professionals and users in order to contribute to increased collaboration.
- 6.** Promote international cooperation and exchange, for example in the form of collaborative research funding calls with international funders, or funding projects that are carried out in co-operation with other countries.
- 7.** Monitor and evaluate the results of the efforts and research that are conducted within the programme and communicate and disseminate the results.

The research needs form the basis for research funding calls



The prioritised research areas

1. The effects of interventions

There is a need for more intervention research that evaluates the effects of the interventions used in social services based on individual-oriented outcomes. Research is needed on both existing interventions and the development and evaluation of new initiatives. The social aspects of interventions need to be highlighted, such as methods for interpersonal communication, creating relationships and approaches. There is also a need for additional research regarding the cost-effectiveness of different interventions.

2. Methods for needs assessment for individuals

Research on methods for investigating, assessing and describing individuals' problems, situation and need for interventions. There is a need for both quantitative research and research with a qualitative approach that investigates interpersonal communication, interactions and the creation of relationships, and how this impacts the assessment.



3. Early/preventive measures of the social services

More knowledge is needed on the effects of the preventive, early and outreach measures of the social services. In addition to the individual and group perspectives, the research area also includes community-based social services. There is a need for research on the effects and benefits of social services' involvement in community planning to help prevent social problems and contribute to a good social environment.





4. Implementation and change management

Research is needed on methods for translating new knowledge into practice as well as knowledge on how the organisation can be arranged to create a working culture centred on learning and quality improvement. There is also a need for research on methods for systematic follow-up, such as development and research on planning and follow-up tools, both for the social services' core activities and for treatment activities.

5. Coherent service provision initiatives

Research on coordination in the interface between the social services and, for example, healthcare services, schools, different authorities and civil society. The research needs to evaluate the effects that coordination will have for the users. There is also a need for research on cooperation between municipalities and within local social services along with socio-economic aspects relating to coordination.

6. User participation

It is important to develop and evaluate methods based on the users' needs and to organise the work and working methods in the social services based on a user perspective. Research on methods for creating participation and influence, as well as the effects and consequences of user involvement. The user perspective is also an important aspect in research within the other priority research topics.

7. Digitalisation and welfare technology

Research on welfare technology to develop working methods, processes, organisation and interventions in the social services. The area covers research on ethical and legal aspects of welfare technology as well as health economics research on the effects on digitisation and welfare technology.

8. Non-profit and entrepreneurial providers of social service

Research on how changes to the social services and the division of responsibility in the form of privatisation affect the users, the quality and content of the services and the cost trend. The conditions for society's governance and control of this field are important research issues, as is the question of how the information to users and relatives should be organised and provided.

Broad participation in the selection process

The prioritised topics of research have been identified through extensive discussions with researchers, representatives of the social services, user and interest groups, and other relevant social actors. A working group with a wide range of skills and competences selected the most urgent areas of research. At a prioritisation workshop, the group then nominated the ten most important areas, which ultimately became a collection of eight research topics for the strategic agenda.

INVENTORY

Forte conducted several hearings with important stakeholders to take stock of the research needs. A total of about 80 people participated.

Researchers



Practitioners



Authorities and user and interest groups





Compilation into a final list of eight research topics.

The working group agreed upon the **10** most important research topics.



The 20 highest-ranking topics proceeded to the next stage in the process.



PRIORITISING

A working group, consisting of 21 people from previous hearings, was appointed. Each participant in the working group chose 10 topics of research that they considered to be the most urgent.



68 fields of research were highlighted.



Sweden's current research in the field

A total of 682 project applications within research topics related to social services were submitted to Forte, Vinnova and the Swedish Research Council between 2008 and 2017. 127 of these were granted funding.


MOST APPLICATIONS concerned elderly care and children/youth. The lowest number of received and approved applications had to do with homelessness, violence in close relationships, migration and unaccompanied refugee children. We do not know the reason for this uneven distribution, but two possible factors may be that some topics are more in line with the researcher's areas of interests and that some topics have been targeted in specific research funding calls.

Most of the applications sent to the Swedish Research Council and Forte matched some of the research agenda's prioritised areas, which shows that there is an interest in research in these areas.

Qualitative research dominates, and efficacy studies are generally few. Many applications described a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods, but few of them intended to use "mixed methods".

The approval rate was similar across the various methodological approaches, which indicates that it is not more difficult for quantitative studies to obtain funding.

THE RESEARCH field is somewhat female-dominated – more than 60 percent of the received applications have a female project manager, and the same applies for applications that were approved.



In total, approximately SEK 350 million were granted between 2008 and 2017, of which almost half came from Forte

What the programme will offer

Each year, Forte will advertise funding calls within the programme. In order to achieve the objectives of the programme, we need to distribute funding across different types of grants, each of which fulfils its function in different phases of the coming 10-year period.

- **Project grants** are aimed at doctoral-level researchers at institutions or other organisations that conduct research. The research projects should be based on the questions and needs of the profession and those of the users/clients and must therefore be conducted in collaboration with social services.
- **Post-doctoral grants** are intended to provide researchers who have recently completed their doctorate an opportunity to continue their research career with a focus on client-and-practice-oriented research. Forte encourages international exchange.
- **Grants for practice-oriented research fellows** provide doctoral-level individuals who work for social services, or other non-academic organisations that work with social services issues, an opportunity to conduct research part time and translate research experience into practice. This type of grant is intended to bring academia and practice closer to each other.
- **Programme grants** aim to strengthen and facilitate the development of research environments in the long term. The grant is intended to facilitate research groups in addressing new issues and working with them for a longer period.
- **Grants for systematic reviews.** Access to systematic compilations of research is an important part of evidence-based practice. A systematic review compiles existing knowledge and points out scientific knowledge gaps where further research is needed.
- **Planning grants and exploratory awards** for preparing for a larger research project, establishing collaboration between different research disciplines, practices and users, and pilot studies.
- **Visiting researcher grants** for short-term stays of both inbound and outbound researchers, with the purpose of facilitating contacts and exchanging experience and knowledge between Swedish and foreign research environments.
- **Grants for training courses abroad,** where the relevant competence exists along with the opportunity to network with international researchers and students.
- **Network grants** for connecting researchers and research groups together in the prioritised areas of research, as well as networks for researchers, practitioners and user representatives.

In addition to various types of funding, a range of activities are also needed to support the research field and to promote collaboration, competency building and utilisation of the funded research:

- **Requirements in the research funding calls.** Amongst other things, the programme requires collaboration between research, practice, users and decision makers in the research process. Implementation of research results should also be done in collaboration with social services.
- **Forte takes an active lead in the programme** by discussing and firmly establishing the programme's strategic objectives, coordinating the programme's activities, and establishing networks and places of meeting for researchers, municipalities/regions, and user organisations. Shouldering the leadership role also involves monitoring and evaluating the programme on an ongoing basis when it comes to for example the various types of grants, the PhD studies as well as how the research compares with Forte's requirements.
- **Establish collaboration in the Nordic countries and internationally** for joint research funding calls, training courses or networks for bolstering the research area.
- **Strategic and active communication** is required to effectively utilise the research results that are generated in the programme. This will be accomplished in part by efforts such as workshops, surveys, interviews and dialogue meetings.



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