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## Up for review

**T**o many students attempting to get onto a graduate programme or to secure a postdoctoral fellowship, the idea of having to undergo peer review for such positions may sound extreme. But a recent study suggests that this could provide a good indication of future success — and might help to eliminate unintentional bias along the lines of gender or nationality.

The Foundation for Basic Research in Biomedicine in Heidesheim, Germany, uses peer review to assess applicants for its PhD scholarships. Social-science researchers at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich analysed nearly 2,700 of these scholarship applications submitted between 1985 and 2000, and found that more than 98% of the fellowship holders successfully completed their PhDs (L. Bornmann and H.-D. Daniel *B.I.F. FUTURA* 19, 7–19 (2004); [www.bifonds.de/public/news/bornmann\\_e.pdf](http://www.bifonds.de/public/news/bornmann_e.pdf)). In addition, the scientific papers produced by the fellows were frequently published in high-impact journals and had higher than average citation figures. The researchers also noted that neither nationality nor gender seemed to play a role in the selection process for the fellowship.

Using peer review to assess prospective graduate students and postdocs might be a way to bypass problems such as cronyism, especially in countries that rely more on patronage and connections than on qualifications. And for European Union programmes, peer review might be a better criterion for recommending funding for young scientists than amorphous concepts such as potential contributions to undefined scientific networks.

The biggest concern with expanded peer review has to do with potential. Subjecting some postgraduates to rigorous review before they have received training means that they might not have the chance to realize their promise, even if review is a good indicator of others' future success.

**Paul Smaglik**  
Naturejobs editor



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