

In this briefing sheet, additional detail is provided on the role and responsibilities of experts involved in assessing applications for funding, confirming tasks, award criteria and scoring mechanisms.

## Introduction

A large part of the **Erasmus+ Programme** follows the *indirect management* model, meaning that National Agencies (NAs) in EU Member States and associated third countries take responsibility for the management of decentralised funds including for the promotion of calls for proposals, the selection and monitoring of projects and partnerships and the accreditation of organisations and consortia, facilitating participation in the Erasmus+ programme. For some actions, NAs are required to engage external experts to assist them in assessing projects, ensuring that only the highest quality projects are selected for funding and that only organisations or consortia that meet predefined quality criteria obtain accreditation. For other actions, usually where lower levels of funding are requested, NAs have the option to use either internal (NA staff) or external experts to undertake assessments.

Figure 1 provides an overview of expert involvement in the assessment process, confirming whether more than one expert is required for quality assessment.

## Expert Appointment, Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest

As an expert, you are appointed on the basis of existing knowledge, skills and experience in the field(s) of education, training and youth for which you have been asked to assess applications. To ensure independence, expert names are not made public. As an expert, you are required to perform assessments to the highest professional standards and to operate within deadlines set by the NA. You are bound to a code of conduct that will be detailed in your appointment letter or contract, and to specific rules on the protection and storage of data. All information related to the assessment process is strictly confidential meaning that you should not disclose any information about the applications submitted and/or the results of the assessment process to any external actors or organisations. Experts are also required to follow clear privacy and data protection rules and guidelines.

As an expert, you must not have a conflict of interest in relation to the proposal(s) on which you have been requested to give your opinion. According to Financial Regulation 2018/1046 (Article 61) “**a conflict of interests exists where the impartial and objective exercise of the functions of a financial actor or other person... is compromised for reasons involving family, emotional life, political or national affinity, economic interest or any other direct or indirect personal interest**”. To ensure this, all experts are required to sign a declaration, provided by the NA, that no such conflict of interest exists at the time of appointment, confirming that they will inform the NA of both the existence and nature of any such conflict should this subsequently become known. The same declaration binds experts to confidentiality. Experts involved in submitting an application for the action that is being assessed are considered to have a conflict of interest and will not be appointed. Beyond this, the NA will decide on the required course of action where a conflict of interest is declared.

## Expert Briefing Sheet

Figure 1: Overview of Expert Involvement in the Assessment Process

## Expert Briefing Sheet

### QUALITY ASSESSMENT INVOLVING A SINGLE EXPERT



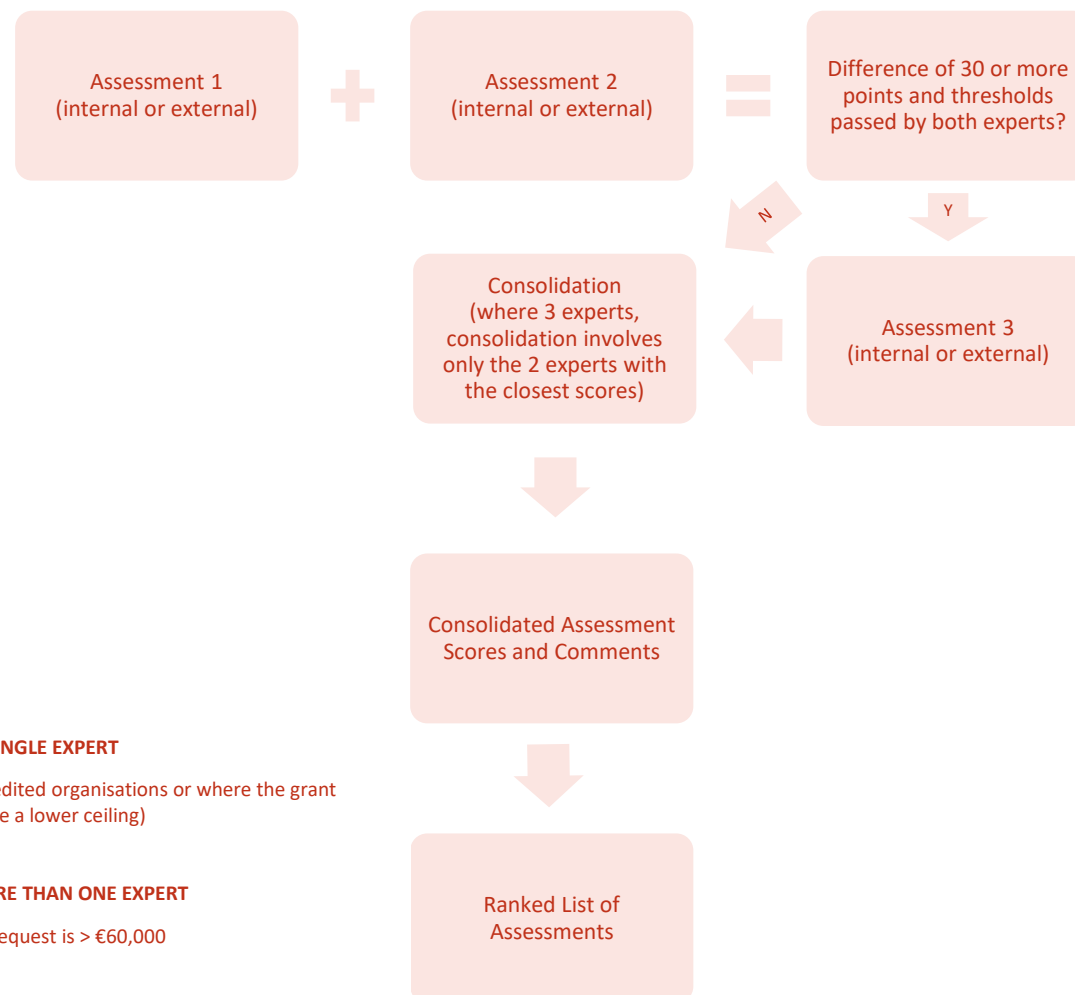
#### QUALITY ASSESSMENT INVOLVING A SINGLE EXPERT

- KA1 Learning Mobility Projects for accredited organisations or where the grant request is ≤ €60,000 (some countries use a lower ceiling)
- KA2 Small-Scale Partnerships

#### QUALITY ASSESSMENT INVOLVING MORE THAN ONE EXPERT

- KA1 Mobility Projects where the grant request is > €60,000 (some countries use a lower ceiling)
- KA2 Cooperation Partnerships

### QUALITY ASSESSMENT INVOLVING MORE THAN ONE EXPERT



## Quality Assessment by Individual Experts

Before assessments begin, experts are briefed by the NA on the Erasmus+ programme and the action being assessed, as well as on assessment processes and procedures.

Experts are provided with reference, background and briefing documents and are given access to the online evaluation tool in which the results of the quality assessment must be entered. Experts are encouraged to initially work offline (e.g. through use of a template) and to subsequently enter their data in the online evaluation tool.

Before starting the assessment of applications, experts must ensure:

- sound knowledge of the latest *Erasmus+ Programme Guide*, which provides all necessary information to potential applicants on the programme, in general, and on the actions for which they can apply for a grant;
- in-depth knowledge of the action concerned, its objectives, and the policy priorities that apply to the targeted action and field(s): for specific guidance on policy priorities, experts should also refer to the *Policy Documents, Frameworks and Reports Briefing Sheet* and/or the *Erasmus+ Guide for Experts on Quality Assessment*;
- in-depth understanding of the award criteria applicable to the applications being assessed;
- familiarity with the content and structure of the relevant application form;
- familiarity with all reference, background and briefing documents and tools provided by the NA;
- access to the IT tools of the European Commission, configured by the NA, via a personalised EU Login account.

Experts must read the whole application carefully before completing their quality assessment (comments and scores). It is also recommended that experts read several applications in full before submitting their first quality assessment: this allows for the benchmarking of applications (provided by applicants) and assessments (produced by experts).

Standard quality assessment criteria have been established by the European Commission and are to be used in all countries, and by all experts, to ensure a coherent assessment of applications.

Experts must work individually and independently, providing scores and comments for each assessment criterion and an assessment summary, in the language specified by the NA. On completion, experts should upload and submit their assessment using the online evaluation tool, whilst also confirming no conflict of interest for each individual proposal. In some cases, experts will also be required to provide typology data in the online evaluation tool.

In all cases, an eligibility check is performed by National Agencies. If an expert identifies an eligibility issue (e.g. number of partners; type of activities), they should immediately inform their National Agency.

## Expert Briefing Sheet

## Award Criteria and Scoring

As an expert, you are required to assess applications using only the award criteria defined in the *Erasmus+ Programme Guide*. Greater detail on award criteria is provided to experts as part of an expert briefing that is provided by the NA prior to the launch of assessments.

In all cases, each award criterion comprises several sub-elements which must be taken into account when analysing and assessing an application. These elements form an exhaustive list of points to be considered, by individual experts, prior to awarding a score for the given criterion. These sub-elements are also intended to help experts arrive at a final assessment of the criterion in question yet should not be scored separately. Additional detail is given in specific briefing sheets covering each of the core assessment criteria (relevance; quality of project design; quality of partnership; impact).

When assessing applications against predefined award criteria, experts:

- should make a judgement on the extent to which an application meets the defined criteria: this judgement must be based solely on the information provided in the application; experts should not assume information that is not explicitly stated;
- should be aware that information for a specific award criterion might appear in different parts of the application and should take into account all relevant information when producing comments and scores;
- should consider the type of project, the scale of the planned activities and the amount of funding requested: projects and partnerships can vary widely in terms of size, complexity, partner experience and capacity and process or product-orientation and, in this respect, experts should ensure that judgements are made in proportion to the scope and size of each project.

### THE PRINCIPLE OF PROPORTIONALITY

In EU terms, the principle of proportionality regulates the exercise of powers by the European Union, limiting intervention to that which is necessary to achieve the objectives of the various European Treaties. In other words, the content and form of a particular action or project must be in line with the broader aim that is being pursued. From an assessment perspective, the idea of proportionality is also extremely important, enabling (often high-level) assessment criteria to be applied to projects of differing sizes and ambitions. In this respect, it is important to consider the appropriateness and suitability of the proposed actions in relation to broader project goals. As an example, whilst larger-scale partnerships might be expected to impact on education and training systems and processes at one or more levels (institutional, regional, national, European), expectations for a smaller-scale partnership, in which fewer activities are targeted, would probably centre on the potential for impact on participating staff, learners and institutions. This does not mean, however, that smaller-scale partnerships, such as those involving just two or three schools, might not have more significant ambitions for change and improvement, including through the joint development and promotion of one or more outputs.

Applications are scored out of a maximum of 100 points. Different actions use different award criteria and scores might differ for different funding actions [Table 1] yet the same scoring mechanism is used in all countries.

## Expert Briefing Sheet

Table 1: Overview of Actions, Assessment Criteria and Maximum Scores

Assessment Criteria	Scoring Range per Assessment Criterion for Key Action 2 Partnerships for Cooperation	
	Cooperation Partnerships	Small-Scale Partnerships
Relevance of the Project	25	30
Quality of Project Design and Implementation	30	30
Quality of Partnership and Cooperation Arrangements	20	20
Impact	25	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2: Minimum and Maximum Scores for Different Qualitative Assessment Definitions

Scoring Ceiling	Scoring Bands			
	VERY GOOD	GOOD	FAIR	WEAK
	[application addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question convincingly and successfully; provides all the information and evidence needed and there are no concerns or areas of weakness]	[application addresses the criterion well, although some small improvements could be made; gives clear information on all, or nearly all, of the evidence needed]	[application broadly addresses the criterion, but there are some weaknesses; gives some relevant information, but there are several areas where detail is lacking or the information is unclear]	[application fails to address the criterion or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information; does not address the question asked, or gives very little relevant information]
<b>30 Points</b>	26 - 30	21 - 25	15 - 20	0 - 14
<b>25 Points</b>	22 - 25	18 - 21	12 - 17	0 - 11
<b>20 Points</b>	17 - 20	14 - 16	10 - 13	0 - 9

## Expert Briefing Sheet

## Award Criteria and Scoring [continued]

For each scoring ceiling (30, 25 or 20 points), scoring bands have been defined in which minimum and maximum scores are provided for different quality standards [Table 2]. The alignment of these scoring bands with qualitative assessment definitions has been done with a view to achieving a coherent approach to assessment among assessors and countries.

The total number of points (out of a maximum of 100) is calculated automatically by the online evaluation tool and is the sum of the scores given to each award criterion. Experts should not use half-points or decimals.

In addition to scoring, experts are required to provide comments on each award criterion and, therein, to refer explicitly to those elements being analysed and assessed. In all cases, comments must be consistent with the score that is given.

Finally, experts must provide comments on the application as a whole. In these overall comments, experts should provide a summative analysis highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the application and indicating any areas for improvement.

Expert comments will be used to provide feedback to applicants therefore experts must ensure clarity, consistency and an appropriate level of detail in their comments, using the language requested by the NA: additional detail is provided in the *Assessment Comments Briefing Sheet*. Expert comments will be quality checked by NAs to ensure that minimum standards are met: where not the case, experts may be required to revise their assessment comments.

As a part of their assessment, experts should analyse the coherence of the grant request with the planned activities and the proposed outputs. Whilst some actions allow experts to suggest a reduction to the proposed grant where there is a lack of coherence with the targeted actions, this does not apply to SMALL-SCALE PARTNERSHIPS and COOPERATION PARTNERSHIPS where a lump sum financing model is adopted and for which the proposed lump sum cannot be revised or reduced.

For Cooperation Partnerships and Small-Scale Partnerships, applications are required to score **at least 60 points in total and at least 50% of the maximum points under each award criterion** to be considered for funding.

Regardless of the score given under any individual award criterion, experts must assess all applications in full.

## Expert Briefing Sheet

## Consolidation and Final Scores

Where an application is assessed by a single expert, this individual assessment provides a final score and set of comments.

Where an application is assessed by two experts, the two individual assessments must be consolidated in order to arrive at a final score and a single set of comments for each application.

Where there is a difference of less than 30 points between the total scores awarded by the two experts, one expert will be asked to prepare a consolidated assessment, bringing together scores and comments from the two individual assessments in consultation with the other expert. Exceptionally, where the two experts are unable to agree on a consolidated score and set of comments, the NA will decide whether or not a third expert (third assessment) is needed.

Where there is a difference of 30 points or more between the total scores awarded by the two experts, the NA will ask an additional expert to undertake an assessment (third assessment). An exception exists where the two original experts have both scored the application below the threshold in one or more criteria. In cases where a third assessment is undertaken, consolidated scores and comments should be produced by taking into account only the two assessments that are closest in terms of overall score, with the comments and scores of the remaining expert not considered. The consolidation process then follows the same rules as outlined (above) for assessments involving just two experts.

Consolidated assessment scores and comments should reflect the results of a discussion among involved experts providing complimentary and harmonious comments - with no elements of contradiction - and scores which are consistent with these consolidated comments rather than being simply the mathematical average of the two individual assessments. Consolidated assessment should take into account both individual assessments but the final version may differ in terms of numerical score and comments. Experts should not use half-points or decimals during the consolidation phase.

Consolidated assessments comments and scores are considered as the final assessment of a given application and form the basis for ranking the application on a list of eligible applications that are suggested for funding.

## Expert Briefing Sheet

## Applicant Feedback

Once a decision has been taken on the selection of projects/consortia to be funded, or accredited, the NA is responsible for notifying the applicant, in writing, of the results of their application. At this stage, the NA also provides consolidated quality assessment scores and comments.

In case of an appeal, or request for further information, by an applicant, the NA can request that involved experts provide additional information or clarification, as necessary.

## Problems and Doubts

There is no situation where an expert should make contact with applicants directly. Where problems arise during assessment, experts should, in all cases, contact the NA whereupon a decision will be taken as to whether the applicant should be asked to provide additional information or clarification, or whether the application should be assessed as it was originally presented.

Where, during assessment, an expert observes that the same or similar text appears in two or more applications, within a single selection round, or where there are other signs of a possible double submission, or overlap, experts should immediately inform the NA.

## Expert Briefing Sheet