

In this briefing sheet, additional detail is provided on the role and responsibilities of experts involved in assessing **Final Reports for KA210 Small-Scale Partnerships** with a focus on tasks, criteria and scores.

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 most actions, NAs are encouraged to involve external experts to assist them in assessing funding applications and reports. In all cases, projects accessing lump sum financing of more than €60,000 are required to involve at least one external expert. There are cases, however, where NAs opt to also involve external experts in assessments relating to projects where lower lump sum financing amounts are involved.

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. The NA will decide on the required course of action where a conflict of interest is declared.

Key Action 2:

Small Scale
Partnerships
(KA210)

Final Report Assessment

EXPERT
BRIEFING SHEET

Page 1



Quality Assessment by Individual Experts

Before final report assessment begins, experts are briefed by NA staff on the Erasmus+ programme and the action being assessed, as well as on related final report 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 Erasmus+ Programme Guide, which provides information to potential applicants on the programme, in general, and on specific funding actions under which they might 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);
- a sound understanding of the assessment criteria applied during project selection and final report assessment;
- familiarity with the content and structure of the relevant final report form;
- familiarity with all briefing/guidance documents associated with final report assessment, as provided by the NA;
- access to the IT tools of the European Commission, configured by the NA, via a personalised EU Login account.

Additionally, to enable the necessary comparative assessment to take place, experts must review and reflect on a number of important documents before completing their final report assessment - these include (but are not limited to):

- initial funding application;
- expert feedback provided by those assessing the original application;
- documentation relating to any formal amendment contractual amendment(s) as agreed by the NA;
- final report and all related annexes;
- results featured on the Erasmus+ Project Results Platform (<http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/>).

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. In all cases, experts must work individually and independently, providing scores and comments for each quality assessment criterion 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. In some cases, experts will also be required to provide typology data in the online evaluation tool.

Key Action 2:

Small Scale
Partnerships
(KA210)

Final Report Assessment

EXPERT
BRIEFING SHEET

Page 2

Erasmus+

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Assessment Criteria

As an expert, you are required to assess final reports using pre-defined assessment criteria.

For KA210 Small-Scale Partnerships there are four quality assessment criteria that need to be considered, namely: *Relevance; Quality of Project Design and Implementation; Quality of Partnership and Cooperation; and Impact*. Each quality assessment criterion includes a number of elements that must be taken into account when analysing and assessing a final report yet scores are provided only at the level of the four overarching criteria, however. Additional detail on what to consider under each of the four quality assessment criteria can be found in the briefing sheet for *Assessment Criteria Briefing Sheet for KA210 Final Reports*.

When assessing final reports against the four quality assessment criteria, experts should:

- make a judgement on the extent to which the final report (and all associated outputs and outcomes) meets the defined criteria: in most cases, judgements should be based on information provided in the application and the final report with the only exception being where an expert is asked to reflect on how any associated or accompanying outputs or results might contribute to change and improvement within existing landscapes (i.e. in the field or sector being addressed by the project);
- be aware that information for a specific award criterion might appear in different parts of the final report and should make an effort take all relevant information into account when awarding scores under individual assessment criteria. Additional detail on can be found in the briefing sheet entitled *Where to Look* for KA210 Final Reports;
- consider the type of partnership, the scale of activities and the amount of lump sum financing being accessed: small-scale partnerships can access either €30,000 or €60,000 and can vary in terms of size, scale and overall complexity, requiring that experts integrate the *proportionality principle* into final report assessment, as was the case for experts assessing the original applications for funding under this action.

PROPORTIONALITY PRINCIPLE

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 suitability and appropriateness of different actions and activities 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), smaller partnerships, targeting the exchange of best practices, would probably centre on the potential for impact on participating staff, learners and institutions. This does not mean, however, that smaller 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 of one or more intellectual outputs.

Key Action 2:

Small Scale
Partnerships
(KA210)

Final Report Assessment

EXPERT
BRIEFING SHEET

Page 3

Erasmus+

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Assessment Scoring

At both the application stage and the final report stage, assessments are scored out of a maximum of 100 points.

Table 1 provides a comparison of the different scoring structures, at each of these important stages of assessment, confirming notable changes in focus during final report assessment.

Table 1: Overview of Assessment Scores for Small-Scale Partnerships at Proposal and Final Report Stages

ASSESSMENT CRITERION	PROPOSAL	FINAL REPORT	NOTABLE CHANGES
Relevance	30	20	FEWER POINTS during Final Report Assessment. Mainly focusing on sustained relevance to funding action and selected priorities.
Quality of Project Design and Implementation	30	30	SAME POINTS during Final Report Assessment. Sustained focus on quality of actions and deliverables and adopted methodology.
Quality of Partnership and Cooperation	20	20	SAME points during Final Report Assessment. Focus shifts to coordination, cooperation and communication rather than to the skills sets and mix of partners.
Impact	20	30	HIGHER POINTS during Final Report Assessment. Important focus on legacy, impact and on efforts to market and promote project achievements to wider audiences.
TOTAL	100	100	Similar threshold of 60% during proposal and final report assessment but no pass or fail threshold within individual criteria.

Whilst the scoring of a project application will potentially determine whether it is to be financed or not, scoring during final report assessment plays an equally important role in determining whether the agreed lump sum financing amount will be paid in full. Quality assessment is the only factor that can influence the amount of financing that will be provided with provision for a dedicated financial assessment at the project end. This is consistent with the new lump sum financing model that is being used in Small-Scale Partnerships or KA210.

Key Action 2:

Small Scale
Partnerships
(KA210)

Final Report Assessment

EXPERT
BRIEFING SHEET

Page 4

Erasmus+

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As can be seen in Table 2, beneficiaries are required to score **at least 60 points** during the quality assessment of their final report to enable their grant to be paid in full. Scores and consequences shown in this table are based on data provided in the Handbook on the Lump Sum Funding Model (2023).

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

	GOOD OR EXCELLENT	BELOW EXPECTATION	INADEQUATE	WEAK	NOT DELIVERED
Scoring Categories and Definitions	Rated good to excellent with results worthy of wider promotion	Activities not fully delivered or not consistent with initial planning with no convincing rationale for change.	Activities only partially delivered and/or lacking the expected quality.	Very few activities delivered and a general lack of quality in activities and outputs.	Planned activities not delivered.
Scoring Range	60-100 points	45-59 points	30-44 points	10-29 points	0-9 points
Consequence	100% Grant Paid	90% Grant Paid	70% Grant Paid	30% Grant Paid	0% Grant Paid

Where a final report is assessed as **Good or Excellent**, receiving an overall score of 60-100 points, the final grant amount will normally be paid in full. It is important in these cases to make use of the full range of available scores, ensuring that partnerships whose results are considered to be excellent are awarded visibly higher scores that will allow them to be identified as good practice examples. Small-Scale Partnerships have relatively simple goals which centre on widening access to the programme and encouraging newcomers or those with less experience in the programme to take a first step towards transnational partnership, networking and exchange. In this respect, failure is not something that we expect to see very often, with all small-scale partnership participants expected to achieve some form of active partnership, networking or exchange that can help to improve their engagement with European collaboration and Erasmus+. However, where the planned activities are not delivered in full, and there is no convincing rationale for change, then a lower score might need to be awarded (45-59 points) with a slight reduction applied to the planned lump sum. The same applies to projects where activities are only partially delivered and/or lacking the expected quality (30-44 points), or where very few activities were delivered (10-29 points). Exceptionally, where a project is not able to be delivered, for one reason or another, a score of 0-9 points will be awarded and all prefinancing amounts will be fully recovered. In cases where a planned project activity is not implemented, and not replaced by an equivalent activity in terms of contribution to the project objectives and associated budget, then the NA shall reduce the amount of the lump sum by the amount allocated to that specific activity. All such reductions will be considered alongside any lump sum financing reductions tied to the final score of the project, with a view to avoiding double penalisation. In all cases, experts should not use half-points in their assessments.

Key Action 2:

Small Scale
Partnerships
(KA210)

Final Report Assessment

EXPERT
BRIEFING SHEET

Page 5



Assessment Comments

In addition to scoring, experts are required to provide comments on each award criterion, each including a number of distinct aspects that need to be judged. In all cases, expert comments must be consistent with and reflect the score that is given. Additional detail on what to consider under each of the four quality assessment criteria can be found in the briefing sheet for *Assessment Criteria Briefing Sheet for KA210 Final Reports*.

Regardless of the score being awarded, experts must assess the final report in full, providing comments under each of the four assessment criteria. Additionally, experts must prepare comments on the application as a whole, providing a summative analysis of the final report and highlighting strengths and weaknesses associated with overall project delivery.

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. Expert comments will be quality checked by NAs to ensure these requirements are met. Where this is not the case, experts may be required to revise their assessment comments to ensure that the required quality standards are met.

Problems and Doubts

In no situation should an expert make contact with funding beneficiaries, or partners, directly. If documentation is missing or problems arise during final report assessment, experts should, in all cases, contact the NA whereupon a decision will be taken as to whether the beneficiary should be asked to provide additional information or clarification, or whether the final report should be assessed as presented.

Key Action 2:

Small Scale
Partnerships
(KA210)

Final Report Assessment

EXPERT
BRIEFING SHEET

Page 6

Erasmus+

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