

In this briefing sheet, additional detail is provided on the role and responsibilities of experts involved in assessing **Final Reports for KA220 Cooperation 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 final reports. In all cases, for projects where the lump sum financing amount exceeds €60,000, NAs are required to deliver at least two assessments of funding proposals and final reports, and to ensure that at least one external expert is 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.

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Quality Assessment of Final Report by Individual Experts

Before final report assessment begins, experts are briefed by the NA on the Erasmus+ programme and the action being addressed, as well as on related final report assessment procedures. Experts are provided with briefing documents and access to the online assessment module (<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-esc/index/>).

Before starting final report assessment, experts must ensure:

- sound knowledge of the Erasmus+ Programme Guide;
- in-depth knowledge of the action concerned, its objectives, and the policy priorities that apply to the targeted action and field(s): it is important to be familiar with objectives and priorities for the year the project was submitted and selected;
- 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/>).

In the agreement that is signed with beneficiaries, reference is made to the fact that the final report will be evaluated on the basis of quality criteria and score out of a maximum of 100 points, referring specifically to: the extent to which the project was implemented; the quality of activities undertaken; the quality of the products and results produced; learning outcomes and impact on participants and on wider individuals and organisations; innovation and complementarity to other initiatives; EU added-value; effectiveness of quality assurance and evaluation measures; quality and scope of dissemination.

In all cases, however, the focus is on the information provided during final reporting, where the predominant focus is on individual work packages and the perceived level of achievement of the listed actions, activities, and deliverables.

Experts are required to work individually and independently, providing scores and comments in the language specified by the NA. Experts are encouraged to initially work offline and to subsequently upload their data to the online assessment module, where there is also a requirement to confirm that no conflict of interest exists. Experts are also required to provide typology data in the online assessment module.

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Assessment Criteria

As an expert, you are required to assess final reports and individual work packages according to pre-defined quality assessment guidelines and criteria.

For KA220 Cooperation Partnerships, whilst four assessment criteria were used during the assessment of funding proposals (*Relevance; Quality of Project Design and Implementation; Quality of Partnership and Cooperation; and Impact*), a simpler review process has been introduced for final report assessment.

When assessing final reports for KA220 Cooperation Partnerships, experts should:

- make a judgement on the extent to which the project was implemented in line with the approved grant application, taking into account any formal amendments that were agreed during the lifetime of the project and reflecting activities delivered in the different work packages - additional detail is provided in the *Quality Assessment Briefing Sheet* for KA220 Final Reports;
- be aware that information might appear in different parts of the final report and accompanying annexes and make an effort to consider all relevant information when preparing comments and awarding scores.
- consider the type of partnership, the scale of activities and the amount of lump sum financing being accessed: cooperation partnerships can access either €120,000, €250,000 or €400,000 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 might have more limited ambitions which centre on the potential for delivering change and impact among participating staff, learners and institutions. This does not mean, however, that smaller partnerships might not have more significant ambitions for change and improvement.

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Assessment Scoring

We have already confirmed that final report assessment for KA220 Cooperation Partnerships is based on a review of individual work packages, allowing assessors to confirm the extent to which the project was implemented in line with the approved grant application. This change requires that we also re-think the scoring model for final report assessment. Other than Work Package 1 for Project Management, for which only comments are provided, each work package is scored out of 100 points. The overall score is then automatically calculated by the online assessment tool and represents the weighted average of the scores applied to individual work packages, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Example of Overall Scoring Calculations for Final Report Assessment in KA220 Cooperation Partnerships

| Work Package | Budget Share | Comments on Implementation and Achievements | Score |
|--|--------------|---|-------------------|
| WP1 Project Management | 20% | Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Curabitur ante felis, tempus eu augue et, luctus semper ligula. | No Score Required |
| WP2 ... | 25% | Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Curabitur ante felis, tempus eu augue et, luctus semper ligula. | 50 |
| WP3 ... | 25% | Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Curabitur ante felis, tempus eu augue et, luctus semper ligula. | 80 |
| WP4 ... | 30% | Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Curabitur ante felis, tempus eu augue et, luctus semper ligula. | 70 |
| OVERALL SCORE is calculated as the score for each WP multiplied by the % budget share for that WP, which is then divided by the total budget share (%) for non-management WPs. In the above example, the following calculation is used to calculate the weighted average: $\text{=sum}((50*25)+(80*25)+(70*30))/80 = 66,875$ which is then rounded to 67. | | | 67 |

Whilst the scoring of a funding proposal 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. This is consistent with the new lump sum financing model that is being used in KA220 Cooperation Partnerships.

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As can be seen in Table 2, beneficiaries are required to score **at least 70 points** (in each individual work package and for the final report assessment as a whole) to enable their lump sum financing to be paid in full. Scores and consequences are in all cases based on the Handbook on the Lump Sum Funding Model. Experts should not use half-points in their assessments.

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

| | GOOD OR EXCELLENT | BELOW EXPECTATION | INADEQUATE | WEAK | NOT DELIVERED |
|------------------------------------|--|---|--|--|--|
| Scoring Categories and Definitions | Activities 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. | Few activities or outputs delivered and a general lack of quality overall. | Planned activities and/or outputs not delivered. |
| Scoring Range | 70-100 points | 55-69 points | 40-54 points | 10-39 points | 0-9 points |
| Consequence | 100% Grant Paid | 90% Grant Paid | 60% Grant Paid | 30% Grant Paid | 0% Grant Paid |

Three types of reduction can apply when calculating the final lump sum amount for a KA220 cooperation partnership. In all cases, where a final report

- **Reduction 1:** this is considered only when a whole project activity is not delivered, and where there is no convincing explanation provided as to why this change happened, or what other activities might have taken place instead; this can only happen where an activity has been separately costed in the work programme. Where an activity is not separately costed, any reduction in activities should be reflected within work package scores. In all cases, Reduction 1 proposals should be noted in the box 'Recommendations on Grant Reductions', allowing a final decision to be taken by the NA. Reduction 1 is always applied before any % deduction of the lump sums resulting from Reduction 2 or Reduction 3.
- **Reduction 2:** this is considered where a final report is considered less than *Good or Excellent*, receiving an overall assessment score of <70, for which a reduction of between 10% and 100% is applied to the agreed lump sum. It is important to remember that the overall score is automatically calculated on the basis of scores given to individual work packages (except WP1, where no score is awarded) and that assessors should check the overall score before submitting their assessment, ensuring it is consistent with their overall perspective on project implementation. Assessors cannot alter the overall score directly, but changes to work package scores will impact the overall assessment score.
- **Reduction 3:** as with the overall assessment score, individual work packages that are awarded <70 points can also lead to a reduction of between 10% and 100% of the value of that work package. Reduction 3 is only applied where the overall assessment score is 70 or above (i.e. Reduction 2 and Reduction 3 cannot both be applied).

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Assessment Comments

In addition to scoring, experts are required to provide comments for each work package that is reviewed. In all cases, expert comments must be consistent with awarded scores. In cases where a score of less than 70 is awarded, a clear rationale should be included. Additional detail on what to consider under Work Package 1 (Project Management) and remaining Work Packages can be found in the *Quality Assessment Briefing Sheet* for KA220 Final Reports.

Regardless of the score being awarded, experts must assess the final report in full, providing comments for each work package. 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.

Consolidation and Final Scores

A new feature of Final Report Assessment for KA220, is the involvement of more than a single expert and the consequent need for consolidating assessments to arrive at a single set of comments and scores for each final report.

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 take the lead in consolidating final report assessment scores and comments, and for securing agreement from 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/assessment is needed.

Where there is a difference of 30 points or more between the total scores awarded by the two experts, the NA can invite an additional or third expert to undertake a final report assessment. This will only be instructed in exceptional cases, however. In cases where a third assessment is undertaken, consolidated scores and comments should be produced by taking into account the two assessments that are closest in terms of overall score, with the comments and scores of the remaining expert not required to be considered. The consolidation process then follows the same rules as already outlined above.

Consolidated assessment scores and comments should represent an agreement among the involved experts, resulting in a single set of complimentary and harmonious comments for each work package, with no elements of contradiction and with scores that are consistent with the final set of comments, rather than being the mathematical average. Consolidated assessment should take into account the content of individual assessments, but final comments and scores might differ as a result of the consolidation process. Experts should not use half-points or decimals in the consolidation phase.

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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.



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