In this briefing sheet, detail is provided on the expectations of NA staff, and others, in relation to the assessment comments prepared and submitted by experts. On pages 2-5, examples are also provided.

Introduction

Strategic Partnership applications are normally required to be assessed by at least two experts (one of which must be external to the NA). An exception to this is *School Exchange Partnerships* for which projects requesting a grant of ≤ €60,000 are required to be assessed by only one expert (internal or external) and projects requesting a grant of > €60,000 are required to be assessed by two experts (internal or external). This is known as the INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENT phase. During this phase, checks will be made by NA staff, with a view to ensuring that experts have understood the need for providing input that is coherent, comprehensive and consistent - the latter, in particular, ensuring a balance between comments and scores.

Once the INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENT phase has been completed, experts will be asked to bring together their scores and comments during a CONSOLIDATION phase. Consolidation activity can take place face-to-face - where the NA confirms a common date and location for experts to come together to consolidate their assessment results - or remotely - where experts work at their own premises with some requirement for virtual interaction. In all cases, the CONSOLIDATION process ultimately involves experts sharing scores and perspectives on an individual grant application, with a view to agreeing on a single assessment document in which common scores and consolidated comments are provided (not simply the average of the two).

Within the NA, staff are responsible for ensuring that all assessments meet minimum standards: ensuring that each assessment is Coherent, Comprehensive, Consistent, Courteous and Concise (the Five Cs):

Coherent	Comprehensive	Consistent	Courteous	Concise
comments should be easy to understand (even for a reader that has not read the application) and should provide feedback that the applicant will understand and can learn from	comments should be provided for each of the award criteria and should incorporate most, if not all, of the composite elements	comments should be consistent with the scores that have been awarded for each criterion and should be aligned with the predefined scoring bands for each action	comments should always be polite and respectful, and should avoid first person reference (e.g. I think that…)	whilst exceptions exist, comments should be of a standard size, as determined by NA staff (e.g. 1-2 paragraphs per criterion); experts should avoid repeating that which is written in the application

NA staff must ensure that final assessment data (scores and comments) is able to be used to inform the National Selection Committee and to provide feedback to individual applicants. Consequently, NA staff might request that experts revisit or revise an assessment where the Five Cs are not satisfactorily met. However, in no situation should NA staff propose changes to the scores attributed by experts, asking instead that experts, themselves, ensure consistency between scores and comments.

Example Comments: Positive Assessment

☞ RELEVANCE

The proposal is both relevant and well-suited to the selected funding action and provides for university-business collaboration in the targeted discipline and sector. Industry collaboration relies, positively, on the direct involvement of enterprises, during the project lifetime, with all such plans wholly in line with broader project goals. Access to such enterprises is also well explained from the perspective of individual partner regions and countries.

Relevant European policies and strategic development objectives are adequately referenced and sit well with broader project goals and targets. The complementarity of the proposed action is also well-described in relation to the participating partner institutions and is particularly convincing for partners from higher education. Needs and development responses are wholly appropriate and achievable and make for a valid three-year collaboration project.

Arguments for European added-value centre on a single European development challenge through which greater employability can expect to be achieved for new (or recent) graduates and refer, appropriately, to plans for knowledge sharing and joint development activity.

☞ QUALITY OF THE PROJECT DESIGN

A clear and convincing work programme and governing methodology is provided in the proposal, via which the broader objectives of the project can expect to be successfully delivered. All expected work phases are present with end beneficiary involvement often positively at the heart of all that is planned.

Partner roles and contributions are clear with relevant expertise also confirmed. Management plans are clearly stated and will benefit from the introduction and use of a dedicated management handbook. Quality assurance plans positively extend across processes, participation and deliverables with the required internal and external actors each involved. Pilot testing plans are wholly complementary to broader development actions with each involving sufficient beneficiary numbers. Days attributed to individual outputs and activities are appropriate.

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☞ QUALITY OF THE PROJECT TEAM AND COOPERATION ARRANGEMENTS

Participating partners are wholly relevant when considering goals for development, testing and collaboration, with each having confirmed participation across each of the core delivery phases. Industry and education partners each convincingly confirm the importance of the planned collaboration. As a whole, the required expertise is present, with mechanisms for access to wider enterprise also clearly outlined. Staff profiles additionally confirm the required skill and expertise to enable successful project delivery. Communication plans are clearly stated and rely on both face-to-face and technology-supported collaboration.

☞ IMPACT AND DISSEMINATION

Dissemination and exploitation goals are clearly stated with listed tools, channels, platforms and approaches each consistent with broader development goals. Particularly positive are plans for confirming target audiences, in the first phase of the project, alongside specific and targeted channels for dissemination.

Exploitation goals are rather less tangible but confirm plans for continued use of the developed platform and tools, particularly within the participating institutions. Moreover, there are plans for the development of a bespoke exploitation strategy which is positive. Open access references are clear and convincing as are plans for maintaining the developed platform.

Target audiences are numerous with each having confirmed benefits, irrespective of the level of involvement in the project, and with cited indicators generally convincing and not overly ambitious.

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Example Comments: Less Positive Assessment

☞ RELEVANCE

Whilst positively involving partners from different sectors of education and industry, the focus of this project is on vocational training in the hospitality sector yet with little obvious contribution to innovation and modernisation in the targeted field of higher education.

Needs are adequately argued and referenced from a broader European perspective, yet it remains unclear how planned platform and content development will complement existing training (course/programme) delivery in the participating partner countries and institutions. References to a lack of efficient and accessible training are declarative and fail to be substantiated, in the proposal, with supporting data. More needed to be said as regards the complementarity and added-value of that which is planned.

European added-value centres predominantly on confirming the importance of education and enterprise collaboration which, itself, is not sufficient to justify development plans. On a positive note, plans for cross-border knowledge sharing are convincingly stated.

☞ QUALITY OF THE PROJECT DESIGN

Whilst covering each of the expected work phases, there are areas of the work programme that are unclear and unconvincing.

Whilst positive to see plans for the translation and localisation of content, the proposal fails to confirm the source of all future learning content. The planned use of a content management system is also not explained in any detail with a need to explain the complementarity of this with broader plans for learner mobility, including classroom-based and self-directed learning activities. Plans for field mid-stage research, once the learning platform has been developed, also require greater argument.

Management plans are appropriate with lead roles adopted by different project partners, which is additionally positive, although the reason for selecting P7 to lead on dissemination activity requires greater explanation.

Whilst the benefits of planned transnational mobility are fairly well argued, from a learner development perspective, such activities are difficult to align with broader project and platform development goals and bring little obvious added-value.

The overall budget is not excessive, as a whole, yet there are unexplained variances in the amount of days attributed to individual outputs even where the depth of associated activity can expect to be the same.

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☞ QUALITY OF THE PROJECT TEAM AND COOPERATION ARRANGEMENTS

Whilst confirming that the targeted developments respond to a common challenge for all partners, it would have been useful to also cite needs within the selected partner countries. Positive is the fact that partners represent the targeted sector, although there is a definite weighting towards vocational education and training which is somewhat misaligned with the field selected in this application (higher education).

Staff profiles are well-suited to the planned technological development yet more needs to be said as regards the capacity of staff to develop and deliver learning (course/programme) content.

Communication and collaboration mechanisms are adequately described and generally convincing, including the proposed mechanisms for decision-making and conflict resolution.

☞ IMPACT AND DISSEMINATION

Dissemination goals are appropriate and extend across both traditional and technology-supported actions. Target audiences are numerous with obvious beneficiaries formed by individual learners and teachers/trainers, which is positive. References to beneficiaries in the higher education sector, however, need much greater explanation and detail.

Sustainability actions centre on plans for the commercialisation of the developed platforms yet there is a need to also confirm plans for open access. Whilst technologically convincing, development goals fail to be adequately positioned alongside existing learning (course/programme) delivery mechanisms, particularly in the field of higher education, thus limiting the potential for impact overall.