

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

Introduction

A large part of the Erasmus+ Programme follows a decentralised model of implementation, meaning that Erasmus+ National Agencies (NAs) in the 33 Programme Countries take responsibility for the management of decentralised funds including for the promotion of calls for proposals, the selection and monitoring of projects and the accreditation of organisations and consortia with a view to allowing (or facilitating) programme participation. For some actions, NAs are required to use independent or 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 fulfil predefined quality criteria obtain accreditation. For other actions, usually where lower levels of funding are requested, NAs will ask internal experts (NA staff) 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

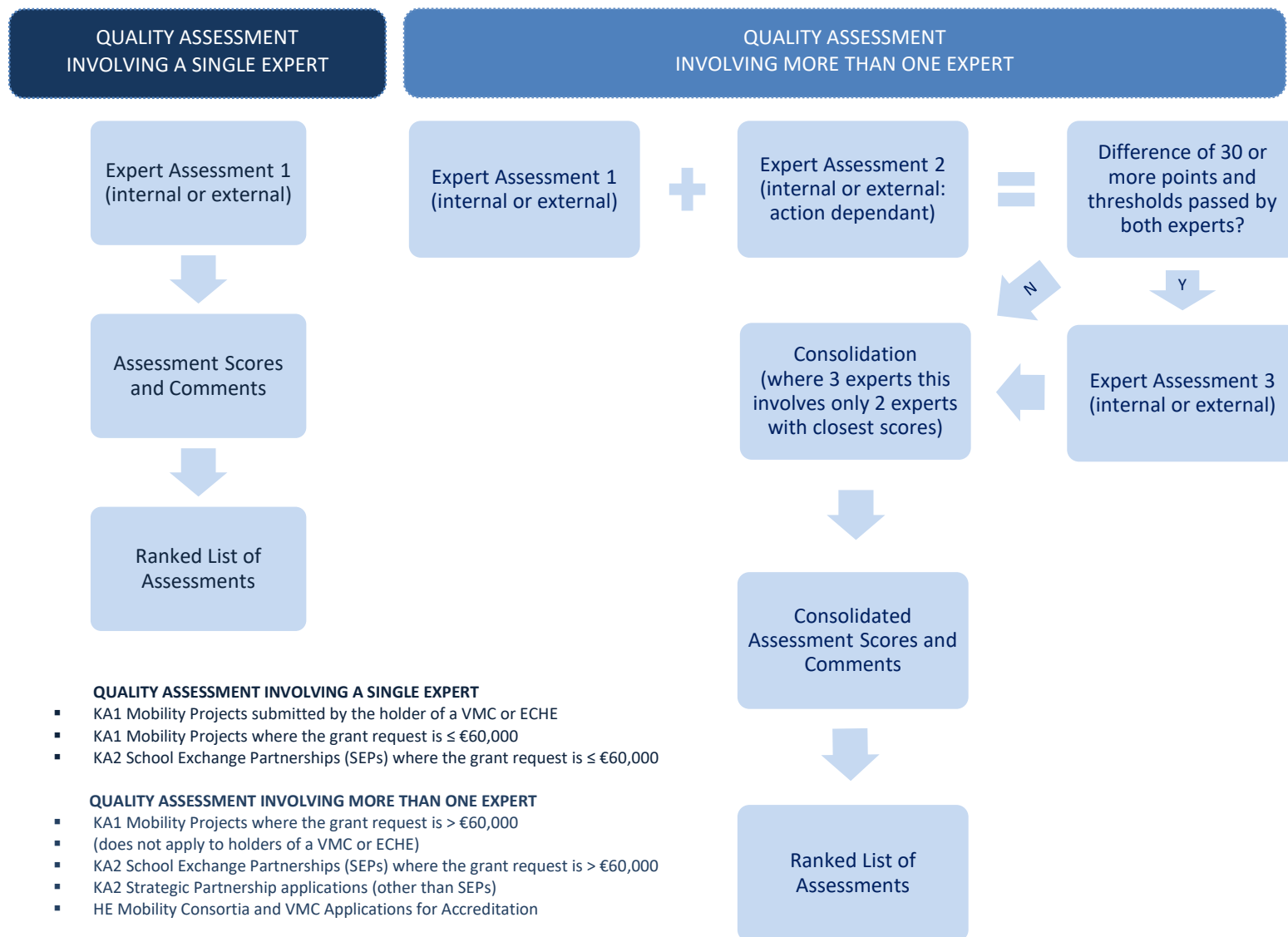
As an expert, you are appointed on the basis of existing knowledge, skills and experience in the field(s) of education, training and youth for which you have been asked to assess applications. In all cases, experts will be appointed from within the same country as the NA or from another Erasmus+ Programme country. To ensure independence, however, 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 also bound to a code of conduct that will be detailed in your appointment letter or contract. 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 other actors or organisations.

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 in the selection round 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.



Erasmus+
Experts
(KA1-KA2)

Figure 1: Overview of Expert Involvement in the Assessment Process



Quality Assessment by Individual Experts

Before assessments begin, experts are briefed by the NA on the programme and the action under assessment, as well as on the assessment process and procedures.

Experts are provided with reference, background and briefing documents and are given access to the [Online Expert Evaluation Tool \(OEET\)](#) in which the results of the assessment must be entered using pre-defined quality assessment forms. Experts can choose to initially work offline (e.g. through use of a template) and to subsequently enter their data in OEET.

Before starting the assessment of applications, experts must have:

- sound knowledge of the 2020 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 Briefing Sheet on Policy Documents, Frameworks and Reports and/or Annex III of the *2020 Erasmus+ Guide for Experts on Quality Assessment*;
- in-depth understanding of the award criteria applicable to the applications under assessment;
- 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;
- basic competence in the use of the OEET, based on a technical briefing provided by the NA.

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 the benchmarking of applications (provided by applicants) and quality assessments (produced by experts).

Standard quality assessment criteria have been established by the European Commission and are to be used in all Programme 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 summarising their assessment using the language specified by the NA. On completion, experts should validate their individual assessment in the OEET, thereby confirming that they have no conflict of interest with respect to the assessment of that particular proposal.

As part of the quality assessment process, experts may be required to provide additional information or data, in the OEET, allowing applications to be classified for statistical purposes (for example, priorities addressed; targeted themes).

Award Criteria and Scoring

As an expert, you are required to assess applications using only the award criteria defined in the 2020 Erasmus+ Programme Guide and the associated Erasmus+ Guide for Experts on Quality Assessment. 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 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 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, with separate briefing sheets provided for both KA1 and KA2.

When assessing applications against 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 make an effort take all relevant information into account when producing comments and scores;
- should consider the type of project, the scale of the planned activities and the amount of funding requested: projects will vary widely in terms of size, complexity, experience of the participating organisations, and process or product-orientation and, in this respect, experts should integrate the *proportionality principle* into their assessment.

Applications are scored out of a maximum of 100 points. Different actions use different award criteria and maximum scores might differ for each award criteria depending on the action (see table 1). However, scores do not change according to the field selected or the country of submission.

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 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 partnership, 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.

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

Award Criteria	Scoring Range per Award Criteria and Action			
	KEY ACTION 1			KEY ACTION 2
	Accreditation of HE Mobility Consortia	Mobility Projects in the field of HE between Programme and Partner Countries	Mobility Projects in the fields of AE, SE, VET and Youth	Strategic Partnerships in the fields of AE, HE, SE, VET and Youth (including SEPs)
Relevance of the Project	30	30	30	30
Quality of Project Design and Implementation	20	30	40	20
Quality of Project Team and Cooperation Arrangements	20	20	-	20
Impact and Dissemination	30	20	30	30
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

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 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]
40 Points	34 - 40	28 - 33	20 - 27	0 - 19
30 Points	26 - 30	21 - 25	15 - 20	0 - 14
20 Points	17 - 20	14 - 16	10 - 13	0 - 9

Award Criteria and Scoring [continued]

For each scoring ceiling (20 points, 30 points, 40 points), scoring bands have been pre-defined in which minimum and maximum scores are provided for different quality standards (see 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 involving different experts across the programme countries.

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

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.

In addition to providing comments on individual assessment criteria, experts must also provide comments on the application as a whole. In these overall comments experts must provide a summative analysis of the application highlighting its relative strengths and weaknesses and indicating 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. 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.

As a part of their assessment, experts should analyse the coherence of the funding request (amount) with the planned activities and the proposed outputs. Where an application is of sufficient quality to receive a grant but there is a lack of coherence with the proposed budget, experts can suggest a reduction (but never an increase) to the proposed funding amount, specifying items that should be reduced and reasons why they are considered incoherent or excessive. NA staff will ultimately decide if a funding request is to be reduced, taking expert comments into account.

For the majority of KA1 and KA2 decentralised actions, 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. There are exceptions, however, with projects targeting International Credit Mobility in the Field of HE between Programme and Partner Countries having a minimum funding threshold of 70 points.

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

Consolidation and Final Scores

Where an application is assessed by a single expert, this assessment results in the final score and assessment 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 lead in the preparation of a consolidated assessment bringing together scores and comments from the individual assessments and seeking agreement from the other expert. The resultant consolidation should also provide a final recommendation to the NA on the amount of funding to be awarded to the applicant, taking into account any proposed budget revision. Exceptionally, where the two experts are unable to agree on a single set of consolidated scores and comments, the NA will decide on the need (or not) for assessment by a third expert.

Where there is a difference of 30 points or more between the total scores awarded by the two experts, the NA will normally ask for a third expert to undertake an assessment. An exception exists where the two original experts have each 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 remaining assessment scores and comments 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 consistent comments and scores and not simply the average score from the two individual assessments. During consolidation it is important that experts also agree on a single set of budget-related comments (for inclusion under the heading of: Quality of Project Design) and on the need, or not, for budget reductions.

Consolidated assessment scores and comments 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 (or, in the case of applications for accreditation, the list of applications suggested for accreditation).

At the consolidation stage decimals (half-points) can be used in applying final scores.

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.