

In this briefing sheet, detail is provided in relation to the various **Quality Assurance** measures that can be implemented by NA staff in relation to the assessment of KA1 mobility applications.

Quality Assurance for projects requesting up to (and including) €60,000 in funding

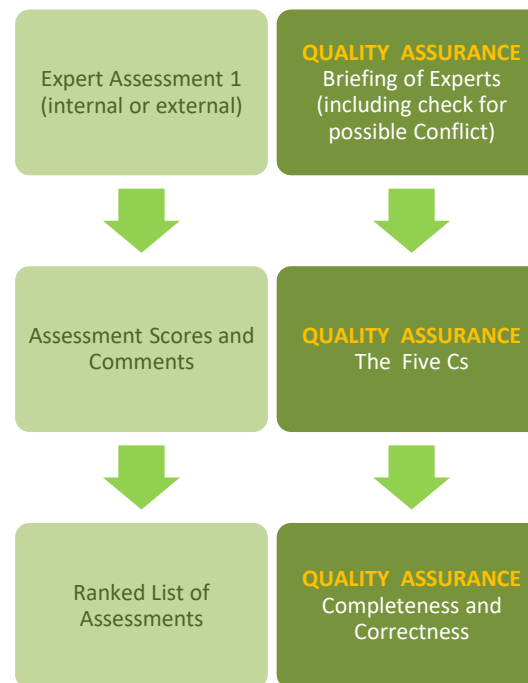
As confirmed by the Guide for NAs, KA1 applications requesting funding of €60,000 or less are required to be assessed by a single expert (internal or external). An exception to this the field of HE, where no quality assessment is required for holders of an Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE). In all cases where a quality assessment is undertaken, experts are required to produce a set of scores and comments, in line with the award criteria for the action, with a final score automatically generated by the Online Expert Evaluation Tool (OEE).

Whilst relatively straightforward, in terms of assessment steps (individual assessment leads to scores and comments and a position in the final ranking list), a number of quality assurance steps can be undertaken by NA staff with a view to limiting the potential for error and ensuring that assessment results in the required standard of assessor input (scores and comments) for consideration by the national selection committee.

As shown in *Figure 1*, quality assurance activity begins with ensuring that all participating experts are provided with an “expert briefing” during which the core goals of the assessment exercise are confirmed alongside national, European and programme level priorities, assessment criteria and thresholds, a schedule for assessment, and all or any tools or materials that need to be used or consulted during assessment. Experts can be presented either with the common Guide for Experts on Quality Assessment (European Commission) or with a series of bespoke briefing or information sheets able to relay the same information.

During the expert briefing, where not previously addressed, it is important to confirm that no Conflict of Interest exists among participating experts. In practical terms, this goes one step beyond the signing of a “Declaration on the Prevention of Conflicts of Interest and Disclosure of Information” and requires that all participating experts (internal or external) work methodically through the list of attributed applications, checking the names of individual applicants, coordinators and partner organisations and ensuring that there is no conflict of interest. According to Financial Regulation Art. 57(2) “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 shared interest with a recipient”.

Figure 1: Overview of Key Assessment and Quality Assurance Phases (≤ €60,000)



Key Action 1:
Individual Mobility

QUALITY
ASSURANCE

Briefing Sheet
Page 1

Where a potential or actual conflict of interest is identified, NA staff need to decide on one of the following courses of action:

- exclude the expert from the whole assessment process: usually only required where there is a direct conflict of interest such as the expert’s own organisation participating in one or more applications;
- replace the application that is causing the conflict with another application: usually the case where an expert is familiar with, or has had previous relations with, an individual or organisation but has no direct link with any project application;
- continue as planned: this might be the case where a perceived connection is felt to be sufficiently in the past, or sufficiently at a distance, with little potential for influence over the assessment process.

Once the briefing process is completed, and potential conflicts have been checked, experts can begin to assess the applications that they have been attributed producing a unique set of assessment scores and comments for each assessed application.

At this stage, the NA is responsible for ensuring that assessments are undertaken to the required or expected standard and that the resulting scores and comments meet NA and higher-level expectations.

Depending on the total number of assessments being undertaken, and the time available to NA staff, either a FULL or a PARTIAL (e.g. random sample of files for each expert) check should be undertaken, 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 are responsible for ensuring that all assessments meet the above standard, allowing assessment data (scores and comments) to be used by the national selection committee and in the provision of feedback to individual applicants. NA staff can request that an individual expert revisits or revises an assessment where the Five Cs are not felt to be satisfactorily achieved, however, in no situation should NA staff propose changes to the scores attributed by experts, asking instead that experts ensure consistency between scores and comments.

Whilst experts in all programme countries continue to use a single online assessment tool (OEET), this use of technology is no guarantee of accurate final data. Previously-unidentified software glitches, or simple human error during data entry, might easily result in missing assessments, missing comments and/or zero-entry scores. With this in mind, additional checks can be considered by NA staff with a view to ensuring the completeness and correctness of assessment data:

Completeness	Correctness
<p>confirming that the total number of submitted assessments matches the number of applications attributed to experts, with any anomalies able to be easily explained (e.g. applications deemed ineligible during assessment) also confirming that any zero entries or scores are meant to be (e.g. relaying a total lack of data for one or more award criteria)</p>	<p>ensuring that scores and comments are consistent with those contained in the printed and signed assessments, through undertaking a quick random sample of assessments (i.e. visiting a small number of applications in the OEET and ensuring that the required data is present in all fields of the assessment)</p>

Quality Assurance for projects requesting more than €60,000 in funding

As confirmed by the Guide for NAs, KA1 applications requesting more than €60,000 in funding are normally required to be assessed by at least two experts (internal or external). An exception is made where the applicant is an accredited organisation holding an Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) or VET Mobility Charter, where only one assessment is required (internal or external). As can be seen in *Figure 2*, the involvement of more than one expert requires a more complex assessment process that culminates in a single series of assessment scores and comments able to be used by the national selection committee and in the provision of feedback to individual applicants.

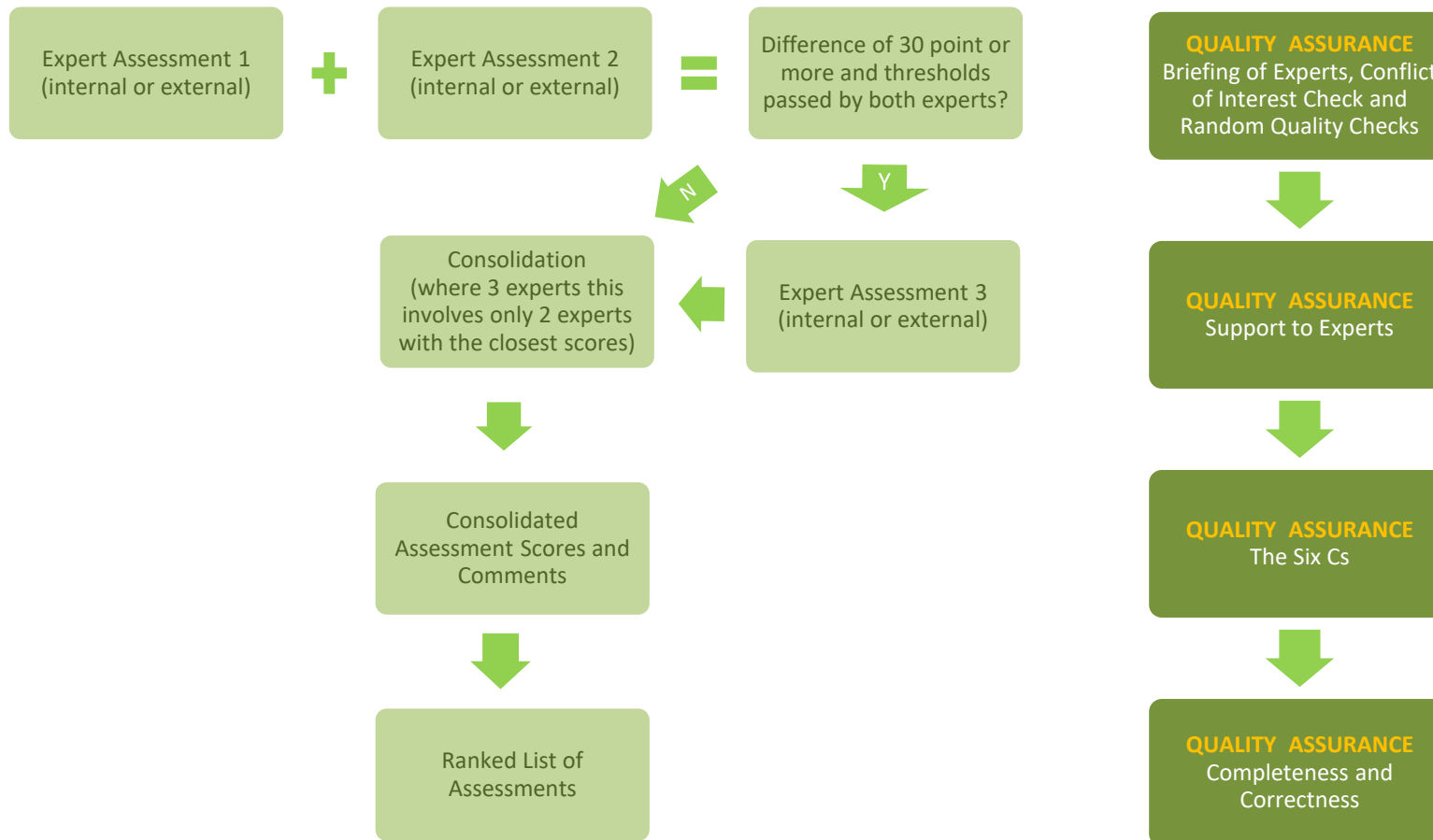
As with applications requesting lower amounts of funding (see earlier in this briefing sheet), quality assurance activity begins with ensuring that all participating experts (internal or external) are provided with an “expert briefing” during which the core goals of assessment and consolidation are confirmed alongside national, European and programme level priorities, assessment criteria and thresholds, a schedule for assessment, and all or any tools or materials that need to be used or consulted during assessment. Experts can be presented either with the common Guide for Experts on Quality Assessment (European Commission) or with a series of bespoke briefing or information sheets able to relay the same information.

During the expert briefing, where not previously addressed, it is important to ensure that no Conflict of Interest exists among participating experts. In practical terms, this goes one step beyond the signing of a “Declaration on the Prevention of Conflicts of Interest and Disclosure of Information” and requires that all participating (internal or external) experts work methodically through the list of attributed applications, checking the names of individual applicants, coordinators and partner organisations and ensuring that there is no conflict of interest. According to Financial Regulation Art. 57(2) “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 shared interest with a recipient”.

Key Action 1:
Individual Mobility

QUALITY
ASSURANCE

Figure 2: Overview of Key Assessment and Quality Assurance Phases (> €60,000)



Key Action 1:
Individual Mobility

QUALITY
ASSURANCE

Where a potential or actual conflict of interest is identified, NA staff need to decide on one of the following courses of action:

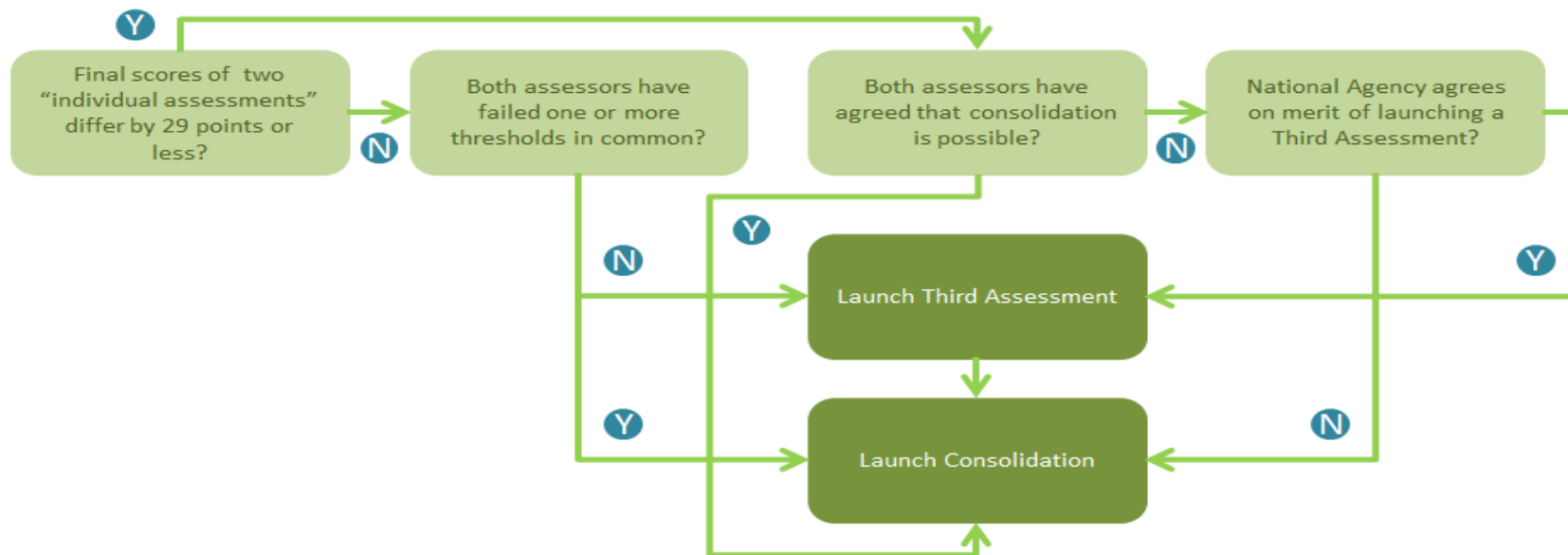
- exclude the expert from the whole assessment process: usually only required where there is a direct conflict of interest such as the expert’s own organisation participating in one or more applications;
- replace the application that is causing the conflict with another application: usually the case where an expert is familiar with, or has had previous relations with, an individual or organisation but has no direct link with any project application;
- continue as planned: this might be the case where a perceived connection is felt to be sufficiently in the past, or sufficiently at a distance, with little potential for influence over the assessment process.

Once the briefing process is completed, and potential conflicts have been checked, experts can begin to assess the applications that they have been attributed producing a unique set of assessment scores and comments for each assessed application. At this stage, the NA is responsible for ensuring that assessments are undertaken to the required or expected standard and that the resulting scores and comments meet NA and higher-level expectations.

As INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENT is only the first stage in the assessment process, it is not necessary to check every assessment to ensure that comments are *courteous* or *concise* - especially as it is only the CONSOLIDATED scores and comments that will be accessed by wider audiences - although it can be useful to undertake a random check of 2-3 files for each of the participating experts ensuring that they have understood the need to be *coherent*, *comprehensive* and *consistent* in their assessment.

At the point where both experts have completed their INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENT, the NA has an additional responsibility for gauging the complementarity of scores and comments and for (potentially) launching a third assessment where experts have a **significant difference** of opinion (i.e. where there is a difference of 30 points or more between individual assessments). In all cases, NA staff need to consider a series of questions relating to differences in scores, the achievement of assessment thresholds and the potential for consolidation, with a view to deciding on the correct course of action (i.e. launch third assessment, launch consolidation): as shown in *Figure 3*.

Figure 3: Overview of Decision-making Process relating to the Need for a Third Assessment



Where a THIRD ASSESSMENT is launched, NA staff have the same responsibility for quality assurance as with earlier assessments (expert assessment 1, expert assessment 2) with the same assessment process followed and resulting in a unique set of assessment scores and comments. Upon completion of the third assessment, NA staff need to select the two experts with the closest scores, with only these two experts invited to work together to produce a final set of scores and comments (consolidation process).

At whichever point the consolidation process is launched, it will only ever involve two experts coming together to produce a single set of scores and comments (i.e. in no case will the comments and scores of three experts be used). In all cases, the NA is responsible for nominating a lead expert that will review the two individual assessments, discuss with their fellow expert and produce a single consolidated assessment (comments and scores) that both experts have agreed on.

As consolidation results are used to inform the national selection committee, and to provide feedback to individual applicants, there is a need for NA staff to quality-assure the results of this process with, wherever possible, a FULL check undertaken, ensuring that each assessment is Coherent, Comprehensive, Consistent, Courteous, Consolidated and Concise (the Six Cs):

<p>Individual Assessment and Consolidation Processes</p> <p>➔</p>	<p>Coherent</p> <p>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</p>	<p>Comprehensive</p> <p>comments should be provided for each of the award criteria and should incorporate most, if not all, of the composite elements</p>	<p>Consistent</p> <p>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</p>
<p>Consolidation Process Only</p> <p>➔</p>	<p>Courteous</p> <p>comments should always be polite and respectful, and should avoid first person reference (e.g. I think that...)</p>	<p>Consolidated</p> <p>comments should read as single texts and should be harmonised (not contradictory)</p>	<p>Concise</p> <p>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</p>

NA staff are responsible for ensuring that all assessments meet the above standards and can request that an individual expert revisits or revises an assessment or consolidation where the Six Cs are not met satisfactorily, however, in no situation should NA staff propose changes to the scores attributed by experts, asking instead that experts ensure consistency between scores and comments.

Whilst experts in all programme countries continue to use a single online assessment tool (OET), this use of technology is no guarantee of accurate final data. Previously-unidentified software glitches, or simple human error during data entry, might easily result in missing assessments, missing comments and/or zero-entry scores. With this in mind, a final series of checks can be considered by NA staff with a view to ensuring the completeness and correctness of assessment data:



Completeness	Correctness
confirming that the total number of submitted assessments matches the number of applications attributed to experts, with any anomalies able to be easily explained (e.g. applications deemed ineligible during assessment) also confirming that any zero entries or scores are meant to be (e.g. relaying a total lack of data for one or more award criteria)	ensuring that scores and comments are consistent with those contained in the printed and signed assessments, through undertaking a quick random sample of assessments (i.e. visiting a small number of applications in the OET and ensuring that the required data is present in all fields of the assessment)

Key Action 1: Individual Mobility

QUALITY ASSURANCE