IMI2 JU responses to the Independent Observer's reports

Call ID: H2020-JTI-IMI2-2020-23-two-stage

IMI2 JU 23rd Call for Proposals

Dates of evaluation: 20 – 26 October 2020 (Stage 1)

13 – 15 April 2021 (Stage 2)

Name of the Independent Observer: Samuel Gwed

Summary of Recommendations – Stage 1

The observer deems this Stage 1 evaluation process successful, transparent, fair and at the highest standard possible based on the H2020 evaluation rules. The observer suggests the following recommendations to further strengthen and streamline the proposal evaluation processes:

- *During the general briefing:*

  a. *Reiterate the responsibilities of the rapporteur (drafting based on the Individual Evaluation Reports (IERs), complete the Consensus Report (CR) based on the comments during the consensus meeting, provide the draft CR with the final comments and scores based on the consensus meeting, finalising the CR based on the quality control feedback performed by the IMI2 JU Office).*
  b. *Emphasise the confidentiality required, stressing that experts must be in a room where there are no one else over listening to the consensus meetings.*
  c. *Stress that the proposal must be evaluated on its own merits.*
  d. *Clarify what is considered a weakness and what is a shortcoming; how they must be recorded and scored. It is recommended therefore that some guidelines are provided of what is meant by "a small number of shortcomings".*

- *Increase the time allocated to the individual remote evaluation of proposals, and leave enough time to rapporteur for compilation of comments. Also, experts strongly suggested that the remote phase should include at least three weekends.*

- *An early check in terms of quality (i.e. four days after the individual evaluation process commences) of one individual evaluation report per expert by the assigned*

Scientific Officers, will catch experts' misunderstandings and it would improve the quality and efficiency of the process.

- *During the consensus meetings, it is recommended that:*

  a. *The moderator reminds experts about the call requirements.*
  b. *The moderator or the rapporteur shows to the experts the scoring table when the panel is about to give the consensus score.*
  c. *Ask experts to be in a quiet environment (since the consensus meeting are taking place remotely) during the consensus meetings and panel review meetings.*

- *The role of 'quality controller' is well described through Vademecum on H2020 submission and evaluation procedure but the Vademecum or the IMI manual for evaluation does not specify who in the staff has to take this role. To avoid confusion this might be detailed somewhere.*

Summary of Recommendations – Stage 2

The observer deems this Stage 2 Evaluation process successful, transparent, fair and at the highest standard possible based on the H2020 rules. In addition to the recommendations generated for Stage 1, the observer suggests the following recommendations to further strengthen and streamline the proposal evaluation processes:

- *Given the role of the rapporteur, Scientific Officers should take into consideration the required skills for this role when selecting an expert to act as rapporteur.*

- *During the consensus meetings, it is recommended that the Scientific Officer or the rapporteur shows to the experts the scoring table when the panel is about to give the consensus score.*

- *The additional payment for the rapporteur task is 90 Euros, but the work is worth at least a half day of additional pay (225 Euros). It is reasonable to request IMI2 JU to consider this point.*

IMI2 JU responses to the recommendations

IMI2 JU is pleased to have the confirmation that the overall quality of Call 23 evaluation was high with transparent and rigorous procedures.

After the recommendations received at the end of stage 1 evaluation, we paid special attention to reinforce even more, and throughout all the steps of stage 2 evaluation, the messages given to the experts at the general experts briefing. These include the role of the rapporteur, the confidentiality aspects of the evaluation, the need to evaluate the proposals on their own merits, and further guidance on the distinction between weaknesses and shortcomings.

We acknowledge the recommendation to increase the length of the stage 1 remote evaluation phase (submission of IERs and preparation of draft CR) and in particular to include at least three weekends. This would help experts to better manage the workload, especially for topics receiving a large number of proposals as experienced in this Call. This recommendation will be taken into consideration for future Calls for proposals.

We agree that early checks of the first IERs a few days after the start of the remote evaluation phase is a very useful practice that allows to identify and correct any missing elements or misinterpretation of the guidance provided, thus improving the quality of the submitted IERs and facilitating the preparation of the CR by the rapporteurs. Although this practice has already been put in place as a pilot for some topics, it has not been fully successful, because its implementation relies on the experts' availability and contribution to read and evaluate one or more proposals much earlier than the IER submission deadline. We will consider the possibility to implement this practice in a more structural manner with specific guidance, including early deadlines outside the IT system for the drafting of a first IER by each expert.

We take note of the recommendation to share in the screen the scoring table when the experts are taking a decision on the scores for the proposals. This table is of course provided to the experts in the general briefing presentation and in the guidelines sent to them before the start of the evaluation. However, while in a face-to-face meeting the scoring table is visually present in the meeting room and in the experts' folders of documents, in a consensus meeting via webconference the table may be less accessible by the experts. Therefore, this recommendation will be followed in any future consensus meetings held remotely.

Concerning the selection of the rapporteurs, we agree that they should be selected based on certain skills that are relevant for this role, such as ability to integrate and summarise comments, identify divergent opinions and good drafting skills. Although this is the most important criterion, in stage 1 we also have to take into consideration the workload balance between experts, including new experts without prior experience as rapporteurs in IMI2 evaluations. In addition, we rely ultimately on the expert's acceptance to act as rapporteur, as taking this role is not a compulsory task in their contract. An increase in the additional payment for this task is currently under discussion in the preparation of the future Calls for proposals under Horizon Europe.

Finally, IMI2 JU follows H2020 rules for evaluation, where the role of the Quality Controller (QC) in the Consensus Report/Evaluation Summary Report phase is clearly defined. However, we take note for further defining the role and responsible staff performing the QC during future Calls for proposals.