

H2020-JTI-IMI2-2014-02

Evaluation of Full Proposals

11-12 December 2014

Independent Observers Report

Dr Ángeles Rodríguez-Pena

**Senior Scientist, Biomedicine Research Institute,
Spanish National Research Council, Madrid, Spain**

Background

This is the report of the independent observer for a **single stage, fast-track evaluation** of the five topics covered under the Ebola+ programme (IMI2-2014-02)

This call was launched on the 6 November 2014 with the submission deadline of 1 December 2014 CET 17:00 and included the following five topics:

IMI2-2014-02-01 Vaccine development Phase I, II, and III

IMI2-2014-02-02 Manufacturing capability

IMI2-2014-02-03 Stability of vaccines during transport and storage

IMI2-2014-02-04 Deployment and compliance of vaccination regimens

IMI2-2014-02-05 Rapid diagnostic tests

The indicative IMI2 JU financial contribution for the five topics mentioned was up to EUR 140 million. EFPIA companies are expected to provide an in-kind contribution of around EUR 140 million.

The online submission and evaluation tool of the IMI2 JU (SOFIA) functioned well during the remote evaluation and the writing and uploading of the consensus reports. Due to the short time given, the deadline to submit the individual independent evaluations was extended until 9 AM on 10 December 2014.

The consensus panel meeting took place in Brussels from 11th to 12th of December 2014. To note that the ethical panel was convened in parallel and held its meeting in the adjacent room which allowed for coordination and mutual feed-back between the two panels.

All proposals evaluated under the 5 different topics were ranked in one single list from which the best-ranked proposals, in the framework of the available budget, were selected to be invited to prepare a Grant Agreement.

Overall observations

This fast-track evaluation was in the view of this observer, conducted professionally, fairly and with commitment from all participants, ensuring an impartial and thoughtful evaluation of all proposals

Highly professional and well qualified professionals were contacted to conduct the evaluations, and take part in the onsite evaluation meetings.

The on-site evaluation and review process was conducted in accordance with the plan set out in the pre-defined agenda and the meeting was moderated by one IMI scientific officer assisted during the whole period by a second also very experienced IMI scientific officer

The number of evaluators per proposal was high ranging from six (due to conflict of interest) to up to eight external experts can covered well the expertise needed. The panel members were selected from this pool of external experts.

Panel members also acted as rapporteurs of the proposals submitted to the call and were pre-assigned prior to arriving in Brussels which given time to prepare well for this task. Each rapporteur presented a summary of the various views and comments of the external experts organised per criteria of the evaluation to the panel which helps to streamline the process and gave focus to the evaluation group. (S)he was responsible of the drafting of the consensus report.

The consensus panel worked efficiently. Each proposal was independently and carefully assessed upon presentation of the proposal rapporteur of its key points, followed by the views of the other panel members that have evaluated the proposal and for each of the evaluation criteria. No comments were allowed from panel members that have not reviewed the proposal.

No EFPIA representatives were present or participated in this fast-track procedure.

In the view of this observer:

- There were no violations against the rules of the published evaluation guidelines.
- Independent experts were of a high quality and possessed expertise relevant for the evaluation of each topic.
- Evaluation of the proposals, panel discussions were fair and transparent.
- Confidentiality and conflict of interest were taken into account and well managed
- A consensus was reached by the independent experts on the scoring and ranking of all proposals.
- The Final Consensus Evaluation Reports represent the consensus opinions of the Panels.

Role and approach of the independent observer

The role of the independent observer is set in the IMI2 Manual for submission and evaluation and grant award. This observer had access to all written and on-line information supporting the evaluation process and attended the briefing and evaluation panel sessions held in Brussels 11-12 December 2014.

I would like to express here my thanks to the panel members for being amenable to being 'observed' and in particular to the IMI staff for their help, input and support during this exercise.

Observations and recommendations

The overall opinion is that the evaluation process was carefully and fairly implemented, of excellent quality and conformed to International standards of peer review.

Established as a fast-track procedure, the short times for the submission of the full proposals, the remote evaluation and the consensus panel meeting, have been very demanding to everyone concerned: Applicants, independent expert evaluators, panel members and in particular to the IMI2 JU Programme Office whose work-load was considerable but were still expertly prepared and supported a very successful evaluation exercise.

The moderation of the panel was excellent and was greatly aided by the considerable support given by other members of the IMI Programme Office. In particular the legal support provided by the two lawyers that were available throughout the two days.

It is also considered advantageous to have a single panel evaluating all of the proposals submitted and producing a single ranking list for all five related topics.

The indicative contribution from the IMI2 JU for the five topics was up to EUR 140 million, which represents a considerable investment of public money. While assessments of proposals budgets should be performed under criteria 3, “Quality and efficiency of the implementation”, the evaluators are not in a position to require a budget reduction or additional detail on budget calculations to be provided before the project proceeds to funding. This is consistent with the concept under Horizon 2020 that proposals should be evaluated as submitted and not on their potential.

Recommendation: Considering the limited number of proposals usually received within a given IMI call in comparison to the highly subscribed H2020 calls, the IMI2 JU and its qualified evaluation panels must be allowed the possibility to make recommendations or requirements to the best proposal including the corresponding budget to ensure its feasibility and maximise the outcome of the project.

Madrid, 16 January 2015