

## IMI2 JU INDEPENDENT OBSERVER'S REPORT

**Call ID:  
H2020-JTI-IMI2-2020-20  
IMI2 20th Call for Proposals  
Stage 2 Evaluation**

**Date of evaluation: 08 to 10 December 2020**

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**Present at the evaluation: 08 to 10 December 2020**

  


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## 1. Introduction and approach taken by the observers

The independent observation was undertaken to witness and report on the practical workings of the evaluation process, on the conduct and fairness of the evaluation sessions, on the application of the award criteria and on the procedures and their implementation, including IT tools. Based on their observations and feedback from the experts, the observers give independent judgement on the conduct and quality of the evaluation and advice for improvement of the evaluation process.

In execution of their task the observers took the following approach:

The observers received detailed information ahead of the central meeting, including SEP Evaluation Expert Quick Guide, Briefing for Experts Stage 2 Evaluation and Evaluation Guidance, briefing notes for IMI Call 20 Stage 2 Hearings, Evaluation Schedule and Agenda as well as access to the eligible proposals in SEP.

During the consensus meetings, the observers attended the full three days of the evaluations. They each attended full days for each topic, being present in one of the parallel topics as follows: topic 1 and 4 on the first day, topic 3 and 6 on the second day, topic 2 and 5 on the third day. The observers introduced themselves to the expert panels immediately after the briefing and invited feedback on the process from the experts. The observers also interacted with the IMI scientific officers and received individual experts' comments and feedback by email after the meetings.

## 2. Overall impression

### a. Scale of complexity of the evaluation task:

During the 3 days of central meetings the proposals submitted to 6 topics were discussed:

Topic 1 - Early diagnosis, prediction of radiographic outcomes and development of rational, personalised treatment strategies to improve long-term outcomes in psoriatic arthritis

Topic 2 - Innovations to accelerate vaccine development and manufacture

Topic 3 - Academia and industry united innovation and treatment for tuberculosis (UNIE4TB)

Topic 4 - Tumour plasticity

Topic 5 - Proton versus photon therapy for oesophageal cancer - a trimodality strategy

Topic 6 - Handling of protein drug products and stability concerns

For stage 2 only one proposal is submitted per topic. Each proposal was considered in a full working day. Compared to stage 1 where each proposal (30 pages) was presented by the applicant consortium, at this stage the full proposal (70 pages) was presented by the final consortium composed of both academic and industry partners. In order to facilitate the experts' evaluation, **hearings with consortium representatives** were organized as part of the agenda. The length of the hearings was 90 minutes. The experts prepared their questions through discussion in the mornings and the consortium representatives received them by e-mail 1 hour prior to the hearing. As part of the hearings the consortia delivered a 10-minute presentation on the proposal. The evaluation task was complex in that it required assessment of a large scale collaborative project proposal, including drawing up hearing questions and taking the responses into account before producing a consensus report.

### b. Transparency of the procedures:

The panel of experts for each topic had a briefing at the beginning of each topic consensus meeting. The briefing provided an overview of the IMI2 programme and a reminder of the procedures. During this briefing the experts had the opportunity to ask questions. The role of the independent observers was also reiterated.

The plan for the day was clearly explained as well as the rules surrounding the hearing with consortium representatives. The criteria and their definitions were clear. The briefing document "Evaluation Guidance: Stage 2 of a 2-stage process" elaborates on the definitions of the criteria and sub-criteria with examples. It points out that the topic text is the key reference document for the assessment of the proposal by the experts.

c. **Throughput time of the process and the efficiency of the procedures**

The six panels completed the evaluation in the time allocated. The agenda was very effective with the mornings focused on discussion of the full proposal against evaluation criteria and identifying issues that need further clarification in view of preparation of hearing questions. Finalisation of comments in the consensus report and scoring of the proposal was done in the afternoon following the hearing and discussion between the panel and the consortium representatives. The timetable allowed for full and fair treatment of the proposals and having only one to evaluate meant that the experts gave detailed consideration to the scoring and comments.

d. **Efficiency, reliability and usability of the implementation of the procedures, including the IT-tools:**

All experts had already experience working in WebEx and the meetings went smoothly, chaired by the appointed moderators. Generally, the technical provision was of good quality although during the hearings some of the representatives of the consortia had connection issues. These, however, were overcome or another representative took the lead to respond the questions. In all panels the hearings were very useful in clarifying points and the experts shared opinion that this contributed to the efficiency and accuracy of the evaluation.

The experts overall were satisfied with the SEP evaluation tool and found that it covered all the main methodological and organizational aspects that need to be considered.

e. **Impartiality, fairness and confidentiality:**

The evaluators were reminded of the rules regarding conflict of interest and confidentiality during the briefings. They were asked to confirm lack of conflict of interest.

The hearings were conducted in a way that respected confidentiality: the evaluators were asked to log-in only by their first name without further indication of job, employer or country.

The evaluation process itself was done with a particular care for impartiality and fairness. The experts spent time ensuring that they had evaluated fairly and consistently the proposals and compared the text and scores until they felt this was done correctly. Consensus on conflicting views was easily reached upon fruitful scientific discussion among evaluators, and facilitated by the skilful moderation of the IMI Scientific Officers.

f. **Conformity of the evaluation process** witnessed with the evaluation procedures published in the H2020 Grants Manual:

The evaluation process was in line with the evaluation procedures published in the H2020 Grants Manual.

g. **Quality of the evaluation process overall:**

The overall quality of the evaluation was high with transparent and rigorous procedures. The experts confirmed that the proposals were thoroughly discussed, fairly and transparently with careful attention to feedback and scoring. They confirmed that their views were fairly listened to.

### 3. Any other remarks

- **Quality of the on-line briefing sessions.** The briefing sessions were informative and enabled the evaluators to ask questions and additional clarification. The quality of these sessions was high based both on our observer opinion and the experts' feedback.
- **The understanding by experts of the call** (context, topics), of the evaluation process and their role and of the award criteria and scoring scheme. During the consensus meetings, the call text was referred to again to ensure that the proposal was answering the call and that the experts were evaluating the

proposal against the call text. The moderators referred the experts to the definitions of the scoring when needed.

- **The allocation of experts to proposals:** balance (gender, geographic, sector), relevance and balance of expertise, etc. Following the usual procedure, the same experts as in stage 1 were kept. A replacement was undertaken only in case of conflict of interest (due to changes in the consortium composition from stage 1 to 2), or to readjust the coverage of expertise in the panel, or because an expert was not available to participate in stage 2. As a result, there were sufficient experts involved per topic. This is a strength because even if there is only one proposal to evaluate in each topic area at stage 2, the projects and consortia are complex and need to address an innovative solution to a challenging problem in healthcare and medicines. By keeping the number and variety of experts, the high complexity and a wide range of needed expertise for the IMI2 proposals was guaranteed. Gender balance was aimed for but due to the reasons out of the control of IMI2 staff at this stage of evaluation, it was not perfect in all panels. For example, in panels 1 and 5 there was only one woman and in panel 6 only one man. The involvement of experts from EU-13 countries was low.
- **The process of the hearings** and the actors involved. The hearings were very helpful in allowing the panels to clarify some points and reaching consensus. The hearings followed the set procedure with a possibility for additional questions (related to the predetermined ones) for clarification. There was a good understanding among experts about this option and it was properly applied without raising new questions. Generally, allowing the evaluators to ask follow-up questions during the hearing was considered very useful.
- The **occurrence and handling of specific issues such as conflicts of interest.** There was no occurrence of specific issues witnessed.
- The **quality of evaluation summary reports** was very good. There was no disagreement on their content.
- **Overall conduct of staff:** responsiveness, hospitality, competence, etc. The moderators handled the panel meetings and hearings very successfully and presented high professionalism. They were mindful of involving all the experts in the discussion and all views heard. The role of the rapporteur in the preparation of the consensus report was underlined and the rapporteurs briefly introduced each report at the beginning of the panel meetings.
- **Workload and time** given to evaluators for their work. The experts reported that the workload and time for the stage 2 remote phase were appropriate. The distribution of tasks within the agenda was assessed positively and the experts expressed general high satisfaction with the on-line organization of the process. While some experts suggested to keep using the web-based systems in future evaluations for the sake of reducing travelling time, others pointed out that a return to the normal working procedures on site in Brussels is highly desirable and very much looked forward.

## 4. Summary of Recommendations

The observed evaluation process was robust and mature. It ran in accordance with the standards published. The experts were satisfied with the workload, timeframe, the IT tools, and skills of moderators. The overall evaluation process enabled the panels to evaluate their respective proposal smoothly in the time allocated.

There are a few minor recommendations:

- 1) Trying to achieve better gender balance of experts per topic at stage 1 in order to be able to keep it at stage 2.
- 2) Involving more experts from EU-13 countries at stage 1 in order to increase the chance to involve them at stage 2.