

IMI2 JU INDEPENDENT OBSERVER'S REPORT

Call ID:

IMI-2 – Call 5 Stage 2

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1. Introduction and approach taken by the observer

The evaluation was followed to observe 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 these observations the observers give independent advice for improvement of the evaluation process.

In performing their task the two independent observers had access to all written information supporting the evaluation process, and access to the SOFIA environment. They attended 3 days of evaluation sessions in Brussels. While there, they attended the briefing sessions, divided their attention across the parallel panel discussions, and were available for discussion with the evaluation experts present as well as IMI employees and particularly the Scientific Officers acting as moderators.

2. Overall impression

- a. Scale of complexity of the evaluation task: Although the number of proposals in stage 2 is only one per topic these full proposals are complex documents which outline large collaborative endeavours working across disciplinary boundaries. Evaluating these proposals is a demanding task. Using the same expert panels as in stage 1, however, most likely made it easier. Also, organising and running the evaluation session including individual remote evaluations followed by on-site panel evaluations, including hearings with the applying consortia (in some cases with remote participation), for six topics over three days is an impressive achievement.
- b. Transparency of the procedures: Clear and detailed information in the provided written information, during the briefing in the morning of each day of the on-site evaluations, and in the communication of the moderators with their expert panels, contributed to the transparency of the process.
- c. Throughput time of the process and the efficiency of the procedures: The professionalism and experience of the IMI JU staff, and the high quality and dedication of evaluation experts, made the on-site evaluation a smooth and efficient process.
- d. Efficiency, reliability and usability of the implementation of the procedures, including the IT-tools: The independent observers did not receive any comments or complaints from involved experts or staff on the implementation of the procedures or IT-tools. We again wish to mention the archaic font used in the IT-tool which is especially bad for when the panel is working together using the big screen.
- e. Impartiality, fairness and confidentiality: No deviations from the rules were observed regarding these aspects. Experts, who during the stage 1 evaluation had declared a Conflict of Interest in relation to what was to become the highest ranked short proposal at this stage, did not participate at stage 2.
- f. Conformity of the evaluation process witnessed with the evaluation procedures published in the H2020 Grants Manual: The independent observers did not record any deviations from the published evaluation procedures.
- g. Quality of the EU evaluation process in comparison with the evaluation procedures of national and/or other international research funding schemes: The independent observers estimate the quality of the evaluation process to be at least at or above the quality of the evaluation procedures of national and other international research funding schemes.
- h. Quality of the evaluation process overall: The independent observers rate the quality of the evaluation process overall as high.

3. Any other remarks

- Quality of the on-site briefing sessions: This time (stage 2 evaluation) the briefing was repeated over three days by three different lecturers (IMI JU staff). The Independent Observers (IOs) greatly appreciated the high and even quality of the presentations.
- The understanding by experts of the call (context, topics) and of the evaluation process: it was obvious that the experts were experienced and had an excellent understanding of the call, the process, their role and the criteria and scoring scheme. In addition, the moderators at each stage of the process reminded everyone of the relevant prerequisites and the option to identify shortcomings if felt necessary.
- During the morning session in one of the panels, the question was raised whether the communication plan should not already have been elaborated in the proposal (and be evaluated) rather than just being presented as a deliverable as was the case here. Depending of what the intention is, further clarification on this issue may be needed and possibly, instructions to applicants could be modified. During the hearing of one panel the conflict between the basic framework of 'pre-competitive activities' versus implementation of results in clinical practice was discussed. Also here some further clarification might be helpful.
- The process of the hearings (if any) and the actors involved: There was some variation between consortia in the time spent presenting the proposal versus answering the questions of the review panel. Unless the presentation includes answers to specific questions (which was true in one case), this consumes valuable time that should be spent on questions and answers.
- Overall conduct of staff (responsiveness, hospitality, competence etc.): As at previous occasions of IMI evaluations, the IOs greatly appreciated the excellent professional and social interaction of the IMI JU staff.

4. Recommendations

Overall, the time allowed for remote and on-site work seemed sufficient. A minor detail would be to revisit the daily agenda of the on-site exercise in order to get started with the finalisation of the panel's consensus report on time. Perhaps that process could start already in the morning in parallel with the initial round table discussion and formulation of questions to the consortium.

The quality of the draft ESRs varied. The rapporteurs should therefore be asked to deliver draft ESRs where comments integrate what the group of evaluators express in their individual reports, not just a compilation of individual comments. The comments should be structured according to the criteria in the final panel report. This would also present a better point of departure for preparing the panel's consensus report.

IMI JU might want to review how the consortia are briefed in preparation for the hearing. There was some variation in the way the consortia balanced presenting their proposal against answering the questions by the evaluation panel. The consortia should be asked to avoid or minimise introductory presentations of their proposals to the already well informed evaluation experts.

The sound quality during remote participation over the phone line may have been improved somewhat due to an improved loud-speaker system, but it was cumbersome to work with several isolated microphones. People are not used of talking in a microphone or tend to forget to use them and then the external reviewer is completely left out of the discussion. Better would have been a proper video connection or at least a central sound system with a screen sharing facility, so that the external reviewer can follow the text editing on the screen.

5. Summary of Recommendations

In view of the independent observers, the IMI evaluations are carried out in a well developed and mature process driven by highly experienced and dedicated staff and experts. The very few and minor remarks that we put forward in this report are really about handling slight variations among the participants in how they interpret their instructions, this in order to improve the process from an already very high level of efficiency. The aim is to keep at a minimum the on-site time and effort spent to compensate for such behavioural variation.

Considering the limited time available to finalise the consensus reports it would be valuable if the rapporteur could arrive to the meeting with a fairly advanced draft that already integrate all comments of the remote evaluation. In order to use time spent for the hearing efficiently, introductory general presentations of the proposal should be avoided. The final consensus reports might gain from distributing the pressure in preparing those reports more evenly during the day or at least over a longer part of the day than the last couple of hours. The process would improve with a font in the IT-tool with better readability.