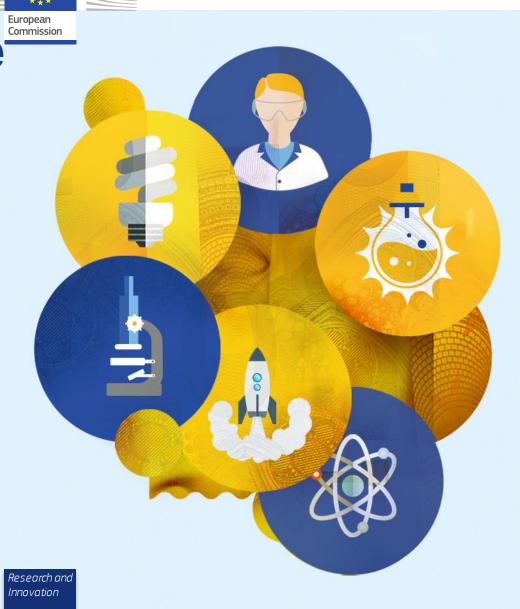# Horizon Europe

**Stakeholder workshop: Shaping how Horizon Europe is implemented**

Parallel session stream I: "An accessible Horizon Europe Programme: Proposal submission, evaluation & selection

#HorizonEU

Alan Cross & Isabel Vergara

Brussels, 30 January 2019

*Research and Innovation*

# Context

- Pending final decisions on Horizon Europe, there seems to be consensus on certain key points. For example:
  - 3 evaluation criteria retained (Excellence, Impact, Quality of Implementation); Excellence only under the ERC
  - Special arrangements possible, especially for missions and EIC
    => e.g. portfolio considerations when ranking; changes to proposals
- It is time to examine in more detail how proposal submission and evaluation should be conducted under the new programme.
- This includes both:
  - Incremental improvements, based on H2020 experience
  - Implications of novel features of HE (especially missions)

# Previous workshop: October 2017

- Provided valuable feedback on some key questions, already with a view to "FP9"

- But divergent view on some issues (e.g. 2-stage, proposal content)

- Also, no clarity on how to prioritise and trade-off possibly competing objectives

  - For example: speed (TTG, TTI), detailed feedback in ESRs, coherence across the programme vs flexibility

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# This session (1)

- Your views on all the topics raised in the briefing note are welcome

- Please distinguish incremental changes from possibly more radical once

- For efficiency, we'd like to devote a little more time on especially crucial issues

# This session (2)

- Experts
  - especially selecting the best and most appropriate, remuneration, workload
- Evaluation sequence
  - especially portfolio considerations, for example in mission calls
- Evaluation criteria
  - especially the degree of flexibility needed; dealing with expected impact
- Proposals
  - especially the structure, length, content
- Feedback
  - especially minimum standards for ESRs
- Any other topic?

# Experts

- selecting the best and most appropriate,
- under-represented profiles
- remuneration,
- workload

# Evaluation sequence

- Possible variations to the standard sequence (individual-consensus-panel)

- More remote consensus?

- More interviews?

- Missions – how to constitute a coherent portfolio of projects, to maximise impact

# Evaluation criteria (1)

- We need simple and meaningful formulations
- Avoiding overlapping concepts

Reminder of H2020 'sub-criteria'

- Excellence
  - Clarity and pertinence of the objectives;
  - Soundness of the concept, and credibility of the proposed methodology;
  - […] beyond the state of the art, and demonstrates innovation potential
  - Appropriate consideration of interdisciplinary approaches and, where relevant, use of stakeholder knowledge and gender dimension in research and innovation content.

# Evaluation criteria (2)

- Impact
  - […] contribute to each of the expected impacts mentioned in the work programme under the relevant topic;
  - Any substantial impacts not mentioned in the work programme, […]
  - Exploit and disseminate the project results […]; Communicate the project activities […]

- Quality and efficiency of the implementation
  - […] work plan, […] resources assigned to work packages…;
  - […] management structures and procedures […]
  - Complementarity of the participants and extent to which the consortium as whole brings together the necessary expertise;
  - […] allocation of tasks, ensuring that all participants have a valid role and adequate resources in the project to fulfil that role.

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# Proposals (1)

- What is a reasonable length for a full collaborative project proposal?
- What is strictly needed for a sound evaluation
- What is needed for statistical purposes (and policy)
- What could be collected later from successful applicants
- What might be impacts on TTG?

# Proposals (2)

Under H2020, the full proposal consists of:

- 'Structured part'
  - Contact details and legal entity status
  - Abstract
  - Declarations of honour
  - Budget breakdown (direct/indirect costs…)
  - Ethics issue table

- 'Narrative part'
  - Addressing the criteria Excellence, impact, implementation
  - Tables on work packages and deliverables, staff effort…
  - Description of consortium members
  - More info on any ethics or security issues.

# Feedback (1)

- How to best ensure that ESRs provide adequate explanations for possible rejection
- For full proposals? For very short proposals?
- Issue of resubmissions
- See current 'Quality of reports in the H2020 evaluation process'…

# Feedback (2)

**REVISED MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR EVALUATION SUMMARY REPORTS**

*Endorsed by the CSC Executive Committee of 11 June 2015 upon proposal by the Proposal Submission and Evaluation Policy Group*

- Every ESR must contain sufficient information for the applicant to understand the assessment of the experts, and the reasons for the resulting score. Scores and comments are provided for each criterion.

- The level of detail should be proportionate to the size and complexity of the proposal, and broadly consistent across proposals submitted to a call under similar conditions.

- For full proposals, as a guideline, comments under each criterion would normally amount to at least 100 words. The number of words will often considerably exceed this. There will be cases where much shorter comments will be appropriate, for example when the proposal fails to address the aspects covered by a criterion.

- For first stage proposals, and short full proposals (e.g. SME instrument phase 1), the comments will generally be much more succinct. They may be based on a collation of individual comments (or selections of the individual comments), which may be edited.

- In all cases, comments must be consistent with the meaning of the scores. ESRs are reviewed for clarity, normally by a person not involved in the consensus discussion.

- An ESR whose comments do not give an indication why the particular score was awarded for each criterion would be regarded as grounds for upholding a complaint in an evaluation review, and may lead to a re-evaluation.

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# Feedback (3)

## 2. Further practical guidance for evaluators, rapporteurs and quality controllers on drafting reports[1] in the H2020 evaluation process

The Evaluation Summary Report (ESR) represents the feedback to the applicant and it should therefore give a clear assessment of the proposal based on its merit, provide a clear feedback on the proposal's weaknesses and strengths with comments which are consistent with the scores. High quality reports[1] are crucial to the success of the evaluation. **The basic quality principle** therefore is:

> **Put yourself in place of the applicant: "If this was my proposal, would I find this report fair, accurate, clear and complete, even if it brings bad news?"**

### Characteristics of a good evaluation report[1]

- The comments are a **value judgement** that fairly reflects **the strengths and the weaknesses**, so that a **justification** for the scores is presented. They should not merely echo the scores, but explain them in **concrete terms**.

  ⚠ Evaluators should keep in mind that their task, certainly in the individual evaluation phase and the consensus group phase, is not to decide about the selection of the proposal by comparison with other projects , but to evaluate the proposal on its own merit. The ESR must therefore not contain comparative statements.

The comments should be of appropriate length (not too short, not too long). It is recommended that approximately 2-3 specific sentences are provided per sub-criterion (for the evaluation of a full proposal).

#### Tip for evaluators/rapporteurs:
*Use specific examples from the proposal ("For example") to make the argument, without falling into pointlessly copying text or summarising the proposal.*

#### Example:
*Avoid: "The methodology is described."*
*Write: "The methodology is poorly described as it fails to sufficiently address X, Y and provides insufficient reference to Z."*

*Avoid: "The innovative aspects of the research programme are poor."*
*Write: "This proposal is not innovative in X or Y, and it does not take Z into account."*

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# Feedback (4)

- The report should be "**just complete**". This means:

  - Comments address **all aspects** (sub-criteria) referred to in the criteria, and, equally importantly, these criteria and sub-criteria **only**.

- The comments should be **precise** and **definite**.

    **Examples:**

    *Avoid*: "We think the management plan is probably inadequate given the duration of the project and the number of partners."
    *Write*: "The management plan is inadequate. It does not include clear overall responsibility for the training activities; it lacks a problem-solving mechanism in the event of disputes between partners."

    *Avoid*: "The resources for the project are unrealistic"
    *Write*: "The resources in WP 4 and 6 are underestimated given the complexity of the activity proposed."

    *Avoid*: "Good potential impact can be foreseen."
    *Write*: "The exploitation and dissemination plan addresses well the key target audiences and provides a detailed and well thought out strategy for engaging with them, for example having confirmed presentation slots at national teacher conferences will ensure a significant impact. However, the lack of detail on X is a shortcoming."

    Care must be taken not to make categorical statements needlessly and to **avoid factual mistakes**. If in doubt, instead of writing "This proposal does not address X", it is advisable to write "This proposal does not significantly [or sufficiently] addresses X".

    **Example:**

    *Avoid*: "There is no discussion of a dissemination strategy."
    *Write*: "Dissemination activities are listed but the proposal lacks a clear dissemination strategy, in particular activities like X, Y and their interaction are not clearly described and Z was not properly taken into account."

    Whenever factual statements are made, they should be explicitly verified.

    **Tip for evaluators/rapporteurs:**

    **Avoid unnecessary details** that could easily be a factual mistake e.g. page numbers, amounts (of whatever kind), project duration, etc.

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# Thank you!

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**QUESTIONS & COMMENTS AFTER THE WORKSHOP:**
**EC-RTD-HE-IMPLEMENTATION@EC.EUROPA.EU**

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