



# **FCH2 JU Rules (‘Vademecum’)**

## **on Proposal Submission and Evaluation**

**Version 1.0**

**Adopted by the FCH2 JU Governing Board on 30/06/2014**

**Disclaimer**

The purpose of this document is to assist FCH2 JU staff in implementing proposal submission and evaluation. It follows *mutatis mutandis* the Horizon2020 Vademecum Section on proposal submission and evaluation, with only small adaptations to FCH2 JU specificities; it will be updated too, if necessary at any time the Horizon 2020 document suffers modifications.

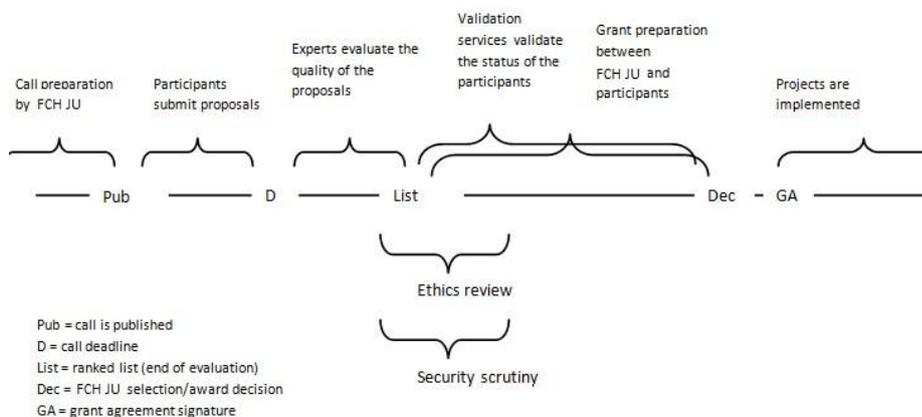
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## I. Grant proposal submission and evaluation

### PROPOSAL SUBMISSION AND EVALUATION — THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS

#### The process



#### Differences to FP7/FCH1 JU

‘grant negotiation phase’ replaced by  
‘grant agreement preparation phase’

#### Time to grant

The FCH2 JU has 8 months between call deadline and grant signature (*see Article 20(2) of the Rules for participation*).

This consists of two periods:

- Period 1: maximum of 5 months, ends when the applicants are informed of the outcome of the scientific evaluation (i.e. evaluation by the experts; *see Article 20(2) of the Rules for Participation and section IV.2*)
- Period 2: maximum of 3 months, for grant agreement preparation and signature. (This does not apply in the case of reserve listed proposals, and upheld cases following the evaluation review procedure that ultimately get funding).

⚠ Both periods may be exceeded in exceptional, duly justified cases, in particular where actions are complex, where there is a large number of proposals or where requested by the applicants (*see Article 20(3) of the Rules for Participation*).

Time to grant implies that proposals must be ready to go. There is no more scope for grant negotiations.

#### Guiding principles

- **excellence** ►► proposals must demonstrate high quality in relation to the topics and criteria set out in the calls
- **transparency** ►► funding decisions must be based on clearly described rules and procedures, and applicants should receive adequate feedback on the outcome of the evaluation
- **fairness & impartiality** ►► all proposals submitted in response to a call must be treated equally and evaluated impartially on their merits, irrespective of their origin or the identity of the applicants
- **efficiency & speed** ►► evaluation, award and grant agreement preparation should be done as quickly as possible without compromising quality or neglecting the rules
- **ethics & security** ►► proposals which contravene fundamental ethical principles or relevant security procedures must not be funded.

Treat proposals **confidentially**, as well as any related information, data, and documents.

Ensure that the process of handling and evaluating proposals is carried out in a confidential manner. Experts are bound by an obligation of confidentiality.

Ensure that proposals are archived under **secure** conditions.

Ensure that **personal data** is processed under [Regulation No 45/2001](#) and according to the 'notifications of the processing operations' to the Data Protection Officer (DPO) of the FCH JU (publicly accessible in the DPO register).

Ensure that all **communication with applicants** is made via the electronic exchange system (['My Area' section](#) of the Participant Portal).

In principle, all communication should be made via the coordinator (i.e. the person or legal entity that becomes the main contact for the FCH JU after submission of a proposal).

Unless specified otherwise, 'applicants' 'participants' or 'consortium' includes also the coordinator (in case of collaborative research) and sole participants.

⚠ In cases of doubt you can liaise with one or more of the services specializing in **specific policy issues** related to the handling of grant proposals,

### **Sole participants — Named beneficiaries**

The instructions in this Vademecum apply, in principle, *mutatis mutandis* to:

- sole participants, where possible under the eligibility conditions (e.g. coordination and support action).
- named beneficiaries (i.e. entities that are identified in the work plan for coordination and support actions or programme co-fund actions; see *Article 11(2) of the Rules for Participation*).

#### **Exception:**

For named beneficiaries, there are no calls for proposals and the evaluation does not have to be carried out by independent experts (see *Articles 11(2) and 15(8) of the Rules for Participation*).

### **Obvious clerical errors**

If you detect — at any moment of the process — an 'obvious clerical error' (*resulting in e.g. omission to submit evidence or information on a non-substantial element of the proposal*) that would clearly disadvantage the proposal, you must ask the coordinator to provide the information or to clarify supporting documents.

*Example* An obvious clerical error in the administrative forms ('Part A'), may be corrected by the call coordinator, if it is clear from the proposal what the error was, if the information is available in the other part of the proposal (Part B) and provided that the coordinator or sole applicant was informed of the change and given the opportunity to disagree to the correction.

The request for information should indicate the form and exact content requested. It should also indicate a (reasonable) deadline for reply.

⚠ Keep a record of any such instances.

When deciding on clerical errors, keep in mind the following basic rules:

- The assessment should be done on a case-by-case basis, since each situation is different.
- You do not have to take any action, if the information or clarification would substantially change the proposal.
- If you receive information or clarifications, you do not have to take them into account, if it turns out that they would substantially change the proposal (or if they concern other issues).

⚠ The correction of clerical errors cannot be used as an opportunity to change other elements of the proposal, even if they are minor.

Only take into account aspects that relate to elements already mentioned in the proposal, and which can quickly and easily be corrected.

- When crucial information in the proposal is inconsistent, give the benefit of the doubt to the proposer, and instruct the experts to do so.
- If an applicant contacts the FCH2 JU to notify a clerical error in their proposal, this information should be checked for plausibility, acknowledged, and be made available to the experts if it meets the above conditions (and the evaluation process still permits taking it into account).
- Adhere to the equal treatment of participants and the principle of transparency. If you ask clarifications or to correct obvious clerical errors for a proposal, the same must apply to other proposals in the *same* situation.

### **Contact with potential applicants**

The following applies:

- The process for advising potential applicants is via the National Contact Point (NCP) network (and, where appropriate, the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN)). This requires good communication between the FCH2 JU and the respective NCPs. The FCH2 JU should provide NCPs (and EEN, when relevant) with lists of contact persons within the FCH2 JU. Such lists should not be made publically available.
- When the FCH2 JU is contacted directly, or in the context of Information Days, FCH2 JU staff may provide general information and clarifications on a call, and its scope, but should not pronounce on particular proposal ideas.
- Individual contacts between FCH2 JU staff and potential applicants should be avoided. If such contacts takes place (e.g. *a direct email or phone call*), it is important to maintain a level playing field, and to avoid taking positions, for example, on the suitability of a proposal idea (i.e. no pre-proposal checks).
- When an important clarification is needed, this should be posted on the Participant Portal, as with other explanations stemming from questions to the central Research Enquiry Service.

## ***1.1 Proposal preparation and submission — Admissibility check — Eligibility check***

### **PROPOSAL PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION, ADMISSIBILITY & ELIGIBILITY CHECK — OVERVIEW**

#### **Background**

The FCH2 JU funds projects ('actions') only on application (i.e. on submission of a proposal).

Only proposals that are admissible and eligible can be retained for funding.

#### **How are proposals submitted?**

Proposals are submitted by the coordinator **on-line**, via the electronic proposal submission system of the Participant Portal (SEP).

SEP carries out basic checks for completeness of the proposal, internal data consistency, virus infection file types, size limitations, etc.

The **date and time** of receipt of submitted proposals are recorded. An automatic e-mail is sent to the coordinator confirming successful submission.

If submission **failed** due to a fault in the electronic submission system, the coordinator may file a complaint (*see section IV.5*).

#### **Multiple proposals**

For calls with a submission deadline:

- if more than one version of a proposal (with the same proposal number) is submitted before the call deadline: the system only keeps the most recent version for evaluation.
- if a very similar proposal is submitted by the same applicants, the CC — having consulted his/her hierarchy as appropriate — may ask the coordinator to withdraw one or both of them.

#### **Resubmission — Withdrawal**

Before the call deadline, the coordinator may replace the proposal by a new proposal.

After the deadline, he/she may no longer change or add anything to the proposal, unless it is to correct an obvious clerical error (*see section IV*).

 Additional information may be required by the FCH JU to clarify issues related to eligibility, ethics review, security scrutiny, or legal entity validation.

The coordinator may at any time, withdraw a submitted proposal.

#### **How are proposals checked for admissibility & eligibility?**

The AO checks compliance with the rules on admissibility and eligibility in the Work Plan/call (*see General Annexes to the Work Plan and the specific conditions for each call and related topics*).

#### **How is proposal preparation & submission organised?**

For each call, proposal submission and evaluation must be planned and prepared in advance.

The **actors** and outside **experts** must be **appointed**.

Outside experts for evaluation ensure that only proposals of the highest quality are selected for funding.

A database of experts is maintained by the Commission, following open calls for interest.

The database may be made available — on request — to research funding bodies with a public service mission in a Member State or associated country and EU funding bodies (including joint undertakings and Article 185 TFEU bodies). Decisions on access will be made by the Director-General of DG RTD (or by his/her representative(s)).

After proposal submission, the **proposals** must be **checked for admissibility** and for **eligibility**.

**Who is responsible for managing it?**

Proposal preparation and submission is managed by the FCH2 JU operational services (os).

The procedures are managed by the call coordinator (CC), project officer (PO), responsible officer (RO) and the authorising officer (AO).

**PROPOSAL PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION, ADMISSIBILITY & ELIGIBILITY CHECK — FCH2 JU TASKS**

**What?** The FCH2 JU services must:

- prepare the submission and evaluation procedure
- appoint experts (as evaluators, observer, ethics experts)
- handle the submitted proposals
- publish proposal numbers
- check admissibility
- check eligibility
- handle complaints

**Who?** call coordinator (CC)/project officer (PO)  
responsible officer (RO); authorising officer (AO)  
DG RTD Ethics department, responsible authorising officer of DG RTD Ethics department (DG RTD Ethics department RAO)

**Rules:** Art 131 FR; Art 201 RAP; Art 7-10, 15(7), 17, 40 RfP; FCH2 JU Financial rules; General Annexes to the Work Plan; Delegation Agreement of the FCH2 JU; Operating Rules of the Common Support Service.

**IT tools:** SEP; EMI; COMPASS; SYGMA; CaP; Participant Portal (for publication of calls for proposals, expert registration).

Key:  
SEP = Proposal submission and evaluation system  
EMI = Expert Management Internal  
COMPASS = workflow system  
SYGMA = grant management system  
CaP = Call publication system

## 1. Getting started

The **CC/PO** is responsible for organising a timely and smooth proposal preparation, submission and evaluation process and for keeping track of time to grant.

You should:

- establish — together with the RAO — a timetable for the entire call (or part of the call), including ethics review, security scrutiny, ranked list, the target date for informing applicants of the outcome of the evaluation by the experts and selection/award decision
  - ⚠ The target date for informing applicants is set out in the call.<sup>1</sup>
- contact at an early stage the evaluation support service of REA and DIGIT (in the European Commission), in order to arrange the practical aspects for evaluation.
- begin to draw up lists of experts as early as possible. Informal contacts can be made to check on availability.
  - ⚠ Make clear that this does not mean that s/he has already been selected.
- Contact the ethics department of DG RTD (if there may be the need for ethics assessments; see *section IV.3*)
- contact the chair of the 'Security Scrutiny Group (if there may be the need for security scrutiny; see *section IV.4*)
- even before the call deadline: access certain data registered by applicants in SEP (i.e. *the call title and the topic for which the proposal is submitted, the title of the proposal, summary information about the proposal, keywords, and the identity codes of the applicants (in the Beneficiary Register)*) with a view to preparing the evaluation sessions and identifying expertise required in setting up the pool of experts.

## 2. Appointing the actors

For each call (or part of a call), the **AO** (or his/her representative) must **appoint** FCH2 JU staff to act as:

- a '**call coordinator (CC)**', to plan and organise the proposal submission and evaluation process and to act as a contact point for practical questions.
- one or more '**responsible officer(s) (RO)**', normally at Head of Unit level, who will give directions on how to deal with any sensitive issues that may arise (e.g. possible conflicts of interest).
- '**project officers (PO)**' who will manage the implementation of a specific part of the call.
- '**moderators**' who will help the consensus groups come to a conclusion (*see section IV.2*).

This role is typically performed by the PO who is responsible for the proposals dealt with by a given consensus group. Alternatively, the moderator may be an external expert, especially in calls where very high numbers of proposals are to be evaluated (*e.g. consensus groups might be moderated by experts that are appointed as 'chairs' or 'vice chairs'*).

- one or more '**panel chair(s)**' for the panel review (unless an expert performs this role; see *section IV.2*).

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<sup>1</sup> See Article 20(1) of the Rules for Participation.

There are also a number of roles or functions in the evaluation process that are performed by external experts who act as:

- **evaluators** who individually assess proposals (see section IV.2)
- **members of a consensus group** (i.e. the group of experts who individually evaluated a given proposal) (see section IV.2)

An expert can be member of more than one consensus group.

- **members of the panel** (see section IV.2)
- **'rapporteurs'** who draft consensus or panel reports (see section IV.2)
- **observers** (see section IV.2)
- **ethics experts** (for the ethics review/screening/assessment; see section IV.3).

### 3. Appointing experts

#### 3.1 Appointing experts as evaluators

The *CC/PO* draws up — for the call or part of the call — a **draft list** of appropriate experts and, if necessary, a **reserve list**.

- ⚠ The CC has to ensure that operational appropriations have been made available to cover the costs of the expert evaluators and observers, and that a provisional commitment has been made prior to the recruitment of the experts.

You normally need a **minimum** of **three** experts per proposal.

#### Specific cases:

A higher number of experts, usually at least **five**, will be necessary for many proposals, due to the nature of the subject, the degree of trans-disciplinarily, cross-sectorial concerns, size of budget, ethical considerations etc.

For named beneficiaries, evaluation may be done without independent experts.<sup>2</sup>

Staff from regulatory agencies (if they are not implementing Horizon 2020 as a funding body), are regarded as independent experts for the purposes of satisfying the minimum number. The daily honorarium is not paid to such experts.

Exceptionally (in duly justified cases), FCH2 JU staff may work as experts alongside external experts (i.e. in addition to the minimum number of experts), if they have specialised knowledge.

You may ask certain experts to carry out only the individual evaluation and not take part in the consensus group (see section IV.2).

Select the experts from the **'database of experts'** (see section II of H2020 manual) according to the following **criteria**:

- high level of skills, experience and knowledge in the areas of the call (including project management, innovation, exploitation, dissemination and communication)

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<sup>2</sup> See Article 15(8) Rules for Participation

Where relevant, make sure you include sufficient experts in appropriate disciplines of the social sciences and humanities, inter-disciplinary experts, as well as gender specialists.

If this condition is satisfied, then also ensure:

- a balanced composition in terms of various skills, experience, and knowledge, geographical diversity and gender

According to the EU equal opportunities policy, this implies achieving in the medium-term at least 40 % of members of each sex in each expert group and committee.<sup>3</sup>

- a private-public sector balance, if appropriate
- a regular rotation of experts:
  - do not choose an expert if this would mean that the expert would be contracted for Horizon 2020 work for a total of more than 120 days over a contiguous four-year period.
  - aim for at least 25% newcomers each year with the aim of achieving this target across the programme.

### Exceptions:

You may depart from these three criteria in justified cases, if following them would jeopardise the quality of the evaluation (e.g. *where expertise is not available elsewhere; chairs and vice chairs, where the role requires considerable experience; if a degree of continuity is desirable; if replacements or additional experts are needed urgently, and suitable experts fulfilling these criteria cannot be found*).

Do **not** select any of the following (since they are always presumed to have a conflict of interest):

- members of an advisory group set up by the FCH2 JU to advise on the preparation of the Work Plan
- National Contact Points
- Members of a Horizon 2020 Programme Committee

Conflict of interest for other reasons will be checked later on — when assigning experts to proposals (see *section IV.2*)

Take into account recommendations made by organisations in the context of the call for interest for experts or by advisory groups (set up by the Commission to advise on the preparation of EU or Euratom Horizon 2020 Work Programmes).

Commission officials or FCH2 JU staff having left the service may only be chosen if the conditions set out in Commission Decision C(2013) 9037<sup>4</sup> are met.

You may choose an expert from **outside** the **database**, provided the selection is transparent.<sup>5</sup> In such cases, ask the expert to sign up to the database.

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<sup>3</sup> See [Commission Decision No 2000/407/EC of 19 June 2000 relating to gender balance within the committees and expert groups established](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/employment_and_social_policy/equality_between_men_and_women/c10920a_en.htm) by it available at [http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/employment\\_and\\_social\\_policy/equality\\_between\\_men\\_and\\_women/c10920a\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/employment_and_social_policy/equality_between_men_and_women/c10920a_en.htm).

<sup>4</sup> Commission Decision C(2013) 9037 of 16.12.2013 on outside activities and assignments. Available on Vista <http://www.cc.cec/sg/vista/home>.

<sup>5</sup> See Article 40(2) of the Rules for Participation.

Don't forget to indicate if certain experts should carry out only the individual evaluation and not take part in the subsequent consensus group, or are only appointed for a specific step of a multi-step evaluation.

Don't forget to indicate if the experts should carry out the evaluation fully or partially at their home or place of work ('remote evaluation') or on Commission/FCH2 JU premises.

The **AO** decides on the **final list of experts** to be invited.

The **CC/PO** encodes the decision in EMI and proceeds with expert contracting

*For more information on expert management, see section II of H2020 manual.*

### 3.2 Appointing an expert as observer

The **AO** selects — for the call, part of the call or several calls — one or more independent observers from the database of experts ('**observer**').

#### Specific case:

For cases where such a role would be disproportionate (in view of the scale or practical arrangements of the call), the AO may decide not to appoint an observer.

To avoid conflicts of interest, it is better that the observer is not an expert in the area in question.

### 3.3 Appointing ethics experts

The list of **ethics experts** (both for the ethics review and for the ethics checks, reviews and audits) is drawn up annually by the **DG RTD Ethics department**, according to the same principles as above point 3.1). The **DG RTD Ethics department RAO** decides on this list.

This is not a list per call, but an annual pool of experts that may be used for the Commission's H2020 ethics appraisal scheme.

Select the experts from the list of ethics experts on the basis of the following criteria:

- skills, expertise and knowledge in the specific field(s) of the proposed research
- the nature of the proposals to be assessed
- the type of ethics issues and or breach of research integrity to be addressed.

If those conditions are satisfied, then also ensure:

- appropriate geographical and gender balance
- a regular rotation of experts.

#### Exceptions:

You may depart from these two criteria in justified cases, if following them would jeopardise the quality of the evaluation (e.g. to ensure expertise for the ethics pre-screening or the ethics assessment).

In view of the limited pool of experts specialising in ethics, exceptions to the rules on rotation may be needed to ensure the quality and timely implementation of the ethics review.

- ⚠ Representatives of civil society may be invited to participate (if they are in the data base of experts).

## 4. Receiving proposals — Admissibility check — Eligibility check

### 4.1 Publishing proposal numbers

After the deadline for submission, the **CC** must publish (on the Participant Portal) the number of proposals submitted for the call (or sub-call or topic for which a separate budget is indicated in the Work Plan), through a 'call update' in CaP.

#### Detailed procedure (call update):

**Step 1** — Go to CaP and select the appropriate call or sub-call.

**Step 2** — Upload a simple statement with the number(s) of submitted proposals in the CaP-section 'Latest information on Call'.

The number of submitted proposals should be broken down by topic.

#### Example:

*A total of [number] proposals were submitted in response to this call. The number of proposals for each topic is shown below.*

- [topic 1]: [number]
- [topic 2]: [number]

### 4.2 Accessing proposals

After the call deadline, the **CC/PO** must **access the proposals** in SEP to prepare the admissibility and eligibility check.

 You can access the proposal only after the call deadline has passed.

If you find **two very similar proposals** submitted by the same applicants, you may — after having consulted your hierarchy as appropriate — ask the coordinator to withdraw one or both of them.

### 4.3 Checking the proposals for admissibility

The **CC/PO** must check the submitted proposals for admissibility.

The **admissibility conditions** are set out in the General Annexes to the Work Plan and may vary from call to call and from topic to topic.

According to these texts, the following are generally **inadmissible**:

- proposals sent on paper, removable electronic storage (e.g. *CD-ROM*), by email or by fax
- proposals not submitted by the coordinator (or named beneficiary or sole participant)  
*Examples: proposals submitted by the other applicants or a linked third party*
- proposals submitted after the call deadline
- proposals which are not readable, not accessible or not printable
- proposals which do not include a draft plan for the exploitation and dissemination of the results (if so specified in the work plan)

**Incomplete proposals** may be inadmissible if essential elements are missing (e.g.

*administrative data, proposal description, supporting documents*).

**Withdrawn proposals** do not need to be rejected; they are considered not submitted.

Unless otherwise specified in the Work Plan, **proposals exceeding** the specified **page limits** (and marked as such in the templates in the SEP for the calls and topics in question) are admissible. However, the excess pages will be watermarked, and the experts will be instructed to disregard them in the evaluation.

If necessary, the **CCPO** can convene the '**admissibility and eligibility review committee**'.

This is an internal review committee to ensure a coherent interpretation and equal treatment of applicants regarding questions concerning admissibility, failed submissions and eligibility.

It is made up of the call coordinator (who chairs it) and at least two staff members with the relevant expertise (*e.g. legal, IT information systems or other*). Other staff with relevant expertise may be co-opted if necessary.

If the question can be resolved through an exchange of e-mails, the committee may conclude on a case without a meeting.

The committee may also seek the legal advice of the FCH2 JU Legal Manager who may, if necessary consult the Common Support Centre by contacting directly the Common Legal Support Service.

For **inadmissible proposals**, the **CC/PO** must encode a draft decision in SEP, on the basis of the conclusions of the committee (if any).

The **AO** validates the decision in Compass.

- ⚠ Don't forget to ensure that the rejection decision is properly motivated (i.e. summary of the reasons for inadmissibility, for each proposal).

#### 4.4 Checking the proposals for eligibility

The **CC/PO** must check the proposals for eligibility.

The **eligibility conditions** are set out in the General Annexes to the Work Plan and may vary from call to call and from topic to topic.

When checking eligibility, keep in mind the following:

- special rules apply for **Israeli** entities<sup>6</sup>
- entities from third countries that are covered by Council **sanctions** are not eligible to participate in Union programmes<sup>7</sup>
- the status of a third country may change
- ⚠ Don't forget to check again the status of countries in the process of becoming associated to Horizon 2020 before the selection/award decision.
- the Work Plan/call may restrict the participation of legal entities established in third

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<sup>6</sup> See Commission Guidelines on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards ([OJC 205 of 19.7.2013, pp. 9-11](#)).

<sup>7</sup> For a [consolidated list of persons, groups and entities subject to EU financial sanctions](#), see <http://eeas.europa.eu/cfsp/sanctions/consol-listen.htm>.

countries, if prejudicial to the Union's interests<sup>8</sup>

- **third country participants** (i.e. participants that are neither from an EU Member State nor from an associated country)
  - that are from a country **listed** in General Annexes to the Work Plan may participate fully (i.e. with EU funding)
  - that are from a country **not** on that list may nevertheless participate as 'beneficiaries not receiving EU funding'<sup>9</sup> (or, exceptionally, even as beneficiaries that receive EU funding, if the AO decides — on the basis of the opinion by the experts during evaluation — that their participation is essential for carrying out the action).
- Other provisions on third countries may be listed in the Work Plan. If the ineligibility of a participant leads to the ineligibility of the proposal, the proposal must be rejected.

In case of doubts, the **CC/PO** can convene the **admissibility and eligibility review committee** (see above point 5.1).

Following discussion in the review committee, you may decide to contact the coordinator to clarify particular issues.

For **ineligible proposals** (and for **applicants** that are **not eligible** for participation), the **CC/PO** must encode a draft decision in SEP, on the basis of the conclusions of the committee (if any).

The **AO** validates the decision(s) in Compass.

- ⚠ Don't forget to ensure that the rejection decision is properly motivated (i.e. summary of the reasons for ineligibility, for each proposal).

## 5. After proposal preparation and submission, admissibility & eligibility check

### 5.1 Informing the applicants of the rejection of their proposal

If the proposal is inadmissible or ineligible, the **AO** must send a '**proposal rejection letter**' to the coordinator (as a 'formal notification' via SYGMA), together with the reasons why and the means of redress.

- ⚠ Use the template for proposal rejection letters.

### 5.2 Informing an applicant of the rejection of its participation

If the proposal is eligible, but one of the partners is not, the **AO** must send an '**applicant rejection letter**' to the applicant (as a 'formal notification' via SYGMA, with copy to the coordinator), together with the reasons why and the means of redress. This information is provided at the same time when feedback is provided to all applicants on the outcome of the evaluation (see section IV.2 below).

- ⚠ Use the template for participant rejection letters.

### 5.3 Complaints

*For information on how to handle complaints, see section IV.5*

<sup>8</sup> See Article 7(2) of the Rules for Participation.

<sup>9</sup> See Article 10 of the Rules for Participation.

## ***I.2 Evaluation of proposals — Operational capacity check — FCH 2 JU ranked list***

### **EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS, OPERATIONAL CAPACITY CHECK & RANKED LIST — OVERVIEW**

#### **Background**

Only proposals that are positively evaluated on their scientific merits and where the applicants have sufficient operational capacity to implement the action they propose can be retained for funding.

The FCH 2 JU use external experts to ensure an independent and objective evaluation that allows identifying the highest quality proposals.

The proposals must be ranked according to the evaluation results ('FCH 2 JU ranked list').

Applicants must be informed of the outcome of the evaluation by the experts (see *Article 20 of the Rules for Participation*).

#### **Where does the evaluation fit in? — When are proposals evaluated?**

The evaluation process is launched after the admissibility and eligibility check.

All proposals within a call (or within a coherent part of a call) are evaluated together.

#### **How are proposals evaluated?**

The proposals are normally evaluated by a minimum of three experts. In many cases there are five or more. The experts have no conflict of interest. They evaluate proposals with regard to the **award criteria** (and the associated weightings and thresholds) set out in General Annexes Work Plan and for the call ('evaluation by the experts' or 'scientific evaluation').

The experts **score** the proposals for each criterion, as follows (half point scores may be given):

- 0 = Proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
- 1 = **Poor**. The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
- 2 = **Fair**. Proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
- 3 = **Good**. Proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
- 4 = **Very Good**. Proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
- 5 = **Excellent**. Proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

#### **How is operational capacity checked?**

Based on the information provided in the proposal, the experts and the AO will assess whether applicants have the operational resources and capacity to implement the action (and, in particular, the part(s) they are responsible for).

The evaluation will be the basis for the FCH 2 JU 'ranked list'.

#### **How are the processes organised?**

First, the experts must be **attributed** their **proposals** and **briefed**.

The **evaluation process** then has three phases:

- Phase 1 — Individual evaluation**
- Phase 2 — Consensus group**
- Phase 3 — Panel review**

In the **individual evaluation**, each expert must submit an 'individual evaluation report' (IER) for each proposal, with the comments and scores for each award criterion.

In the **consensus group**, the experts must attempt to reach a consensus for the evaluation of each proposal and set out the comments and scores for each award criterion in a 'consensus report'.

In the **panel review**, the panel compares the different consensus reports in order to ensure consistency and equal treatment of proposals. The results of the review are formulated in a 'panel report' (including notably the '**panel ranked list**').

The evaluation process is normally accompanied by one or more independent expert **observers**, in order to ensure a high degree of transparency, by:

- checking the functioning and execution of the overall process;
- verifying compliance with the procedures;
- advising on the conduct and fairness of the evaluation sessions, how the experts apply the criteria, and how the procedures could be improved;
- liaising with the staff members involved in the evaluation sessions and
- if necessary suggesting possible corrections that could be put into practice immediately.

The observer sets out his/her findings (and suggestions on corrections) in an 'observer's report' to the FCH 2 JU.

At the end of the evaluation by the experts, the AO must establish the FCH 2 JU **ranked list** of proposals to be funded.

### **Who is responsible for managing it?**

The evaluation process is managed by the FCH 2 JU operational services (os).

The procedures are managed by the call coordinator (CC), project officer (PO), responsible officer (RO) and the authorising officer (AO).

The evaluations are made by experts (individually and in groups, with moderators and chairs).

## **EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS, OPERATIONAL CAPACITY CHECK & RANKED LIST — FCH 2 JU TASKS**

**What?** The FCH 2 JU services must:

- manage the evaluation process
- finalise the evaluation by establishing a 'ranked list'
- exclude participants for lack of operational capacity
- inform the applicants of the outcome of the evaluation by the experts
- publishing the 'flash call info'
- handle complaints

**Who?** call coordinator (CC)/project officer (PO); responsible officer (RO); authorising officer (AO); moderators; panel chairs

**Rules:** Art 131(3), 132(1,2), 133 FR; Art 202, 203, 204 RAP; Art 15 RfP; FCH2 JU Financial Rules; Delegation Agreement of the FCH2 JU; Operating Rules of the Common Support Service.

**IT tools:** SEP; EMI; COMPASS; SYGMA; CaP

## 1. Getting started

The **CC/PO** is responsible for organising and following the evaluation process.

You should:

- check the planning and, if necessary, adapt it (together with the RO and AO). Inform the other actors of the changes.
- maintain close contact with the experts throughout the evaluation process to assist them on any query.
- invite the observer(s) to be present throughout the evaluation process (including the briefing of the experts).

In case of doubt, liaise with the RO.

**Moderators** should first consider enrolling for the one of the training courses for moderators.

## 2. Assignment of the experts to proposals — Setting up the panel

The **CC/PO** must assign experts (*for the appointment, see section IV.1*) to the proposals that must be evaluated.

You normally need a **minimum** of **three** experts per proposal.

A higher number of experts, usually at least **five**, will be necessary for many proposals, due to the nature of the subject, the degree of trans-disciplinarity, cross- sectoral concerns, size of budget, ethical considerations etc.

Do **not** assign experts that are in a **conflict of interest** (as set out in the expert contract), i.e. if the expert:

- was involved in the preparation of the proposal
- stands to benefit directly or indirectly if the proposal is accepted
- has a close family or personal relationship with any person representing an applicant legal entity
- is a director, trustee or partner or is in any way involved in the management of an applicant legal entity
- is employed or contracted by one of the applicants or any named subcontractors

Such an expert may, however, exceptionally be invited to take part in the evaluation session, if all of the following apply:

- the expert works in a different department/laboratory/institute from the one where the action is to be carried out.
- if the constituent bodies operate with a high degree of autonomy.
- such a role is justified by the requirement to appoint the best available experts and by the limited size of the pool of qualified experts (and this is documented).
- is a member of an advisory group set up by the FCH 2 JU to advise on the preparation of

the Work Plan.

- is a National Contact Point.
- is a member of a Horizon 2020 Programme Committee.

**Ask RO** to decide on whether there is a **conflict of interest** (on the basis of circumstances, available information and related risks), if the expert:

- was employed by one of the applicants in the last three years
- is involved in a contract, grant agreement, grant decision, management structure (*e.g. member of management or advisory board etc.*) or research collaboration with an applicant or fellow (or had been so in the last three years)
- is in any other situation that could cast doubt on their ability to participate in the evaluation of the proposal impartially (or that could reasonably appear to do so in the eyes of an external third party).

⚠ If a conflict of interest is found only later on in the evaluation procedure, the expert must stop evaluating the proposal (and may not take part in any panel review where the proposal is discussed)<sup>10</sup>.

The consensus group in which s/he has participated will have to be declared null and the consensus meeting will have to be reconvened and the proposal(s) concerned will have to be re-evaluated.

For more information on conflicts of interest, see the [H2020 expert contracts](#).

The **AO** must set up — for the call or part of the call — the 'panel'.

The panel may be composed of experts involved in the consensus groups, new experts, or a mixture of the two.

#### Specific case:

There will be **no separate panel review**, if the *same* consensus group has examined *all* the proposals within the scope of a particular indicative budget (as mentioned in the Work Plan). In this case, their final review will be done together with the consensus report. This is considered to constitute the panel review.

### 3. Briefing of the experts

The **CC** is responsible for organising a thorough briefing of the experts — before and possibly during each evaluation session.

The **briefing** should be based on the standard **material** prepared by the Commission and/or the FCH2 JU (adapted as necessary), covering, among other issues:

- the key features of Horizon 2020 (*including, for example, the focus on the full research and innovation cycle; the challenge-based approach; and the expectation that many proposals will be both inter-disciplinary and cross-sectoral in nature*)
- the content of the R&I topics under consideration
- the evaluation processes and procedures (including the selection and award criteria to be

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<sup>10</sup> See Article 2.3 of the Code of conduct for experts annexed to the [H2020 expert contracts](#).

applied)

- instructions to disregard any excess pages (if these have not already been removed)
- instructions to give the benefit of the doubt to the proposer, if the proposal contains contradictory information
- the need to evaluate proposals as they were submitted (and not their potential if changes were to be made) and that this implies:
  - not to make recommendations to improve proposals
  - to reflect any shortcomings (in a proposal) in lower scores (i.e. that proposals with a significantly inflated or cost-inefficient budget should not pass the relevant threshold; see below point 5.2)
- the conditions that should be applied to assess operational capacity
- the conditions for possible exceptional funding for entities from countries that are normally not eligible for funding (i.e. not listed in General Annexes to the Work Plan; not provided for in a bilateral scientific and technological agreement or other arrangement<sup>11</sup>).
- the terms of the experts' contract (including confidentiality, impartiality, concealment of conflict of interest, completion of tasks and approval of reports, and the possible penalties in the case of non-compliance).

You should also remind the experts:

- that they have to provide comments to accompany *each* of their scores and that these comments must be consistent with the scores awarded
- to immediately signal to the FCH 2 JU any indications of scientific misconduct related to the proposal
- to immediately signal any conflict of interest he/she became aware of during the evaluation of the proposal
- that they must actively close their reports in the system. Tacit approval can only be accepted in exceptional circumstances and repeated failure to close reports may be regarded as a breach of contract that may lead to financial consequences.

⚠ In remote evaluations, different material may be needed (e.g. *on-line presentations*).

#### **4. Evaluation process: Phase 1 — Individual evaluation**

Each *expert* must examine each proposal to:

- evaluate it according to the award criteria

and give a view on:

- operational capacity  
Operational capacity must in principle be assessed on the basis of the information provided in the proposal (e.g. *CV; relevant publications or achievements; relevant*

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<sup>11</sup> See Article 10 of the Rules for Participation.

*previous projects etc.*).

⚠ This check is primarily designed to identify manifestly inadequate (or even fraudulent) partners.

⚠ If an expert believes that one or more partners lacks sufficient operational capacity, he/she should nonetheless **continue to evaluate** the full proposal, including the parts related to the partner(s) concerned. (It is only later on, at consensus group stage, that the experts will come to a common view as to whether one or more participants should be excluded from the the scope of the evaluation; see *below point 5.1*).

- scope
- exceptional funding of third country participants (from a country not on the list of General Annexes to the Work Plan)

The '**individual evaluation reports**' (**IER**) must:

- set out **comments** and **scores** for each award criterion

⚠ The scores must be consistent with the comments.

and indicate:

- if the participants have sufficient operational capacity to implement the action (and, in particular, the part(s) they are responsible for)
- whether or not the proposal is 'in scope' ( a proposal is 'in scope' if its content corresponds — at least in part — to the topic/part of call for which it is submitted)
- if the conditions for exceptional funding of third country participants (from a country not on the list of General Annexes to the Work Plan) are fulfilled

The report must be **approved** and **submitted** by the expert (in SEP).

By approving, the expert confirms that they have no conflict of interest with respect to the evaluation of that particular proposal.

After submission, an IER can normally no longer be changed. If duly justified, the moderator may allow for changes by the expert (and resubmission of the report).

After submission of the reports, the **CC/PO** must check if:

- the proposal is considered to be out of scope by the experts.

If considered out of scope by all experts, only pass it on to the consensus group if you consider that a further consideration by experts is necessary.

## **5. Evaluation process: Phase 2 — Consensus group**

The consensus group consists of experts who carried out the individual evaluations for a given proposal.

### **Specific case:**

In some cases, the CC/PO can decide that individual experts do **not take part in the consensus group**. This can be useful, for example, when specific expertise is needed to evaluate certain aspects of multi-disciplinary proposals. The IERs of these experts are nonetheless made available to the consensus group.

The group is assisted by a moderator (*for the appointment see section IV.1*).

## 5.1 Reaching consensus

The *consensus group* is asked to reach a consensus on the evaluation of each proposal.

The *moderator* must seek a consensus and ensure that each proposal is evaluated fairly according to the evaluation criteria, by helping the experts to come to:

- a **common view** on questions of **scope** and **operational capacity**

If the consensus group agrees that one or more partners lacks sufficient operational capacity, they should continue to evaluate the proposal, as if the partner(s) concerned were absent from the proposal (i.e. disregarding their activities and their estimated budget).

If necessary, experts may seek further information from publically or otherwise available sources (e.g. number of employees).

- an *agreement* on **consensus comments** for *each* of the evaluation criteria and suitable **scores** reflecting the comments.

### Specific cases:

If provided in the Work Plan/call, the consensus score may be the **arithmetic average** (i.e. 'median' or 'mean' value) **of the individual scores**.

The 'mean' is the total score of the experts, divided by the number of experts.

The 'median' is found by arranging all the scores from lowest value to highest value and picking the middle one (*e.g., the median of {3, 5, 9} is 5*).

If there is an even number of experts, then there is no single middle value; the median is then the mean of the two middle scores (*e.g. the median of {3, 5, 7, 9} is  $(5 + 7) / 2 = 6$* ).

Use the mean value if only two experts were involved.

If provided in the Work Plan, the consensus process may **stop** as soon as the experts agree to award a **below-threshold** score for a particular **criterion**.

You should also make available:

- a previous evaluation summary report, if a proposal is resubmitted within 2 years (as indicated by the applicant in the part A of the proposal) and the report was produced under comparable conditions, *e.g. broadly similar Work Plan topics and criteria*). In this case, the experts should provide a clear justification for comments and scores that significantly differ from those awarded to the earlier proposal
  - IERs of experts that were asked to carry out only the individual evaluation (see *above point 4*).

### Specific cases:

**Disagreement/No consensus** — the *moderator* should keep the RO informed on any points on which the experts are in disagreement.

If a consensus group cannot reach a common view: the RO may ask up to three additional experts to examine the proposal in order to establish whether a clear majority view exists.

If it is impossible to bring the experts to a common point of view: the consensus report should set out both the majority view and the dissenting views.

## 5.2 Consensus report

The 'consensus report' must:

- indicate whether or not the proposal is 'in scope' ( a proposal is 'in scope' if its content corresponds — at least in part — to the topic/part of call for which it is submitted)
- indicate if the conditions for exceptional funding of third country participants (from a country not on the list of General Annexes to the Work Plan) are fulfilled
- indicate any cases where the experts judge one or other partner to lack the necessary operational capacity to carry out the tasks assigned to them. In such cases, they evaluate the proposal as if the partner(s) concerned were absent.
- reflect an evaluation of the proposal as it was submitted, not on its potential if certain improvements were to be made.
- reflect any identified shortcomings (except minor ones) in lower scores. If experts identify significant weaknesses that prevent the project from achieving its objectives or with resources being seriously over-estimated, they must give the proposal a below- threshold score for the criterion concerned.
- contain comments that explain the shortcomings that justify lower scores.
- set out comments and scores for each evaluation criterion that:
  - reflect the consensus reached
  - are clear, sufficiently detailed, and consistent
  - are suitable for feedback to the applicants
- contain any minority views.

The consensus report must **not**:

- contain any recommendations.

The consensus report must be **drafted** by the expert designated by the moderator or call coordinator ('**consensus group rapporteur**'). This rapporteur must not necessarily be a member of the consensus group.

The draft report must be **reviewed** by the *moderator* who has to ensure that the evaluation criteria have been correctly applied. (If necessary, the moderator may refer the draft report back to the experts).

When the experts have reached a consensus view, the consensus report must be:

- **approved** and **submitted** by the **consensus group rapporteur** (in SEP)
- **approved** or **rejected** within a certain deadline by the other *experts of the consensus group* (via SEP).

⚠ The experts of the consensus group must be explicitly informed that inaction (i.e. no approval or rejection by the deadline) will be considered as tacit approval.

The report is considered to be **adopted**, if a majority of consensus group experts has approved it

(actively or exceptionally, tacitly).

- ⚠ A consensus report can normally no longer be changed at this stage. If duly justified, the RO may allow for changes by the consensus group (and resubmission of the report).

After adoption of the report, the report is automatically **closed** in SEP.

In the exceptional case of a tacit approval(s), the *moderator* must close the report.

The experts of the consensus group are automatically informed (by SEP) of the adoption of the consensus group report and its closure in the system.

## 6. Evaluation process: Phase 3 — Panel review

A panel review is necessary in all cases, unless one of the following applies:

- the Work Plan/call provides for an exception
- there are sufficient funds to support all proposals that passed the relevant thresholds.

### Specific case:

There will be **no separate panel review**, if the *same* consensus group has examined *all* the proposals within the scope of a particular indicative budget (as mentioned in the Work Plan). In this case, their final review will be done together with the consensus report. This is considered to constitute the panel review.

The panel (set up by the AO; see *above point 1*) may be composed of experts involved in the consensus groups, new experts or a mixture of the two.

The panel is chaired by panel chairs (i.e. one or more FCH 2 JU staff members; *for the appointment, see section IV.1*).

### Specific case:

The AO may appoint an **expert for this role** if this would contribute to the efficient handling of an evaluation session involving a large number of proposals.

## 6.1 Panel review

The main tasks of the *panel* are to:

- examine and compare the consensus reports in a given area
- check on the consistency of the comments and scores given at the consensus stage
- resolve cases where there were dissenting views recorded in the consensus report
- recommend a priority order for proposals with the same score (if necessary, taking into account the available budget, and subject to the procedure in the Work Plan)
- where necessary, propose a new set of marks or revision of comments.

The *panel* may also:

- hold hearings with the applicants of those proposals that have passed thresholds, where applicable (see below point 6.2).

The panel chair should ensure fair and equal treatment of the proposals.

If the panel members cannot come to a common view, they must vote (and the majority will determine

the final score). Panel chairs that are FCH 2 JU staff have no vote.

## 6.2 Panel hearing

As part of the panel deliberations (and if specified in the call), the FCH 2 JU may hold hearings with the applicants to:

- clarify the proposals and help the panel establish their final assessment and scores or
- improve the experts' understanding of the proposal.

Hearings are limited to proposals that have passed at least the individual thresholds (even if they fell short of the overall threshold).

Hearings may not be used to modify proposals. Applicants may only provide explanations and clarifications in response to questions submitted to them in advance.

Applicants may choose not to attend the hearing and to reply only in writing.

The panel may invite additional experts to clarify particular issues requiring specific expertise. These experts may not take position on the proposal as a whole.

Hearings are usually held in Brussels - but may also be conducted by written exchanges, via telephone or by video-conference.

## 6.3 Panel report

The 'panel report' must contain all of the following:

- an '**evaluation summary report (ESR)**' for each proposal (based on the consensus report, including comments and scores, and taking into account the panel's deliberations and any **new or modified comments** or **altered scores** considered necessary), with explanations

Changes by the panel must follow the rules on the evaluation by the consensus group. This includes the requirements that the ESR must:

- reflect an evaluation of the proposal as it was submitted, not on its potential if certain improvements were to be made.
- reflect any identified shortcomings (except minor ones) in lower scores. If experts identify a significant shortcoming, they must give the proposal a below-threshold score for the criterion concerned.
  - ⚠ A significant shortcoming is one that would prevent the project from reaching its objective, or is a serious over-estimation of resources.
- contain comments that explain the shortcomings that justify lower scores.
- not contain any recommendations
- a list of the proposals that passed all thresholds, along with a final score and the panel's recommendations for priority order in the event of equal scores ('**panel ranked list**')
  - ⚠ If necessary, the evaluation panel report must clearly distinguish multiple ranked lists.
- a list of the (evaluated) proposals that failed to achieve one or more threshold scores, with a summary explanation for each proposal
- a list of the proposals that were found ineligible during the evaluation, with a summary

explanation for each proposal

- a list of the proposals that passed all thresholds, but where one or more of the applicants was found to lack operational capacity, with a summary explanation for each applicant
- list of the proposals that passed all thresholds and that have third country participants (from a country not on the list of General Annexes to the Work Plan) that requested funding and that should exceptionally be funded, with a summary explanation for each third country participant
- list of the proposals that passed all thresholds and that have third country participants (from a country not on the list of General Annexes to the Work Plan) that requested funding and that should not be funded (i.e. become 'beneficiaries not receiving EU funding'<sup>12</sup>), with a summary explanation for each third country participant
- a record of hearings held
- a summary of any other recommendations from the panel

A record should also be made of:

- proposals where the panel had to vote to determine the final score, with explanations and minority views
- proposals having the same score, where the panel was unable to agree a priority order, having first applied the procedure specified in the Work Plan, with explanations.

The expert ('panel rapporteur') appointed by the panel chair drafts the panel report. The chair may appoint him/herself as rapporteur.

The panel report must be:

- **approved and submitted** by the *panel rapporteur* (in SEP)
- **approved** by the *panel chair* (in SEP)
- **approved** or **rejected** within a certain deadline by the **other members of the panel** (via SEP).

⚠ The members of the panel must be explicitly informed that inaction (i.e. no approval or rejection by the deadline) will be considered as tacit approval.

The report is considered to be **adopted**, if a majority of panel members has approved it (actively or exceptionally, tacitly).

After adoption of the report, the report is automatically **closed** in SEP.

In the exceptional case of tacit approval(s), the **CC/PO** must close the report.

The members of the panel are automatically informed (by SEP) of the adoption of the panel report and its closure in the system.

## 7. Observer report(s)

At the end of the evaluation, the observers must submit their observer reports.

The **AO** must ensure that the FCH2 JU Governing Board is informed of the findings of the observers.

The **AO** may publish a summary of the observer report.

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<sup>12</sup> See Article 9 of the General MGA.

## 8. FCH 2 JU ranked list — Operational capacity check

The **CC/PO** must — on the basis of the panel ranking and available budget — draw up (in SEP) a draft decision on the **ranked list** of proposals that passed the thresholds, consisting of:

- a main list(s) (proposals proposed for funding)
  - ⚠ Remember that funding would be required in the event of successful redress procedures.

Do **not include** any proposals that were found **ineligible** during the evaluation.

Among the proposals on the main list, do not include participants that were found not to have sufficient operational capacity (and flag them to the AO).

- a reserve list(s)

The reserve list(s) allows for different eventualities of proposals in the main list(s), such as the withdrawal of proposals, the rejection of proposals during grant preparation or the availability of additional budget from other sources.

  - ⚠ This is only the FCH 2 JU ranked list, not the selection/award decision. This latter decision will be taken by the AO at the end of the grant agreement preparation.

The main list (and reserve list) must indicate for each proposal:

- the title of the proposal
- the names of the applicants
- the proposed maximum grant amount.<sup>13</sup>

### Specific cases:

Exceptionally, if the AO believes that the evaluation procedure was flawed (*e.g. experts misapplied the award criteria; one expert unduly influenced the other experts in an inappropriate and biased way*), the AO may decide that all proposals that were evaluated by the same panel have to be **re-evaluated**.

Moreover, the **CC/PO** must encode (in SEP) draft decisions for:

- **proposals that cannot be funded**, because they failed one or more **thresholds**
- proposals that should be **rejected** because they were found to be **ineligible** (including 'out of scope').

In addition the **CC/PO** must encode (in SEP) a draft decision for **applicants** that — on the basis of the opinion of the experts — should be **rejected** due to a lack of **operational capacity** (although their proposal is retained for funding, but without them).

- ⚠ Don't forget to ensure that decisions to put proposals on the reserve list and rejection decisions are properly motivated (i.e. summary of the reasons, for each proposal/applicant).
- ⚠ Ensure that the Governing Board is informed of the outcome of the evaluation before feedback is sent to applicants.

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<sup>13</sup> See Article 204(5)(b) of the Rules for Application

## 9. After evaluation & ranked list

### 9.1 Changes to reports – Ethics assessment and Security screening check, if necessary

Once adopted, individual evaluation reports (IERs), consensus reports (CRs), evaluation summary reports (ESRs) or panel reports can no longer be changed, except if necessary to improve readability or exceptionally, to remove any factual errors or inappropriate comments.

Any such changes may not affect the evaluation results. The scores must not be changed.

The **CCPO** must check, if it could be necessary to make an **ethics assessment** and/or **security scrutiny** (see section *IV.3 and IV.4*)

If so, liaise with the DG RTD Ethics department and/or chair of the 'Security Scrutiny Group and, following the opinion received, include it in the planning.

### 9.2 Approval by the Governing Board

In accordance with Article 8 of the FCH2 JU statutes, the Governing Board approves the lists of actions selected for funding on the basis of the ranking list produced by a panel of independent experts.

After encoded (in SEP), the draft decisions and related lists are sent to the Governing Board for formal approval. This includes **consultation** of the other Commission services and Agencies on the list, in order to detect instances of **double funding**.

Once approved, the **AO** validates the decisions in Compass.

### 9.3 Feedback to the applicants on the outcome of the evaluation

As a result of the evaluation, there are four categories of proposals:

- proposals on the main list (proposals proposed for funding)
- proposals on the reserve list
- proposals that cannot be funded because they failed one or more thresholds or were found to be ineligible (including 'out of scope').

After these lists are approved by the Governing Board, the **AO** must **inform** the applicants on the outcome of the evaluation (within 5 months of the call deadline).

All applicants that were evaluated by the same panel must be informed at the same time.

**For proposals proposed for funding:** the AO must send a '**grant information letter**' to the coordinator (as a 'formal notification' via SYGMA), together with a copy of the ESR, and invite them to the grant agreement preparation phase.

⚠ Use the template for grant information letters.

Delete any personal data in ESRs (especially that of the experts), before sending them to the applicants.

The grant information letter does not give rise to any right to receive funding.

Don't forget to specify that all proposals are subject to a systematic ethics review and if there maybe the need for a security scrutiny (*see sections IV.3, IV.4*).

**For proposals on the reserve list:** the AO must inform the coordinator of the **reserve status** (as a 'formal notification' via SYGMA), together with the reasons why, the means of redress and a copy of the ESR.

Any subsequent change in their reserve status must be notified to the coordinator.

A proposal on the reserve list may be funded, if and when budget is available. In this case, the AO must send a grant information letter to initiate the grant agreement preparation phase (*see above*).

Once the call budget has been used up, the AO must reject the remaining proposals on the reserve list and inform the applicants by sending a proposal rejection letter to the coordinator (*see below*).

⚠ Use the template for 'reserve list letters'.

**For unsuccessful proposals that cannot be funded:** the AO must send a **proposal rejection letter** to the coordinator (as a 'formal notification' via SYGMA), together with the reasons why, the means of redress and a copy of the ESR.

⚠ Use the template for proposal rejection letters.

#### 9.4 Informing an applicant of the rejection of its participation

If the proposal is proposed for funding, but without one of the partners (due to lack of operational capacity), the **AO** must send an '**applicant rejection letter**' to that applicant (as a 'formal notification' via SYGMA, with copy to the coordinator), together with the reasons why and the means of redress.

⚠ Use the template for participant rejection letters.

#### 9.5 Publishing the 'flash call info'

At the same time, when applicants are informed about the evaluation results (or soon after), the **CC** must publish (on the Participant Portal) basic statistics on the outcome of the call (*e.g. number of total proposals submitted, ineligible proposals, above-threshold and below- threshold proposals*), through a 'flash call info' in CaP.

##### Detailed procedure (flash call info):

**Step 1** — Prepare the 'flash call info' by completing the template.

**Step 2** — Go to the CaP and select the appropriate call or sub-call.

**Step 3** — Upload the 'flash call info' in PDF format in the CaP-section 'Information Package' (by placing it at the top of the list of documents in this section).

**Step 4** — Announce the publication of the 'flash call info' through a 'call update' (i.e. upload the announcement in the CaP-section 'Latest information on Call').

#### Complaints

*For information on how to handle complaints, see section IV.5.*

## ***1.3 Ethics review (ethics screening and ethics assessment)***

### **ETHICS REVIEW — OVERVIEW Background**

The FCH2 JU will not fund proposals that contravene ethical principles.

The ethics review is part of the Commission's overall 'H2020 ethics appraisal scheme' (i.e. the global approach on ethics issues — as developed under the responsibility of the DG RTD Ethics department) which includes all of the following:

- ethics self-assessment (by the applicants, in their proposal)
- ethics review (by the Commission and FCH2 JU, during the selection procedure)
- if necessary, ethics checks, reviews and audits (during the implementation of the action and up to two years afterwards; *see MGA*).

The Commission/FCH2 JU use external ethics experts to ensure that ethics issues identified in proposals are adequately addressed (both for the ethics review and other procedures of the ethics appraisal scheme).

Although the ethics self-assessment should ideally identify all proposals with potential ethics issues — through a self-flagging of the ethics issues (in the 'ethics issues table' in the administrative forms ('Part A')) and additional information on how these issues are addressed (in an ethics self-assessment under section 5 of the technical annex for proposals ('Part B')) —, all proposals with a positive evaluation and considered for funding are nevertheless systematically subject to the ethics review.

The ethics review may lead to 'ethics requirements' in Annex 1 to the grant agreement.

### **Where does the ethics review fit in? — When are proposals reviewed?**

The ethics review starts during the scientific evaluation or soon after.

The grant agreement can only be signed after the ethics screening/assessment and if all conditions that must be fulfilled before the signature are met.

### **How are proposals reviewed for ethics issues?**

Proposals are evaluated to see if they raise 'ethics issues' and, if so, to check if these issues are adequately addressed (including during the action implementation phase).

The ethics review is a full and independent assessment. 'Opinions' of ethics structures in EU Member States (that are submitted as part of a proposal) will be taken into account, but will not prejudice the ethics review.

The main focus of the ethics review is on the ethical dimension (e.g. *human rights and protection of human beings, animal protection and welfare, data protection and privacy, environmental protection, malevolent use of research results*) and compliance with international, EU and national law.

However, research integrity aspects may also be addressed (*in particular, fabrication, falsification and plagiarism, in proposing, performing, or reviewing research or in reporting research results; this includes misrepresentation of credentials and improprieties of authorship*).

Indications related to integrity aspects, such as plagiarism and other research misconducts, may also be detected during the scientific evaluation (see *section IV.2*).

### **How is the ethics review process organised?**

The ethics review has 2 stages:

#### **Stage 1 — Ethics screening**

#### **Stage 2 — Ethics assessment (if necessary)**

During the ethics screening, the proposals that have an empty 'ethics issue table' in the Part A (and therefore no ethics self-assessment in Part B) are first 'pre-screened', in order to establish potential

ethics issues.

Proposals raising ethics issues are then screened more thoroughly ('full screening'), in order to check if the ethics issues are properly addressed by the applicants.

If the ethics screening shows more serious or complex ethics issues requiring a more in-depth analysis, they will be subject to the ethics assessment and should be passed to the DG RTD Ethics department.

### **Who is responsible for managing it?**

The ethics review is managed by the FCH2 JU operational services (os).

The procedures are managed by the CC/PO and specialised services.

The first stage of the ethics review process (i.e. ethics screening) is managed by the CC/PO during the evaluation of proposals. The second stage (i.e. ethics assessment) is managed by the DG RTD Ethics department. The review is normally made by experts (in groups).

## ***I.4 Security scrutiny***

### **SECURITY SCRUTINY — OVERVIEW Background**

Under Horizon 2020 programme, proposals concerning actions that would deal with information that is 'EU-classified' under the Commission Internal Rules of Procedure must undergo a periodic security scrutiny.

The scrutiny check is not a fully-fledged security check on all potentially security-relevant aspects of an action; it is limited to identifying actions that involve security-sensitive information (and classifying them and their deliverables as 'classified deliverables').

- ⚠ The security scrutiny does not concern other issues or 'activities involving dual-use goods or dangerous materials and substances'.

Security scrutiny will be used for most parts of 'Societal Challenge — Secure Societies', but it may also apply to other proposals (including FCH2 JU proposals), for instance, if:

- the applicants declared in the proposal submission form that it is 'security-sensitive', i.e. concerns EU-classified information;
- the topic is flagged in the Work Plan as potentially resulting in security-sensitive actions;
- the FCH2 JU detect or suspect that:
  - classified information is, or may be, used as background and/or
  - it is planned that some results will be classified.

In such cases, the process will be triggered by the FCH2 JU operational services (os) managing the call and passed to the chair of the 'Security Scrutiny Group' in the Commission.

## ***1.5 Complaints***

If the applicants consider that the FCH2 JU unduly rejected their proposal, the coordinator may file a ***complaint*** via the Participant Portal ('formal notifications box').

For specific complaints concerning the ***evaluation of proposal***, the coordinator may — within ***30 days*** of receiving the proposal rejection letter — file a ***request for an evaluation review*** via the Participant Portal, using the on-line forms provided.

An FCH2 JU internal evaluation review committee will then be convened to examine the complaints.

⚠ The review covers only the procedural aspects of the evaluation, not the merits of the proposal.

If the complaint is justified, the FCH2 JU will arrange for a re-evaluation and inform the coordinator.

If the complaint is not justified, the FCH2 JU will inform the coordinator, together with the reasons why.