International Conference Assessment Processes of Erasmus+ Applications

Challenges beyond 2020

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

E+

January 2018

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Dear Colleagues,

On 25th and 26th January 2018, the Spanish NA for Education and Training was proud to gather in Madrid over 90 people coming from 30 different National Agencies located in 25 countries, with the aim of sharing our views, experiences and challenges on the assessment processes of Erasmus+ applications.

We would especially like to thank the participation of all the speakers, coming from a wide range of National Agencies and from the European Commission, which was really supportive with the organisation of this event from the very beginning.

We also counted on the participation of several external experts from various countries participating in a roundtable discussion, and a representation of 5 Spanish controllers, a key figure for the quality assurance of the evaluation processes managed by our National Agency, which was explained during the conference.

Unfortunately, in the end it was not possible, as initially planned, to count on the collaboration of a representative from EACEA.

In our National Agency, the importance of assessment has always been highlighted. In fact, the Unit that organised this conference, the Quality Assessment and Primary Checks Unit, was created in 2015 to manage three specific areas of work: the panel of external experts, the quality assessment processes of applications and primary checks. Today, we can say we still have a lot to learn and improve, but we have also learned and improved a lot, as it has surely been your case too.

As you know, evaluation processes are complex but highly relevant for the life-cycle of projects, and this was an excellent opportunity to stop for a day and a half and evaluate these processes themselves. By analysing their pros and cons, and sharing the experience within this field gained by all the NAs present, we had the chance to exchange ideas and learn from each other's working procedures. This is always a positive and healthy exercise and we hope we can have the chance to repeat this enriching experience on other occasions.

It was also the perfect time to think about the future. Given the lessons learned regarding the assessment of Erasmus+ proposals, it was a good moment to reflect on the changes these processes could or should undergo in the next generation programme. The best way of doing this is, again, the exchange of experiences and ideas, and that was the reason why we conceived this conference as a useful tool for this purpose.

Assessment implies several problems that cannot be avoided. The correct development of assessment processes guarantees that only good quality projects are financed and implemented. This is translated in the attainment of the Programme's objectives and, therefore, its success. However, it is a highly difficult task to determine if an application contains a good quality proposal, if it is innovative, if it would produce substantial impact on the organisations and participants of the activities proposed, etc.

Another problem is caused by the circumstances surrounding assessment. The process facilitating the assessment task is also complex and should work smoothly, implying the coordinated work of many people and the respect of really tight deadlines. The participation of external experts is here essential since they add objectivity, impartiality and also expertise to the evaluation outcomes. And finally, another problem that we cannot avoid is one that will appear once projects have been evaluated and we realise that sometimes we do not have enough budget to finance all the good quality proposals we have carefully assessed.

Taking all these ideas into account, we should be hopeful for the future. This is the right time to stop and think of what we are doing now and what we would like to do in the year 2021. The next generation programme should learn from our experience and recognise our needs, and the needs of beneficiaries and participants. In this context, and given the importance of this programme, a higher budget will also be necessary to cater for all these great projects left behind unfinanced, since these could also make a difference in their participants, in their institutions, in their regions, in their countries and in Europe.

Director of the Spanish Service for the
Internationalisation of Education (SEPIE)

I. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ASSESSMENT PROCESSES

MAIN TOPICS DISCUSSED AND CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

1) Management of calls for external experts on quality assessment

Regarding the various tasks external experts can perform in their collaboration with the NAs, different options were presented:

- Collaboration only in the assessment of applications.
- Collaboration also in the assessment of final reports and also interim reports.
- Collaboration in other assessment activities: applications in ELL calls, other international projects out of the sphere of Erasmus+, etc.
- Other types of collaboration: desk checks.

With regard to the frequency of calls for external experts, different approaches seem to be chosen by the NAs, like:

- Annual calls.
- Tri-annual (or other durations) calls.
- Open calls.

They all seem to have their advantages and disadvantages, open calls can guarantee the continuous incorporation of new experts to the existing panels, although the complexity of the management of calls for the NA must also be contemplated when choosing the type of call.

As for the profile of the experts, some of the best practices discussed were:

- Previous experience in assessment activities.
- Previous experience in European/international educational projects.
- Previous experience in local/regional/national educational projects.
- Qualifications (University degree holders).
- Language skills (knowledge of other European languages), necessary, at least, for reading and understanding proposals written in those languages. The language in which assessments can be written seems to be most times the official language of the NA to which the applications was addressed, due to the added complexity for the NA of correcting the drafts and the nuances of the language.
- Good acceptance of external experts from other countries.

Other criteria to be taken into account in the selection of experts´:

- Incorporation of newcomers: sometimes a minimum percentage of newcomers is granted in the NAs per call and assessment process (e.g.: around 30%). In any case, their presence seems to be positive bringing new points of view and academic and professional background, although making the process more complex sometimes due to their lack of expertise in the assessment of Erasmus+ applications.
- Incorporation of experts from less represented regions in the Programme, which favours the possible future development of projects in those areas once these people count on the experience gained in the assessment processes in which they are involved.
- Thorough knowledge of the Erasmus+ Programme, especially due to its differences with other EU programmes like Horizon 2020.

As for the training offered to external evaluators, each NA seems to offer a different approach. Among the main ideas presented:
- Possible online training course or period prior to assessment activities.
- On-site training before starting the assessment process (briefing session). This training can consist of 1, 2 (or more) days, and they are considered as essential for both experts and the NAs for the correct development of the processes. This on-site training includes the assessment of case studies.
- Sometimes, on-site training at the end/final phase of the assessment process (debriefing session). These sessions are used in some cases for the facilitation of the consolidation phase of the assessment.
- Specific training for newcomers was also mentioned during the external experts' roundtable.

The contracting of experts greatly depends on national regulations. Thus, in some cases, contracts between the NA and the expert are signed, in other cases there is a collaboration agreement or other types of administrative procedures are involved. The taxation of the expert's work is also something that may differ from one country to the other.

Challenges for the future

- The impact of the increasing budgets also affects the needs of the NAs in terms of the collaboration required from external experts in assessment tasks.
- The creation of a common European pool of experts could be very positive for NAs since the criteria of the call would be common for all countries, although several problems might arise too, such as:
  - All countries would need experts at the same time, so the experts required might respond to a similar profile to the one required at present in the NAs' individual calls.
  - Payment and taxation to EU experts living out of the NA's country might require further study.
  - The language proficiency of the experts in the language in which the assessment is written would be mandatory, minimising NA intervention in the correction and editing of the resulting texts.
  - The training received by the experts would have to meet some common standards, regardless of the NA in charge of this previous training. Another idea would be to develop a common EU training model for external experts collaborating in assessment processes.

2) Expert training experiences.

Among the issues raised on this topic during the conference, several ideas were presented:

- The collective Nordic approach to the development of training models for external experts in the assessment of Erasmus+ applications was considered as an excellent experience:
  - The "Model for Expert Training" jointly developed by the Erasmus+ National Agencies of Iceland, Norway and Sweden has been available online for other Erasmus+ NAs since 2014.
  - Between its objectives: the sharing of knowledge, the production of common training materials for NAs and experts and their publication in English have contributed to the success of this model, used by many NAs (as it could be seen during the conference).
  - On-site briefing of experts is considered necessary (1 ½ days), including the assessment of case studies.
- Other models were also presented, like the one used by the Spanish NA in Education and Training, consisting of:
  - An online course on Erasmus+ and assessment processes which is compulsory to pass.
  - An on-site briefing session (1 ½ days) at the beginning of each assessment process (per call and action), including the assessment of case studies.
  - Reference material available for the experts involved in the assessment of applications during the process.

Challenges for the future

- On-site training sessions are considered essential in the assessment processes. This idea was widely supported by both the NA staff and external experts participating in the conference. Among others, the following benefits of onsite meetings addressed to experts were mentioned:
  - The exchange of points of view concerning various aspects of the assessment process is key for the training of experts and for the quality assurance of the whole process.
  - These meetings are particularly useful for experts participating for the first time in assessment processes, because they can gain from the experience and advice offered by the NA and more experienced experts.
- It would be highly positive to establish a "European culture of assessment", favouring the uniformity of evaluation criteria and scoring.
- Suggestion of organising post-evaluation process meetings in order to exchange opinions about the process itself and also about possible best practice proposals.
- More transnational meetings/workshops/conferences would be really beneficial for external experts.

3) Specific NA assessment tools and resources for Erasmus+ decentralised projects.

Several developments have been carried out to help NAs with the management of the assessment processes of Erasmus+ decentralised projects, namely:

- The Spanish NA for Education and Training (SEPIE) presented their specific IT tool aiming at improving the workflow and communication during the assessment processes. Among its main features this tool offers:
  - Different interfaces: for evaluators, controllers and administrators (NA staff).
  - Batch allocation of projects, really useful with high numbers of applications.
  - Budgets can be reviewed by the evaluators and changes are signaled for their later check by controllers/NA staff.
  - Assessments' follow-up: changes and their date of introduction can be checked.
  - Improved communication through messages and comments between expert and controller as well as the upload of a daily updated FAQs file.
  - Link to reference documentation for the experts.
  - Information on the payment to experts and preparation of the experts' invoices including all the necessary details for their subsequent payment.
  - Experts and controllers performance assessment at the end of the process, consisting of 5 criteria.

- Despite its complexity, it is a tool that has greatly simplified procedures in the NA regarding the assessment processes of Erasmus+ proposals. It is being updated and improved call after call also due to the lack of management functionalities offered by the OEET tool.
- The Spanish NA uses a Moodle platform for the organisation of the compulsory online course (on Erasmus+ and assessment tasks) that all new experts to their panel must pass before starting their collaboration as evaluators.

- SEPIE also makes use of anti-plagiarism software in order to detect cases of different applications presenting identical or very similar texts. It is used in the double funding check phase of the project selection process.

- The French and Spanish NAs contemplate the figure of the "controller". Controllers are experienced external experts (under the NA supervision) in charge of the quality control of the assessments carried out by external evaluators. Their quality control includes the coherence and completeness of the narrative part of the assessment, as well as the assessed budget. They also assess the evaluators' performance during the process.

Challenges for the future

It would be desirable if the OEET (or the EC tool to be used instead, if that is the case) could incorporate some valuable features that would be appreciated by all/most NAs, such as: the possibility of downloading the proposal and its accompanying documents easily, the possibility of analysing and assessing the budget by using the tool, the possibility of uploading the results of the assessment in a fixed format to the tool so as to avoid copy-pasting and human error, etc.

4) **Critical points in the assessment of proposals**

Several issues (in fact, challenges in all cases) were raised that might need further reflection from the NAs and/or EC, such as:
- The same institution submitting an unlimited number of applications (in the same action and sector or in others). This may lead to the problem of having very few institutions presenting really good projects and utilising most of the available budget. Doubts on limiting these practices arouse.
- How to define and measure innovation. What is innovative for an institution may not be so for another. This idea is also linked to the expected impact of the project, varying from one context to the other and with the transfer of innovation.
- The difficulties of assessing bearing in mind the principle of proportionality. What might be a great impact for one institution or consortium may not be so relevant for others.
- Connected to the idea of proportionality is the situation of small institutions, especially new comers applying for the first time. It should be remembered the potential impact of a small project for this type of institutions too, although sometimes this principle is difficult to apply in a consistent way.

- The difficulties of identifying and assessing intellectual outputs correctly. Although things are clearer in this sense as the Programme evolved, there are still doubts on this critical issue.
- The assessment of the budget also poses some difficulties. It is always wise to stick to the rules of the Programme Guide and scrutinise all sections carefully.
- Apparently excellent applications turning into mediocre or simply bad projects. The issue of professional project writers was also raised.
- The difficulties posed by the existing forms (the KA107 form was specifically mentioned because of its extraordinary complexity).

Challenges for the future

- Taking into account the past performance of the coordinating institution in the management of projects was mentioned as a possible aid to deter professionals in the drafting of good proposals but appalling project managers.
- A more logical structure for applications forms would be desirable. It should be remembered when devising new forms that these crucial documents are meant to be understandable by potential applicants in the project drafting phase, they should also be easy to read and connect ideas in it and, really important for us, they are also meant to be assessed, so a more logical approach should be sought.
- The training on assessment processes is perceived as highly important for the future of the Programme, both for NA staff and for external experts. Either training sessions/guidelines facilitated by the EC or initiatives at the level of NAs in this respect (such as the Nordic expert training model) are welcome.
- It was also pointed out the need to include mock applications based on real cases in the training of evaluators (either experts or NA staff).
- The concepts of innovation, impact and proportionality should be further stressed and explained in the next generation Programme. Although their individual definitions might seem simple, they are subjects open to a wide range of different and sometimes conflicting interpretations. Further training on these concepts seems to be highly necessary for the preparation of future assessment processes.
- Another suggestion was to create an EU community of experts, sharing experience, best practice and gathering for training at international level. In this sense, during the conference other proposals included the request for the organisation of transnational workshops and the possibility of launching a conference on best practices for external experts.
- In connection with the results of the assessment processes, it was highlighted the need for NAs to be proactive helping and guiding institutions to reach high quality and sustainable standards.
- The need of bringing back schools into the Programme was also underlined. This is also connected with the necessity to simplify application forms.
- As elsewhere has been commented, it is very important for the future to facilitate access to newcomers to the Programme so as to amplify the relevance and impact intended.
- It would be interesting to establish ways to link the impact and innovation, taking the proportionality principle into account, on the institution organising or participating in a project assessed as of high quality and the resulting overall improvement in the corresponding Programme action.
- The simplification of the KA107 application process and forms is a general claim among NAs. One of the most widely supported ideas is to carry out the assessment on regions rather than on individual countries, which complicates it all.
- Another widely supported request is the introduction of national priorities in the assessment and selection of proposals, also for KA1 projects. These national priorities should be defined by each NA and be clearly contextualised in the framework of European priorities.
- A working group on assessment processes would be desirable to help in the planning of the next generation Programme. As suggested, this could take the form of a group coordinated by the EC (although there seems to be an overabundance of WGs at the moment) or an informal group integrated by several NAs as an initiative of their own (counting, of course, on the support and collaboration of the EC where possible). Assessment is a crucial issue in the life-cycle of funded Erasmus+ projects, and its possible developments should be tackled in a coordinated collective way.

5) Monitoring of experts

Regarding the monitoring of the experts' work, different experiences were shared, such as:
- The Italian NA (Indire) shared their experience in this sense. They establish a close internal monitoring system in which experts are tutored by NA staff, so they feel accompanied all along the process. For them it is essential to let experts know the NA's point of view so they can improve their experience and performance.
- The French NA uses webinars, which are helpful for this purpose, apart from the briefing and debriefing onsite meetings they hold.
- In the Netherlands regular meetings with the experts are celebrated (3-6 times a year).

Challenges for the future

- Feedback from the experts is very important for the NAs so they can reflect on their internal procedures and improve for the future.
- It is very positive to have the chance of exchanging experiences on this and other issues with other NAs' staff and also external experts from various countries.

6) OEET. Opportunities for improvement

With regard to the advantages and disadvantages of the OEET assessment tool, some of the main points mentioned were the following:
- Among the tool's weaknesses, some comments were shared:
  o Difficult allocation of projects to experts, one by one to each evaluator. No batch allocation is contemplated.
  o It is not a tool for the management of the whole assessment process.
  o The overview for the experts is not clear. Features such as the name of the applicant and project are missing.
  o It is not user-friendly. During consolidation only the lead expert can read both individual assessments.
  o No budget assessment features are included despite their relevance for the evaluation of the proposal.
- As for its strengths, the following ideas were mentioned:
  o It is a web based application.
  o It is highly configurable.
  o It is integrated with other internal systems.
  o It is easy to use.

Challenges for the future

- From the EC several options were explained regarding this tool in the next generation programme, each with its pros and cons:
  - Maintaining the current tool with improvements.
  - Developing a new system.
  - Using another corporate solution offered by the Commission.

- Some of the requests of the audience were:
  - Having only one tool would simplify things, although the EC representative pointed out it is not a good idea since if one of the embedded tools crashes, as it happens sometimes, there would be no access to any of the other tools.
  - With regard to KA107 specificities, all the information that is now in BO reports on this action should be included in the tool.
  - A popular request was the need for software to control plagiarisms developed centrally by the EC.
  - The incorporation of a spell check functionality.
  - The export and import of information should be facilitated.
  - It should be a more collaborative tool to favour consolidation.
  - Allowing for the allocation of several proposals per expert.
  - Possibility of assessing the budget in the tool.

One of the main conclusions of this conference has been the realisation that learning and improvement is really facilitated by the sharing of experiences by all the different participants.

Regarding the topics tackled, the main messages could be summarised as follows:

1) There should be further opportunities for NAs to exchange their expertise, working methodologies and best practices on the assessment of Erasmus+ applications. These opportunities could take the form of other conferences, workshops, working groups, or any other kind of collaboration. The EC should promote this type of initiatives in the future since it really benefits us all.

2) There should be some common initiatives in the EU concerning external experts. These could be organised by the EC or the NAs and should concentrate on their specific training, focusing on those aspects that are especially conflictive or open to different interpretations.

3) Collaboration through common panels of experts could be explored, without losing sight of the possible problems that could be originated (payment regulations, different previous training, the requirement of language proficiency, etc...).

4) The monitoring of experts' work is also relevant, both benefitting NAs and evaluators. The exchange of monitoring models and the conclusions drawn in this field would be particularly welcome.

5) Specific collaboration on training models has proved to be effective and positive for NAs. The experience of the Nordic model on expert training is clearly an example of this, which could show the way to other similar initiatives in the future. Further training material on these issues should also be developed by the EC for the next generation programme.

6) Assessment processes should be simplified as much as possible, aiming at attracting newcomers and small organisations. This could be facilitated by means of a sensible approach to the simplification of application forms.

7) It must be borne in mind that the design and structure of application forms should take into account the fact that they must be understood by potential applicants and, once completed and submitted, understood by evaluators.

8) The OEET assessment tool does not cater for all the different needs of NAs during the assessment processes managed by them. A more user-friendly and practical approach is necessary. This could mean either a further development of the tool or the generation of a new one.

9) It would be really positive for the preparation of the next generation programme if there could be a more fluent exchange of information and expertise between the NAs and EACEA, especially on issues they have extensive experience in, such as the organisation of calls for external experts and the management of the assessment processes themselves. Although EACEA deals with calls for projects at centralised level, there are surely lessons learned that would really be beneficial for the NAs at decentralised level.

10) Specific conclusions and recommendations with regard to the assessment processes of KA1, KA2 and KA107 are contained in the annexes on the work carried out in the three specific workshops of the conference.

II. CONCLUSIONS TO THE WORKSHOPS ON EVALUATION PROCESSES OF KA1, KA2 AND KA107 APPLICATIONS

a. Workshop: Evaluation process of KA1 applications

The workshop allowed participants from different NAs, from the European Commission and some external experts to exchange on the challenges, problems and opportunities of the evaluation process of KA1 applications.

The main subjects discussed were:

- Quality Assessment
- Application forms
- Possibility of an Accreditation in AE and SE fields

Quality Assessment

- Guide for Experts. Overall, NAs and evaluators agree on the positive role of the Guide for Experts: it ensures the homogeneity of comments and practices, avoids subjectivity and allows experts to have a common understanding of what is expected. Especially appreciated are the definitions of 'weak/average/good', as well as the different criteria.

- Role of the controllers. The Spanish NA has developed a system of two pools of experts: evaluators and controllers. The latter are in charge of monitoring the evaluation carried out by the evaluators, they offer them advice on the process and they answer content and technical questions related. A fundamental element for this two-fold system is trust: NAs trust the controllers who are trained, have experience and organise their work based on the clear information that is given in the Experts Guide. Some small NAs appreciate this system but rather prefer NA's staff to ensure the monitoring and control of experts. This is easier to organise in case of a smaller number of projects.

- Training of experts. NAs and evaluators alike agree on the importance of a good training. Not only should experts be able to recognise good and bad projects, but they should also be trained on how to identify the good project beyond the well-written application. This can be done particularly through the use of the well-known proportionality principle, whose definition can help develop the sense for an empty application.

Application forms

The discussion rose around the need of an easier application form, both for applicants and for experts. The European Commission stressed the difficulty of merging two different needs, when elaborating the questions for the form. On the one hand, some minimum standards have to be respected, e.g. transparency, financial regulations…, and on the other hand, it is difficult to structure sentences in order not to have too many of them, or not to ask too many questions.

A central question remains: who do we want to address through the application form? Participants agreed that given the different types of audience, there is not a unique solution.

Possibility of an Accreditation in the Adult Education and School Education sectors

The different needs of different applicants in different sectors led to a discussion about the possibility of awarding Charters in the adult and in the school education fields. This would allow candidates to access funding in an easier way – upon demonstration of high quality implementation of projects. Nevertheless, some doubts still remain. It is particularly difficult for NAs to assess the quality of the implementation of projects whose content tends to change from call to call – which is less the case for the HE and VET sectors. Participants did not find a common position on this issue.

Conclusion

The workshop ended on a positive note. All NAs agreed that it would be good to have a common platform for materials, resources and for the exchange of good practices among agencies. This could allow agencies to share examples of mock applications, comments of experts, useful expressions, etc.

b. Workshop: Evaluation process of KA2 applications

About 41 participants in the KA2 Action Workshop provided active comments into 3 specific aspects of the evaluation process. This paper is an attempt to synthesise some common issues that arouse in the debates generated. The three overall topics of the workshop were:

- External Experts: Selection and organisation
- Assessment IT Tools
- New Action KA229

External Experts: Selection and organization:

Strengths:

- NAs make an effort to ensure they have experienced experts with relevant expertise.
- Although respecting the deadlines can be challenging sometimes, NAs manage to cope with it.
- To combine everyday work and the assessment process is very challenging but it is done so far.

Weaknesses:

The issue of money was put on the table by the three groups. How much could/should we pay an expert?

One of the most common points of view addressed the difficulties for small countries to find experts; the problem becomes bigger in those countries that match expert´s subject profile to project assignment.

Also timing and deadlines make the problem major because KA2 deadlines are mostly at the same time for all sub-actions, so particular fields compete for experts.

Opportunities:

- The possibility to create a European Pool of Experts was referred to as interesting but maybe too challenging at the current time, and not desired by all because the national context might be ignored and the language barrier would generate some issues.

- Encourage experts to join the pool, in this sense an open call could be a good idea. As a best practice to minimise the problem, the use of external experts across all fields was suggested.

- Best practice: Some countries have different ranking lists of experts for each sector.

- The majority of the participants agreed that face-to-face training of experts is more beneficial.

Future Improvements:

- To keep the process as quick, clear and simple as possible.
- European level conferences and/or European working groups to exchange best practices for experts (as TCAs with support from EC).
- Another suggestion was the establishment of similar training processes, led by the EC and supported by an online training platform for Erasmus+. The process should include a combination of training, review of assessment documents, onsite training and a face-to-face consolidation process.

Assessment IT Tools

The general thoughtful insights were around the feeling that the current OEET tool does not cover the results of KA2 final reports effectively and does not handle too well either KA2 projects or Intellectual Outputs so an overall assessment tool that copes with all the needs of the experts (registration, assessment, consolidation) and also to deal with the possibility to import the assessment into the tools was seen as very important.

As none of the 24 nationalities represented, apart from Spain, stated that they were using other tools complementary to OEET, the discussion around this topic was concentrated in the improvements for the future in order to plan a new tool, possibly developed by the EC with inputs from NAs. The countries were against the idea of creating their own tools, due to either economic or management and implementation reasons. They stressed the extra workload that an initiative like this might have given.

The most highlighted improvements were:

1. Communication with experts through the interface.
2. Export/Import functionality.
3. Solving problems with Intellectual Outputs review.
4. Common working tool for all countries
5. Include the name of the organisation and title of project.
6. Transfer of information should be easier.
7. Make it compatible with Ipads/tablets and adapted to different devices.
8. Final reports for KA219 must be better organised and renamed better.

New Action KA229

Strengths:
Budget increase plus the simplification of the action should provide the opportunity to increment the number of applications.

Weaknesses:
Difficult to manage from contractual and reporting perspective.

Opportunities:
- – Process for evaluation of KA229 is highlighted during the assessment training for experts (either separate day or separate working group during the general training).
- – In action KA229, participants discussed about the opportunity to include the long term mobility for pupils in KA1, as it happens in the other fields. According to the group this will be a future improvement.

Future Improvements:

- – The award criteria for KA229 should be simplified in line with the new action.
- – Mobility charter in School Education for long-term pupil mobility.

c. Workshop: Evaluation process of KA107 applications

The objective of this workshop was to come up with some new ideas and ways of improving the assessment process on ICM (KA107), a challenging new action which is growing and evolving call after call: new regions, countries, funds and even mobilities.

The main subjects discussed were:

- • Assessment process: Simplification, application forms, briefing of expert's consolidation
- • IT tools: features, budgets, other tools
- • Projects sustainability: budget duration, accreditation, balance newcomers vs experienced

Assessment process: Simplification, application forms, briefing of expert's consolidation

Strengths:

Unlike KA103 application forms, KA107 forms allow the NAs to access the quality of the proposal in terms of the impact of the mobility for the individual, the HEIs and to some extent the sector.

There are streamlined guidelines for the action: Expert Guidelines, Dos and Don´ts, handbook.

Weaknesses:

There are too many repetitions of questions in the form. Experts have to read through every question for every country, in some countries applicants are applying for 40 countries or over. In the majority of cases, some questions like "how the mobility is managed" are copied and pasted by the HEI in all sections but experts have to read them all in case there is a slight change. This is time consuming.

When the differences in the expert´s scores are over 30 points for only one country, a 3rd expert is required for the whole project.

Opportunities:

As the application is endorsed by the HEI, it would be desirable to:

- Have an application form based on a region rather than by country.
- Limit the questions, i.e., questions like how the mobility is going to be managed or disseminated, while they are of the upmost importance, these could be posed once for all countries rather than for each country.
- We need to take into account past history – maybe a more detailed form for newcomers and a shorter one for HEIs with previous experience.
- A budget tab should be included, and linked to E+Link.

IT tools: features, budgets, other tools

Strengths:

- Simple to use but they do not always work.

- It would be better to have some stability now compared to the start of the programme.

- There has been a constant communication with the EC about the development of IT tools for KA107.

Weaknesses:

- IT Tools are not integrated (with EPlusLink or MT+)

- Not enough time allowed for testing and fixing of bugs.

- OEET does not suit for KA107: the evaluation is per project and not per region; and it scores the whole project.

Future Improvements:

- To Upgrade the OEET in order to include budgets

- Have countries in the same order as they are in the application form in OEET – it is time consuming for experts to have to go through numerous pages before they get to the country on the application page.

- We should be able to integrate our national IT tools with OEET and EPluslink.

- The OEET tool should allow to import and export files.

Other :

It would be appreciated if new upgrades to IT tools were not released just before deadlines.

Projects sustainability: budget duration, accreditation, balance newcomers vs experienced

Strengths

- The EC for KA107 is very pragmatic and easy to deal with. Whenever they are informed of a problem, they aim at solving it fast.

- KA107 facilitates the implementation of the internationalisation strategy of HEIs.

- It gives a good perspective to HEIs since it is an action in the Programme until 2020, not just a pilot action.

Weaknesses:

- Evaluators do not have access to see the budgets for each region in OEET.

- For the size of the budget for KA107 the whole process takes up a great deal of the NAs' time in comparison to other KAs.

- It is hard for HEIs to have any kind of sustainability with these projects because of the yearly application process.

- The application form is too long.

Future Improvements:

- Ensure stability and sustainability by, for example, increasing the duration of the project (possible two or three years of funding under one application). Past performance could also be taken into account in the assessment process- shorter forms for HEIs that perform well. However, this might prevent newcomers from gaining access to funding.

- The creation of a platform for partner countries for partner searches.

Opportunities:

- Allow NAs to prioritise certain areas.

- To have a list of eligible HEIs per partner country.

- Further distribution of budget among NAs (in case some envelopes did not get enough applications, this remaining budget could be redistributed).

SUMMARY OF RESULTS, QUALITY ASSESSMENT PROCESS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Does your NA have a pool of external experts? If so, name three requirements used to belong to that pool and how often the call is launched:	
Requirements	85% (Experience, University degrees, language, CV and others such as technical, writing skills or availability).
Open call	42%
Annual call	25%
Other	25%
No	2%

2. Which criteria does your NA use to assign the applications to the external experts for their quality assessment?	
Profile	77%
Action	71%
Field of the project	69%
Expertise	79%
Language of the application	52%
Other criteria (explain):	19% (Experience of experts; previous performance; participation on onsite/online training; conflict of interest; random assignation; another region different to the applicant´s organization)

3. How does your NA manage the Quality Assessment Process with external experts?	
Online	25%
In person	15%
Both	52%
It depends on the case	13%

4.	More simplified application forms would improve the process for:		
	Agree	Disagree	N/A
Applicants	88%	4%	2%
NA management	73%	4%	10%
QA process	79%	10%	2%

5.	Would you recommend the existence of a Mobility Charter similar to the one for VET for?		
	Agree	Disagree	N/A
KA101	40%	21%	31%
KA 104	23%	31%	29%
KA107	35%	2%	42%

6.	Apart from the NA staff, does your NA work with other people who help to monitor the process?
YES	21%
NO	73%
N/A	6%

7.	Does the EU quality assessment tool (OEET) fulfill the needs you have in your NA for the Quality Assessment Process?
YES	25%
NO	71%*
N/A	2%

(* It is not user friendly or flexible; it needs other new functionalities)

8.	Do you consider the Quality Assessment Process IT tool should contemplate the assessment of the application's budget?
YES	81%
NO	13%
N/A	4%

9. Does your NA use other IT tools for the Quality Assessment Process?	
YES	13%
NO	69%
N/A	15%

10. In general terms, do you think the assessment process could/should be simplified? If so, how? Find the suggestions below	
YES	67%
NO	21%
N/A	8%

Further Comments and Suggestions:

• More cooperation among NAs.
• More working groups and face to face meetings with NAs and experts to discuss common issues are necessary. A common approach to the same concepts is needed when assessing. There could be a permanent discussion group on assessment.
• Centralised platform for partner search for all sectors.
• Long term pupil mobility better in KA1.
• Some of the procedures (e.g. identical applications) should be cared for with improved tools.
• The evaluators could be trained on a platform common for all countries especially in what concerns the "relevance criterion and the priorities and objectives of the application". European training sessions for experts should be promoted.
• Definition of eligibility of costs in the guide (outputs-management) would make the training of experts easier.
• More focus on assessment from the Commission.
• An annual conference for evaluators & NAs for the exchange of experiences. More interactive sessions, workshops, etc.
• A more extended European tool with additional features such as a budget tool. Budget as a separate award criteria.
• Exchange platform to communicate with experts.
• Simplification of forms.

IV.   **ANNEX 2**

(See Programme below)

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
Assessment Processes of Erasmus+ Applications
Challenges beyond 2020

25th-26th January 2018

Thursday 25th

09:30-10:00   **Registration of participants.**

10:00-10:15   **Welcome and opening.**

Mr. Pablo Martín González, Director of the Spanish Service for the Internationalisation of Education (SEPIE), Erasmus+ National Agency in Education and Training, Spain.

10:15-11:00   **Management of calls for external experts on quality assessment. Round table.**

Ms. Joana Mira Godinho, Director of the Erasmus+ National Agency – Education and Training (ANE+EF), Portugal.

Ms. Sabine Lioy, Deputy Head of Unit KA2 of the National Agency for European Programmes in the School Education Sector (PAD), Germany.

Mr. Juan Carlos Parodi Román, Head of the Quality Assessment and Primary Checks Unit, Spanish Service for the Internationalisation of Education (SEPIE), Erasmus+ National Agency in Education and Training, Spain.

<u>Moderator:</u> Mr. Fernando de Hipólito Ruiz, Deputy Assistant Director-General for University Teacher Training and Student Support - Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (MECD), Spain.

11:00-11:45   **Expert training experiences. Collaboration through TCAs.**

Ms. Jessica Hintze, Programme Coordinator for the Erasmus+ School Sector and Coordinator of Assessment Training, Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR), Sweden.

Mr. Anders Duvkär, external expert, Sweden.

11:45-12:15   Coffee break

12:15-13:00   **Specific NA assessment tools for Erasmus+ decentralised projects.**

Mr. Juan Carlos Parodi Román, Head of the Quality Assessment and Primary Checks Unit, Spanish Service for the Internationalisation of Education (SEPIE), Erasmus+ National Agency in Education and Training, Spain.

13:00-13:45   **Quality assessment processes from the perspective of external experts. Round table.**

Ms. Emilia Andrade, external expert, Portugal.

Ms. Mireia Galí Reyes, external expert, Spain.

Ms. Consuelo García Sánchez, external expert, France.

Ms. Vanessa Lambrecht, external expert, The Netherlands.

Mr. Lorenzo Mari, external expert, Italy.

<u>Moderator:</u> Ms. Blanca Admetlla Ribalta, Technical Advisor, Management Support Unit of the Spanish Service for the Internationalisation of Education (SEPIE), Erasmus+ National Agency in Education and Training, Spain.

13:45-15:15   Lunch

15:15-16:00   **Managing the assessment of high numbers of applications.**

Ms. Laura Nava, Head of Unit, School Education and Adult Education, Erasmus+ National Agency (INDIRE), Italy.

Ms. Sylvie Thomas, Coordination Officer, Project Management Department of the Erasmus+ National Agency Education and Training, France.

16:00-16:45   **Use of EC IT tools in Erasmus+ quality assessment processes: possible future developments.**

Mr. José Manuel Fernández Arroyo, Team Leader Business IT, Erasmus+ Coordination Unit, DG EAC, European Commission.

16:45   **Closing remarks – first day.**

17:30-19:00   **Visit to the Prado Museum.**

19:30-20:30   Dinner-cocktail at *Real Jardín Botánico*.

20:30   **Conference closure – first day.**

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Plaza de Murillo, 2
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Friday 26th

09:30-10:15	**The role of quality assessment processes in the life-cycle of Erasmus+ decentralised projects.** Ms. Marta Gutiérrez Benet, Programme Manager, Erasmus+ Coordination Unit, DG EAC, European Commission.
10:15-10:45	Coffee break
10:45-12:00	**Workshops/Working groups: Challenges in the quality assessment of Erasmus+ decentralised actions' applications.**
12:00-12:30	**Conclusions of the WGs.** **Moderator:** Ms. Manuela Vera Colás, Technical Advisor, Quality Assessment and Primary Checks Unit of the Spanish Service for the Internationalisation of Education (SEPIE), Erasmus+ National Agency in Education and Training, Spain.
12:30-12:45	**Closing remarks – second day.**
12:45-14:00	Lunch
14:00	**Conference closure – second day.**

Facilitator: Mr. Miguel Ángel Milán Arellano, Head of the Communication and Information Area of the Spanish Service for the Internationalisation of Education (SEPIE), Erasmus+ National Agency in Education and Training, Spain.

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