

# IHI JU INDEPENDENT OBSERVER'S REPORT

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2022-01-single-stage

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Present at the evaluation: 19/10/2022 – 25/10/2022



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# 1 Introduction and approach taken by the observer

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

In execution of her task the observer took the following approach:

The observer received information ahead of the central meeting, had introductory meeting with the Call Coordinator, access to the documentation related to the call and access to the proposal submission and evaluation on-line system SEP.

During the central meeting, the observer attended all days of the evaluations. In the first and second day, topics 1, 3 and 4 ran in parallel. Topic 2 ran on the last two days. The observer also interacted with the IHI scientific officers and received individual experts' comments and feedback during the central meetings and by email after that.

## 2 Overall impression

- **Scale of complexity of the evaluation task:**

According to the call requirements, applicants must ensure that at least 45% of the sum of total project eligible costs plus costs of any related In-kind contributions to additional activities is provided by IHI JU private members and IHI JU Contributing Partners, their constituent entities and affiliated entities. This eligibility criterion was not met by 2 proposals that were not evaluated (found ineligible). In addition, 3 other proposals did not meet minimum consortium composition and therefore were also found ineligible. Thus, out of 18 received proposals, 13 proposals were considered admissible and eligible, therefore evaluated and discussed. The number of proposals per topic is listed below.

Topic number	Topic title	№ of received proposals	№ of eligible discussed proposals
1	An innovative decision-support system for improved care pathways for patients with neurodegenerative diseases and comorbidities	5	3
2	Next generation imaging and image-guided diagnosis and therapy for cancer	5	4
3	Personalised oncology: innovative people centred, multi-modal therapies against cancer	5	4
4	Access and integration of heterogeneous health data for improved healthcare in disease areas of high unmet public health need	3	2

<b>Total proposals</b>	18	13
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Proposals were scored using the evaluation criteria (excellence, impact, quality and efficiency of the implementation) as specified within the Work Programme.

- **Transparency of the procedures:**

The procedures were clearly stated in the documentation, reiterated during the briefing sessions and when needed, moderators clarified the scoring system to the experts. The need to treat proposals equally was reminded several times during the meetings. The difference between a weakness, shortcoming and minor shortcoming was clarified during the discussions in order to facilitate reaching consensus. The necessity to point to the strengths in order to argue the assigned high scores was also reminded. In this regard, in all panels the moderators, with the support of the quality controller, paid particular attention to aligning the scores on the criteria with the comments of the experts.

- **Throughput time of the process and the efficiency of the procedures**

The throughput time varied between the topics but all evaluations were completed on time. Topics 3 and 4 finished earlier on the second day. Topic 1 used two full days for completing the work as originally planned. Discussions in this latter group went slower but all experts' opinions were respected. Consensus was achieved through careful consideration of the consensus report text by the experts and the assistance of the panel moderator. Discussions in topic 2 went smoothly and finished earlier on the last day.

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

All experts received WebEx guidelines to facilitate the use of the videoconference tool in advance. Most of the Scientific officers have had previous experience with remote evaluations in IHI. They were also given technical instructions on how to organise and run Webex briefings. Generally, the technical provision was of good quality. In topic 3 there was an issue with a rapporteur not being able simultaneously to share the screen and to access the Word file for copy-pasting text. The chat function was used effectively for editing of the draft CR text. Moderators had highlighted in different colours the points of discussion that facilitated the reaching of the consensus. Generally, the technology allowed extended discussions. The experts overall were satisfied with the SEP evaluation tool.

- **Impartiality, fairness and confidentiality:**

Each group of experts was briefed by the responsible IHI scientific officer on the first morning of their evaluation. The introductory video address by the IHI Executive Director ad interim, Hugh Laverty, and the PowerPoint presentation were played. The procedures were highlighted including confidentiality and conflicts of interest. The guiding principles of independence, impartiality, objectivity, accuracy, and consistency were reiterated as well as to avoid marking down a proposal for the same critical aspect under two different criteria (double penalisation). During the discussions the experts, with the moderators' guidance, paid particular attention to point not only to the weaknesses and shortcomings but also to the strengths of the proposals. The experts spent time ensuring that they had evaluated fairly and consistently the proposals in the topic by revisiting and comparing the CR text and scores until they felt this was done correctly.

- **Conformity of the evaluation process witnessed with the evaluation procedures published in the HE Grants Manual:**

The evaluation process followed the procedures published in the HE Grants Manual as they are reproduced for the procedures for experts for IHI calls.

- **Quality of the EU evaluation process in comparison with the evaluation procedures of national and/or other international research funding schemes:**

The majority of the experts (about 92%) were new, i.e. they have not participated in any evaluations in a similar field over the last three calendar years. They felt that the follow-up for the report writing, and the evaluations were very streamlined and comprehensive. One of the experts was very detailed in expressing her admiration to the transparency, rigorousness and professionalism of the evaluations contrary to some opinions, not substantiated though, among the academic field that the decisions about EU funding need to provide more sufficient evidence. Many experts, even those with previous experience in IMI and other calls, shared the opinion that they learned a lot during the current evaluations and with everyone bringing their own expertise, they were able to adjust justifiably their opinion after hearing the other reviewers' comments/concerns, with the purpose of reaching a consensus.

- **Quality of the evaluation process overall:**

The overall quality of the evaluation was high. The experts felt that the proposals were thoroughly discussed, fairly and transparently with special attention to feedback and scoring. Careful consideration was given to each expert's question and expressed opinion. Experts shared that they received valuable input from the discussions and the on-line meetings still offered a nice way for collaboration (although they preferred the meetings in person in Brussels). Except for some small deviations, that were necessary for the logical completion of a particular discussion, the time schedule was followed offering enough time for breaks.

### 3 Any other remarks

These include comments on:

- **Quality of the on-line briefing sessions** was high based both on the observer's opinion and the experts' feedback.
- **The understanding by experts of the call (context, topics), of the evaluation process and their role** and of the award criteria and scoring scheme was good. Still there was a need of additional clarification of certain criteria, e.g. one expert was not sure how to interpret the requirement of integration of social sciences and humanities in proposals.
- **The allocation of experts to proposals:** balance (gender, geographic, sector), relevance and balance of expertise was good. Generally, for the call as a whole gender balance of experts was achieved, i.e. 13 female experts and 12 male experts were engaged. However, in different topics the balance was not optimal due to the different required expertise. In topic 3 only one man was involved and in topic 1 two men (and five women) were involved while in topic four there were 4 men and only 2 women. Out of 25 experts, only 5 experts were from EU-13 countries while 8 experts were from non-EU countries, e.g. United States, Israel, United Kingdom, Norway, Switzerland. One expert was involved in two topics evaluations. Good balance was achieved in regard to the involvement of experts from Higher or secondary education establishment and Research and Public organisations. As a whole, the evaluators' expertise was sufficiently diverse to ensure the proper evaluation of proposals.

- **The occurrence and handling of specific issues.**
  - An issue that was raised was the ostensible budget exceeded the suggested proposal amount as per the WP in one of the proposals. It was clarified how the 45% eligibility condition works and that all evaluated proposals complied with such condition. Additionally, the moderator clarified that the experts can judge and criticize expenditure that are not justified. No such unjustified expenditures were further identified. The proposed in-kind contributions for additional activities were found reasonable.
  - A general issue was that the moderators had to remind that the judgement should be based on the proposal as it is but not on the potential of the proposal if it was changed.
- **The process of the final panel meeting** was well organised. The independent observer could not be present in all final meetings due to the different ending time of the topics with earlier completion of the task.
- **Overall conduct of staff:** The moderators were mindful of involving all the experts in the discussions. Still, in the different topics it happened that some experts were more active than the others. The moderators were very skillful considering the new distant means of handling the evaluations. They followed the same standards in the different topics. The experts expressed satisfaction with the responsiveness and professionalism of the IHI Scientific Officers.
- **Infrastructure and working conditions for evaluators.** Generally, the schedule was well balanced starting from 9:00 a.m. and finishing at 6:00 p.m. with an hour lunch break and several coffee breaks. Occasionally, it was necessary to postpone and shorten the breaks in order to complete certain part of the evaluation and text editing. One of the experts was American and the time difference presented a challenge to her although she managed very well. Another evaluator had to accommodate an unexpected work engagement during the sessions so as to she was absent for a short time.
- **Workload and time given to evaluators for their work.** Generally, the experts were satisfied with the workload and the time given for the remote phase and consensus meetings. The experts had freedom and time to speak and discuss the weaknesses and strengths of proposals. However, there was an opinion that the time estimated for the work of the rapporteur to draft the consensus report (0.3 day) is underestimated since it is a hard work to summarize diverging point of views in an objective way. Additionally, due to the different number of proposals submitted in the topics, some groups experienced higher workload and they admitted that the two-day discussions were hard work.

## 4 Summary of Recommendations

The observed evaluation process was robust and mature. It ran in accordance with the standards published.

There are a few minor recommendations:

- 1) In case of future engagement of one sole independent observer, it will be useful to separate the briefings of the different topics in time so that the observer can be present in each of them to introduce himself/herself personally. The same is recommended for the last sessions.
- 2) Closer Involvement of the observer by copying his/her e-mail in the pre-meetings communication with the experts. This would allow gathering direct impressions at the stage of preparation of the call evaluations.
- 3) To try to achieve better gender balance of experts per topic.
- 4) To involve more experts from EU-13 countries.
- 5) To reconsider the time, allocated to the rapporteurs, for drafting consensus report.