

MANUAL OF PROPOSAL EVALUATION PROCEDURES

Introduction

The new approach followed in preparing and implementing the fifth framework programmes requires an evolution in the earlier practices for evaluating research proposals. The purpose of this evolution is threefold:

- a broader integration of scientific and technological evaluation criteria with socio-economic issues, matching these to resources and management capabilities;
- a faster processing of calls for proposals and a more effective assistance and information to potential proposers;
- a more harmonised set of general procedures in order to facilitate coordination and interaction between specific programmes or key actions.

The processes for evaluating proposals submitted for funding to research, technological development and demonstration (RTD) programmes of the European Communities will continue to rest on a number of well established principles:

- i. **Quality.** Projects selected for funding must demonstrate a high scientific, technical and managerial quality in the context of the objectives of the RTD programme in question and must help in making a contribution to Community policies in general.
- ii. **Transparency.** In order to provide a clear framework for researchers preparing proposals for funding, the process of reaching those funding decisions, both the principles and the practice, must be clearly described and available to any interested party. In addition, adequate feedback must be provided to proposers on the outcome of the evaluation of their proposals.
- iii. **Equality of treatment.** A fundamental principle of Community RTD support is that all proposals should be treated alike, irrespective of where they originate or the identity of the proposers.
- iv. **Impartiality.** All eligible proposals are treated impartially on their merits, following an independent peer review.
- v. **Efficiency and speed.** The procedures have been designed to be as rapid as possible, commensurate with maintaining the quality of the evaluation and respecting the legal framework within which the RTD programme is managed.

The purpose of this manual is to provide in one document the “ground rules” or guidelines for the evaluation of proposals for European Community funded projects, taking the principles set out above into consideration. It describes the basic

procedures that will be followed by all the programmes under the fifth framework programmes of the European Community and the European Atomic Energy Community, indicating any particular procedures that will be used in specific cases or under particular circumstances.

The harmonisation of the basic procedures between the specific programmes of the fifth framework programmes which is implied by the preparation of this manual is intended to make it easier for consortia and researchers to prepare their proposals in the full knowledge of the rules that will apply. In addition, the aim is to ensure that, whenever possible, proposals are not excluded from consideration for administrative reasons when they span areas covered by more than one programme and to ensure that projects can easily be transferred between the programmes when appropriate. This manual recognises, though, that individual programmes and/or action lines will have special needs in some circumstances and provides flexibility within a harmonised framework for programmes to adapt procedures to their own particular needs when this is appropriate. Due to the nature of the research training measures and specific measures for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) a number of specific rules will apply to such measures funded under the horizontal or thematic programmes. Any exceptions from the general rules are mentioned in the text of this manual.

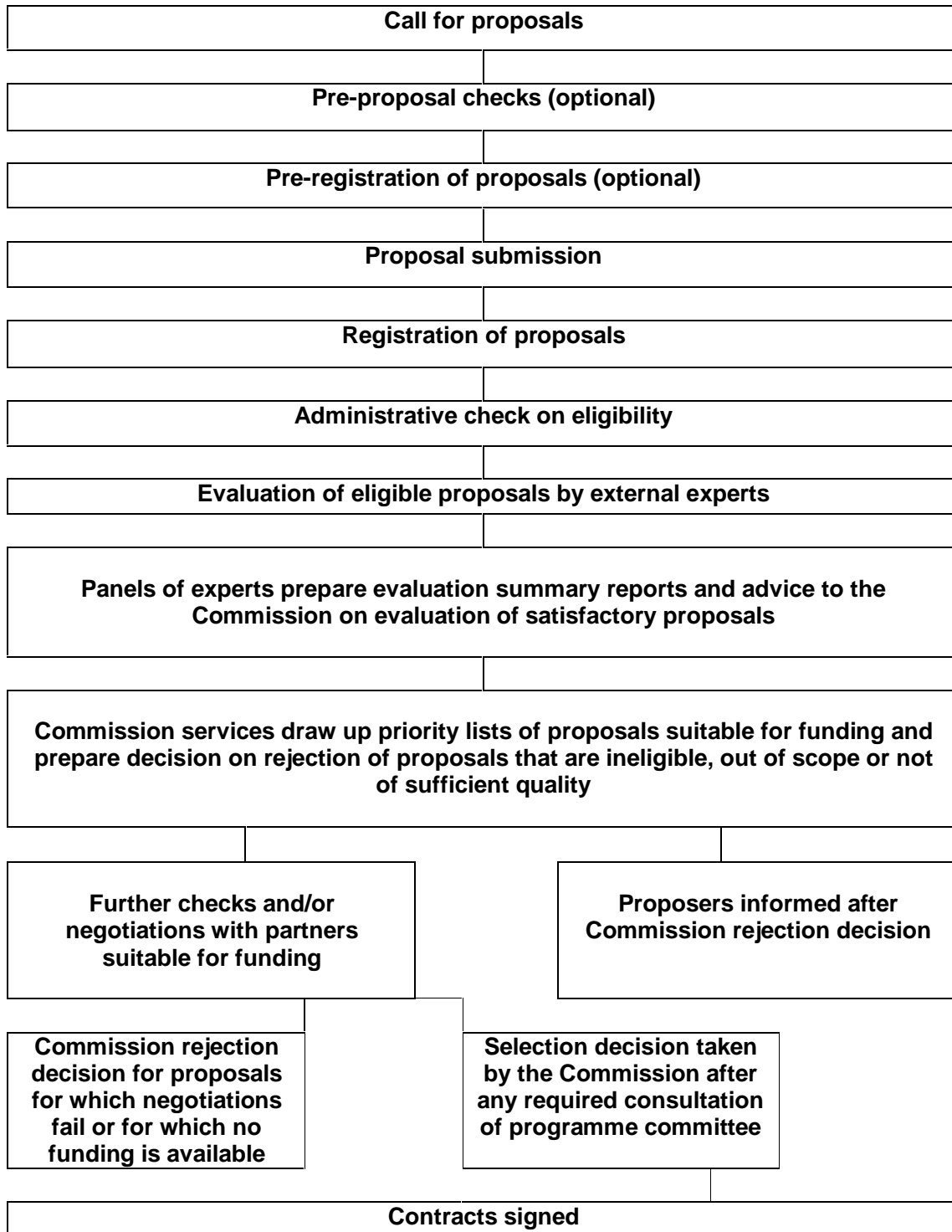
For each specific programme, a short annex is appended to this document setting out how it is intended to apply the guidelines contained within this manual, in particular the choices made (where choices exist) and details of each programme's priorities through a description of the marking and weighting system to be used and any programme-specific interpretations of the general evaluation criteria or criteria specific to the particular programme. Whilst the programme-specific annexes adapt these guidelines and provide further detail, they may not go against the provisions of this manual; if the text of annex is unclear in this respect, the main text of this manual will apply.

Throughout this manual, the term "proposal" generally signifies an application for funding of a shared-cost RTD project through either a European Community or Euratom specific programme. The rules set out in this manual for the evaluation of such proposals also apply to all other proposals for funding initiated through calls for proposals (e.g. concerted actions, fellowships and training actions and other measures such as SME-specific measures and certain accompanying measures), unless otherwise stated. Procedures for dealing with measures submitted through normal public procurement procedures or for ad-hoc subsidies are covered by the Commission's general rules for such measures. Special provisions for any particular measures are either mentioned in the main text or dealt with in an annex.

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Summary of the steps involved in the proposal evaluation and project selection process



N.B. In some instances, it may be decided to operate proposal submission in two stages. Details are set out on p.15.

Pre-proposal checks

Pre-proposal checks are an informal advisory service which may be offered by the Commission services to the research community. Their purpose is to advise potential proposers on whether their proposals would fulfil formal eligibility criteria and on whether they appear to be within the scope of the calls for proposals. When used by a programme, they are carried out through the proposal coordinator sending to the Commission services concerned a short description of the proposal he/she intends to submit. The short proposal description must also contain details of the proposed project consortium, to allow an examination of the eligibility of the partners.

The Commission services will send back a standardised check list reply to the proposal coordinator by fax or electronic mail in general within 5 working days of receipt or, in the event of pre-proposals being explicitly invited, of any deadline specified in the call for proposals. There will be no element of evaluating the quality of the scientific content of the proposal by the Commission services and the advice provided is not binding on either the Commission or the proposers. Pre-proposals will not be checked against any full proposals received later, nor will their content form part of the evaluation of full proposals or be divulged to expert evaluators. The feedback form to be used by RTD programmes is attached at Annex A.

The submission of a pre-proposal is not obligatory and the feedback provided by the Commission services does not commit the Commission nor oblige the proposer either to submit or not to submit a full proposal. No pre-proposals will be accepted later than one month before the deadline of a call for proposals (in the case of calls with fixed deadlines) or the date of evaluation sessions (in the case of continuously open calls with fixed dates for evaluation sessions). The Commission services will only reply to one pre-proposal per proposal. Further contact between the proposal coordinator and the Commission services or the sending in of “refined” pre-proposals will not be allowed.

Pre-registration

For the purposes of planning evaluation sessions and inviting the appropriate external experts, programmes may request proposers intending to submit a proposal to pre-register their proposal with the Commission services. To do this, they will have to send in by fax, letter or electronic mail the names and addresses of the participants in the proposal as well as a title and short summary of the proposal content (including an indication of the language in which the proposal is to be submitted) no later than three weeks before the call deadline. In return, they will receive, normally within a few working days, but not earlier than 4 weeks before the call deadline, a proposal number from the Commission services to be quoted in the full proposal submitted. The pre-registration of a proposal would not commit the proposers to submitting a full proposal or an identical proposal.

Receipt of proposals

Proposers are encouraged to prepare proposals with a software tool (the Proposal Preparation Tool - ProTool) which will be made available by the Commission via Internet, by electronic mail or distributed on CD-ROM. It will help them prepare the administrative and technical information required.

Proposals may be sent in one of two ways:

- Made by the Proposal Preparation Tool and sent electronically, by use of a sealing mechanism, including encryption and server uploading or electronic mail.

The coordinator must request a digital certificate from the Commission's certification authority for electronic signature of the proposal file. When the proposal has been finalised, it is then "sealed" and a short validation file ("fingerprint") is created.

The validation file, which identifies the proposal file uniquely, must be sent (electronically or by fax) before the deadline. The unmodified proposal file must be received electronically within 48 hours after the deadline.

- Made by the Proposal Preparation Tool and printed out by the coordinator, or prepared on the paper forms distributed with information packages.

To be receivable, proposals submitted on paper must be received by the Commission at an address specified in the call on or before the deadline published in the call for proposals¹.

Packages containing proposals may be opened by the Commission staff (or any contractor retained by the Commission for the purpose of providing administrative services for evaluation sessions) as they arrive for the purposes of registering the administrative details in Commission databases and for returning acknowledgement of receipt forms. In the case of proposals submitted electronically, files will be unsealed and their contents entered into the databases as they arrive. No evaluation or analysis of the proposal contents will take place before the call deadline has passed, nor will any contact with proposers be permitted. 10 working days after the deadline in the call, a record will be drawn up of all the proposals received.

Electronic proposals will be archived electronically under secure conditions at all times, both in sealed format as received, and in unsealed, decrypted format. Where a proposal is received correctly in both electronic and paper formats, the electronic copy only will be treated as valid and used for making further copies for the purpose of evaluation.

Paper proposals and any paper copies of proposals will be kept under secure conditions at all times. When no longer needed, all paper copies will be destroyed except for any copies required for archiving and/or auditing purposes. Unless

¹ In the case of open calls without fixed dates for evaluation sessions, proposals will be batched and the batches evaluated at intervals that depend on the number of proposals received, but which will not exceed 3 months.

otherwise stated in the programme-specific details relating to the particular call, no proposal or copy of any proposal will leave any premises or parts of premises controlled by the Commission (such as the site for the evaluation sessions). No correspondence will be entered into with the proposers concerning the proposal submitted until after the completion of the evaluation².

An acknowledgement of receipt will be sent to the proposal coordinator not more than 3 weeks after receipt of the proposal.

For proposals not submitted electronically, details of the proposals (title, project partners, funding requested, proposal summary, etc.) will be entered into a Commission database using optical character recognition (OCR), where possible. Standard EU rules regarding the confidentiality of data contained in such databases will apply.

In the case of “open” calls for proposals for measures for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with fixed dates for evaluation sessions, special arrangements for the receipt of proposals are set out in Annex B.

² However, by analogy with the procedures followed for public procurement, the Commission services may request additional information of a purely technical nature from proposers.

Administrative check on eligibility

Commission staff will verify that proposals meet the eligibility criteria referred to in the call for proposals. These criteria will be rigorously applied and any proposal found to be ineligible will be excluded from evaluation.

An eligibility check list will be filled out for each proposal on the basis of the information contained in the proposal form. If it becomes clear during or after the evaluation phase that one or more of the eligibility criteria have not been fulfilled by a proposal, it will be declared ineligible and withdrawn from any further examination.

The following criteria will be checked for all proposals. Only proposals that fulfil all of these criteria will be retained for evaluation³:

- date of dispatch of electronic validation file or sealed electronic proposal before deadline for dispatching
- date of reception of proposal on or before deadline for reception
- for proposals submitted electronically, agreement between the unique identifier code sent with the validation file and that calculated from the proposal file
- signature of the coordinating legal entity (or appropriate electronic “signature”)
- signatures of the partners who would contribute to the funding of a project (i.e. potential contractors, assistant contractors and members) **or** a signed declaration of the proposal coordinator that he/she is authorised to send the proposal and that the proposal is agreed to by the partners
- minimum number of eligible, independent partners, as referred to in the call for proposals
- completeness of the proposal, i.e. the presence of all relevant administrative forms and the proposal description (N.B. the completeness of the information contained in the proposal description will be for the expert evaluators to judge; the eligibility checks only apply to the presence of the appropriate parts of the proposal). Photocopies of completed forms will be accepted.

It is the responsibility of the applicants to ensure that proposals are addressed to the address given in the call for proposals and are despatched in time to arrive by the stated deadline. The Commission can not be held responsible for packages wrongly addressed nor for proposals that are split between packages with no adequate identification to allow the different parts to be reassembled.

³ These criteria may be complemented by additional eligibility criteria provided for in the specific programme decision and/or the work programme.

The decision to exclude a proposal for failing eligibility criteria will be taken by the Commission. Coordinators of ineligible proposals will be informed immediately after the Commission decision.

Special arrangements for eligibility checking in the case of continuously open calls for proposals for SME-specific measures and Marie Curie fellowships are set out in Annexes B and N, respectively.

Evaluation experts

All proposals that fulfil the eligibility criteria will be evaluated to determine their quality (see below for evaluation criteria). To advise the Commission in evaluating proposals, programmes will use independent external experts. As a general rule, a minimum of three⁴ independent experts will examine each eligible proposal submitted to the Commission⁵.

The independent experts used for examining the proposals are sought through a call for applications published in the Official Journal of the European Communities and open for the duration of the framework programmes. The call details the criteria to be used for selecting the experts. In general, experts will be expected to have **appropriate competence in the areas of activities in the fifth framework programmes**. They must also have a high level of professional experience in the public or private sector in one or more of the following areas or activities: research in the relevant scientific and technological fields; administration, management or evaluation of RTD projects; use of the results of research and technological development projects, technology transfer and innovation; international cooperation in science and technology; development of human capital. The Commission will also take account of applicants' abilities to appreciate the challenges and industrial and/or socio-economic effects of research, in particular with regard to Community policies and their capacity for judging the relevance of proposals for these policies. Experts must also have appropriate language skills. Each application for selection to serve as an expert comprises a form incorporating a CV and appropriate keywords, on the basis of which the selection will be made.

The lists of individuals from which panels of experts can be chosen will be drawn up by the Commission staff using the selection criteria set out above. The database of experts will be maintained centrally and an adequate rotation of experts will be ensured.

In general, in any period of 6 years, experts will not serve for more than 3 years (or 3 calls, whichever takes longer) per programme. Programme managers will ensure a renewal of at least one third of the experts used by a programme per year or per call if these are more than one year apart.

To evaluate the proposals submitted in response to calls, Commission staff will draw up a list of appropriate experts (including a reserve list, if required) from the database of eligible experts. Care will be taken to ensure that each panel of experts chosen has an appropriate range and balance of competences, geographical backgrounds and linguistic capabilities. As far as possible, attention will also be given to achieving an

⁴ For example, due to the nature of Marie Curie Fellowship proposals (large numbers of relatively small projects), a minimum of two experts will evaluate these proposals.

⁵ For measures submitted through normal public procurement procedures or for ad-hoc subsidies, the Commission's normal rules for evaluating such measures will apply. Specific criteria relating to subsidies are set out in Article 10(2) of the rules for participation. In the case of accompanying measures, particularly those of small size, it may be decided to carry out the evaluation without the assistance of outside experts.

appropriate gender balance⁶. Care will be taken to avoid inviting experts who could be potentially biased for or against any particular proposal they are asked to examine, for whatever reason. The list of experts to be used for any particular evaluation session will be decided by the relevant Director(s), as will any replacements or additional experts needed in the course of the session.

Experts participating in the evaluation will be required to sign a contract with the Commission, binding them to confidentiality and impartiality regarding the proposals that they examine. Terms of reference and a code of conduct for experts to be annexed to this contract is given in Annex C. A declaration regarding impartiality, to be signed by experts, is attached at Annex D.

For most programmes and calls, experts will be invited to a central location to carry out the evaluation. However, where time permits and where issues of commercial sensitivity are not a limiting factor, proposals may be sent to experts, either as electronic or paper copies, for them to carry out an initial evaluation at their place of work. If this latter alternative is to be used, it will be made clear in any public supporting documentation for the particular call.

In this case, the results of the initial evaluation will be communicated to the Commission by post or electronically and, where necessary, discussed further in panels to arrive at the final advice to the Commission. In certain cases the Commission may invite all experts for discussion of the advice to the Commission.

⁶ The European Communities pursue an equal opportunities policy. In this context, women are particularly encouraged either to submit proposals or to be involved in their submission. In its communication on "Women and Science", the Commission has set itself a target of having evaluation panels comprising, if possible, 40% women.

Evaluation criteria

A number of evaluation criteria are common to all the programmes of the fifth framework programmes⁷ and are set out in Annex I of the Council Decisions on the framework programmes and the Council Decisions on the rules for participation of undertakings, research centres and universities and for the dissemination of research results⁸ (the “rules for participation”) under the section dealing with selection criteria for indirect actions. Each eligible proposal will be examined against these criteria by the independent experts. The specific programme decisions provide further details of these criteria and may also provide for additional evaluation criteria which apply only to the particular programme(s) concerned. Any particular interpretations of the criteria to be used for evaluation and any weights and thresholds to be applied to the criteria are set out in the programme-specific annexes to this document and referred to in calls and all relevant supporting documentation.

For the detailed examination of proposals against the criteria set out in the rules for participation, the experts will generally provide marks and comments. In addition, the experts will be asked to examine certain evaluation criteria by answering a set of questions relevant to the specifications referred to in the call. The following questions will be addressed at an appropriate moment in the evaluation:

- Does the proposal address the parts of the work programme, including policy issues, open for the particular call? If the proposal is only partially in line with the call, does it have sufficient merit to be considered in its entirety or partially?
- Have relevant ethical issues been adequately taken into account in the preparation of the proposal; is the proposed research compliant with fundamental ethical principles, if relevant? Is the research proposed in line with Community policies, if relevant; have appropriate safeguards/impact assessment regarding Community policies (e.g. environment) been taken into account, where necessary?
- Does the proposal follow the requirements for presentation (notably requirements for anonymity)?

In the case of negative answers to these questions, the experts will be required to provide comments to justify their answers. On the basis of the experts’ remarks, the Commission reserves the right not to continue with the evaluation of any proposal which is found not to fulfil one or more of the above requirements. In clear-cut cases (for example, a proposal which addresses a research task which is not open in the

⁷ For research training actions (Marie Curie fellowships, Human Potential Research Training Networks, Enhancing Access to Research Infrastructures and High Level Scientific Conferences), specific criteria taking into account the training aspects of these activities will apply; these criteria are outlined in Annex N. In the case of the specific programme “Promotion of innovation and encouragement of SME participation”, Annex III-2 of the Council Decision adopting the programme notes that implementing arrangements concerning pilot activities may depart from the procedures generally applicable to indirect RTD actions, on condition that they provide for evaluation and selection procedures respecting the principles of equity and transparency.

⁸ O.J. N° L26 of 1.2.99, pp.46 and 56.

particular call), a proposal may be ruled out of scope or contrary to clearly stated policy requirements at the moment that the eligibility checks are carried out.

Proposals which are only partially in line with the call for proposals and/or which span areas of more than one programme will be examined on a case-by-case basis. Options may include evaluating the proposal in its entirety, evaluating only those parts of the proposal which conform to the call, transferring the proposal to another programme (where the latter has an appropriate call open), or abandoning the evaluation of the proposal if the part which conforms to the call is so minor as to have no real interest when separated from the rest of the proposal. All eligible proposals which conform to the requirements of the call will be examined for their quality and relevance by the Commission assisted by external experts. Unless otherwise indicated in the programme-specific annex to this manual, experts will examine proposals and provide marks for the criteria set out below (which are drawn from the decisions on the framework programmes and the “rules for participation” decisions and grouped into five main blocks). In addition, they will also provide an overall mark for each block of criteria (unless a proposal fails any thresholds – see below). Experts will be required to provide comments to accompany each of their marks in a form suitable for providing feedback to the proposers. These comments must be consistent with any marks awarded.

The blocks of criteria to be applied by all programmes are as follows:

Scientific/Technological quality and innovation

- The **quality** of the research proposed and its contribution to addressing the key scientific and technological issues for achieving the objectives of the **programme and/or key action**;
- The originality, **degree of innovation** and progress beyond the state of the art, taking into account the level of risk associated with the project;
- The **adequacy** of the chosen approach, methodology and work plan for achieving the scientific and technological objectives.

Community added value and contribution to EU policies

- The **European dimension of the problem**. The extent to which the project would contribute to solving problems at the European level and that the expected impact of carrying out the work at European level would be greater than the sum of the impacts of national projects;
- The **European added value of the consortium** - the need to establish a critical mass in human and financial terms and the combination of complementary expertise and resources available Europe-wide in different organisations;
- The project’s contribution to the implementation or the evolution of one or more **EU policies** (including “horizontal” policies, such as towards SMEs, etc.) or addressing problems connected with standardisation and regulation.

Contribution to Community social objectives

- The contribution of the project to improving the **quality of life and health and safety** (including working conditions);
- The contribution of the project to improving **employment** prospects and the use and development of skills in Europe;
- The contribution of the project to **preserving and/or enhancing the environment** and the minimum use/conservation of natural resources.

Economic development and S&T prospects

- The possible contribution to growth, in particular the **usefulness and range of applications** and quality of the **exploitation plans**, including the credibility of the partners to carry out the exploitation activities for the RTD results arising from the proposed project and/or the wider economic impact of the project;
- The **strategic impact** of the proposed project and its potential to improve competitiveness and the development of applications markets for the partners and the users of the RTD results;
- The contribution to European technological progress and in particular the **dissemination strategies** for the expected results, choice of target groups, etc.

Resources, Partnership and Management

- The **quality of the management and project approach** proposed, in particular the appropriateness, clarity, consistency, efficiency and completeness of the proposed tasks, the scheduling arrangements (with milestones) and the management structure. In addition, the tools to be used for monitoring project progress, including the quality of specified indicators of impact and performance, and ensuring good communication within the project consortium;
- The **quality of the partnership** and involvement of users and/or other actors in the field when appropriate; in particular, the scientific/technical competence and expertise and the roles and functions within the consortium and the complementarity of the partners;
- The **appropriateness of the resources** - the manpower effort for each partner and task, the quality and/or level and/or type of manpower allocated, durables, consumables, travel and any other resources to be used. In addition, the resources not reflected in the budget (e.g. facilities to carry out the research and the expertise of key personnel). For this criterion, comments may be given rather than marks.

In addition to the criteria outlined above, if the proposal includes participants from third countries not associated to the framework programmes, the experts will examine whether their participation is in conformity with the interests of the Community and

brings substantial added value for implementing all or part of the specific programme in accordance with the objectives of the programme. If such participants request Community funding, the experts will examine whether such funding is essential for achieving the objectives of the action in question.

When examining proposals, experts will only apply the criteria set out in this manual, supplemented by any programme-specific criteria contained in the programme decision. These criteria as they apply to the particular programme may be described in greater detail in the programme-specific annex and the work programme. Experts will not be allowed to apply criteria which deviate from those set out in this manual and the programme-specific annex.

Where appropriate (for example when a high level of oversubscription is expected or a new complex research theme is introduced), a call for proposals may be carried out in two steps, involving two submissions. Following the first submission, which will be of a simplified form, the evaluation will concentrate on the quality of the research proposed and its degree of innovation. A Commission decision to reject those “outline” proposals not reaching the required level of quality will be taken following the first evaluation step. Coordinators of proposals that are not rejected at this step will be invited to submit full proposals within a certain time frame for the second step of the evaluation. In this case, the essence of the evaluation rules described in this manual will apply to the full process. The breakdown and weighting of the criteria in each of the steps will be clearly set out in the programme-specific annex and referred to in the call for proposals and supporting documentation.

The evaluation sessions will be supervised overall by Commission staff. Their role is set out in Annex E.

Proposal marking⁹

Experts will examine the proposals assigned to them individually, filling in an individual evaluation sheet with their comments and marks. Marks will be attributed according to the schemes set out in the programme-specific evaluation annex. According to the specific nature of the programme and/or the particular call, it may be decided to weight the blocks of criteria differently for the programme. The weightings to be applied to each block of criteria are set out in the programme-specific evaluation annex and referred to in the call for proposals and relevant supporting documentation.

When putting together their proposals, proposers will be asked to prepare the scientific/technical parts with no references to the identity of the proposers, in order to allow the evaluation of the first block of evaluation criteria (scientific/technological quality and innovation) to be carried out anonymously. In general, experts will mark the anonymous parts of a proposal separately, fill in and sign an evaluation form on the anonymous part before being given the remaining parts in which the proposers' identities are revealed. Where the nature of the projects requires a knowledge of the proposers during the whole evaluation process, it may be decided, for duly justified reasons, to reveal the identity of the proposers to the experts from the outset. When this is the case, it is mentioned in the programme-specific evaluation annex.

Each evaluation criterion will in general be marked by the experts on a six point scale from 0 to 5.

In this scheme, the scores indicate the following with respect to the criterion under examination :

- 0 - the proposal fails to address the issue under examination or can not be judged against the criterion due to missing or incomplete information
- 1 - poor
- 2 - fair
- 3 - good
- 4 - very good
- 5 - excellent

In addition, taking into account their marks for each of the individual evaluation criteria, experts will give a mark from 0 to 5 to each of the blocks of criteria. Only these marks for each block of criteria will be taken into account (after applying any weightings) for the final overall mark for the proposal¹⁰.

⁹ The proposal marking procedures applying to research training actions (Marie Curie fellowships, Human Potential Research Training Networks, Enhancing Access to Research Infrastructures and High Level Scientific Conferences) are outlined in Annex N.

¹⁰ The purpose of the procedure as described is to allow the evaluators to reflect on the individual criteria and, by giving them each a mark, to provide a base line for subsequent tracking of quality indicators throughout the life of projects. By only taking the marks for the blocks of criteria into consideration in the final evaluation of the proposals, evaluators are encouraged to "look at the larger picture" and score the proposal against the 5 important categories of criteria as a whole, rather than applying a "mechanical" process of adding the marks for individual criteria. Choosing a short scale of marks from 0 to 5 applied to a small number of main criteria is intended to give confidence that

Once all the experts to which proposals have been assigned have completed their individual assessments for a given phase, a panel will be brought together to discuss the marks awarded with a Commission official acting as moderator for the group. During this consensus meeting, the experts will attempt to agree on a final mark for each of the groups of criteria and on an overall mark for the proposal. They will justify their marks with comments suitable for feedback to the proposal coordinator and agree on an overall evaluation summary report, which will be signed by them.

If during the consensus meeting it is found to be impossible to bring all the experts to a common point of view on any particular aspect of the proposal, the Commission services in charge of the evaluation may ask additional experts to examine the proposal. The evaluation summary report prepared will set out the majority view of the experts but will also record any dissenting views from any particular expert(s). The final decision concerning any particular advice or view from the experts will be the Commission's.

It may be decided to divide the evaluation into several stages with the possibility of different experts examining different aspects. In addition, thresholds will normally be set for some or all of the blocks of evaluation criteria, such that any proposal failing to achieve the threshold marks for any set of criteria will not be proposed for selection. Where the evaluation is carried out in several successive stages, any proposal failing a threshold mark will not progress to the next stage. Such proposals will immediately be categorised as rejected.

Independent observers

To tie in with the annual programme monitoring exercise and not less than once per year for each specific programme, independent observers will be invited to monitor evaluation sessions. Their task will be to verify that the procedures set out in this manual and supplemented by information published by the specific programmes are adhered to and to report to the programme management on ways in which the process could be improved. In the case of a two-step proposal submission, the observers will report on the application of the procedures for the full process of both steps. Observers will be chosen from among those having replied to calls for monitoring and evaluation experts and calls for expert advisors concerning the RTD programmes. Terms of reference for the independent observers are set out in Annex F.

differences in overall scores for different proposals reflect real differences in quality, rather than possible statistical errors or inconsistencies between evaluators.

Final examination, proposal ranking and rejection decision

Following the examination of the individual proposals by the experts and the preparation of evaluation summary reports by the panels, it will be the task of the experts to examine and compare the reports of those proposals which pass the various thresholds, if any, in order to check on the consistency of the marks applied by the individual panels and, where necessary, have these corrected. In addition, those proposals receiving the same marks following the initial examination will be re-examined with a view to placing them in priority order, if possible and relevant.

If necessary, the Commission may decide to refer a proposal to additional experts to have further opinions and, as a result, the overall mark and/or comments contained in the evaluation summary report may change. In this instance, a new version of the evaluation summary report will be prepared by the final panel rapporteur and will be signed by the members of the panel and/or the panel chairman.

Depending on the nature of the call and the number of proposals submitted in response to it, it may be possible to arrange that all the experts for a particular area see all the proposals submitted for this area and carry out this final examination at the same time as they examine the individual proposals. Alternatively, it may be necessary to constitute an additional “extended” panel for this task. The practical arrangements to arrive at the experts’ final recommendations will be determined in the light of the call circumstances.

A further task of the panel(s) of experts carrying out the final examination may be to review those proposals considered to be worthy of funding and, where relevant, to make recommendations as to any possible regrouping or combination of proposals into larger projects or into project clusters.

Proposal coordinators will be informed of the outcome of the evaluation of their proposals after the completion of the examination carried out by the external experts.

On the basis of the recommendations of the experts, the Commission research services will draw up (a) final list(s), ranked, if appropriate, in priority order of all the proposals evaluated and which pass the required thresholds. Normally, this ranking will follow the marks received and any advice concerning the priority order for proposals receiving the same marks. In drawing up the final ranked list, the Commission services will also take into account the programme priorities (for example, coverage of the programme objectives, compatibility with stated Community policy objectives and ethical considerations, if appropriate). For these reasons, it may be decided not to follow the experts’ priority order. In this instance, the reasons for overriding the advice of the experts will be fully set out in writing by the services concerned at the moment of preparing the final ranked list.

The Commission services will draw up a list of proposals to be rejected. This list will comprise all proposals found to be ineligible (unless rejected earlier after the first eligibility checks – see pp.8 and 9), out of scope, failing any of the individual thresholds for evaluation criteria or the overall threshold required to be passed by a proposal to be taken into consideration and those which, because they fall below a

certain ranking, cannot be funded for budgetary reasons. The list of proposals to be rejected will take into account the budget available (which will have been set out in the call for proposals) plus, if necessary, a percentage of the call budget to allow for withdrawal of proposals and/or savings to be made during contract finalisation. No proposals failing any evaluation threshold will be retained for possible selection.

Following an appropriate consultation of other Commission services on the final ranking and the rejection list, the decision on proposal rejection will be taken by the Commission. Immediately after this decision, coordinators of rejected proposals will be informed in writing of the Commission's decision. The letter informing them will also include an explanation of the reasons for rejection. For those proposals rejected after failing an evaluation threshold, the evaluation summary report may only be complete up to the particular block of criteria for which the threshold was failed. A model evaluation summary report is given in Annex G.

Contract preparation and finalisation

Immediately following the preparation of the priority list by the Commission services, the coordinators of all proposals of the main priority list (i.e. those not rejected and for which funding is available) will be contacted in writing. They will receive a summary report of the evaluation of their proposal and, where required, a request for further administrative information necessary for the preparation of a project contract. A deadline for replying to any request for further information will be given, beyond which, if the information is not received, the Commission may terminate discussions on contract preparation and reject the particular proposal. This extra information will include that necessary for establishing the financial viability of the contract partners and the potential availability of all the necessary resources to carry out the project. The coordinators of any proposals held in reserve (in case of the failure of negotiations on projects in the main priority list, withdrawal of proposals or savings being made in contract negotiation) will receive a summary report on the evaluation of their proposal and an indication that negotiations with a view to preparing a contract may be offered, but only if further funding becomes available.

Among the items to be dealt with in the contract preparation and finalisation phase will be an examination of the costs proposed in relation to the resources requested and the detailed technical work to be carried out. In particular, the cost-effectiveness of the use of resources will be examined – the scale and level of manpower, economy in the use of durables, consumables, travel expenditure and other resources and the effective mix between manpower and other resources so as to deliver the planned outputs for the least input. In discussing these items with proposers, the Commission staff will take account of the comments of the experts. In addition, any arrangements for possible clustering/coordination and/or fusion of projects (with the agreement of proposers) will be dealt with in this phase.

Once the contractual details have been finalised with the proposers and all the necessary financial and legal checks carried out, a draft selection decision will be prepared by the Commission services. This will be adopted by the Commission following normal internal procedures and the procedure adopted in the specific programme decision. Once the selection decision has been taken, the contracts will be sent for signature. If it proves impossible to reach agreement with any proposers on modifications to their proposal in line with the outcome and recommendations from the proposal evaluation, and within a reasonable time (to be indicated by the Commission), negotiations on contract preparation will be terminated and the proposal rejected by Commission decision.

When the budget for the particular call has been used up, any proposals remaining from the “reserve” which it has not been possible to fund will be rejected by a decision of the Commission as set out above and the coordinators informed.

Reporting

Following each evaluation session, a summary report will be prepared and made publicly available. The report will give general statistical details on the proposals received (number, priority themes covered, background of proposers, budget requested, etc.) and those selected, on the evaluation procedure and on the experts - number, disciplines represented, nationality, gender, etc.

The names of the experts assigned to individual proposals will not be made public, however the Commission will make available lists of all the experts used at regular intervals.

Feedback form for pre-proposal check

Programme name and year of call : PRE-PROPOSAL CHECK

Name and address of co-ordinator

Proposal title:

Dear Sir/Madam,

Following your recent request, I attach comments on your summary of this proposal.

Appears to fulfil partnership and transnationality requirements:

YES ☐ NO ☐

Comment:

[Comment obligatory if No]

Appears to conform with scope and objectives of call:

YES ☐ Partly ☐ NO ☐

Comment:

[Comment obligatory if Partly or No]

Please note that these comments are provided on the basis of an appreciation of the summary information supplied and do not commit the Commission. They may not be taken as indicating either acceptance or rejection of any subsequent full proposal submitted for evaluation.

Official responsible:
DG/Unit:

SME-specific measures

Calls for proposals for specific measures designed for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) will be continuously open (usually for the duration of a specific programme) to allow proposal submission at any time but will have fixed dates for evaluation sessions. In this case, the calls will specify the cut-off dates for receipt of proposals to be considered in any particular evaluation session.

For such calls, project officers will carry out checks on certain formal requirements (signature of the proposal, appropriate partnership, presence of all parts of the proposal) as the proposals are received for all proposals arriving at least three weeks before each cut-off date. Where a proposal is found not to meet these requirements or where a doubt exists over whether the proposal fulfils these requirements, the proposal coordinator will be contacted by the staff of the special SME “single entry point” in order to request further information to verify any requirements which can not be judged or to indicate that the proposal as submitted may be deemed ineligible. In such instances, the proposal coordinator will be allowed to withdraw the proposal without waiting to receive the results of the next evaluation session or may provide additional information before the cut-off date to allow the checks to be completed. If such additional information is not received or the proposal is not withdrawn before the cut-off date, the proposal will be evaluated as it stands. A written record of all such contacts will be attached to the proposal file.

Exploratory Awards and CRAFT proposals are evaluated in common evaluations by one of the specific programmes indicated as thematic priorities in the proposals. The specific programme under which a proposal has been evaluated will be indicated in the evaluation summary report. Where none of the indicated priorities appears appropriate, the Commission services may transfer a proposal to a more appropriate specific programme. In the case that a proposer disagrees with such a transfer, he/she may request a new evaluation at the next possible cut-off date under the specific programme/thematic priority originally indicated. At the final cut-off dates (18 April 2001 for Exploratory Awards and 17 April 2002 for CRAFT proposals) proposers will be informed of any suggested transfer prior to evaluation.

Terms of Reference and Code of Conduct for Expert Evaluators

1. The task of the expert is to participate in a confidential, fair and equitable evaluation of each proposal according to the procedures described in this manual and in any programme-specific evaluation document. He/she will use his/her best endeavours to achieve this, follow any instructions given by Commission staff to this end and deliver a constant and high quality of work.
2. The expert works as an independent person under contract to the Commission. He/she is deemed to work in a personal capacity and, in performing the work, does not represent any organisation, even if the contract for remuneration is concluded with the organisation employing the expert.
3. The expert will sign a declaration of confidentiality before starting the work. In doing so the expert commits him/herself to strict confidentiality and impartiality concerning his/her tasks. Invited experts who do not sign the declaration will not be allowed to work as an evaluator. If an expert has a direct or indirect link with a proposal, or any other vested interest, is in some way connected with a proposal, or has any other allegiance which impairs or threatens to impair his/her impartiality with respect to a proposal, he/she must declare such facts to the responsible Commission staff as soon as he/she becomes aware of this. The Commission staff will ensure that, where the strength of the link is such that it could threaten the impartiality of the expert, the expert will not participate in the evaluation of that proposal, and, if necessary, competing proposals.

An expert is deemed to have a direct link with a proposal if

- he/she is currently or has recently been employed by one of the proposing organisations; or
- he/she has been involved in the preparation of the proposal; or
- he/she is related to an applicant or a member of the proposing team; or
- he/she may be knowingly involved in the publication or exploitation of the results.

An expert is deemed to have an indirect link with a proposal if he/she is employed by an organisation which has contractual links with one of the proposing organisations in the field covered by the proposal or if he/she has any direct link with or works for an organisation submitting a competing proposal.

4. Experts should not discuss any proposal with others, including other experts or Commission staff not directly involved in the evaluation of the proposal, except during the formal discussion at the meetings moderated by or with the knowledge and agreement of the responsible Commission staff.

5. Experts may not communicate with proposers, nor should any proposal be amended during the evaluation session. Experts' advice to the Commission on any proposal may not be communicated by them to the proposers or to any other person.
6. Experts are not allowed to disclose the names of other experts participating in the evaluation. The Commission services will make public lists of names of experts at regular intervals without indicating which proposals they have evaluated.
7. Where it has been decided that proposals are to be posted or sent electronically to experts, who then work from their own or other suitable premises, the expert will be held responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of any documents or electronic files sent and erasing or destroying all confidential documents or files upon completing the evaluation. In such instances, experts may seek further advice or information in order to allow them to complete their examination of the proposals, provided that any discussions or contacts with others respect the overall rules for confidentiality and impartiality.
8. Where the evaluation takes place in an office or building controlled by the Commission, experts are not allowed to take outside the evaluation building any parts of proposals, copies or notes, either on paper or in electronic form, relating to the evaluation of proposals. All information concerning the proposals will be securely stored during the experts' absence from the evaluation building.
9. In the evaluation premises, experts must always wear visibly the badge provided to them at the beginning of the evaluation. Without badges, entrance to premises will not be allowed without special permission from the relevant Commission staff. Badges should be returned to the evaluation organiser by the expert, when leaving on the last day of his/her contract.
10. Experts are required at all times to comply strictly with any rules defined by the Commission services for ensuring the confidentiality of the evaluation process (for instance, regarding communication with persons outside the evaluation sessions). Failure to comply with these rules may result in exclusion from the immediate and future evaluation processes.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

(Please tick whichever is applicable)

I, the undersigned, confirm that I have read and understood the terms of reference and code of conduct for expert evaluators.

☐ I declare that I have not submitted, nor am I, to my knowledge, directly or indirectly involved, in any proposal submitted for evaluation under the Call for Proposals.

☐ I declare that my participation in the evaluation of the following proposal(s) could create either a direct or an indirect conflict of interest:

<u>Acronym</u>	<u>Title</u>	
<u>Area</u>		
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

I undertake to inform the Commission staff immediately if I discover any conflict of interest, direct or indirect, with any proposal that I am asked to evaluate or which is the subject of discussion in any evaluation meeting at which I am present.

Signed

Name.....

Date

Role of Commission staff in Evaluations

1. Commission staff will organise a confidential, fair and equitable evaluation of each proposal according to the criteria described in the programme-specific evaluation annex and guide to proposers in full respect of the relevant procedures, rules and regulations set out for this task.
2. Commission staff will assign proposals to experts for evaluation. In doing so, they will take care to avoid assigning proposals (or competing proposals) to experts who might have a direct or indirect link with the proposal (see Annex C for definitions of such links).
3. In selecting experts for the evaluation of proposals, Commission staff will further ensure:
 - the appropriate range of competences required
 - an appropriate balance between academic and industrial expertise and users
 - a reasonable gender balance¹¹
 - a reasonable distribution of geographical origins of experts
 - regular rotation of experts between evaluations.
4. Commission staff will, where needed, take action to ensure the correct implementation of the process. This includes briefing experts on the procedures to be followed, reminding experts of the rules and reporting any irregularities to the responsible Commission official, who will exclude a person from the process if he/she deems them to be in breach of the contractual or confidentiality obligations. Any exclusion of persons will be reported to the Head of Unit and/or Programme Director as appropriate.
5. When coordinating meetings of expert panels for establishing advice to the Commission services, Commission staff will act as moderators, seeking consensus between the external experts, without any prejudice for or against particular proposals or the organisations involved. Commission staff present at the meetings of evaluation panels will provide any additional explanation or information needed to allow a proper evaluation of proposals.
6. Commission staff are responsible for overseeing the performance of the work by experts. They must check that the above mentioned points are taken into account.

¹¹ See footnote 46.

7. Commission staff will be responsible for maintaining an “audit trail” (i.e. a full file on each proposal containing, for example, experts’ marking sheets and comments). They will record the marks from the individual experts’ marking sheets and identify any criteria on which discussion is needed to arrive at a consensus, according to the rules set out in any programme-specific evaluation document.
8. Commission staff will not discuss aspects of the evaluation or selection process with proposers or any persons not involved directly in the process unless this has been explicitly authorised (on a case-by-case basis) by their Director or Head of Unit, as appropriate. This will only be done in exceptional cases, taking full account of the need to maintain the confidentiality of the process.
9. Commission staff will treat in the strictest confidence the assignment of experts to proposals. The list of all experts who have taken part in evaluations will be made public at regular intervals without indicating their specific assignments.
10. Commission staff will take all the necessary measures to ensure appropriate confidential treatment of proposals and any other documents related to the evaluation. In particular:
 - proposals and related documents will not be shown to any persons other than those Commission officials who need it for the proper performance of their work, and to the experts and proposers themselves, unless the proposers have explicitly agreed otherwise.
 - evaluation reports and advice to the Commission from experts will be restricted to Commission officials who need it for the proper performance of their work and to persons who are assigned to observe or audit the evaluation process.
11. Commission officials will restrict the copying of proposals and evaluation documents to a minimum and ensure that copies and any documents/notes used during the evaluation are destroyed when they are no longer needed.

Terms of Reference for independent observers of the evaluation process

The role of the observers is to give independent advice to the Commission on the conduct of the evaluation sessions, ways in which the procedures could be improved, the appropriateness of the evaluation criteria used in the sessions and the way in which these criteria are applied by the experts.

Observers will be chosen by the Director General or Director concerned, in some cases from among the high level experts taking part in the annual monitoring exercises for each programme and also from among those having replied to calls for monitoring and evaluation experts and expert advisors. Such a choice is aimed at obtaining continuity between the various exercises and ensuring, in particular, that the monitoring panels are able to comment on the evaluation process from first hand experience. The observers will be required to examine the evaluation process from the point of view of its working and not the outcome. In particular, they will not express views on the proposals under examination or the experts' opinions on the proposals.

The observers will be invited to be present at the beginning of the evaluation sessions when the experts are briefed by the Commission staff and to visit the evaluation panels to observe the discussions and the process of reaching a consensus viewpoint on the evaluation criteria set by the Commission.

The observers will report on their findings to the Director(s) concerned, with a copy of the report being sent to the appropriate Director(s) General. A summary of their report will be made publicly available. As well as producing a report, the observers are also encouraged to enter into informal discussions with the Commission staff during the evaluation sessions and to make observations on any possible improvements that could be put into practice immediately to the programme Director, programme manager or official in charge of the evaluation.

Observers are required to respect the same confidentiality obligations as experts (see Annex C) and to sign a confidentiality agreement. They are not permitted to divulge details of the proposals, the experts assigned to examining the proposals, nor the discussions in the evaluation panels.

Model of Evaluation Summary Report¹²

Programme:

Date:

Proposal No.:

Proposal title:

Proposal acronym (if used):

Marks achieved for evaluation criteria:

1. Scientific/technological quality and innovation

☐

Comments:

2. Community added value and contribution to EU policies

☐

Comments:

3. Contribution to Community social objectives

☐

Comments:

4. Economic development and S&T prospects

☐

Comments:

5. Resources, partnership and management

☐

Comments:

Overall

☐

General/overall comments [including proposals for modifications and possibilities for clustering/fusion with other proposals]:

¹² As the expression of the evaluation criteria for research training actions is somewhat different from other RTD actions, the feedback forms used will reflect these differences (see Annex N for main categories of criteria)