Guidelines for assessment and award of applications for Erasmus accreditations in adult education, vocational education and training, and school education

1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to outline the process for assessment of applications under the 2020 Call for Erasmus accreditation in the fields of adult education, vocational education and training, and school education. These guidelines complement the general requirements set out in the Guide for National Agencies.

1. Organisation of the quality assessment of accreditation applications

The following section presents an overview of the technical steps to be undertaken prior to the main quality assessment by the assessing experts.

* 1. Eligibility and exclusion criteria

The National Agency will organise the check of eligibility and exclusion criteria as described in Article 3.7.3 of the Guide for National Agencies.

* 1. Selection and award criteria

The selection and award criteria will be assessed as part of quality assessment in accordance with Article 3.7.4. The quality assessment procedures will be organised in four separate parts (or fewer, depending on the fields covered by the National Agency):

1. Erasmus accreditation in the field of school education (standard procedure)
2. Erasmus accreditation in the field of adult education (standard procedure)
3. Erasmus accreditation in the field of vocational education and training (standard procedure)
4. Erasmus accreditation in the field of vocational education and training (light procedure for VET Mobility Charter holders)

Under the standard selection procedure, each application must be assessed by at least two assessors. Under the light selection procedure for VET Mobility Charter holders, applications can be assessed by only one assessor. Assessors in both the standard and light selection procedure can be members of the National Agency’s staff or external experts selected by the National Agency.

Under the standard procedure, the selection and award criteria may be assessed by the same or different experts, depending on the choice of the National Agency. The decision on the selection criteria assessment can be either positive or negative, while the result of the assessment of award criteria is a numerical score as described in the Call.

1. Guidelines for expert assessors

This section presents the main principles to be followed by the experts conducting quality assessment of applications. While respecting the award criteria defined by the Call, the National Agencies may complement these guidelines with further information and interpretation relevant for their national context, such as relevance in different fields of education, or typical strategic documents that could be annexed to the application.

The information in parts 3.3 to 3.7 of this section, as well as any complementary information issued by the NA, must be made available to applicants on the National Agency’s website.

* 1. General principles

At the level of overall assessment, the expert assessors must pay particular attention to the following aspects:

* **Long-term importance of the accreditation**: while the call for Erasmus accreditations does not allocate any funding, the approval of the accreditation allows successful applicants to access funding over a long period of time, and potentially for a large total sum. The quality of applications should be assessed accordingly, with special attention given to parts of the application that have long-term implications, such as the objectives of the Erasmus Plan.
* **Careful consideration of the overall quality threshold:** the minimum requirement for each award criterion is set at 50% of the points allocated to that criterion. However, to be considered for approval, an application must also score 70/100 points in total.

This higher overall requirement indicates that for an application to be successful, the overall quality of the application must be higher than a simple sum of its parts. In particular, the three application form sections covering the Erasmus Plan must show interconnectedness, coherence and synergy. Before concluding their assessment with a pass mark, assessors must determine if the applicant has managed to demonstrate a vision for their organisation, as opposed to simply addressing the questions one by one.

* **Proportionality, contextualisation and non-discrimination:** some factual or technical aspects of the application may motivate assessors to score the application higher or lower based on elements that are no actually part of the award criteria.

Previous experience in the programme, the organisation’s size and capacity, length of the Erasmus Plan and the number of objectives proposed are among the most typical causes for ‘more is better’ bias. Assessors should pay particular attention how they take into account these aspects because according to the award criteria more experience, higher capacity, a longer plan or more numerous objectives cannot automatically translate into a higher score. To be convincing in their planning, applicants must show self-awareness and a realistic outlook about their own capacity, resources and experience.

Therefore, assessors must take into account the organisation’s context and the entire content of the application when considering any of the above-mentioned aspects. A similar Erasmus Plan presented by two very different organisations should not necessarily yield the same score.

It is particularly important to prevent any discrimination against smaller organisations or those with less capacity. By defining a few well-targeted objectives over the first two to three years of implementation, such organisations may propose plans with very high added value for their own development. Conversely, organisations with more experience and capacity must be able to demonstrate not just the simple existence of such experience and capacity, but their ability to use it to improve future activities.

In line with the award criteria, it is important to consider each proposed plan on its own merits, internal consistency and appropriateness for the applicant organisation rather than contrasting it with a plan of other organisations with a different profile.

* **Dealing with insufficient, irrelevant or poorly structured information:** to assess the application correctly, assessors will require contextual information that they must find in the application form. Applications may be scored lower if the provided answers contain insufficient information, if the included information is vague, poorly explained or not relevant, or if an overwhelming amount of poorly structured or inappropriately presented information is included (for example, by including annexes without interpreting and explaining the relevance of their content).

The space provided in the application form is limited so applicants must demonstrate their ability to select the most pertinent information and present it effectively. Applicants may include annexes with their application; however, these annexes must comply with the instructions provided in the application form. Specifically, as a matter of equal treatment of all applicants, annexes cannot be used to provide longer answers to the same questions as contained in the application form. If the assessors conclude that this is the main purpose of an annex, the annex in question shall be disregarded.

* **Importance of application type:** applicants can apply as an individual organisation or as a mobility consortium coordinator. The type of application is stated in the first section of the application form. In case of consortia, the purpose of the consortium is further specified in the section ‘Background’. Assessors must keep in mind the type of the application throughout the assessment since it forms a major element shaping the context for the proposed Erasmus Plan in all of its aspects.
* **Recognising original, convincing and genuine proposals:** assessors should consider the information presented in the application form critically to evaluate if it shows a real self-reflection on the part of the applicant, if it is rooted in reality of everyday educational work and if the links being established with European or national policy narratives are concrete and tangible.
* **Consequences of the evaluation score:** the resulting score may be used as part of budget allocation formulas when the approved applicants apply for funding. It is thereforeto fine-tune the scores to reflect the quality of the application as precisely as possible.
  1. Relevance (10 points)

The purpose of the relevance criterion is to make sure that the award of the accreditation to the applicant organisation actually contributes to the achievement of the objectives of the call. For this purpose, the assessors shall consider primarily the information in the section ‘Background’ and analyse to what extent the organisation is rooted in the field of education where it is applying. In the field of adult education, the assessors must be particularly careful to take into account the profile of adult learners the applicant is working with, and how this target group relates to the objectives of the Call.

Assessors should also consider if the chosen type of application (individual organisation or a consortium) is optimal for the organisation to contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the call, given the profile of the organisation itself.

In case of a mobility consortium, the assessors should carefully consider the profile of the planned member organisations, the dynamic of their current and future relationship with the coordinator, and the added value of the consortium for the member organisations in particular. The mobility consortium format exists to create synergies between participating organisations on a cooperative, non-profit basis and therefore the relationship between the accredited coordinator organisation and the potential members must be formulated in the same way.

The 10-point maximum score for the relevance criterion means that assessors must assess the relevance strictly. Even if the other parts of the assessment show that the proposed Erasmus Plan is technically well-written and logically sound, assessors must consider the long-term importance of the accreditation. Consequently, applications whose relevance for the field and the call is questionable must not be assessed positively on the relevance criterion.

* 1. Erasmus Plan: Objectives (40 points)

This award criterion carries the largest part of the assessment with 40 out of 100 points. The large number of points reflects the complexity of the criterion and the wide variation in quality that assessors may encounter. Assessors should make full use of the 40 points scale to fine-tune their assessment and differentiate applications according to their level of quality.

As defined in the award criteria, the Erasmus Plan objectives need to achieve balance between being realistic and ambitious enough to achieve impact. This element is strongly linked with the concept of proportionality, as explained under ‘General principles’. Therefore, while the award criterion clearly focuses in the application form section ‘Erasmus Plan: Objectives’, the assessors must take into account the context presented in other parts of the application form.

In addition to the overall assessment of the criterion, assessors should carefully examine each proposed objective. If the application is approved, the Erasmus Plan objectives are going to become a part of the evaluation criteria for assessing implemented activities and the organisation’s overall progress. Therefore, each approved objective must be clear and concrete enough to serve that purpose. Assessors must pay particular attention to how the applicant proposes to track and evaluate the progress of each objective.

If the assessors find that a specific objective is irrelevant, not cost-effective, or impossible to track and evaluate, they must indicate these objective to the National Agencies, so that they are removed from the Erasmus Plan in case the application is approved. In case of minor issues, the assessors may make recommendations to the applicants for improvement during implementation.

* 1. Erasmus Plan: Activities (20 points)

The activities represent the means to achieve the set objectives as part of the proposed Erasmus Plan. Therefore, the main aspect of assessing this award criterion is to compare the proposed number of participants with information presented in other parts of the form: with the size and profile of the organisation, with the Erasmus Plan objectives, and with the management arrangements.

As explained in the ‘General principles’, the assessment must be well-contextualised and there is therefore no automatic advantage in proposing lower or higher estimated number of participants. The most appropriate proposal will depend on the content of the application itself.

The assessors should also consider trends in the estimated number of yearly mobility activities over time. The time dimension is especially important for organisations with less experience in the Programme that may require a learning period at the start of implementation.

The assessors may recommend a reduction of the number of participants (in all or some categories and years) if they estimate that the proposed number of participants is disproportionately high in relation to the set objectives, or the organisation’s capacity and available resources. In case of significantly exaggerated requests, this disproportionality should also be reflected in the evaluation score of this award criterion. Assessors may also recommend postponing a part of the planned activities.

In the field of school education, the assessors should pay close attention to applications by organisations that are not education providers. Such organisations may not apply for activities of learners unless they are applying as a mobility consortium coordinator. If this condition is not met, the assessors shall indicate which activities need to be removed from the application.

* 1. Erasmus Plan: Management (30 points)

Together with Relevance, the award criterion on Management underlines the horizontal aspects of the programme. The main purpose of this criterion is to determine if the applicant has taken into account the Erasmus quality standards in preparation of their application, and if they have put in place resource planning that will facilitate the achievement of the Erasmus Plan objectives while respecting these standards.

Assessors should pay particular attention to proportional assessment, as different organisations will have different levels of resources to commit. As with other aspects of the application, the assessors must not make their judgment based on the absolute level of the committed resources, but need to take into account the applicant’s objectives and the estimated number of participants in mobility. Assessors should also evaluate the reliability of the commitments made by the applicant, based on the reasoning in the application form and the level of involvement of the organisation’s leadership.

1. Award of the Erasmus accreditation

Following the quality assessment, the National Agency will award Erasmus accreditations to applicants according to the procedure described in the Call, and in accordance with the decisions made on the maximum number of accreditations to be awarded per field.

Applicant organisations must be validated (certified) before the award of the accreditation.

* 1. Communicating the award decision

The information on the award decision communicated to the applicant must include:

* a reference to the rules set out in the Call and in the Erasmus quality standards;
* the evaluation score;
* any changes to the Erasmus Plan requested by expert assessors;
* comments and any recommendations for improvement addressed to the applicant by the expert assessors;
* the start date of accreditation’s validity which shall be defined as 1 March 2021 for applications approved under the 2020 Erasmus accreditations call[[1]](#footnote-2);
* an indicative schedule of planned accreditation progress reports.

The applicant must provide their agreement to the conditions of the award decision, signed by the applicant organisation’s legal representative.

1. Recognition of excellence

As part of the 2020 Erasmus accreditations call, excellence labels can be awarded to VET Mobility Charter holders. An excellence label will be awarded to VET Charter holders that satisfy the criteria defined in the Call.

For the calculation of the average score of the last two final reports, the National Agency will take into account final reports which: (a) belong to action type KA116, and (b) have been closed by the submission deadline of the Erasmus accreditation call. A final report will be considered closed if the National Agency has completed its evaluation of the report, has informed the beneficiary of the evaluation results and the relevant deadlines for complaint have expired.

1. To ensure harmonisation across all approved accreditations, this date shall not be changed for any applicants. If the decision on the accreditation is issued or the agreement is delivered by the applicant after this date, the validity shall apply retroactively. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)