

## IMI2 JU INDEPENDENT OBSERVER'S REPORT

**Call ID: H2020-JTI-IM2-2015-03**

**IMI-2 3<sup>rd</sup> Call for Proposals**

**Stage 1 Evaluation**

**H2020-JTI-2015-03**

**Date of evaluation:**

**May 5<sup>th</sup>- 8<sup>th</sup> 2015**

**Number of pages in this report (title page included): 6**

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**Present at the evaluation: May 5<sup>th</sup>- 8<sup>th</sup> 2015**

## Signature and date

*Katharine Barce*

June 5<sup>th</sup> 2015

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June 7<sup>th</sup> 2015

## 1. Introduction and approach taken by the observers

The evaluation was followed 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 their observations, the observers give independent advice for improvement of the evaluation process.

For the IMI-2 Third Call, 35 proposals (short proposals (SP) respectively) in 6 topic areas were evaluated over the course of 4 days (2 full working days for each set of 3 topics). A pair of independent observers worked together. In advance of the evaluation the observers “met” during a telephone briefing, where all the formal procedures were explained to them. The IMI call manager also provided a set of links to all relevant documents about the programme and the present and previous calls. Both observers had full access to the proposals and to the combined advance assessments of all the expert panels through the electronic tool "Submission OF Information Application" (SOFIA).

During the 4 days of the evaluation as much as possible of the panel meetings were followed by the observers. They sat in on different panels and regularly conferred with each other. The observers had previously introduced themselves to the independent experts during the initial briefing meetings for experts and made it clear that they were keen to receive any comments during and after the evaluation, in person or in writing. In addition, the observers undertook short face to face interviews with a selection of independent experts and industry representatives during the meeting breaks, following a common set of points. They were able to obtain clarifications from IMI officers and panel moderators during the evaluation. The observers were present throughout the 4 day evaluation period.

## 2. Overall impression

The six panels covered the following call topics:

- Topic 1 Remote assessment of disease and relapse (RADAR Programme) Topic 1 CNS - this topic received 13 proposals
- Topic 2 Assessing risk and progression of prediabetes and Type 2 diabetes to enable disease modification - 5 proposals
- Topic 3 Linking clinical neuropsychiatry and quantitative neurobiology - 12 proposals
- Topic 4 The consistency approach to quality control in vaccine manufacture - 1 proposal
- Topic 5 Pertussis vaccination research - 2 proposals
- Topic 6 Knowledge repository to enable patient focused medicine development - 2 proposals

Overall, both evaluators are firmly convinced that the evaluation has been transparent and fair, conducted by highly professional independent experts with the appropriate levels and

domains of expertise, moderated by IMI scientific officers. Both industry representatives and the independent experts expressed views that the right expertise was present in the panels (with a minor comment expressed in part 3 below).

The task was indeed complex, but was manageable for the independent experts in the time given, both before and during the meetings, this was explicitly confirmed in topics 1 and 3 with respectively 12 and 13 proposals. Experts, industry representatives and the observers found the written procedures and the panel meeting procedures clear and transparent. The independent experts reported that the remote evaluation had taken a reasonable amount of time. In the panel meetings, time was needed mainly to prepare fair and clear wording for the justification of scores in the consensus reports and also to decide upon the first ranked proposal when there were 2 very close in quality at the top of the list. In panels where experts had a declared conflict of interest, the experts left the room when the proposals were discussed and kept to this procedure even when having to leave and re-enter the room several times. Confidentiality for this matter was respected fully.

The industry representatives and the independent experts reported that the quality of the evaluation in this call was fair and at least equal to if not much more rigorous than national level evaluations in their own countries and for other international programmes where they had experience. The evaluation overall conformed to the evaluation procedures published for H2020 as presented in the IMI2 Manual for Evaluations, Submission and award, with technical differences according to the approach and principles of IMI and as commented below.

One important matter to report is the slow speed of the web based tool, SOFIA. The average response time to a request was in the order of 60 seconds. All the experts and both observers found this unreasonably slow, making the evaluation process difficult to process with efficiency. Due to this evaluators (as well as the Independent Observers) have not been encouraged to explore the site and thus fully use the whole potential of it. In short, the user-interface should be improved in structure as well as response time in order to better support the user.

During the evaluation meetings the tool also had a period of non-functioning. The experts reported that they were still able to do their work with detail and care, but that this required more time overall due to the technical problems.

### **3. Any other remarks**

The experts felt that the telephone briefings by the panel moderators in advance of the meeting were useful. They also found the on-site briefings useful. After these general briefings, at the start of each panel meeting the industry experts gave a short presentation in the respective topics and the independent experts found this valuable. During the meetings, the surroundings were pleasant and well serviced. The panel moderators were seen to ensure that all experts had the chance to speak and they

ensured that the experts referred back to the call text for wording the consensus reports and awarding the scores. They also frequently referred to the definitions of each score 1-5 during the rankings and consensus report formulation. For the detailed debates deciding on final rankings, the experts went back to the call text in detail to ensure that the proposals more closely aligned to the call text were ranked higher than those with less relevance overall.

An observation which provides evidence of the professional work by the independent experts is that the remote evaluations were completed in detail and there was general consensus about the lower ranked proposals and also those with the higher scores. This meant that the meetings dealt with the unsuccessful proposals quite efficiently and then spent more time discussing the proposals which could be worthy of being selected. These discussions were extensive and thorough.

Occasionally evaluators stated, that they had difficulties to properly assess the impact of a proposal (SP, first stage) at the beginning, which later could be solved in the course of the consensus meetings.

In order to facilitate this in the future, it is recommended to include into the Call text in each topic a section with "Expected impact" for that particular topic. In the present Call text this already has been done in topic 5 ("pertussis vaccination research"), which could serve as an example on how to implement this in a coherent way. This in addition would be in line with advancements in H2020 as compared to FP7, where "Expected impact" now indeed is listed as part of the topic descriptions.

The evaluation of stage 1 in IMI2 is different as compared to the procedures in H2020. In IMI2 at most one short proposal will be passed to stage 2, as opposed to H2020, where stage 1 acts as a kind of filter, letting pass more than one SP, according to the scores given and predefined threshold values. This means IMI2 is more definitive at this stage. The most striking difference however is the fact, that the contribution of the EFPIA partners to a proposal - in its written form - is not known at stage 1, this will be provided for in stage 2. In the stage 1 consensus meetings however, information is available due to the participation of two EFPIA representatives. The industry representatives had access to the SPs during the remote as well as the on site evaluation. This whole procedure was clearly outlined to the independent experts well in advance by written material and in phone conferences already mentioned.

The independent experts were asked about the role of the industry representatives. All those asked stated that the industry participation was beneficial to the evaluation process. The industry representatives answered to questions of the experts relating to the call text (which they had written) and they also facilitated the discussion. The EFPIA representatives were able to explain the needs and specific perspectives of industry but did not participate in the scoring and ranking. Most importantly, the industry experts were both senior and highly expert themselves in the area of the topic call where they contributed. This dimension of achieving high level dialogue between scientific and industry experts for IMI proposal evaluation is clearly extremely valuable for the selection of the very best and most appropriate proposals for further development in stage 2.

The independent experts and industry representatives had a good balance of gender and nationality and included non-European experts, which is good practice where a community of experts is fairly small and would tend to be too close to the proposing scientists. A minor observation from some of the EFPIA representatives was that more clinical and industry expertise among the independent experts may have helped to clarify some of the discussions.

Another aspect of IMI proposal evaluation is the possibility of organising a telephone hearing to help to decide on the rankings of proposal. Where these took place, the panel moderators followed the rules of informing the proposal coordinators and ensuring that the questions were fair and did not compromise the anonymity of the independent experts. Several panels decided against a telephone interview. Where one was held, the independent experts declared it useful. The observers note that it was quite time consuming to perform the telephone hearings.

The experts and industry representatives were asked whether they would have preferred to have longer proposals in order to improve the evaluation process through having more information available than the page restriction allows. However, the clear majority view was that 15 pages are sufficient and that, while it is not an easy task, the best proposals were able to use the 15 pages to effectively present their ideas such that they could be highly ranked for selection with the full confidence of the panel.

## 4. Summary of Recommendations

The problems with the online evaluation tool are known to IMI but the observers note that this presented a major inconvenience for all concerned with the evaluation in terms of the slowness. They therefore strongly recommend that priority is given to solving these technical problems in time for future calls.

The observers do not recommend that longer proposals are required in future calls.

The experts made some observations concerning the difficulty of selecting a single proposal when the overall standard was very high. They would have preferred to have been able to select more than one. Some also would have preferred to explore more information from proposal coordinators and enter a dialogue about how to shape the proposals. Since this is not foreseen in the IMI regulations, the observers merely note these views but do not offer recommendations with respect to them.