

IMI2 JU INDEPENDENT OBSERVERS' REPORT

Call ID: H2020-JTI-IMI2-2017-two stage

IMI2 12th Call for Proposals

Stage 2 Evaluation

Date of evaluation:

5th June – 7th June 2018

Number of pages in this report (title page included): 5

Professor Ian Kitchen, University of Surrey, Guildford, UK

Dr Shosh Merchav, Multifacet BioSolutions Ltd., Israel

Present at the evaluation: 5th June – 7th June 2018

IMI2/INT/2018-01607

1. Introduction and approach taken by the observer

This report describes the evaluation of two independent observers whose role was to observe and report on the practical workings of the evaluation process, the conduct and fairness of the evaluation sessions, the application of the scoring criteria and the procedures and their implementation. The modus operandi of the observers is detailed below:

- Both observers had been present at the Stage 1 evaluation in December 2017 and were thus familiar with the overall IMI processes. The observers received a link to the full proposals 12 days before the meeting and an aggregate of the written expert evaluations of the proposals, one week before the panel meeting.
- Seven panels were convened, each to evaluate one proposal selected from the Stage 1 evaluation. The 2nd stage evaluation was to assess a final application in partnership with Industry Consortium. The panels were held over a three-day period with three panels assessed on Day 1 and two panels on Day 2 and on Day 3. All expert panel members and both observers attended a pre-briefing presentation by the IMI directorate, which set the scene for the operation of the 2nd stage panel assessments. The IMI directorate provided a short briefing to the observers highlighting key issues in relation to the 2nd stage evaluation. Both observers shared attendance throughout the three days, observed how the panels met and monitored the operation of all panels at some point during the evaluation process.
- Both observers were provided with hard copy of all the applicant proposals, expert panel comments which formed the basis of consensus reports for each proposal, as well as a dedicated room for confidential discussions between them.
- In addition to observing the panel discussions, assignment of scores and production of consensus reports, both observers attended face to face presentations and hearings between representatives of each consortia from the selected proposal and the expert panel members.
- Both observers informally discussed the panel procedures with several expert panel members and with panel moderators during coffee and lunch breaks.

The details of the call topics are given below:

Topic 1. Development and validation of technology enabled, quantitative and sensitive measures of functional decline in people with early stage Alzheimer's disease (RADAR-AD)

Topic 2. FAIRification of IMI and EFPIA data

Topic 3. Development of sensitive and validated clinical endpoints in primary Sjogren's Syndrome.

Topic 4. European Health Data Network (EHDN).

Topic 5. Analysing the infectious disease burden and the use of vaccines to improve healthy years in aging populations

Topic 6. Discovery and characterisation of blood-brain barrier targets and transport mechanisms for brain delivery of therapeutics to treat neurodegenerative & metabolic diseases

Topic 7. European Screening Centre: unique library for attractive biology (ESCuLab).

Topics 1, 2 and 6 were evaluated on 5th June, Topics 3 and 4 were evaluated on 6th June and Topics 5 and 7 were evaluated on 7th June.

2. Overall impression

Call 12 follows the traditional IMI route for funding, with a topic text defined by the Industry, a Stage 1 evaluation, merging with an industry partner followed by a Stage 2 evaluation. In this (Stage 2) assessment there were four to eight expert panel members for each topic with a good breadth of expertise, nationalities and gender balance, giving excellent rigour in the assessment process. The panels were well supported by a scientific officer as a moderator as well as having a second scientific officer present. The evaluation process and the evaluation procedures conformed to those published in the IMI guidance literature, primarily the IMI2 Manual for Submission, Evaluation and Grant Award. The IMI directorate provided clear briefings on confidentiality and conflicts of interest and the panels were professionally managed by the moderators. Each panel had pre-selected rapporteurs for every proposal to lead the drafting of consensus reports and feedback to the applicants. The rapporteurs and the moderators produced the consensus reports with agreement from all panel members. Overall, there was very fair and detailed discussion of each proposal by the expert panel members. A very high proportion of the experts had also been involved in the Stage 1 assessment and this consistency was very valuable in arriving at consensus scoring of the proposals. The importance attached to generating consensus reports to rigorously inform the scoring against the descriptive scoring criteria, as well as providing feedback for applicants formed a major part of the panel process. The 2nd stage evaluation included a face to face hearing with four members of each consortium who gave a presentation of their project proposal and answered prepared questions by the expert panels. This was an extremely valuable part of the process in arriving at a rigorous consensus score. The workings of the panel were conducted with a high level of professionalism and in a transparent manner.

3. Specific comments

Set against a backdrop of a high-quality evaluation process, we have detailed below a number of specific comments that might be useful in developing further the IMI evaluation processes:

The initial part of the panel meetings was spent preparing of a list of questions to be provided to the consortium members prior to a face to face meeting later in the day. This process allowed an active discussion among the panel members and also assisted in

setting the stage for pinpointing open issues in the proposals and for formulation of the final consensus report following the hearing. The process of consortia hearings was extremely valuable in moderating the initial opinions of the panel on the written proposals. One panel included discussion with two consortium members by telephone and this served to highlight that face to face discussions are by far the most useful way of carrying out this assessment.

One characteristic of the hearings that was noted was the varying introductions to the panels received by the applicant consortia. We noted different approaches of moderators to identifying the panel members and indeed, a range of views by the panel experts towards identifying themselves.

Whilst we recognise the value of open discussion of proposals, in some panels the process of discussing the proposal and arriving at a consensus score would have benefited from a clearer prescription in the panel agenda and a more defined process for the rapporteur to enable agreement of scores for the three evaluation criteria (Excellence, Impact, Quality of Implementation). We felt that sometimes a disproportionate amount of time was devoted to wordsmithing consensus reports compared to discussing and debating the scoring of proposals against evaluation criteria. It was noted that “Scoring of Proposals” was not a specific agenda item for panels. A stronger role of the moderators in directing the panel in this regard would be beneficial.

The administrative support from the IMI team was excellent throughout the whole of the panel process. We were very grateful for this level of support.

4. Summary of recommendations

1. We recommend that consideration be given to ensuring a reasonable level of anonymity of expert panel members during hearings with consortia members by removing their name cards during the hearing and by abstaining from introductions at that stage.
2. We recommend a more detailed agenda for the panel meetings and that moderators use a more defined approach to directing panels to prepare the list of questions for consortium hearings and to achieve a consensus score on each criterion. In particular we recommend adding the item “Scoring of Proposals” to the formal agenda and that consideration should be given to determining the proposal scoring as a basis for completion of the consensus report comments, rather than vice-versa.
3. The process of introducing the panel members to the Consortium representatives at the hearing may benefit from a consistent approach to mirror the fact that the evaluators’ names are not provided in the letter of approval/rejection sent to the consortium at the end of the evaluation process.
4. We recommend the independent observers are routinely provided with a copy of the list of questions formulated by the panellists prior to the hearing.

5. We recommend providing the independent observers with a dedicated chair at the meeting table to facilitate taking notes during the panel meetings.