

# Guidelines for assessment of applications for Erasmus accreditation in the fields of 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 2020 Guide for National Agencies and its annexes (in particular annexes III.01a Erasmus+ Guide for experts on Quality assessment and III.2 - Erasmus+ and ESC Guidelines for NAs on quality assessment). Consequently, standard rules, requirement, procedures and practices that are defined in the Guide for National Agencies apply also to the assessment of applications for Erasmus accreditations. Standard procedures will not apply if a different procedure is defined below, or if the standard procedure is not relevant due to the provisions of the Call for accreditations and its Rules of application.

## 2. Assessment steps

### 2.1. 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.

### 2.2. Selection criteria

Under the standard procedure, the National Agency may assess the selection criteria in one of the following ways:

1. Assessment performed by the same experts handling the assessment of award criteria (see section 2.3 for requirements on internal and external experts for assessment of award criteria). In this case, the assessment will take place in OEET and the result will be recorded in EPlusLink. The NA must provide the experts with information required to assess the selection criteria, including any documentation available in the Organisation registration system (ORS).
2. Assessment performed by a single internal expert. In this case, the assessment will take place in EPlusLink.

Under the light procedure, the National Agency may assess the selection criteria in one of the followings ways:

1. Assessment performed by one or two external experts. In this case, the assessment will take place in OEET and the result will be recorded in EPlusLink.
2. Assessment performed by a single internal expert. In this case, the assessment will take place in EPlusLink.

If selection criteria are assessed by two experts who do not agree on the assessment outcome, consolidation by a third expert will take place.

The assessment of selection criteria under the light procedure should be limited to determining if the proposed Erasmus Plan is coherent, clear and consistent with the organisation's internationalisation strategy, as stated in the Rules of application. The purpose of the assessment is to determine if the applicant has understood the Erasmus accreditations framework that will replace the VET Mobility Charter and if they have managed to translate their internationalisation strategy into an Erasmus Plan. The assessment is not an evaluation of all past activities of the VET Charter holder – this is a task handled through the reporting framework of that Charter.

### **2.3. Award criteria**

The assessment of award criteria takes place only under the standard procedure and is organised in three separate selection panels (or fewer, depending on the fields of education and training covered by the National Agency):

1. Erasmus accreditation in the field of school education
2. Erasmus accreditation in the field of adult education
3. Erasmus accreditation in the field of vocational education and training

Each application under the standard procedure must be assessed by at least two experts. External experts are not required.

## **3. Guidelines for experts for the quality assessment of accreditation applications under the standard procedure**

This section presents the main principles to be followed by experts assessing award criteria under the standard procedure. While respecting the criteria defined in the Rules of application, the National Agency may complement these guidelines with further information about relevance within the national context or typical strategic documents that could be annexed to the application.

The information in parts 3.1 to 3.5 of this section and in section 4, as well as any complementary information issued by the NA, must be made available to applicants on the National Agency's website.

### **3.1. General principles**

The following guidance is additional to the overall assessment framework presented in the 2020 Erasmus+ Guide for Expert assessors. The main principles of that Guide remain applicable unless a different instruction is provided in these guidelines or in the Rules of application.

The assessment scores will follow the standard pattern to indicate the level of quality:

Maximum score for a criterion	Range of scores			
	Very good	Good	Fair	Weak
40	34 - 40	28 - 33	20 - 27	0 - 19
30	26 - 30	21 - 25	15 - 20	0 - 14
20	17 - 20	14 - 16	10 - 13	0 - 9
10	9 - 10	7 - 8	5 - 6	0 - 4

At the level of overall assessment, the experts must pay particular attention to the following aspects specific to applications for Erasmus accreditation:

- **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 at least 70/100 points in total.

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

- **Proportionality, contextualisation and non-discrimination:** in line with the award criteria, experts must assess each application and the proposed Erasmus plan on its own merits, internal consistency and appropriateness for the applicant organisation.

As a matter of proportionality, experts should avoid direct comparison of applications by organisations with a different profile. A similar Erasmus Plan presented by two very different organisations should not necessarily yield the same score.

In particular, experts must avoid introducing criteria or interpretations that are not stated in the Rules of application or elaborated in these guidelines. For example, the amount of previous experience in the programme, the organisation's size, duration of the Erasmus Plan, estimated number of participants and the number of objectives are aspects that should be considered very carefully. Experts must pay attention not to apply an over-simplified 'more is better' bias: for example, more numerous objectives cannot automatically translate into a better score.

Rather, experts must take into account the organisation's context and the entire content of the application when considering any of the above-mentioned aspects. A good application will demonstrate self-awareness on part of the applicant, with a realistic outlook about their own capacity, resources and experience.

It is particularly important to prevent any discrimination against smaller organisations or those with less existing 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 and gradual build-up of capacity and competences. Conversely, organisations with more existing experience and capacity must be able to demonstrate not just the simple existence of such experience and capacity, but their ability to use Programme funds to improve future activities and themselves organisations.

- **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'. Experts must keep in mind the type of the application throughout the assessment as it is a major element shaping the context for the proposed Erasmus Plan.
- **Recognising original, convincing and genuine proposals:** experts 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 evaluation score will be used in budget allocation formulas when the approved applicants apply for funding. Before finalising the assessment, experts therefore must make sure to carefully fine-tune the scoring to reflect the quality of the application as precisely as possible.
- **Dealing with insufficient, irrelevant or poorly structured information:** to assess the application correctly, experts 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 unstructured, 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 experts conclude that this is the main purpose of an annex, the annex in question shall be disregarded.

### 3.2. Relevance (10 points)

<b>Relevance</b>  <b>Maximum 10 points</b>	The extent to which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ the applicant’s profile, experience, activities and target population of learners are relevant for the field of the application and the objectives of this Call</li><li>▪ in addition, for consortium coordinators:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– the profile of the planned consortium members is relevant for the purpose and objectives of the consortium as defined in the application, for the field of the application and the objectives of this Call</li><li>– the creation of the consortium brings a clear added value for its members in terms of the objectives of this Call</li></ul></li></ul>
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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 general and field-specific objectives of the Call. For this purpose, the experts 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.

When assessing the ability of the organisation to contribute to the objectives of the Call, the experts must carefully take into account the profiles of learners the applicant organisation is working with. This aspect is particularly important in the field of adult education given the diversity of potential target groups and the specific objectives for the field<sup>1</sup>.

Experts 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 experts 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. In line with the Call objectives and the Erasmus quality standards, the relationship between the accredited coordinator organisation and the potential members must be based on a cooperative, non-profit basis. In case of doubt, experts may seek advice of the National Agency about the eligibility of described potential member organisations.

The 10-point maximum score for the relevance criterion means that experts 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, experts must consider the long-term importance of the accreditation. Consequently, applications whose relevance for the field and the Call is questionable may not reach the quality threshold (50% of the points) for the relevance criterion.

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<sup>1</sup> In particular:

- increasing the quality of formal, informal and non-formal adult education in Europe by improving the provision of adult education for key competences as defined by the EU framework (2018), including basic skills (literacy, numeracy, digital skills) and other life skills
- contributing to the creation of the European Education Area by raising the participation of adults of all ages and socio-economic background in adult education, especially by fostering participation of organisations working with disadvantaged learners, etc.

### 3.3. Erasmus Plan: Objectives (40 points)

<p><b>Erasmus Plan: Objectives</b></p> <p><b>Maximum 40 points</b></p>	<p>The extent to which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the proposed Erasmus Plan is in line with the objectives of this Call</li> <li>▪ the proposed Erasmus Plan objectives address the needs of the applicant organisation, its staff and learners in a clear and concrete way                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– for consortium coordinators, this criterion applies to the entire planned consortium and requires the Erasmus Plan objectives to be coherent with the purpose of the consortium as defined in the application</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ the proposed Erasmus Plan objectives and their timing are realistic and sufficiently ambitious to achieve a positive impact for the organisation (or the consortium)</li> <li>▪ the proposed measures for tracking and evaluating the progress of the Erasmus Plan objectives are appropriate and concrete</li> <li>▪ if the applicant has attached strategic documents to their application: there is a clear explanation of the link between the proposed Erasmus Plan and included documents</li> </ul>
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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 experts may encounter. Experts 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 a 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 experts must take into account the context presented in other parts of the application form.

In addition to the overall assessment of the criterion, experts 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. Experts must pay particular attention to how the applicant proposes to track and evaluate the progress of each objective.

### 3.4. Erasmus Plan: Activities (20 points)

<p><b>Erasmus Plan: Activities</b></p> <p><b>Maximum 20 points</b></p>	<p>The extent to which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the proposed number of participants in mobility activities is proportional to the applicant organisation’s size and experience                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– for consortium coordinators, the planned size of the consortium will be taken into account</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ the proposed number of participants in mobility activities is realistic and appropriate for the objectives set in the Erasmus Plan</li> <li>▪ the profiles of planned participants are relevant to the field of the application, the proposed Erasmus Plan, and the objectives of this Call</li> <li>▪ where relevant and if the applicant is planning to organise mobility activities for learners: involvement of participants with fewer opportunities</li> </ul>
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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. Similarly, the experts need evaluate to what extent the profiles of staff and learners (where applicable) are appropriate to help achieve the objectives of the Erasmus Plan.

As explained under ‘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. Since the numbers of participants are broad estimations, experts should not look for minute differences in possible level of participation, but should focus on detecting any systemic issues, particularly when it comes to significantly exaggerated numbers of participants.

The experts 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.

In the field of school education, the experts 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 the applicants makes a mistake of including such activities, the experts shall indicate them for removal from the Erasmus Plan.

### 3.5. Erasmus Plan: Management (30 points)

<p><b>Erasmus Plan: Management</b></p> <p><b>Maximum 30 points</b></p>	<p>The extent to which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the applicant has proposed concrete ways of contributing to the basic principles of the Erasmus accreditation described in the Erasmus quality standards</li> <li>▪ the applicant has proposed a clear and complete allocation of tasks in line with the Erasmus quality standards</li> <li>▪ the applicant has allocated appropriate resources to manage the Programme activities in accordance with the Erasmus quality standards</li> <li>▪ there is appropriate involvement at the level of organisation’s management</li> <li>▪ appropriate measures have been defined to ensure continuity of programme activities in case of changes in the staff or management of the applicant organisation</li> <li>▪ the applicant has proposed concrete and logical steps to integrate the results of their mobility activities in the organisation’s regular work             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– for consortium coordinators, this criterion applies to the entire planned consortium</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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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 and how applicants have taken into account the Erasmus quality standards in preparation of their application and if they have put in place resource planning that will allow them to achieve their Erasmus Plan objectives while respecting those standards.

The key quality to look for in the application is the inclusion of concrete measures that have a realistic chance of being operationalised if the accreditation is approved. The applicant should also show awareness of the obligations they are taking up and willingness to commit to those obligations, to the extent this is possible in their planning timeframe.

Experts 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 experts 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 mobility participants.

Experts 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.

#### 4. Experts' feedback and recommendations

The content of the Erasmus Plan and particularly its objectives will serve as part of evaluation criteria for activities implemented under the accreditation in case it is approved. Therefore, during both light and standard procedure, expert assessors must make sure that the approved Erasmus Plan and its objectives are fit for this purpose.

Experts can make two types of recommendations concerning future implementation:

1. Removal of Erasmus objectives: the experts must advise the National Agency to remove from the Erasmus Plan any objectives that are duplicated, clearly irrelevant for the Call or the field of application, severely lacking in clarity, or otherwise impossible to track and evaluate.
2. Recommendations for improvement: experts may propose other types of improvements to the Erasmus Plan. These comments will be reviewed by the National Agency and communicated to the applicant. In case the application is approved, the accredited organisation will have the responsibility to decide to what extent they will follow such recommendations during implementation.

**Important note:** the application assessment is not iterative. This means that the final score (in case of the standard procedure) or the final decision (in case of the light procedure) must reflect the quality of the proposal as submitted by the applicant. The final score or decision should not be revised based on any of the above recommendations proposed by the experts.

#### 5. Recognition of excellence

As part of the 2020 Erasmus accreditations call, re-accredited VET Mobility Charter holders can receive an additional recognition of excellence for high quality of previously implemented activities as defined in the Rules of application.

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.

## **6. 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 Rules of application. The award decision shall be taken by an Evaluation committee composed and operating in accordance with the principles defined in the 2020 Guide for National Agencies.

The Organisation ID (OID) of the applicant organisation must be validated (certified) before the award of the accreditation.

### **6.1. Communicating the award of the Erasmus accreditation**

The information on the decision to award the Erasmus accreditation communicated to the applicant within the timeframe indicated by the Call, and must include:

- a reference to the Call, its Rules of application and Erasmus quality standards;
- the accreditation code as generated by EPlusLink;
- the evaluation score (only for applications assessed under the standard procedure);
- any Erasmus Plan objectives indicated for removal by the experts;
- other comments and recommendations made by the experts and reviewed by the National Agency;
- the start date of the accreditation's validity, which shall be defined as 1 March 2021 for applications approved under the 2020 Erasmus accreditations call<sup>2</sup>;
- the end date of the accreditation's validity, which shall be defined as 31 December 2027;
- an indicative schedule of planned accreditation progress reports.

For the accreditation to become valid, applicants must provide their agreement to the conditions of the award. The agreement shall be confirmed with a signature by the applicant organisation's legal representative. Following the applicant's agreement to the applicable conditions, the National Agency will issue the accreditation certificate.

Following the completion of these procedures, the National Agency shall publish on its website the list of the accredited organisations per field of education and training.

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<sup>2</sup> To ensure a harmonized approach across all approved accreditations, this date shall not be changed for any applicant. If the decision on the accreditation is issued or the agreement is delivered by the applicant after this date, the validity shall apply retroactively.