**Instructions for remote evaluators**

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# 1. General principles of the expert’s conduct

## 1.1. Conflict of Interest

Before commencement of the assessment, the expert must ascertain that s/he is not in a conflict of interest (CoI) with respect to evaluation of a given proposal. This requires checking the list of all participants and partners of the proposal. The CoI situations are described in the Annex 4 of the Service Agreement. Should the expert be in a position of an actual CoI, s/he must notify the Central Finance and Contracting Agency (CFCA) immediately and withdraw from evaluation of this proposal. In case of a potential CoI the expert must seek the ruling of CFCA as to whether it is disqualifying.

## 1.2. Confidentiality

All information related to the evaluation, including the information provided in the proposal, the personal information of the applicant and the participants, and the evaluation results, is strictly confidential. Under no circumstances may the expert disclose such information to any other parties than the CFCA, nor s/he can consult any other expert regarding evaluation of the whole or parts of the proposal (except two EC experts that are selected to evaluate the same project proposal), nor s/he can contact the applicants during or after the evaluation regarding any matters related to it.

This is a single-blind review, and the CFCA shall take all necessary measures to prevent disclosure of the expert’s identity to the applicants and to any third parties. On her/his behalf, the expert should neither reveal her/his identity to the applicants nor disclose the fact of participation in this review to any third parties.

## 1.3. Integrity of the evaluation

In order to ensure due integrity of the evaluation, the expert must perform the evaluation based on the following principles:

* **objectivity**, meaning that the expert assesses the proposal strictly against the predefined evaluation criteria and based solely on the information provided in it and on her/his knowledge; the expert should not make any judgements based on assumptions, e.g., that the participants may have the required expertise, resources, or technical means to implement a certain methodology if the evidence is not contained in the proposal or the expert is otherwise not in a possession of factual knowledge about it;
* **impartiality**, meaning that the assessment must be purely merit based and without favouritism or prejudices against the applicant, project participants, or the involved organizations; it must be free of biases with respect to sex, race, or nationalities. In case the expert evaluates more than one proposal, s/he ensures that the same standard and rigor of judgement is applied to all evaluated proposals;
* **independence**, meaning that the expert assesses the proposal on personal basis as a professional of her/his research discipline and not as a representative of any organization or country; the expert may not involve any other expert in this evaluation.

# 2. Evaluation criteria and written assessment

This section summarizes the priorities of the call, the criteria of this evaluation, and the requirements for written assessment. A detailed interpretation of application of the evaluation criteria is provided in the document “*Methodology of application of criteria for evaluation of project applications*” that is attached as Annex 1 to the Service Agreement.

## 2.1. Context and priorities of the call

The proposals are submitted in response to a thematic call aimed at supporting **Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning** in Latvia as part of the Latvian National Operational Programme “Growth and Employment”, which is one of the national measures linked to the objectives of EUROPE 2020. The proposals are submitted to ensure better governance in higher education institutions. For definitions, provisions, and requirements pertaining to the call the expert is advised to refer to the document “*Implementing Regulations for Specific Objective 8.2.1“To reduce fragmentation of study programmes and to strengthen sharing of resources”, round 2nd.*

The proposed research must fall within one (or several) of the **Smart Specialization areas** defined by the Latvian National Research and Innovation Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3) and must meet one (or several) **growth priorities** defined by this strategy. The expert shall evaluate the compliance of the proposal with RIS3 under the criterion “Excellence” and the associated socio-economic effects under the criterion “Impact”. Detailed information on the national RIS3 can be found in the document “*The informative report “About the Development of Smart Specialisation Strategy”*”[[1]](#footnote-2). An overview of the Smart Specializations and the respective priorities from this document are given in **Table 1.**

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| **Table 1. Overview of Smart Specialization areas and growth priorities of the Latvian National Research and Innovation Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3)** | | |
| **Directions of the national economy transformation** | **Growth priorities** | **Smart specialisation areas** |
| 1. Change of the production and export structure in traditional economy areas | **Priority 1:**More efficient use of raw materials for production of goods with greater added value, creation of new materials and technologies, and diversification of their application. Wider use of non-technological innovations and Latvian creative industry potential to produce goods and services with greater added value of national economy sectors. | **1. Knowledge-intensive bio-economy**  **2. Biomedicine, medical technologies, bio-pharmacy and biotechnologies**  **3. Smart materials, technology and engineering systems**  **4. Smart energy**  **5. Information and communication technologies** |
| 1. Future growth sectors, in which products and services with high added value exist or may appear. | **Priority 2:** The creation of such innovation system that provides support for the creation of new products and technologies within the framework of existing sectors and cross-sectors, as well as for new sectors with high growth potential based on key sectors defining the development and providing an effective new products/services identification system, and that is able to find and provide support for the creation of new products both in the existing sectoral and cross-sectoral frameworks, and creating of new sections with high growth potential. |
| 1. Sectors with significant horizontal impact and contribution in national economy transformation. | **Priority 3:** Improvement of energy efficiency, which include the creation of new materials, production process optimisation, introduction of technological innovations, use of alternative energy resources and other solutions. |
| **Priority 4:** Development of a modern and contemporary standard-compliant ICT system in the private and public sectors. |
| **Priority 5:** A modern, and corresponding to the future labour market demands, education system that facilitates the transformation of national economy and development of competences required for the implementation of RIS3 priorities, enterprising spirit and creativity at all levels of education. |
| **Priority 6:** Advanced knowledge base (basic science and scientific infrastructure) and human capital in areas of knowledge, in which Latvia has a comparative advantage and which are important in the process of transformation of the national economy: in areas of knowledge related to the smart specialisation areas (1) knowledge-intensive bio-economy, (2) biomedicine, medical technologies, bio-pharmacy and biotechnologies, (3) smart materials, technologies and engineering systems, (4) smart energetics, and (5) ICT, as well as key technologies identified by the EC (nanotechnologies, micro-and nano-electronics, photonics, advanced materials and manufacturing systems, biotechnologies). |
| **Priority 7:**Studying of the existing resources of territories and specialisation, proposing the prospective economic development opportunities and directions *int. al.* leading and prospective business directions in the municipal territories. |

## 2.2. Scores

The numerical scores applied in the evaluation of quality criteria are provided in the document “*Methodology of application of criteria for evaluation of project applications*”, namely:

**0 points** — The application fails to address the respective criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information (unless a “manifest clerical error has occurred”);

**1 point**— Weak: the criterion is not sufficiently addressed, or there are serious deficiencies in the application;

**2 points** – Fair: the application broadly addresses the criterion, but there are some significant shortcomings;

**3 points** – Good: the application addresses the criterion well, but there is still a number of shortcomings;

**4 points** – Very good: the application addresses the criterion very well, but there is still a small number of shortcomings;

**5 points** – Excellent: the application successfully meets all the relevant aspects of the criterion; if there are shortcomings, they are minor.

The scores shall be applied in **increments of 0.5**.

## 2.3. Evaluation criteria

There are three main project proposal quality evaluation criteria as summarized in the table below will be used.

**NB1:** In addition to the assessment text, each criterion must be given a numerical score even if the expert evaluates one or several of the criteria below threshold.

**NB2:** When evaluating compliance of the project application with evaluation criteria, only the information available in the project application (in the project application form and annexes) should be taken into account. The evaluation cannot be based on assumptions or other information, which cannot be checked or proved, or which is not applicable to the specific project application. However, if the expert has access to any information, which can affect the evaluation of the project, specific facts and sources of information should be indicated, which support and prove the information provided by the expert.

**NB3:** The expert should review each criterion based on the information provided in the entire proposal. If information regarding a given sub-criterion is not provided in the respective section of the proposal, but this sub-criterion has been addressed in another section or any of the provided annexes, the expert should not penalize the proposal for this circumstance in the assessment.

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| **Table 2. Evaluation criteria and sub-criteria** | | |
| **Criterion and sub-criteria** | **Explanation for eligibility determination** | **Scores** |
| **Criterion 1:**  **RELEVANCE OF THE PROJECT**   * The project corresponds to the objectives of higher education policy of Latvia. * The project corresponds to the development and consolidation plan of the study programmes. * The new study programmes to be developed within the project correspond to the HEI’s strategic specialisation, development needs of the economy and the demand of potential students. * The new study programmes to be developed within the project correspond to the growth priorities set by the Smart Specialisation Strategy. | The project application justifies that the implementation of the activities included in the project application, for example, the reduction of the number of study programmes in the higher education institutions (HEI), by developing new study programmes on the basis of several existing study programmes, sharing of HEI resources, development of interdisciplinary study programmes, development of professional study programmes, attraction of foreign students in new study programmes will foster the achievement of the goals of the higher education policy of Latvia according to provisions of the Guidelines for the Development of Education 2014–2020, the Guidelines for the Development of Science, Technology and Innovation 2014–2020 and the Latvian Smart Specialization Strategy.  The compliance justification should also take into account conclusions and recommendations of the Assessment of the Quality, Cooperation and Sustainability of Study Programmes (<http://www.aip.lv/ESF_par_projektu.htm>) and the International Assessment of Scientific Institution (<http://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/zinatnisko-instituciju-starptautiskais-izvertejums>) (if applicable).  The main goal of reforms in higher education is to ensure qualitative, internationally competitive and research-based higher education, which is offered by effectively managed educational institutions or HEI. The reforms are aimed at redefining of the role of HEI – they should stimulate economic development of the state as knowledge centres.  The Ministry of Education and Science has set four tasks for HEI:   1. *to ensure a potentially diverse knowledge base in all fields of science, fostering research in those, which characterise the highest development potential, international competitiveness, as well as sufficient research capacity and the operation of which matches the goals and priorities defined in the Smart Specialisation Strategy;* 2. *to promote the innovative capacity of enterprises improving cooperation with industry enterprises, fostering commercialisation of knowledge and performing ordered research;* 3. *to create a rooted and global human capital in Latvia, to the extent possible linking the study process to the preparation of specialists necessary for the development of Latvian national economy, at the same time identifying global labour opportunities and ensuring an internationally competitive supply of education;* 4. *to develop as knowledge centres, attracting resources from different sources, ensuring an open access to laboratories and equipment, as well as making it possible to share infrastructure and the material and technical base for training with other education institutions, research institutions and industry enterprises.*   Reforms in higher education should ensure an increase in the quality of higher education, as a result creating a new model of quality of higher education.  Four elements are in the centre of it: students, academic staff, resources and regulatory framework.   1. *Higher education is considered qualitative, if students obtain theoretical knowledge and also develop practical skills, they have access to state-funded study positions and are provided with the possibility to work in research and creative projects. The quality of education is certified not only by the opportunities offered to students, but also by the opportunities realised by students themselves (specific, practical skills) and transversal competences (convertibility, application of these skills) in the selected field. International mobility of students in studies and research is also important.* 2. *The quality is also characterised by academic staff of the HEI, which is internationally competitive in research and teaching, including is able to work with international students. Provides a research-based education content.* 3. *Modern infrastructure and a material and technical base are the basis for the resources of HEI for the implementation of the research and study process; access to modern laboratories, latest scientific literature and international academic research networks is ensured.* 4. *The regulatory framework should consist of sound regulatory enactments, balanced incentives and accreditation corresponding to international standards. Motivation programmes for achievements are also important quality promoters.*   The project application shows that the study programmes to be developed within the project correspond the HEI’s development and consolidation plan of the study programmes, their development is feasible and fosters a qualitative supply of study programmes. The project application should be accompanied by a development and consolidation plan of the study programmes (in English).  The project application shows that the new study programmes to be developed within the project correspond to the HEI’s strategic specialisation, development needs of the economy and the demand of potential students (the analysis of needs has been performed).  The project application should specify and explain the compliance of the study programmes developed within the project with at least one growth priority set in the Smart Specialisation Strategy of Latvia (see the description of growth priorities in the annex to this methodology “RIS3 priorities and their explanations”).  The project applicant provides information about other initiatives (for example, cooperation agreements, agreements with other institutions, preliminary works, foreruns, etc.) and projects related to the activities planned in the project application (for example, Marie Skłodowska-Curie programmes within Horizon 2020, or Nordplus development and implementation projects for joint master’s programmes, etc.), which are or have been implemented, as well as planned projects (for example, content linkage (synergy) of the activities planned in SO 8.2.1 projects with those of SO 8.2.2, SO 8.2.3) under evaluation. Also those projects can be indicated, where HEI is involved as a cooperation partner in the projects implemented by other institutions. | **Range:** 0-5  **Threshold:** 4.0  **Weight:** 20% |
| * The project complements other initiatives and projects implemented or ongoing at the higher education institution. |
| **Criterion 2:**  **Quality of the project design and implementation**   * The substantive solution of the project (methodology) is innovative, the planned activities are contextually appropriate for the achievement of the objective, their reciprocal logic is justified and appropriate for the achievement of the planned results. * The activities planned within the project are sound and developed in a quality that enables achievement of the expected goals and results. * The project is economically feasible (profitable), with adequate resources envisaged for each project activity. | The project application should describe whether project results will be innovative and whether innovative work methods will be used to achieve the results specified in the project application, for example, in the new study programmes, when planning innovative learning methods, access to information and e-solutions in the implementation of study programmes.  If the project application is based on existing innovations or results of other projects, the project application should show what innovative value added will be obtained as a result of the activities planned in the project application.  The project application provides information that the activities planned within the project and their implantation steps are sound, enforceable, qualitative and aimed at the achievement of the objective defined in the project application.  The project application identifies the amount of financial and other necessary resources corresponding to each activity, including necessary human resources, financial resources, infrastructure resources at the disposal of the HEI, etc.  The project applicant should demonstrate that the activities planned within the project are defined on the basis of the analysis of the situation conducted by the project applicant and the cooperation partner (if applicable), the order of their implementation is logical, transparent, mutually coordinated and corresponding to the time schedule planned within the scope of the project.  The activities planned in the project and the order of their implementation should ensure the achievement of the goals and results planned in the project application within the scope of the planned funding.  The project application provides information about the project implementation quality control measures planned by the project applicant and the cooperation partner (if applicable), which allows to measure progress, quality of the planned actions and make necessary amendments to ensure the achievement of the goals and results planned in the project application within the scope of the time schedule specified and the funding planned in the project application. | **Range:** 0-5  **Threshold:** 3.0  **Weight:** 20% |
| * The overall project design ensures consistency between its objectives, substantive solutions, activities and planned budget. |
| **Criterion 3:**  **Quality OF the project implementation team and the cooperation arrangements**   * The project envisages close, reciprocally complementary and goal-oriented partnerships between higher education institutions participating in the project; * The project implementation staff (incl. that of the cooperation partner) have appropriate knowledge, skills, experience and management support to successfully implement all the activities planned within the project and achieve the set objective; * An appropriate and varied range of experts has been attracted to project implementation to enable use of their diverse experiences, specialisation (foreign experts, technology experts, industry representatives etc.); * Roles and responsibilities of the staff involved in the project implementation are clear and appropriate and affirm the commitment or motivation of all actors involved to actively participate in conformity with their competences and tasks set by the project; * The project envisages an efficient cooperation mechanism between all actors involved to ensure effective (qualitative, operative) coordination, decision-making and communication. | The project application provides information:   1. *about cooperation partner’s (if applicable) specialisation, experience, skills, know-how and management support, which are necessary for the implementation of the specific planned activities listed in the project application, and a description of the cooperation partner’s (if applicable) planned involvement and expected effect on the achievement of the aim and results defined in the project application;* 2. *about the project applicant’s and cooperation partner’s (if applicable) staff involved in the implementation of the project, describing necessary professional qualification requirements, competencies, experience and fitness for the fulfilment of anticipated duties and provides a justification, why it is planned to attract the respective staff to ensure the implementation of the specific actions planned within the scope of the project;* 3. *about experts (for example, foreign experts, experts with experience and competence in the development of study programmes, experts from professional industry organisations; technology experts, representatives of employers), who are planned to be involved for the implementation of the activities planned within the scope of the project and provides an explanation (including a description of their specific competencies, knowledge and skills) for their attraction to ensure the implementation of specific activities planned within the scope of the project.*   The project application describes the contribution of the project applicant and the cooperation partner (if applicable) and their responsibility in the implementation of the activities planned within the scope of the project according to their specialisation, experience, skills and know-how. Planned activities of the project applicant and the cooperation partner (if applicable) are complementing and their overlapping or redundancy is prevented.  The project application describes the breakdown of activities of the project management and project implementation staff involved in the implementation of the project specifying information about the breakdown of duties, tasks and responsibilities of the staff involved in management and implementation of the project of the project applicant and the cooperation partner (if applicable) according to their competencies, planned activities planned within the scope of the project and contribution to the implementation of the objectives defined in the project application.  The project application accurately describes and justifies the organisational structure of management of the project applicant and the cooperation partner (if applicable), the decision making and the conflict resolution procedure, including specifies, who takes decisions in certain matters, for example, in process management, distribution of the flow of funding, etc. to ensure the implementation of the actions and the achievement of the objectives set in the project application.  The project application justifies, why this particular organizational structure and mechanism of decision making process comply with the complexity and scope of the project. | **Range:** 0-5  **Threshold:** 3.0  **Weight:** 10% |
| **Criterion 4:**  **Project impact and dissemination of the results**   * The project will have a significant impact on the capacities of participating organisations (in particular, higher education institutions) and their development and modernisation in order to make them available to society as a whole and to the labour market, and to support their international cooperation capacities at local, regional, national or international level. * The project will have an impact outside the participating organisations at a local, regional, national or international level. It envisages appropriate measures to monitor progress and evaluate the expected (short- and long-term) impact. * The project envisages a clear and efficient plan for dissemination of results and includes appropriate measures, tools and channels to ensure efficient dissemination of results and outputs among stakeholders, both during and after project implementation. * The project includes appropriate measures and resources to ensure sustainability of its results and outputs after the completion. | The project application provides information on the changes and benefits, which the implementation of the specific project will introduce in the project applicant’s and the cooperation partner’s institution (if applicable) during the implementation of the project and after its completion (during the implementation of new study programmes), as well as provides information on the potential effect of the project in the field of higher education at local, regional, national or European level and the society in general.The project application describes the impact of the project on the development of the quality of higher education to foster research-based studies, modern study content corresponding to the labour market and public needs and development trends, the development of locally rooted and globally thinking and related human resources, as well as the availability of qualitative higher education.  A communication and publicity plan has been developed that the project applicant and the cooperation partner (if applicable) will ensure the distribution of the results created within the framework of the project in the project applicant’s and the cooperation partner’s (if applicable) institution, as well as to other stakeholders, which, inter alia, describes anticipated target audience reaching, involvement and awareness measures (during the implementation of the project and after the completion of the project), using specifically indicated communication channels, which are the most appropriate for the respective target audience (for example, informative booklets, interviews on radio/TV, conferences, seminars, social media, lectures, participation in international exhibitions, lectures and other measures).  The project application describes how the materials and documents prepared within the framework of the project will be made freely available through open  licences[[2]](#footnote-3) to stakeholders (for example, to project applicant’s academic staff and students, academic staff and students of other HEIs, representatives of scientific institutions, school teachers and other interested persons).  If any restrictions for the dissemination and free access of information are envisaged, they should be stipulated in the project application. These restrictions should be proportionate and cannot have a serious effect on the dissemination of results.  The project application should describe sustainability of the activities and results performed within the scope of the project after the completion of the project.  Types of sustainability can be:   * *Institutional sustainability means human resources available to the project implementer in order to continue the initiated project activities after the completion of the project. The project applicant shows that the structures established within the framework of the project, attracted employees, trained specialists or other project results will be maintained after the completion of the project. A description is provided, who and in what way will inherit project results and acquired experience/ knowledge;* * *Financial sustainability means financial resources available to the project implementer in order to continue project activities after the completion of the project. If the project applicant has no such resources, then it provides an explanation based on its previous experience regarding the attraction of such resources from other financial sources.*   The project application provides information whether and how cooperation with the project cooperation partner (if applicable), with the parties involved in the strategic partnership (scientific institutions, student organisations, leading industry associations) will continue after the completion of implementation of the project. | **Range:** 0-5  **Threshold:** 3.0  **Weight:** 10% |
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## 2.4. Quality requirements for the written assessment.

The expert must submit to the CFCA a duly substantiated written assessment according to the template that is provided in Annex 2 of the Service Agreement. The conditions set or comments provided for each criterion by the expert should justify, and should be coherent with, the provided numeric scores relevant to criteria.

The CFCA will ask the expert to complement or revise the conditions or comments if insufficient justification is provided or contradictory statements are made. In writing the evaluation report, the expert should observe the following:

* the text of expert’s assessment for each criterion should be at least 1000 characters and no more than 4000 characters long including spaces;
* the statements for each criterion should be structured in strengths, weaknesses, and overall comments;
* each sub-criterion of a given criterion must be addressed;
* the comments should not summarize the content of the proposal. Instead, each statement must convey expert’s judgement about a specific sub-criterion;
* the comments must be precise and formulated in full sentences (e.g., extended with words such as “because”, “for example”, “specifically”) to unambiguously and explicitly explain the remark.
* the comments should not express the expert’s assumptions, intuition, or guesses (the usage of words such as “assuming”, “presumably”, “seems”, “perhaps” should be avoided);
* the adjectives used to comment the strengths must be coherent with the provided score. For example, with the score 3.0 or 3.5 (meaning “*Good*”), adjectives such as “*good*”, “*appropriate*”, “*suitable*”, “*sound*” can be used. The scores 4.0 or 4.5 (meaning “*Very good*”) would be coherent with “*very good*”, “*very strong*”, “*innovative*”, “*convincing*”, “*comprehensive*”, etc. The use of adjectives such as “*excellen*t”, “*outstanding*”, “*highly relevant*”, “*highly innovative*”, “*profound*”, etc., would be characteristic to score 5.0 (meaning “*Excellent*”);
* the full range of scores 0-5 should be used in rating as relevant. For example, if a criterion is assessed as “fair”, the score should be 2.0 or 2.5;
* the proposal should not be marked down for one and the same weakness observed in relevance to two different criteria;
* the assessment text should be written in respectful language towards the applicant and/or any participants of the proposal; no remarks of political nature should be included;
* the assessment text should not contain any information that may, directly or indirectly, reveal the expert’s identity.
* the text should be in fluent English; the expert is advised to check spelling (e.g., using the common built-in spelling tools of her/his text editor) before submitting the assessment to the CFCA.

## 2.5. EC Experts involvement procedure

• Every one project application must be evaluated by two EC experts according to the quality criteria for the evaluation of project applications (quality criteria No.3.2, No.3.3, No.3.4, No.3.5. of the document “*Methodology of application of criteria for evaluation of project applications*” that is attached as Annex 1 to the Service Agreement.

• Each EC expert provides his or her independent assessment in accordance with the standard form for the evaluation of EC experts' qualifications.

• One of the EC experts involved in the evaluation of a project application, in terms of qualifications and experience, is nominated as a Rapporteur EC expert, who is responsible for formulating the consensus of the two EC experts and preparing the consolidated assessment. The EC expert assessment, which contains quantifiable points and substantiated arguments in each of the evaluation criteria, is prepared according to a standard quality assessment standard, confirmed by two EC experts.

• If there is a situation, when after providing individual assessments by both EC experts, it is found that experts cannot agree on a consolidated assessment due to a significant difference in opinion, the experts shall inform the CFLA. In these cases, a third EC expert who conducts an independent evaluation of the project application in accordance with the Individual Evaluation Report Template, is invited.

• Following the submission of the third EC expert assessment, a consolidated assessment is prepared. The consolidated assessment is prepared by an expert who, in the light of his qualifications and experience, is nominated as a key EC expert. The consolidated assessment is confirmed by two EC experts involved in the preparation of the consolidated valuation.

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Open data licences are the so-called free licences, which enable the use of the content without asking for an additional permit, because the permit has already been provided in the licence conditions.

   Open data are machine readable data in an open format with such a licence, which enables their repeated use. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)