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Debriefing of experts following evaluation of KIC proposals

Summary and analysis of experts' responses to debriefing questionnaire on the evaluation procedure and statements during debriefing meeting on 14 January 2010

Summary:

The aim of the debriefing exercise was to get input from the experts on the evaluation and designation procedure. According to the experts, was the KIC call text sufficiently clear? Were the criteria easy to use in their work? Did they have the impression that the proposers had well understood the EIT vision and intentions? Was the organisation appropriate?

A questionnaire was sent to experts from Step 1 and 2 as well as the Final Panel on 4 December 2009. 24 experts participated in a debriefing meeting on 14 January 2010.

This document is based on the 26 questionnaires received (out of 29, 7 from Final Panel, 19 from Panels 1 and 2) and on the outcome of the debriefing meeting. It concentrates on issues of substance and on items which might be improved for future activities.

Overall the experts positively perceived the evaluation exercise. Main findings and suggestions for improvement:

The role of the GB chair was essential in explaining the EIT and KIC objectives.

The call could have been clearer: better definitions (ex. management structures and co-location centres); merge Parts B and C

Evaluation criteria are essential: fewer, more precise and not so complex criteria

Organisation of evaluation could be improved: only two steps, less wide range of scores, more reliable remote working tool, contact with proposers

1. Motivation and experience of experts

Before the evaluation exercise, a call for experts was launched. Interested individuals were asked to register via an online tool.

The experts considered the call for experts and the online tool clear and appropriate. They had no difficulties to choose their thematic pool and the online tool was sufficiently user-friendly (with a few exceptions).

Ten experts had already been involved in Commission evaluation exercises: two from the Final Panel and 8 from Steps 1 and 2. All of these identified considerable differences compared to other Commission evaluations. The most important differences:

- The three-step evaluation
- The specific role of the Final Panel (Panel of "rapporteurs")
- The criteria: different, less technical, more detailed, more numerous and with unusual objectives
- More time for discussion
- More involvement of Commission staff
- Different expertise of experts, more business-related experts

Motivation of experts to participate in this exercise could be summarised as follows:

- Participate in and helping to establish something ground-breakingly new such as the KICs
- See the latest developments in Commission support for research, education and innovation
- Network with renowned and experienced colleagues.

2. EIT and KIC objectives

The experts were asked how well the aims of the EIT and the KICs were explained to proposers and evaluators. Their judgement lies between "about right" and "very well". They considered that the aims were well explained to them and above all in the expert briefing meeting. They pointed out that proposers who attended the EIT seminars may have been better informed than those who relied on written information. Many experts expressed the opinion **that the role of the GB chair was essential in explaining EIT and KIC objectives to them.**

3. KIC call

The answers on the KIC call in general indicate that there is **room for improvement for future activities.**

On the call text, experts considered that some elements would need more detailed explanation, e.g. the required KIC management structure or the role of co-location centres and the interaction between them. Also, definitions could have been more precise, above all on the business plan and funding issues. Overall experts considered the call text rather long and not clear enough. They suggested that interaction with the proposers might be used for future calls.¹

As for the call structure, experts' opinions varied. In particular, a majority thought that the separation between Parts B and C was not very useful and that there was overlap between the two parts. It was also felt that the separation was not well understood by proposers and above all that the two parts were so interrelated that they should have been seen and evaluated together.

Experts' opinions varied extremely on the length of proposals. About a third thought that 40 pages was exactly the right length and gave good basis for comparison between the proposals. Another third believes that proposals could be even shorter (such as 30 pages). An important number of experts, however, said that proposers should be given more flexibility as to the length of the proposals. They believed that complicated issues such as the management structure and the IP regime need more detailed description.

4. Evaluation criteria

The general appreciation of the evaluation criteria was "about right". However, many of the experts gave rather critical comments:

- Criteria were rather unspecific and broad
- There were too many and too complex criteria (one proposal: sub-criteria might be skipped)
- Some issues insufficiently addressed, e.g. thematic focus, education or novel approaches to innovation
- Redundancy between criteria, although some experts said redundancy could not be avoided and was not necessarily a bad thing

Experts' comments clearly show **that evaluation criteria have to be given specific priority when discussing future EIT activities.**

¹ EIT/Commission have prepared the same exercise – questionnaire plus possible meeting – for proposers to get input for the learning process.

5. Evaluation markings (only applicable to Step 1 and 2 experts)

Marking was considered between "easy" and "a bit difficult". Difficulties were above all related to

- different interpretation of evaluation criteria
- finding consistency and coherence between evaluators (not always easy because of different backgrounds and different level of expertise)
- scoring on Part B without regarding Part C and conversely
- using a score between 1-50

Experts suggested that a different scoring approach might be taken: using a standard range of scores for all criteria together with a weighting for each criterion. Experts also said that thresholds should have been higher.

6. Evaluation organisation

There was overall satisfaction with the information provided before the evaluation started and with the expert briefing meeting. Most evaluators said that the mix of experts in the different panels was right.

Critical comments related above all to time delays – the majority of evaluators found it very hard to cope with **time restrictions** given, and to the **online system**. Few experts found the latter totally useful, many got accustomed to it after initial difficulties; some found it unreliable and not very user-friendly. **Improvements should be considered for future activities.**

There was important criticism from Step 1 and 2 experts on dividing the process into two steps and a Final Panel. They criticised the absence of interaction between the groups. Most said that **Steps 1 and 2 should be merged**. Some of the experts regarded the Final Panel as being redundant. Some were of the opinion that the Final Panel could be replaced by independent observers accompanying the evaluation procedure.

There was a **strong plea** from experts **for personal contacts with the proposers**. Suggestions span from having a video-presentation of the proposals to having hearings with the proposers.

7. Recommendations for future activities

Answers from experts varied according to their background. People with a business background attach more importance to the commercial aspects of KICs whereas experts from academia would rather like to reconcile research demands with innovation.

In general, experts gave the following recommendations for the immediate future:

- Close monitoring and careful design of the establishment of KICs
- Implementation of the recommendations of the Final Report, e.g. relating to management structures and IPR regimes
- Better definition of co-location centres
- Shaping the EIT brand, creating credibility for EIT and the KICs
- Help establishing the KICs ("nurture them")

For the medium term (up to 2013), experts recommended above all:

- Outreach of EIT and dissemination of EIT brand on a worldwide scale
- Link of EIT and KICs with other Commission strategies and activities
- Document the learning process and drawing lessons for future calls
- Involve partners from third countries
- Use foresight methods to find new subject matters
- Organise conferences to discuss lessons learnt and shape future activities.

Some of the experts would like to be further involved in EIT activities.