

Independent Observer's Report EIT 2016 Call for KIC

Final Report

**On the conduct of the evaluation process and
application of the evaluation criteria by the
evaluators**

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Executive Summary

The Task of the Independent Observer is to give independent advice to EIT on the conduct of the evaluation process, application of the evaluation criteria by the evaluators, and on ways in which procedures could be improved. This report presents the observations relating to the conduct of the evaluation process and application of the evaluation criteria by the evaluators

This report contains the main findings of the Independent Observer for the EIT 2016 Call of KIC, which was concerned with the EIT Added Value Manufacturing and EIT Food. The time period covered was from 28 July to 17 November 2016. The findings presented here are based on personal observations, interviews with the evaluators, rapporteurs, EIT personnel, Governing Board Members, and questionnaires.

Judging the evaluation process a whole, the general conclusion is that it provided a balanced and objective assessment of all proposal evaluated, that the EIT evaluation criteria were applied consistently and accurately assessed, all steps of the evaluation were performed according to the EIT evaluation rules and codes of conduct, and no misconduct was observed.

The whole evaluation process was professionally organized and effectively conducted by the EIT. In particular the EIT staff carefully tracked possible causes for conflicts of interests throughout the whole evaluation process to eliminate any possible bias. No partiality was observed during the evaluation.

The measures to avoid bias and opinion influencing worked well in each step of the evaluation process (e.g. experts did not know the other IER scores, expert communication was eliminated during the remote phase, the Rapporteur did not make an IER, the Moderator lead the Consensus Meeting, etc.).

The evaluators and rapporteurs were provided with all relevant written material of the call and evaluation procedures in beforehand and separately briefed in a Webinar session. The time allocated for the remote evaluation was adequate. The electronic proposal evaluation system SEP turned out to be useful, in most cases smooth to use, and the help-desk worked properly. It provided a good tool for the Remote Evaluation Phase as also for the finalization of the Consensus Report.

The individual evaluation reports (IER) were prepared in accordance to the instructions given. Their quality was satisfactory, though in some cases the underlying evaluation text to motivate the scores was on a general level and could have been elaborated in more detail.

The expert panels showed strong dedication and high working moral in the Consensus Meetings (CM). The panels were able to reach a consensus in finding a common recommendation on each criterion, without a need for a minority opinion or undermining expert views. The role of the Moderators was important

in guiding the discussion and providing clarifications, while not affecting the outcome. There was a full agreement among the experts on given marks for each criterion. The experts felt that right decisions were made. Also, the group dynamics of the panels was positive demonstrating their ability to act as a team with different opinions and multiple skills. In this respect, the selection of the experts turned out to be successful.

Due to the low number of proposals received, the panels had ample time to discuss each criterion of the proposals from different angles, which positively correlated with the quality of the consensus reports, for example in terms of accuracy and consistency of given marks and text for justification. All proposals received that same consideration and were consistently evaluated.

Concluding, the evaluation process of the EIT 2016 Call for KIC succeeded well in delivering an objective, impartial, and justified proposition for final decision.

The Governing Board of the EIT prepared carefully the final decision by integrating the outcome of the expert evaluation (Consensus Report) into their own hearing of the proposers and arrived in their final decision of the proposals through a transparent and justified process.

1. Introduction

This report concerns the work of the Independent Observer (IO) in the EIT 2016 Call for KICs spreading over a time period from 28 July to 18 November 2016 (Appendix 1).

The Task of the Independent Observer is to give independent advice to EIT on the following points:

- The conduct of the evaluation process;
- On the application of the evaluation criteria by the evaluators;
- On ways in which procedures could be improved.

The key activities of the Independent Observer included the following:

- Participation in the Experts' Briefing meeting and briefing with the EIT staff on 28 July 2016 (Skype Meeting);
- Remote monitoring of the remote evaluation;
- Participation in the Consensus Meeting 11-13 October 2016;
- Presentation of the assessment of the Panel of Experts evaluation to the Interim Director of EIT on 15 November 2016;
- Participation in the Hearings and Decision Meeting of the Governing Board on 16-17 November 2016.

Figure 1 illustrates the phases of the Call and the evaluation process. Though the work of the Independent Observer is linked to the evaluation part of the call only, measures in the upstream part may also influence the downstream steps, which cannot be sorted out from the IO's report.

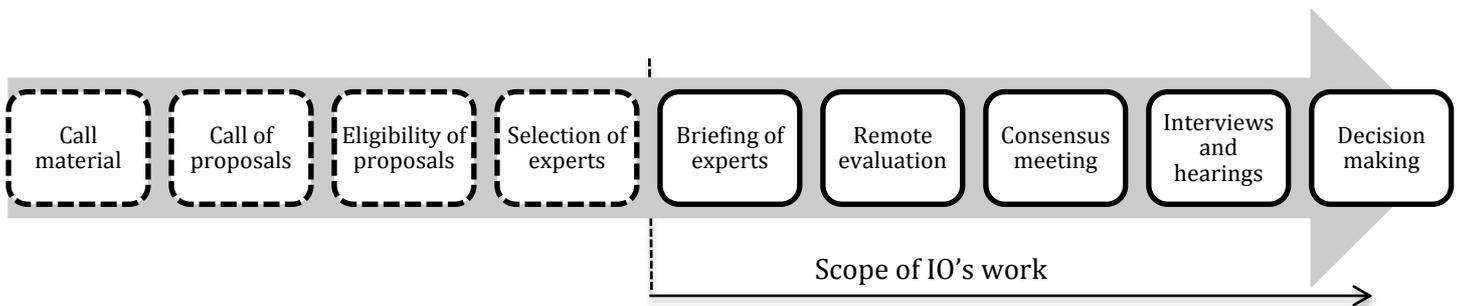


Figure 1. Simplified flow-chart of the EIT 2016 Call for KIC

In addition to above information sources, a lot of written information was available (Appendix 2). The IO interviewed the evaluators and rapporteurs along the process, discussed with the EIT staff involved with the evaluation, and talked to the members of the Governing Board. In addition, two main questionnaires were prepared (Appendix 3 and 4).

The assessment of the evaluation has been done observing the five Guiding Principles for Independent Experts defined by the EIT: 1) Independence, 2) Impartiality, 3) Objectivity, 4) Accuracy, and 5) Consistency.

2. Observations by the Independent Observer

In the next, key observations are presented in a chronological order.

2.1 Written material

Prior to starting the individual evaluation, the experts received all relevant material on EIT in general, the EIT 2016 Call for KICs, and Evaluation Procedures. Appendix 2 gives a more complete list of documentation provided.

2.2. Briefing Meeting (28 July)

The evaluators received all relevant information described in 2.1 in beforehand enabling them to get familiar to their tasks before the technical briefing and to prepare questions on possible open questions.

The Briefing Meeting worked technically well, all evaluators participated. The Q/A session clarified any open questions. The key points presented at the briefing were the following ones:

- Presentation of EITs and KICs
- Presentation of the Call
 - Evaluation Process and Criteria
- Organization of the Evaluation Process
 - Role of actors
 - E-evaluation system SEP
 - Consensus Meeting
 - Administrative Issues
- Q&A session

A post-briefing questionnaire (Appendix 3) was sent out to all evaluators by the Independent Observer after the Briefing Meeting to check their familiarity with the evaluation task and how useful they did find the Briefing. The experts had basically no prior experience with the EIT evaluations. Most experts found the Briefing very useful and it improved their self-confidence and skills to undertake the evaluation with the SEP system (scores 4-5 on a scale 0-5). The main comments received were the following:

- More explanation of terms, job profiles and tasks of experts;
- Some of the documentation could have been more specific for the Call;
- Some diagrams could have been provided in beforehand to the experts;
- One expert wished the process to settle conflicts of interest and providing clearance in unclear cases could have been quicker.

Basically, all experts were well equipped for the remote evaluation phase.

2.3. Remote evaluation phase

The experts had more than 2 months for remote evaluation (effective time indicated in their contracts was naturally less), which was well adequate for delivering the Individual Evaluation Reports (IER) as requested. Though most of the experts met the deadlines set, some of the experts did not manage this albeit reminders from the EIT staff two weeks before delivery. The progress of the evaluation was regularly checked by the Independent Observer through the SEP system.

The Rapporteurs were reserved a time period of 11 days (4 working days per proposal) after the deadline of the IERs for preparing the Consensus Reports, which might have been somewhat tight when considering the few delays in the IERs.

A certain challenge in the IERs was the short written explanations, from which the Rapporteur had to write the first draft for the Consensus Meeting. In few cases the expert statements were somewhat superficial. The instructions on this point were, however, quite clear, EIT staff reminded on this, and also the Rapporteurs occasionally remarked on this.

No 'manipulation' or misconduct was observed during the remote monitoring phase or during the drafting of the Consensus Report. The EIT staff provided assistance and feedback to Rapporteurs on the quality of the draft Consensus Reports. This was done in a transparent way without influencing the evaluation outcome, e.g. highlighting the importance of providing better elaboration of the draft CR texts. The drafts CRs delivered by the Rapporteurs were commented by the experts in an appropriate way and no attempts of influencing was observed. The draft CRs were delivered to the experts for commenting before the deadline October 5, except for one, which was sent on October 7. All draft CRs were commented by the experts before the Consensus Meeting (CM) on Oct 11, though with varying intensity. The minority views prior to the Consensus Meeting represented 1, 1, and 2 out of the 6 experts in the three proposals, respectively. One proposal was scored (average of expert scores) just around the threshold value for acceptance.

2.4. Observing the Consensus Meetings

The Consensus Meeting (CM) 11-13 October 2016 was attended by all evaluators and rapporteurs (6+1 per panel). From the EIT side participated 2 moderators (one per panel), the call coordinator, the head of unit, and the EIT's interim director.

The number of proposals was low (2+1) for reasons unknown which deserves further analysis by EIT. The implications to the evaluation and consensus meeting were the following:

- There were ample of time for the in-depth discussions and analyses in the panels, in particular in the panel with one proposal only. This helped to better understand the details of the proposals;
- Special attention was paid in the panels to the quality of the final Consensus Report, in particular to the accuracy and consistency of scores and texts for each criterion;
- One panel had one proposal only which was scored just around the threshold of acceptance, which caused a certain stress and unusual setting.

The Consensus Meetings were chaired by the Moderators in a professional way, also providing a kind of 'help-desk' to the experts on unclear points, e.g. clarifying the meaning of wordings, criteria, etc. Experts needed some time to better understand the meaning of some wordings in the criteria (e.g. Criteria 1.2 on novelty, 2.3 on sustainability) as experts come with quite different background. No manipulation, bias, or partiality was observed in the meetings. The role of the Moderator was unclear to one of the Rapporteurs and to some of the experts.

2.5. Expert feedback on the Consensus Meeting

Both the experts and the EIT personnel were interviewed during the Consensus Meetings in addition to the traditional 'observing' of the meetings. A post-evaluation questionnaire (Appendix 4) was sent to the expert immediately after the CM to gain feedback and views on the Consensus Meeting and on the evaluation as a whole. All 12 experts and 2 rapporteurs responded.

Figure 2 below summarizes key findings from the expert feedback, which indicates high satisfaction to the whole evaluation and its outcome. Importantly, the experts stated full agreement with the final marks given and full satisfaction with getting own opinion heard at the CM. The process was found fair and they thought that the right decision was made.

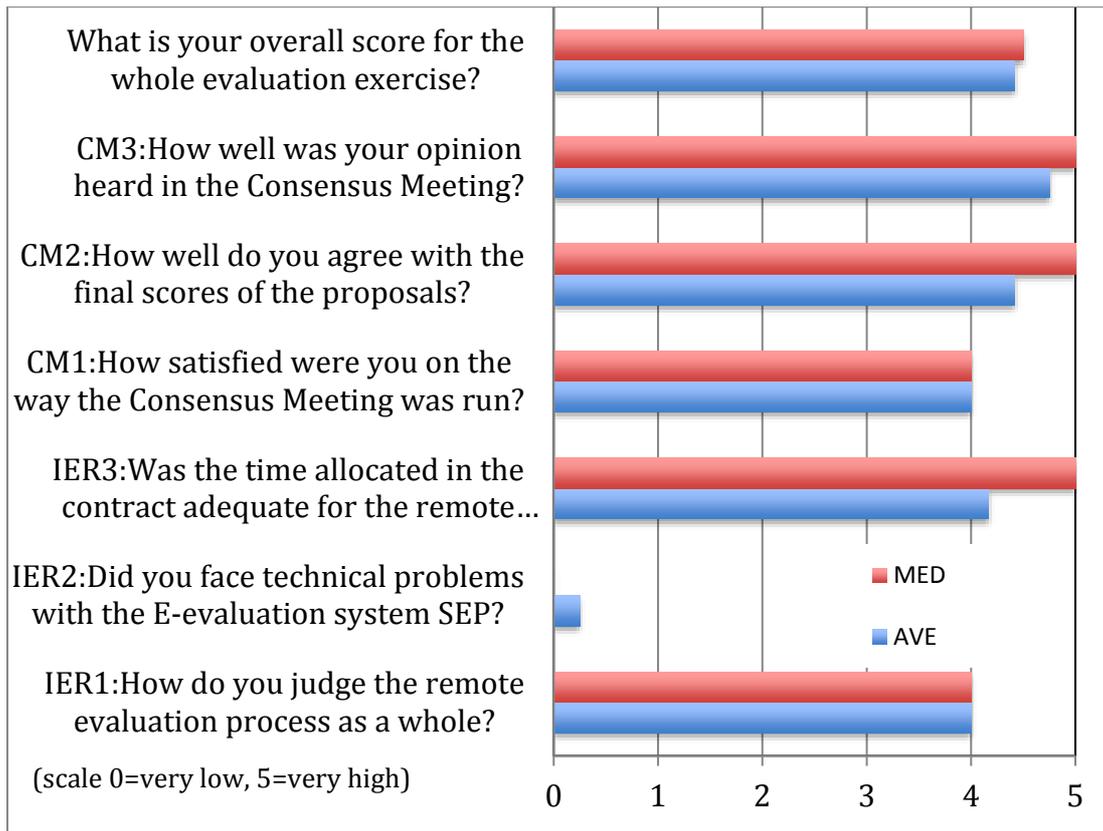


Figure 2. Experts' view on the Consensus Meeting and the whole Evaluation.

The experts were also checked how difficult they found to understand and apply the criteria (Fig. 3). Criterion 2.3 (financial sustainability) and 1.2 (novelty) were found the most challenging, whereas e.g. 3.2 Communication was easy to handle.

2.6. Governing Board Meeting

The final decision on the proposals was done at the Governing Board Meeting 16-17 November 2016. The preparation stage was held at the meeting of the EIT's Governing Board Executive Committee. The final decision-making process was well handled, in a neutral and transparent way. The preparatory steps prior to the hearings of the proposer integrated the information from the Consensus Reports, but also the observations by the Independent Observer of the evaluation so far. The proposers at the hearings were equally treated. The roles of some stakeholders for the new Governing Board Members might not have been fully clear, e.g. understanding the strategic nature of the GB and the status of observers (not IO) in the GB, but this did not influence the outcome. The Governing Board strongly emphasized the quality and added value aspects in their decisions, and showed admirable capability to make tough decisions (e.g. rejecting one proposal) in this respect.

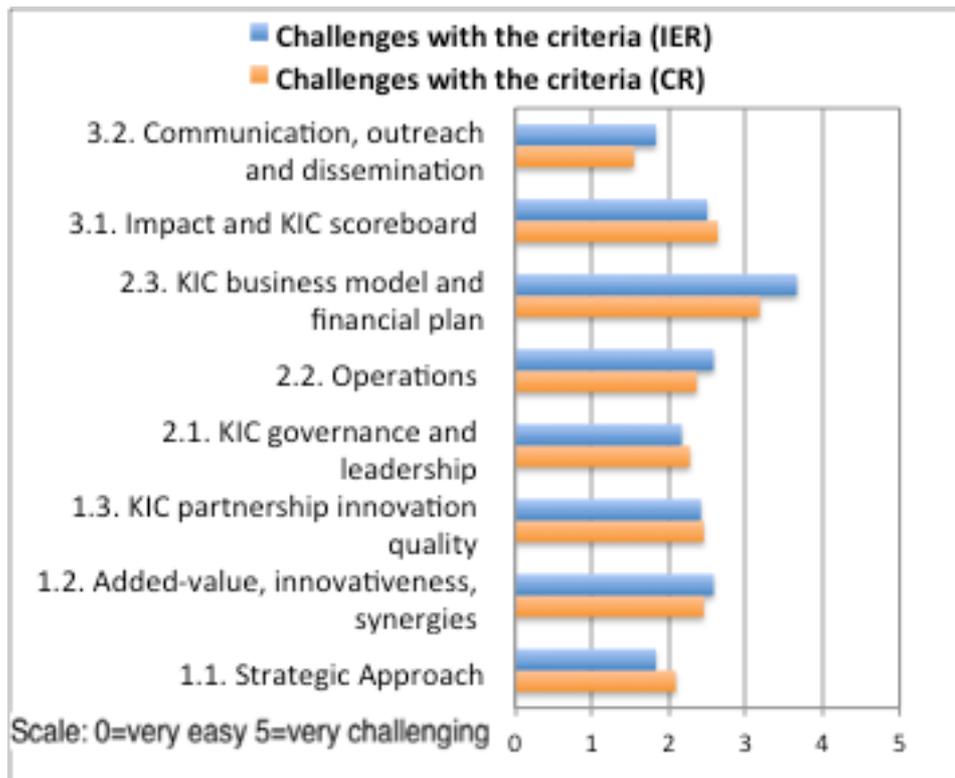


Figure 3. Expert’s perception of the evaluation criteria.

3. Summary of findings

The whole evaluation process went well and provided a balanced recommendation of the proposals evaluated. No misconduct or manipulation was observed and all steps of the evaluation were performed according to the EIT evaluation rules and codes of conduct. The evaluation criteria were applied consistently. The final scores given represented a consensus view of all experts concerned, and agreed with the written evaluation report for each criterion.

The background material, instructions, and guidance organized by the EIT provided an adequate basis for the evaluators to perform the remote evaluations as requested

The measures to avoid bias and opinion influencing worked well in each step of the evaluation process (e.g. experts did not know the other IER scores, expert communicating eliminated during the remote phase, the Rapporteur did not make an IER, the Moderator lead the Consensus Meeting, etc.)

The electronic proposal evaluation system SEP seems to be useful and provided a good tool for the Remote Evaluations as also for the finalization of the Consensus Report.

The individual evaluation reports (IER) well demonstrated that the experts had dedicated time and effort in analyzing the proposals in accordance to the

instructions given. The quality of the reports was satisfactory, though in some cases the underlying evaluation text to motivate the scores was quite general and could have been better elaborated.

The Consensus Meetings were run professionally and were well organized. Both the EIT staff and evaluation experts worked well and provided the requested outcome (CR). The quality of the final Consensus Reports were of high quality, with scores and written findings in balance. Compared to the IERs, the final CR represented a major improvement, which stresses the central importance of the Consensus Meeting in the whole evaluation process.

The expert panels provided a high-quality understanding, strong dedication, high working morale, and a good capability for finding a consensus (without inflating own opinion) at the meetings, indicating that the EIT was highly successful in the recruitment of the evaluators. Each panel well demonstrated its capability to function as one team with multiple skills instead of a collection of single experts.

The natural bias of experts, e.g. through strong personal opinions, which could be typical for an evaluation exercise with high-caliber experts, was not observed to influence the evaluation outcome. The group dynamics in the panels was positive.

The role of the Moderators in the Consensus Meetings was of high importance to guide the discussions and to provide clarifications, without affecting the outcome. KIC is a sophisticated Programme with multiple dimensions, which clearly created challenges to the evaluators in the beginning.

The moderation of the Consensus Meetings was effective and guiding the discussions to essential points avoiding wasting of time in a time-constrained evaluation process.

Due to the low number of proposals received, the time for the remote evaluation was found adequate as well as for the Consensus Meeting. This clearly correlated positively with the quality of the Consensus Reports.

The Governing Board did the final decisions on the proposals in an unbiased, transparent, and impartial way treating the proposers in an equal way. The GB emphasized quality and added value aspects, but also integrated in a proper and efficient way the information from the Consensus Reports and the observations by the IO so far into their decision making process.

The administrative procedures and tasks linked to the evaluation process were smooth. The EIT staff carefully tracked any possible causes for conflicts of interest throughout the whole evaluation process. The IO did not observe any reasons for conflict of interest during the evaluation process.

Appendix 1: Timeline of the EIT 2016 Call Evaluation

Timeline

Event	Date
Experts' briefing	28 July
Individual Experts assessments deadline	21 September
Consensus report submitted to the EIT	03 October
Consensus report to be submitted for experts	05 October
Possible comments of experts on the consensus reports	07 October
Reports ready for the consensus meetings	10 October
Consensus report meeting	11-13 October
Preparation to GB hearings and GB hearings (for rapporteurs and IO only)	15-17 November

Appendix 2: Key documents available for the evaluation

The key information and material distributed to the Evaluators and Rapporteurs prior to the remote evaluation included among others the following:

- General information on the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) <http://eit.europa.eu>
- Complete set of information on the EIT 2016 Call for KICs (incl. EIT Strategic Agenda, Evaluation Criteria, Framework of Guidance, EIT Regulation, EIT Monitoring Strategy, Decision of the EIT Governing Board on "Principles on KICs' Financial Sustainability", Call of Proposals January 2016, EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (EIT RIS) Implementation Guidance Note (31/03/2016) , EIT Proposal Template, Advanced Manufacturing and Food4Future Factsheets, EIT Proposal Evaluation from 2016, EIT Model Start-up, EIT Model Framework Partnership Agreement, TimeLine for the 2016 Call for KIC proposals, among others) <http://eit.europa.eu/collaborate/2016-call-for-kics>
- Material on the Information Day for the 2016 Call for Knowledge and Innovation Communities Proposals
- Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community institutions and bodies
- Selection process of evaluation experts
- Webinar 28 July 2016 Briefing Meeting Material (Presentation of EITs and KICs, Presentation of the Call, Evaluation Process and Criteria, Organization of the Evaluation Process)

It may be important to notice that the KIC 2016 proposer had in their disposal almost identical information to understand the basis of how and against which criteria their proposals would be evaluated.

Appendix 3: Pre-questionnaire

Questions to evaluators and rapporteurs of the EIT2016 Call (KIC) prior to the remote evaluation (IER)

1. Have you had any previous experience as an evaluator or a rapporteur of EIT evaluations? (0=no, 1=yes)
2. How useful did you find the pre-information sent to you prior to the webinar (July 28)? (Scale: 0=little, 5=very much)

Please specify if any information which was missing?

3. How useful did you find the webinar on July 28? (Scale: 0=little, 5=very much)
Please specify if you missed any information, which could be important for the evaluation or reporting tasks?
4. How confident are you with the E-evaluation system SEP? (Scale: 0=little, 5=very much)
5. Any other comments on the evaluation process so far?

Appendix 4: Post-questionnaire

Questions to evaluators and rapporteurs of the EIT2016 Call (KIC) after the evaluation.

A. Background Information

Your role in the evaluation: Evaluator () Rapporteur ()

Did you have any prior experience as an evaluator or a rapporteur of EIT evaluations? No () Yes ()

Your main background: Industry () Academics () Other () Which?

B. Questions on the Remote Evaluation (IER; August-October)

1. How do you judge the remote evaluation process as a whole?
() Scale: 0=poor, 5=excellent Would you like to suggest any improvements?
2. Was the time allocated in the contract adequate for the remote evaluation (or compiling the CR)?
() Scale: 0=not adequate, 5= well adequate.
3. Did you face technical problems with the E-evaluation system SEP?
() Scale: 0=NO 1=YES. Please specify the problem and how solved.
4. How challenging did you find it to assess the 8 criteria? Why?
(Scale: 0=very easy 5=very challenging)
 - 1.1. Strategic Approach ()
Comments:
 - 1.2. Added-value, innovativeness, synergies ()
Comments:
 - 1.3. KIC partnership innovation quality ()
Comments:
 - 2.1. KIC governance and leadership ()
Comments:
 - 2.2. Operations ()
Comments:
 - 2.3. KIC business model and financial plan ()
Comments:
 - 3.1. Impact and KIC scoreboard ()
Comments:
 - 3.2. Communication, outreach and dissemination ()
Comments:

C. Questions on the Consensus Meeting (11-13 October 2016)

5. How satisfied were you on the way the Consensus Meeting was run?
() Scale: 0=very unsatisfied, 5= very satisfied.
Any feedback or points that you would like to improve?
6. How well do you agree with the final scores of the proposals?
() Scale: 0=not at all, 5= fully satisfied
7. How well was your opinion heard in the Consensus Meeting?

() Scale: 0=not adequately, 5=very adequately. Please specify on which points you weren't heard?

8. How challenging did you find the discussion on the criteria at the Consensus meeting? Why? (Scale: 0=very easy 5=very challenging)

1.1. Strategic Approach ()

Comments:

1.2. Added-value, innovativeness, synergies ()

Comments:

1.3. KIC partnership innovation quality ()

Comments:

2.1. KIC governance and leadership ()

Comments:

2.2. Operations ()

Comments:

2.3. KIC business model and financial plan ()

Comments:

3.1. Impact and KIC scoreboard ()

Comments:

3.2. Communication, outreach and dissemination ()

Comments:

9. What is your overall score for the whole evaluation exercise

() Scale: 0=poor 5=excellent. Any further suggestions for improvements?