

1. Purpose of this document

This document provides guidance for panels assessing full research proposals in Research grants (IP), Installation research grants (UIP) calls, and Weave applications.

At this stage:

- full stage proposals have been submitted using the Stage 2 form,
- each proposal has been evaluated by three external reviewers,
- your task is to interpret the reviewers' assessments, assess possible problems, resolve those and produce a final ranking list to the Management Board of HRZZ.

2. Overview of the process

2.1. Read the evaluations and assess them individually.

2.2. Discuss proposals in panel meetings, with particular attention to:

- major disagreements between reviewers,
- borderline cases,
- proposals close to the funding cut-off,
- *Weave* / bilateral / trilateral proposals, where applicable.

2.3. Agree a final ranked list.

3. Materials you will receive

For each proposal, you will receive:

- the full Stage 2 proposal (application form with all sections),
- external review reports (three per proposal),

Panel decisions should be based on the full proposal and the external reviews.

4. Assessing the quality of external reviews

4.1 Clarity and structure

- Is the review clearly written and structured (e.g. by domains or sections of the proposal)?
- Does it provide concrete arguments, or only general statements?

4.2 Depth and justification

- Does the reviewer engage with the key elements of the proposal (objectives, methods, impact, feasibility)?
- Are scores supported by specific examples and reasoning?
- Are criticisms proportional and tied to the actual content of the proposal?

4.3 Expertise and relevance

- Does the review demonstrate appropriate understanding of the subject area and methods?
- If terminology or concepts are misused, treat the review with caution.

4.4 Balance and tone

- Does the reviewer acknowledge both strengths and weaknesses?
- Is the tone professional and fair, avoiding personal or biased remarks?

4.5 Consistency

- Are scores consistent with the written comments?

- Are there internal contradictions (e.g. very positive text but very low scores)?

4.6 Accepting or rejecting reviews

If a review is found to be superficial, inconsistent, or clearly based on a misunderstanding, the panel may decide to:

- ask a reviewer for clarification, and then accept a review,
- ask a reviewer for correction, to which he or she may agree or not, and then decide whether to accept or reject a review, or
- reject the review and seek another reviewer (in case of substantial errors, omissions or failures).

A special attention must be given to all scores assigned as 1 or 2, since these automatically reject the proposal due to not meeting the threshold criteria. Make sure that all such instances are justified by the reviewer comments.

4.7 Disagreements between accepted reviews

It is normal for experts to disagree. When external reviews that were accepted in the previous step of this guidance diverge substantially:

- Identify the main points of agreement (shared strengths/weaknesses).
- Identify the points of disagreement and assess if these differences are due to legitimate scientific judgement, or to a misunderstanding?
- Which review provides the more careful and better-justified reasoning?
- Consider whether any reviewer appears to be an outlier (much harsher or more positive than others, without strong justification).

4.8 Review outliers

A review is classified as an outlier if it is 6 or more points apart from the average of the sum of two other reviews. Scoring and identification of outlier reviews is performed by HRZZ, you do not have to calculate this yourself.

4.9 Disagreement and outlier procedures

When disagreement occurs or an outlier review is identified, panel may proceed to one of possible actions:

- Retaining disagreement as is, if each of the scores are well explained,
- Ask for a reviewer to clarify the position,
- Proceed to review alignment procedure (section 4.10),
- Reject an outlier review and seek for another reviewer (in case of substantial errors, omissions or failures).

4.10 Review alignment procedure

All three reviewers will receive all comments, and be required to respond within five days. The reviewers have an opportunity to read each other's comments and then adjust their score. Reviewer also retains the right to maintain the same score, if the counterargument is insufficiently compelling.

5. Finalized ranking list

HRZZ will merge all the scoring and share a finalized ranking list with the panel. In case of ties, priority is given to the proposal with the higher score in Excellence domain (section 3 of the stage 2 application form). In case

this does not resolve a tie, a priority will be given to the proposal with the higher score in Implementation, work plan and feasibility domain (section 5 of the stage 2 application form).

6. Evaluation of work

Panels are asked to provide feedback on the protocols and procedure, outlining areas for improvements.