



Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

INTRA-AFRICA Academic Mobility Scheme

GUIDE FOR EXPERTS

ON

QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF THE INTRA-AFRICA ACADEMIC MOBILITY SCHEME

managed by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

2017 version

Call for Proposals EACEA/05/2017

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INTRODUCTION

The European Commission's Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (the Agency) is responsible for the implementation of the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme under the supervision of the Directorate General for International Development and Cooperation and in cooperation with the African Union Commission. The Agency is in charge of the selection of projects to be funded, it assesses projects with the assistance of independent experts to ensure that only those of the highest quality are selected for funding.

This guide is intended to provide experts with instructions and guidance on how to ensure a high quality standardised assessment of a project proposal¹ received in response to the Calls for Proposals EACEA/07/2016 under the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme.

The Guide for Experts provides information on:

- the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme and its objectives
- the role and appointment of experts
- the principles of the assessment
- the assessment process in practice
- information on how to assess the award criteria

1. INTRA-AFRICA ACADEMIC MOBILITY SCHEME

1.1. BACKGROUND

The scheme is part of the Pan-African Programme (PanAf), which has been created in 2014 as one of the instruments that will support the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) adopted at the Lisbon Summit in December 2007.

The Roadmap 2014-2017 of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy underlines the crucial role of HE for economic and social development and the strong potential of mobility to improve the quality of higher education, by accelerating the use of transparency and recognition tools, and by helping institutions develop better services to send and receive foreign students and researchers.

As a response, and based on the experience under the Africa component of the Intra-ACP Academic Mobility Scheme (2010-2013), the EU decided to continue supporting mobility of students and staff within Africa through the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme which is one of the actions foreseen in the PanAf Annual Action Programme 2016.²

The present Call is the second Call organised under the new programme. A first Call for proposals was launched in March 2016 with a deadline in June 2016 (EACEA/07/2016). Seven projects were selected and started their activities in November 2016.

1.2. OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of the programme is to promote sustainable development and ultimately contribute to poverty reduction by increasing the availability of trained and qualified high-level professional human power in Africa. The programme's specific objective is to improve the skills

¹ Please note that the terms "proposal" and "application" are used interchangeably in this guide.

² Commission implementing Decision C(2016) 4513, (Annex 1), adopted on 19 July 2016.

and competences of students and staff through enhanced intra-African mobility. Strengthening cooperation between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Africa will increase access to quality education and will encourage and enable African students to undertake postgraduate studies in the African continent. Furthermore, mobility of staff (academic and administrative) will enhance the international cooperation capacity of HEIs in Africa.

More specifically the programme aims to:

- a) contribute to the improvement of the quality of higher education through the promotion of internationalisation and harmonisation of programmes and curricula within participating institutions;
- b) enable students, academics and staff to benefit linguistically, culturally and professionally from the experience gained in the context of mobility to another African country.

2. GENERAL ASPECTS OF EXPERTS EVALUATION

The aim of the expert evaluation is to ensure that each application receives an objective assessment from a person with expertise in the field covered by the action, and that this individual assessment is also subject to a review with at least one other person who has assessed the same application. This process helps to ensure that applications of the highest quality are selected for funding. Experts support the process through evaluating applications, drafting feedback provided to applicants and reviewing the comparative merits of applications with equal scores in order to rank them.

The Agency appoints an Evaluation Committee for each Call for Proposals published under the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme. The Evaluation Committee is designated by the EACEA Director (Authorising Officer) and is composed of representatives of the Executive Agency, the relevant services at the European Commission, i.e. Directorate General Development and Cooperation and DG Education and Culture, and the African Union Commission.

Outside experts may assist the Committee in its work. Upon completion of its work, the members of the Evaluation Committee establish a list of all the proposals examined, containing an assessment of their quality and identifying those which may receive funding. Where necessary it may provide recommendations on the maximum amount to award and possible non-substantial adjustments to the grant application. As a final point, based on the above, the authorising officer will take his grant award decision.

This committee puts forward to the Agency's Authorising Officer, a list of applications that are recommended for funding. The final decision on whether to fund applications is taken by the Agency following consultation with the above mentioned European Commission services and the African Union Commission.

2.1. ROLE AND APPOINTMENT OF EXPERTS

The role of experts is to **advise the Agency on the quality and value for money of the applications** in relation to the policy objectives of the programme.

Quality assessment is an essential part of the selection procedure. A list of grant applications, ranked in quality order, is established based on experts' scores. This list then serves as a basis for the Evaluation Committee to determine the applications of highest merit that will be

proposed for funding³. The feedback that is sent to applicants at the end of the selection process, builds on the experts' assessments (see *section FEEDBACK TO APPLICANTS*).

Experts are **recruited** through an open [call for expression of interest](#)⁴. They are appointed on the basis of their expertise in the specific field(s) related to the programme's scope and objectives. However, other criteria like language competencies, gender balance, the coverage of nationalities and geographical balance intervenes also in the final composition of an expert panel. The management of expert contracts is based on a fully electronic workflow which is further explained in the call mentioned above.

The Agency does not disclose information or contact details on experts in relation with a given proposal they assess. The Agency however publishes each year on its website the list of experts who have concluded a contract of more than 15.000€ (see [point 13.6 Ex post transparency of the call for expression of interest](#))⁵.

2.2. CODE OF CONDUCT

Experts must perform their tasks to the highest professional standards and in accordance with the instructions of the Agency. They are further bound to a code of conduct as set out in the [call for expression of interest \(section 13.4\)](#) and contract with the Agency. In that respect, experts' attention is drawn to the following aspects:

2.3. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

- Experts must not have a conflict of interest⁶ **at the time of their appointment**. A declaration that no such conflict exists is part of their contract signed electronically (for information, see template in the annex of experts' contract).
- They must also inform the Executive Agency if such a conflict should arise **in any of the applications** they have been allocated.

When a potential conflict of interest is reported by the expert or brought to the attention of the Agency by any means, the Agency will analyse the circumstances and any objective elements of information at its disposal. If the Agency comes to the conclusion that there is conflict of interest, the expert is either excluded from the assessment of that particular application, or from the entire selection round.

2.4. CONFIDENTIALITY

Experts are bound by confidentiality, as all information relating to the assessment process is *strictly* confidential. They are not allowed to disclose any information about the applications submitted and the results of the assessment and selection to anyone either during or after the selection.

³ The grant award decision is taken by the authorising officer on the basis of the quality of the applications and the budget available (see Article 133 of the *Financial Regulations* applicable to the general budget of the Union: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2012:298:0001:0096:EN:PDF>)

⁴ The list resulting from this call for expressions of interest is valid for the duration of the current generation of programmes managed by the Agency, i.e. until 31.12.2020 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about-eacea/workingexpert/call-for-expressions-interest-n%C2%B0-eacea201301_en

⁵ https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about-eacea/working-expert/call-for-expressions-interest-n%C2%B0-eacea201301_en

⁶ Financial Regulation Art. 57(2): " ... a conflict of interests exists where the impartial and objective exercise of the functions of a financial actor or other person, ..., is compromised for reasons involving family, emotional life, political or national affinity, economic interest or any other shared interest with a recipient." <http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2012:298:0001:0096:EN:PDF>

2.5. CONDITIONS OF REMUNERATION AND REIMBURSEMENT

The framework for the remuneration by the Agency of the services provided by experts and the reimbursement of possible travel cost is laid out in the [call for expression of interest](#) (cf. section 12).

The maximum daily fee for the assessment of applications is 450€. Experts are asked to assess several project applications (maximum 2) per day. The exact workload is subject to the complexity and volume of an application. Experts are informed about their precise workload and payment conditions, including reimbursement of travel and subsistence cost, at the time of engagement. These conditions are clearly stated in the contract signed with the Agency.

3. OVERVIEW OF THE SELECTION PROCEDURE AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. CRITERIA TO ASSESS AN APPLICATION

Criteria used to assess an application submitted under the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme are found in the [Call for Proposals Guidelines - EACEA/05/2017](#).

Eligibility Criteria for the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme

- Please refer to the section 6 – Eligibility Criteria of [Call for Proposals Guidelines - EACEA/05/2017](#) (pages 5-16).

Selection Criteria for the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme

- Please refer to the section 8 – Selection Criteria of [Call for Proposals Guidelines - EACEA/05/2017](#) (pages 19-20).

Award Criteria for the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme

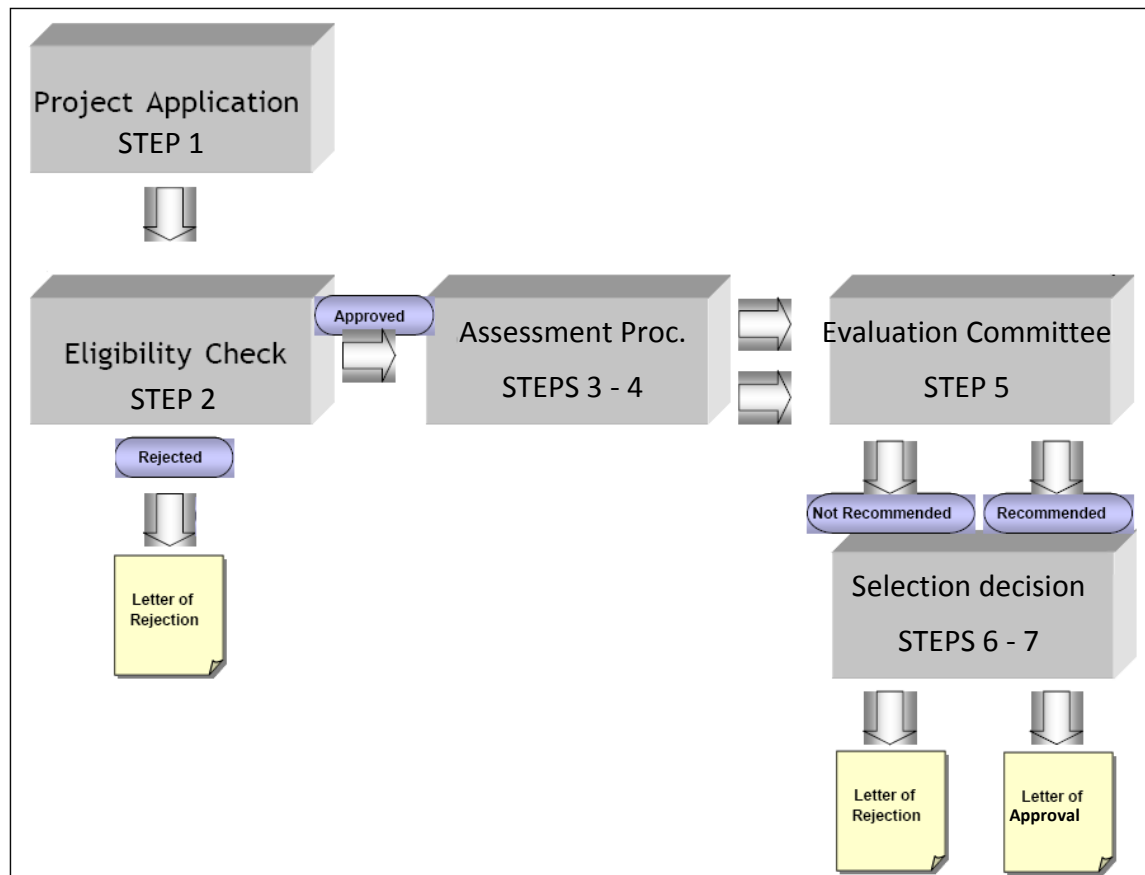
- Please refer to the section 9 – Award Procedure and Criteria of [Call for Proposals Guidelines - EACEA/05/2017](#) (pages 20-23).

3.2. SELECTION PROCEDURE OF THE PROPOSALS

Proposals are selected through a competitive system based on their overall academic and operational quality and organised in accordance with the following selection procedure:

Phase 1. →	Registration of submitted proposals and acknowledgement of receipt by the Agency.
Phase 2. →	<p>Eligibility check performed by the Agency, with the objective to ensure that the eligibility requirements of the Call for Proposals Guidelines are respected. Proposals that did not comply with any of the eligibility criteria will be rejected and notified accordingly.</p> <p>In parallel, the EU Delegations in Africa and the African Union Commission are consulted on the eligibility of the institutions involved in the proposals. The EU Delegations express also their opinion on the relevance of the proposals for their respective countries.</p>
Phase 3. →	<p>Assessment against the relevant Award Criteria by external experts including individual assessments, consolidated assessments and academic debriefing. The academic debriefing is attended by all experts and chaired by the Agency.</p> <p>While assessing the award criteria, the experts will take into account the applicant's operational capacity as part of the selection criteria. This will ensure that they have the relevant experience, professional competencies and qualifications required to successfully complete the proposed action. This also applies to any partner of the partnership.</p>
Phase 4. →	Verification of applicants and partners' compliance with the second Selection Criterion, i.e. financial capacity, by the Agency. This selection criterion is intended to evaluate the applicants' and partners' financial capacity in order to ensure that they have the management and financial capacity to successfully complete the proposed action.
Phase 5. →	Based on the outcome of the award criteria assessment, the Evaluation Committee composed of representatives of the Commission and the Agency will prepare a draft selection decision taking into account the opinions issued during phases 2, 3, and 4.
Phase 6. →	Selection decision by the Agency, based on the relative high quality of the proposal in comparison with the other proposals received and the budget available.
Phase 7. →	Applicants are notified by the Agency about the selection decision. Experts' assessments are provided to all applicants as part of this notification. The selection decision is taken by the Authorising Officer.

The following picture illustrates the different steps of the project selection process:



3.3. TIMETABLE OF THE INTRA-AFRICA EXPERTS ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

The assessment procedure consists of the following main steps described in more detail below:

- **briefing of experts;**
- **individual assessments** including quality review;
- **consolidated assessments** including quality review;
- **final consolidation panel and debriefing for the establishment of a ranked list of grant applications proposed for funding;**
- **feedback to applicants** including editing of final comments.

The table below shows the key dates of the experts' assessment procedure:

	WHEN	WHAT
Induction phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As from EACEA's formal invitation and prior to the beginning of the assessment • The on-line briefing session on 22/05/2017 (morning and afternoon) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of the assessment exercise: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. reading the relevant material (Intra-Africa Call for Proposals, Application form and its annexes, Guide for Experts and other reference documents) 2. participation to the mock application exercise • Participation to the online briefing session
Individual assessment phase	23/05/2017 – 01/06/2017 <i>-on-remote-</i>	Individual assessment of the award criteria
Consensus discussion and consolidation phase	02/06/2017 – 13/06/2017 <i>-on-remote-</i>	Consensus discussions and drafting of the consolidation assessment by the experts
Final Consolidation and Debriefing	15/06/2017 – 16/06/2017 <i>-on-site-</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalisation and submission of consolidated assessments • General panel discussions and debriefing

Following the experts assessment exercise, the Evaluations Committee will gather on 10.7.2017 in order to draft the selection decision taking into account the opinions issued during the experts' assessment exercise.

At the end of July 2017, the Authorising Officer of the Agency will take the selection decision based on the relative high quality of the proposals in comparison with the other proposals received and the budget.

It is planned to send the feedback to applicants in the course of August 2017. All applicants will be officially notified on the selection results, together with the feedback from the experts' assessment.

Before starting the assessment of applications, experts must:

- i. have a sound knowledge of the call for proposals of the programme, which provides all necessary information to potential applicants;

- ii. acquire an in-depth knowledge of the scheme, its objectives, and the policy context that apply. For specific guidance on policy priorities, experts are referred also to the documents listed in Annex 2 to this Guide;
- iii. have an in-depth understanding of the award criteria applicable to the applications under assessment;
- iv. know the content and structure of the application form and its annexes;
- v. be familiar with all the reference documents and tools provided by the Executive Agency.

The assessment process must be completed within the period which has been communicated to the experts. The timing has been carefully planned and the timetable must be adhered to by all people concerned. Delays in the submission of individual or consolidated assessments by one single expert can have serious consequences on the entire selection.

Given that the Intra-Africa selection is organised as a paperless exercise, the application form and its annexes, as well as the individual and consolidated assessments will be provided in electronic version only. As a result, it is the expert's responsibility to print hard copies of some or all of these documents if needed. Necessary equipment and resources will be provided at the Agency premises during the final consolidation panel and debriefing on 15-16 June 2017).

3.4. EXPERTS BRIEFING

In order to ensure high quality of evaluations, the Agency makes certain that the experts receive all necessary information and training before they start working. Therefore, briefing sessions are organised in order to:

- ensure that **all information** on the content of the call, the technicalities (tools) and the process (selection timetable) has been **read** by the experts and thoroughly **understood**. For specific guidance on policy priorities, experts may also refer to the documents listed in Annex 2 to this Guide;
- make sure experts are familiar with the **structure and content of the application form** and tools to be used;
- foster **common understanding** of the award criteria, priorities and objectives of the call for proposal concerned through group discussions;
- **train and guide experts** on how to conduct their evaluations in compliance with the award criteria set out in the call and on what is expected in terms of comments so that all assessments are carried out in a coherent and consistent way;
- ensure that all experts adhere to the **principles of confidentiality, impartiality and absence of conflict of interest** in the frame of the evaluation exercise.

General principles of expert briefing

- All information needed to carry out the evaluations is made available in advance before the briefings.
- **Transparency:** experts must be provided with the same information as applicants and carry out their assessments on that basis.
- **Experienced expert(s)** will take the lead role as facilitators to stimulate and frame discussions during the briefing sessions.

Within this assessment specific exercise, two (2) experts with a longstanding experience in assessing European cooperation projects will be appointed as Lead Experts and will monitor

the quality and progress of the assessment performed. Their main role will be to provide quality assurance, to guarantee coherence, and to monitor the efficient progress of individual and consolidated assessments performed by the experts within their group.

The briefing session is **essentially interactive** and emphasis is put on practical exercises (i.e. exercise on a mock application). This allows experts to exchange points of view, get answers to their questions and clarify any doubts related to the selection process and methodology.

3.5. INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENTS

Applications are evaluated by two experts. Each expert is nominated as Expert 1 or Expert 2 for an application. Each expert first works individually and independently, giving scores and comments for each award criterion, summarising the evaluation in the assessment form and submitting it electronically⁷.

In this phase, the experts' first task will be to check that they do not have a potential conflict of interest with any of their proposals.

After having checked all their proposals and ensured they have no conflict of interest with any of them, experts will start assessing their proposals in accordance with the instructions contained in this manual. Experts will therefore be asked to assess to what extent the elements covered by the award criteria have been addressed in the proposal. In addition, they should verify the coherence between the answers given to the award criterion and all the relevant sections of the application and its mandatory annexes. **The length of the text to be written per award criterion should be between 15-20 lines.**

Experts are not obliged to consult other sources of information than the application form and its mandatory annexes. They can consult other documents or sources of information provided by the applicant in order to crosscheck, verify or **confirm information provided in the application form but not to find new elements that failed to be addressed in it.**

When they have completed their draft individual assessment, the experts will save their draft assessment and send it by email to the lead expert for quality check. Experts are required to submit their individual assessments to their lead expert on a regular basis, in accordance with the timetable proposed by the Agency. This will guarantee the efficient implementation of the individual assessment phase and avoid that lead expert are overcharged with assessment forms to review on the last days of this first phase of the exercise.

At individual assessment stage, the role of the lead expert will be:

- to check that a minimal quantity of text is provided for each award criterion;
- to check the quality of the comments in view of avoiding that they are made up of mere summaries of the information provided in the project application;
- to make sure that the expert's comment does not contain factual mistakes;
- to check coherence between comments and score and that there are no inherent contradictions between the comments;
- in cases where the language is inappropriate or unclear, to send an early warning, and occasionally to provide simple advice in order to help the experts improve their assessment reports.

⁷ At this stage of the evaluation only full points can be used.

Based on the observations provided by their lead expert ("Quality Check"), experts will revise their individual assessment and, after a final proofreading, will "submit/endorse" their individual assessment in the **Online Expert Evaluation Tool (OEET)**⁸.

3.6. CONSENSUS DISCUSSION AND CONSOLIDATED ASSESSMENTS

Once both individual assessments are finalised and submitted electronically, the Agency puts the experts in contact to consolidate their views on the application and produce single agreed scores and comments on each of the award criteria⁹. The two experts will start discussing the results of the previous phase with the objective to share their understanding of the proposal.

During the consensus discussion phase, two different situations may occur:

- There is **not significant divergence** between the individual assessments. Therefore, a draft of consolidated assessment can be formulated.
- There is **a significant divergence of more than 30 points** between the final score of the two individual assessments. In order to reach a consensus and to consolidate the assessment, an **additional third assessment** of the application is required. In this case, the lead expert or another expert will be asked to assess the proposal. For reasons of availability of experts, resources and time, third assessments should represent the rare exception to the rule.
- When a third assessment is triggered, the experts with the two assessments that are closest in terms of their overall score will undertake the consolidation: the most extreme assessment in terms of overall score is not taken into account.

At the end of the consensus discussion, one of the two experts will be identified as "expert one" in the online assessment tool and will be responsible for drafting the consolidated assessment in close collaboration/contact with "expert two", by harmonising comments and observations based on the consensus discussions. Although experts may use the arithmetical average of their scores for their consolidated assessment, they can also modify individual assessment scores in accordance with the agreement reached during the consensus discussion. In case of a third assessment, the expert who has given the middle final score will be act as "expert one".

The steps below explain in more details the consolidation procedure:

✓ **Expert 1 starts the consolidation procedure**

For each of your Expert 1 proposals (if a third assessment was not needed), you will find an additional row in the OEET: "*Project list*". These proposals are identified as "*Consolidation*" in the left hand side column (called "*Type*") of the list. Clicking on the "*Type*" header will allow you to bring these proposals on the top of your list.

In the "*Consolidation*" assessment form, you will find all experts' comments (preceded by an "*Expert 1*", "*Expert 2*" header) identifying who has provided them, as well as the average score for each of them.

⁸ A detailed manual on the OEET will be provided to the experts.

⁹ At the stage of consolidation, experts may use half points.

Copy-paste and save the content of the draft consolidation in Word (.docx) and send it to your fellow expert who, until that stage, has not yet been given the possibility to look at the other expert's comments and scores.

✓ **Two (2) experts work together**

After point 1 above, Experts 1 and 2 have the same information at their disposal, i.e. each other's scores and comments.

At this stage, two (2) experts will start exchanging questions, concerns, opinions on different aspects of the proposal's assessment (score and comments). These exchanges do not necessarily need to be copied to the Lead Expert (and the EACEA contact persons). However, if further clarifications are needed they can of course do so and the Lead Expert as well as EACEA will be at their disposal to help them in this consolidation process.

Experts can also exchange different (/consecutive) versions of the consolidated form reflecting the progress made during their consensus discussion, but only the final draft of the consolidation assessment should be sent by Expert 1 to the Lead Expert (with Expert 2 and the Agency in cc) for a quality check.

It is the experts' responsibility to ensure that **the final score and comments correspond to a real consensus** and do not result from one of the experts giving up on the arguments of the other(s)! In this respect, it is important to underline that all experts have the same importance and the fact that Expert 1 is in charge of drafting the comments does not give his/her comments, opinion or score, more weight (/importance).

As mentioned before, the online tool will provide the arithmetical average of the two (2) individual scores, but experts can (/should) diverge from this average in order to reflect more adequately their consolidated assessment (i.e. the average is not necessarily the expected result). In addition, although average scores can correspond to two decimal points, only ½ points can be given at consolidated assessment stage.

In principle, the final consolidated score should be kept within the limits of the final scores given in the individual assessments. It may be true that during their consensus discussion, the experts agree on the fact that the proposal has been over- or underrated by all of them during the individual assessment phase. In this case the consolidated score could be higher or lower than the above mentioned boundaries. This type of cases should be an exception. They must include appropriate "Comments to the Agency" in the relevant text box of the online assessment form and should be subject of a discussion with the Lead Expert.

- If there is **agreement on the overall proposal assessment**, the expert identified as "Expert 1" will draft the consolidated assessment, bringing together the most relevant comments and observations provided by the two experts involved, thus not purely a copy/paste of individual comments, ensuring that observations on issues expected to be addressed by the proposal have not been omitted.
- In each section of the award criteria, observations should reflect **coherently strengths, weaknesses and potential of the proposal on the relevant topic**.
- If the **two (2) experts cannot reach an agreement** (in their comments and/or scores) the Agency in close collaboration with the lead expert(s) will decide on organising a specific consensus discussion. The experts will nevertheless be requested to prepare a draft consolidation assessment, leaving open the disputed elements for further discussion with the Agency staff and the lead expert.

✓ **Expert 1 finalises the consolidated assessment**

The draft consolidated assessment has to be sent via e-mail as word document to the lead expert and the contact persons at the Agency in copy. It must contain:

- A common agreed score for each award criterion, which should generally lie between the respective original scores;
- A common set of comments under each award criterion;
- A common overall final score, calculated as the sum of the scores given to each award criterion.

After agreement with Expert 2 and the quality check by the lead expert, Expert 1 submits the consolidated assessment electronically in the system.

When finalising the consolidation, experts should not forget to update the "Decision" ("not recommended" / "recommended" / "highly recommended"). In principle, each of these three (3) options corresponds to a range in the experts' score, i.e.:

- **Highly recommended** → Proposals with a score of 75 points or higher
- **Recommended** → Proposals with a score lower than 75 but at least 50 points
- **Not recommended** → Proposals with a score lower than 50 points

The consolidated assessment is considered the final assessment of a given application. It means that in case of applications for a grant (min. 50 out of 100 points), the consolidated assessment and scores form the basis for ranking applications in order of merit on the list of eligible grant applications.

After the consolidation phase, the comments observation and scores cannot be changed any more.

Experts should make sure that all their comments observation in the consolidated assessment are **clear, objective, transparent, qualitative, detailed, instructive, complete and in accordance with the scoring**. These comments observation will be sent to applicants with the notification letter on the selection results.

3.7. FINAL PANEL AND ESTABLISHMENT OF GRANT APPLICATION LISTS

Once the consolidation phase is complete, experts will meet to discuss and establish a ranking list of project proposals in order of merit.

The aim of this meeting is to:

- Provide an overview of the assessment outcomes to the Agency;
- Ensure coherence and consistency across the expert assessments;
- Elaborating arguments in favour or against ex-aequo proposals;
- Identify a provisional list of proposals ranked on the consolidated final ratings.

Procedure for the ranking of ex-aequo cases

The assessment process may lead to clusters of applications with the same total score: the **ex-aequo cases**. For those ex-aequo cases that fall around the funding line, experts may be asked to assist with ranking them according to the agreed criteria.

The final decision on the ranking of ex-aequo applications shall be taken by the Evaluation Committee, taking into account the opinion of the experts. This opinion is usually given by the group of experts who evaluated the individual applications, working as a team. The group discussion shall be facilitated by an Agency and/or Commission staff member.

During the discussion the group should comply with the following procedure:

- Only consolidated assessments are taken into account¹⁰. Each of the ex-aequo applications is briefly presented to the group by the lead expert (Expert 1), highlighting:
 - the strengths and weaknesses identified during the evaluation;
 - the priorities/objectives addressed by the application;
 - possible issues linked to the budget (budget corrections or potential insufficient funding in regard to the planned outcomes);
 - Possible imbalance in the level of quality across the different award criteria.
- Experts may pose questions on the applications presented to better understand the results of the evaluations and the nature of the applications.
- Experts may consider supplementary information provided by the Agency, to set the applications under discussion in the context of the overall evaluation results.
- Experts may then discuss the relative merits of the applications and share their opinions.
- The discussion and outcomes are recorded in writing.

The ranking of applications **should not be based** on:

- Assessment results of a subset of award criteria;
- Information other than what is available in the applications or provided by the Agency (e.g. additional information provided by an individual expert based upon his own opinion);
- The geographical balance of the various ex-aequo projects.

At the end of the debriefing, the Agency will establish the final ranking list of proposals. The shortlist of proposals and the corresponding background information (consolidated assessment, relevant statistics, proposals summary, etc.) will be sent to the Evaluation Committee in preparation of their meeting.

¹⁰ Individual assessments of ex-aequo projects are not to be considered during the ranking discussions.

3.8. ASSESSMENT OF AWARD CRITERIA AND SCORING

Experts assess applications against the following three main award criteria as defined in the call for proposals guidelines:

- 1) Relevance of the proposal (20 points)**
- 2) Quality of the project design and implementation (70 points)**
 - a. Academic quality (15 points)
 - b. Partnership composition and cooperation mechanisms (15 points)
 - c. Organisation and implementation of the mobility (20 points)
 - d. Students'/staff facilities and follow-up (10 points)
 - e. Gender Balance (10 points)
- 3) Sustainability (10 points)**

Each of the award criteria is defined through several elements which must be taken into account by experts when analysing an application (see section ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSALS). These elements form an exhaustive list of points to be considered when scoring the criterion. They are intended to guide experts through the evaluation of the criterion in question but they must not be scored individually.

When assessing applications against award criteria experts make a judgement on the extent to which these applications meet the defined criteria. This judgement must be based on information provided by the applicant only. Information relevant to a specific award criterion may appear in different parts of the application and experts take all of it into consideration. Experts must not assume information that is not stated explicitly in the application or search the internet or make use of their personal background knowledge.

An application can receive a maximum total of 100 points. The maximum score for the different criteria ranges between 10 and 20 points.

In order to ensure quality standards and coherence in approach three ranges of scores and quality levels for applications have been defined. The table below shows the ranges of scores for the individual quality standards depending on the maximum score of the award criterion.

Maximum number of points for a (sub) criterion	Range of scores			
	Very good	Good	Fair	Weak
20	17-20	14-16	10-13	0-9
15	14-15	11-13	8-10	0-7
10	9-10	7-8	5-6	0-4

- **Very good:** the application addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question convincingly and successfully. It provides all the information and evidence needed and there are no concerns or areas of weakness.
- **Good:** the application addresses the criterion well, although some small improvements could be made. It gives clear information on all or nearly all of the evidence needed.
- **Fair:** the application broadly addresses the criterion, but there are some weaknesses. It gives some relevant information, but there are several areas where detail is lacking or the information is unclear.
- **Weak:** the application fails to address the criterion or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information. It does not address the question asked, or gives very little relevant information.

Experts must provide comments on each award criterion and, in their comments, refer explicitly to the elements of analysis under the relevant criterion. The comments on each award criterion have to reflect and justify the given score. They should emphasise the application's strengths and weaknesses.

More specifically, the following elements should be checked before finalising the assessments:

- For the content:
 - ✓ Comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal against the award criteria, based on objective facts
 - ✓ No recommendations should be given on how to improve, as these could lead to false expectations in case of resubmission
 - ✓ Ensure coherence between the comments and the scoring
 - ✓ Ensure coherence between comments
- For the form:
 - ✓ Use an appropriate tone: neutral and polite
 - ✓ Use simple language and avoid complex sentences
 - ✓ A linguistic check should be carried out

As regards **budgetary assessment of an application**, the budget is based on a simplified grant¹¹ i.e. a fixed amount is applied to specific budget headings and / or types of activity or outputs. (see section 11.2 of the Call for proposals guidelines). The financial analysis of a project should focus on the experts' analysis of the methodology to implement the proposed mobility activities and to achieve the proposed results and objectives in a cost/effective way. The experts comment on this under the sub-criterion **Organisation and implementation of the mobility** of the award criteria.

Experts must assess all applications in full, regardless of the score given to any of the award criteria.

¹¹ Lump sum amount for the organisation of the mobility and unit costs for the implementation of the mobility.

4. ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSALS

As mentioned under chapter 3, experts will have to assess to what extent all the elements covered by the award criteria have been addressed by the applicant partnership. In order to perform this task they will analyse the specific answers provided to the award criteria, but also all the other information included in the application form and its mandatory annexes.

The application form (eForm) and its annexes are composed of the following sections and documents:

1. Application Form (eForm)

- Identification of the applicant and other organisations participating in the project (Part A)
- Organisations and Activities (Part B)
- Summary of the project or the activities (Part C)
- Thematic fields of study (Part D)

2. Annex 1 - Detailed Description of the Action

- Detailed Description of the Action (Part E)
- Planned activities for the implementation of the project (Part F)
- High Quality Master/Doctoral Programmes offered (Part G)
- Operational Capacity (Part H)

3. Annex 2 – Budget and Mobility Form

4. Annex 3 – List of Master/Doctoral Programmes

5. Annexes 4 to 7 – Administrative documents¹²

The award criteria allow evaluating the quality of the proposals submitted in relation to the objectives and priorities set so that grants are awarded to actions which maximise the overall effectiveness of the Call for proposals. They allow the selection of proposals which comply with the objectives and priorities of this Call for proposals and which guarantee the visibility of the European Union funding.

The activities related to the organisation and implementation of mobility aim at creating optimal conditions, through quality support measures, for students and staff to undertake periods of study/teaching/research/training at partner HEIs in a different country than the one of nationality. The necessary actions for assuring optimal conditions for the organisation and implementation of the mobility are explained in details in the Call for Proposals Guidelines (see Section **6.3.3. Organisation of the mobility**). The experts should therefore consult carefully this section together with the following sections of the Call for Proposals:

- 6.3.1. General provisions on eligible activities
- 6.3.2. Thematic fields of study
- 6.3.4. Individual mobility for students and staff

This will guarantee that the proposals are assessed against the requirements stipulated in the Call.

In the proposals, the main information for assessment of the award criteria is provided in the **Annex 1 – Detailed Description of the Action**. However, the experts should cross check the elements provided in this annex with the relevant sections of the **main application form**

¹² Declaration on honour, Mandates for partners, Mandate for Technical Partner, Legal Entity Form and Financial Identification Form. These documents are checked by the Agency during eligibility check of the proposals.

(eForm), where the experience and the role of the participating organisations are presented in relation with the activities covered by the project. Furthermore, there should be a list of projects/activities implemented by the partnership organisations in relation with the proposal (title, duration, funding programme, partners involved). The eForm presents also a summary on the project with a short description, duration and the requested grant amount. The final section of the eForm presents the thematic fields of study covered by the project. Another important source of information/verification is the following two annexes:

- Annex 2 – Budget and Mobility Form, presenting the detailed calculation of the requested grant and planned number of mobility flows
- Annex 3 – List of Master and Doctoral Programmes, presenting as a list all master and/or doctoral programmes to be offered by each partner as referred to in the **Part G - High Quality Master/Doctoral Programmes offered of the Annex 1.**

The following paragraphs underline the specific aspects experts should look at when reading the application form and its mandatory annexes.

4.1. AWARD CRITERION – RELEVANCE (20 POINTS)

Under this criterion the applicant needs to state the relevance of their proposal in relation with the programme's objectives (see Section 2 of the Call for proposals guidelines), and how the expected results contribute to fulfil its requirements. The applicant should illustrate how the project will contribute to the promotion of internationalisation and harmonisation of programmes and curricula within Africa and to the increase of career development opportunities towards a wider employment market.

Where applicable, the proposal should involve higher education institutions which have not yet benefited from or had a limited participation in similar partnerships/collaboration (e.g. Intra-ACP academic mobility scheme or similar programmes) and demonstrate a balanced geographical coverage among and within the partner countries.

If the proposal is a continuation of a previous/on-going partnership/collaboration in the region (e.g. Intra-ACP academic mobility scheme or similar programmes), applicants are expected to indicate the added value and complementarity of their new proposal.

The following aspects should be assessed by the expert:

- *Overall objective, specific objectives and expected results of the project*
- *The potential of the proposal to contribute to the improvement of the quality of higher education through the promotion of internationalisation and harmonisation of programmes and curricula within participating institutions and countries;*
- *The potential of the proposal to foster institutional cooperation, to facilitate the recognition of studies and qualifications, to develop higher education teaching and learning capacity, to build the management capacity of the higher education institutions;*
- *The potential of the proposal to address the identified needs and constraints of the target countries and target groups, with specific attention to the needs of the participating Higher Education Institutions (HEIs);*
- *The potential of the proposal to improve the skills and competencies of students and staff members;*
- *The innovative character of proposal and how the chosen subject(s) will contribute to the programme's objectives and to the policy priorities of environment and climate change, in particular to promoting development, innovation and "green jobs";*

- *The involvement of HEIs which have not yet benefited from or had a limited participation in similar partnerships/collaboration (e.g. previous Intra-Africa or Intra-ACP Academic Mobility Scheme or other similar programmes). The proposal should state clearly their role in the project and how their full integration in the partnership will be assured as well as the expected impact on their capacity building;*
- *The added value and complementarity of the proposal in comparison to an on-going project, if the proposal is a continuation of an on-going partnership/collaboration in the region (e.g. previous Intra-Africa or Intra-ACP Academic Mobility Scheme or similar programmes).*

The answers to these questions should provide clear, concrete, substantiated justifications of the proposal from both the academic and operational points of view. The project's overall and specific objectives as well as the expected results should be well described. Based on a needs' analysis of different target groups (students and staff) and the countries involved, the applicant should clearly explain how the project fits into the programme objectives, how it will contribute to foster institutional cooperation (e.g. for the HEIs involved which do not have international mobility experience etc.); to facilitate the recognition of studies and qualifications, to develop higher education teaching and learning capacity, to build the management capacity of the higher education institutions.

The proposal can focus on one or more eligible thematic fields. The experts should assess how the choice to concentrate on one or more thematic fields is justified from the academic point of view and whether it is coherent with the needs' analysis.

While assessing this aspect, the experts should read carefully also the **Part G - High Quality Master/Doctoral Programmes offered** of the **Annex 1**, where the partnership members are requested to list and describe the high quality masters and doctoral programs offered which are relevant to the aims of the programme and in the thematic fields of study prioritised in the Call (see Section 6.3.2 of the Call for Proposals Guidelines). Moreover, applicants are required to identify which thematic field(s) is/are covered by each partner. One must bear in mind that applicants are recommended to target a limited number of thematic fields only among the 7 (even) ones defined in the Call. Experts, consulting also Annex 3 in which an overview of the academic offer is presented, will assess the quality of the listed masters and doctoral programs.

On the thematic fields of study, the potential applicants were advised to consult the International Standard Classification of Education - Fields of education and training 2013 (ISCED-F 2013) in order to check the detailed field descriptions under each thematic field prioritised in the Call for proposals guidelines.¹³ This list allows also identifying the fields that are not prioritised anymore as opposed to the previous call for proposals, i.e. Health sciences, Marine Sciences and the Blue Economy and Social Sciences and Governance.

Whereas the above fields of education encompass a wide range of subjects, the applicant should describe in the project proposal how the chosen subject(s) is linked to **the objective of promoting sustainable development in Africa by considering policy priorities of environment and climate change.**

4.2. AWARD CRITERION – QUALITY (70 POINTS)

Under this criterion the applicant needs to explain the measures undertaken to ensure a quality organisation and implementation of the mobility. It will focus on the expertise of the

¹³ The list is available on <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/isced-f-detailed-field-descriptions-en.pdf>

partnership proposed to achieve the project's objectives, strategies/procedures and activities in order to organise and implement the mobility, the services and facilities offered to enroll students as well as the way the partnership intends to ensure efficient participation of these students in the mobility scheme.

As the organisation and implementation of the mobility will concern the whole project period, the information provided in the **Part F - Planned activities for the implementation of the project** should be also carefully analysed by the experts. According to the Call for proposals there is a number of conditions with regard to the timetable which needs to be respected like the maximum project duration, the duration per type of mobility, the indicative latest start of mobility per cohort etc. Experts should pay attention that all formal requirements and recommendations are fulfilled in the planning, as well as that description of the project is reflected in the key activities proposed.

The mobility period needs to fall within the maximum project duration, i.e. **60 months**. If indicated, the call for applications for an individual mobility needs to be open minimum 45 days after publication as mentioned in the **minimum requirements for selection procedure** (Annex IX of the model Grant Agreement). Partnerships can organise student mobility in several cohorts (if necessary), according to the following **indicative timeline**:

- **First cohort** – mobility flows should start by 31 December 2018 at the latest. Any long-term mobility (i.e. 48 months) must start early in the first cohort in order to ensure that its end date falls inside the eligible period (see Section 6.3.1 of the Call for proposals guidelines).
- **Second cohort** – mobility flows should start by 31 December 2019 at the latest.
- **Third cohort** – mobility flows should start by 31 December 2020 at the latest.

Staff mobility may start at any time during the eligibility period and must be finalized before the end of the eligibility period, as all other mobility flows.

The duration per mobility type needs to be respected. The duration of mobility is an important element that is defined for each type of mobility (see section 6.3.4 of the Call for proposals guidelines). It is interesting to see how the applicants have combined **degree-seeking mobility** with **credit seeking mobility**. The duration of the mobility has an impact as well as on the process of recognition (recognition of period of study, diploma, etc). Therefore an appropriate strategy for recognition of studies should be presented in the proposal under the award criterion "Organisation and Implementation of the Mobility".

Student mobility may include a placement period of maximum three (3) months in the same country of the host partner and preferably in an associated partner, provided that it is preceded by a minimum period of study abroad of six (6) months and that the placement is recognised as an integral part of the student's programme. **As a result, a mobility period only for an internship is not an eligible activity.**

In addition, the type and frequency of partnership meetings/working groups should be considered. The timing and type of meetings should allow a smooth organisation of the mobility.

4.2.1. AWARD CRITERION – ACADEMIC QUALITY (15 POINTS)

Under this sub-criterion applicants need to demonstrate the academic quality of the programmes on offer. They will have to present an indicative list of identified master and doctoral programmes in the priority thematic fields as indicated in this Call (Section 6.3.2), to provide a description of each program and demonstrate that they are of high quality and fully accredited by the relevant national body under the national law.

The following aspects should be assessed by the experts:

- *Appropriateness of the academic programmes in terms of reaching the objectives of the project and addressing the needs identified in the thematic field(s);*
- *Quality of the academic programmes in terms of structure and content; learning outcomes and potential impact on students' future academic opportunities and employability;*
- *Criteria of the partnership in selecting the master and doctoral programmes (as listed under the section G). and the complementarity of the curricula among the partner institutions who will host or send mobility flows;*
- *Procedure and mechanisms in place at institutional level or by external bodies to assure the quality of the academic programmes.*

The information provided in this section of the Annex 1 should be complementary to the information provided in the **Part D. Thematic fields of study** and **Part G - High Quality Master/Doctoral Programmes offered** of the **Annex 1**, where the partnership members are requested to list and describe the high quality masters and doctoral programs offered which are relevant to the aims of the programme. **The Annex 3 – List of Master and Doctoral Programmes** is also a reference point. The academic programmes referred to in both documents should be identical. The fact that whether all partners offer academic programmes at master and/or doctoral levels is an indication about the level of involvement of each partner in the preparation of the proposal and in the future implementation of the project.

4.2.2. AWARD CRITERION - PARTNERSHIP COMPOSITION AND COOPERATION MECHANISMS (15 POINTS)

Under this sub-criterion applicants need to explain cooperation mechanisms, the involvement of the partners in the project, including the EU technical partner and the associated partners (where applicable), the balance of their operational capacity and expertise in order to achieve the project's objective.

The following issues should be assessed by the experts:

- *The partnership's composition and synergies in terms of diversified level of experience in similar programmes, complementary expertise, geographical coverage;*
- *The cooperation and communication strategy including financial arrangements for the organisation and the implementation of the mobility and distribution of tasks amongst partners in this respect;*
- *The level of involvement of partners, and their respective role in the project activities such as visibility activities, preparatory academic activities, selection process, recognition of study periods, project quality assurance and academic follow-up, institutional services, etc.*
- *The role/responsibilities of the EU technical partner;*
- *The role/responsibilities of the associated partners, if applicable;*

Under this criterion applicants need to explain the diversity of the partnership (experience, complementarities and geographical coverage), their cooperation and communication mechanisms, the involvement of all partners in the project, their specific role and responsibilities, the operational capacity of all partners and the expertise in order to achieve the project's objective(s).

In addition to the information provided under this section of the **Annex 1**, the experts should also read in details the **Part A. Identification of the applicant and other organisations participating in the project** and **Part B. Organisation and activities**. These parts have to be filled in by all the partnerships members (i.e. the applicant, its partners and the EU Technical partner). They will therefore provide information on the expertise of the participating organisations in

carrying out the project proposal. Aspects such as presentation of the organisation in relation with the activities covered by the project and the role of the organisation in the project are crucial elements when assessing the solidity, reliability and sustainability potential of the partnership.

There should be a list of projects/activities implemented by the partnership organisations in relation with the proposal (title, duration, funding programme, partners involved).

Furthermore, under the **Part H. Operational Capacity**, experts will have to pay attention to the relevant expertise of the partnership to implement the activities and to consider their experience in managing cooperation projects of this size. An overview should be provided on the projects and activities already implemented by the institutions in the partnership, which are in relation with the proposal. Comments should be provided whether past experience is taken into account and how the know-how is shared with less experienced partners.

In addition, experience of the key staff involved in the project within the applicant institution, the partner HEIs and the EU technical partner should be taken into account.

4.2.3. AWARD CRITERION - ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MOBILITY (20 POINTS)

Under this sub-criterion applicants need to focus on the way the partnership intends to manage the mobility in order to ensure its efficient and effective implementation. The applicants have to illustrate the specific measures to attract the appropriate number of students and staff, the methodology to ensure impartial and transparent selection process, agreed mechanisms for ensuring recognition of the period of study abroad, the evaluation strategy etc.

The following issues should be assessed by the experts:

- *The methodology to implement the proposed mobility activities and to achieve the proposed results and objectives in a cost/effective way;*
- *Justification of the total number of mobility flows and the distribution of mobility flows among partner HEIs based on the technical and operational capacity of all partners to manage the mobility including their capacity to host and send students and staff members;*
- *Methodology on the organisation of the planned mobility flows in cohort(s) and on the distribution of the mobility flows among the partner institutions. The strategy proposed should address how all mobility requirements and recommendations as stated in the Call will be fulfilled (i.e. distribution per type of mobility, type of recognition, target group, par nationality as well as the balance of the mobility flows among the partners);*
- *Efficient use of mobility periods – making best use of time abroad for maximum level of benefit from linguistic, cultural and professional points of view;*
- *Strategy and concrete measures proposed to ensure visibility of the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme and the project, including promotion of the scholarship opportunities among different target groups and individuals from different backgrounds;*
- *Measures taken to attract the appropriate number and profile of students and staff members in order to reach the planned number of mobility flows;*
- *Methodology to match the profile of the students/staff with the thematic expertise of the partner institutions,*
- *Methodology and criteria set to guarantee an impartial and transparent selection process based on merit and equal opportunities as well as standards agreed by the partnership for application, selection, admission and exam procedures;*
- *The agreed mechanisms for:*
 - *academic monitoring of scholarship holders, including student examination and follow-up;*
 - *recognition of study periods for credit-seeking mobility flows and of research/teaching period (e.g. use of a credit transfer system or other equivalent mechanisms), including establishment of learning agreement/research plans describing the programme of study abroad;*
 - *recognition of diploma's acquired abroad (e.g. use of a diploma supplement)*
- *Activities to be carried out by staff members during their mobility period, the expected outcomes including their recognition in the framework of the institutional staff development plan and impact on their career development;*
- *The anticipated quality assurance and evaluation strategy (internal and where possible external) envisaged by the partnership in order to ensure an efficient monitoring of the project course (from both an academic and administrative point of view);*

- *Concrete measures taken by the partnership to meet the cross-cutting requirements of participation of individuals with disabilities and economically disadvantaged people, participation of students from fragile and conflict affected states, brain drain prevention.*

Under this criterion, the applicants need to focus on the way the partnership intends to manage the mobility in order to ensure its efficient and effective implementation. The applicants have to provide concrete measures to attract the appropriate number of students and staff; a methodology to ensure impartial and transparent selection process, the foreseen distribution of mobility flows foreseen among the partners according to their capacity to host students and their academic offer; the agreed mechanisms for ensuring recognition of the period of study abroad; evaluation strategy, etc. The envisaged selection process of the scholarship holders should comply with the **minimum requirements for the selection procedures** (Annex IX of the model Grant Agreement).

Regarding the cross cutting issues, experts should assess the strategy and concrete measures that the applicant will put in place during the different stages of the project implementation (promotion of the scholarship opportunities and selection of the scholarship holders).

While assessing this sub-criterion, partnership's plan on the mobility flows, presented in the **Annex 2 – Budget and Mobility Plan** should be attentively analysed by the experts. During this assessment the following aspects of the Call requirements should be taken into consideration:

- **Foreseen mobility distribution per Target Group and type of mobility)**

The distribution of mobility must be in compliance with the percentage indicated in the Call for proposals (see section 6.3.4 of the Call for proposals guidelines). At least 40% of the mobility flows must correspond to Target group I. The number of Target group II should be commented in view of reaching a wide geographical/institutional spread as well in view of providing access to higher education to as many students as possible, in line with the programme's objectives.

The different types of individual mobility and their distribution must respect the following ranges:

Type of mobility	Distribution
Master	50-70%
Doctorate	15-30%
Staff	10-30%

- **Distribution of the individual mobility per credit-/degree seeking mobility**

Mobility of students can be of short term (**credit-seeking mobility** - leading to the academic recognition of the study period spent abroad) or for a complete course of an academic programme (**degree-seeking mobility** - leading to the award of a degree after the successful completion of their studies). **Credit-seeking mobility must represent at least 25% of the total student mobility flows.** This might include also planning for sandwich doctorates - a programme where the doctoral candidate carries out his/her research and studies alternately in his/her home/host institution, following a schedule set in advance and under joint supervision. Like all student mobility periods, the minimum duration is six months.

As mentioned previously, the duration of mobility is an important element that is defined for each type of mobility (see section 6.3.4 of the Call for proposals guidelines). It is interesting to see how the applicants have combined **degree-seeking mobility** with **credit seeking mobility**. The duration of the mobility has an impact as well as on the process of recognition (recognition of period of study, diploma, etc). As a result, the experts should pay attention to the strategies identified for ensuring recognition of the studies abroad and assess their significance.

- **Indicative distribution of individual outgoing mobility per country**

Under this part, the applicants are required to provide information by country. It is recommended that the individual mobility from any eligible country should not represent more than 20% of the total individual mobility offered by the partnership. This is only an encouragement in order to reach to a geographical diversity among the scholarship holders. The number foreseen for Target Group 2 mobility is therefore a very important element in order to see to what extent the partnership aims at covering different countries/regions in the region, those not involved in the partnership.

- **Indicative distribution of individual incoming mobility per partner**

Under this part, the applicants are required to provide information by partner institution. It is a very important element in order to see how the mobility is allocated among the partner institutions, as well as to check that the foreseen type of mobility is coherent with the academic offer of the partnership as indicated in the **Part G- High Quality Master/Doctoral Programmes offered** of the Annex 1 and the **Annex 3 – List of Master and Doctoral Programmes**. For example, there should not be incoming Doctorate mobility flows foreseen for a partner university, which is not offering doctoral programmes.

4.2.4. AWARD CRITERION - STUDENTS'/STAFF FACILITIES AND FOLLOW-UP (10 POINTS)

Under this sub-criterion particular attention will be paid to the services and facilities offered to selected scholarship holders as well as to the way the partnership intend to ensure efficient participation of scholarship holders in the partnership activities.

The following issues should be assessed by the experts:

- *Information services to be provided for incoming and/or outgoing scholarship holders on the practical, financial/administrative, academic aspects of the mobility (e.g. information manual for scholarship holders, designated contact persons, information kit on recognition, etc.);*
- *Student agreements for students and mobility agreements/work plan for staff members clearly defining the rights, obligations and responsibilities of both the scholarship holders and the partnership concerning academic, financial and administrative aspects of the student's/staff members' participation in the mobility scheme;*
- *Practical arrangements for the reception of incoming students and staff members at home and host institutions in particular the assistance for obtaining visa, administrative support prior and during the mobility, welcoming, housing facilities, support for residence permit, coaching, languages courses, etc.;*
- *Arrangements for an insurance scheme guaranteeing that students and staff members in mobility are adequately covered in line with the minimum insurance requirements referred to in the Call for proposals;*
- *Strategy/approach for integrating the mobile staff members in the teaching and/or administrative activities of the hosting institutions.*

Experts should pay attention under this criterion to the services and facilities offered to enrolled students and staff members as well as to the way the partnership intends to assure efficient participation of these students and staff in the partnership's activities.

The hosting institutions must guarantee a high level of support and assistance to the scholarship holders (preparation, implementation and follow-up of mobility). The experts have to assess the

level of information and assistance that the partnership will provide to candidates and selected students and staff in order to address all above-mentioned issues.

For students and staff the partnerships are obliged to design **student/mobility agreements** that cover precisely the rights and obligations from both parties (the partnership and the individual students/staff) during the involvement in the course. The **learning agreement** is the main document for facilitating recognition. The learning agreement must be signed by the home/host institutions and the student. The experts should assess the level of development of this document and comment whether the document is considered to be signed by the responsible actors.

4.2.5. AWARD CRITERION – GENDER BALANCE (10 POINTS)

Under this sub-criterion, applicants have to describe the partnership's strategy to assure gender balance in the partnership's management and in the mobility flows. In particular, they have to illustrate which initiatives and measures will be taken in the promotion of scholarship opportunities and in the selection of candidates, in order to address existing obstacles to achieving gender balance.

The following issues should be assessed by the experts:

- *Measures to encourage the participation of women in the partnership management;*
- *Partnership's strategy to address the identified obstacles for gender balance, including measures and incentives (in addition to the ones offered by the Intra-Africa Mobility Scheme) to assure a gender balance among the scholarship holders and to enhance the participation of female candidates in the mobility flows under each type of mobility, especially in long-term study periods.*

Experts should note that in the Call for Proposals there are incentives for increasing the number of female scholarships who will benefit from the scholarship opportunities. An extra allowance corresponding to the monthly subsistence allowance's amount must be paid per academic year (see Glossary) to female master students and doctoral candidates, for mobility equal or longer than 2 academic years. This extra allowance aims at facilitating their access to longer study periods abroad and may for instance cover costs related to their family obligations.

In addition to this financial support, the proposals should plan specific initiatives and measures that would encourage and facilitate the participation of female candidates. The foreseen strategy should cover both the activities related to promoting the scholarship opportunities and selecting the candidates.

4.3. AWARD CRITERION – SUSTAINABILITY (10 POINTS)

This criterion focuses on the measures taken by the partnership to assure the appropriate dissemination and exploitation of the project's results, as well as to guarantee positive impact at individual, institutional and national/regional level; and these should be described at different levels in the application. The proposal shall also describe the partnership's strategy to ensure the financial and institutional sustainability of the project activities and results beyond the funding period.

The following issues should be assessed by the experts:

- *Partnership's strategy to assure a financial and institutional sustainability of the project activities and the ways to mobilise other funding sources for the continuation of the cooperation after the funding period;*

- *Expected impact at:*
 - *individual level on students and academic/administrative staff members (aspects such as academic and professional development, linguistic and cultural benefits, etc.)*
 - *institutional level (aspects such as recognition of studies among partners, creation of international cooperation structures in the participating HEIs, etc.)*
 - *national/regional level (aspects such as internationalisation of higher education systems, contributing to the development priorities of the countries involved, etc.) ;*
- *Expected outputs, multiplier effects and plan for capitalisation on the project results and dissemination activities (types of activities, methods, target groups and concrete tasks of the partners).*

4.4. ASSESSMENT FORMS

Experts carry out their assessment online using the **Online Expert Evaluation Tool (OEET)**. The applications to be assessed as well as the assessment forms are accessible through the OEET. Experts are provided with technical instructions for the use of OEET as part of their briefing.

The standard assessment forms in word format, for individual and consolidated assessments, are provided by the Agency. The template assessment forms are presented in Annex 3. Experts examine the issues to be considered under each award criterion, enter their scores for each award criterion and provide comments (see section Assessment of Award Criteria and Scoring).

Once the individual assessment is complete following a quality check by the lead expert, experts validate it in the OEET and confirm that they have no conflict of interest with respect to that particular application.

As part of the quality assessment, experts may be required to provide information on data included in the applications that are collected for statistical purposes such as priorities, objectives or topics, or they may be asked to confirm that the data stated in the application is correct. Experts may also be asked to confirm that the applications comply with the eligibility criteria set out in the call for proposals, i.e. number of organisations present in the partnership, the type of organisations, etc. Experts will have to register this information in the OEET.

4.5. THRESHOLDS

The assessment and funding of applications is based on two types of threshold:

Quality thresholds

In general terms, an application submitted to the Agency in the frame of the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme qualifies for funding if it is highly recommended or recommended as a result of the experts' assessment.

Funding threshold

The number of applications that can be funded is also dependent on the budget available under the current call for proposals. As explained above, applications are ranked in order of merit and considered for funding until the available budget runs out. To be considered for funding, proposals must score at least 50 points out of a total of 100 points. If applications of sufficient

quality are available, the Agency usually draws up a **reserve list** of applications. These could be considered for funding in the event that:

- one or several applications on the main list can no longer be funded (e.g. in the case that a contract between the Agency and the project partnership fails to be signed);
- additional budget becomes available for the action.

4.6. QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Agency aims at the highest level of quality at every stage of the evaluation process. Therefore particular emphasis is put on:

Training of experts and communication: the Agency sets up interactive and flexible briefing sessions to make sure that all aspects of the assessment procedure are clearly understood by experts before they start working (see section Experts Briefing).

Quality review: the Agency closely monitors the quality of expert assessments and can require the expert to revise the assessment if it fails to meet the quality standards. As mentioned above, The Agency will call upon experienced expert(s), commonly referred to as 'quality / lead' experts, to assist in carrying out quality review of individual and/or consolidated assessments. The aim is to ensure:

- a. formal correctness;
- b. appropriateness, clarity and completeness of comments;
- c. coherence between scores and comments.

Quality expert will be previously introduced to the panel and then be in direct contact with the experts whose work they are supervising.

Editing of consolidated assessments: Some experts will be appointed to proofread the commentary of final consolidated assessments. The nature of this task is to perform a *linguistic review* of the text in order to remove spelling and grammatical errors¹⁴ and to ensure coherent, correct and polite comments.

4.7. TOOLS

During the entire assessment process, experts are required to make use of a certain number of IT tools and platforms. At the time of their engagement and in any case before starting the work, experts will receive complete and detailed instructions on the tools they have to use. Specific user guides will be put at their disposal.

Briefing and training of experts

The short online induction session will be held through a web conferencing system which allows setting up virtual meeting rooms for instantaneous discussions and viewing of presentations and documents.

Online Expert Community

The Community is set up through an online platform that can be accessed through the internet at any time during the entire selection period. The platform should allow experts to access to all

¹⁴ The majority of comments are not written by English native speakers.

reference documents concerning the assessment exercise and to work in more collaborative way.

Assessment of applications

Experts access the applications that have been assigned to them in the Online Expert Evaluation Tool (OEET). They also submit their individual and consolidated assessments in this tool.

The OEET further allows an expert with the role of editor to access the commentary of consolidated assessments to proofread them and improve their linguistic quality.

4.8. POSSIBLE PROBLEMS WITH APPLICATIONS

Applications may be submitted with some weaknesses of administrative nature or content related. It might also happen that overlaps between several applications are noticed. The Agency's policy in these cases is the following:

Unclear or missing information

In case of incomplete or unclear applications the Agency may contact the applicant and ask to submit additional information or clarifications provided that this does not substantially change the application, or it may decide to assess the application in the form it was submitted.

Double submissions and overlaps

Experts are bound to inform the Agency immediately if they notice that the same or similar text appears in two or more applications submitted under a given selection round, as well as any other indications of possible double submissions and overlaps. Identical or very similar applications – submitted by the same applicant or by other partners of the same partnership – will be subject to a specific assessment in order to exclude the risk of double funding. Applications which are submitted twice or more times by the same applicant or partnership, either to the same Agency or to different Agencies, will **all** be rejected. Where the same or very similar applications are submitted by other applicants or consortia, they will be carefully checked and may also all be rejected on the same grounds.

Please note that the experts are under no circumstances allowed to contact applicants directly.

5. FEEDBACK TO APPLICANTS

The Agency notifies applicants in writing of the results of their application. Each applicant receives feedback on the application submitted. This feedback is based on the consolidated final assessment and is given in the language of the application.

After the closure of the selection exercise, experts may be called upon to revisit their evaluation and clarify certain aspects of the application.

6. GOOD ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

To conclude, this guide presents some general tips for good assessment practice and specific guidance on the assessment of the proposals submitted under the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme at the time of their briefing and during the assessment period.

It is recommended that experts:

- read several applications before assessing a first one of them in full as this allows to benchmark answers in different sections of the applications;

- read the whole application carefully before completing the assessment form;
- evaluate the applications in a prescribed order so that both individual assessments are completed at the same time to avoid losing time with the consolidations;
- pay particular attention to clarity, consistency and appropriate level of detail in their comments. The commentary must also be balanced, in line with the scoring, objective and polite.
- contact Agency staff immediately if they feel uncertain about any of their assignments or face difficulties which may hamper their work.

7. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 DECLARATION OF ABSENCE OF CONFLICT OF INTERESTS AND OF CONFIDENTIALITY (CF. EXPERT’S CONTRACT).

ANNEX 2 REFERENCE DOCUMENTS ON POLICY AND PRIORITIES

1. The Africa-EU Strategic Partnership – 2007
2. Fourth EU-Africa Summit Results and Roadmap 2014-2017 (3-4 April 2014)
3. Commission Implementing Decision on the Annual Action Programme 2015 for the Pan-African Programme (19 July 2016)
4. Action Document for “Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme”, 2016
5. Report “Tuning and Harmonisation of Higher Education: The African Experience”
6. International Standard Classification of Education - Fields of education and training 2013 (ISCED-F 2013) – Detailed field descriptions

ANNEX 3 INDIVIDUAL AND CONSOLIDATED QUALITY ASSESSMENT FORM TEMPLATE