Guidelines for the assessment of applications for Erasmus accreditation in the field of youth

This document presents the main principles to be followed by the experts conducting quality assessment of applications for Erasmus accreditation in the field of youth.

General principles

The following guidance is additional to the overall assessment framework presented in the Erasmus+ Guide for experts on quality assessment. The main principles of that Guide remain applicable unless a different instruction is provided in these guidelines or in the Programme Guide.

The assessment scores will follow the standard pattern to indicate the level of quality:

Maximum score for a criterion	Range of scores			
	Very good	**Good**	**Fair**	**Weak**
40	34 - 40	28 - 33	20 - 27	0 - 19
30	26 - 30	21 - 25	15 - 20	0 - 14
20	17 - 20	14 - 16	10 - 13	0 - 9
10	9 - 10	7 - 8	5 - 6	0 - 4

At the level of overall assessment, the experts must pay particular attention to the following aspects specific to applications for Erasmus accreditation:

- **Long-term importance of the accreditation**: while the call for Erasmus accreditation in the field of youth does not allocate any funding, the approval of the accreditation allows successful applicants to access funding over a long period of time, and in some cases for significant grant levels. The quality of applications should be assessed accordingly, with special attention given to parts of the application that have long-term implications, such as the organisation's objectives and activities planned.

- **Careful consideration of the overall quality threshold:** the minimum score for each award criterion is set at 50% of the points allocated to that criterion. However, to be considered for approval, an application must score at least 70/100 points in total.

  In particular, the different sections and elements of the application must show interconnectedness, coherence and synergy. Before concluding their assessment positively, experts must determine if the applicant has managed to demonstrate a clear and holistic vision for the development of their organisation, as opposed to only addressing the questions one by one.

- **Proportionality, contextualisation and non-discrimination:** In line with the award criteria, it is important to consider each proposal on its own merits, internal consistency and appropriateness for the applicant organisation.

As a matter of proportionality, experts assess applications based on the unique characteristics and context of each applicant, rather than making direct comparison of applications submitted by organisations with a different profile. A similar activity plan presented by two very different organisations should not necessarily yield the same score.

Previous experience in the programme, the organisation's size, length of the activity plan and the number of objectives proposed should be considered very carefully. Experts must pay attention not to apply an over-simplified 'more is better' approach (e.g., longer activity plan or more numerous objectives cannot automatically translate into a higher score).

Rather, experts must take into account the organisation's context and the entire content of the application when considering any of the above-mentioned aspects. A good application will demonstrate self-awareness on part of the applicant, with a realistic outlook about their own capacity, resources and experience.

It is particularly important to prevent any discrimination against smaller organisations or those with lesser pre-existing capacity. By defining a few well-targeted objectives over the first two to three years of implementation, such organisations may propose plans with very high added value for their own development that can lead to gradual build-up of capacity and competences. Conversely, organisations with higher pre-existing experience and capacity must be able to demonstrate not just the simple existence of such experience and capacity, but their ability to use Programme funds to improve future activities and themselves as organisations.

- **Recognising original, convincing and genuine proposals:** experts should critically evaluate if the information in the application form derives from a genuine process of self-reflection and self-assessment on the part of the applicant, if it is rooted in the reality of its everyday youth work and if the links being established with European or national policy narratives are concrete and tangible.

- **Consequences of the evaluation score:** the resulting score will be used in budget allocation formulas when the approved applicants apply for funding. Before finalising the assessment, experts therefore must make sure to carefully fine-tune the scoring to reflect the quality of the application as precisely as possible.

- **Dealing with insufficient, irrelevant or poorly structured information:** to assess the application correctly, experts will require contextual information that they must find in the application form. Applications may be scored lower if the provided answers contain insufficient information, if the included information is vague, poorly explained or not relevant, or if an overwhelming amount of unstructured, inappropriately presented information is included (for example, by adding annexes without interpreting and explaining the relevance of their content), thus preventing a thorough assessment. The maximum length of replies in the application form is deliberately limited, so applicants must demonstrate their ability to select the most pertinent information and present it effectively. Applicants may include annexes with their application; however, these annexes must comply with the instructions provided in the application form. Specifically, as a matter of equal treatment of all applicants, annexes cannot be used to provide longer answers to the same questions as contained in the application form. If the experts

conclude that this is the main purpose of an annex, the annex in question shall be disregarded.

Relevance of the organisation's profile and experience (20 points)

Relevance of the organisation's profile and experience (maximum 20 points)	The relevance of the organisation to the youth field and objectives of the action in terms of: • The organisation's objectives and principles; • The organisation's target groups; • The organisation's regular activities; • The organisation's experience in the youth field. The proposal is relevant for the respect and promotion of shared EU values, such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, as well as fighting any sort of discrimination.

The purpose of the relevance criterion is to make sure that the award of the accreditation to the applicant organisation actually contributes to the achievement of the objectives of the call. For this purpose, the experts shall consider primarily the information in the section 'Background' and analyse to what extent the organisation is rooted in the youth field.

The experts should assess that the accreditation objectives align with the EU values. The following factors could be taken into consideration during the assessment:

- Examine whether the proposal references integrates EU values into its objectives, methodologies, and expected outcomes. A clear articulation that the project supports and advances these values would be an additional strength;

- Ensure that the objectives are designed with a non-discriminatory approach to benefit a diverse range of participants and avoid any form of discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, disability, or any other relevant criterion;

Consider the presence of educational components that aim to enhance participants' understanding and appreciation of EU values. The 20-points maximum score for the relevance criterion means that experts must assess the relevance strictly. Even if the other parts of the assessment show that the proposed activity plan is technically well-written and logically sound, experts must consider the long-term importance of the accreditation. Consequently, applications from organisations whose relevance for the field and the call is questionable must not reach the quality threshold (50% of the points) for the relevance criterion.

Strategic development (40 points)

Strategic development (maximum 40 points)	The extent to which: • The objectives identified are relevant and in line with the objectives of the Action and contribute to the EU Youth Strategy; • The planned activities are suitable to address the identified needs and objectives; • The planned activities bring a real benefit to the organisation, participants, participating organisations and have a potential broader impact (e.g. on local, regional, national and transnational level);

	• The objectives and planned activities are integrated in the organisation's regular work and activities; • The organisation contributes to the Inclusion and Diversity strategy of the Programme; • The organisation embeds in its activities one or more basic principles (environmental sustainability and responsibility, active participation in the network of Erasmus+ organisations, virtual components)

This award criterion carries one of the two largest parts of the assessment with 40 out of 100 points. The high number of points reflects the complexity of assessing the organisation's objectives and the wide variation in quality that experts may encounter. Experts should make full use of the 40 points scale to fine-tune their assessment and differentiate applications according to their level of quality.

The needs and issues addressed should be clearly described and the objectives and activities planned should have a substantial positive impact on the applicant organisation, the partner organisations, the participants and the youth field in general. The activities represent the means to address the needs and achieve the set objectives. Experts should thus assess the activity plan in relation to the set objectives but also the size and profile of the organisation and in view of the management arrangements.

For both the objectives and the activity plan, a balance should be achieved between being realistic and ambitious enough to achieve impact. This aspect is strongly linked with the concept of proportionality, as explained under 'General principles'. Therefore, this award criterion should be assessed by taking into account the context described in the entire application, not only the content of the activity plan.

In addition to the overall assessment of the criterion, experts should carefully examine each proposed objective. If the application is approved, the organisation's overall progress will be measured against these objectives and implemented activities. Therefore, each approved objective must be clear and concrete enough to serve that purpose.

Proposed mobility activities represent the means to achieve the objectives proposed as part of the activity plan. Therefore, one important element is to compare the proposed number of participants with information presented in other parts of the form: with the size and profile of the organisation, with the objectives, and with the management arrangements.

As explained under 'General principles', the assessment must be well-contextualised and there is therefore no automatic advantage in proposing lower or higher estimated number of participants. The most appropriate proposal will depend on the content of the application itself. Since the numbers of participants are broad estimations, experts should not look for minute differences in possible level of participation, but should focus on detecting any systemic issues, particularly when it comes to significantly exaggerated numbers of participants.

The experts should also consider trends in the estimated number of yearly activities over time. The time dimension is especially important for organisations with less experience in the programme that may require a learning period at the start of implementation.

The organisation should be able to demonstrate, and experts assess, that the accreditation is not only seen as a pre-requirement for applying for funds in a simplified way, but that it fits within the organisation's work and is part of an internal process of continuous development and improvement.

The experts should assess the approach of the organisation to inclusion and diversity, including where relevant proactive, qualitative and efficient measures that will be taken to reach out to young people with fewer opportunities and/or ensure diversity, as well as its planned involvement and role to support and promote the Erasmus+ programme.

Within this criterion, the experts should also take into consideration the extent to which the organisation plans to integrate elements of environmental sustainability and virtual components, key features of the Programme.

Quality of management and coordination (40 points)

Quality of management and coordination (maximum 40 points)	The extent to which: • The objectives, the activities and targets planned are clear and realistic in relation to the applicant's human resources and internal organisation • The partnership approach is balanced and effective and, where applicable, suitable to bring in new and less experienced organisations • The measures to ensure quality of activities and safety and protection of participants are appropriate; • The principle of active youth participation is applied and an involvement of participants in all phases of the activities is planned; • The measures to ensure a solid learning dimension are appropriate, including the support to the reflection, identification and documentation of the learning outcomes; • The methods of measuring the organisation's progress towards achieving its objectives (monitoring and evaluation) and for risk management are appropriate and effective; • The measures aimed at sharing the outcomes of the project within and outside the participating organisations are appropriate and effective.

The main purpose of this criterion is to determine whether the applicant can deliver high quality learning activities, in line with the Erasmus Youth Quality Standards.

The application should demonstrate that efficient measures are put in place and appropriate resources allocated to implement the activity plan in a qualitative way and reach the set objectives. The applicant should also show awareness of the obligations they are taking up and willingness to commit to those obligations, to the extent this is possible in their planning timeframe.

As for the previous criterion, experts should pay particular attention to proportional assessment, as resources to commit would vary depending on the applicant's objectives and the estimated number of activities and participants. Experts should also evaluate the reliability of the commitments made by the applicant, based on the measures described to ensure continuity and the level of involvement of the organisation's management.

The approach to identify and involve partners should be suitable to establish quality partnerships and an appropriate level of cooperation and commitment between organisations. Experts should also assess whether the profile and experience of the partners are consistent with the set objectives and whether the organisation will reach out to new or less experienced organisation with Erasmus+.

The organisation should foresee effective procedures to guarantee protection and safety of the participants and an appropriate level of support before, during and after the activities. Experts should assess the appropriateness of such measures in relation also to the activity plan and type of participants to be involved.

The organisation should have a clear method and concrete activities to identify risks and manage conflicts and problems as well as to monitor and measure the quality of the activities and the progress towards reaching its objectives.

The organisation should demonstrate a clear understanding of the participatory approach and methods, the capacity to embed them in all activities and to ensure a strong learning dimension. Experts should also assess the measures foreseen to support participants' reflection on their learning outcomes, their identification and validation.

A quality plan for disseminating the outcomes of the activities should be concretely described.

Experts recommendations

Experts can recommend improvements to the activity plan. These recommendations will be reviewed by the National Agency and communicated to the applicant. In case the application is approved, the accredited organisation will have the responsibility to decide how to best implement such recommendations during implementation.