**Annex 7**

to the National Research Programme

"Development of research identified in the

 Biodiversity Priority Actions Programme”

Regulations of the open tender for project applications

**Methodology for carrying out the expert assessment**

(**for the project application, the project mid-term/final scientific report)**

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# Introduction

 "Methodology for Expertise" (hereinafter – the Methodology) has been developed in accordance with the Cabinet Regulation of 4 August 2018 No. 560 "Procedures for Implementation of the State Research Programme Projects" (hereinafter – the Cabinet Regulation) and in compliance with the Cabinet Regulation of 2 April 2024 No. 252 "Regarding the Development of the National Research Programme "Development of Research Identified in the Biodiversity Priority Actions Programme"" (hereinafter – the Cabinet Order) and

 the Regulations for the open call for proposals (hereinafter referred to as 'call for proposals') of the National Research Programme "Development of research identified in the Biodiversity Priority Actions Programme” (hereinafter referred to as 'the Regulations') approved by the implementation and monitoring commission of the National Research Programme "Development of research identified in the Biodiversity Priority Actions Programme" (hereinafter – the Commission) on 16 July 2024.

 The methodology has been developed for the experts who carry out the scientific assessment of the project applications and the mid-term and final scientific reports.

According to Section 35(1) of the Law on Scientific Activity, a national research programme is a state commission to carry out scientific research in a specific economic, educational, cultural or other sector of national priority, with the aim of promoting the development of that sector.

The target audience of the methodology includes project applicants (hereinafter – the project applicant) for the National Research Programme "Development of research identified in the Biodiversity Priority Actions Programme” (hereinafter – the Programme) open call for proposals (hereinafter – the call for proposals), who draft project applications and the necessary documentation for submission within the framework of the call for proposals.

 As a state commission, the programme is a policy implementation mechanism that identifies and researches issues of importance for Latvia’s sustainability and development, which need to be the focus of the work of Latvian scientific institutions, and identifies relevant scientific research tasks to address them. In the light of the above, the programme creates favourable conditions for achieving Latvia’s sustainable development goals.

 Implementation of the programme envisages involvement of the strongest teams of scientists which will include scientists representing industries/areas of natural sciences (nature conservation; biodiversity; climate; social economy) in order to achieve the aim of the project.

 The programme was created by the Ministry of Smart Administration and Regional Development, but it is funded by the Ministry of Education and Science (hereinafter referred to as – the Ministry). State budget funds in the total amount of 1,800,000 *euros* have been assigned for the implementation of the programme, and the period of implementation will continue from 2024 to 2026.

The call for proposals will finance 3 (three) projects, with a total of EUR 1,674,000 (one million six hundred and seventy-four thousand *euro*) available for the tasks set out in paragraph 6 of the Cabinet Order, including the indicative project funding:

1) For the task under Sub-paragraphs 6.1 and 6.2 of the Cabinet Order – 1,097,400 euro (one million ninety-seven thousand four hundred euro);

2) For the task under Sub-paragraph 6.3 of the Cabinet Order – 167,400 euro (one hundred and sixty-seven thousand four hundred euro);

3) For the task under Sub-paragraph 6.4 of the Cabinet Order – 409,200 euro (four hundred and nine thousand and two hundred euro).

 In accordance with the Cabinet Order:

1. the overarching aim of the programme is to generate new knowledge and solutions for reconciling conservation and socio-economic interests in a changing climate.
2. the aim of the programme is to provide a basis for planning and implementing appropriate conservation measures to achieve favourable conservation status as defined by the Law on the Conservation of Species and Biotopes.

 3) the tasks of the programme and the sub-tasks set out in Paragraph 10 of the Regulations,

* + - 1. to ensure the increase of the knowledge base for the determination of nature conservation measures included in Latvian and European Union (hereinafter – EU) planning documents and regulatory acts, for the assessment of socio-economic factors and climate change impacts on species of EU importance and biotopes of EU importance whose conservation status is assessed as unfavourable (Sub-paragraph 6.1 of the Cabinet Order;
	+ 2. to ensure that the knowledge base on species ecology, threats and distribution is increased for species and habitats of EU importance for which no assessment of conservation status is known (Sub-paragraph 6.2 of the Cabinet Order):
	+ sub-tasks of Tasks 1 and 2, which are described in detail in Annex 12 to the Regulations:
	+ 1) use an assessment methodology in line with that used for the Habitats Directive report 2013-2018;
	+ 2) to ensure that the necessary data are collected and that scientifically sound recommendations are made for terrestrial habitat types with unfavourable conservation status and unknown conservation status, in accordance with the information on the assessment of the conservation status of habitats in the Annex to the Habitats Directive Report;
	+ 3) to ensure that the necessary data are collected and scientifically sound recommendations are made for terrestrial species whose conservation status is assessed as unfavourable and whose conservation status is unknown, in accordance with the information on the assessment of the conservation status of species in the Annex to the Habitats Directive Report;
	+ 4) use an assessment methodology in line with that used for the Birds Directive Report 2013-2018;
	+ 5) to ensure that the necessary data is collected and scientifically sound recommendations are made for bird species for which 1) short-term trends are "declining", "uncertain", "no data", 2) long-term trends are the three above, 3) species for which Natura 2000 sites are to be established, as indicated in the Annex to the Birds Directive Report;
	+ 6) to carry out an assessment of the impact of conservation regime, management, socio-economic and climate change on the conservation status of Annex I, II and IV habitats and species of the Habitats Directive in Latvia (priority – species with unfavourable conservation status);
	+ 3. to develop scientifically sound proposals for optimal spatial connectivity (connectivity) of species and habitats of EU importance, including specially protected nature territories, micro-reserves and habitats and species habitats existing outside the network of protected nature territories in a single network of nature territories (paragraph 6.3 of the Cabinet Order):
	+ sub-tasks of Task 3 (Annex 12 to the Regulations):
	+ 1) following the habitat connectivity approach, identify/designate areas where the concentration of natural values is highest and make proposals on the way forward for the protection of these areas;
	+ 2) using spatial analysis tools and existing grassland connectivity data, identify areas for strengthening the Natura 2000 network and developing protected areas (Habitat Connectivity Model for the whole country, including outside protected areas, which will delineate grassland and forest areas, taking into account the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030);
	+ 3) The assessment should include proposals for the creation of new protected areas, improved compensation mechanisms, improved management conditions and the introduction of voluntary conservation schemes, taking into account property rights.
	+ 4. provide research on habitat dynamics as affected by different management practices and climate variability, ensure the assessment of ecosystem services and values in order to prioritise conservation planning, taking into account cost-effectiveness, and develop and validate an economic model for biodiversity sustainability, nature conservation and restoration (catalogue offsetting measures, assess the degree of mitigation and offsetting measures) (Paragraph 6.4 of the Cabinet Order):
	+ sub-tasks of Task 4 (Annex 12 to the Regulations):
	+ 1) The research should develop a number of alternative scenarios, taking into account future projections and strategic settings in policy planning documents, in order to find an optimal balance between climate change mitigation objectives and nature conservation objectives, promoting sustainable development of territories. Include land-use related measures (e.g. land management and infrastructure development, including for renewable energy) in the scenarios;
	+ 2. to establish a balanced set of measures that reconcile the scenarios for achieving the objectives set out in Paragraph 10.4.1 of the Regulations, adapting to climate change and promoting sustainable economic activity, while also ensuring the conservation of nature for future generations;
	+ 3) Predicting climate change impacts on ecosystems, habitats and species of EU importance in Latvia: a multi-faceted analysis of impacts and adaptation options.

# 1 Definitions of terms

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| **No.** | **Term** | **Meaning** |
| **1** | **Scientific group** | Scientific staff and scientific technical staff (persons who have the necessary technical knowledge and experience in one or more fields and who, under the supervision of scientists, participate in scientific activities by carrying out technical tasks. Scientific technical staff (engineers, technicians, laboratory technicians, technologists, operators) involved in the implementation of the project. The scientific group shall be composed of the project manager, the project PIs (if required) and the project implementers |
| **2** | **Scientific staff** | Leading researchers, researchers, scientific assistants, academic staff[[1]](#footnote-1) and students. |
| **3** | **Project applicant** | A project applicant is a scientific institution registered in the Register of Scientific Institutions of the Republic of Latvia (body governed by public or private law) or an institution of higher education, as well as meeting the definition of a research organisation[[2]](#footnote-2). The applicant is responsible for the implementation of the project and the achievement of the overall project results |
| **4** | **Project cooperation partner - scientific institution** | A scientific institution registered in the Register of Scientific Institutions of the Republic of Latvia (body governed by public or private law) or an institution of higher education, as well as meeting the definition of a research organisation, participating in the project with its own staff or research infrastructure. |
| **5** | **Project cooperation partner - public institution** | A public body which is required to carry out scientific activities by an external legal enactment, its regulations or its articles of association, and is engaged in the implementation of the project with property, intellectual property, funding or human resources in its possession or ownership |
| **6** | **Project manager** | A scientist who manages the project and ensures its implementation. The project manager plans and supervises the execution of the project tasks, is responsible for the activities of his/her own and those of other persons involved in the project in accordance with the tasks set out in the project, scientific ethical norms, timely preparation and submission of documentation describing the scientific progress of the project in accordance with the procedure provided for in the Cabinet Regulation.The project manager is registered in the National Scientific Activity Information System (hereinafter - information system). |
| **7** | **Principal investigators** | The scientists implementing the project or sub-project and responsible for the implementation of its parts. |
| **8** | **Project implementers** | Members of the scientific group who carry out individual scientific tasks in the implementation of the project and are responsible for carrying out relevant parts of it. |
| **9** | **Students of the institution of higher education** | A student involved in the project scientific group is a bachelor student, a professional student, a master student, a medical resident and a PhD student.[[3]](#footnote-3) Students of the institution of higher education must be involved in the project according to the provisions of Paragraphs 21–24 of the Regulations. |
| **10** | **Project contact person** | A natural person who is registered in the information system, fills in information on the project application, uploads its annexes, as well as, where necessary, maintains contact with the staff of the Latvian Council of Science (the project contact person may also be the Project Manager) and the staff of the Ministry of Education and Science during the project submission and implementation. The project applicant indicates the project contact person in Chapter 1 “General information” of Part A of the project application. If the project has cooperation partners, their contact persons are likewise indicated. The contact person and the project manager can be the same person. |

# 2 Scientific examination of the project application

1 The scientific assessment process of all the project applications submitted under the tender is organised by the Council.

2 If the project application fulfils the criteria for administrative assessment, the Council shall, on the basis of Paragraph 36 of the Regulations, call upon two or more suitably qualified experts to carry out the scientific expert assessment of the project application.

3 Before accessing the project application in the information system, the expert:

3.1 declares that he/she has no conflict of interest and undertakes to respect the requirements of confidentiality by signing and sending to the Council, by electronic mail, Annex 5 to the Regulations, “Declaration of absence of conflict of interest and maintenance of confidentiality” (the expert's declaration);

3.2 shall enter into a contract with the Council – Annex 6 to the Regulations, "Service Contract for Performance of Expert Examination" (hereinafter referred to as – Expert Examination Contract).

4 The Council shall, upon receipt of the expert's certificate and the conclusion of the expert agreement, give the expert access to the project application and to all the necessary information in the information system to carry out an appropriate assessment of the project application.

5 The expert shall assess the project application by applying his/her professional qualifications and experience in the relevant scientific field and by justifying his/her rating with scientific evidence.

6 The expert cooperates with the council during the examination and complies with the instructions given by the council pertaining to the performance of the examination in accordance with the Regulation and the examination contract.

7 According to point 44 of the Regulation, the expert is only authorised to evaluate 20 pages of a project application, with up to three additional pages, if acknowledgements of social partners, letters of recommendation on cooperation and other documents are attached.

**2.1 Individual assessment of the project application**

8 The individual evaluation of the project application (‘individual evaluation’), prepared in accordance with Annex 8 ‘Individual/Consolidated Evaluation Form for the Examination of the Project Application’ to the Regulations, shall be completed and approved by the expert in the information system within two calendar weeks from the date of conclusion of the examination agreement and receipt of access to the project application and all necessary information, unless a different deadline is specified in the expert agreement.

9 In the individual assessment, the expert shall evaluate each criterion and provide a score taking into account the considerations set out in Paragraph 13 of the methodology.

10 The expert evaluates the criteria and assigns a score from 1 to 5 for each criterion, where:

10.1 With distinction – 5 points (excellent project proposal, meets or exceeds the highest standards in the relevant scientific field, any shortcomings in the project proposal are minor);

10.2 Good – 4 points (good project proposal, fulfils the requirements of the criterion in the relevant scientific field, but there are some shortcomings);

10.3 Satisfactory – 3 points (satisfactory project application, generally fulfils the requirements of the criterion in the relevant scientific field, with some shortcomings that will make it difficult to implement the project and achieve high results);

10.4 Weak – 2 points (weak project proposal, partial or only general compliance with the requirements of the criterion in the relevant scientific field, identifiable shortcomings that make it difficult to successfully implement the project and achieve its objectives);

10.5 Unsatisfactory – 1 point (unsatisfactory project application, does not meet the requirements of the relevant scientific field for the criterion, and the information provided is insufficient for the assessment under the criterion, and there are significant shortcomings that make the implementation of the project and the achievement of the objectives questionable);

10.6 if the project application's score in a given criterion exceeds the requirements of the previous lowest score but does not fully meet the requirements of the next highest score, the score may also be supplemented by a half point, i.e. 0.5.

11 The expert shall provide a reasoned justification for the mark of each criterion. The expert explains in the justification the mark awarded, using his/her professional qualifications and experience in the relevant scientific field.

12 Within three calendar days from the date of receipt of the individual assessment, the Council shall assess the compliance of the individual assessment with the considerations referred to in Paragraphs 27, 28 and 29 of the Cabinet Regulation, as well as with the Methodology, where necessary, returning the individual assessment to the expert for specification/revision/improvement, justifying the reasons for the return. In the event of such a return, the expert shall update, revise and validate the individual assessment in the information system within three calendar days of the date of receipt of the notification by the Council, sent by e-mail, of the return of the individual assessment of the expert.

13 The expert complete the individual assessment in the information system (see Annex 8 “Project application examination individual/consolidated assessment form” to the Regulation) according to the following criteria and considerations:

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| **Individual/consolidated examination of the project application** |
| Project title:Expert(s): |
| **1** | **Criterion: Scientific quality of the project** | Maximum 5 points |
| **1.1** |  Consideration: Contribution to the overarching aim and objective of the Programme and to the implementation of the thematic objectives | *The expert shall justify the score given by taking into account the fulfilment of the criterion as a whole and of each criterion consideration.* *1 Specific information for the criterion is given in Chapter 1 “Scientific excellence” of the project application, as well as in sub-chapters 2.4 “Scientific results of the project and ensuring their availability” and 3.1 “Project applicant and scientific group”, but it is the project application as a whole that should be taken into account when assessing the criterion.* *2 The scientific excellence of the project, including the chosen research strategy and methodological solutions, the ability to generate new knowledge or technological insights, as well as the ability to build and develop an interdisciplinary and inclusive team of internationally competitive scientists using research methods and technologies that are recognised among scientists worldwide, shall be assessed according to the specificities of the relevant scientific field or fields and the project, as well as the specificities of the institutions of the applicant and the project cooperation partners (if any).**3 The evaluation takes into account:**1) the programme's overarching objectives and aims (in line with Paragraphs 4 and 5 of the Cabinet Order);**2) the task chosen (in accordance with Paragraphs 6.1 and 6.2, or Paragraph 6.3, or Paragraph 6.4 of the Cabinet Order)**3. the sub-tasks corresponding to the selected task (in accordance with Paragraphs 10.1 and 10.2, 10.3, 10.4 of the Tender Regulations);**4) the results to be achieved (in accordance with Paragraphs 8 and 7 of the Cabinet Order);**5. assess whether the project application is adequate to achieve the overarching objective and aims of the Programme, in accordance with the thematic area of the project and the expected deadline for implementation.**4 Assess the overall potential of the project to develop the knowledge base in the social sciences and humanities to develop State research and innovation systems that address societal challenges.* |
| **1.2** | Consideration: scientific quality, reliability, and novelty of the research |
| **1.3** | Consideration: scientific quality of the chosen research strategy and methodological approaches, and relevance to the objectives |
| **1.4** | Consideration: capacity of the project to generate new knowledge or technological insights |
| **1.5** | Consideration: contribution of the collaborating partners (if any), their scientific capacity, planned quality of the collaboration |
| **2** | **Criterion: Impact of project results** | Maximum 5 points |
| **2.1** | expected transfer of acquired knowledge and skills to further activities and scientific capacity development | *The expert shall justify the mark given by taking into account the fulfilment of the criterion as a whole and of each criterion consideration. Criteria-specific information is given in Chapter 2 "Impact" of the project application, but the assessment of the criterion must take into account the project application as a whole.* *The results and their expected impact, including the planned transfer of results into further activities and scientific capacity development, the possibilities for further development of research shall be assessed according to the specificities of the scientific field or fields concerned and of the project, as well as the specificities of the institution of the applicant and the specificities of the institutions of the project cooperation partners (if any).* *The expert shall assess how effectively the project engages students and young scientists in relation to the overall workload of the scientific group, including a plan for engaging students and building the capacity of the scientific group within the framework of the project. Information on the workload of the project scientific group, including students, can be found in Chapter 3 "Project Budget" of Part A "General Information" of the project application.**Sustainability of the project results is assessed in relation to the expected scientific publications and the dissemination of the project results in scientific conferences. Information on the dissemination of the project results can be found in the project application description, subsection 2.5 "Scientific results of the project and making them accessible". Particular attention should be paid to ensuring the sustainability of results, following the principles of Open Access, Open Data, FAIR - findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable - as well as to the choice of the project applicant for data deposition.**The potential of the project to raise public awareness of the project results and to increase the socio-economic impact of the project results should be taken into account (sub-chapters 2.2-2.5 of description of the project application). Assesses whether the plans described in the project application for applying and transferring the results of the research to end-users are adequate and feasible. Assesses the collaboration of the project applicant with other scientific institutions, as well as with public institutions, NGOs and business persons.**The expert shall also assess the feasibility and achievability of the selected project task in accordance with Paragraph 6 of the Regulations.* *The aim of the programme:* *development of a rationale for planning and implementing appropriate conservation measures to achieve favourable conservation status as defined in the Law on Conservation of Species and Biotopes.**Programme tasks:**1**. To increase the knowledge base for the identification of nature conservation measures in Latvian and European Union (hereinafter – EU) planning documents and laws and regulations, for the assessment of socio-economic factors and climate change impacts on species of EU importance and biotopes of EU importance whose conservation status is assessed as unfavourable;**2**To increase the knowledge base on species ecology, threats and distribution for species and habitats of EU importance for which no assessment of conservation status is known;**The sub-tasks for Tasks 1 and 2 of the selected programme are set out in Sub-paragraphs 10.2.1; 10.2.2; 10.2.3; 10.2.4; 10.2.5; 10.2.6 of the Regulations, with a detailed description in Annex 12 to the Regulations.**3**. To develop scientifically sound proposals for optimal spatial connectivity of species and habitats of EU importance, including specially protected areas, micro-reserves and habitats and species habitats outside the network of protected areas into a single network of nature territories;**The sub-tasks for the selected Programme Task 3 as set out in sub-paragraphs 10.3.1; 10.3.2; 10.3.3 of the Regulations;**4.**To provide research on habitat dynamics as affected by different management practices and climate variability, assess ecosystem services and values to prioritise conservation planning in a cost-effective manner, and develop and validate an economic model for biodiversity sustainability, conservation and restoration (catalogue compensating measures, assess the degree of mitigation and compensating measures);**The sub-tasks for the selected Programme Task 4 are set out in sub-paragraphs 10.4.1; 10.4.2; 10.4.3 of the Regulations.* |
| **2.2** | opportunities for research development, including contributions to the preparation of new projects for submission to competitions under the European Union Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation Horizon Europe and other research and innovation support programmes and technology initiatives |
| **2.3** | the research will lead to knowledge important to the relevant sector, and development of the national economy and society |
| **2.4** | sustainability of the knowledge generated and a qualitative dissemination plan, including scientific publications and public outreach |
| **2.5** | implementation of the research contributes to strengthening the scientific capacities of the research staff, including students |
| **3** | **Criterion: Possibilities and provision of project implementation** | Maximum 5 points |
| **3.1** | quality of the research activity plan and its relevance to the objective. The resources provided are adequate and sufficient to achieve the objective. The research aims to ensure efficient use of resources. The planned work steps and tasks are clearly defined, relevant and reliable | *The expert justifies the score given by taking into account fulfilment of the criterion as a whole and of its sub-criteria. Specific information for the criterion is given in Chapter 3 'Implementation' of the project application and in Part C 'Curriculum Vitae' of the project application, but the assessment of the criterion must take into account the project application as a whole.* *Feasibility of the project, including the research work plan prepared, the envisaged management and quality control of the research, information provided on the data management plan, the resources envisaged, available infrastructure, shall be assessed according to the specificities of the sector or sectors of the science concerned and of the project, as well as the specificities of the applicant and the collaborating partners (if any).* *The expert shall assess the relevance of the scientific qualifications and experience of the project manager and the principal investigators to the achievement of the project objectives and the performance of the tasks envisaged on the basis of the curriculum vitae submitted in Part C 'Curriculum Vitae' of the project application.**The planned implementation of the project is assessed in relation to the completed project application in Part A "General information", Section 3 "Project budget", which foresees the costs of the project team's salary, material and technical support, travel and publication costs.* |
| **3.2** | scientific qualifications of the project manager and of the key project implementers, based on the curriculum vitae submitted |
| **3.3** | appropriate research management, including quality management is provided for. The management organisation allows to follow the progress of the research. Potential risks have been assessed and a plan developed to avoid or mitigate them |
| **3.4** | the research infrastructure required for the research is available, including access to cooperation partners’ equipment (if applicable) |
| **3.5** | the institution carrying out the research and the cooperation partners (if applicable) have the necessary knowledge and expertise |

## 2.2 Consolidated assessment of the project application

14 Once the experts have completed and validated their individual assessment in the information system, the Council shall give each expert access to the individual assessment completed by the other expert and disclose the identity of the other experts to each expert.

15 One of the experts completes the consolidated assessment in accordance with Annex 8 to the Regulation, “Project application examination individual/consolidated assessment form”, in the information system, following the conditions under clauses 6 to 13 of the methodology. All expert (unless the exception referred to in Paragraph 43 applies), shall validate the consolidated evaluation in the information system within two weeks after the validation of the last individual evaluation in the information system.

16 The consolidated evaluation is the agreement between all experts (unless the exception specified in Section 43 applies), on the final evaluation of the project application, so that the expert preparing the consolidated evaluation consults other experts on:

16.1 score of each criterion;

16.2 justification for the scores of each criterion, compiled from the justifications provided by all the experts in their individual assessments.

17 The council examines the consolidated assessment referred to in clause 15 of the methodology once it has been confirmed in the information system. If the Council (without interfering in the competence of experts) finds any inconsistencies with the methodology or the tender Regulations, it has the right to return the consolidated assessment to the experts for revision and confirmation.

18 In the event of a return of the consolidated assessment, the experts must revise and agree on the consolidated assessment within three calendar days, validating it in the information system in accordance with clauses 15 to 16 of this methodology.

# 3 Scientific mid-term and final expert assessment of scientific report of the project

19 Before accessing a mid-term or final scientific report in the information system, the expert shall declare that he/she has no conflict of interest and undertake to respect the confidentiality requirements by signing and sending to the Council the expert declaration and by concluding a contract with the Council.

20 The Council shall, upon receipt of the expert’s declaration, give the expert access to the mid-term or final scientific report of the project and to all the information necessary for its assessment.

21 The Council shall provide each expert with access to the mid-term or final scientific report and to the application for the same project. Where a final report of the project is being assessed, the Council shall additionally provide the expert with access to the mid-term report of the same project.

22 The expert assesses the mid-term or final scientific report of the project using his/her knowledge of the relevant scientific field and arguing his/her opinion with scientific reasons.

## 3.1 Individual evaluation of the mid-term and final scientific report

23 Within two weeks from the date of conclusion of the contract with the Council, the expert shall carry out an individual assessment of the mid-term or the final scientific report by completing Annex 10 to the regulations, “Individual/consolidated assessment form for the mid-term/finalscientific report" in the information system and confirming it therein.

24 The expert gives one of two grades to the project’s mid-term scientific report:

24.1 proceed with the project;

24.2 do not proceed with the project.

25 The expert gives the final scientific report one of two scores:

25.1 the project has achieved its objective;

25.2 the project has not achieved its objective.

26 The expert assesses the final scientific report of the project against the following criteria:

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| **Project mid-term/individual/consolidated assessment of the final scientific report** |
| Project title:Expert(s): |
| **1** | **Criterion: Scientific quality of the project** |
| *The expert assesses how the project’s scientific group has achieved the objectives of the project application by the moment of delivery of the mid-term/final report. Basically, Chapter 1 "Scientific excellence” of the mid-term/final scientific report is taken into account, while linking it to the mid-term/final scientific report as a whole and to the project application. Here, the expert provides comments and suggestions to fully achieve the project’s objective and perform the tasks to the highest scientific quality, or on research opportunities after the end of the project in order to achieve scientific excellence. The comments shall take into account the programme’s specific tasks and results, as well as assess whether the project is progressing towards the achievement of the programme’s overarching objective and the objectives.**The expert assesses whether the performance of the project’s scientific team over the relevant period of time demonstrates its high research capacity and whether the results described are appropriate for the supplementing of the knowledge base of the sector(s) of the science* |
| **2** | **Criterion: Impact of project results** |
| *The expert assesses how the project’s scientific group has achieved the objectives of the project application by the moment of delivery of the mid-term/final report. Basically, Chapter 2 "Impact” of the mid-term/final scientific report is taken into account, while linking it to the mid-term/final scientific report as a whole and to the project application. In this box, the expert provides comments and suggestions to better achieve the intended impact and ensure dissemination of the knowledge gained to the scientific community and communication to the general public, or for post-project activities.**The expert shall assess whether the project has resulted in a more internationally competitive field of natural sciences (nature conservation; biodiversity; climate) and scientific community and whether its capacity has been increased.**The expert shall assess how the project implementer has selected the project’s target groups, whether their opinions have been sought in a quality way and whether the activities have been effective for information of the public. The expert also assesses cooperation with public authorities, NGOs, and businesses (e.g. making recommendations, participating in policy planning, etc.).**The expert assesses and comments on the implementation of the plan to make the project results and scientific knowledge available both in Latvia and internationally (including by publishing results in open access journals and depositing newly generated research data in research data repositories according to the principles of "as open as possible" and FAIR - findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable.**The expert also assesses the project implementer's capacity building activities for students and the scientific group, as well as the progress of the student involvement plan.**The expert assesses progress towards the specific objective(s) selected for the programme project and the results set out in Paragraph 6 of the tender Regulations* *Tasks:**6.1 to ensure the increase of the knowledge base for the determination of nature conservation measures, socio-economic factors and climate change impacts for species of EU importance and biotopes of EU importance with unfavourable conservation status in Latvian and European Union (hereinafter – EU) planning documents and laws and regulations;**6.2 to increase the knowledge base on species ecology, threats and distribution for species and habitats of EU importance for which no assessment of conservation status is known;**6.3 to develop scientifically sound proposals for optimal spatial connectivity (connectivity) of species and habitats of EU importance, including specially protected areas, micro-reserves and habitats and species habitats outside the network of protected areas in a single network of nature territories;**6.4 to provide research on habitat dynamics as affected by different management practices and climate variability, to provide an assessment of ecosystem services and values in order to prioritise conservation planning in a cost-effective manner, and to develop and validate an economic model for biodiversity sustainability, conservation and restoration (catalogue compensating measures, assess the degree of mitigation and compensating measures).**Results:**8.1 studies were carried out to develop nature conservation measures to meet existing requirements and in line with new EU initiatives; three reports on the results of the studies were published, identifying the conservation measures to be taken;**8.2 a single spatial model is developed to compare connectivity alternatives;**8.3 scientific articles published in journals or collections of articles included in the Web of Science or SCOPUS databases;**8.4 newly acquired research data deposited in open research data repositories, promoting data re-use according to FAIR principles (findability, accessibility, interoperability, re-usability);* |
| **3** | **Criterion: Possibilities and provision of project implementation** |
| *The expert assesses how the project’s scientific team has achieved the objectives of the project application by the time of delivery of the project mid-term/final report. Basically, Chapter 3 "Implementation” of the mid-term/final report is taken into account, while linking it to the mid-term/final scientific report as a whole and to the project application as a whole. In this box, the expert provides comments and suggestions for adjustments to the work plan or research opportunities after the end of the relevant project.**The expert assesses whether the management of the project has been effective, including taking into account the overall progress of the project. The expert assesses the information provided by the project implementer on the development and maintenance of data management plans. Whether the risk plan stated in the Project Description, sub-chapter 3.3 "Project Management and Risk Plan", has been implemented in cases where the risks materialised, and whether the solutions are credible.**In addition, the expert assesses and indicates whether the project has sufficiently involved students and PhD candidates by the specified stage. Students must be involved with a total workload of at least 2,0 PLE* *on average during the implementation of the project.* |
| ***Mid-project evaluation*** |
| **Proceed with the project/** **Do not continue with the project** | *If the expert’s assessment of the project’s mid-term scientific report is "Proceed with the project", the expert may skip any final conclusions.**If the expert’s assessment of the project’s mid-term scientific report is "Do not proceed with the project",* *the expert shall provide final conclusions with an explanation and additional reasons on the progress of the project and the risks identified to the achievement of the project objective.* |
| ***Project assessment at the end*** |
| **Project objective has been achieved.** *Project objective has been achieved – overall score as a percentage is 85–100% and more.***Project objective has not been achieved,****objective rating as a percentage.** *The project objective has not been achieved, it does not correspond partially - overall rating as a percentage is 25%-84%* *The project objective has not been achieved, it does not correspond at all - overall rating as a percentage is 0%-24%* | *The expert provides a target rating as a percentage in the overall rating of the final scientific report of the project according to provisions of Paragraph 30 of the methodology.* |

**3.2 Consolidated rating of the project mid-term and final scientific report**

27 Once the experts have completed and validated their Individual Rating mid-term or final scientific report in the information system, the Council shall provide experts with access to the Individual Rating to be completed by the other experts, as well as disclose the identity of the other experts to each expert.

 28 One of the experts shall complete the consolidated assessment in accordance with Annex 10 to the regulations "Individual/consolidated rating form for the mid-term/final scientific report", under the conditions set out in Paragraphs 24 to 26 of the Methodology, in the information system and all the experts shall confirm it in the information system within one week.

29 In the consolidated rating, the experts agree on a single score for the mid-term or final scientific report and summarise the comments made in the individual assessments.

**3.3 Evaluation of the objective of the final scientific report**

 30 In the consolidated valuation in the Final Report, the two experts agree on a consolidated percentage valuation, which has the following meaning:

The project objective has been achieved – overall score as a percentage is 85% – 100% and more. The score is given if the project has been carried out with good or excellent scientific quality and has met or exceeded the expected objectives and scientific results. Where there is non-performance or other minor shortcomings, but the existing scientific results are of good scientific quality, e.g. the scientific articles are published in high quality journals, so that these shortcomings have not affected the achievement of the objective.

Project objective has not been achieved, it does not correspond partially – overall rating as a percentage is 25 % – 84 %. The score is awarded if the project has been carried out with sufficient scientific merit, the planned results of the project have been partially achieved, which has affected the overall achievement of the project objectives. Whenever the mid-term scientific quality assessment of the project makes recommendations for the further implementation of the project, these have been taken into account partially or not at all, and the reasons for not taking them into account are not sufficiently substantiated.

The project objective has not been achieved, does not correspond fully - overall percentage score 0% - 24%. The score is awarded if the project has been carried out with insufficient scientific quality, the planned results have been entirely or almost entirely not achieved, and the overall objective of the project has therefore not been achieved, or has been achieved to an insufficient extent.

 31 Taking into account clause 30 of the methodology, the council calculates the refundable part of the funding as follows:

 31.1 if the percentage of the Experts' objective rating referred to in Sub-clause 2.20 of the Contract is 60% to 65%, a flat rate of 5% applies;

 31.2 if the percentage of the Experts' objective rating referred to in Sub-clause 2.20 of the Contract is between 50% and 59%, a flat rate of 10% applies;

 31.3 if the percentage of the Experts' objective rating referred to in Sub-clause 2.20 of the Contract is below 50%, a flat rate of 25% applies.

1. Higher Education Law, Section 27(1) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Article 2(83) of European Commission Regulation (EU) No [651/2014](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2014/651/oj/?locale=LV) of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty (Official Journal of the European Union, 26 June 2014, No L 187/1) )<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2014/651/oj/?locale=LV>) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Section 44(1) of the Law on Higher Education Institutions [↑](#footnote-ref-3)