

Methodology for the Evaluation of the Project Proposal, Mid-term Scientific Report of the Project and Final Scientific Report of the Project

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Introduction

The Methodology for the Evaluation of the Project Proposal, Mid-term Scientific Report of the Project and Final Scientific Report of the Project (hereinafter – the Methodology) has been developed for the Open Call for 2021 Fundamental and Applied Research Projects (hereinafter – the open call) with the implementation period of three years for drawing up the necessary documentation and ensuring of the evaluation.

The Methodology has been developed for foreign independent scientific experts (hereinafter – the experts) who perform the scientific evaluation of the project proposal, mid-term scientific report of the project and final scientific report of the project.

The Methodology has been developed in compliance with Cabinet Regulation No. 725 of 12 December 2017, Procedures for Evaluating Fundamental and Applied Research Projects and Administering the Financing Thereof, (hereinafter – Cabinet Regulation No. 725) and Regulations for the Open Call for 2021 Fundamental and Applied Research Projects approved on 30 April 2021 by the Latvian Council of Science (hereinafter – the Regulations).

1. Terminology

1.	Scientific team	Scientific staff and research technical staff which participates in the project implementation. A scientific team shall be composed of a principal investigator, lead participants of the project, and participants of the project.
2.	Submitter of the project proposal	A scientific institution registered in the register of scientific institutions (hereinafter – the scientific institution) which regardless of its legal status (entity governed by public or private law) or type of financing in conformity with the laws and regulations governing the activity thereof (articles of association, by-law or constitution) performs principal activities of non-economic nature and which complies with the definition of a research organisation defined in

		Article 2(83) of Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty.
3.	Principal investigator	A scientist who submits the project proposal, manages the project, ensures the implementation thereof – plans and supervises the fulfilment of the project tasks, is responsible for his or her activity and the activity of other persons involved in the project in conformity with the tasks defined for the project and rules of scientific ethics, for timely drafting and submission of the documentation characterising the progress of the project implementation in accordance with the procedures laid down in Cabinet Regulation No. 725.
4.	Lead participant of the project	A scientist who implements the project and is responsible for the implementation of the parts thereof.
5.	Participant of the project	A member of a scientific team who fulfils separate scientific tasks in the project implementation (hereinafter – the participant of the project), including the student of a higher education institution ¹ and applicant for a scientific degree (hereinafter – the participant of the project – the student). ²
6.	Project contact person	A natural person who has registered in the National Research Information System (hereinafter – the Information System) completes information on the project, uploads annexes thereto and reports and also, if necessary, maintains contacts with the staff of the Council (the principal investigator may also be the project contact person). The submitter of the project proposal shall specify the project contract person in Part D “Certification of the Submitter of the Project Proposal” of Annex 1 to the Regulations “Project Proposal”.
7.	Project secretary	A specialist who organises the selection of experts for the purpose of evaluating a project proposal, mid-term scientific report and final scientific report, ensures circulation of documents and information relating to the project implementation and supervision, and also drawing up of draft decisions and communication.
8.	Expert	A scientist who performs the individual evaluation of the project proposal, mid-term scientific report of the project and final scientific report of the project and the scientific qualification, evaluation competence and work experience whereof conform to the science sector and topic of the relevant project proposal, mid-term / final scientific report.
9.	Rapporteur	An expert who performs the individual scientific evaluation of the project proposal, mid-term scientific report of the project and final scientific report of the project and also prepares the consolidated evaluation of the project proposal, mid-term scientific report of the project and final scientific report of the project by coordinating the latter with the second expert.

¹ In accordance with Section 44, Paragraph one of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

² Pursuant to Section 44, Paragraph one of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the students of higher education institutions shall be: students of the bachelor degree study programmes; students of the vocational study programmes; students of the master’s degree study programmes (master’s programme students); residents in medicine; doctoral students.

2. Scientific Evaluation of the Project Proposal

1. The process of the scientific evaluation of the project proposals shall be organised by project secretaries.

2. If the project proposal conforms to the administrative conformity criteria, the project secretary shall invite two suitable experts from the list of experts of each project proposal for the purpose of the scientific evaluation of the project proposal.

3. Prior to obtaining access to the project proposal in the Information System, the expert shall:

3.1. confirm that he or she has no conflict of interest and also that he or she undertakes to conform to the confidentiality requirements by signing the certification on the absence of conflicts of interest and a commitment to respect confidentiality (hereinafter – the expert certification) and send the latter via electronic mail to the Council;

3.2. conclude the expert contract with the Council.

4. After receipt of the expert certification and conclusion of the expert contract, the Council shall grant access for the expert to the project proposal and all necessary information in the Information System in order to perform the evaluation of the project proposal.

5. The expert shall perform the scientific evaluation of the project by applying his or her knowledge in the relevant science sector and by providing scientific justification for his or her opinion.

6. During the expert-examination, the expert shall cooperate with the Council and also observe the instructions given by the Council in relation to the procedures for the performance of the expert-examination.

2.1. Individual Evaluation of the Project Proposal

7. The expert shall complete and approve the individual evaluation of the project proposal in the Information System within three weeks from the date of conclusion of the expert contract and granting of access to the project proposal and all necessary information unless another time period has been specified in the expert contract.

8. The expert shall evaluate each criterion in the individual evaluation and provide evaluation in points, taking into account the considerations specified in the Methodology.

9. The criteria shall be evaluated with the score of 1 to 5 points for each criterion where:

9.1. excellent – 5 points (excellent project proposal which conforms to the highest requirements of the relevant science sector or even exceeds the requirements for the criterion, any deficiency in the project proposal is insignificant);

9.2. good – 4 points (good project proposal which conforms to the requirements of the relevant science sector for the criterion; however, there are certain deficiencies);

9.3. satisfactory – 3 points (satisfactory project proposal which in general conforms to the requirements of the relevant science sector for the criterion, there are certain deficiencies which will hinder the project implementation and achievement of high results);

9.4. weak – 2 points (weak project proposal, partial or only general conformity with the requirements of the relevant science sector for the criterion, presence of deficiencies which hinder successful implementation of the project and achievement of objectives);

9.5. unsatisfactory – 1 point (unsatisfactory project proposal which does not conform to the

requirements of the relevant science sector for the criterion and the provided information is insufficient for providing evaluation for the criterion and also there are significant deficiencies which cast doubt over the implementation of the project and achievement of objectives);

9.6. if the evaluation of the project proposal for the relevant criterion exceeds the requirements of the previous lowest score evaluation, but does not fully meet the requirements of the next highest score evaluation, the evaluation may be expressed by awarding half a point, i.e. 0.5.

10. The quality threshold of the consolidated evaluation in points of the project proposal provided by experts (in accordance with Clause 40 of the Regulations) shall be at least 4 points for the criterion specified in Sub-paragraph 19.1 of Cabinet Regulation No. 725 (the scientific quality of the project), at least 3 points for the criterion specified in Sub-paragraph 19.2 of Cabinet Regulation No. 725 (the impact of the project results), at least 3 points for the criterion specified in Sub-paragraph 19.3 of Cabinet Regulation No. 725 (the project implementation possibilities and security) and at least 10 points for all criteria specified in Paragraph 19 of Cabinet Regulation No. 725 (hereinafter – the criteria of Cabinet Regulation No. 725 and each separately – the criterion of Cabinet Regulation No. 725).

11. The ratio of the criteria of Cabinet Regulation No. 725 against the overall total score of the project proposal shall be as follows:

11.1. scientific quality of the project proposal – 50 per cent;

11.2. impact of project results – 30 per cent;

11.3. project implementation possibilities and security – 20 per cent.

12. The expert shall provide a reasoned justification for the evaluation in points of each criterion of Cabinet Regulation No. 725.

13. The project secretary shall, within three working days after receipt of the individual evaluation of the project proposal from the expert, evaluate the conformity of the respective individual evaluation with the criteria of Cabinet Regulation No. 725 and with the considerations referred to in Paragraphs 20, 21, and 22 of Cabinet Regulation No. 725, and also with the methodology for the expert-examination and, if necessary, shall return the respective evaluation to the expert for revision / redrafting thereof in such case providing duly justified reasons for the return thereof. In case of such return, the expert shall, within three working days from the date of receipt of the notification of the Council via electronic mail in relation to the return of the evaluation which was sent via electronic mail, revise, redraft and approve the individual evaluation in the Information System.

14. The expert shall complete the individual evaluation in the Information System (see Annex 7 to the Regulations “Form for the Individual / Consolidated Evaluation of the Project Proposal”) in accordance with the following criteria and considerations:

Individual / Consolidated Evaluation of the Project Proposal		
Project title:		
Expert(-s):		
1.	Criterion: Scientific quality of the project proposal	Maximum score: 5 points
1.1.	Consideration: the scientific quality, credibility, and novelty of the research	<i>The expert shall justify the evaluation thereof with points, taking into account the fulfilment of the criterion in general and the fulfilment of the</i>

1.2.	Consideration: the scientific quality of the selected research strategy and methodological solutions and also suitability for the achievement of the laid down objectives	<p><i>considerations of each criterion.</i></p> <p><i>1. Information which is specific to the criterion is provided in Chapter 1 “Scientific Excellence and also Sub-chapter 2.1 “Scientific Results and Technological Findings of the Project, Plan for the Distribution Thereof” and Sub-chapter 3.1 “Submitter of the Project Proposal and Scientific Team” of Part B “Description of the Project” of the project proposal but, upon evaluation of the criterion, the project proposal shall be taken into account as a whole.</i></p> <p><i>2. The scientific excellence of the project, including the selected research strategy and methodological solutions, and also the ability to create new knowledge or technological findings and justification for the necessity of the project and the novel characteristics of the project within the context of the research area shall be evaluated in accordance with the specific nature of the relevant science sector or sectors and of the project and also the specific nature of the submitter of the project proposal and cooperation partners of the project (if any).</i></p>
1.3.	Consideration: the ability to create new knowledge or technological findings	
1.4.	Consideration: the contribution of cooperation partners (if any), their scientific capacity, planned cooperation quality.	

		3. <i>In the case of an interdisciplinary project proposal, the expert shall evaluate the synergy of disciplines, evaluating the contribution of the representatives of each discipline to the achievement of the project objectives.</i>
2.	Criterion: Impact of project results	Maximum score: 5 points
2.1	Consideration: expected transfer of the acquired knowledge and skills in further activity and the development of scientific capacity	<i>The expert shall justify the evaluation thereof with points, taking into account the fulfilment of the criterion in general and the fulfilment of the considerations of each criterion.</i>
2.2.	Consideration: research development possibilities, including investment in drafting new projects for submission to the calls for projects of the European Union Framework Programme for Research and Innovation “Horizon 2020” and other research and innovation aid programmes and technology initiatives	<i>1. Information which is specific to the criterion is provided in Chapter 2 “Impact” of Part B “Description of the Project” of the project proposal but, upon evaluation of the criterion, the project proposal shall be taken into account as a whole. 2. Results and estimated impact thereof, including the planned transfer of results in further activities and development of the scientific capacity, further research development possibilities (for example, preparation of new research projects, involvement in international cooperation networks) shall be evaluated in accordance with the specific nature of the relevant science sector or sectors and the specific nature of the project and also the specific nature of the submitter of the project proposal and cooperation partners of the project (if any).</i>
2.3.	Consideration: the knowledge important for the relevant sector, development of the national economy and the society is created as the result of the research	<i>3. The expert shall evaluate the plans described in the project proposal for the identification of the parties involved, application of appropriate cooperation forms and transfer of the knowledge acquired in the project (for example, in the form of recommendations, guidelines,</i>
2.4.	Consideration: sustainability of the acquired knowledge and a qualitative plan for the dissemination thereof, including the planned scientific publications and public information	

<p>2.5.</p>	<p>Consideration: research implementation promotes strengthening of the scientific capacities of the scientific staff of the research, including students</p>	<p>creation of prototypes etc.). Evaluation of the cooperation of the submitter of the project proposal with State and local government institutions, non-governmental organisations and entrepreneurs.</p> <p>4. The expert shall evaluate how successfully students and applicants for a scientific degree have been involved in the project, compared to the overall workload of the members of the scientific team. Information on the workload of the scientific team of the project, including students and applicants for a scientific degree, is provided in Chapter 2 “Scientific Team” of Part A of the project proposal.</p> <p>5. Sustainability of the project results is evaluated in conjunction with the intended scientific publications and distribution of project results at scientific conferences. Particular attention should be given to ensuring sustainability in compliance with Open Access, Open Data, FAIR principles – findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable – and also the choice of the submitter of the project proposal for data depositing. Evaluation of the conformity of the planned scientific results and amount with the topic, budget and implementation period of the project. Information on the distribution of the project results is provided in Sub-chapter 2.1 “Scientific Results and Technological Findings of the Project, Plan for the Distribution Thereof” of Part B “Description of the Project” of the project proposal.</p>
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3.	Criterion: Project implementation possibilities and security	Maximum score: 5 points
3.1.	Consideration: quality of the research work plan and its conformity with the objective brought forward. The intended resources are adequate and sufficient for the achievement of the objective. It is intended to ensure efficient use of resources in the research. The planned work stages and tasks are clearly defined, suitable and credible	<i>The expert shall justify the evaluation thereof with points, taking into account the fulfilment of the criterion in general and the fulfilment of the considerations of each criterion. Information which is specific to the criterion is provided in Chapter 3 “Implementation” of Part B “Description of the Project” of the project proposal and Part C “Curriculum Vitae” of the project proposal but, upon evaluation of the criterion, the project proposal shall be taken into account as a whole. The project feasibility, including the prepared work plan of the research, intended project management and quality management thereof, intended resources, available infrastructure shall be evaluated in accordance with the specific nature of the relevant science sector or sectors and the specific nature of the project and also the specific nature of the submitter of the project proposal and cooperation partners of the project (if any).</i>
3.2.	Consideration: scientific qualification of the project manager and main participants of the project on the basis of the submitted curriculum vitae (CV)	<i>The submitter of the project proposal is the scientific institution. It has the possibility to attract cooperation partners – other scientific institutions, if necessary for the achievement of the project objectives.</i>
3.3.	Consideration: suitable research management, including quality management, is envisaged. Management organisation enables following the progress of carrying out the research. Potential risks have been evaluated and a plan for the prevention thereof or minimisation of the negative impact thereof has been developed	<i>The expert shall evaluate the compliance of the scientific qualification and experience of the principal investigator and the lead participant of the project with the achievement of the project objectives</i>

3.4.	Consideration: research infrastructure is required for the performance of research, including access to equipment of cooperation partners (if applicable);	<i>and fulfilment of the intended tasks on the basis of the submitted Curriculum Vitae in Part C “Curriculum Vitae” of the project proposal (Curriculum Vitae may be submitted by the principal investigator only).</i>
3.5.	Consideration: the institution which implements the research and cooperation partners thereof	<i>It should be taken into account that the implementation period of one project is 3 years. The planned project implementation shall be evaluated in conjunction with the completed Chapter 4 “Project Budget” of Part A of the project proposal which provides for the costs for the remuneration of the scientific team of the project, material supplies and technical provisions, official travels and publicity costs. There are no conditions in the open call for the mutual division of direct costs.</i>

(if applicable) have the necessary knowledge and competence	<i>The maximum funding amount of one project is EUR 300,000 and the minimum funding – EUR 150,000.</i>
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2.2. Consultative Working Group of Rapporteurs

15. In order to ensure that the expert who fulfils the duties of a rapporteur would prepare an objective and justified consolidated evaluation in points of the project proposal, the Council shall arrange consultative groups of rapporteurs (hereinafter – the consultative group) in accordance with the science sectors groups specified in Clause 6 of the Regulations. In order to ensure the review of all project proposals in the consultative groups, the Council may arrange also consultative subgroups, taking into account the number of project proposals submitted in the science sector group. Prior to arrangement of the consultative group, project secretaries shall verify repeatedly whether experts have no conflict of interest with the submitter of the project proposal, principal investigator and lead participant of the project.

16. In order to ensure successful work of the consultative group, the project secretary shall invite one rapporteur of each consultative group to become the head of the consultative group. The head of the consultative group shall be determined by taking into account the scientific and management experience thereof in order to organise the work of the consultative group and to lead a reasoned discussion among rapporteurs which is of a consultative nature for the purpose of providing to rapporteurs a comprehensive view of the situation in the relevant science sector group according to the submitted project proposals.

17. Rapporteurs from the relevant science sector group shall participate in the consultative group.

18. The work of the consultative group shall be ensured online by using a video call. The meeting of the group shall be recorded and the minutes thereof shall be made by the project secretary.

2.3. Consolidated Evaluation of the Project Proposal

19. In accordance with the tasks and time limits set out in the expert contract the rapporteur shall prepare the consolidated evaluation in points of the project proposal in accordance with Annex 7 to the Regulations “Form for the Individual / Consolidated Evaluation of the Project Proposal”. The rapporteur shall prepare the consolidated evaluation in points of the project proposal by taking into account the individual evaluations of the project proposal provided by both experts and, prior to submission thereof to the Council, coordinate the latter in the Information System with the other expert.

20. The project secretary shall, within three working days, evaluate the compliance of the consolidated evaluation in points of the project proposal with the Methodology and approve it in the Information System. In the event of the non-compliance of the consolidated evaluation in points of the project proposal or insufficient reasoning provided therein in relation to the respective evaluation, the evaluation shall be returned to the rapporteur by indicating the discrepancies and deficiencies of the project proposal. The rapporteur shall, within three working days from the date on which the notification on a returned evaluation from the Information System has been received to the electronic mail thereof, revise the consolidated evaluation in points of the project proposal and submit it in the Information System for approval thereof by the project secretary, previously coordinating the latter with the other expert.

3. Scientific Evaluation of the Mid-term Scientific Report of the Project and Final Scientific Report of the Project

3.1. Individual Evaluation of the Mid-term Scientific Report of the Project and Final Scientific Report of the Project

21. At the mid-term stage of the project, i.e. 18 months from the project start date, the submitter of the project proposal must complete the mid-term scientific report of the project (hereinafter – the mid-term report), whereas within a month after the completion of the project implementation the submitter of the project proposal must complete the final scientific report of the project (hereinafter – the final report). A scientific expert-examination is ensured for mid-term and final reports and such expert-examination is carried out by at least two foreign experts.

22. The project secretary shall provide each expert involved with access to the mid-term report and/or final report of the relevant project and the relevant project proposal. In the event of the evaluation of the final report, the project secretary shall additionally provide the expert with access to the mid-term report of the same project.

23. The expert shall, within three weeks after signing the expert certification and conclusion of the expert contract, perform the individual evaluation of the mid-term report and/or final report by completing Annex 9 to the Regulations “Form for the Evaluation of the Mid-term / Final Scientific Report of the Project” in the Information System and approving the latter in the Information System.

24. The expert shall evaluate the mid-term report and/or final report according to the following criteria:

Individual / Consolidated Evaluation of the Mid-term Report / Final Report	
Project title:	
Expert(-s):	
1.	Criterion: Scientific Excellence
	<p><i>The expert shall evaluate how the scientific team of the project has managed to achieve the objectives laid down in the project proposal until the mid-term stage / conclusion of the project. The primary focus is on Chapter 1 “Scientific Excellence” of the mid-term report / final report, while also taking into account the mid-term report / final report in general and the project proposal. Here the expert shall add comments and recommendations in relation to research possibilities after completion of the relevant project in order to achieve scientific excellence.</i></p> <p><i>The expert shall evaluate whether the results achieved by the scientific team of the project in the relevant time period reflect the high research capacity thereof and whether the results described are sufficient for supplementing the knowledge base of the science sector / sectors.</i></p>
2.	Criterion: Impact

The expert shall evaluate how the scientific team of the project has managed to achieve the objectives laid down in the project proposal until the mid-term stage / conclusion. The primary focus is on Chapter 2 “Impact” of the mid-term report / final report, while also taking into account the mid-term report / final report in general and Part B “Description of the Project” of the project proposal. Here the expert shall add comments and recommendations in relation to the impact of the project and dissemination of the knowledge acquired and also communications activities following the conclusion of the relevant project.

The expert shall evaluate whether the science team has achieved the intended result under Part B of the project proposal. The expert shall evaluate whether the plans described in the project proposal for the identification of the parties involved, application of appropriate cooperation forms and transfer of the knowledge acquired in the project (for example, in the form of recommendations, guidelines, creation of prototypes etc.) have been achieved as expected. Evaluation of the cooperation of the submitter of the project proposal with State and local government institutions, non-governmental organisations and entrepreneurs. It shall be evaluated whether the submitted scientific publications comply with the topic, objective and budget of the project and whether Open Data, Open Access and FAIR principles have been complied with in the preparation thereof and also the policy of the project implementer in terms of data depositing shall be evaluated. At the same time, it shall be evaluated whether the impact of scientific results has been achieved in accordance with the plans specified in the project proposal.

It shall be evaluated whether the work of the project in relation to the public awareness of the project results and increasing the socio-economic impact of the project results has ensured the transfer of knowledge acquired in the project through the involvement of society and raising public awareness of the role of the project in addressing issues included in the respective project.

The expert shall evaluate whether international cooperation planned within the scope of the project (including the writing of new projects, involvement in international cooperation networks etc.) has taken place to the extent planned within the project and has contributed to the achievement of the objective set forth for the project and also to the capacity building of the scientific team of the project.

3.	Criterion: Implementation
	<p><i>The expert shall evaluate how the scientific team of the project has managed to achieve the objectives laid down in the project proposal until the mid-term stage / conclusion. The primary focus is on Chapter 3 “Implementation” of the mid-term report / final report, while also taking into account the mid-term report / final report and Part B “Description of the Project” of the project proposal in general. Here the expert shall add comments and recommendations in relation to more successful project implementation.</i></p> <p><i>The expert shall evaluate whether the project management has been successful, including by taking into account the overall progress of the project implementation. It shall be also evaluated whether the risk plan provided for in Sub-chapter 3.3 “Project Management and Risk Plan” of Part B of the project proposal has been achieved in cases where the risks materialised and whether the solutions thereof were credible. In addition, the expert shall evaluate and indicate whether students and applicants for a scientific degree have been sufficiently involved in the project implementation. Students must be involved with the total workload of at least 1.0 FTE, considering that each student is employed in the project for at least 0.25 FTE.</i></p>

25. The expert shall provide one of the following two types of evaluation for the mid-term report:

- 25.1. to proceed further with the project;
- 25.2. not to proceed further with the project.

26. The expert shall provide one of the following two types of evaluation for the final report:

- 26.1. the project objective has been achieved;
- 26.2. the project objective has not been achieved.

3.2. Consolidated Evaluation of the Mid-term Report and Final Report

27. After both experts have completed and approved their respective individual evaluation in the Information System, the project secretary shall provide both experts with access to the individual evaluations prepared by both experts and also reveal to each expert the identity of the other expert.

28. In relation to the consolidated evaluation in points of the mid-term report and final report, both experts shall agree on the consolidated evaluation in points by summarising the comments provided in their individual evaluations.

29. The rapporteur shall complete the consolidated evaluation in points in the Information System, whereas both experts shall approve it in the Information System within a week after the date on which the rapporteur has provided the draft consolidated evaluation in points to the other expert in the Information System.