

## Practical guidelines for evaluating a Network of Excellence (NoE)

### PLEASE READ THIS FIRST

**Before you start evaluating the proposed NoEs please make sure you have understood<sup>1</sup>:**

**First, the purpose of an NoE in general.** NoEs are an instrument to overcome the fragmentation of the European research landscape with the objective to strengthen European excellence in a given area. Their purpose is to reach a durable restructuring/shaping and integration of efforts and institutions or parts of institutions (labs, departments, units, teams, etc.) in areas where this is necessary. The **success** of an NoE is not measured in terms of scientific results but by the extent to which the social fabric for researchers and research institutions in a given field has changed due to the project and the extent to which the existing capacities become more competitive as a result of this change.

In order to check if a proposal might be a **good candidate** for an NoE, it is of the utmost importance to analyse if the research area is fragmented and would gain in excellence by restructuring; and if all the participants intend to undertake a major effort to re-structure and re-organise the way research in the area under concern is carried out in Europe and, to this end, establish durable integration of their research capacities. However if the participants are going to continue to work as they have always done with no significant changes of structures, portfolios and organisations, the proposal is most **probably not an NoE**.

**Secondly, scientific excellence is a necessary but not sufficient condition for being successful.** The **scientific excellence** of the participants and their research activities is **imperative**. Proposers have to demonstrate that the participants belong to the key players in Europe in the scientific area concerned and that the science they are doing is world class. However, just bringing together excellent scientific groups around an exciting topic is not enough for an NoE. Each partner (institution) involved has to convincingly show its commitment to durable integration (beyond the period for which the Community support is requested), restructuring and organisational change.

**Thirdly, what is behind the Joint Programme of Activities (JPA) and achieving the expected degree of integration.** NoEs are expected to induce and to manage processes of change: to remove mental, financial, technical and legal barriers to integration; to durably "institutionalise" the links between the institutions involved, which will imply the restructuring of the research portfolios and of the existing organisational structures. The JPA must provide the actions to implement these processes.

The JPA must show the **serious commitment** of all partners to **organisational change**. The **integrating activities** should include<sup>2</sup>:

- ?? discussing and establishing mechanisms for coordinating and finally merging the research portfolios of the different partners;
- ?? staff exchange schemes or complete re-location of staff;

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<sup>1</sup> See also the Guides for proposers )

<sup>2</sup> (non-exhaustive list; for a description of other types of activities in the JPA (research, management, spreading of excellence) see [http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/instr\\_noe.htm](http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/instr_noe.htm))

- ?? establishment of shared and mutually accessible research equipment, managerial and research infrastructures, facilities and services;
- ?? exploring the legal circumstances and possibilities for durable integration;
- ?? setting up joint supervisory bodies;
- ?? measures for joint public relations.

**Fourthly, research is part of the JPA: Jointly executed research** is an obligatory part of the JPA. These research activities must aim at achieving the purpose of durable integration, e.g. by developing common tools or filling gaps in the collective knowledge portfolio of the network. Apart from this, the participants in an NoE will of course pursue their own institutional research portfolios in the area covered by the NoE. This research **cannot form** part of the JPA.

[only for Networks of Excellence]

**While evaluating the proposed NoEs against the evaluation criteria set out in the Work Programme and the related call for proposals, the following indicative questions may help guide your evaluation.**

### **Criterion 1: RELEVANCE**

Would the proposal, if successful, contribute to **meeting the objectives (scientific, technical, socio-economic) of the work programme as described in the relevant call for proposals?** In which way do the proposed network's integration goals address the scientific, technical, wider societal and policy objectives of the [X Priority/ research activity] in the areas concerned? If the proposal addresses the objectives only partially, is it of sufficient interest to warrant further evaluation?

### **Criterion 2: POTENTIAL IMPACT**

Criterion 2 addresses the potential impact and potential success of the proposed NoE. These questions are not always easy to evaluate as they deal with potential outcomes in the future. The following questions should be addressed:

- ?? Does the proposal strengthen or reinforce S&T excellence on a topic concerned where the research efforts are scattered and fragmented in Europe? NoEs are an instrument **to overcome the fragmentation** of the European research landscape. Their purpose is to reach a durable restructuring and integration of efforts and institutions in areas where this is useful/necessary. Proposals should demonstrate that this is actually the case in the area under concern. In other words, proposals should describe the existing fragmentation that needs to be addressed in the topic of the network. Has the proposal clearly described and demonstrated the existing fragmentation that needs to be addressed? Has the proposal clearly described how the network will achieve the restructuring/shaping of the existing research capacities?
- ?? Are the intentions/goals of the proposed NoE clearly oriented towards **achieving a world-class network**? Are the goals clearly defined and suitably ambitious? Does the proposal adequately explain how the proposed approach will have a durable structuring impact on European research after the ending of Commission funding?
- ?? **Optimal dissemination and spreading of the results.** Does the proposal describe clearly a plan for spreading excellence beyond the network and disseminating knowledge and exploiting results outside the network? Do they have a plan for management of knowledge and intellectual property? Does the proposal lead to a widespread sharing and dissemination of results and thus enhance the prospects for their use and exploitation? What is the quality of these plans? Are any industrial partners committed to embedding the proposed work into their wider activities (strategic planning, investment plans, etc.)?
- ?? Is **the proposal likely to have a durable structuring impact**? This is difficult to evaluate, but indicators will come from the degree of integration envisaged and a clear

vision of what might come after the end of the project. The success of an NoE is measured by the extent to which the fabric of research capacities in a given field has changed due to the project.

### **Criterion 3: EXCELLENCE OF THE PARTICIPANTS**

?? The **scientific excellence of the participants and their research activities is imperative**. Does the proposal explain well that the proposed participants belong to the key players in Europe in the scientific area concerned and that the science they are doing is world class? The credibility of the partners and the quality of partnership are of the utmost importance: have they included indicators that demonstrate their excellence?

?? In addition you have to evaluate if the **participants are well suited to execute the tasks** assigned to them in the proposed NoE. Are the tasks to be carried out by the individual participants well defined and can they be expected to be fulfilled? Are sufficient key stakeholders in the planned research involved while maintaining a manageable size of the network?

?? Next to the excellence of the participants and their suitability to execute the tasks, the question of **whether they collectively have the necessary critical mass of expertise and resources** has to be evaluated. What counts is that all the participants together convincingly show that they have the required expertise and resources to execute the joint activities with a view to becoming a European leader or a world force in the topic of the network. If there are as-yet-unidentified participants in the network, are the expected competencies, the role of the potential partners and their integration into the network well described? Does the proposal mobilise the critical mass of expertise and resources needed to successfully carry out the project? Are the proposed resources reasonable and appropriate?

*NOTE: The allowable grant for integration is determined on the basis of a “head count” of the researchers constituting the research capacity of the participants in the topic of the network (plus a bonus for doctoral students), by applying a table converting numbers of researchers into an average annual grant. This will be subject to negotiation with the Commission during the negotiation phase. Evaluators are therefore not expected to formulate recommendations concerning the size of the grant. However, any **comments on the level of resources** proposed for implementing the JPA will help the Commission to establish the size of the grant.*

### **Criterion 4: DEGREE OF INTEGRATION AND THE JOINT PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES**

?? NoEs are to be used in scientific areas where the research efforts in Europe are scattered and fragmented. Does the **degree of integration foreseen** justify **supporting the project as an NoE**?

?? The proposal should also explain how restructuring/shaping and integration could lead to higher scientific excellence and more efficient use of resources. These explanations should help you evaluate **the extent to which the Joint Programme of activities (JPA)**

**is sufficiently well designed to achieve the expected degree of integration<sup>3</sup>**. To which extent are the tasks contained in the JPA clear and well defined? Does the proposal demonstrate and show how the joint programme of activities brings about the expected degree of integration and restructuring/shaping of the existing research capacities? To what extent is the JPA likely to enable the network to strengthen excellence through integration, joint research and spreading excellence? To what extent does the joint research programme of the JPA consist of a coherent set of new and/or reoriented activities other than those already undertaken and/or planned by the participants?

?? Just bringing together excellent scientific groups around an exciting topic is not enough to qualify a project as an NoE. Scientific excellence is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for success. What counts is the **serious commitment** of all partners to organisational change. Have all participating organisations convincingly demonstrated their commitment **to durable integration, restructuring and organisational change**? To what extent have the partners made a convincing commitment towards a deep and durable integration **beyond** the period of Community support? This should be based on information given by the NoE members in the Joint Programme of Activities such as e.g. letters of commitment from the executive bodies of the organisations. This will also be reflected in the organisational structure foreseen (see below), which has to involve each participating institution

The objective of far-reaching and durable integration requires serious and long-lasting commitment from all participants. Please note that **the depth of integration aimed at is the decisive criterion, not the size of a network**. It is scarcely imaginable that the necessary change processes can be managed in very large networks comprising several tens or more of participating organisations. Proposals involving the coordination of large networks in a looser way without the ambition of far-reaching organisational change and durable integration are more appropriate for a Coordination Action rather than an NoE.

## **Criterion 5: ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT**

?? How are the **appropriate decision-making structures** of the participating organisations involved? Is there adequacy, clarity and efficiency of the management strategy, scheduling arrangements and decision-making structures? Proposals should demonstrate that each participating organisation is involved at a strategic level in the management of the network (e.g. in a governing board or similar structure). Structural and organisational changes need strategic decision-making at the highest institutional levels and sometimes even beyond (financing bodies, supervisory boards, etc.). Have proposers shown that the appropriately high levels of decision-making of the participating organisations are committed to the proposal?

?? Is the **management of the network** demonstrably of adequate quality? Is an appropriate management structure proposed for achieving the goals? Is there a plan for the management of knowledge, of intellectual property and of other innovation-related activities arising in the proposal? Will the partners be able to react flexibly to unexpected developments that might occur during the lifetime of the network? Are there adequate tools for monitoring progress and communication flow between the partners? If the

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<sup>3</sup> (for a description of other types of activities in the JPA (research, management, spreading of excellence) see [http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/instr\\_noe.htm](http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/instr_noe.htm))

addition of participants during the period of Community funding is foreseen, how will the management structure adapt to this?

?? Proposals must include an **action plan regarding activities that will be developed to promote gender equality** in all forms within the project. How realistic/imaginative is the action plan? In addition, if there are gender issues associated with the subject of the proposal, have these been adequately taken into account?