Net4Mobility
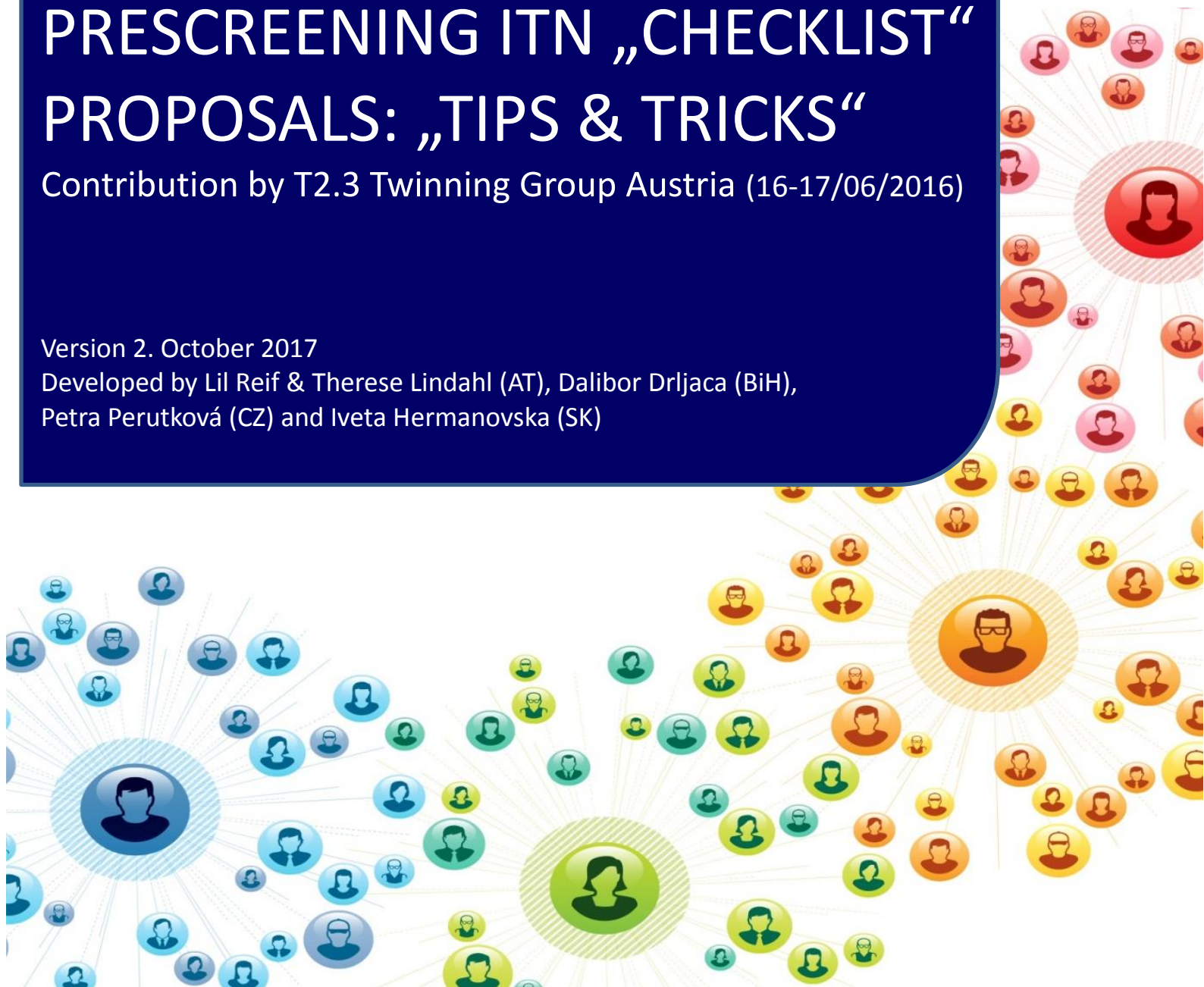
PRESCREENING ITN „CHECKLIST" PROPOSALS: „TIPS & TRICKS"

Contribution by T2.3 Twinning Group Austria (16-17/06/2016)

Contents

DISCLAIMER

This is an UNOFFICIAL document prepared by the EU-funded Project "Net4Mobility" (Grant No.: 640603) of National Contact Points (NCP) for the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA).

The information contained in this document and any others transmitted or attached to the same is **intended to assist and support, in an unofficial and easy-&-practical way, the (less experienced) MSCA NCPs interested in engaging in „Prescreening" Proposals for the Innovative Training Networks (ITN) Call**. It is therefore **NOT a substitute of European Commission Documents, which in all cases must be considered as official and prevailing**.

Introduction

The content of this document was outlined during a twinning workshop on ITN proposal screening, held in Vienna, in June 2016. The aim is to provide less experienced NCPs of MSCA with „tips and tricks" for ITN proposal prescreening. It is based on practical prescreening experience accumulated over the past years and summarizes some aspects and practical approaches helpful for newcomers and less experienced NCPs. Having mentioned this, it should be stressed that in practice, there is of course not *the one* right way to perform a prescreening. Instead, NCPs have various approaches of doing this work. This depends not only on the institutional / national context defining the way of supporting applicants, but also on individual working styles and preferred forms of interaction with applicants. Therefore, this document should be seen as a suggestion to less experienced NCPs, providing some ideas on how to make prescreening more effective and eventually also more efficient.

We hope you find this document useful and wish you a good prescreening for the next ITN calls to come ☺

Knowledge basis for proposal screening

Key documents

The central documents and thus, knowledge basis for prescreening, are:
a) the **current MSCA Work programme** and
b) the **current MSCA ITN Guide for Applicants**.

In addition, there **are other good documents and resources**:

− the "Guide for Evaluators", for example for the ITN call 2016
− the "FAQ section" of the Net4mobility section
− the „European Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training"
− the "Guidelines for Communication and outreach measures in MSCA"
− the "Guidelines on IPR issues in MSCA" provided by the IPR helpdesk
− the "H2020 online manual" available in the participant portal

Sources for inspiration…

Apart from the above mentioned documents, there are good other sources for inspiration which NCPs can suggest to applicants for the planning / improvment of an ITN, as they provide a whole range of ideas and best practice for training networks from universities all over Europe:

− **„Good practice Elements in Doctoral Training"**, published 2014 by LERU, the League of European Research Universities
− **„Quality assurance in Doctoral Education"**, published 2013 by EUA, the European University Association
− **„European Industrial Doctorates – towards increased employbility and innovation"**, published 2017 by the European Commission
− **„Providing researchers with the skills and competencies they need to practise Open Science"**, Report of the Working Group on Education and Skills under Open Science published 2017 by the European Commission – a good resource for a better understanding of skills related to Open Science, which are mentioned explicitly in the new Work programme for MSCA
− The **FOSTER initiative – Facilitate Open Science Training for European Research** provides a good source for skill training in the field of Open Science: www.fosteropenscience.eu
− The **„Gender-Net"** provides a list of links and ressources for promoting the gender dimension in research projects and content: http://www.gender-net.eu/spip.php?article38&lang=en

Important Policies: Charter and Code

Keep in mind: The principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers („Charter& Code") are a best effort obligation for funded projects. Meanwhile, a lot of institutions have endorsed the principles of Charter & Code, and some even applied for the HRS4R-Logo, an award for Excellence in Human Ressource for Research. One way or the other, it is good to make reference to this also in the text, thus highlighting commitment to these principles from an institutional perspective. Below you find at one glance the principles emphasized in the Guide for Applicants for ITNs proposals and the subchapter where these should be reflected.

Check that the applicant describes related aspects in "own words" and that there is no copy/paste from Charter and Code or the Guide for Applicants.

Supervision → Chapter 1.3

*Employers and/or funders should ensure that **a person is clearly identified** to whom Early-Stage Researchers can refer for the performance of their professional duties, and should inform the researchers accordingly.*

*Such arrangements should clearly define that the proposed supervisors are sufficiently **expert in supervising research**, have the **time, knowledge, experience, expertise and commitment** to be able to offer the research trainee appropriate support and provide for the necessary progress and review procedures, as well as the necessary feedback mechanisms.*

Cf. Charter for Researchers, p. 21

Recruitment& Selection → Chapter 3.2

*Employers/funders should establish recruitment procedures which are **open, efficient, transparent, supportive and internationally comparable,** as well as tailored to the type of positions advertised. Advertisements should give a broad description of knowledge and competencies required, and should not be so specialised as to discourage suitable applicants. Employers should include a description of the **working conditions and entitlements,** including **career development prospects**. Moreover, the time allowed between the advertisement of the vacancy or the call for applications and the deadline for reply should be realistic.*

***Selection committees** should bring together **diverse expertise and competences** and should have an adequate **gender balance** and, where appropriate and feasible, include members from **different sectors** (academic and non-academic, including enterprise) **and disciplines**, including from **other countries** and with relevant experience to assess the candidate. Whenever possible, a wide range of selection practices should be used, such as external expert assessment and face-to-face interviews. Members of selection panels should be adequately trained.*

Cf. Code of Conduct, p. 24

Dissemination, exploitation & public engagement → Chapter 2.3 and 2.4

***All researchers should ensure**, in compliance with their contractual arrangements, **that the results of their research are disseminated and exploited**, e.g. communicated, transferred into other research settings or, if appropriate, commercialised. Senior researchers, in particular, are expected to take a lead in ensuring that research is fruitful and that results are either **exploited commercially or made accessible to the public** (or both) whenever the opportunity arises.*

*Researchers should ensure that their **research activities are made known to society at large** in such a way that they can be understood by non-specialists, thereby **improving the public's understanding of science**. Direct engagement with the public will help researchers to better understand public interest in priorities for science and technology and also the public's concerns.*

Cf. Charter for Researchers, p. 13 f.

Important Principles: European Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training

To get an idea what is meant be „innovative" training funded in MSCA, make sure that you are acquainted with the European principles for doctoral training, encompassing the seven principles listed below – in full length, this is a nice, short 2-pager available here:

http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research_policies/Principles_for_Innovative_Doctoral_Training.pdf

Three of these principes are the so called „triple-i" – international, interdisciplinary, intersectoral (industry). Some aspects – for example „international networking" – is already inherent in an ITN due to the rules for participation. However, this aspect should also be well reflected in the description for networking activities in the training programme.

- Research Excellence
- Attractive institutional environment
- **Interdisciplinary** research options
- Exposure to **industry** and other employment sectors
- **International** networking
- Transferable skills training
- Quality assurance

Screening "All-at-once" or "With-a-little-structure"?

In general, one could of course do the prescreening in a "all-at-once"-mode, that is: simply reading the draft proposal from beginning to end, looking at all details and aspects outlined in the template and in the guide for applicants in parallel and preparing feedback right away.

Maybe this is feasible for very experienced NCPs, but even then, one shouldn't underestimate the length and complexity of each proposal, but also to mention the busy situation before deadlines, when NCPs deal with requests and prescreening proposals from different clients at the same time.

Therefore, we recommend newcomers and less experienced NCPs to "structure" a little bit the prescreening of proposals, for example in the following way:

First things first: quick check on formal requirements for an ITN
... ie size, countries, sector, LoIs

The second step: Overview of the structure of part B
... done quickly, but important

The 5-minutes-check on formatting/layout requirements
... quick and easy if based on a check list

Diving-into-part-B
... plan in a couple of hours for focused reading & writing feedback

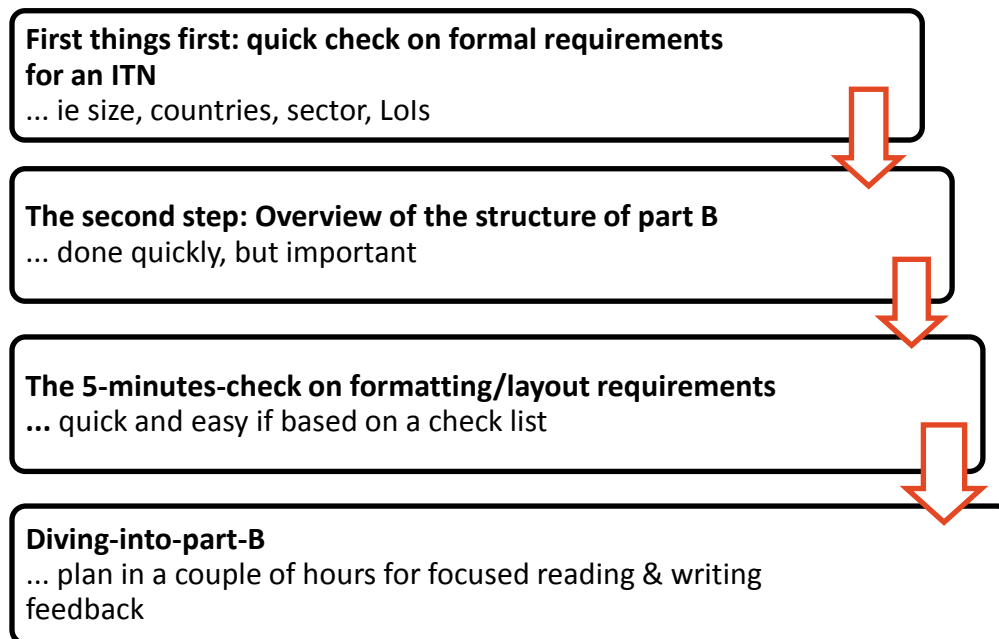FIGURE 1 PROPOSED PRE-SCREENING STEPS

First Things First: Quick Check on Formal Requirements

Before actually *reading* the proposal, we suggest **to check if the general requirements** for the ITN format in question are met. Why? In the case that one of the **mandatory requirements** are not met, for example, when the minimum number of countries or institutions is not met, the applicant should be informed immediately - instead of spending a couple of hours for reading the draft of an incomplete (and thus, ineligible) proposal. The introduction of missing features, partners, necessary changes in the programme etc. most probably will need quite some extra time: for additional communication between the partners involved, and at the end, leading to sometimes substantial changes in the description of the action. Hence, there is no sense to start a prescreening if the mandatory requirements are not met. At this stage, we also recommend to check **if letters of commitment (LoC) for all partner (in the case of EJD: also from all degree awarding institutions), are provided and up-to-date**. If not: ensure that the applicant is aware of this requirement, which means in practice: this should be communicated to the applicant as quickly as possible.

A list on the basic requirements called **"key points"** can be found in the Guide for applicants (GfA ITN 2018 version 1, on page 28-29), including also an overview of different features for the different ITN modes. An even quicker view including some softer features is given in the table below.

	ETN	EJD	EID
Consortium	min. 3 beneficiaries (academic/non-academic) from 3 different MS/AC	Min. 3 academic beneficiaries from 3 different MS/AC	Min. 2 beneficiaries from 2 different MS/AC and sectors (enterprise)
	→ Additional beneficiaries or partner organisations possible, regardless whether MS, AC, TC		
Funding (max. nr. of units)	540 ! max. 40% of the budget for one country	540 ! max. 40% of the budget for one country	! 180 if 2 beneficiaries; if more than 2: 540 ! max. 40% of the budget for one country if more than 2 beneficiaries
Enrollment	not mandatory, but typically enrolled	enrollment in doctoral programme mandatory	
Joint supervision	not obligatory, but advised	Mandatory	
Recruitment	3 – 36 months	typically 36 months	typically 36 months ! min 50% must be spend in the non-academic sector
Secondments	Optional, up to 30% of recruitment period	Optional, above requirements of doctoral programme: secondments up to 30% of overall recruitment period	spend least 50% in the non-academic sector; has to be cross-country Additional secondments up to 30% of overall recruitment period

TABLE 1. MOST IMPORTANT ITN-FEATURES AT A GLANCE

Step Nr. 2: Check Stucture of Part B

As a second step, not less important, we suggest **to check the structure of the proposal**, which means if the applicants have used the correct template, headings, if all necessary tables are included. Why should one do this before the actual reading? In practice, it sometimes happens that applicants do not follow the structure provided in the template, but use their own. Under these circumstances, feedback on the proposal becomes very extensive; it turns from "making suggestions to improve" towards "rewriting the proposal" - which is not the aim of prescreening and feedback. It can also happen that applicants prepare a resubmission of a proposal, using the old template and thus, overlooking possible changes from one year to the other. Particularly for less experienced NCPs or newcomers, this is sometimes hard to recognize.

To keep the process of checking the correct proposal structure short, we recommend to set up a list on the structure of part B similar to the example provided on the next page, with all mandatory chapters, subchapters etc. at one glance to be printed out. Apart from a quicker verification, such an overview of the structure helps to get acquainted much quicker with the content of the different proposal sections. When writing feedback later on, this is also a helpful thing, as this goes much quicker than if one has to browse for the respective section and related numbering over and over again in the template or proposal.

Example of Part B Structure for printing

START PAGE (1 page)
TABLE OF CONTENTS (1 page)
LIST OF PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS (max. 2 pages)

1. Excellence (starts on page 4 or 5, depending on list of participants)
1.1 Quality, innovative aspects and credibility of the research programme
- introduction, objectives and overview of the research programme
- research methodology and approach
- originality and innovative aspects of the research programme
- Table 1.1 - Work package list

1.2 Quality and innovative aspects of the training programme
- Overview and content structure of the training (ETN) or doctoral programme (EID/EJD)
- Role of non-academic sector in the training programme
- Table 1.2 a) Recruitment Deliverables per Beneficiary
- Table 1.2 b) Main Network-Wide Training Events, Conferences and Contribution of Beneficiaries

1.3 Quality of the Supervision (joint supervision for EJD/EID)
- Qualifications and supervision experience of supervisors
- Quality of the joint supervision arrangements (mandatory for EJD/EID)

1.4 Quality of the proposed interaction between the participating organisations
- Contribution of all participating organisations to the research and training programme
- Synergies between participating organisations
- Exposure of recruited researchers to different (research) environments & complementarity thereof

2. Impact
2.1 Enhancing career perspectives & employability of researchers, contribution to skills development
2.2 Contribution to structuring doctoral/early-stage research training at European level
- Contribution of the non-academic sector to the doctoral research training
- Developing sustainable joint dotoral degree structures (EJD only)

2.3 Quality of the proposed measures to exploit and disseminate the results
- Dissemination of the research results
- Exploitation of results and intellectual property

2.4 Quality of the proposed measures to communicate the activities to different target audiences
- Communication and public engagement strategy

3. Quality and Efficiency of the Implementation
3.1 Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan
- Table 3.1 a Work packages description
- Table 3.1.b List of major deliverables
- Table 3.1.c List of major milestones
- Table 3.1.d Fellows' individual projects
- Gantt chart including secondment plan

3.2 Appropriateness of the management structures and procedures
- Network organisation and management structure
- Joint governing strcture (EID/EJD)
- Joint admission, selection, supervision, monitoring and assessment procedures (EJD)
- Supervisory board
- Recruitment strategy
- Progress monitoring and evaluation of individual projects
- Risk management at consortium level (Table 3.2a "Implementation risks")
- Intellectual property rights (IPR)
- Gender aspects (recruitment and decision making)
- Data management plan (if participating in Open Data Pilot)

3.3 Approriateness of the infrastructure of the participating organisations
3.4 Competences, experience & complementarity of the participating organisations, and their commitment
- Consortium composition and exploitation of participaing organisations complementarities
- Commitment of beneficiaries and partner organisations to the programme
- Funding of non-associated third countries (if applicable)
- Partner organisations role and contribution to the research and training activities   **END of document 1**

4. Gantt chart
5. Participating Organisations (max. 1 page per beneficiary, max. 1/2 page per partner)
6. Ethics issues
7. Letters of Institutional Committment

The 5-Minutes-Check on Format/Layout

Requirements on formatting/layout can be checked quickly, based on a simple list as provided on the next page for printing. Such a list will save you time to browse the Guide for applicants on details over and over again. When working such a list, it is important *to check the requirements at the call opening, based on the current GfA*.

Depending on your individual working style and preferences to give feedback, you might use this list in excel file format as shown in the example below. Once done electronically, you can later on easily transfer the feedback towards clients, so it safes time again.

Another approach would be to simply go through the list, ticking items and in case something is missing, write it directly in the draft proposal document, at the beginning, as a general comment on format/layout.

Formalia ITN 2018	ETN "Examplified"	EJD "United"
WHAT	comment	comment
2 Docs for part B	ok	doc 2 missing
Part B "complete": LoCs per Partner	ok	LoC for VIA missing
Part B "complete" EJD: LoCs degree awarding institutions	na	missing
min 150 mm margins - without footers/headers	ok	so small - 110 mm
Font size main text min.11 pt	ok	ok
Font size foot notes 8 pt	too small	ok
Font size Table partner information 9 pt	too small	ok
Font size tables and gantt chart 8 pt	too small	ok
literature references in footnotes min 8 pt, not extra	to big	
text/pics are legible? (readable --> print black/white?)	fig 2 hard to read	ok
readible: check number of characters (max 5000-6000 per	to small/narrow (6354)	ok
Doc 1 Start page, max. 2 pages for participants, if less: blar	ok	ok
Section 1 starts on page 5	ok	ok
Sections 1-3 max. 30 p	ok	over 30 - shorten!
Beneficiary information max. 1 p. per organisation	ok	ok
Partner information max. 1/2 per Organisation	ok	ok
struture and headings in line with template	! old template - revise	ok
Header Akronym and Type of ITN	ok	ok
Frontpage Akronym and Type of ITN	ok	ok
Page numbering correct Part B - X of Y	missing	ok
List needs to be cross-checked / adapted before each call		
Suggest to use this list together with content overview		

FIGURE 2 EXAMPLE OF ITN FORMALIA LIST IN MS EXCELL

Formalia ITN 2018 – Part B Doc 1 and Doc 2

☐   Part B consists of 2 documents (doc 1 chapter 1-3, doc 2 chapter 4-7)

☐   Structure and (sub-)headings of part B are in line with template

☐   Frontpage acronym and Type of ITN

☐   Doc 1 begins with Start page, Content page & max. 2 pages for „participanting organisations" – if less than 2 pages needed: leave second page blank

☐   Doc 1 Section 1 starts on page 5

☐   Doc 1 Sections 1-3 cover max. 30 p Header: acronym and Type of ITN

☐   Footer: page numbering correct: Part B - X of Y

☐   If partner: LoC from each partner included

☐   If EJD: LoC from degree awarding institution included – cross-check with template

☐   Font size main text min. 11 pt: max. 5000 - 6000 characters including spaces / page

☐   Font size foot notes min. 8 pt

☐   Font size tables and gantt chart min. 8 pt

☐   Font size tables participant information min. 9 pt

☐   Margins min. 150 mm

☐   Text and pics are easy to read visually, especially if printed in black/white

☐   Doc 2 Beneficiary information max. 1 page per organisation

☐   Doc 2 Partner information max. 1/2 page per organisation

Diving in Part B… Meet the Evaluation Criteria

CRITERIA 1 "Excellence" (Chapter 1)

1.1   Quality, innovative aspects and credibility of the research programme (including inter/multidisciplinary, intersectoral and, where appropriate, gender aspects)

> **For Chapter 1 – 3 in general: Check if the "triple-i-dimension" is easy to identify in the presentation of the research and training programme:** is it interdisciplinary – intersectoral?

> **Is the relevance of the research topic stated clearly?**

> **Can you easily identify interdisciplinary & intersectoral aspects?**

> **Check if the link between the individual ESR projects and the overall research programme is made clear**

> **Are gender aspects relevant for the research topic?**
> **➔ If yes: are these aspects stated clearly?**

1.2 Quality and innovative aspects of the training programme (including transferable skills, inter/multidisciplinary, intersectoral and, where appropriate, gender aspects)

> **Check for three general training aspects:**
> **1) Scientific training** - "through research" --> the sub project of the ESR
> **2) Additional scientific training**, including those in the network
> **3) Training in soft, transferable or complementary skills**

> **Check: Is the role of the non-academic partner for the training well described?**

> **If appropriate: Are gender aspects part of the training programme?**

> **Are skills related to Open Science or RRI part of the training**

1.3 Quality of Supervision (qualification and supervision experience, joint supervision arrangements)

Check that a) qualification of the supervisors and b) their experience in supervision is clearly stated.

This chapter should read well together with partner information in chapter 5

Good to have „Supervisor teams", also for ETNs
→ e.g. one from each sector (A/N-A)

1.4 Quality of the proposed interaction between the participating organisations

Check the explanation:

Can you easily identify the contribution of all participating organisations to the research/training programme?

Are all organisations included and represented adequately?

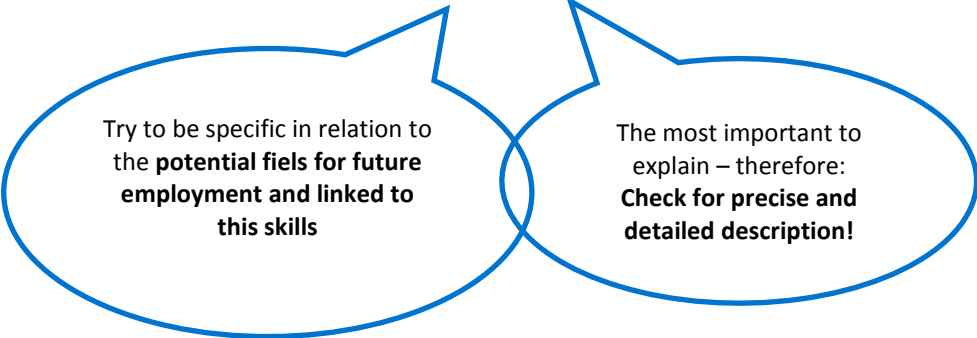Tip: Sometimes tables or figures for illustration can be helpful

Check if the exposure of the ESRs to different research environments is well described.

Is it clear that all organisations are qualified for the tasks they are assigned for?

Are the synergies easy to identify?

CRITERIA 2 „Impact" (Chapter 2)

2.1 Enhancing the career perspectives and employability of researchers and contribution to their skills development
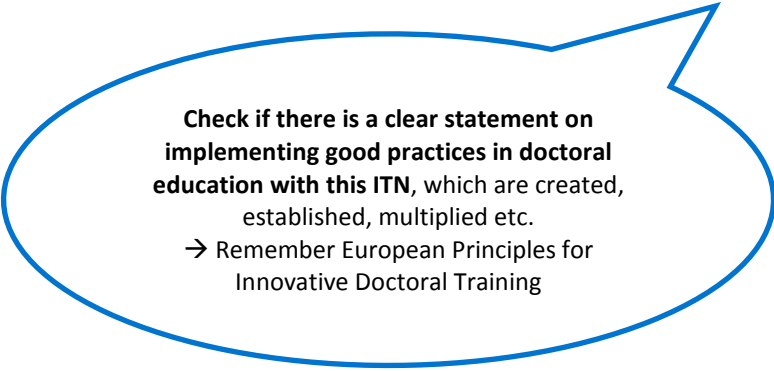
Try to be specific in relation to the **potential fiels for future employment and linked to this skills**

The most important to explain – therefore: **Check for precise and detailed description!**

2.2 Contribution to structuring doctoral / early-stage research training at the European level and to strengthening European innovation capacity, including the potential for:
- Contribution of the non-academic sector to the doctoral / research training, **as appropriate** to the implementation mode (ETN/EJD/EID) and research field
- Contribution to developing sustainable joint doctoral degree structures (for EJD only)

Check if there is a clear statement on implementing good practices in doctoral education with this ITN, which are created, established, multiplied etc.
→ Remember European Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training

2.3 Quality of the proposed measures to exploit and disseminate the project results

- Dissemination of the research results
- Exploitation of results and intellectual property

For chapter 2.3 and 2.4: remember the statement on dissemination, exploitation and communication from Charter & Code.

Check if Open Research Data will be implemented? (if applicable)

Check how Open Access will be implemented?

Check if there are concrete **plans** for dissemination and exploitation and the tables?

Check if there are exploitation and dissemination strategies - What will happen with the results? What would be the next step? To whom can it

Check for short description of background and IP results? Include a plan for IP and exploitation as a deliverable at the beginning of the project. Mention that details will be part of the CA

2.4 Quality of the proposed measures to communicate the project activities to different target audiences

- Communication and public engagement strategy of the project

Check for clear division between target groups, methods and tools for communication and outreach?

Check: is there communication and public engagement strategy in place?

Check: Are there concrete **plans** in the tables?

CRITERIA 3 "Implementation" (Chapter 3)

3.1 Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources (including awarding of doctoral degrees for EID and EJD)

Even though not necessary for the proposal, but might be relevant to some countries due to doctoral study regulations: **how can a 4th year (if applicable) be financed?**

Wording/numbering etc. should match easily the description from previous chapters. Check if this is coherent.

3.2 Appropriateness of the management structure and procedures, including quality management and risk management (with a mandatory joint governing structure for EID and EJD)

- Network organisation and management structure, including financial management strategy, strategy for dealing with scientific misconduct
- Joint governing structure (mandatory for EID and EJD actions)
- EJD: joint admission, selection, supervision, monitoring and assessment procedures
- Supervisory board
- Recruitment Strategy
- Progress monitoring
- Risk management at Consortium level
- Intellectual Property rights
- Gender aspects (Recruitment, decision-making within the action
- Data-management plan, if applicable

The network organization should fit to the project, but „better keep it simple"!

Check: Are all project participants (beneficiaries AND partner organisations) must be represented in the Supervisory Board
Tip: It is good to include an representative of the ESRs

Tip: It can help to use charts etc. to explain in detail for example the flow of documents, the decision making process, the selection process, the consortium structure etc.
If charts etc. are used: check if these are embedded in the text.
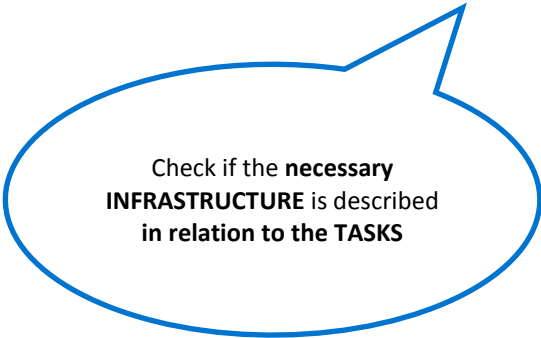
Check recruitment procedure especially
Recruitment related:
- Job posting (Euraxess mandatory)
- Open, merit based
- Selection of the ESRs
- Decision making
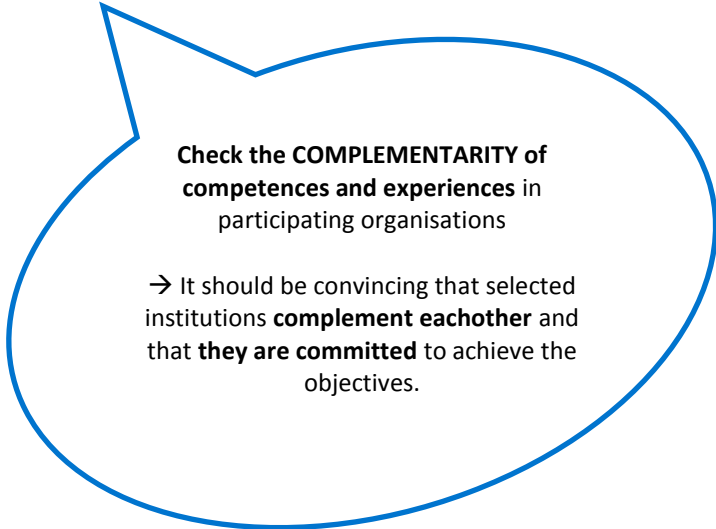- Equal opportunities (gender, nationality, religion…)
- etc.

3.3 Appropriateness of the infrastructure of the participating organisations

Explain the **appropriateness of the infrastructure** of each participating organisation, as outlined in Section 5 (Participating Organisations), **in light of the tasks allocated** to them in the action.

Check if the **necessary INFRASTRUCTURE** is described **in relation to the TASKS**

3.4 Competences, experience and complementarity of the participating organisations and their commitment to the programme

Check the COMPLEMENTARITY of competences and experiences in participating organisations

→ It should be convincing that selected institutions **complement eachother** and that **they are committed** to achieve the objectives.

Chapter 4 – 6 „Varia"

- ☐ Chapter 4: Gantt chart: check if the 30%-Secondment rule is respected
- ☐ Chapter 5: Is information provided about the extent of involvement in the action (percentage of full-time employment per person/beneficiary)
- ☐ Chapter 6: If ethical issues → needs to be cross-referenced and matching with information part A