

EWGIC OPINION ON EIC ACCELERATOR UNDER HORIZON EUROPE

Will the new format of the EIC Accelerator reduce the part of luck vs skills in the selection of the European deeptech champions?

Foreword

The EIC Accelerator (launched under the “SME instrument” brand in 2014) has become the largest and most competitive public funding scheme for deeptech startups in Europe. With success rates falling rapidly below 1% (over 5,000 submissions expected in October 2020 vs funding available for 30-40 companies), the EIC Accelerator has fallen victim to its popularity.

Today, success in this programme requires a very high quality application, and a fair amount of luck (represented by the subjective opinion of third party evaluators).

In his science blog [Veritasium](#), Derek Muller makes an excellent summary of the contribution of luck to highly competitive selection processes: check this video (in particular [the part starting at 3:32](#)).

To summarize his point: Derek took the most recent class of NASA astronauts, where only 11 were selected out of 18,300 applicants, and simulated a selection process where astronauts are selected mostly based on skills, experience and hard work (95% of the evaluation weight) but also based on luck (5% of the evaluation weight). For each applicant, he generated a luck score out of 100, then added those numbers together weighted in a 95-5 ratio, to produce the final ranking. Then he went on and repeated this simulation 1,000 times, representing a 1,000 different selection processes. What he found is that the 11 astronauts that were picked had a very high “luck” score on average (94.7). He also found that, out of the 11 astronauts selected, only 1.6 on average (less than 20% of the astronaut class) would have been in the top 11 if luck had not played any role. The conclusion: when competition is fierce, being talented and hardworking is important, but not enough to guarantee success: you also need the “luck factor”.

Applying this line of reasoning to the EIC Accelerator, one can easily understand why the current evaluation process is not conducive to the best companies applying to the programme.

In the EIC Accelerator context, the “luck factor” is the difference between a proposal scoring 13.9 (excellent but not invited to interview) and a proposal scoring 14.2 (excellent and invited to interview). As the CEO of a deeptech startup, if I feel that 80% of the companies selected for funding got there by a combination of skills and luck (not only skills), I am less tempted to invest the 200h+ required to complete a high quality grant application.

To address this issue, the EIC Task Force is considering radical changes to the submission process under Horizon Europe. This position paper summarizes the most important changes as well as their expected impacts, and offers a few ideas for improving the programme further.

Highlights

The EIC Task Force has put forward a radically new evaluation process with a pre-screening stage (short application), a regular written stage (full application) and an interview stage. The scoring scale (out of 15) is replaced with a simple "go / no go" approach. Most importantly, only two submissions are allowed at each stage before a 24-month cooling off period.

Overall, these changes are likely to be **favourable to the best applicants** as they will reduce the application "noise" (sub-par applications that will not go through the pre-screening, less resubmissions overall), allowing the EC to provide higher quality evaluations of a smaller set of full stage applications, and therefore reducing the "luck factor" of the evaluation process.

However, the approach will also put a higher responsibility on a smaller number of evaluators, which as a result, must be carefully selected and trained. We present in this paper 15 possible improvement areas that should result in a fair and transparent evaluation process. Of these 15 proposals, we highlight the 3 most important below:

1. Assuming the number of full applications has decreased sufficiently, **the use of an (online) consensus meeting and the involvement of 3 evaluators at full application stage** would eliminate potential "evaluation mistakes" (one evaluator misreading the proposal and giving a "no go" on one criterion would reject the proposal without any chance for contradictory discussion with other evaluators).
2. **All evaluators should receive detailed guidelines** to evaluate key criteria (e.g. TRL, non-bankability/risk) based on the same rules. The guidelines should include concrete cases of what is deemed and not deemed "bankable", and what is TRL5/6 in multiple industries (as these guidelines already exist in most cases).
3. **All evaluators should be regularly tested about their knowledge** of the evaluation process (e.g. with an online survey) and re-trained when they are scoring under a certain threshold (especially when evaluation criteria keep changing during the course of the programme, as it has been the case under Horizon 2020)

Challenge 1: reducing oversubscription

The EIC Accelerator programme has suffered from a “snowball” effect as it allowed resubmission of all proposals, regardless of the score they achieved in the previous submission. This has led the success rate to drop over time, from 4% in October 2019 to 2.5% in January 2020 and less than 1% expected in October 2020.



The EIC Advisory Board presented recently their [vision and roadmap for Horizon Europe](#):

Entrepreneurs (startups, potential scaleups) should be able to get *fast feedback based on a short, simple application which they can easily complete themselves* – it should be similar in format to the pitch decks expected by VCs. The EIC should use this fast feedback to screen out large number of startups and applicants who do not fit the EIC profile, and so avoid these companies spending time (and consultancy fees) preparing the full applications. Such companies should be directed to other sources. Companies should not be allowed to resubmit the same proposal multiple times. We recommend a “second chance” approach, whereby promising proposals are allowed to resubmit once only, but with significant improvements expected.

This led the EC to implement two major changes in the EIC 2021 Work Programme:

- A new pre-screening stage where applicants can submit a short application at any time, consisting of a 5-page, a pitch deck and a video pitch.
- A strict limitation of 2 consecutive submissions at any given stage, after which applicants will not be able to submit again for 24 months from the date of the second submission.

This is a **commendable effort** to reduce the oversubscription (and therefore the importance of the “luck factor”) but it comes with a **very high responsibility for the 2 evaluators** in charge of filtering in/out the application at any of the two attempts.

Another issue is that this new process does not differentiate low quality applications (a 10+ application in the current scheme) from high quality applications (a 13+ application in the current scheme) at the short application stage (seals of excellence will only be given at the full proposal stage or after the interview).

The process (at the short application and full application stages) now involves two evaluators who must assess whether the application meets each of the evaluation criteria (“go” or “no go” for each criterion). This approach does not support the granularity of the previous scoring scheme (where all proposals were scored out of 15 with 2 decimal places) as it now only has 2 outcomes: “go” or “no go”.

The upside is that the new approach solves one of the major issues of the previous programme, as it forces the expert to take a clear position (“go” or “no go”) and therefore to use the full scoring scale (from 0 to 1 with no intermediary result). The previous scoring scale (out of 15) was interpreted very differently from one evaluator to another. Some evaluators felt that 13 was an excellent score they were giving, as they were not aware of the interview threshold being 14+ (so, in practice, they were condemning the proposal despite considering it as excellent).

The downside is that the new approach cannot differentiate between a poor proposal (“no go” on all criteria) and a very-good-but-not-excellent proposal (“no go” on only one criterion), although seals of excellence can be delivered:

- At full proposal stage, if you have not been selected for interviews but have met the excellence and impact criteria (meaning you have failed on the implementation criteria, which currently includes the risk/bankability aspect).
- At interview stage, based on the decision of the expert panel (criteria not mentioned at this point).

It seems that the SoE mechanism is meant for companies that score highly on innovation and impact, but are not risky enough to be in the scope of the EIC. However, this would create a disadvantage for high-risk proposals, if the interview panel is instructed to give SoEs only to low-risk proposals that should be redirected to other funding instruments, while rejected high-risk proposals have to go to the cooling-off period without SoE.

The short application step involves 2 evaluators and has 3 possible outcomes (one of them requiring to call 2 more evaluators to decide).

If both initial experts score all criteria as “go”, the result is a “go” (invited to full application stage):

Outcome: Go	Expert 1	Expert 2
Criterion 1	Go	Go
Criterion 2	Go	Go
Criterion 3	Go	Go
Overall	Go	Go

If both initial experts score a criterion (same or different one) as “no go”, the result is a “no go”:

Outcome: No Go	Expert 1	Expert 2
Criterion 1	No Go	Go
Criterion 2	Go	No Go
Criterion 3	Go	Go
Overall	No Go	No Go

If one expert scores an overall “go” and the other one an overall “no go”, additional evaluators are brought in:

Outcome: New Experts	Expert 1	Expert 2
Criterion 1	No Go	Go
Criterion 2	Go	Go
Criterion 3	Go	Go
Overall	No Go	Go

This leads to two additional possible outcomes involving 2 more experts.

If at least one of the 2 additional experts also gives a “go”, then the overall outcome is a “go”:

Outcome: New Experts - Go	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Expert 4
Criterion 1	Go	Go	Go	Go
Criterion 2	Go	No Go	Go	No Go
Criterion 3	Go	Go	Go	Go
Overall	Go	No Go	Go	No Go

If both additional experts also give a “no go”, then the overall outcome is a “no go”:

Outcome: New Experts - No Go	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Expert 4
Criterion 1	Go	Go	Go	Go
Criterion 2	Go	No Go	No Go	No Go
Criterion 3	Go	Go	Go	Go
Overall	Go	No Go	No Go	No Go

The full application step involves 2 evaluators and has only 2 outcomes.

If both experts score all criteria as “go”, the result is a “go” (invited to interview):

Outcome: Go	Expert 1	Expert 2
Criterion 1	Go	Go
Criterion 2	Go	Go
Criterion 3	Go	Go
Overall	Go	Go

If any expert score any criterion as “no go”, the result is a “no go”:

Outcome: No Go	Expert 1	Expert 2
Criterion 1	Go	No Go
Criterion 2	Go	Go
Criterion 3	Go	Go
Overall	Go	No Go

The interview step involves a maximum of 6 [jury members](#) and has 4 possible outcomes:

- granting the funding
- allowing you to reapply directly to a new interview
- giving you a seal of excellence (SoE) and encouraging to look for alternative sources of funding
- not allowing you to resubmit for 24 months (similar outcome to the above, minus the seal of excellence)

Note: the difference between the last 2 options is not totally clear yet: are the cases receiving the SoE allowed to resubmit after the 24-month cooling off, or are they forbidden to resubmit at all in the programme (because they are deemed “not risky enough for the EIC Accelerator”)?

Our recommendations:

1. At the short application and full application stages, evaluators **should be completely new** between the two evaluations of the same proposal (to guarantee the absence of bias)
2. At the short application and full application stages, the cooling off period could be **reduced to 12 months** for the “best” unsuccessful applications (this would require a ranking process based on the number of “no go”)
3. At full proposal stage only, **a third submission** could be granted before their cooling off period (because the investment in developing a full proposal is much larger than at the short application stage) OR, assuming the number of applications has decreased sufficiently, the **use of an (online) consensus meeting and 3 evaluators** would eliminate potential “evaluation mistakes” (one evaluator misreading the proposal and giving a “no go” on one criterion would reject the proposal without any chance for contradictory discussion with other experts).

4. At the interview stage, evaluators should receive **clear guidelines** about how to allocate cases to the 3 different negative outcomes (there is a substantial difference between getting a new interview chance, vs being rejected with or without SoE).
5. **SoE should be awarded to all high quality proposals** (together with the 24-month cooling off period), not only low-risk ones, so they have equal chances to raise funding from alternative sources.

Challenge 2: a fair evaluation with clear evaluation criteria

Reducing the “luck factor” requires making the evaluation process as objective as possible, and reducing the risk for the experts to misinterpret key evaluation criteria. This is especially important for two evaluation criteria that have been causing major headaches for evaluators.

Non Bankability

In the current scheme, evaluators receive the following guidelines:

Please pay particular attention to the ‘bankability’ sub-criteria under Implementation in the IER – “Evidence that the applicant company cannot leverage sufficient investments from the market and/ or, particularly for applicant companies requesting blended finance support, evidence that the applicant company is deemed ‘non- bankable’ by the market, in view of the activities to be developed”.

- *If your assessment finds that the company is able to raise sufficient funds for development of the described activities then you should consider it to be bankable and score below 5 with supporting comments.*
- *If your assessment finds that the company is NOT able to raise sufficient funds for development of the described activities, then you should consider it to be non-bankable and score above 8 with supporting comments.*

The sensitivity of the evaluation process means that, if a majority of evaluators score this individual criteria below 5 (out of 10), the score will move by 0.2-0.3 (out of 15) and a 14+ score (invited to interview) will turn in a 13.8 score (not invited to interview). If the new evaluation process involves, for example, 4 criteria, and one of them is “the financial angle”, then it is likely that “non-bankability” would make or break a successful evaluation of this particular criteria as well.

Is that a bad thing? Not necessarily, if the criterion is well understood by the evaluators and applied fairly throughout all cases.

However, we have observed 3 major biases related to this new criterion:

- Some evaluators believe that only companies who have not been able to raise any funding are non-bankable. This means they only select the weakest and least convincing companies to the next stage.
- Some evaluators evaluate companies that are in D or E rounds as non-bankable just because it is difficult to raise such large rounds. While some of them could indeed be non-bankable, it feels dangerous to start focusing on these companies, as they will naturally absorb most of the budget available (€164M of funding = 11 companies raising a D-round out of a pool of 4,000, i.e. a 0.25% success rate).
- Some evaluators evaluate bankability in terms of size of funding. For example a company that has raised over €5M must be bankable, regardless of the industry in which it operates (in practice, €5M is a lot of money for a SaaS start-up but not a lot for a deeptech hardware start-up).

Note the following change in 2021: "grant component only" (i.e. maximum €2.5 million to cover TRL 5/6 to 8 and without requesting an investment component for TRL 9) is now an exception under the following conditions: "you can provide evidence that you have sufficient financial means (e.g. revenue flow, existing investors or shareholders) to finance the deployment and scaling up of your innovation. In such a case, you will have to detail in your proposal all elements demonstrating that **you possess or are in the process to obtain those necessary resources and financial means to provide for necessary TRL 9 expenditures** normally covered by the "investment component".

This essentially means that the company should be bankable, which might be confusing for all evaluators who have been discarding such applications so far as per the previous rules.

Technology Readiness Level (TRL)

Here we observe discrepancies in the EC's own guidelines, as well as a lack of industry-specific guidance.

For example, the [new work programme](#) clearly states "If the activity concerns a primarily technological innovation, **a TRL of 5/6 or above** is required for primarily technological innovation or the equivalent for non-technological innovation". Unfortunately, up until the May deadline, the [official evaluation form](#) (used in the evaluation process) still stated "realistic description of current stage of development, **at least TRL 6**, or something analogous for non-technological innovations".

So, although the official rules now allow a company that has reached TRL 5 to apply, in practice, evaluators are required to only consider companies that have reached TRL 6.

Worse, there are no detailed guidelines to properly evaluate TRLs, which creates significant problems in several industries. Take the standard H2020 guidelines outlined below.

HORIZON 2020 WORK PROGRAMME 2018-2020 19. General Annexes, G. Technology readiness levels (TRL)

TRL	Description
TRL 1	basic principles observed
TRL 2	technology concept formulated
TRL 3	experimental proof of concept
TRL 4	technology validated in lab
TRL 5	technology validated in relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies)
TRL 6	technology demonstrated in relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies)
TRL 7	system prototype demonstration in operational environment
TRL 8	system complete and qualified
TRL 9	actual system proven in operational environment (competitive manufacturing in the case of key enabling technologies; or in space)

Research and
Innovation
Action

Innovation Action

SME
instrument

Now, how do you apply these guidelines to the ocean energy industry? Does TRL5/6 mean that you need to have a 1:1 scale (realistic prototype) wave energy converter before applying to the EIC Accelerator?

Not at all. If you study [industry-specific documents](#), you will find that TRL5 is typically 1:15 to 1:4 scale subsystems tested in a laboratory or fetch-limited site

ESBI TRL 5: Reduced Risk Subsystem Verification – 1:15 to 1:4 scale subsystems tested in a laboratory or fetch-limited site.

Functional Readiness	Lifecycle Readiness	ESBI Verification Checklist	Indicative :
<p>Technology component and/or basic technology subsystem validation in a relevant environment.</p> <p>HMRC Development and Evaluation PHASE 3 (Lab Tests / fetch-limited site)</p> <p>Absorber: <i>Performance:</i> Experimental verification of 1:4-1:15 scale (or larger) moored structure in large basin facility or benign site. Measurement of dynamic response to operational sea-state excitation. Conservative control methods may be employed at this stage. Measured response behaviour compared to expectations from numerical simulation for validation. <i>Validated simulation used to extrapolate performance to full-scale with fully operational control.</i> <i>Survivability:</i> Experimental 1:4-1:15 scale (or larger) moored structure exposed to scaled storm events in the sea. Mooring forces measured and compared to numerical model predictions.</p> <p>PTO / End-stop control: Experimental verification of PTO system at 1:4 (or larger) Froude scale power levels in laboratory environment (or within scaled sea-trial oscillator).</p> <p>Power Export: Experimental verification at 1:4 scale or larger of any unconventional components. (e.g. mechanical integrity of electrical risers in large waves/shallow water, marineised electrical substations, 11kV wet mate connectors)</p> <p>Naval Architecture: Static and Dynamic stability and other naval architecture concerns are addressed. Early structural layouts for commercial scale complete. Detail designs for TRL 6 scale structure.</p> <p>Operability / SCADA: SCADA and telemetry developed to support large scale experiments control and data acquisition.</p> <p>System Definition (commercial): System and interface definition for commercial scale system is further detailed and updated with supplier feedback and test information.</p> <p>System Definition (next phase): Full detail design definition for 1:4 (or larger) scale system and subsystems suitable for procurement exercise for TRL 6 testing. Experimental schedule for TRL 6 testing drafted.</p>	<p>Supply-chain Mobilisation Major Subsystem Integrators consulted and actively working on meeting subsystem requirements</p> <p>Health & Safety: Risk Assessments (HAZOP / HAZID) complete for all phases of scaled sea / lake / basin trial activity. Design/Process changes implemented to eliminate identified risks. Event Log in place to catch arising risks and hazardous events. Impacts on commercial product considered.</p> <p>Health & Safety / Insurability: In respect of sea / lake trials, inspections and reports by a marine surveyor / classification society should be used to obtain all insurance deemed necessary.</p> <p>Interface Management: Supply chain feedback and interaction used to define important interfaces and to iterate the system level definition.</p> <p>Maintainability / Deployability (commercial): Intervention and deployment operations described. Warranty Surveyors assessment of planned marine operations is available.</p> <p>Manufacturability (commercial): Consultation with potential suppliers on fabrication and assembly at commercial scale. Design update as required.</p> <p>Manufacturability (next phase): Structural design, fabrication, assembly and fit-out of TRL 6 structure at advanced stage of planning with suppliers consulted.</p> <p>Deployability (next phase): TRL 6 Installation & Removal Operations of foundation, mooring systems and device from quayside to experimental site are defined.</p> <p>Economic Viability: Updated business model using supplier derived cost estimates and where possible, quotations.</p>	<p>Consistent with ESBI Requirements:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Simulation predictions of device motion shown to match measured response of structure in basin / sea.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> PTO conversion simulation and large scale experimental testing indicating that the required conversion efficiency can be achieved for power flows associated with irregular waves.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Updated power matrix based on validated simulation & PTO conversion efficiencies.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Scaled storm survival and acceptable mooring loads. Measurements consistent with simulation predictions.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> SCADA for remote control of an offshore system developed.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Health & Safety HAZID / HAZOP reports and effected design changes. Event log procedure in place.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Marine surveyors consulted for large scale experimental work. Appropriate insurance obtained for activity.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Warranty surveyor assessment of proposed deployment and intervention marine operations.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Commercial system definition updated with supplier derived data.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> TRL 6 hardware system definition, experimental plan, fabricators and marine operations suppliers in place.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Commercial business model updated with converted energy production and supplier derived cost estimates.</p>	<p>Spend: €3-5m</p> <p>Power Revenue: None</p> <p>Funding Mix: Govt Research Grants. Strategic investment (VC, utility, system integrator)</p> <p>Duration: 12-18 months</p> <p>Team: 10-15 staff covering simulation, control, structural, electrical design & definition, commercial & procurement. Plus subcontract support & steel fabrication.</p>

Unfortunately, these detailed TRL guidelines are not provided to the evaluators, who then might incorrectly assume that, unless you have a 1:1 scale model of your device, you do not qualify for the EIC Accelerator (note that 1:1 wave energy devices are typically at TRL8 and cost over €15- 20M to develop, making it clearly beyond the maturity stage of an EIC Accelerator applicant).

We observe exactly the same issue in the healthcare industry. Does TRL5/6 mean that you need to have a drug / medical device already tested on humans before applying to the EIC Accelerator?

Absolutely not. EIT Health has even produced [detailed guidelines](#) on TRLs in the healthcare industry. Unfortunately, these have not been made available to EIC evaluators.



TRL 9	Post marketing studies and surveillance
TRL 8	Phase 3 clinical trial is completed. FDA (CDER) approves New Drug Application (NDA)
TRL 7	Phase 2 clinical trial is completed. Phase 3 clinical trial plan is approved by FDA (CDER)
TRL 6	Phase 1 clinical trials support proceeding to phase 2 clinical trials. Investigational New Drug (IND) application submitted to and reviewed by FDA (CDER)
TRL 5	Pre-clinical studies, including GLP animal safety & toxicity, sufficient to support IND application
TRL 4	PoC and safety of candidate drug formulation is demonstrated in a defined laboratory or animal model
TRL 3	Hypothesis testing and initial proof of concept (PoC) is demonstrated in a limited number of <i>in vitro</i> & <i>in vivo</i> models
TRL 2	Research ideas and protocols are developed

Clearly, it is sufficient to have completed pre-clinical (animal) studies to apply to the EIC Accelerator. However, some evaluators are clearly dis-regarding this point. Here is a recent ESR from a company that had completed all animal studies and reached the EIC interview:

The commercialisation strategy is thought through. The jury is not convinced that the current progress is sufficiently advanced to TRL 5-6, to judge future investments. In addition, the lack of interest by pharma companies, to commercialise new antibiotics, is not sufficiently addressed with alternative plans, in view of the large equity investment requests.

Note that the jury even decided that “the lack of interest by pharma companies” was a weakness, when in fact, it is a requirement in relation to non-bankability (any biotech start-up with an out-licensing deal with a pharma company is clearly bankable and would not need EIC funding).

Our recommendations:

1. **All evaluators should receive detailed guidelines** to evaluate TRL and non-bankability based on the same rules. The guidelines should include concrete cases of what is deemed and not deemed “bankable”, and what is TRL5/6 in multiple industries (as these guidelines already exist in most cases).
2. **All interview experts should receive detailed guidelines** to decide whether a proposal is allowed to present again at the interview, receives an SoE or goes into a cooling off period, and the decision should be clearly motivated in the evaluation summary report
3. **The “non-bankability” criterion should be renamed “risk”**: for example, a quantum computing company may have raised €10M last year and ask for €20M this year because it is extraordinarily difficult to get funded in this “high risk” domain. This does not make them bankable, quite the opposite, in fact.
4. **Evaluators should be evaluated**: data analysis could flag where evaluators are constantly overscoring or underscoring proposals and should be retrained or kicked out of the pool.

Challenge 3: skilled and trained evaluators

Recruiting a sufficient number of evaluators skilled in various deeptech topics is a major challenge, especially for thematic deadlines like the May “green deal” cut-off or the March “COVID-19” cut-off where EASME had to recruit a large number of green deal and healthcare evaluators over a short period of time.

The expert recruitment and management approach has been so far:

- **Open:** any expert can sign up to the expert database (in fact, funding applicants are also invited to apply to the same database, so they can claim interview travel expenses, and therefore could potentially be called as experts later).
- **Self-declarative:** there is no process to interview experts or to check their qualifications before they are invited to evaluate applications. Evaluators are allocated to cases based on keywords they have themselves entered into the database. EASME team members sometimes recheck their profiles to make sure that they are allocated to the right themes, but do not have the resources to verify their credentials.
- **Hands-off:** EASME moderators present in interviews are not participating in the evaluation discussion and always support the opinion of experts (even in a case where experts could seem to be wrong).
- **Trust-based:** when a Col is potentially flagged, EASME leaves it to the expert to decide for him/herself if this is really a Col.

We believe that such a hands-off, open, trust-based management of the expert pool is not adequate for an ultra-competitive instrument where **evaluators must be bound to the same levels of excellence as the applicants**.

Today, it is more difficult for an applicant to get one of their own team members to qualify for the interview (in particular if the team member happens to be charging his company as a part-time consultant instead of being on the payroll) than for an expert to be selected to an EIC jury.

It is therefore essential that the recruitment and training of the new EIC expert pool, under Horizon Europe, undergoes a major overhaul as well.

Our recommendations:

1. **EASME should proactively screen** the expert database for conflicts of interest (Col) instead of relying on third party reporting (professional proposal writers and EIC coaches should never be part of the expert pool as many of them work as freelancers and do not show their filiation with the consultancy firms they work for). EASME should also perform extensive due diligence on a random sample of evaluators to root out overstated credentials.
2. **All evaluators (including interview jury members) should be regularly tested about their knowledge** of the evaluation process (e.g. with an online survey) and re-trained when they are scoring under a certain threshold (especially when evaluation criteria keep changing during the course of the programme, as it has been the case under Horizon 2020)
3. **Scoring patterns of evaluators should be analysed** in order to flag outliers (experts who constantly underscore or overscore proposals, or specific criteria) in order to make sure that funded proposals are not the ones that got the most generous evaluators.
4. **The new evaluation system should provide the detailed comments** of the experts to the applicants, as well as to the evaluators of the next stage, for transparency of the evaluation criteria (applicants should of course accept that 2 experts might have conflicting comments).

5. **The new evaluation system should allow for bi-directional communication between experts** where evaluators can send comments to each other (within the same stage or across multiple stages) in order to give them feedback about their understanding of the criteria.
6. **All interview jury members should be requested to read the proposal entirely** before the panel, and the role of “briefer” (the jury member who is supposed to introduce the case and lead the pre-interview internal discussion) should be discontinued so one jury member does not have a disproportionate impact on the evaluation outcome.

Will the new EIC Accelerator reduce the impact of luck vs skills in the selection of the European deeptech champions?

We believe the suggested changes are indeed supporting a more transparent and fair evaluation, but only when combined with clear and consistent evaluation criteria, as well as a thorough overhaul of the expert pool recruitment and training processes.

About EWGIC

Created in September 2019, the European Working Group of Innovation Consultants (EWGIC) gathers active innovation consultants in the field of European research and innovation projects. The group aims to facilitate exchange and promotion of best practices and success stories, as well as to promote professional skills and expertise. Today the group gathers 40 members, active in more than 18 countries around Europe.