



SURVEY AMONG EVALUATORS ON PROPOSAL EVALUATION 2008

Synthesis

European Commission
DG RTD – Unit A.1
Silvana Carminati
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1. PURPOSE AND METHOD

This report is based on an anonymous on-line survey¹ addressed to all experts who have participated in the evaluation of proposals during the second year of the Seventh Framework Programme. The purpose of the survey is to receive the **experts' opinions on the quality of the evaluation process and procedures applied**.

This synthesis will be distributed to the participants in the meeting of independent observers that will take place on 30 January 2009 and to concerned Commission services.

The survey was sent to 3492 experts, that participated in the evaluations of proposal between October 2007 and November 2008 (some of them evaluated more than one call). The results are based on 1682 responses which were recorded between 15 April and 2 December 2008 and represented a response rate of 48%.

All charts are included in this report.

To enable comparisons, the survey is nearly identical² to the survey used in the first year of FP7 which in turn was very similar to the survey used in FP6. It was structured along the various evaluation steps as follows:

1. Questions about the expert
2. Questions about the evaluation process (Information; Individual evaluation and consensus; Hearings; Panel review)
3. Evaluation criteria
4. Opinion on the evaluation task and on the other evaluators
5. Logistics
6. Comments and recommendations

The questions were formulated with multiple choice questions with possible answers ranging from "1" to "5" (1 = very poor/ very low/ strongly disagree/ not in favour/ very unfair; 5 = excellent/ very high/ strongly agree/ strongly in favour/ very fair). The experts were asked to choose "N/A" if a question was not applicable and "Don't know" if the evaluator had no opinion. Evaluators were asked to comment if a particularly low mark was given.

As last year we start summarising the main findings of the survey. A comparison between the 2007 and 2008 results will follow. Moreover taking into account last year's recommendations we have retained a sample of "free-style" comments expressed by experts in their surveys.

¹ The survey was developed via the IPM ('Interactive Policy Making') tool on EUROPA. The collected data will only be kept until they have been statistically evaluated, and in any case not more than up to 5 years of the end of FP7. Final summary tables of the survey will be published on Cordis.

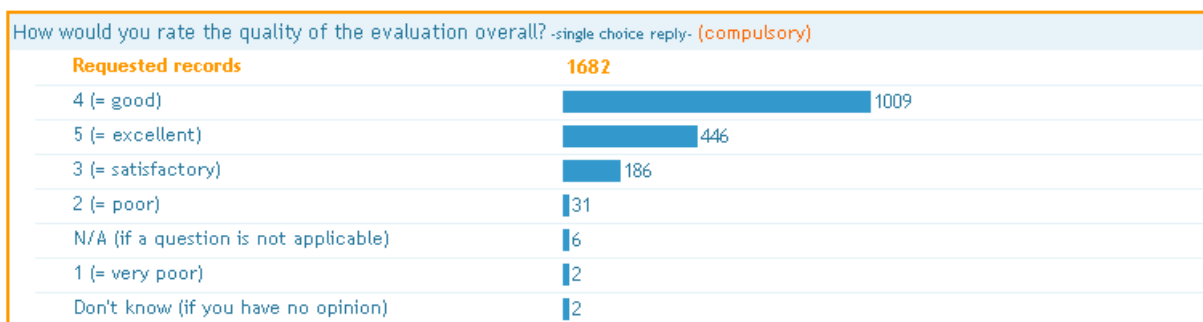
² The only change between 2007 and 2008 was a requirement to indicate the relevant call. This enables the extraction of useful information for management in the operational directorates.

2. MAIN FINDINGS

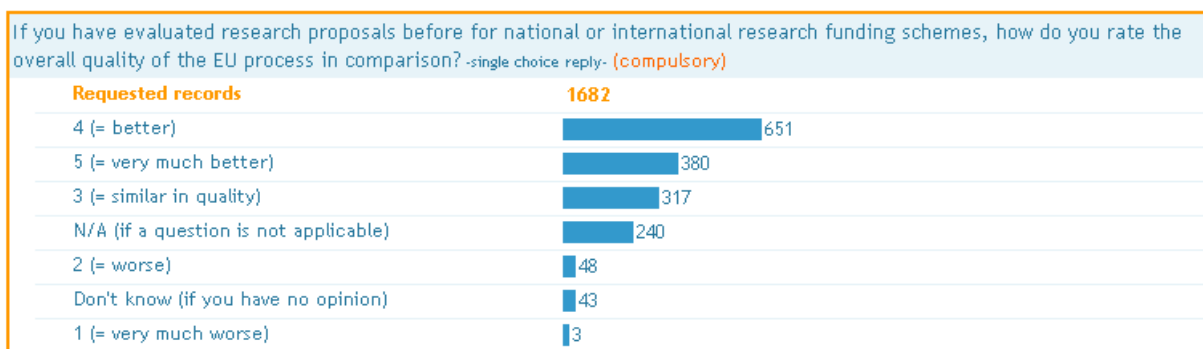
2.1 GENERAL COMMENTS

The data collected from the second year of FP7 give, as was the case in the first year, a **positive picture of the quality of the evaluation process**. Across the calls 97,6% of the respondents found the quality of the evaluation overall 'satisfactory' to 'excellent' (96% last year).

We can see an improvement with respect to last year results: 26,5% (22,1% 2007) rated the quality 'excellent'.



The percentage of experts that had previously evaluated research proposals for national or international research programmes, who found the EU evaluation process similar, better and very much better in quality, has increased since last year from 90,9%% to 93,5%%.



"I serve as an expert for many international evaluations (in US and Europe). My personal opinion is that the EC evaluations are fair and well done"

"In comparison with other evaluation processes in which I have been involved (both national and international) this one was outstanding and I think fully guarantees both impartiality and a high quality evaluation"

Evaluators were very satisfied with the way in which the evaluations were conducted, with respect to impartiality, confidentiality and fairness.

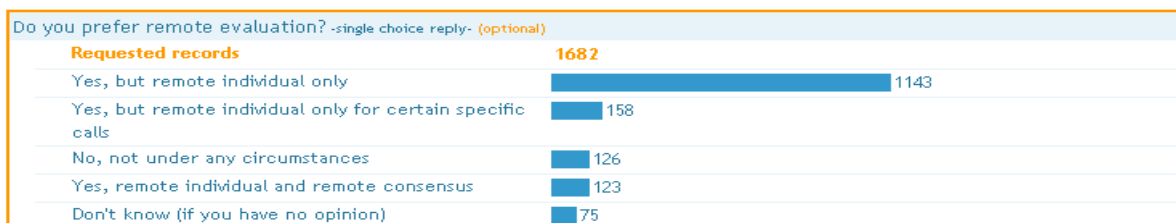
In particular the level of efficiency of the evaluation task has been rated good/satisfactory/excellent (96,5%).

2.2 REMOTE EVALUATION

Like last year there was a **clear preference** among evaluators for **remote individual evaluation** (68% prefer the remote individual evaluation).

"Two steps evaluation process in 7FP based on remote individual and consensus centrally evaluations was very effective and time spending. I recommend to use it as often as possible"

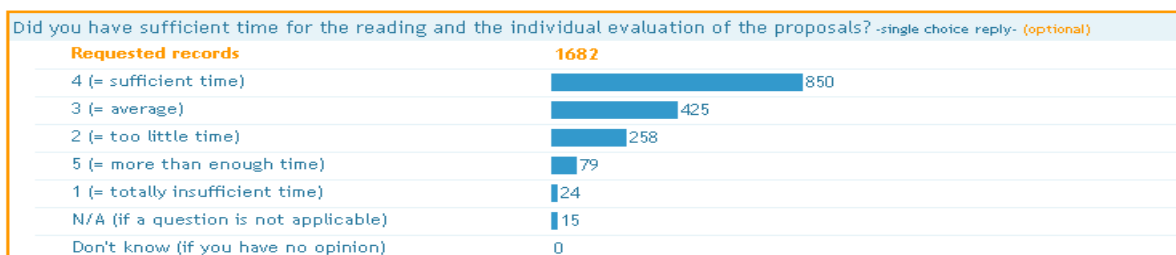
"Remote individual evaluation would certainly allow a more in depth analysis and cross-check according to the personal reading and processing speed"



2.3 TIME FOR EVALUATION

A **large majority** (80,5%) believed there was **sufficient time for the reading and the individual evaluation of proposals**. However, a significant minority of the experts (16,7%) thought they had too little or totally insufficient time for this part of the evaluation, which is the same figure that was recorded in 2007 and remains a very frequent and recurrent complain in the free comments.

Many evaluators would also like to see **more time for consensus discussions**.



"More time allocated for IER and Consensus meetings"

"Time reserved for reading the proposals was very short"

"Quite tight schedule for individual evaluations"

"More time for decision making (thinking, referring, discussing etc.) would give much more quality to the final product"

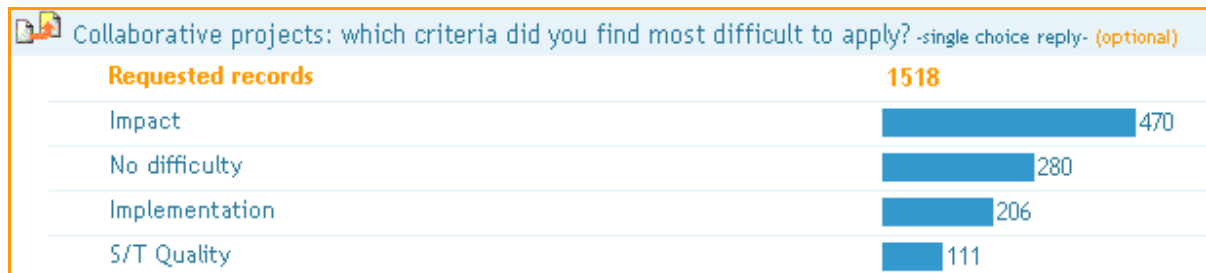
"It is important to give evaluators at least three weeks to perform remote evaluation"

"Time to consensus sessions (30 minutes minus time for changing rooms; introduction for all points) is extremely short"

2.4 EVALUATION CRITERIA

Asked whether they thought that the **evaluation criteria** were **appropriate and consistently applied** 93,7% (90% 2007) believed they were.

Nevertheless a few experts consider that different weight should be given to the S/T quality criterion compared to the other ones. Some expert suggests changing the respective weights, giving higher weight for this criterion. In particular the 'impact' criterion is still found the most difficult to apply and is considered "less" relevant or "less" assessable by the experts.



2.5 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

21,5% of the evaluators answered 'YES' when asked if they were aware of any possible conflicts of interest. However, an overwhelming majority of these, 92,1% (70,3% 2007) believed that these possible conflicts of interest were thought to be **handled correctly**.



"Excellent system in place to avoid conflict of interest"

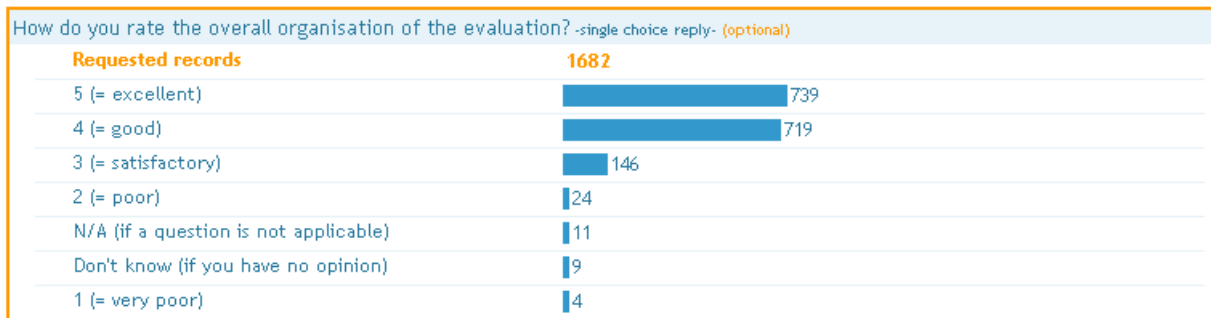
"From my side the conflict of interest was only of theoretical nature. Though, I have informed the moderator and I think, the situation was absolutely correctly handled"

2.6 LOGISTICS

An overwhelming majority of the experts (95,3%) still rates the overall organisation of the evaluation very positively. A significant part of these respondents (43,9%) evaluates it 'excellent' (29,9% 2007).

Clearly the logistical aspects seem to have been improved during this year. This is probably due to the improved operability of the Covent Garden site and the dedicated support team.

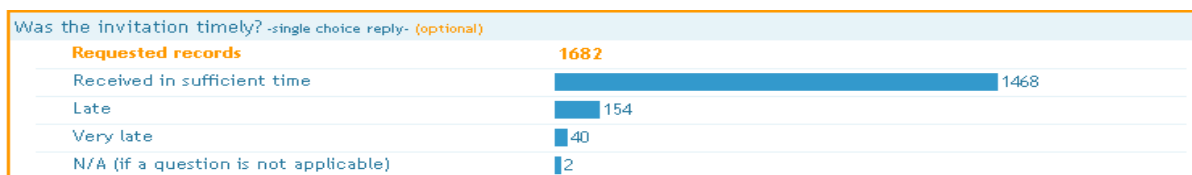
"The working conditions in Covent garden facilities are very good"



Most of the evaluators (95,5%) found the registration efficient and welcoming and rated it from 'satisfactory' to 'excellent' (55,2%)

Nevertheless a number of comments and recommendations have been made with respect to the **IT related aspects** of the evaluation, such as **access to Internet** (*too slow connections*) and the working of the **RIVET system** (*font size, save utility, spelling check facility, user-friendliness*) and other supporting infrastructure.

Several experts (11,6%) complained that they received the **invitation too late** leading to problems with booking of hotel, flight, etc.



"Invitation was very late and it is not always easy to be able to arrange the travel, particularly if you need to stay in Brussels for more than one day"

"The exact dates of the meetings in Brussels should be known well in advance. The evaluators should be notified immediately, when possible. It is difficult to leave large spaces empty in calendars"

Moreover we find a few comments relating to the **late reimbursement** of experts' expenses. However, since the experts replied to the survey soon after the evaluation session, it is understood that these comments relate to problems encountered in 2007.

Among the free comments we can also find **general suggestions** to improve the proposal evaluation process:

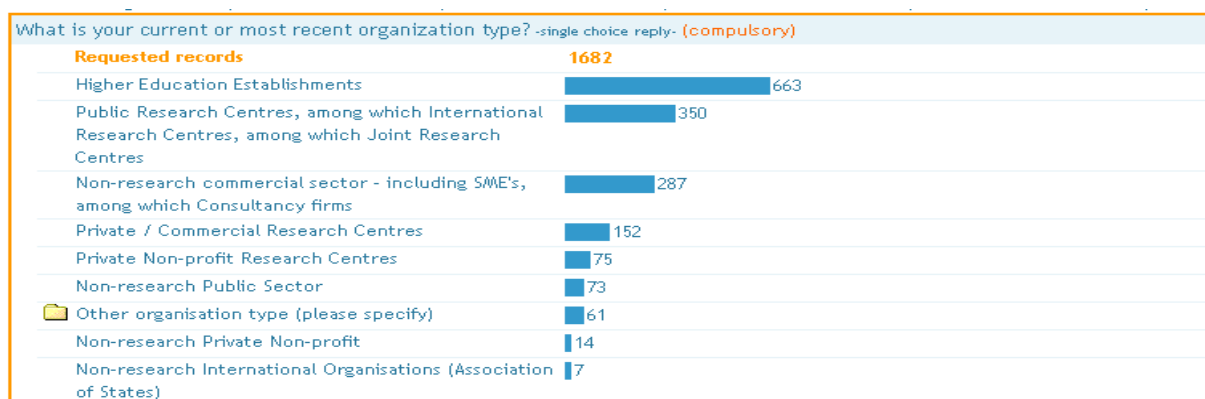
*"There is still room for improving the logistics and for a more streamlined approach. It seems that there is currently little learning between the different evaluation approaches at Unit and DG level. However a more uniform (across DGs and Units) **best practices** set-up would be beneficial to the process"*

3. FULL RESULTS AND COMPARISON 2007-2008

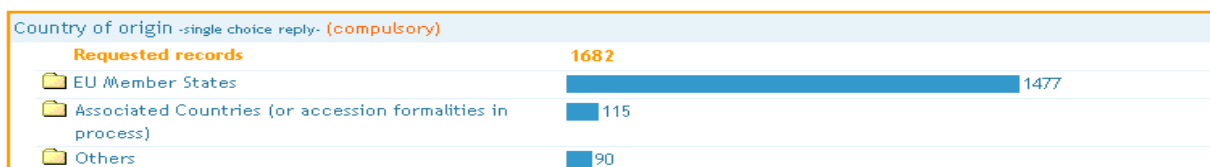
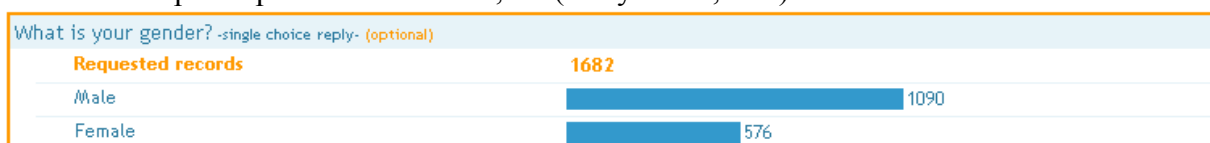
This year we have the opportunity to compare the general results of the first two years although the total numbers of the surveys are different (2007: 2281 responses; 2008: 1682 responses).

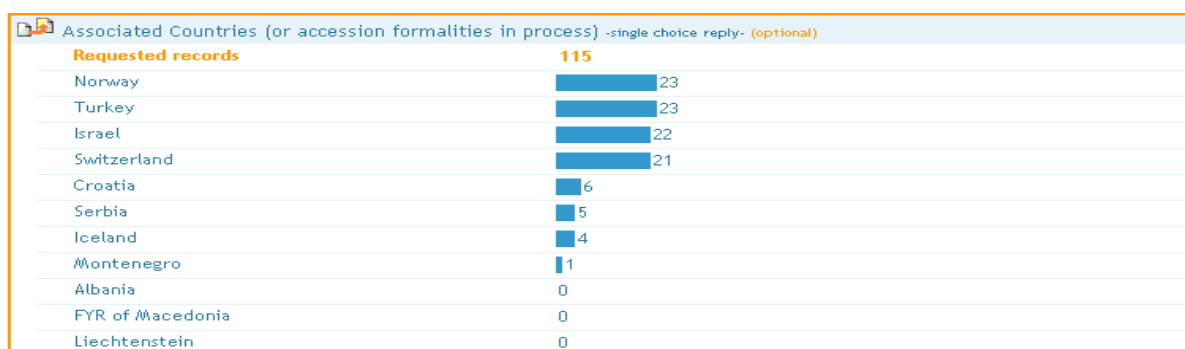
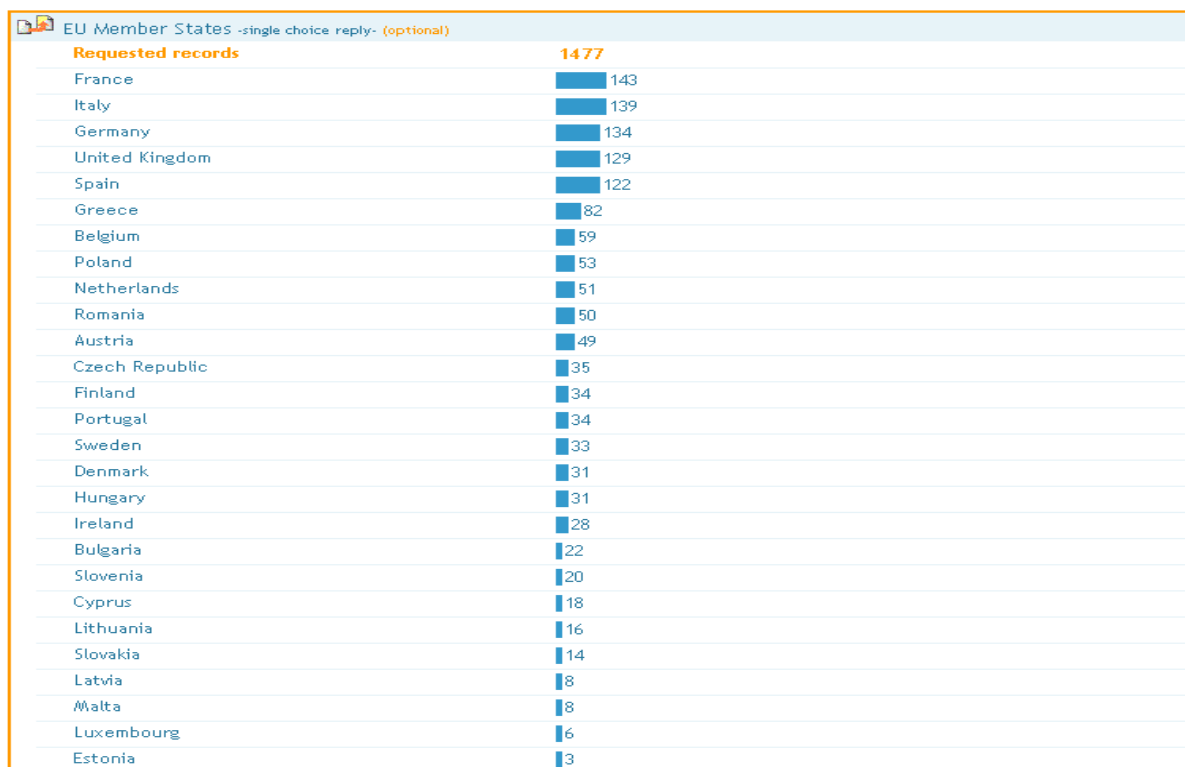
It is interesting to note that the pattern of replies in the 2007 and 2008 surveys are very similar. Where there are variations, we see generally a slight improvement. We will highlight with comments where there are remarkable differences.

SECTION 1: QUESTIONS ABOUT YOURSELF



More female participation. Female: 34,2% (last year 30,44%)

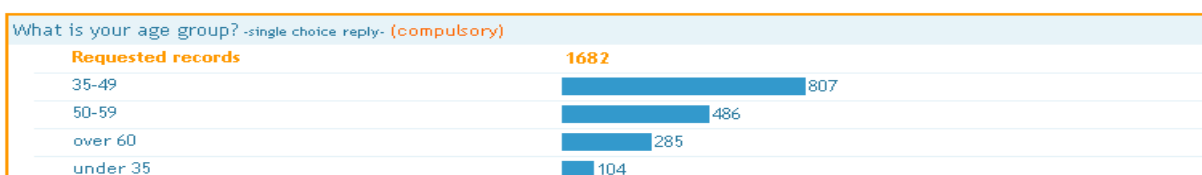


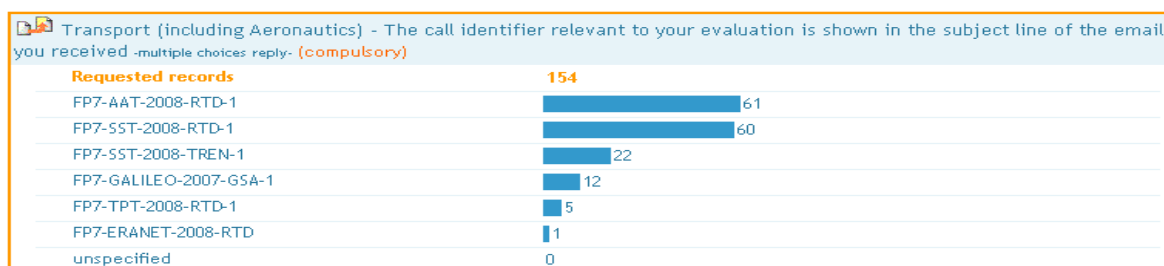
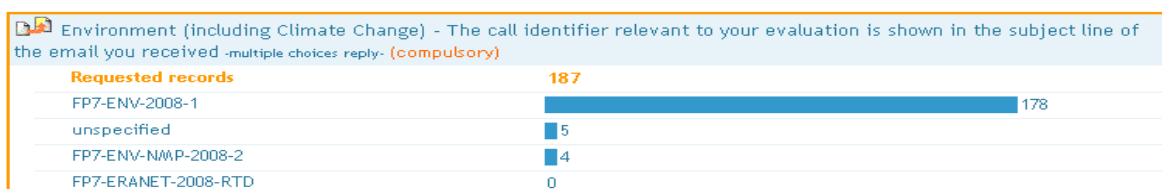
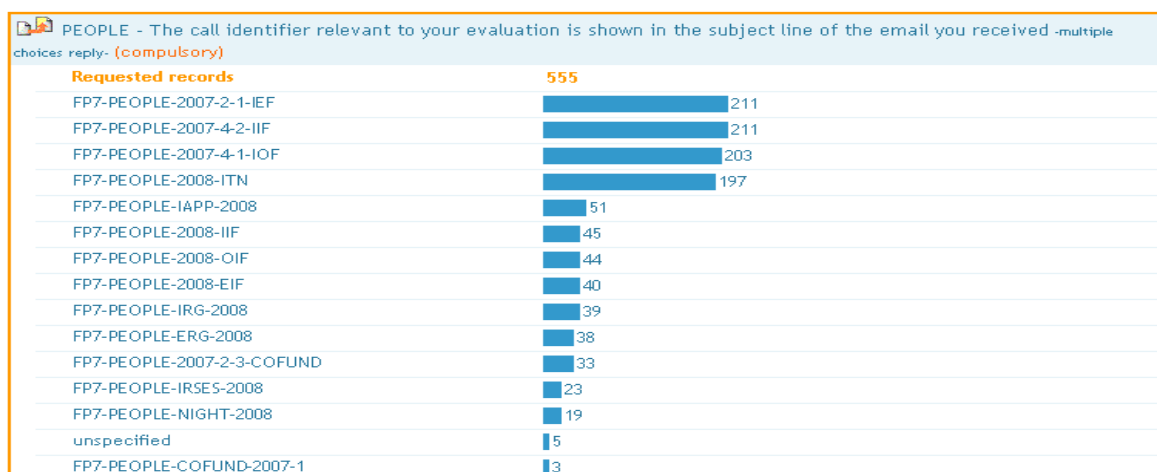
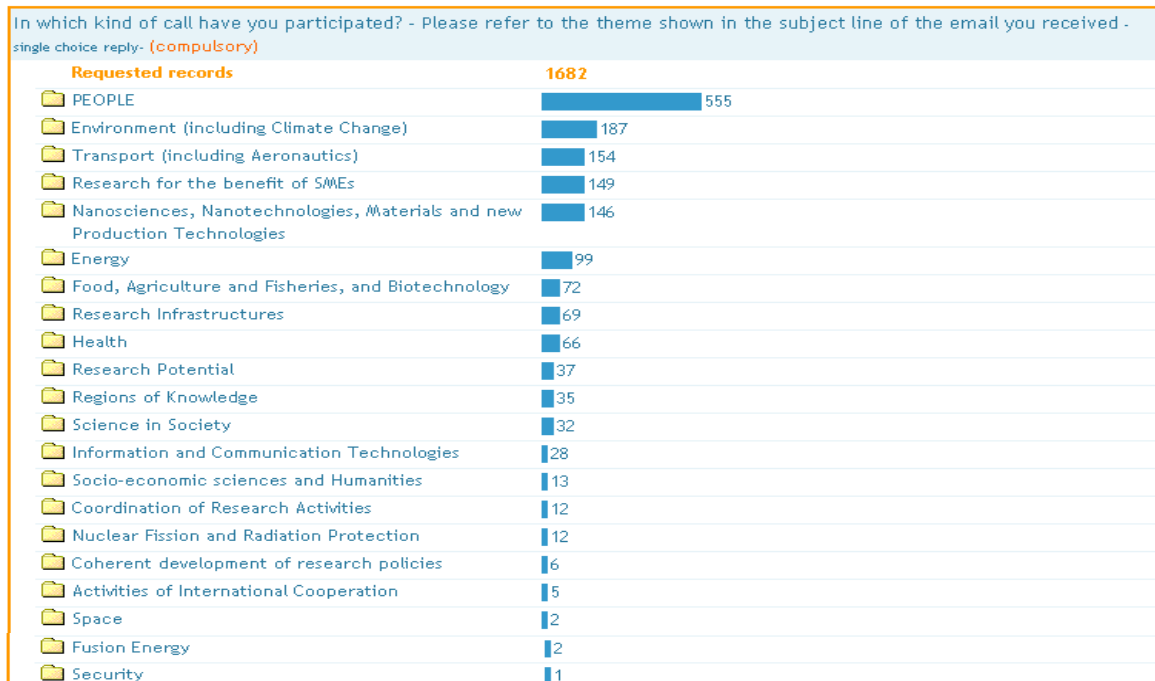


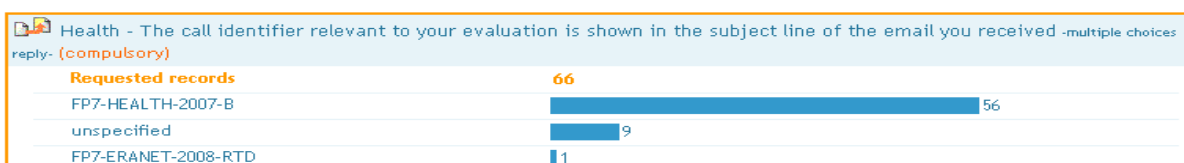
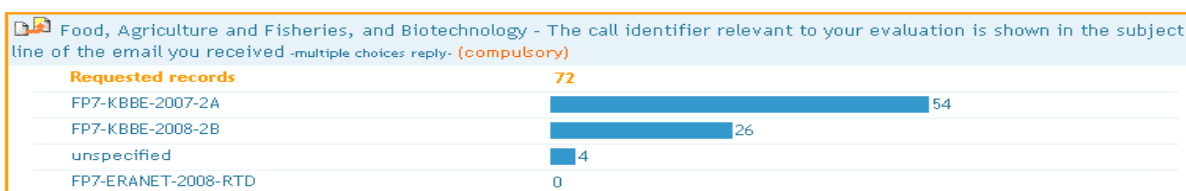
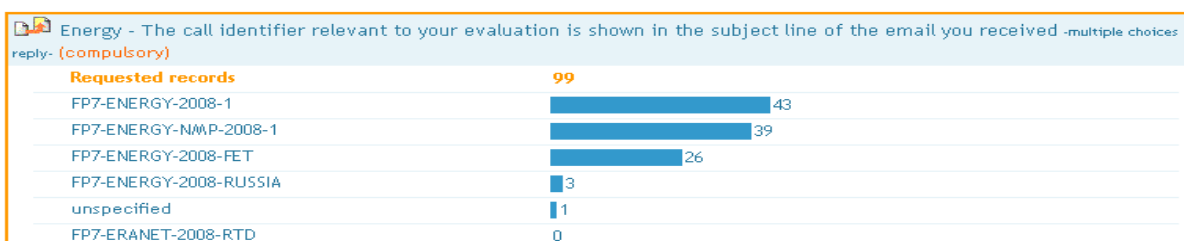
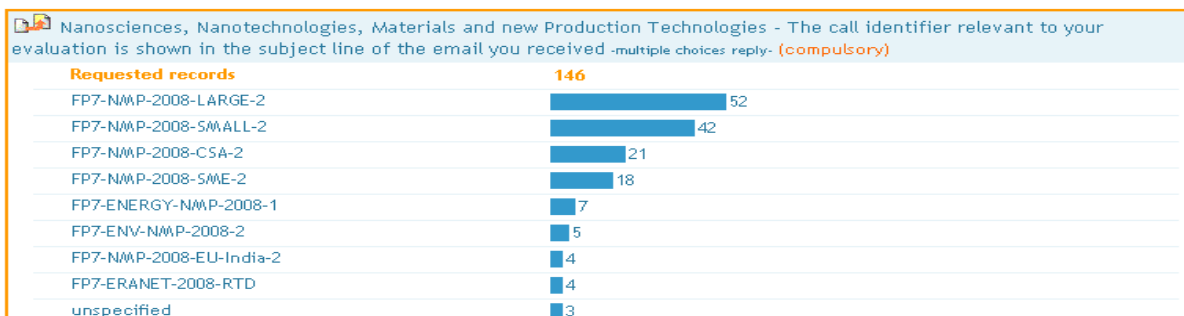
Fewer new experts. First time evaluator: 30,7% (last year 42,18%)

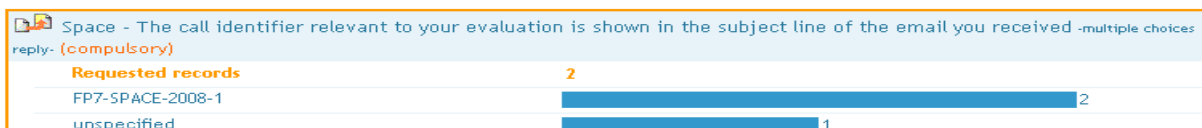
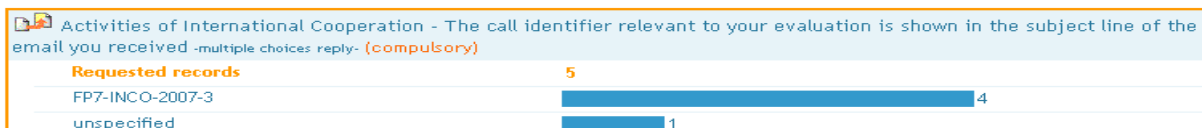
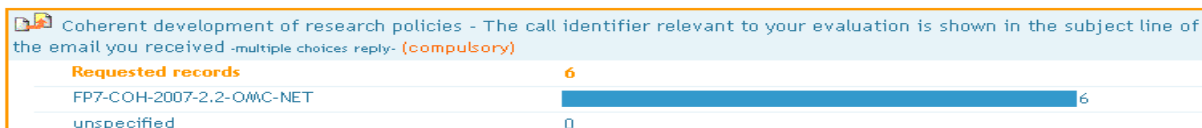
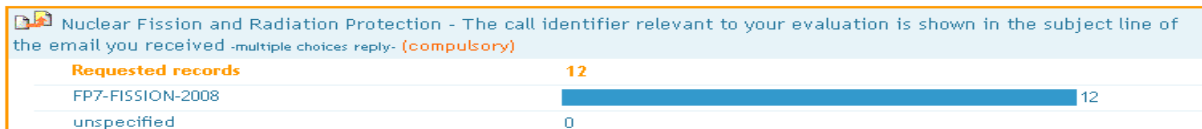
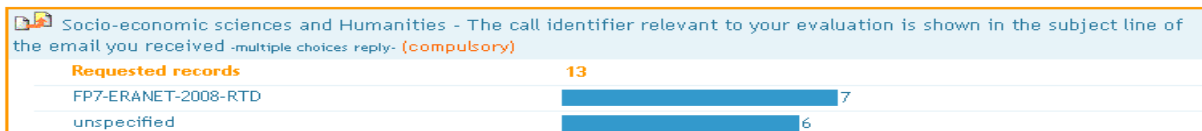
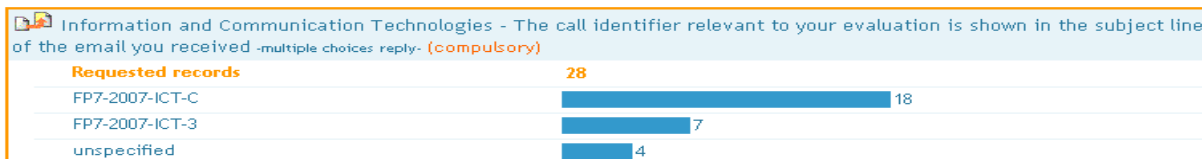
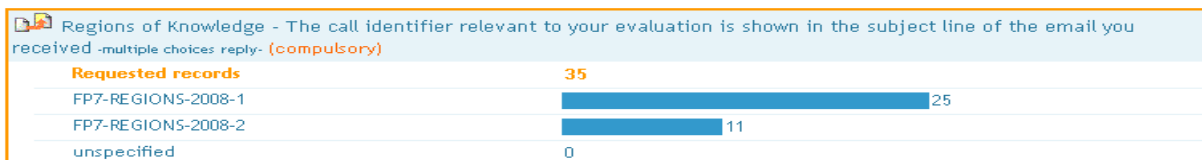


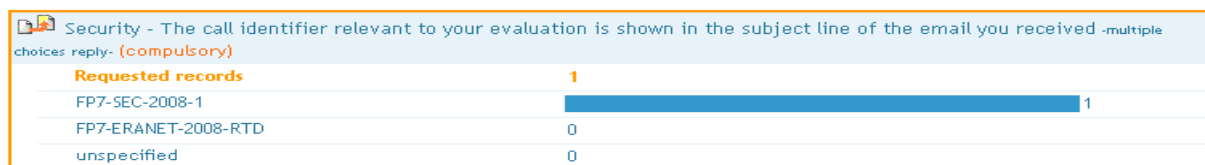
This percentage would seem to assure a good balance between experienced and non experienced experts. Many experts have highlighted the need to involve every year new experts (carrying new and different experiences) but have also suggested, in order to make the evaluation process more efficient, to limit the percentage of the newcomers in the evaluation groups. New experts need specific training and briefing indeed.





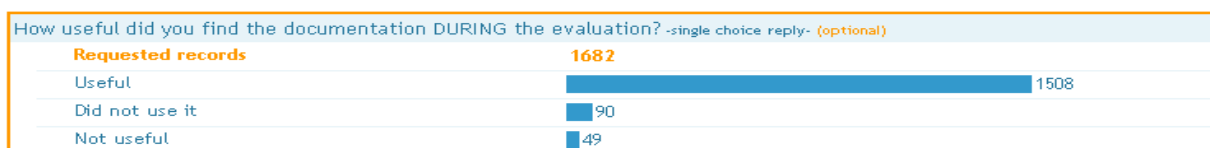
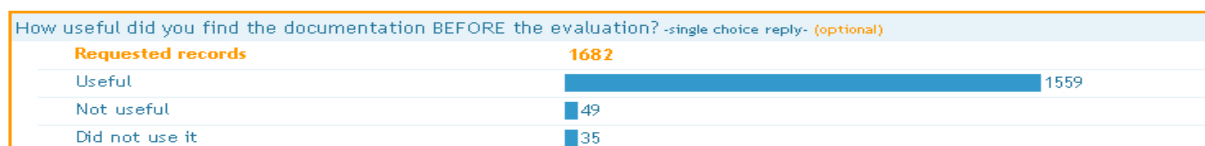
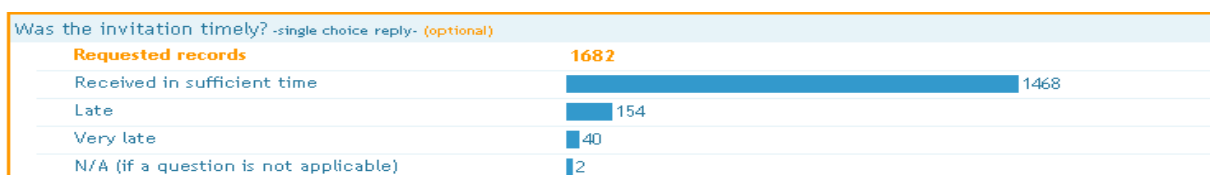




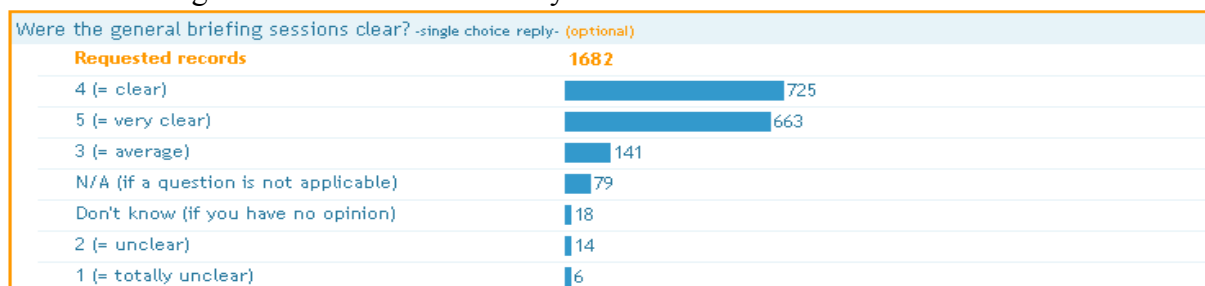


SECTION 2: QUESTIONS ABOUT THE EVALUATION PROCESS

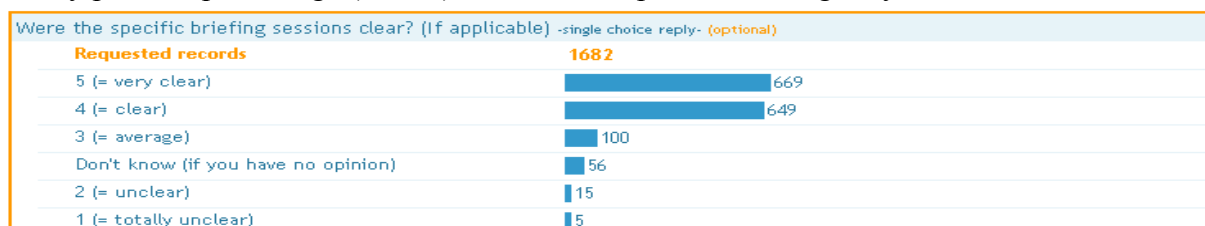
A. INFORMATION



General briefing was evaluated clear or very clear

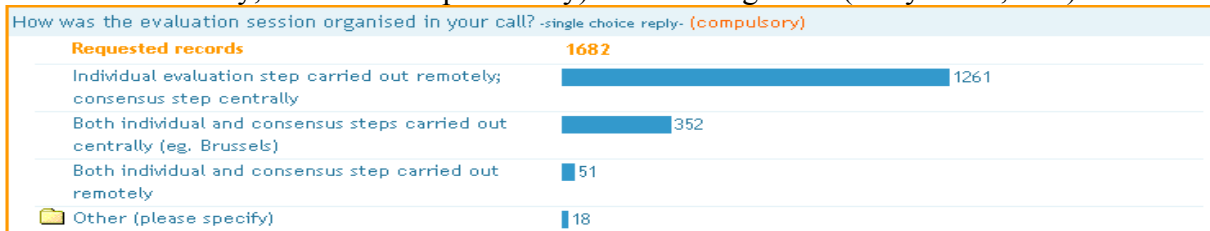


A very positive percentage (39,8%) consider the specific briefing very clear .

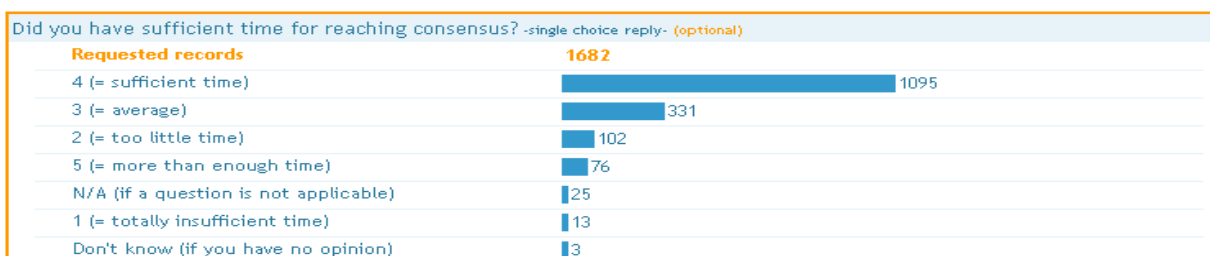
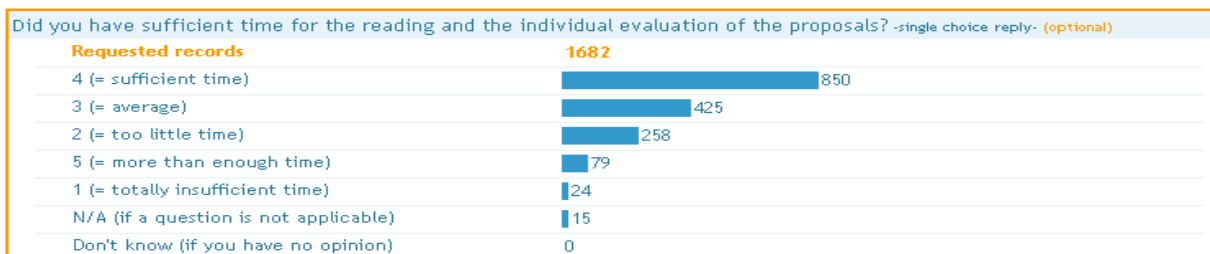
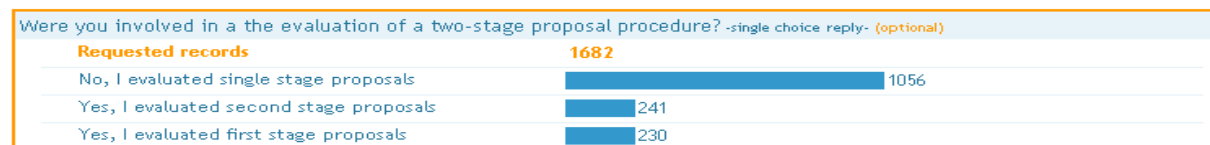
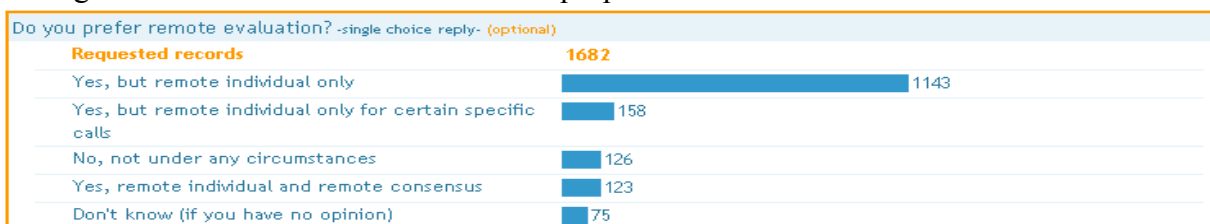


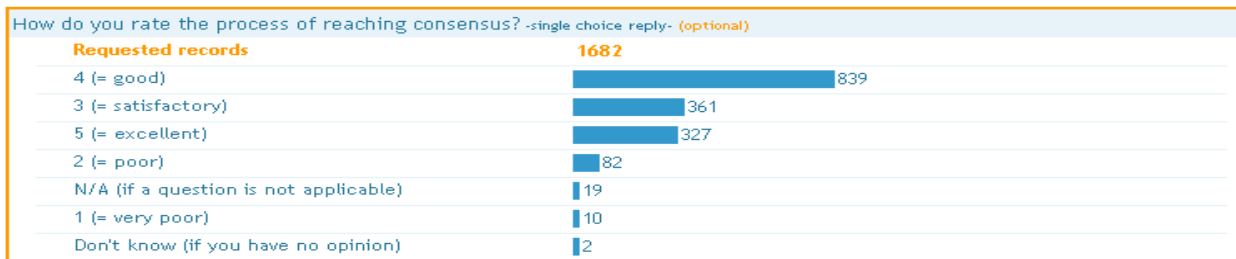
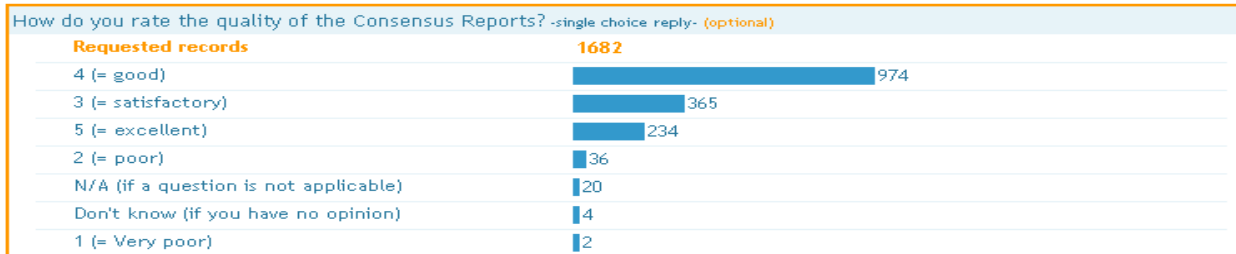
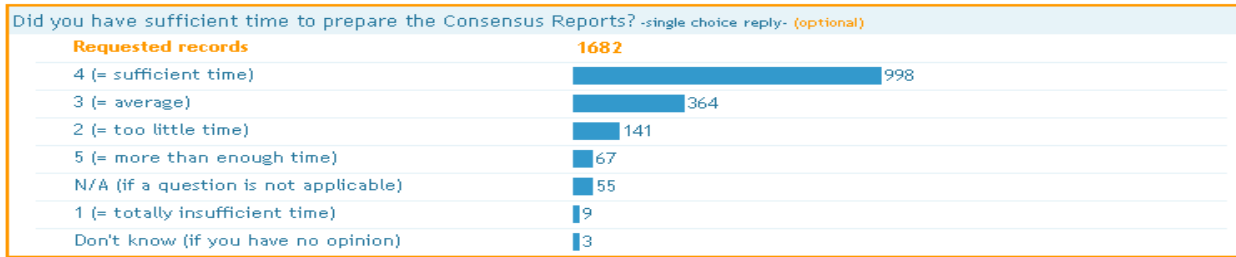
B. INDIVIDUAL EVALUATION AND CONSENSUS

The percentage of the evaluation sessions organised in two steps (Individual evaluation step carried out remotely, consensus step centrally) is increasing: 75% (last year 61,54%).

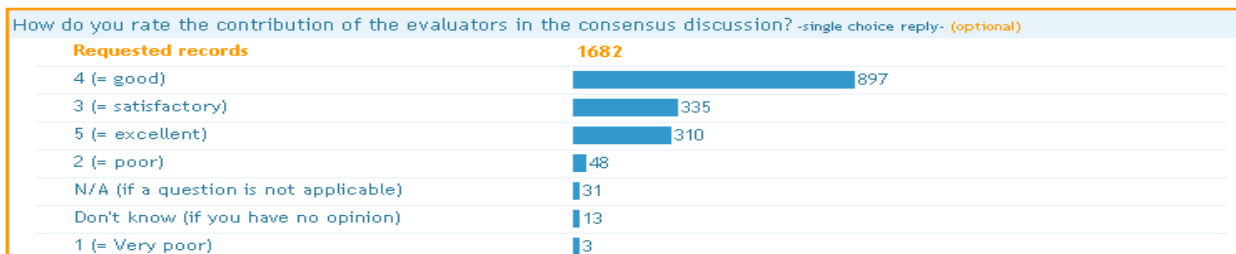
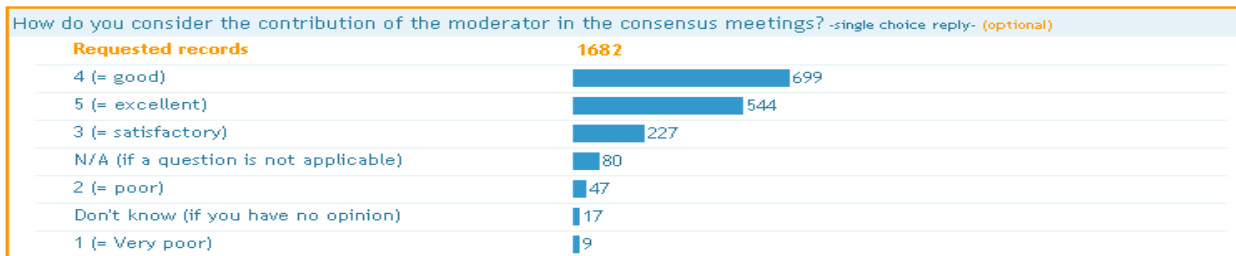


As already mentioned above in the main findings **the Remote evaluation** is still more appreciated 68% (last year 61,%) and there is a general positive feeling about the time for the reading and the individual evaluation of the proposals.





As last year, the role of **MODERATOR** is considered from 'satisfactory' to 'excellent': (87,4%).

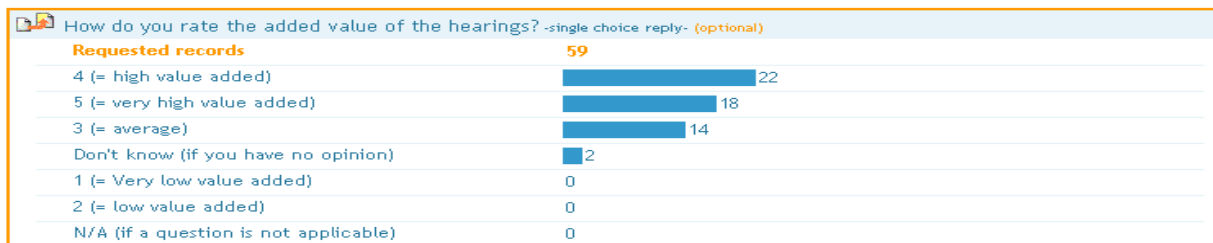
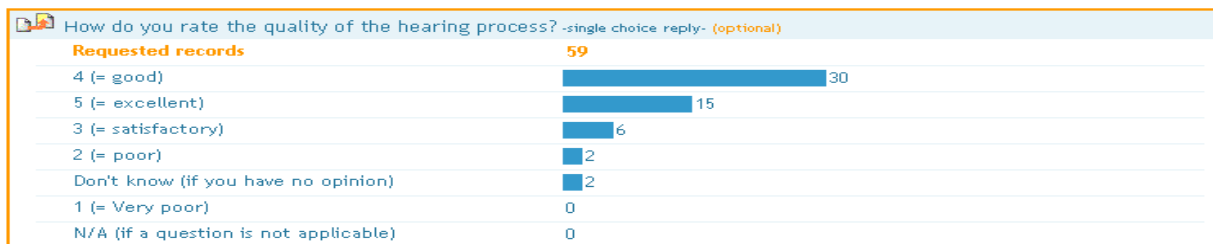
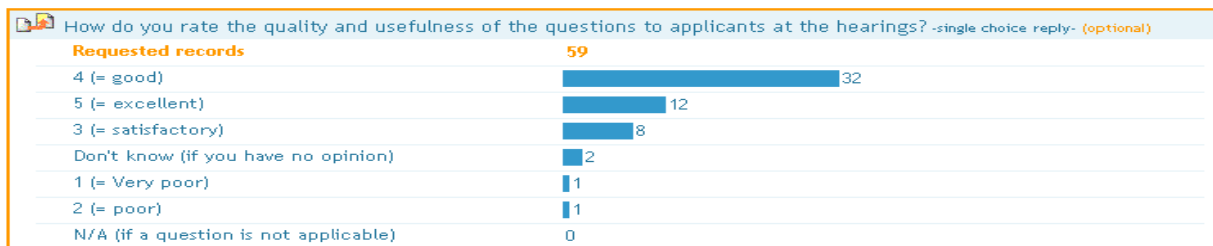
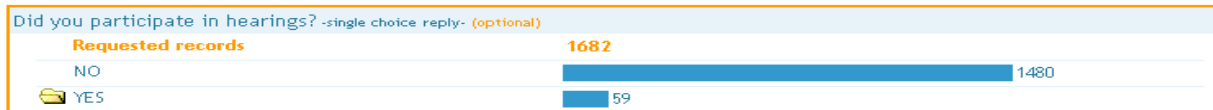


C. HEARINGS

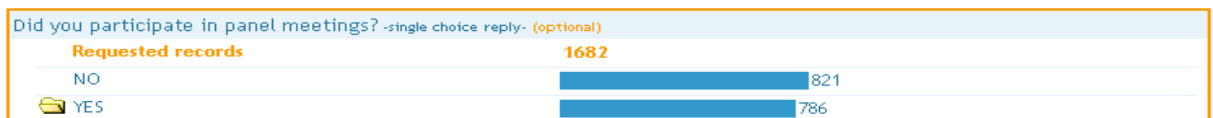
Quality and added value of hearings were rated more positively.

"I would add, finally, that I was very happy with the organization of the hearings and with the support I received from the commission officials"

"I suggest that the selection of the proposals for the hearings is revised to be more fair on the proposals that don't stand a chance of being funded even if they are above the threshold"

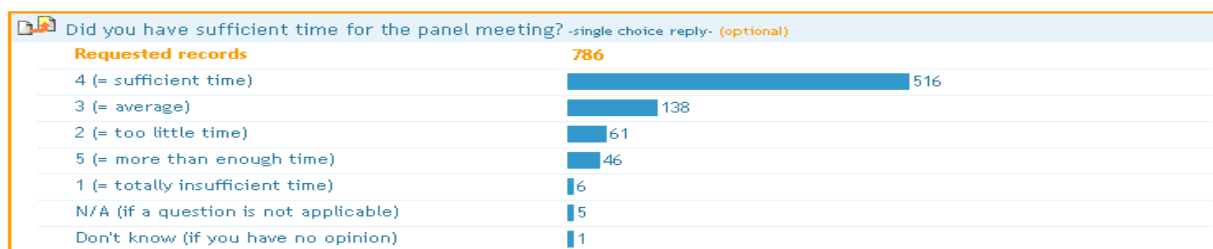


D. PANEL REVIEW

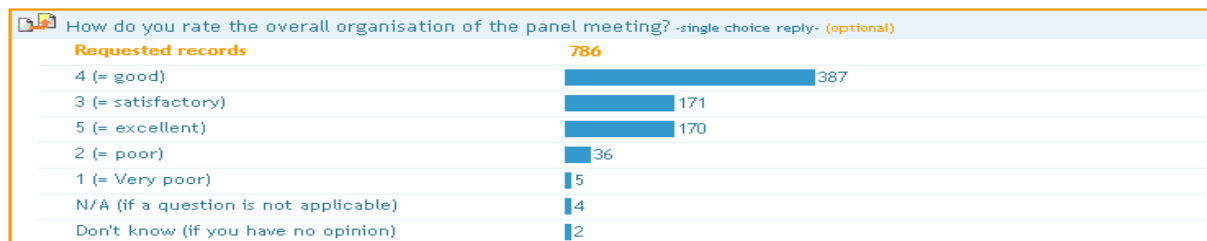


A **clear positive opinion** is notable in this section of the survey. All the replies show an improved opinion on the panel review stage.

The time for the panel meeting is evaluated 'Sufficient' by 65,6% of the respondents. (last year 41%)



The majority of experts thinks that **the overall organisation of the panel meeting** is 'good' to 'excellent': 73% (last year 48%)



The very positive evaluation of the **"Contribution of the panel chairperson/moderator"** - 95% from 'satisfactory to excellent': (last year 63%) – confirms on one hand the extended good opinion on the overall organisation of the panel meeting, on the other hand the central role of the moderator during the evaluation process.

"Moderators helped a lot to get the impression how to evaluate the proposal for the first time"

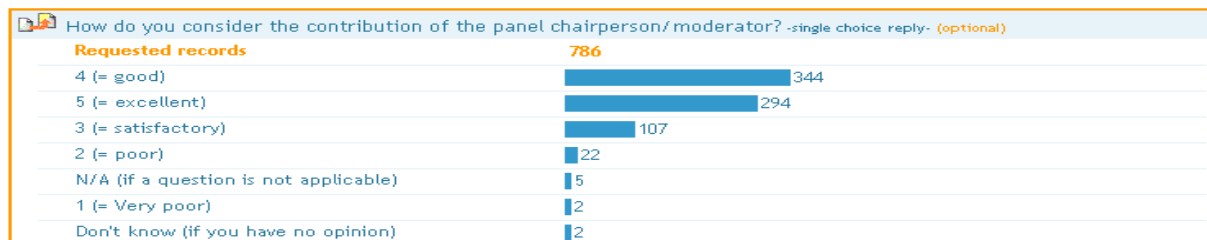
"The moderators in general helped enormously"

"I was very impressed by the skill and professionalism of the moderator"

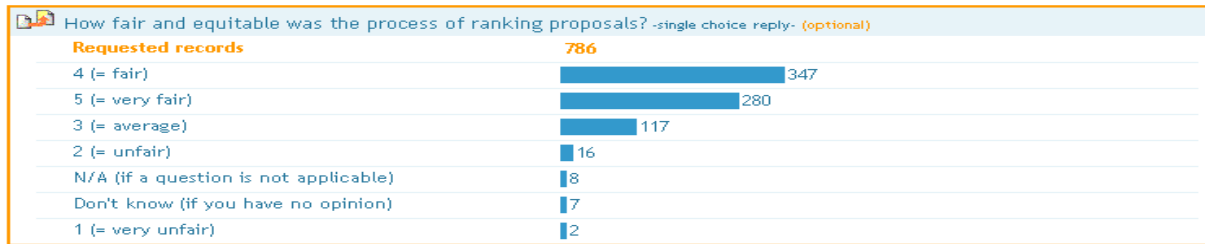
Nevertheless

"Moderators must have uniform standardized approach to the consensus process. Currently, the procedure differs from moderator to moderator"

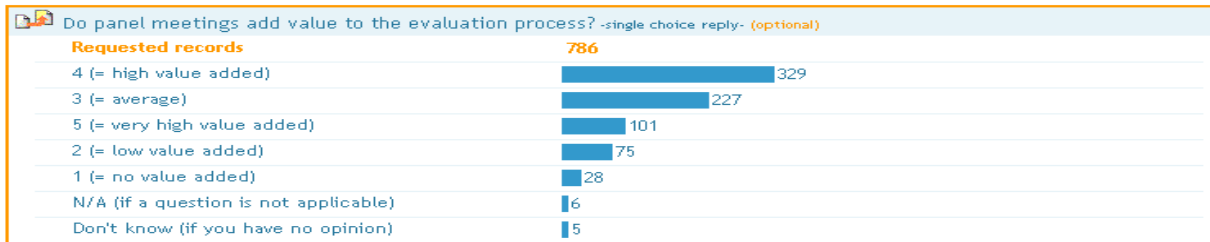
"During the evaluation in Brussels, I have made the experience that the moderators of the consensus meetings acted very differently. Some did not interfere at all, some did explain and structure the discussion very well, others were in between. I think that it is absolutely crucial for a fair evaluation of the proposal that the moderation task is realized in a more standardized way."



Also the **process of ranking proposals** is evaluated fair and equitable from 'average' to 'very fair': 94,6% (last year:62%)

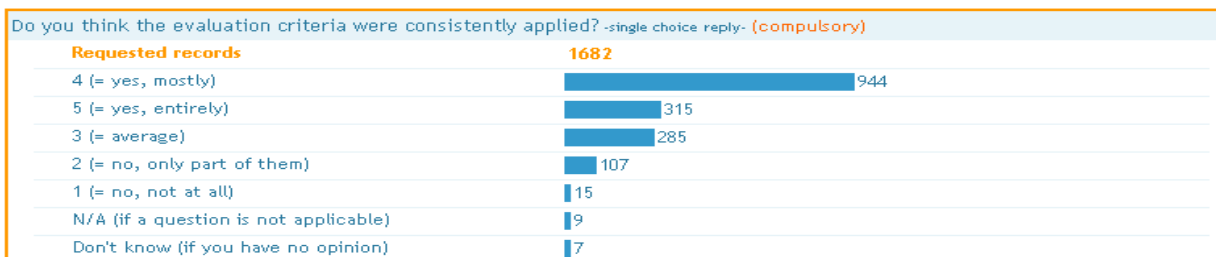
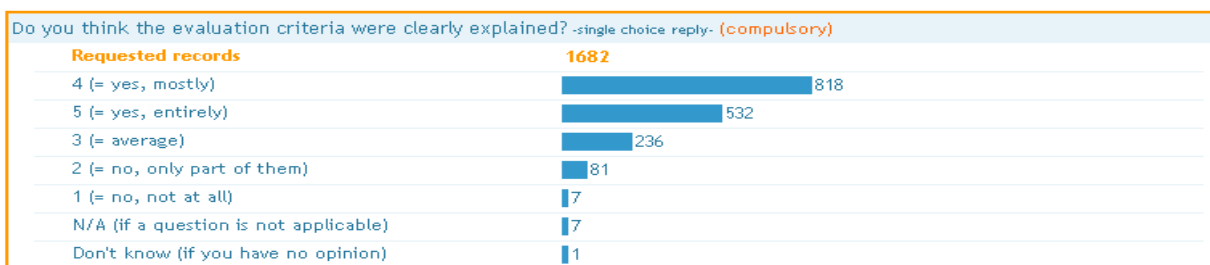
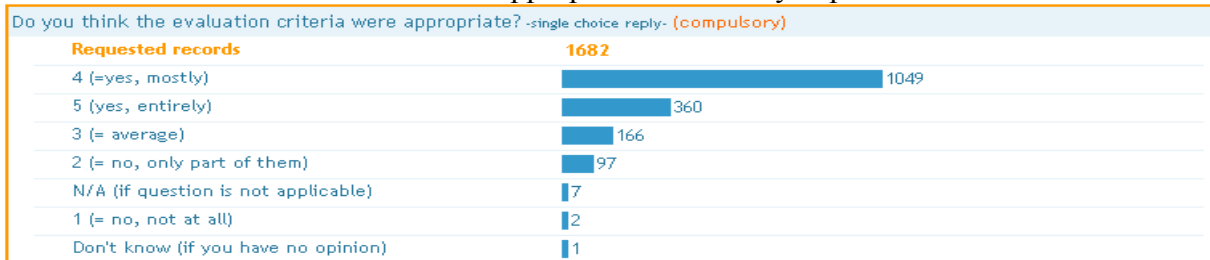


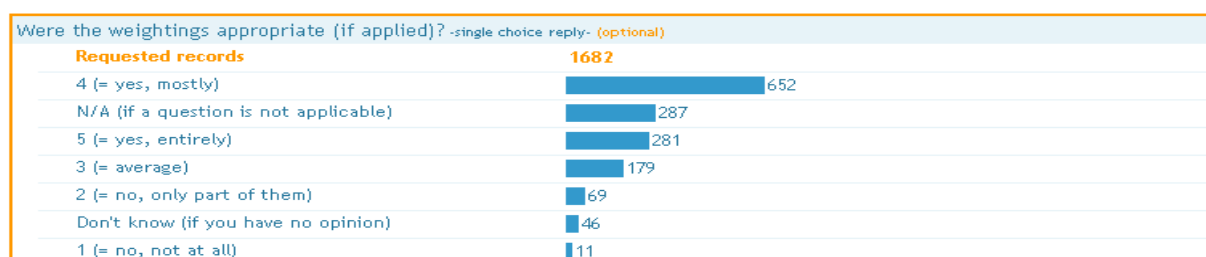
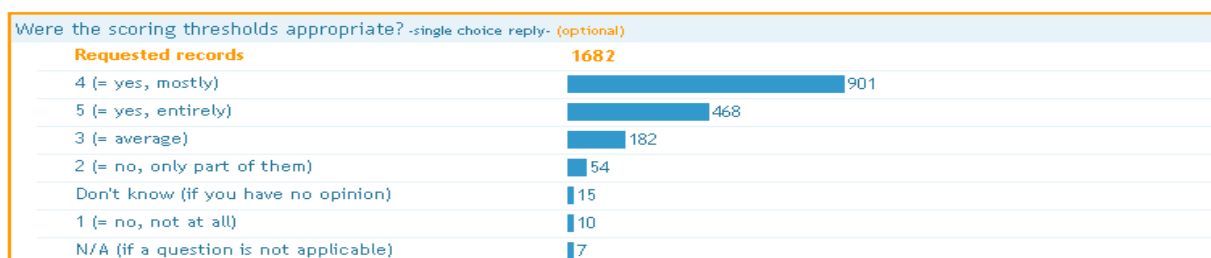
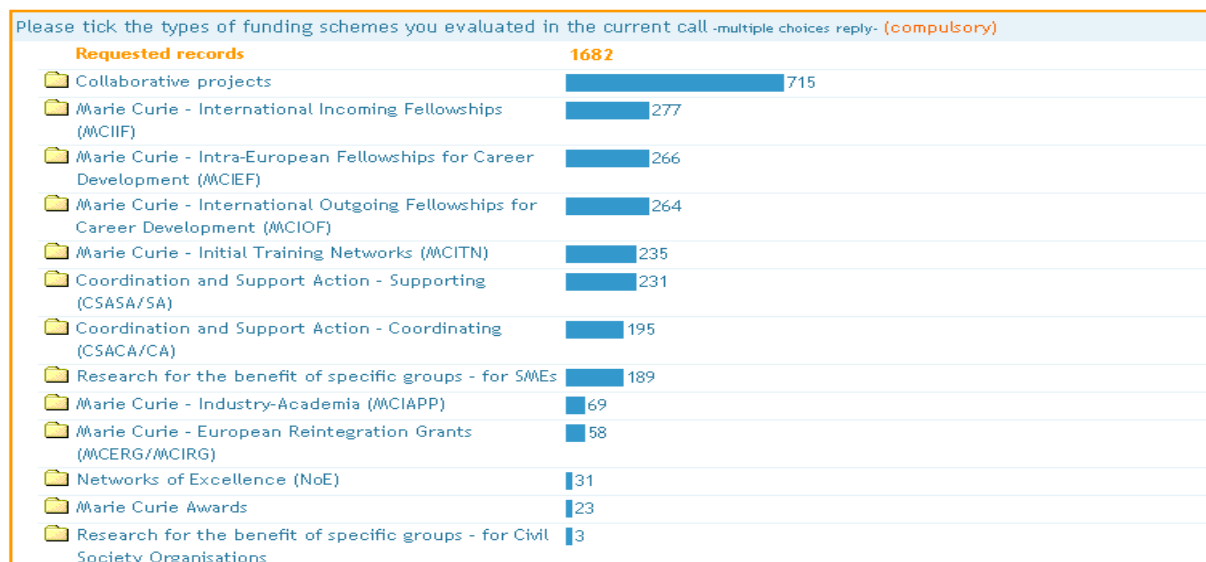
The added value of the panel meeting was evaluated very positively this year: 83,6% (28,5% last year)



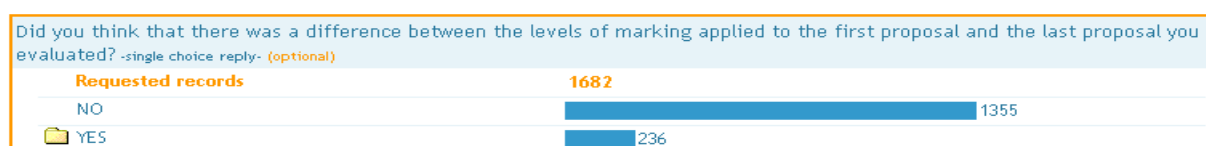
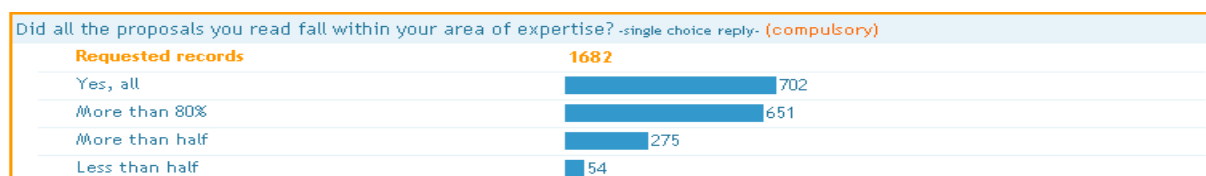
SECTION 3: EVALUATION CRITERIA

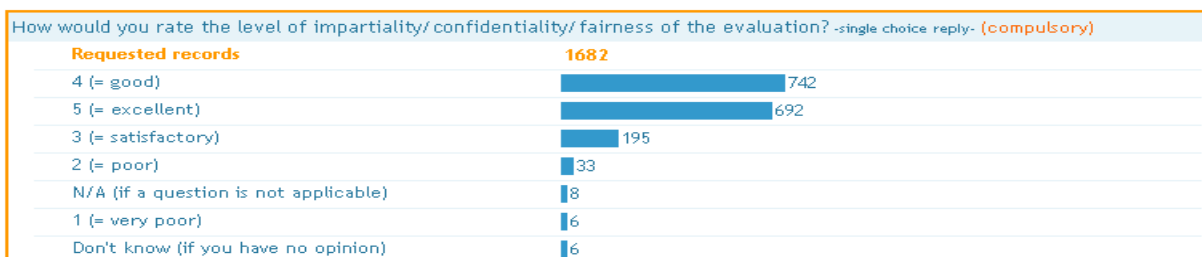
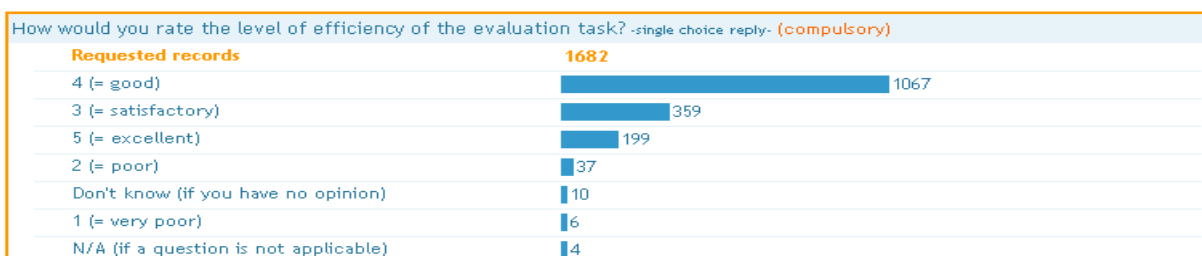
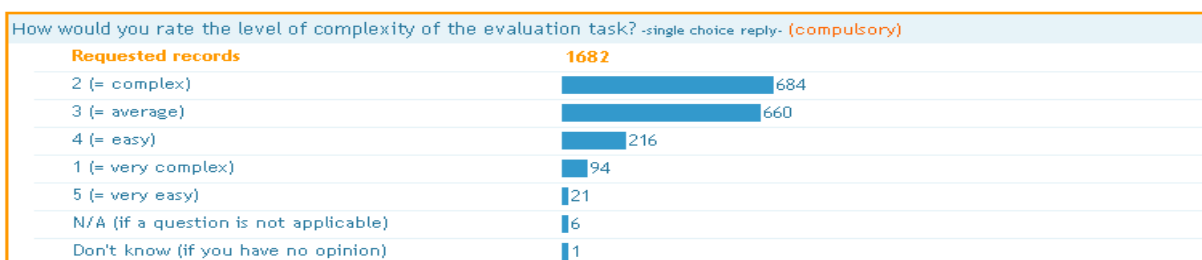
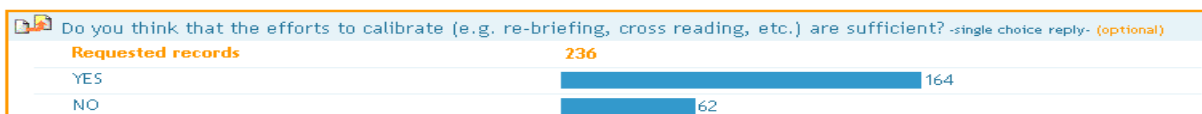
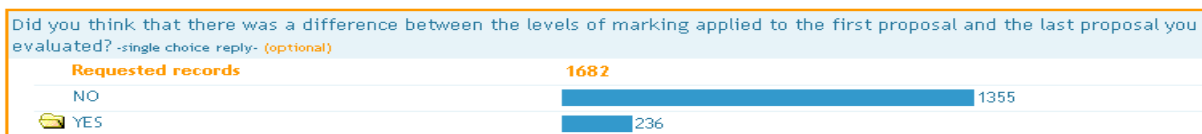
The Evaluation Criteria were assessed 'appropriate and clearly explained'.



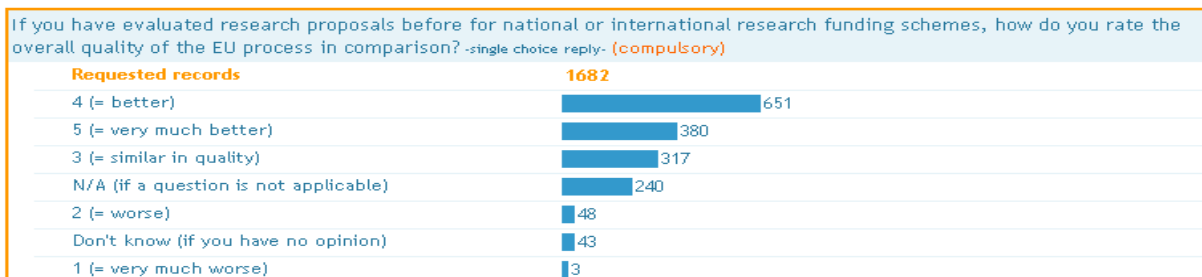


SECTION 4: OPINION ON THE EVALUATION TASK AND EVALUATORS

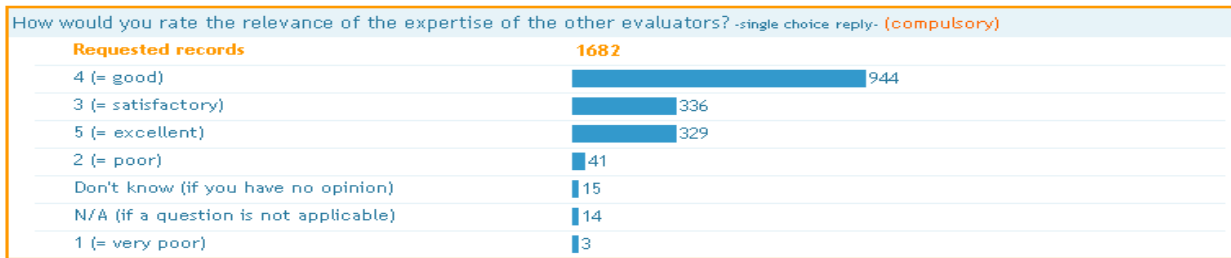




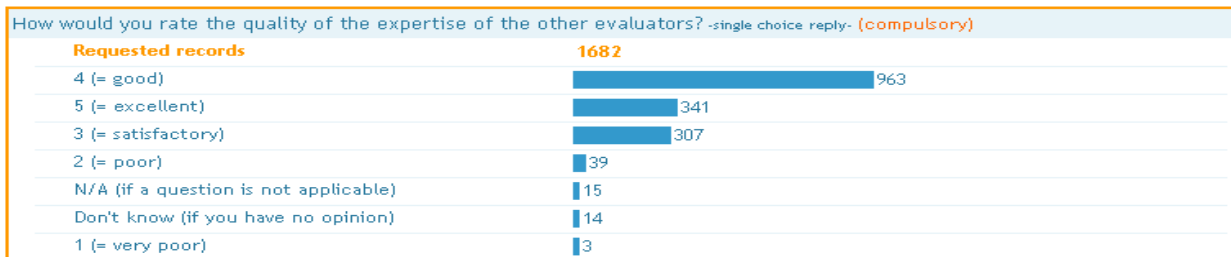
Compared with national or international research evaluation processes the EC evaluation process seems to be 'better' to 'very much better' (61,3%) (last year: 52,64%)



The evaluation of the relevance and quality of the expertise of the other evaluators is in line with the last year opinion. 95,7 % of experts rated the relevance of the expertise of the other experts 'satisfactory' to 'excellent'.

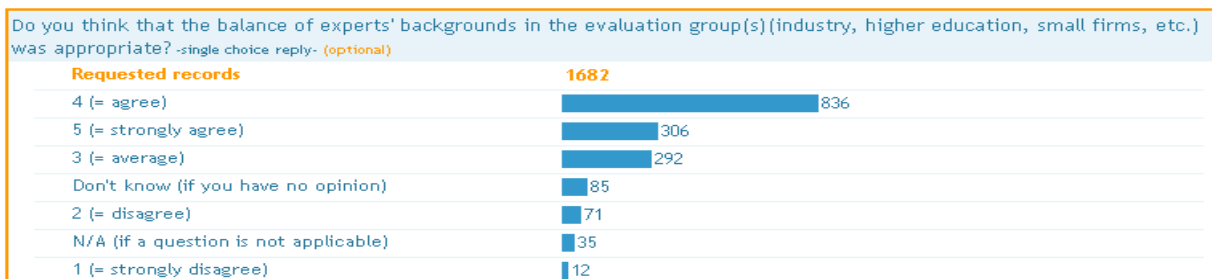


96 % of experts rated the quality of the expertise of the other experts 'satisfactory' to 'excellent'.



Balance of experts' backgrounds: this is a recurrent issue arising also in the experts "free comments".

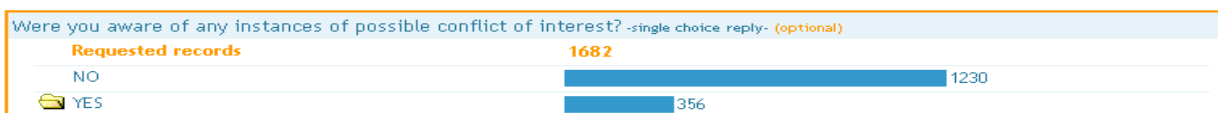
"The experts balance is essential to deal with the broad scope of topic included in the proposal"

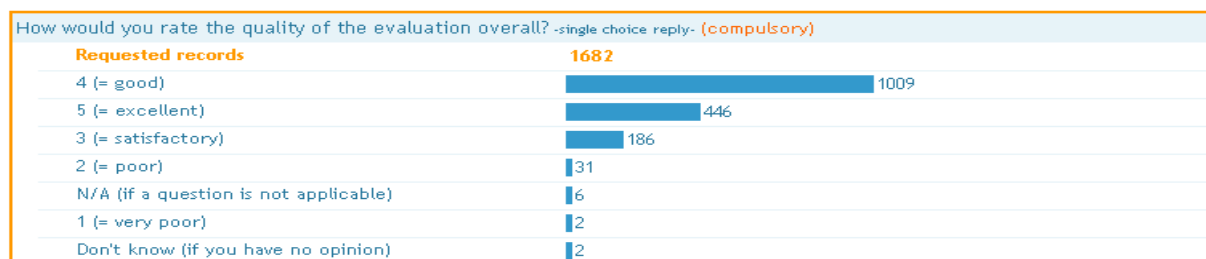


Conflict of Interest

Respect to last year the experts were less aware of instances of possible Conflict of Interest: 73% replied 'No' (69% in 2007).

Another positive aspect is related to their opinion about how the eventual Conflict of Interest was handled: 92,1% answered YES: "correctly handled" (last year 70,3%).





SECTION 5: LOGISTICS

