



Ongoing Evaluation of the Implementation of the Operational Programme Research, Development and Education

Ministry of Education, Youth and
Sports

Evaluation of First Calls of OP RDE

Executive Summary

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Final version



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Executive Summary

Findings and conclusions of the Report concern calls chosen by relevant departments of the MEYS for the purpose of the evaluation. The calls are following:

- 02_15_001 Individual systemic projects in PA3;
- 02_15_002 Regional Action Plans for the Development of Education in Priority Axis 3;
- 02_15_003 Support of Excellent Research Teams;
- 02_15_004 Smart Accelerator;
- 02_15_005 Local Action Plans for the Development of Education;
- 02_15_006 Teaming;
- 02_15_007 Inclusive Education.

Factual Focus of First Calls and other OP RDE Interventions

Factual focus of first calls is considered appropriate by applicants and recipients of first calls (the same evaluation was conducted by most applicants and recipients of other calls). The evaluator evaluates the focus as appropriate with regards to other interventions planned in the programme and SOs. In priority axes 1, 2 and 3, high relevance of following calls' attributes was confirmed:

- factual focus of a call – supported activities of individual specific objectives;
- factual focus of a call – a project's target groups identification;
- specification of eligible applicants in a call;
- specification of territorial focus of a call;
- minimum amount for overall eligible expenditures for a project;
- maximum amount of overall eligible expenditures for a project;
- amount of the first advance payment (for projects with ex-ante financing).


Factual continuity of PA1 OP RDE calls in Schedule of Calls 2015 and 2016 is evaluated positively by the evaluator. OP RDE calls first provided the continuity for OP RDI projects, activities of the call regarding systemic projects from May 2016 directly follow Update of National Strategy for Smart Specialization from July 2016. In the beginning of the programme period, calls focusing on the continuation of projects from OP RDI (02_15_008 Staged Projects) were announced, followed by calls focusing on support of excellent research teams and excellent research projects, that is for applicants from the whole Czech Republic including Prague (e. g. calls 02_16_019 Excellent Research and call 02_15_003 Support of Excellent Research Teams). R&D institutions from Prague had only limited opportunities to join the financial support of ESIF as recipients of financial support in the previous programme period. Which is why a high demand for the funding was to be expected (e. g. for first call 02_15_003 Support of Excellent Research Teams there was a 692% ratio of demanded funding for allocation – R&D institutions from Prague played an important role in the demands). Call 02_16_040 Strategic Management of RDI at the National Level I was announced in May 2016. Activities supported by the call concerning support of management of the national RIS3 strategy at the national level therefore directly follow the Update of National Strategy for Smart Specialization approved in July 2016.

The evaluator positively evaluates the focus of first call 02_15_004 Smart Accelerator with regard to other calls from OP RDE Schedule of Calls 2015 and 2016. A goal of projects in the call is to support development of human resources in order to implement strategy for smart specialization at the regional level. This call is according to the Schedule of Calls 2015 and 2016 followed by other calls



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whose focus directly carries out the concept of strategy for smart specialization (e. g. call 02_16_014 Building Expert Capacities – Technology Transfer).

The evaluator positively evaluates factual and logical interconnection of first calls in PA3 in Schedule of Calls 2015 and Schedule of Calls 2016. In PA3, the first call announced was 02_15_001 for systemic projects and then calls 02_15_02 for RAP and 02_15_005 for LAP. Projects in these calls are supposed to help create effective systemic environment (creation of local and regional communication LAP/RAP platforms to improve strategic management at regional level, improve quality and implement new elements in system of initial education etc.). These “system-creating” calls are eventually followed by other calls in PA3 whose purpose is to realize a particular measure under the created or improved system using projects.

Justification for targeting of a call stated in MS2014+ is in the case of all the analysed first calls in agreement with Justification for the establishment of a priority axis or with Key problems and needs, as stated in the OP RDE text.

Criteria of economy, efficiency and effectiveness (so called 3E) are included in every call. From the point of view of the evaluator, **setting of the criteria is functional and the criteria always concern the factual focus of the call.** In order to evaluate real effectiveness of realized OP RDE investments, it is considered to be convenient to realize evaluation of factual effects of OP RDE projects in individual axes/subjects/calls etc.

Absorptive Capacity of First Calls

It can be said about most first calls that the absorptive capacity was estimated properly, support was received mostly by project applications of high quality. We consider absorptive capacity of these two calls, 02_15_005 LAP for Education Development and 02_15_007 Inclusive Education, to be underestimated.

The applicants applied for most calls (6 calls where ratio of quality applications was higher than 50%; average ratio of high-quality applications was 74%) with projects that may be, according to the total point value, considered high-quality. The lowest ratio of applications evaluated as being of high-quality was submitted in call 02_15_006 Teaming (33% high-quality applications). In this call three applications were submitted in total, one of them evaluated as being of high-quality, other two as of medium-quality. A part of factual evaluation was carried out by a complementary call from Horizon 2020.


Accessibility and Comprehensibility of Information for Applicants/Recipients in First Calls

Programme documents and call documents are according to applicants and recipients in first (and also other) calls accessible. All the documents are accessible online on the website of the MEYS. The website of the MEYS is considered rather transparent and comprehensive by applicants in first and also other calls. Under the announcement of first calls, the FAQ section was problematic on the website. Applicants had problems navigating in the section. In the announcement period of first calls, there was no thematic categorization in the FAQ section (this flaw is now eliminated). The applicants still claim to have problem finding recently answered questions in the FAQ section. This makes browsing the answers more difficult for them because they need to read answers in the FAQ section repeatedly and look for recently answered questions. Applicants and recipients of first and other calls do not evaluate seminars, discussions, panel discussions and other meeting organized for applicants and recipients from individual calls particularly positively.



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Comprehensibility of the documents is considered good, applicants/recipients are mostly able to find the needed information there. Still, the documents are considered relatively difficult.

Applicants and recipients (in both first and other calls) consider the fact that individual employees of the MEYS sometimes interpret OP RDE rules in different ways unsatisfactory. Applicants and recipients also claim than in the beginning of PA3–LAP/RAP projects, there was not a united interpretation of the rules between NIFE and NIE. Applicants and recipients of first calls in PA1, PA2 and PA3 evaluated operation with information system MS2014+, or more precisely with ISKP14+ module for applicants, overall negatively. Based on results from questionnaires, focus groups and interviews with employees of the MEYS, the system is seen as not reliable (in terms of stability and overloading) and the response time is low (linked to e.g. hardware requirements, server connection etc.).

Effectiveness of Preparation of Calls and Administrative Load Connected to the First Calls

The evaluator considers the process of preparation of calls to be functional. The process effectively keeps duplications between individual OP RDE calls and between OP RDE calls and other operational programmes' calls from emerging.

Formal settings of the process of evaluation and selection of projects for funding is considered correct by the evaluator. What keeps the process from optimal and real functioning is malfunction of MS2014+ and shortage of personnel in the MEYS (overloaded intern evaluators, shortage of foreign experts. These obstacles cause delays in e.g. issuing Decisions to Provide Financial Support and in paying advance payments to realizers (i.e. given deadlines are not observed).

Administrative load connected to first calls met the expectations from the beginning of the OP RDE implementation. After announcement of first calls of the operational programme, increased interest of potential applicants in gaining financial support is to be expected as well as increased demands on administrative capacity of the MEYS. In the setting of the preparation process and MEYS's administration of first calls and their project applications, employees of the MEYS did not identify any fundamental problems that would make administration of calls and project applications impossible.

The administration is made more difficult by the MS2014+ system containing relatively high amount of technical errors or process flaws. These are difficult to eliminate from the point of view of the MEYS. The reason is a complicated process of carrying out requests for change (in case of process flaws) and error correction requests. Room to increase effectivity of call preparation, application creation and choosing projects for funding was identified based on discussions with applicants and recipients of first calls. Findings from applicants and recipients were further discussed with representatives of 433 – Department of Evaluation and Approval of the MEYS Projects.


Overview of PA1–PA3

- As far as applicants and recipients are concerned, OP RDE calls have too wide scale of point evaluation. Therefore, it is important for applicants and recipients to get as many points as possible so that the requested project budget is not reduced. This means that for a grant to be assigned, units of evaluating points can be decisive.
- Evaluation of applications in agreement with carried out CBA is considered purely formal by applicants and recipients. It is evaluated whether results of the analysis are positive (regardless of “financial leveraging tool” created by the project). CBA is created based on inputs and



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outputs that are often determined only by an expert's estimate, impossible to objectively verify. This causes low validity of the created CBA in practice.

- From the point of view of applicants and recipients, the application process would be easier and faster if some documents (e.g. confirmation of no outstanding payments or extract from criminal register regarding an institute's senior manager) were submitted with approved projects, not with all the applications during the approval process. Before the project being approved, the documentation should be sufficient with sworn statements (e.g. Act on Public Procurement makes a similar procedure possible).
- OP RDE rules set additional requirements for projects regarding financial control that are beyond financial controls defined by Act No. 134/2016 Sb., on Public Procurement and Act No. 320/2001 Sb., on Financial Control. It makes requirements for applicants considerably more difficult. Applicants would prefer placing more emphasis on current legislation to creating more regulations.

PA1: Strengthening Capacity for High-Quality Research

- From the point of view of applicants and recipients in PA1, it is not optimal that financial allocation of projects is broken into more years under the OP implementation period and it gradually vanishes in more, relatively small projects. In terms of sustainability and extent of positive effect on R&D environment, these are of peripheral importance in comparison with bigger long-term projects (it should be typically linked to e.g. faster benefitting for R&D projects in the end of OP EIC and OP RDI programme period). Applicants would therefore prefer supporting higher number of long-term projects (especially in the beginning of OP implementation) whose effects have higher potential to run continuously even after the end of MEYS's financial support.
- Project applications in PA1 were submitted in both Czech and English (for foreign evaluation). Changes had to be entered in both versions. From the point of view of applicants and recipients of PA1, it would be more appropriate to submit the applications in only one language (e.g. English).
- From the point of view of applicants and recipients in PA1, reasons given for the evaluators' evaluation of applications is not a constructive feedback that would make it possible for applicants to avoid similar mistakes in future or improve the quality of their project application.
- In projects with foreign experts involved (e.g. PA1 projects from calls 02_15_003 and 02_15_006), deadline extensions cause communication problems with the experts and problems with organizing their physical presence in the Czech Republic (contracts must be signed about the experts' work in the Czech Republic, they must be offered a time-framed job, it is needed to arrange e.g. the expert's moving to the Czech Republic, hire a flat, book air tickets etc.). Extending deadlines for submitting applications (as well as e.g. late evaluation of applications) make the arrangements more complicated and may decrease the expert's interest in taking part in an OP RDE project.

PA2: Development of Universities and Human Resources for Research and Development

- Universities invest in projects already in the phase of preparation of the application. Some hire consultant firms to help them and they need to cover these costs from their own budget. They worry that unexpected expenses caused by prolonging the process of submitting applications will play a significant role in their finance situation because they cannot be sure that their project will be approved (temporary earmarking of funds from universities' budgets for consultation services, uncertainty that the project will be approved and the expenses will be



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possible to cover from the project's budget). Many universities therefore hesitate if earmarking funds for preparation of OP RDE applications is worth it.

PA3: Equal Access to High-Quality Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education

- Applicants of calls 02_15_002 and 02_15_007 miss consultations with people from relevant departments of the MEYS. The MEYS project managers who are occupied with more administrative than factual aspect of projects often do not have, according to applicants, insights factual enough to be able to give applicants and recipients advice professional enough (especially when it comes to the factual part of a project realization).
- It was not possible to realize more than one project in every region from call 02_15_002. In this call were applications evaluated qualitatively and based on decreased number of assigned points, amount of funding was reduced as well. The MEYS's goal in this strategically important call (follow-up on systemic projects) should be realization of as high-quality projects as possible. Active collaboration of the MEYS and applicants and recipients in factual area of preparation of the application would therefore be considered more convenient.
- In call no. 02_15_002, methodological sheets issued by P-RAP were evaluated as not very clear and transparent. From the point of view of applicants and recipients, the sheets are changed often, there is no clear and transparent marking of changes, issue date, effective date, authorship. In general, applicants came across inconsistency in interpretation of principles of creating LAP/RAP between NIFE and NIE (e.g. regarding specification of responsibility for mapping of investments in a region).

Recommendations Resulting from Findings

Recommendation Name	Recommendation Description	Recommendation Prioritization
Proceed with elimination of the risk factor according to planned processes of the MEYS	The MEYS bears a risk of insufficient functionality of MS2014+ including ISKP14+ portal in mind. The risk is regularly monitored (the last monitoring took place as a part of Overall Report about Risk Management in OP RDE in 1 January 2016 – 30 June 2016 period). The MEYS constantly works on elimination or reduction of the risk factor.	●
Continuously monitor quality and sufficient amount of external foreign evaluators	It is recommended to continuously monitor ratings of evaluators and monitor based on the rating if the MEYS has enough high-quality foreign evaluators who can evaluate project applications in upcoming calls. If there is a risk of shortage, the MEYS is supposed to take steps to complete the database of external foreign evaluators.	●
Carry out a process-personal analysis in order to discover free capacities of the MEYS for evaluation and administration of projects from planned calls	The analysis should be based on a schedule of calls and expected number of project applications and it should identify bottlenecks in expected development of submitting project applications. Afterwards, it should be determined whether the MEYS is able to cover expected labour-intensity connected to evaluation of applications from current personnel resources (Department 433 and other relevant departments). Based on the analysis, the MEYS should take steps to secure sufficient personnel capacities for early evaluation of announced calls.	●
Increase in active communication with applicants while answering questions regarding OP RDE administration – e.g. in a form of courses, also during announcement period	We suggest that courses for applicants that usually take place in the beginning of the announcement of a call are repeated at least once in a later phase of the announcement of the call (e.g. in the last third of the announcement period). The MEYS actively answers all the applicants' individual questions and organizes the courses in the beginning of the announcement period. However, applicants do not have much practical experience with application preparation at the time, which is why they do not have enough practical questions they could ask.	●



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Recommendation Name	Recommendation Description	Recommendation Prioritization
Improvement of quality of arrangement and organization of the FAQ section on the website of the MEYS	It is suggested that with every update of the FAQ section in individual sections of answers, it will be stated when the new answers were added. At the same time, it is considered convenient to automatically send notifications when the sections are updated (e.g. in a form of emails sent to applicants who signed up for notifications or in a form of automatically sent dispatches in ISKP14+) to active applicants. The notification would contain information about what section was updated/newly added answer to a frequently asked question.	●
Verify an opportunity to simplify preparation of applications for applicants using documenting sworn statements	It is recommended to state in calls that sworn statements are enough for project applications instead of relevant documents (e.g. extract from the criminal register). These documents would be documented in full version after application approval, which means just before signing decision about the funding allocation. The MA should verify if this simplification can be done considering the United Methodological Environment 2014–2020, valid legislation and other intern MEYS regulations.	●
Revision of system for project application evaluation with an objective to improve criteria relevance and objectification, evaluation and decrease in administrative demands on MEYS' employees	It is suggested that evaluation criteria of newly announced calls (change of criteria and evaluation range cannot be changed in already announced calls) are revised. The revision should focus on effective placement of criteria in calls and on minimization of number of qualitative criteria that are limited because of evaluation methodology only to control formal meeting of a criterion (e.g. CBA analysis). It is also necessary to minimize a number of criteria that are difficult to evaluate objectively and for which it is possible to achieve a high score at the same time (e.g. motivation letter). It is also suggested that an option of overall reduction of point range in application evaluation is considered in revision.	●
Active factual assistance of the MEYS for applicants and recipients of projects with conceptual characteristics	According to MEYS, it is convenient that from non-competitive projects with conceptual characteristics, the realized projects are of the highest quality (e.g. call 02_15_002 – excess of financial allocation over applications and a number of projects limited by a number of regions; there was no competition among applicants). Therefore, it is recommended that the MEYS carries out active factual assistance for both applicants during preparation of the applications and for realizers of the projects. We consider convenient for the assistance to be provided for individual projects in calls with a set maximum number of projects (e.g. 02_15_002, 02_15_004), group assistance can be provided for groups of projects (e.g. 02_15_005). Factual assistance for projects in realization is recommended for individual projects or groups of projects in which the MA identified risks significantly threatening quality of achieved results and outputs. Based on still existing general problems with these projects, remedial actions may be taken in following calls.	●
Announcement of calls that will cover supported activities that have not been cover by first or other calls yet	Supported activities stated on theory of change cards that have not been covered by finished, announced or planned calls yet were identified. Realization of supported activities in projects is necessary for the complete mechanism of theory of change as it is described in individual specific objectives of OP RDE.	●
More careful setting of conditions in other calls	Deadlines for submitting applications where delays occurred were evaluated negatively. Deadline extensions may cause problems with realization itself for both applicants and recipients (postponement of expected launch date, necessity to re-assess agreements made with e.g. foreign experts about participation in projects in the Czech Republic etc.) Announcement length should be adequate to estimated difficulty of application preparation.	●
Reduction of minimum project costs in relevant calls in PA1 and PA2	The minimum project costs set in a call may result in private universities and R&D institutions not being able to participate in OP RDE interventions (either because of exhaustion of de minimis support or because projects of private universities that are significantly smaller than public universities in the Czech Republic require funding under the level of stated minimum overall project costs. Therefore, it is recommended that relevant calls in PA1 and PA2 decrease stated minimum project costs. It is recommended that	●





Recommendation Name	Recommendation Description	Recommendation Prioritization
	this issue is paid a particular attention during preparation of calls especially at programme planning committees with participation of representatives of private universities and Association of Research Organisations.	

Disclaimer:

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