

Periodic Assessment of Research, Development, Artistic and Other Creative Activities VER 2026

Final Report of the Social Work Sub-panel

1. SUMMARY

The evaluation process in the Sub-panel Social work was overall smooth, without any major discrepancies between the evaluators. We reached consensus after discussions without difficulties, and there was strong agreement between the five sub-panel members concerning the final scores.

Having completed the evaluation of the 10 applications included in the Sub-panel Social work's assignment, we conclude that the quality of the respective outputs, social impact and creative environment criteria is overall high. However, there are important quality differences both between and within the applications. In this report, we will provide a detailed description of how the assessment was performed and what characteristics were taken into account in assigning each of the five quality levels. We end the report with a discussion of the main challenges we encountered as evaluators, and some general recommendations for the applicants.

2. THE EVALUATION RESULTS

2.1. OUTPUTS

In this section, we will discuss how we assessed the five different score levels and how we assigned these scores for the three evaluation criteria: Originality, Significance, and Rigour.

2.1.1. World-leading quality

The highest possible score required consensus between the sub-panel members that the output is outstanding in terms of both originality, significance and rigour. This was, all in all, the case for slightly **less than 5% of the evaluated outputs**.

What these works have in common is that, in addition to meeting the highest applicable academic standards—through clearly defined and relevant research questions, coherent argumentation, and rigorous methodologies aligned with their theoretical frameworks and problem formulations—they address research problems of significant relevance to the international scientific community in innovative ways. In doing so, they make substantive contributions that advance existing knowledge in the field.

The outputs classified as world-leading stood out as genuinely “top of the field”: they concisely identified important research gaps, provided a strong theoretical base that was actually used in the analysis, and a contribution that moved the international conversation forward. Methods and analysis were solid and transparent, with claims tightly backed by evidence. Often (but not always) these outputs were also published in high-quality journals/other outlets. While this is not an evaluation criteria per se, we did consider it a confirmation of the recognized excellent quality of the output.

2.1.1. Internationally excellent quality

The second-highest score also reflects excellence at a level significantly higher than average. In total, around **20% of the outputs** were assigned this score, though there are large differences between the applications in this respect.

Overall, these outputs share that they indicate strong international connectivity and show clear academic added value to an international readership. They apply a solid, appropriate and clearly described methodology, a coherent argumentation supported by relevant

references, with a clear contribution of new knowledge to the field, and the researchers demonstrate capacity to open new avenues of inquiry grounded in original source material. The internationally excellent outputs are typically characterized by defined research questions, solid methodological framework, explicit engagement with international and/or current debates, and integration of empirical data within broader interpretative frameworks.

A significant portion of the outputs in this category are published in top-tier international journals. Many outputs also reflect strong collaboration within both national and international contexts. Outputs that achieve the highest ratings (particularly those of world-leading calibre, but also many of the internationally excellent ones) demonstrate sustained research agendas rather than isolated achievements.

3.3. Internationally recognised quality

The internationally recognised quality score makes up the largest category, with **roughly 45% of the outputs** scored at this quality level.

This quality level was applied to the large number of publications that represent sound, credible scholarship, but without being outstanding in terms of originality and significance. The methodology in this category is rigorous, but rarely innovative, and the analysis is more often descriptive than theoretically ground-breaking. Compared to the two highest scores, the internationally recognised outputs reflect weaker theory–analysis links, or a narrower contribution of more limited interest to the international research community.

3.4. Nationally recognised quality

Nearly **27% of the outputs** were classified as of nationally recognised quality. These works are often useful and relevant, but often more locally and practically oriented and applicable, while less clearly positioned in international debates and academic discourses. Methods and analysis tend to be basic and descriptive rather than analytical, and the engagement in

theories and references to the existing literature are somewhat limited. For quantitative pieces, the sample size is often very small, or data/methods do not fully match the arguments and conclusions. Many of these outputs are published in proceedings of international (often regional) conferences. The quality of the articles in these conference proceedings is rather mixed (suggesting that there is less quality control than, for example, for journal articles). While, as noted above, we have not evaluated the outputs based on where they are published, we consider this aspect relevant in case they are published without proper peer review or quality controls, which is an important indicator of lower quality standards.

3.5. Below the standard of nationally recognised work

This was the least common category, with slightly **3.5% of the outputs**. We were very restrictive in applying the lowest score, and only did so when we agreed that the work did not meet minimum academic standards, and at times was not deemed relevant for social work or related fields in the social sciences. Typical issues were unclear or incomplete definitions of research gaps/questions/arguments, weak coherence (there was no theory at all, or the theoretical framework was not connected to the analysis), very thin or unclear methods (e.g. when methods were not mentioned at all), conclusions were not supported by the data, or in the case of some subjectivist opinion/religion-based advocacy texts without any form of evidence or connection to academic research.

2.2. SOCIAL IMPACT

Below, we describe how the scores applied for the Social impact criterion were assigned for each of the sub-criteria of evaluation: 1) Application potential of the underpinning research; 2) Degree of social impact; 3) Link between underpinning research and social impact; and 4)

Quality of evidence of social impact. Four scores were applied in practice: Excellent; Very good; Good and Satisfactory. The lowest score (Unsatisfactory) was not applied for any of the applications.

2.2.1. Excellent

The score Excellent was applied in five of the applications; in one of these cases, in all four sub-criteria. Overall, 27% of the sub-criteria across the ten applications were qualified as Excellent. In evaluating the different sub-criteria as Excellent, we particularly valued the following aspects:

1) Application potential of the underpinning research

The research institute clearly demonstrated how they conduct highly socially relevant research and have a solid capacity to transform research results into social impact. Important facilitators such as large European research grants were positively valued in this evaluation criterion.

2) Degree of social impact

The degree of actual social impact generated by the institute was deemed very strong and highly credible, based on the facilitated evidence such as recognition of collaboration with public institutions and the Ministry.

3) Link between underpinning research and social impact

The link between the research conducted by the group and the intended social impact is very strong, explicit and well defined.

4) Quality of evidence of social impact

There is strong evidence of how the research group/institute generates significant social impact through their research, for instance through active participation in policymaking.

There is demonstrated high potential for continuous social impact of the research produced by the group.

2.2.2. Very good

The score Very good was applied in six of the applications, and in 27% of the sub-criteria across the ten applications. In evaluating the different sub-criteria as Very good, we particularly valued the following aspects:

1) Application potential of the underpinning research

The research institutes clearly demonstrated how they conduct socially relevant research and have a real capacity to transform research results into social impact.

2) Degree of social impact

The degree of actual social impact generated by the institute was deemed high and credible, based on the facilitated evidence.

3) Link between underpinning research and social impact

The link between the research conducted by the group and the intended social impact is strong and well defined.

4) Quality of evidence of social impact

There is significant evidence of how the research group/institute generates significant social impact through their research, for instance through collaboration with relevant social actors.

2.2.3. Good

The score Good was applied in four of the applications, and in 23% of the sub-criteria across the ten applications. In evaluating the different sub-criteria as Good, we particularly valued the following aspects:

1) Application potential of the underpinning research

The research institute shows that they conduct socially relevant research and have a certain capacity to transform research results into social impact.

2) Degree of social impact

The degree of actual social impact generated by the institute was deemed relevant, based on the facilitated evidence.

3) Link between underpinning research and social impact

There is an established link between the research conducted by the group and the intended social impact.

4) Quality of evidence of social impact

There is some evidence of how the research group/institute generates significant social impact through their research.

2.2.4. Satisfactory

The score Satisfactory was applied in three of the applications, and in 23% of the sub-criteria across the ten applications. In evaluating the different sub-criteria as Satisfactory, we particularly valued the following aspects:

1) Application potential of the underpinning research

The research conducts some socially relevant research and has certain potential to transform research results into social impact.

2) Degree of social impact

The degree of actual social impact generated by the institute was deemed moderate, based on the facilitated evidence.

3) Link between underpinning research and social impact

The link between the research conducted by the institute and the intended social impact is implicit, but not sufficiently developed and demonstrated.

4) Quality of evidence of social impact

There is limited evidence of how the research group/institute generates significant social impact through their research.

2.3. CREATIVE ENVIRONMENT

In this section, we explain how the scores applied for the Creative environment criterion were assigned for each of the sub-criteria of evaluation: 1) The strategic direction and scientific profiling of the submitting institution in the area of research, artistic activity and social impact; 2) Workplace conditions in terms of staffing for the creative environment; 3) Degree of collaborations and their contribution to the relevant research area and workplace; and 4) The overall sustainability of the applicant's workplace, considering its strategic direction, scientific profiling, collaboration and staffing conditions for creative activity. Three scores were applied in practice: Very good; Good and Satisfactory. The highest (Excellent) and lowest (Unsatisfactory) scores were not applied for any of the applications.

2.3.1. Very good

The score Very good was applied in six of the applications, and in 48% of the sub-criteria across the ten applications. In evaluating the different sub-criteria as Very good, we particularly valued the following aspects:

1) The strategic direction and scientific profiling of the submitting institution in the area of research, artistic activity and social impact

The institutes evaluated as Very good for this sub-criterion placed strong emphasis on social impact and knowledge transfer, also through teaching. They provided evidence that they maintained a very high level of achievement in this field.

2) Workplace conditions in terms of staffing for the creative environment

The staff situation is solid, stable and balanced in the relationship between more senior and junior professors, and permanent/temporary staff, safeguarding continuity and stability of the institute's activities.

3) Degree of collaborations and their contribution to the relevant research area and workplace

The institute/research group engages in numerous, national and international collaborations that enrich their research activities.

4) The overall sustainability of the applicant's workplace, considering its strategic direction, scientific profiling, collaboration and staffing conditions for creative activity

There is comprehensive and coherent planning of the research and other activities, including detailed descriptions of how the work is carried out. The direction is overall clearly of high quality and sustainable.

2.3.2. Good

The score Good was applied in four of the applications, and in 23% of the sub-criteria across the ten applications. In evaluating the different sub-criteria as Good, we particularly valued the following aspects:

1) The strategic direction and scientific profiling of the submitting institution in the area of research, artistic activity and social impact

The institutes considered social impact and knowledge transfer, also through teaching. There was a clearly stated mission, but not necessarily a very strong scientific profile.

2) Workplace conditions in terms of staffing for the creative environment

There is overall a good level of infrastructure and resources for conducting creative work, and balance between different professional profiles.

3) Degree of collaborations and their contribution to the relevant research area and workplace

The institute/research group has established collaborations with other research institutions, for instance partnerships with international universities.

4) The overall sustainability of the applicant's workplace, considering its strategic direction, scientific profiling, collaboration and staffing conditions for creative activity

There are some examples of ongoing research projects and grant funding; moderate evidence of impact of publications.

2.3.3. Satisfactory

The score Satisfactory was applied in three of the applications, and in 29% of the sub-criteria across the ten applications. We considered the following aspects:

1) The strategic direction and scientific profiling of the submitting institution in the area of research, artistic activity and social impact

The institutes scored as Satisfactory for this sub-criterion typically had a weaker-than-average scientific profile.

2) Workplace conditions in terms of staffing for the creative environment

Acceptable level of infrastructure and resources for conducting creative work, and balance between different professional profiles.

3) Degree of collaborations and their contribution to the relevant research area and workplace

The institute/research group has few established collaborations with other research institutions or other relevant institutions.

4) The overall sustainability of the applicant's workplace, considering its strategic direction, scientific profiling, collaboration and staffing conditions for creative activity

Few examples of ongoing research projects, nearly no grant funding; comparably low impact of publications.

3. CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. Challenges identified during the evaluation

The most challenging aspect for all the evaluators in the sub-panel Social work was how to guarantee fair assessment of the outputs that were submitted in Slovak language, accompanied by sometimes very short abstracts in English. In these cases, we based the evaluation entirely on the content of the abstract, meaning that the assessment was more comprehensive when a longer, more detailed abstract was provided.

3.2. Recommendations for applicants

As a general recommendation for future evaluation processes, we would like to recommend that the applicants make sure that they include scientific publications that are as detailed and coherent as possible regarding the basic elements: research question/problem,

methodology and data, theoretical contribution and connection with/contribution to enhance existing research in the field.

In writing the outputs the authors should try to outline to the reader as clearly as possible what is novel about their findings and how their findings can be used to inform the reader's theoretical understanding of the topic being examined, as well as draw out the possible policy and practice implications that may flow from their findings. Doing this would help to better demonstrate the originality and significance of the research. Moreover, the description provided of the methodologies underpinning the research outputs in the Applications could have been outlined in greater detail. Oftentimes, the methodologies were only briefly described, if at all, when a more detailed discussion of the sample, recruitment method and limitations of the research design were required to better understand the generalisability of the findings. This information is important to assess if the rigour scores of the outputs are to be enhanced. Likewise, it would be good practice for the outputs which collected primary data to state whether or not ethical approval was obtained to conduct the research, as often this information is currently omitted.

In general, while some outputs were very good at drawing out the implications of their findings for academic knowledge, policy and practice, the majority of outputs could have been stronger in this area. It is recommended that authors spend more time in highlighting how the findings from their research can be used to advance the academic understanding of the topic, as well as inform policy and practice, such as interventions, policies, interactions, etc., if the significance scores of the outputs are to be improved. In addition, the research profiles of the applicants could be strengthened by aiming at publication outlets that have higher visibility for the strongest outputs.

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