Background

ESF has a strong and deep knowledge of peer review and evaluation processes. In 2011, ESF issued the *European Peer Review Guide – Integrating Policies and Practices into Coherent Procedure*s. This guide resulted from an in-depth analysis of peer review processes implemented by the leading European public research funding organisations. This benchmarking and synthesising exercise allowed ESF to refine and improve its approach and internal processes in order to integrate some of the best practices identified during that analysis.

Similarly, ESF organised a detailed review of evaluation practices across European research organisations that allowed the organisation to grasp and get strong understanding of this the complex issues raised by scientific evaluation. From this review, the ESF issued a report entitled *Evaluation in Research and Research Funding Organisations: European Practices*.

Operations

In providing peer review services and evaluation services, ESF draws upon its long experience in the field and its highly competent staff. Having implemented peer review and evaluation for its own purposes or third parties for more than three decades, ESF has a deep understanding and strong expertise allowing its partner organisations to have access to peer review and evaluation services of the highest international standards. ESF expertise is particularly valuable in the following domains:

- *Structuring the overall process*

    ESF has developed its capacity to define and design efficient and appropriate assessment and evaluation processes. Therefore ESF can support its partner organisations in designing a given process and/or implementing it.

- *Mobilising the most appropriate expertise*

    Beside the overall structure of the scientific assessment to be performed, the core of any such process is the provision of assessments that would best serve the evaluation process. In this context, it is of utmost importance that documents and people are assessed by appropriately qualified experts, in particular:

    - External experts having a precise knowledge of the proposals they are asked to assess
    - Review panel members who have broad knowledge and experience allowing a good overview of the state of the art

    Identifying the right experts and setting up balanced review panels are complex tasks, in particular when considering multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary topics. ESF has developed the skills, processes, guidelines, infrastructure and tools (including a vast international database of experts) to perform these tasks in a coherent, ethical and efficient manner.

- *Providing an efficient and smooth operational structure*

   Any single step of an assessment process is highly demanding in terms of resource, in particular staff. ESF has developed skills, competences and procedures that allow an efficient and reliable management of scientific information to be considered. This capacity is also supported by an optimised IT infrastructure that allows fast and trustworthy interactions and exchange of information for all the actors involved.

   ESF procedures and infrastructures allow:
   - Production of documentation and guidelines appropriate to each phase
   - Tailored web platform for remote reviews and panel review
   - Identification and contact of appropriate expert remote reviewers
   - Identification and contact of appropriate review panel members
   - Logistical and administrative support to panel
   - Production of the agreed deliverables

- *Quality control and integrity*

   ESF is a not for profit, non-governmental organisation. Implementing scientific assessment involves accountability not only towards the partner organisation but also towards the scientists being assessed themselves. ESF is committed to peer review and evaluation services of the highest quality. In doing so ESF pays special attention to the following issues:

   - *Conflicts of interest*

      A conflict of interest may be defined as a situation where a person may benefit either financially, professionally or personally by the result of an assessment. ESF has developed and is implementing robust and well-defined guidelines to identify and manage potential conflicts of interest throughout the whole peer review process.

   - *Transparency*

      ESF is committed to ensure full transparency throughout the whole peer review process. This involves:

      - Regular interaction with and feedback to the partner organisation
      - Ensuring the partner organisation can have access to all the relevant documentation and information produced throughout the process
      - Inviting representatives from the partner organisation to the meetings held in the frame of a given activity

   - *Equality of treatment*

      Development and writing of research proposals and scientific reports require significant effort and sometimes coordination with collaborators. It is crucial that the assessment process implemented recognises and values this effort. In implementing its peer review or evaluation services, ESF is committed to ensure that all documents are assessed and processed in a coherent and consistent way in order to produce a fair treatment in which the same level of consideration is given to all scientists.

   - *Confidentiality of information provided*

      All participants in the peer review process are required to note that the information provided in the frame of a process should be used only for that purpose. They are also

required to treat all information provided as strictly confidential and are requested to sign non-disclosure agreements.

Recent peer review and evaluation activities for third parties

ESF has always conducted high quality peer review of research proposals submitted in the frame of its instruments (Research Networking Programmes, EUROCORES, Exploratory Workshops, conferences), it has also performed evaluation of the various individual programmes and projects as well as of the schemes themselves. Since a couple of years ESF has implemented Peer Review and evaluation services beyond its remit and has served third party organisations, the most significant activities are listed below.

Peer review of research Proposals:
- European Space Agency/NASA/Canadian Space Agency/Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency
  International Life Science Research Announcement and Physical sciences research announcement (microgravity and space environment) - 2009
- Europolar Consortium
  EUROclimate Research Programme - 2009
- HERA – Humanities ERANet
  Handling agent for the open calls between 2005 and 2012
- University of Bologna
  Basic research investment fund (FIRB) and Research projects of significant national interest (PRIN) preselection - 2012
- Universities of Torino and Piemonte Orientale
  Peer review of proposals submitted in the frame of philanthropy (Compagnia di San Paolo) university support - 2012
- University of Naples
  Peer review of proposals submitted in the frame of philanthropy (Compagnia di San Paolo) university support - 2013
- AXA Research Fund
  Peer review and call management of Post Doctoral fellowships scheme 2013-2014
- FP7 GRAPHENE Flagship
  Call management and peer review in the frame of the Call for consortium Extension – 2013-2014
- University of Torino Train2Move FP7 Marie Curie COFUND programme
  Assessment of mobility applications submitted – 2014-2015

Evaluating (national) institutes of research/programmes
- European Space Agency European Life and Physical Sciences in Space programme – 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012
- Bulgarian Academy of Sciences - 2009-2010
- Slovenian Academy of Sciences - 2011
- Evaluation of a selection of Spanish research Groups in ICT - Fundación Leonardo Torres Quevedo and EMCANTA (Empresa Cantabra Para Desarrollo Nuevas Tecnologias en la Administracion) – 2011
- Research Council of Lithuania – 2013-2014
- Hungarian Scientific Research fund - 2014