

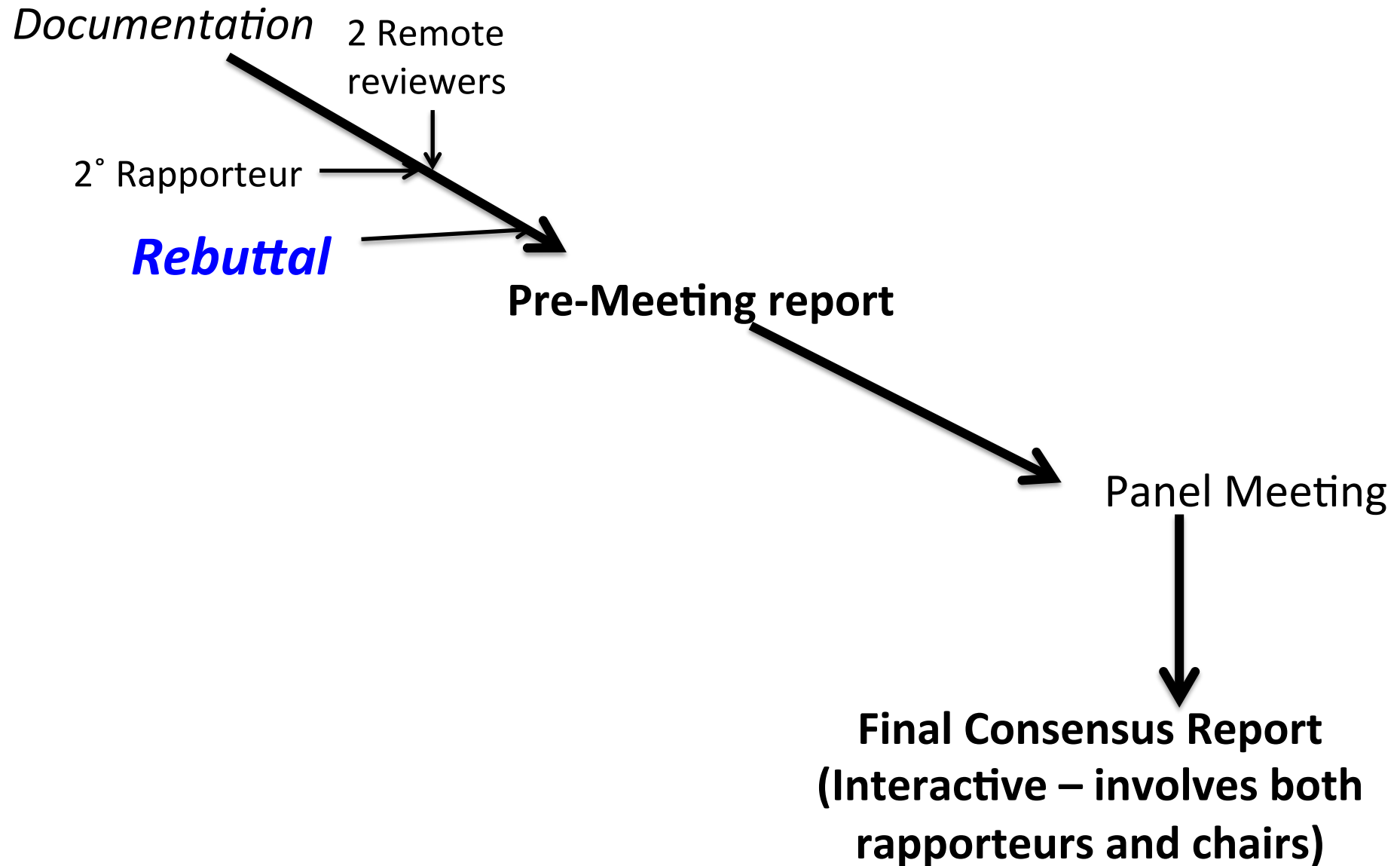
Review of Research Units: challenges and lessons learned

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Process Overview



(quite similar to UK Research Council Institute reviews)

Challenges

Paperwork

Voluminous (from 12-348 pages)
Repetitious (similar questions asked)

Time-scale

Reasonable time to read everything
Short time window for post-Panel reports

External Reviewers

Identification & securing agreement
Interpreting comments

Bibliometrics

Some discrepancies
Used Elsevier data only interests of consistency

Disparate Scores

Reviewer to reviewer
Reviewer to Panel

Re-structuring

Recent versus established
Assessment of 'new' units.

Positive Features of FCT Review

Well-organised	ESF online platform worked superbly FCT support at Panels excellent, too (process questions) Panel meetings well-timed and supported
Panelists	Met ESF & FCT requirements for seniority and experience Fully prepared, excellent level of discussion and analysis Willing to do more <i>in situ</i>
Objectivity	Cols declared well in advance Few formal links to Portuguese labs, <i>per se</i>
Rebuttal Phase	Clarification of points of detail Correction of mis-conceptions Occasional extra information (e.g., on re-structuring plans)
No Fixed Budget	Decisions based on merit <i>Not</i> on declining budget or 'funds remaining'
Standardisation guidelines	General analysis provided by FCT on distribution of units' classification Allowed some degree of normalisation across panels

Bibliometrics

Used *only* the Elsevier bibliometric data

- Took a holistic view over the review period
- *Nature* is nice but not the whole story
- Looked for papers in credible journals in the field
- Quality took precedence over quantity
- Not overly focused on journal impact factors
- Treated H-indices and citations with caution

Re-structuring

"We trained hard, but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams, we would be reorganized. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganizing; and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency, and demoralization."

Gaius Petronius Arbiter, 210 BC

(Actually by Charlton Ogburn Jr in *Merrill's Marauders; the truth about a terrible adventure* (1957))

In the Units

Some have re-structured very effectively

Some have good forward plans for re-organisation

Some have unusual governance arrangements

“New” units took different approaches to ‘history’

Disparate Scores

Reviewers

Remote reviewers see only **ONE** proposal

Everyone has their own suite of “likes and dislikes” that shape a score

Some reviewers are unrealistically harsh

Panelists

Saw a *minimum* of 6 proposals each in detail; full spectrum

Interpret reviews (a “5” with lots of critical points is not a “5”)

Interpret rebuttal (*immensely* important; generally positive and helpful)

Discuss points of difference openly; other panelists contribute

Agreement reached by all contributors.

14/15

The cut-off for a site visit was 15.

What happened to proposals scoring 14 (4, 3, 4, 3) or those scoring 15 but as 4,4,3,4?

Some identified early (pre-meeting reports), others at meeting

Reviewed 'overnight' by another 'new' panel member (P3 & P7)

Re-discussed in full Panel with 'benefit of doubt' in mind

FCT supported maximising number of units to be site visited

Some proposals were re-scored to 15, others remained at 14

In short, read by *six* different individuals

What did we learn? A mini-SWOT analysis

STRENGTHS

Strong units across the country
Some truly world-class centres
Strong Leadership
Multi-disciplinarity
Excellent M.Sc / PhD programmes
Very fine outreach programmes
Internationalisation

OPPORTUNITIES

Facilities sharing
EU resources
Broader networks
Succession planning
Wider links via alumni
National Centres of Excellence

WEAKNESSES

Some units not competitive, alas
Wide performance levels within units
Opaque strategy and forward plans
Multi-disciplinarity
Mixed success with EU funding
Limited networks
Unclear budget arrangements

THREATS

Resource restriction
Variation in performance levels
Strong leadership
Governance fitness for purpose
Lack of success with EU applications

Site Visits

Coming soon...(coordinated and implemented by FCT with ESF support on logistics and operation)

- Panel members are looking forward to seeing round the units, meeting the teams and hearing more about the science
- Engage positively
- Some outline questions will appear on consensus reports; others will arise on the day
- Some Panels will ask for a local “SWOT” analysis; that would be helpful
- Some Panels would like to meet PhD / Post-doc students to hear their views on training programmes
- Ask for feedback; these are discussions, not monologues
- Ask for assistance (e.g., identifying advisory board members)

Conclusions

Review worked well

Documentation was challenging for all

All applications got a fair, positive hearing, especially at 'borderlines'

Outcomes are robust

>50% of units will be site visited

There is good science being done across the nation

There are centres that are genuinely world-leading

Training programmes are excellent

Portuguese Science is fine shape and getting stronger