

EAAP Animal Fibre Working Group (AFWG): experience of funding applications to the EC COST Framework

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Abstract

The EAAP AFWG was constituted in 2007 with a view to enhancing the role of animal fibre in EU27, utilizing an approach based on science and technology. Although an unrecorded and neglected product, annual production of wool from 62m breeding sheep (Eurostat) alone is substantial at an estimated 186,000 tonnes (FAO). Recent outputs include organised symposia and publications defining current knowledge. In recognising the need for better networks of scientists and technologists, a total of 5 applications for financial support has been made to the EC COST Framework since 2010. Such applications, by initial pre-proposal, are assessed in 6 categories with a maximum score of 6 for each, giving a maximum score of 36. Pre-proposals scoring most highly, on average, are invited to submit a full proposal. Evaluation has been characterised by large variation in scores of individual assessors. For one example, scores of 36, 33, 32, 32, 28, 21, 16 were awarded by 7 assessors, giving mean value = 28.3; SD = 7.23; CV% = 25.5. The divergence of the median value of 32 from the mean (28.3) shows a skewed distribution. Removal of the two lowest outliers, gives a mean = 32.2; SD = 2.86; CV% = 8.9 and median = 32 and removes the skew. The use in ranking, of such a simple average of means, is clearly unreliable. Another example, with a mean score of 31.25, gave rise to an invitation to submit a full proposal. This was done, involving 14 EU partner, and 4 international “reciprocal agreement”, countries. The outcome of this application was a score of 53, and below the cut-off score of 55, for further progression. The consensus conclusion of evaluation was that “the expected benefits are likely to be non-European”. This conclusion is surprising and essentially without explanation. The selection of evaluators remains a concern.

EAAP Animal Fibre Working Group (AFWG): experience from funding applications to the EC Cost Framework

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EAAP Animal Fibre Working Group (AFWG)



1. Background

- EAAP AFWG constituted in 2007
- Aim: enhance role of animal fibre in Europe
- Focus: science and technology of production, collection and processing

2. Activities;

- Arranging science/technology meetings
- Publishing conference proceedings and original papers
- Disseminating knowledge to farmers and industry
- Developing [network](#) links between scientists and technologists
- Targeting submissions to *EU COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) for funding of [networks](#)*

3. Experience of COST applications

- 2 applications to the Food and Agriculture (FA) domain entitled
 - "connecting biology and technology in animal fibre production"
- A further 3 applications, "**Transdomain (TD)**" (FA with Materials, Physics and Nanosciences (MPNS))
- "Connecting biology and technology in animal fibre production and utilisation" and "Making animal fibre count: integrating biology and technology"

4. Results from pre-proposal evaluations

- assessed in 6 categories; maximum score 6 in each; maximum 36.
- Highest scoring, based on average, invited to submit a full proposal
- Average scores/36 were: 26.18; 28.0; 31.25; 28.29; 29.75

5. Outcomes:

- Respectable, if variable, averages,
- Further analysis shows scores are too dependent on individual assessors

6. Example, For one evaluation, 7 assessors scored individually

36, 33, 32, 32, 28, 21, 16. Mean = 28.3 : median = 32.0 ; CV = 25.5%

- Divergence of the mean from median shows skewed distribution

Removal of outliers 16 and 21 removes the skew , reduces CV (8.9%)

- Gives mean = 32.2 and median = 32.0

- The simple averaging of means is clearly questionable

7. Another example; mean score of 31.25

- Delivered an invitation to full proposal
- This involved 14 European partners and 4 international partners from "Reciprocal Agreement" countries with highly developed industries and science base.

8. Result: score of 53, below threshold of 55. Included comment without explanation, that " the expected benefits are likely to be non-European".

9. Note: COST is working to improve for, **TDP**, using "specialist "and "generalist " "experts," (http://www.eurosfaire.prd.fr/7pc/documents/1361442375_tdpguidelines.pdf)

10. Conclusion.

Overall experience; Disappointing. Evaluation remains a major weakness Unless;

- Excessive variability reduced
- Use of averages improved
- Genuine "peers" selected for "peer review"
- Training provided in evaluation
- More attention given to quality assurance in process

