

MERIT Newsletter



12 - 2012

Dear all,

Half of the time is done, all projects are running very successful, and the overall progress presented at our Midterm Meeting was impressive. Especially the high quality of the student's presentations during the meeting was worth to be explicitly mentioned by the independent observer of the meeting, Prof. Findlay from the University of Leeds.



We also got very positive comments from our new Project Officer, Victor Estrada, about the progress of the project in general. Thus, we are on a good way and I can just say:

Looking forward to the next half of our project!

Wish you merry Christmas and a happy new year,
Best regards, Sylvia

PS As usual: for more information please visit our website:

<http://theory.bio.uu.nl/MERIT/html/index.html>

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M³ – MERIT Midterm Meeting
in Lisbon

General Project evaluation

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**Suggestions for the next
issue are highly welcome!**

Project timeline

- 01/11 start of the project
- 03/11 kick off meeting in Utrecht
- 09/11 website online
- 10/11 almost all fellows selected
- 11/11 1.annual meeting in Madrid
- 01/12 1.Annual Report submitted
- 02/12 ST1 successfully finished
- 03/12 Umeå new MERIT partner
- 05/12 1.Annual Report accepted
- 06/12 MERIT team complete
- 07/12 ST2 successfully finished
- 08/12 Midterm Report submitted
- 10/12 CST 2 and M³ – MERIT Midterm Meeting in Lisbon

Periodic Report is coming soon!

Please find the management presentation on our website!



M³

MERIT Midterm Meeting

08 – 10 October 2012, Lisbon

The Midterm Meeting – time to take stock

The Midterm Meeting of MERIT was held in project month 22, organized in Lisbon by Elena Baena–Gonzalez. The perfect organization, the nice location and the optimal weather conditions (at least compared with the Netherlands) gave best conditions for the meeting.

Each ITN is obliged to a Midterm Meeting, which should be understood as a “constructive dialogue between the network participants and the Research Executive Agency (REA)” and a “valuable source of feedback to both” (Informal guidelines for the Mid-Term Review).

This was the intention and the aim of the meeting, and this was reached. All participants had the chance to talk to the EU representatives: our project officer, Victor Estrada and the independent observer, Prof. Findlay from the University of Leeds. Especially for the fellows was it the opportunity to talk to an intermediary in case of problems. Obviously, this is not the case yet; the project was excellent evaluated by the students (see below).

Thus, during the final discussion with the EU representatives, we got the feedback, that the project is right on track, without any problems. However, they advised us to take care about possible overlap between the projects and to intensify the training with respect to the non–academic sector. These are for sure important issues and we are now in discussion how to do this. If you have any suggestions, please let us know!

The second and third day was reserved for a scientific update to the network participants, the poster session, and the organization of upcoming administrative issues. The atmosphere was relaxed and efficient, and especially the poster session was a perfect opportunity for individual discussions about the several projects. In the evenings the day was highlighted by excellent Portuguese food.

In summary it was a successful meeting with fruitful discussions, and we are now looking forward to our next one in Würzburg 2013!

All the best,
Sylvia

Evaluation of the project

Calendar 2013

24th ICAR - International Conference on Arabidopsis Research
24 – 28 June 2013
Sydney, Australia

SEB Annual Main Meeting
3 – 6 July 2013
Valencia, Spain

Plant Biology
20 – 24 July 2013
Providence, Rhode Island, US

ST3 Metabolomics – measuring metabolic adaptation
11 – 17 March 2013
Vienna, Austria

CST 3 + CST 4 Scientific writing
Probably in the week before the 3. Annual Meeting
Würzburg, Germany

MERIT 3. Annual Meeting
Probably 15 – 18 September 2013
Würzburg, Germany

If supervisors want to make a good job, critical feedback is indispensable. For this the students were asked to evaluate the project from their point of view so far (see Fig. 1). The evaluation was based on the midterm questionnaires; containing 12 questions with subitems about general expectations, prospects and experiences. From the anonymous results it is obvious that no serious problems appeared until now and that the fellows are generally comfortable with the projects and host institutions. All of them have the impression to benefit for their researcher and personal skills (Fig. 2), which are essential for their future career, and that they will improve their employability. The fellows are interested in additional skill trainings, whereas scientific skills (e.g. new

techniques) were higher ranked than “soft” skills (e.g. ethics) (Fig. 3). However, it became also clear, that not all students have the possibility yet to strengthen their group leader and teaching skills, either due to language problems, dedicated time to the project, or general conditions. These are important skills, not only for an ongoing career inside university, but also outside in the “real” world. The majority of the fellows is aware of this and is interested to improve it (Fig. 4). Here individual solutions have to be found between the supervisors and the fellows. Besides this, the consortium is offering several more scientific skill trainings, conferences and workshops, which are coming up in the next year. The first one will be the Metabolomics course in Vienna.

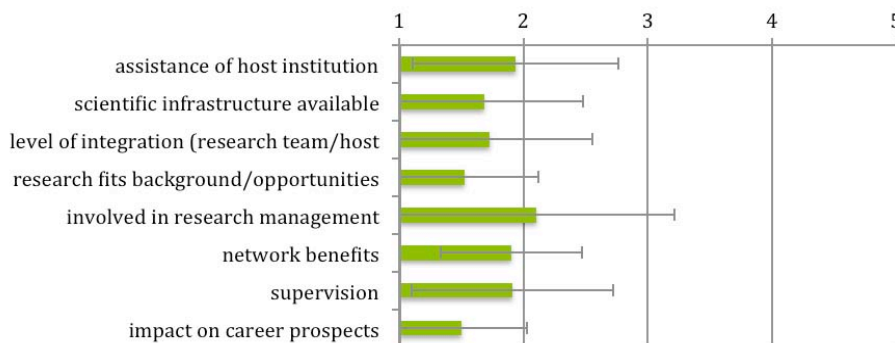


Figure 1: Project in general – How satisfied are the fellows with the project and the general conditions / support, note: 1 is excellent, 5 needs improvement

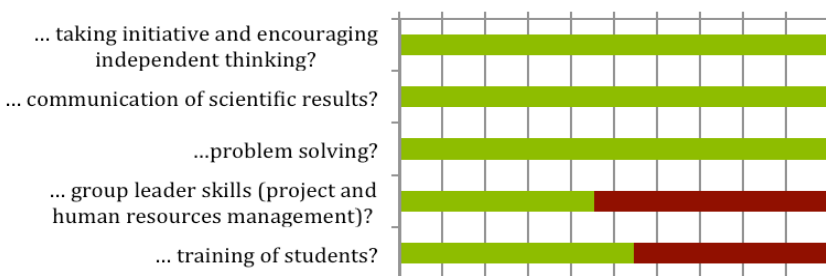


Figure 2: The project is improving the skills in direction of ..., note: green is yes, red is no



Figure 3: Interests in the following skill trainings, note: green is yes, red is no

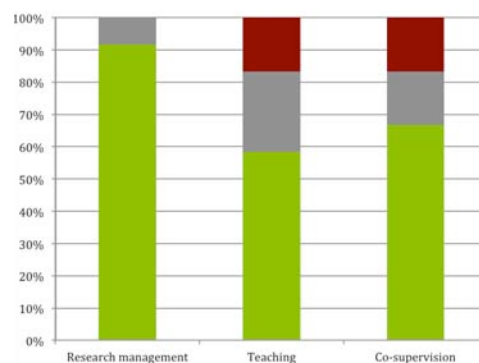


Figure 4: Interests to be involved in ..., note: green is desired, red is undesired, grey n.v.

Metabolomics – measuring metabolic adaptation

Time and location: 11. – 16.03.2013, Vienna, Austria

Metabolomics is nowadays widely used high-throughput technique to study metabolomes of all kind of organisms. Compared to gene expression levels, which are indirect indicators of physiological events, metabolites are important messenger compounds and they have a direct effect on physiology. In our next network-training course we have a change to study regulation of primary metabolism in low energy conditions. All the plants used in the course will be grown and sampled in the same controlled conditions in Utrecht University and then sent to Vienna for sample preparation and analysis. This will allow us to compare all the lines in same conditions. The course will consist of introduction to metabolomics and use of mass spectrometry in metabolomic research, sample preparation, GC-MS measurement, data analysis, statistics and modeling. So basically we will go through the whole metabolomics approach in one week! Even though the course program will be intensive, we will have a change to explore the beautiful city full of history. And of course have a coffee and piece of Sachertorte in one of the many famous Viennese cafés! Looking forward to see you in Vienna!

Your organization team Wolfram, Ella and Thomas

For more information you can also search here:

<http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wien>

<http://www.vienna.at/>

<http://www.wien.info/de>

Details in view – Skill training ST2

Microscopy – Imaging to understand signaling

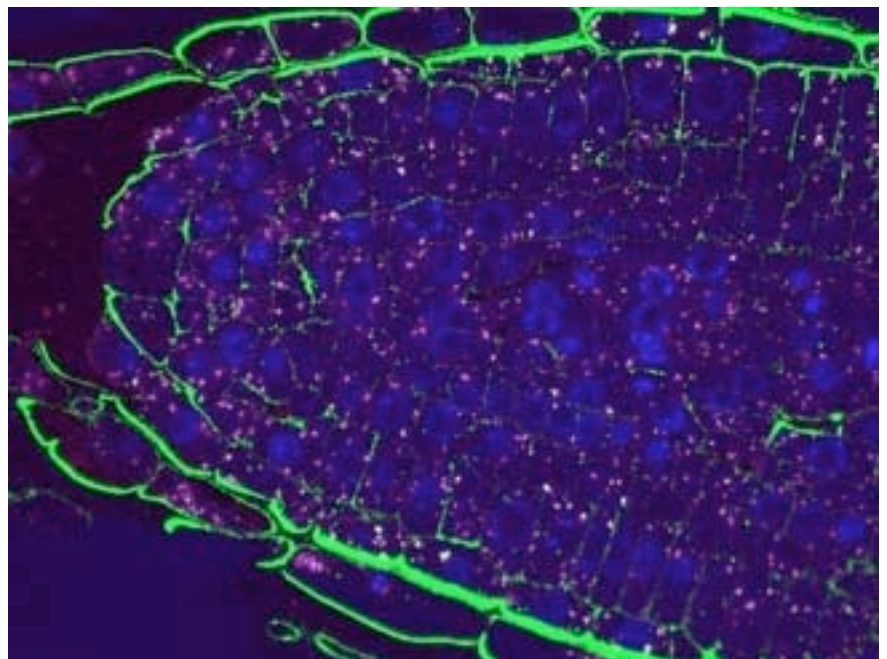
In July this year Merit fellows met up again to take our second Merit skill training, this time in microscopy. The course took place from 9-13th of July at Zentrum für Molekular biologie der Pflanzen at University of Tübingen and was organized by Dr. Christina Chaban.

The aim of the course was to introduce us to the world of microscopy and provide us with theoretical and practical knowledge on the power of different microscopy techniques and their application in biological investigation of, for instance, protein localization or protein-protein interactions.

The course was organized as three independent workshops each composed of theoretical lectures backed up by practical hands-on sessions. We learned how to prepare our samples and analyze them using different methods spanning from immunofluorescence labeling for correlative light microscopy, immunogold labeling for electron microscope analysis to fluorescence techniques like FRET.

The final touch to the fruits of our labor was given by last part of the course: the image processing using Photoshop. During the hands on session we had an opportunity to explore the potential and special features of this program that can be applied to the image and data processing.

We concluded our training with analysis and discussion of our results and giving short presentations.



Immunolabeling of *A.thaliana* root tip after processing in Photoshop (courtesy of A.Peviani)

Network – Network

But do not think we were only sitting in the darkened room microscoping our samples, we also had time for social events; stretching our legs on the hiking route in the vicinities of Tübingen, group barbecue and dinners.

Spending some time together was another excellent opportunity to meet each other better, exchange ideas and discuss scientific problems. And actually, it was there where we set the first “foundations” of Merit students review considering the Low Energy Syndrome, which hopefully might be the topic of one of the upcoming newsletters.



Enjoying the barbecue made with combined effort (Courtesy of A.Peviani)

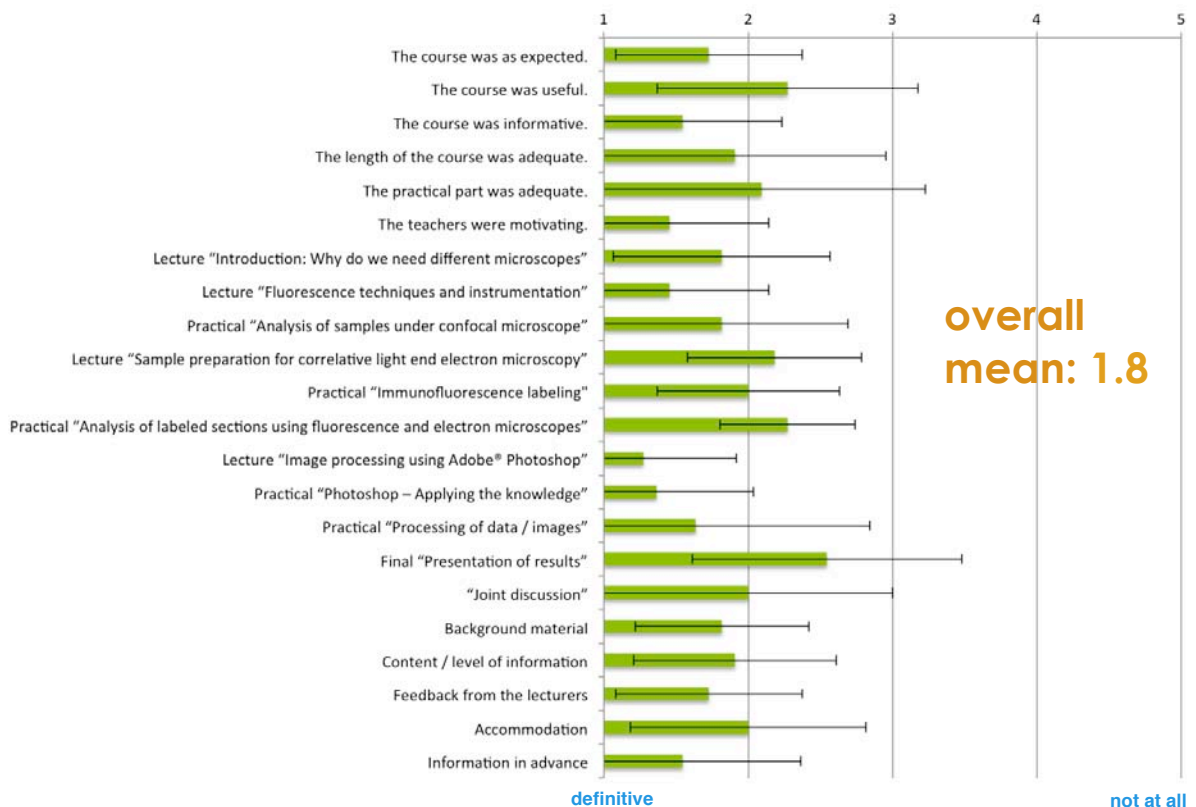
But for now, I would like to thank once again on the behalf of all course participants to Christina and all the tutors for the organization and training.

Andrea Simeunovic,
M. Teige group, Vienna



Microscopy – Imaging to understand signaling

Aim of the course was learning about modern imaging techniques in theory and praxis as a tool to better understanding biological processes. The fellows were impressed by the possibilities, and although not all fellows are using this technique, parts of the course (e.g. the introduction about [®] Adobe Photoshop) were useful for all of them and highly appreciated. As the skill courses before the course was also highly ranked.





Hello,

I'm Mattia and I came from Arona, a small town in the north of Italy. I studied molecular and cellular biology at the Bologna University and now I am doing my PhD in Portugal at the Instituto Goulbenkian de Ciencia, Oeiras – only 15 km from Lisbon. I joined Elena's Plant Stress Signaling Lab one year ago just one month before our first meeting in Madrid.

During the days before our last meeting we had a complementary skill training course given by Dr. Inês Crisóstomo, who explained us how to design a scientific poster and, in general, what is behind a successful one. Most of the scientific conferences and meetings have a dedicated session for poster exposing in which the researchers can discuss results, new ideas or just satisfy their curiosity in an informal environment. In this perspective it becomes clear how convenient it could be to have a clear milestone from which to start for some worthwhile discussion and idea exchanges.

A scientific poster is a static presentation that illustrates and describes briefly a research project and results. One of the main differences between a poster and an oral presentation is that the poster has to "speak" by itself even without the mediation of a third person. It is very different from a manuscript and one of the main common mistakes while doing a poster is to give too many information instead of focusing on the essential take-home message. A good balance between text size and images is essential to make the work understandable at first sight. Images and graphics should occupy most of the "workspace", as too much text can result in a less appealing poster. In this regards an effective poster is a good combination of science and art: an attractive layout may give a great contribution to the scientific communication.

During the course each of us prepared his own poster and presented it in the dedicated session within the midterm meeting. After they were submitted to the unappealable judgment of our MERIT jury represented by our invited speaker Julia Bailey-Serres.:-)

See you soon!

Mattia

Comment by the editor in chief: Mattia forgot to mention, that he was awarded with the prize for the best poster, congratulations!

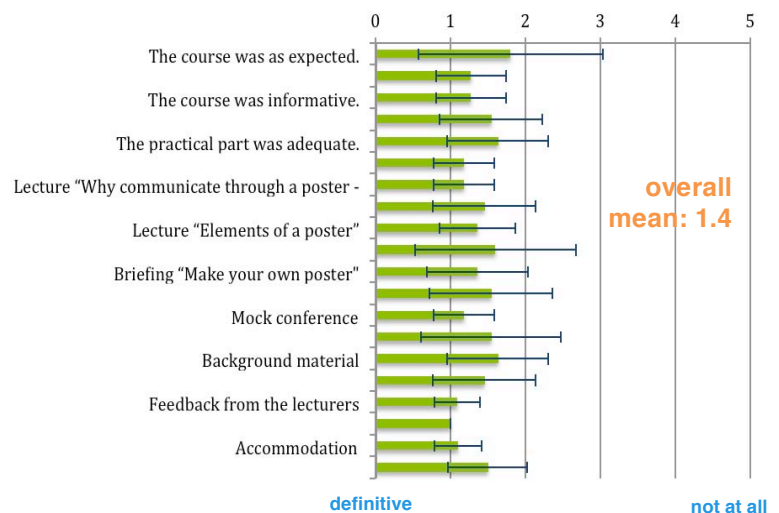


Acadamy award of MERIT

Evaluation

CST2 – Making the most of you poster presentation

Aim of the course was to give a hands-on training on how to prepare and present a scientific poster. Presenting posters is an excellent opportunity for networking, thus the fellows were trained not only in making a poster, but also in getting in interaction with peers during a poster session. This was exercised by role play and a critical debriefing and self assessment of both, poster and presentation. The course was highly ranked by the fellows, especially because of the individual feedback on the posters.



MERIT 1. Periodic Report

Although the last report was submitted just a few months ago, the next one is coming soon. The **1.Periodic Report** will mark the end of the first half of the project and must make explicit reference to the

- overall progress of the project
- deliverables update including recruitment and international conferences / events.

Please check the deliverables of your Work Package on our website!

Any relevant material evidencing this selection of most significant results of the project, such as reviewed scientific publications, invited papers, patent descriptions, media coverage, prizes, awards, etc. should be attached. To make work easier for everybody you got a new template for this report (which is also available via our website and attached to this newsletter).

Besides this every beneficiary has to submit a **financial report** by sending the Form C. The general procedure is as follows:

- You or your financial contact has to fill in the form C until the **deadline 25.01.2013**. **Please check with them as soon as possible, if they are authorized to fill in the form, otherwise you can give them the authorization via your Participant Portal account (link on our website).**
- I have to check your form C and to agree on it.
- In case I have agreed on it, you have to print it, to stamp and sign it, and send it to me.
- I have collect the original signed form C's and send them to Brussels.

As you can imagine, this procedure costs time, thus please keep the deadline!

As usual: For any questions don't hesitate to contact me!

**Best wishes,
Sylvia**



The financial part of the project

Each beneficiary got his part of the financial project cake. This money has to be used and declared regarding the rules of the EU, separated in the following categories:

Category A: Living and mobility allowance

- Living allowance
 - Salary (before any deductions)
 - Depends on level of experience
 - 36700 € ESR / 56400 € ER
 - Corrected by the country coefficient
- Mobility allowance
 - Depends on family status (married, children)
 - 800 € per month / 500 € per month
 - Corrected by the country coefficient

Category B: Travel allowance

- Fixed amount between 250 € and 2500 € / year
- Depends on distance between place of origin and host institution

Category C: Career exploratory allowance

- Fixed amount of 2000 € / project
- For the fellows to use on their own discretion

Category D: participation expenses of fellows

- Fixed amount of 600 € / fellow month
- Used for research and training activities
- Managed by the host institution

Category E: research / training / transfer of knowledge program expenses

- Fixed amount 1200 € / fellow month
- Used for performance of the project
- Publications, secondment, training actions, teaching material, network meetings, organization, ...
- Managed by the host institution

Category G: management activities

- Specified during negotiation (max. 7 %)
- Salary of manager, costs for audits or certificates of financial statements, reports, ...

Category H: overheads

- Max. 10 % of the total direct costs / period

OVERVIEW

Category A – B – C

- Paid directly to the fellow

Category D

- Used for the fellow

Category E – G - H

- Used for the performance of the project

1. Periodic Report (individual project reports): **DEADLINE 25.01.2013**

Covered period: 01.01.2011 – 31.12.2012

Dear all,

Please fill in the template for the period of the first **TWO YEARS** of the project. Some parts are slightly changed, please check and read the instructions carefully! At some points information has to be filled in twice!

Please be aware that the report is crucial for the next payment and cannot be written without your contribution, thus please be one time.

If you have further questions, don't hesitate to contact me!

Greetings,

Sylvia

Name	
Project title	
ESR number	
Supervisor	
Co-supervisor	
Official Start – End of contract	
Origin	City / country of origin
Recruitment process	Where was the position announced? How many candidates applied? How was the selection procedure? Any problems, e.g. lack of information, contractual issues?
Project introduction	Short description for non-experts about the goal and the content of this project within MERIT
Progress / results	General overview about the progress and the results of your project for the timeframe: 1. Year: 01.01.2011 – 31.12.2011 2. Year: 01.01.2012 – 31.12.2012

Future plans / expected results	What are the plans or expected results for the next report period (until 31.12.2013)?
Collaborations	Which collaborations were started during the first two years? Which are planned for the next one? Short description including goals and expected results
Lab exchange	Which lab exchanges have been done during the first two years, which are planned in the next one? Including date and duration, short description including goals and expected results. Please check the secondments schedule (Annex I), which secondments were promised!

Deliverables (Period 1: 01.01.2011 – 31.12.2012)

Number	Work package	Lead beneficiary	Short description	Reached (yes / no)	Progress 1. Year	Progress 2. Year
See Annex I, page 21, which are relevant for your project e.g. Deliverable 1, WP 6, Lead beneficiary 1:			What is promised to deliver?	Month/year	including problems, reasons for not reaching them, ...	including problems, reasons for not reaching them, ...

All Training activities (fellows, Period 1: 01.01.2011 – 31.12.2012)

Name	Local or network	Date	type	Short description (contribution, results)	ECTS points
		Start - end	e.g. Language course, workshop lab techniques, teaching, lab exchange...		

All Meetings / conferences (fellow)

Name	Local or network	Date	Contribution (poster / oral presentation)

All Poster, oral presentations, publications related to MERIT (fellows and PI's)

First Author	Co-Authors	Title	Conference or Journal (including volume, pages, year)	doi

1. Periodic Report (workpackage reports): **DEADLINE 25.01.2013**

Covered period: 01.01.2011 – 31.12.2012

Dear all,

Besides the individual project reports we need workpackage reports, which have to be written by the individual workpackage leader.

Please fill in the template for the period of the first **TWO YEARS** of the project. Please be aware that the report is crucial for the next payment and cannot be written without your contribution, thus please be one time.

If you have further questions, don't hesitate to contact me!

Greetings,

Sylvia

Workpackage	
Workpackage leader	
Short description	
Progress / results	<p>General overview about the progress and the results of your project (figures appreciated) for the timeframe:</p> <p>3. Year: 01.01.2011 – 31.12.2011</p> <p>4. Year: 01.01.2012 – 31.12.2012</p>
Future plans / expected results	What are the plans or expected results for the next report period (until 31.12.2013)?

Deliverables belonging to the workpackage (Period 1: 01.01.2011 – 31.12.2012)

Number	Work package	Lead beneficiary	Short description	Reached (yes / no)	Progress 1. Year	Progress 2. Year
See Annex I, page 21, which are relevant for your project	See Annex I, page 21, which are relevant for your project	See Annex I, page 21, which are relevant for your project	What is promised to deliver?	Month/year	including problems, reasons for not reaching them, ...	including problems, reasons for not reaching them, ...