

ICREA call evaluation guide

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The **ICREA** call offers permanent positions in the Catalan Research system. The selected researchers get a permanent position, ICREA Research Professorship (equivalent to tenure) and become ICREA employees. ICREA researchers go through an evaluation process (the promotion) at regular intervals throughout their entire career.

The ICREA call is the core of our activity. Everything else we do revolves around it.

The extraordinary success and impact of ICREA researchers in our system is directly related to the quality of the selection and evaluation procedures that you, as evaluator, are part of. This is a great responsibility, and ICREA is extremely grateful that you have accepted to assist us.

The selection of candidates for ICREA positions is **based on peer evaluation and has scientific excellence and leadership as its sole criteria**. There are five evaluation panels, covering all areas of knowledge, with some overlap to cater to interdisciplinary and emerging fields.

The basic concept for the evaluation is that it depends essentially on the judgement of high profile experts. We do not want to rely on quantitative measures of academic production, but rather on the highly informed judgement of the experts in recognizing excellence. We look for quality, not quantity.

ICREA fully endorses and shares the principles of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment ([SFDORA](#)), by which it discourages evaluators to rely only on journal-based metrics (such as Journal Impact Factors) as a surrogate measure for the quality of individual research articles. For the purposes of research assessment, ICREA considers the value of all research outputs, including qualitative indicators of research impact such as influence on policy and practice.

We encourage evaluators to equally treat all disciplines (both emerging and established) when making their decisions. Panel members shall not defend/represent their field. Moreover, interdisciplinary research is welcomed in ICREA – even if it may sometimes be more difficult to evaluate – it must be given the same fair chance as the non-interdisciplinary one.

Also, we encourage the evaluators to carefully evaluate the candidate and not the institution. Biases based on the perceived reputation of the institutions should be avoided.

ICREA is an equal opportunity organization. Thus, each gender, age, nationality, racial group, etc. should have the same fair chance in the evaluation. We also encourage evaluators to be vigilant for unconscious bias when reviewing the candidatures. Scientific excellence and leadership remain the sole criteria.

Areas and Panels

For organizational purposes, ICREA considers five areas of knowledge, with a different evaluation panel for each of them:

1. Social and Behavioural Sciences

2. Humanities
3. Experimental Sciences and Mathematics
4. Engineering Sciences
5. Life and Medical Sciences

Panels consist of members covering different subdisciplines (usually between six and nine).

Interdisciplinary research will be evaluated using the expertise from more than one panel. There will always be, however, a main panel that makes the decision, and a counselling panel that contributes its opinion for consideration. Evaluators can request this cross-panel evaluation at any moment throughout the assessment process, even at the panel meeting if the need arises during the discussions.

Goals of the call and selection criteria

*The ICREA call is geared towards recruiting the most promising and influential researchers in all fields of academic knowledge. As stated above, the main selection criteria are **scientific and academic excellence** and **leadership** of the applicants.*

These two main criteria can be further broken down to include concepts such as: impact and relevance of publications (books, essays, journals, monographies and other contributions); citations; position in the authorship of publications and relevance of personal contribution; influence and footprint of candidates' contributions; number and amount of national and international research projects obtained; relevance of personal contribution in these projects, leadership ability; number of supervised PhD theses, professional progression of former mentees, role in international societies of the field, invitations to speak at congresses and plenary conferences of major international events, participation and role in international research networks, participation in editorial committees, structure and quality of the research plan presented; balance between incremental research and the ability to present innovative ideas, viability of the planned funding sources, importance of the research proposed in the broader context of the specialty, quality and rigor of the chosen methodology, contribution to the development of new methodologies, impact of research, importance and influence of books, clinical guidelines, protocols and sectorial analyses, services to the scientific and academic community, importance of the national and international research awards obtained, as well as other academic or research milestones achieved.

The above list is not necessarily complete, although it covers most of the elements commonly used in assessments.

Age

Applicants of all ages are welcome. There are often questions as to whether there should be an age limitation in ICREA calls. In fact, there is none, outside current legal and labour regulations.

Currently, ICREA offers late retirement at 70 (a hard deadline) and standard retirement at 65 years of age (a soft deadline, based on a number of factors, including evaluation of scientific performance). In the periodic evaluation of ICREAs, the first evaluation after 60 will decide whether the late retirement is offered to the researcher.

Our main purpose is that ICREAs make a difference in our research system, and that depends on many factors. Hiring candidates approaching retirement age is perfectly possible, provided the Committee sees them as fully active and productive.

Gender & minorities

We at ICREA take gender inequalities very seriously. The fact remains, however, that ICREA receives many more male than female applications. In spite of the fact that the success ratio of female applicants is higher than the male success ratio, the proportion of grantees remains biased and stable about 75/25. Of course, this is a general issue across all areas of science – and society at large – but we keep working to revert this situation, and exploring all options in our hands to improve the matter: we promote public debates and scientific discussions to try to come up with solutions to this particularly resilient problem, we have created an internal discussion group and we work hand in hand with our host institutions to improve the chances of female scientists of reaching the more advanced stages of their careers.

We remain vigilant on this issue and encourage panellists to share their ideas with us to try and implement a system that we can be proud of. We have found that videos [such as this one](#) help to raise awareness against unconscious gender biases in selection processes and would recommend all panel members to watch it. Also, if you want insights on your unconscious biases, there are several self-tests you can take, including [this one](#).

Quotas

Although there are five areas of knowledge and it is very unlikely that one of them does not receive high quality applications, there are no pre-assigned quotas to the number of researchers to be selected in each area. In fact, ICREA operates with no quotas whatsoever. Thus, there are no quotas for universities vs. centres, for CSIC vs. CERCA centres, for female vs. male researchers, for nationals vs. foreigners, no quotas for different disciplines within areas, and again, no quotas at all.

Selection procedure

ICREA evaluations have always two steps. The first one is online and individual, and the second one is a face-to-face meeting of the committee members where discussions come together to form a consensus and the final decisions are made.

Zero evaluation round:

In this round, the assessment is based on the same criteria of academic excellence, independence, leadership, impact, etc.. It is also a good moment to identify those candidates that fall well out of scope of the call. In this phase, no report needs to be prepared: you only have to separate those with less chances of success ('Competitive'/'Uncompetitive'). You can keep revising and reviewing your evaluations until the deadline.

Candidates deemed uncompetitive by a majority of the subpanel will be filtered out. They will receive a standard feedback commentary. The rest will be moved over to the first round. Remember that you will also have the opportunity to 'rescue' any candidate left behind if you think they should continue in the selection process without the need to provide any justification.

First evaluation round: individual assessment

Special care is taken to ensure that online assessments truly reflect individual opinions of each member of a committee. To that end, the identity of the other members is not disclosed in the online phase, and all remarks and comments remain undisclosed until later in the selection process.

Grades are used to create the shortlist but never disclosed to avoid any mutual bias.

These measures increase the quality and independence of the comments made by each evaluator.

In the first evaluation round, evaluators review only the applications that lie in subfields which can be considered relatively close to their expertise. This distribution helps to reduce the overall workload, since the least competitive applications need not be reviewed by the entire panel.

Evaluators are expected to write a report on each candidate and provide an indicative numerical grade between 1 and 10. As stated above, this grade does not get disclosed: it is used only to generate the shortlist (see below).

The best rated applications are then combined in a **shortlist**. Typically, this shortlist is about a third of the size of the initial list. A unique feature of our evaluation process is that **the shortlist is in fact 'soft'**. This means that **any evaluator can request the inclusion of any application in the shortlist without having to justify the request**. To make this possible, the process allows time for the revision of the proposed shortlist and the inclusion requests (if any).

Second evaluation round: individual assessment

Once the shortlist is decided, the **second round** begins. This is analogous to the first round, except that there will be a small number of new candidates to review. Evaluators are also asked to revisit and validate applications already graded by them in the first round and are offered the chance to reevaluate them again.

Panel meeting & decision making

The last phase of the selection process is the panel meeting. A few days beforehand, all remarks and comments are open to all evaluators. At the meeting, all that is required from the panel is a discussion of all shortlisted candidates and a consensus on the ranking based on the selection criteria explained above.

The strength of ICREA selection depends on the quality of the decisions made by the panels. At ICREA we discourage the use of algorithms to rank candidates. Rankings are made exclusively by consensus within the panel, and not through voting or polling. Once the consensus has been reached, the ranked list is prepared and signed by all evaluators.

Discussions are confidential and the ICREA direction does not participate in the decision-making. The ranked lists produced by the committees are always fully respected.

Feedback

Candidates expect to receive a short report from the panel, highlighting the aspects that may benefit from further improvement. Every evaluator acts as **'Feedback Editor'** for a small

number of candidates in the call. These are assigned at the beginning of the selection process. To avoid creating any biases, however, this assignation is not disclosed until later in the selection.

Well-elaborated comments should be provided. Feedback etiquette demands the use of complete, clear, **assertive** sentences and **polite** remarks, as well as constructive critical comments. Offensive remarks shall be always avoided, as shall be any mention of personal details of the candidates (gender, family status, nationality, and the like). Finally, do not refer to specific numerical scores or data (h-index, number of publications, thesis...) since those are already known by the applicants and seldom help them to understand their ranking.

Preparing useful feedback demands some quality time. Specific time is provided at the end of the panel meeting precisely for that purpose, so that the entire panel can discuss and agree on the reports.

All other remarks and comments generated in the selection process are confidential and will not be disclosed.

To control the feedback process, each evaluator has 'Feedback' tab on their control panel where candidates still awaiting feedback will appear.

Appointment of experts

Panels are made *ad hoc* by invitation each year. ICREA maintains a database of scholars and scientists with a high rate of turnover. Members can serve in a given panel for a maximum of four editions.

Candidates are not informed of the identity of the evaluators. In the ICREA webpage there is a list of past evaluators and committee members without indication of area or year. Your opinions are never disclosed, except when explicitly authorized by yourself.

Details of candidates, names of other experts participating in the evaluation, and the results of the panel meeting (ranked list, panel discussions etc.) must be kept strictly confidential.

Do not engage in any contact with candidates or representatives from their host institutions about this evaluation (neither during nor after the evaluation). If you are ever contacted by a candidate or by representatives of their host institutions, do not respond and inform ICREA immediately.

Confidentiality is a contractual obligation and breaches can lead to termination of the contract. After the meeting, make sure to delete all the electronic files and destroy all hard copies.

In case your laptop is lost or stolen, please inform ICREA immediately.

Conflicts of interest

If you find yourself in a position of conflict of interest regarding a particular applicant, or you are unable to evaluate an application for personal or professional reasons, please notify ICREA staff as soon as practicable, and a solution will be offered.

Evaluators will be asked to leave the meeting room during the deliberations over conflicted cases. The main responsibility to declare any Conflict(s) of Interest always lies with the individual evaluator. For clarity, a conflict of interest exists if an expert:

- (a) stands to benefit directly or indirectly if the applicant is selected
- (b) has a close family or personal relationship with any person representing an applicant
- (c) has close family ties (spouse, domestic or non-domestic partner, child, sibling, parent etc.) or other close personal relationship with the applicant s/he is requested to evaluate
- (d) has or has had during the last five years, a scientific collaboration with the applicant
- (e) has or has had a relationship of scientific rivalry or professional hostility with the applicant
- (f) has or has had in the past, a mentor/mentee relationship with the applicant

Administrative requirements

All candidates are checked for eligibility before inclusion in the lists. As a panel member, you can safely assume that all administrative, academic, legal and labour issues of candidates have been cleared previously. However, if doubts arise, please notify ICREA staff.

Grace period for researchers with tenure or on a tenure track

Often, centres and universities encounter hiring opportunities that fall outside the window of a particular ICREA call. In these cases, the institution may decide to hire anyway, hoping that the researcher obtains an ICREA position later. To allow institutions to offer tenured positions that do not invalidate the eligibility, ICREA has a 24-month policy of 'grace period', in which holding a permanent position is made compatible with the application.

Candidates that have been tenured **within the grace period** described above are still eligible.

Note that this is for your information only: ICREA administration will have checked for eligibility beforehand.

Mobility and international experience

Committee members should consider mobility as a valuable experience. This may seem obvious, but sadly, in some instances other institutions still think and act otherwise. Thus for ICREA it is always necessary that candidates have had a substantial international exposure.

Further questions

ICREA staff is here to provide you with prompt and accurate advice in all matters concerning the evaluation process. Please do not hesitate to ask if you need clarification