

Introduction and principles of ICREA evaluations

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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.

In general, Universities and Research Centres find it difficult to welcome interdisciplinary and emerging fields. We encourage evaluators to equally treat all disciplines (both emerging and established) when making their decisions.

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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.

Needles to say, ICREA is an equal opportunity organization and does not allow discriminatory references to gender, age, nationality, racial group, nor any other possible discriminatory issues.

A word on ICREA positions

At present, ICREA has two very different calls.

The **ICREA Senior** 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. This is our most important and best-known call.

The **ICREA Acadèmia** call offers an award to university professors who already hold permanent positions in the Catalan research system. The award is for five years and is meant to promote the research of the awardees mainly through relieving them from teaching duties.

Areas and Panels

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

1. Experimental Sciences and Mathematics
2. Technology and Engineering
3. Life and Medical Sciences
4. Social and Behavioural Sciences.
5. Humanities

Interdisciplinary

Interdisciplinary proposals may be evaluated by 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.

Committees

ICREA Senior Committee. It selects the new ICREAs to be recruited as Research Professors.

Promotion Committee. It evaluates the periodic performance of ICREA Research Professors and proposes a salary increase. ICREA evaluates its researchers at fixed intervals: 3 years after joining ICREA, and every 5 years from then on.

ICREA Acadèmia Committee. It chooses the University Professors who will receive the ICREA Acadèmia award.

In all cases, all committee members are working outside the Catalan system. This is a hard rule that admits no exceptions.

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.

Individual assessment

Special care is taken to ensure that online assessments truly reflect individual opinions of each member of a committee. Hence, the identity of the other members is not disclosed in the online phase. This is intended to increase the quality and independence of the comments made by the evaluators.

Appointment of experts

Committees 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 committee for a maximum of 4 years.

Candidates are not informed of the identity of the reviewers. 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 authorised.

Ability to evaluate

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.

Decision making

The strength of ICREA selection depends on the quality of the decisions made by the committees. At ICREA we deliberately avoid using calculations or algorithms to rank candidates. Rankings are made exclusively by consensus within the panel, and not through voting or polling.

The ranked lists produced by the committees are always fully respected. The capacity of ICREA direction is limited to decide how many candidates of each area can be selected each year. For this purpose, ICREA Director may request counselling from the panel, and will compare the current list to those from previous calls (the existing ICREAs and ICREA *Acadèmia* awardees).

Eligibility

The main eligibility criterion remains scientific and academic excellence, combined with leadership (capacity to lead a research group).

Administrative requirements

All candidates are checked for eligibility before inclusion in the lists. As a 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 and we will look into it.

Grace period for researchers with tenure or on 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 permanent positions that do not invalidate the eligibility, ICREA now has a 24-month policy of 'grace period', in which holding a permanent position is made compatible with the application.

Another instance in which the grace period is needed is the case of tenure tracks. Some centres –and, increasingly, some universities– have proper tenure tracks in place. Since tenure decisions do not necessarily coincide in time with ICREA calls, often candidates in tenure tracks already hold their tenure when applying to an ICREA position.

The holding of a tenure should not disqualify the applicant or in any way be considered detrimental to chances of selection. While this may seem like a waste of valuable ICREA resources, the larger picture requires that ICREA contributes to support the implementation of tenure tracks in the Catalan system.

In short, candidates that have been tenured within the grace period described above are perfectly eligible.

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.

Age

Applicants of all ages are welcome both in ICREA senior and ICREA *Acadèmia* calls.

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.

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.

Gender balance

We at ICREA take gender inequalities very seriously. The fact remains, however, that ICREA receives many more male than female applications (roughly a 75/25 proportion). At present the proportion of ICREA researchers is about 80/20. Despite the fact that this is a general issue across all areas of science -and society at large- we keep wondering how this situation can be changed, and whether there are things that we should do to improve the matter.

Although the question seems unanswerable at the moment, we keep promoting public debates and scientific discussions to try to come up with solutions to this particularly resilient problem.

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.

Senior and *Acadèmia* calls

An ICREA Senior call committee is appointed for each of the five areas and is composed by a number of members (from six to eight) covering the different subdisciplines. The committees assess the candidates twice: first online and later in a meeting in Barcelona.

As an evaluator, you will start with an online individual assessment followed by a face-to-face meeting with the full committees, where the final decisions are made.

If the number of candidates is too large, the online evaluation phase may be broken into two, so that half of the committee reviews about half of the candidates. The resulting grades are then used by ICREA to produce a shorter list that is then shared (without the grades) with the other half of the committee.

In the first online phase, you are expected to write a short report on each candidate (for the candidate to receive as feedback) and provide an indicative numerical grade (which does not get disclosed). This grade is used only to generate shortlists (for instance, to split a list of applicants that is too long), and is not used after that phase of the evaluation.

Please be aware that all applicants are open to selection, regardless of shortlists and numerical grades. The entire list stays open throughout the selection process.

The final output that is expected from each committee is a ranked list of the best applicants. All the remarks and comments generated in the selection process are confidential, and will not be disclosed, except the short report written in the first phase of the evaluation.

Evaluation for promotion

The first step of the evaluation is made online by five groups of reviewers (one group for each area of knowledge) who comment on and grade the researcher's performance. The composition of the reviewing panels varies from year to year depending on the number of ICREAs and the particular areas in which they work. We ask each reviewer to assess all ICREAs in a given area in order to have a comparative view. We understand that this may be difficult in some cases (depending on the area of the reviewer and that of the ICREA) but we insist that it is done in this way. Evaluators are welcome to make subjective remarks as to the self-assessed weakness or strength of their own opinions.

The review is based on the research output and the short summary of past work and future challenges written by the researcher. The Host Institution also fills a report meant to give an indication of the level of commitment and integration of the researcher in her/his immediate research environment.

All the reports are then transferred to a single committee, the Promotion Committee, formed by six experts from different disciplines and research backgrounds. Each member of the committee will make her/his evaluation based on the reports produced by the reviewers. Please note that all the reports and grades will remain strictly confidential and will be seen only by the Promotion Committee and the ICREA staff.

The second step of the evaluation is the meeting of the Promotion Committee in Barcelona, where the reports of the reviewers and the Committee are considered and a final decision is made. The members of the Promotion Committee are encouraged to mark for an interview those researchers about who they need further information, very especially if the outcome is likely to be negative. These interviews will be held on the day of the Committee meeting in Barcelona.

Timing and contents

Promotions are circumscribed to a specific period, usually three or five years. Evaluations should consequently be based on the performance during the period under consideration.

ICREA will provide the evaluators with all necessary documentation. This will generally take the form of a short report, written by each researcher, with a selection of the scientific output and a future research statement. The report should be sufficient to form an opinion. Exceptionally, the full CV may also be used for reference.

Scientific output not signed with the ICREA affiliation cannot be considered for promotion and will not be included in the documents to be reviewed.

Budgetary restrictions

ICREA's evaluation for promotion comes with salary repercussions for the researcher. However, members of the Promotion committee should make their judgements based exclusively on the scientific performance of the researcher and avoid being biased by budgetary restrictions, whether real or perceived.

ICREA has always been very faithful to the principle of rewarding excellence independently of other considerations. This in practice means that the particular budgetary context should never influence the judgement of the committee. There are not a fixed number of grades to be distributed among the ICREAs, nor a budget earmarked for this purpose.

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