

Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment Policy

1. Overview

ICFO is a public research center established by the Government of Catalonia and the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya. ICFO's core mission is to perform research at the highest international level by fostering an environment where talented people can develop their full potential, generate extraordinary ideas, and transform them into new knowledge and applications that benefit society.

Research at ICFO spans six main areas: Quantum and Advanced Materials, Energy and Environment, Quantum Science and Technology, Bio-nano and Medical Photonics, Light and Matter, and Ultrafast Science.

The quality of our research and the effectiveness of our mission depend entirely on the people who join us. Attracting, selecting and developing outstanding researchers and professionals is therefore one of ICFO's most important institutional responsibilities. Our objective is not only to recruit excellent people, but also to ensure a strong mutual fit between candidates, research groups and operational teams, creating an environment in which they can develop their full potential and contribute to ICFO's mission.

Successful recruitment depends not only on identifying outstanding candidates but also on ensuring a strong mutual understanding between candidates and the research groups or operational teams they may join. We therefore seek to provide candidates with the information they need to make well-informed decisions while enabling both candidates and ICFO to determine whether there is a strong mutual fit that will support long-term success.

ICFO endorsed the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers in January 2014. In 2015, the European Commission granted ICFO the HR Excellence in Research award in recognition of our commitment to aligning our human resources policies with the forty principles of the Charter and the Code. In 2018, ICFO successfully completed the Interim Assessment step following a self-audit. We are currently undertaking the renewal process. This OTM-R Policy is one of the central commitments made under that framework. It is reviewed periodically and its implementation is monitored as part of ICFO's HRS4R action plan.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all recruitment and selection processes at ICFO, covering research staff at all career stages and operational team members across all functional areas. It applies regardless of the source of funding, the contract type, or the duration of the position.

Certain categories of appointment may be subject to additional or more specific procedures, including competitive fellowship calls, positions governed by external funding agency requirements, and appointments made through formal international collaborative programs. In these cases, the specific rules of the relevant program apply, provided they are consistent with the principles set out in this policy. Any exceptions to standard advertising and selection procedures must be approved and documented.

3. Policy Statement

ICFO is committed to selecting and appointing the best available candidates for every position, based on demonstrated and potential merit, assessed in a fair, consistent, and transparent way. We provide all applicants with equal opportunities, regardless of gender, age, nationality, ethnic or social origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, or any other characteristic unrelated to professional ability and potential.

We believe that diversity of background, perspective, and experience strengthens both our research and our institution. We actively work to attract candidates from a broad range of contexts, and we design our recruitment processes to minimize unconscious bias and to ensure that our selection committees are representative and adequately trained. We comply fully with applicable Spanish employment legislation and with relevant European directives on non-discrimination, including Organic Act 3/2007 on the effective equality of women and men.

Recruitment at ICFO is viewed as a shared institutional responsibility. While recruitment processes are coordinated by the Talent Attraction team and supported by Hiring Managers and Selection Committees, the responsibility for attracting outstanding people and ensuring a fair, transparent and merit-based selection process is shared across the institution.

4. Principles

ICFO's OTM-R policy is grounded in the principles of the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. The following principles govern all recruitment and selection activity at ICFO.

4.1 Open Recruitment

All positions at ICFO are advertised publicly. Vacancies are published on ICFOjobs, our official careers portal, and on relevant international platforms, including EURAXESS for research positions. Depending on the profile of the role, positions are also disseminated through LinkedIn, specialist job boards, professional networks, and the institution's official social media channels. Job advertisements are published in English and include a full description of the role, requirements, selection process, evaluation criteria, and conditions offered.

Minimum advertising periods are 30 calendar days for permanent positions and 15 calendar days for temporary positions, to ensure the widest possible reach. Exceptions to public advertising, such as, continuity positions for researchers completing an active project, or positions governed by the specific rules of an external funding program, may be possible under objective justification

4.2 Transparent Recruitment

We inform applicants prior to the selection process about the recruitment procedure. All applicants are notified of the outcome of the process. Shortlisted candidates are entitled, upon request, to receive feedback on the strengths and areas for development identified in their application.

All selection decisions are documented. The composition of every selection committee and the basis for the hiring recommendation are recorded in the Selection Report (ACTA), which constitutes the formal record of the process and the central enabling document for any offer of employment.

4.3 Merit-based Recruitment

Selection decisions at ICFO are based on the merit of the candidate, assessed against the requirements, level, and scope of the specific position. We evaluate the whole range of a

candidate's experience and potential, not only quantitative indicators such as publication counts or bibliometric indices. We recognize that research and professional careers can take many forms, and that outstanding contributions may include original research, knowledge transfer, supervision and mentoring, team management, and public engagement activities.

For research staff, we consider the quality and originality of scientific output, the experience, the capacity for independent work, and the potential for future development. For operational staff, we assess technical competence, professional experience, and alignment with ICFO's values, mission and collaborative working culture, recognising that operational professionals play an essential role in enabling research excellence.

4.4 Equal Opportunities and Non-discrimination

ICFO does not discriminate at any stage of the recruitment or selection process on grounds of gender, age, nationality, ethnic or social origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, or any other characteristic unrelated to professional suitability. Our approach is grounded in our Gender Equality Plan, which extends to LGBTI+ individuals across all stages of recruitment and employment. We monitor the gender composition of applicant pools and selection outcomes at each stage. We aim to ensure gender balance in all selection committees.

4.5 Variations in Career Paths and Career Breaks

Career breaks and non-linear career trajectories, including periods taken for parental leave, illness, caring responsibilities, or other personal reasons, are not penalized in the evaluation of a candidate's record. We assess each candidate's experience and output relative to the time effectively available to them to develop it, and candidates are encouraged to provide context in their application where relevant. Mobility across institutions, countries, sectors, or disciplines is regarded as a valuable contribution to a candidate's professional development.

4.6 Recognition of Qualifications

ICFO recognizes academic and professional qualifications obtained in any country. Qualifications are assessed in the context of the national system in which they were awarded. Candidates from international contexts are not disadvantaged by differences in degree nomenclature, grading conventions, or institutional standing. Where relevant, the Talent Attraction team seeks appropriate verification of qualifications.

5. Advertising and Job Offers

All ICFO vacancies are created with a full job description that defines the purpose of the role, the main responsibilities, the mandatory and desirable requirements, the professional category and the contract type and duration. Job descriptions are prepared by the Talent Attraction team in collaboration with the Hiring Manager, and are reviewed for consistency between the described tasks, the professional category, and the salary level before the vacancy is published.

Job advertisements and the careers webpage reference the professional development opportunities available within the institution and outline the selection process. They also make explicit reference to ICFO's OTMR Policy, to ICFO's equal opportunities policies, confirming that ICFO does not restrict applications on the basis of gender or any other protected characteristic, in line with the commitments of our Diversity and Inclusion Committee, to the protection of personal data during the recruitment process, and to the mechanisms established for candidates to appeal the selection decision.

6. Selection Committees

All selection decisions at ICFO are made by a formally constituted selection committee rather than by a single individual. Committees bring together the expertise, perspectives, and seniority needed to evaluate candidates rigorously and objectively.

The following principles apply to all selection committees at ICFO regardless of position type.

- Gender balance: committees must include at least one third of each gender wherever possible. The Hiring Manager or committee chair is responsible for reviewing the composition against this requirement before the Opening Form is submitted
- Category: committee members must hold a category above the position being filled, with limited and documented exceptions
- Training: committee members are familiar with ICFO's recruitment policy and principles. Guidance is available on topics such as competency-based evaluation, unconscious bias, and behavioral interviewing
- Conflict of interest: committee members must declare any personal, professional, or family relationship with any applicant before the process begins. If such a relationship may compromise the merit principle, the member must withdraw and be replaced
- Consistency: the composition of the committee must remain the same throughout all stages of the selection process, including pre-screening and final interviews

7. Selection and Evaluation Process

The selection process at ICFO follows a structured, sequential, and competency-based approach. The stages applied depend on the nature and seniority of the position and are described in the job advertisement.

In all cases, evaluation at each stage is carried out using predefined criteria derived from the job description. All candidates are assessed against the same criteria. Evaluation records are documented at each stage and are included in the Selection Report.

Candidates are informed of the structure and timing of the process before it begins. Shortlisted candidates are kept informed of their status throughout. All candidates are notified of the outcome, and those who reach the final interview stage may request feedback.

8. Offer and Appointment

Once the Selection Report has been completed and signed, the selected candidate is formally notified by the Labour Affairs team who issue the formal employment offer. If the selected candidate declines the offer, the committee may recommend the next highest-ranked candidate, provided the evaluation documentation supports this. Where the position carries a salary range, candidates may request a review of the proposed salary by providing objective justification based on their experience and qualifications

9. Conflict of Interest

ICFO staff involved in recruitment and selection must avoid any situation that gives rise to, or could reasonably give rise to, a real or perceived conflict of interest. Staff must declare any close personal, professional, or family relationship with any applicant to the committee chair before shortlisting begins. If the relationship may make it difficult to apply the merit principle impartially, the staff member must withdraw from the committee and be replaced. The Talent Attraction team can provide guidance on conflict of interest situations.

10. Appeals

Any candidate who has participated in a selection process at ICFO and believes that the process was not conducted in accordance with the principles set out in this policy may submit a formal appeal. Appeals must be submitted in writing to the Talent Attraction team within 15 calendar days of the candidate being notified of the outcome of the process.

The appeal must state clearly the grounds on which it is based. Grounds for appeal are limited to procedural irregularities, that is, a failure to follow the procedures established in this policy, and do not extend to a review of the academic or professional judgments made by the selection committee.

Appeals are reviewed by an ad-hoc independent committee not involved in the selection process. They may request relevant documentation from the Talent Attraction team and, where appropriate, seek input from the selection committee chair. A written response is provided to the appellant within 30 calendar days of the appeal being received.

Where the appeal identifies a substantiated procedural irregularity, the independent committee will determine the appropriate corrective action, which may include a review of the selection documentation, reconvening the selection committee, or, in exceptional cases, reopening the process. The outcome of the appeal is final at the institutional level.

11. Data Protection

All personal data collected during the recruitment process is handled in accordance with Organic Law 3/2018 on the Protection of Personal Data and Digital Rights and with applicable European data protection regulation. Application materials are used solely for the purpose of the relevant selection process and are not shared beyond those involved in the evaluation.

12. Monitoring and Review

This policy is reviewed periodically as part of ICFO's Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R). The review evaluates compliance with the principles of open, transparent and merit-based recruitment, the effectiveness of recruitment practices in attracting outstanding and diverse talent, candidate experience, recruitment outcomes, and other relevant indicators that contribute to the Institute's long-term commitment to research excellence and continuous improvement.