

TEMPLATE 2: HR STRATEGY - ACTION PLAN

Name Organisation under review: Name Organisation under review: ICREA (Institució Catalana de Recerca i Estudis Avançats)

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SUBMISSION DATE:

1. ORGANISATIONAL INFORMATION

Please provide a limited number of key figures for your organisation. Figures marked * are compulsory.

STAFF & STUDENTS	FTE
Total researchers = staff, fellowship holders, bursary holders, PhD. students either full-time or part-time involved in research	259
Of whom are international (i.e. foreign nationality)	112
Of whom are externally funded (i.e. for whom the organisation is host organisation)	0
Of whom are women	49
Of whom are stage R3 or R4 = Researchers with a large degree of autonomy, typically holding the status of Principal Investigator or Professor.	259
Of whom are stage R2 = in most organisations corresponding with postdoctoral level	0
Of whom are stage R1 = in most organisations corresponding with doctoral level	0
Total number of students (if relevant)	0
Total number of staff (including management, administrative, teaching and research staff)	5
RESEARCH FUNDING (figures for most recent fiscal year)	€

<i>Total annual organisational budget</i>	28.556.719€
<i>Annual organisational direct government funding (designated for research)</i>	28.400.000
<i>Annual competitive government-sourced funding (designated for research, obtained in competition with other organisations – including EU funding)</i>	0
<i>Annual funding from private, non-government sources, designated for research</i>	156.719€
ORGANISATIONAL PROFILE (a very brief description of your organisation, max. 100 words)	
<p><i>ICREA, Catalan Institution for Research and Advanced Studies, is a foundation supported by the Catalan Government and guided by a Board of Trustees. ICREA was created in response to the need to seek new hiring formulas that would make it possible to compete with other research systems on a similar footing by focusing on hiring only the most talented and extraordinary scientists and academics.</i></p> <p><i>ICREA is an institution without walls. It works hand in hand with Catalan universities and research centres to integrate ICREA research professors in the Catalan research system.</i></p> <p><i>ICREA offers permanent, tenured positions to researchers from all over the world to come and work in Catalonia. Over the years these positions have become a synonym of global academic excellence.</i></p> <p><i>ICREA offers new research positions every year and continues to promote research in Catalonia. Cooperation, international openness and excellence are ICREA's hallmarks.</i></p> <p><i>ICREA employs 259 researchers in all fields of knowledge, from philosophers to astrophysicists, who perform their research in 49 different host institutions in Catalonia.</i></p>	

2. NARRATIVE (MAX. 2 PAGES)

Please provide an overview of the organisation in terms of the current strengths and weaknesses of the current policy and practice under the four thematic headings of the Charter and Code at your organization.

ICREA is a research institution with many peculiarities that affect the way it is managed and organised. In adopting an HR strategy, careful examination of ICREA's principles and management is needed therefore. The main feature shaping the scope of ICREA's activities is that ICREA hires only senior researchers and appoints them to host institutions in Catalonia where the research is effectively conducted.

ICREA is thus a research institution 'without walls'. None of the 259 ICREA research professors work at the ICREA premises: they have a permanent position at ICREA, and are working in universities and research institutes all over Catalonia. The fact that ICREA attracts researchers to Catalonia generates international mobility of researchers, while it also contributes to mobility within Catalonia as research professors can move between host institutions as they choose, without this affecting their ICREA status in any way.

ICREA opens calls for positions once a year. They are publicised in international scientific journals and on dedicated websites (including, of course, *Euraxess Jobs*). Calls offer positions in all fields of scientific research, from the Humanities to the Experimental Sciences. As the selection process is focused on excellence it involves panels of external, international experts. Panels must decide by consensus on the most promising recruits

and rank them. ICREA then offers a position to the applicants at the top of the list. Performance of researchers is evaluated periodically throughout their career.

ICREA does not have facilities or any kind of infrastructure to carry out research: all this is provided by the Host Institutions, where the ICREA Research Professors work on a daily basis. For that reason, applications for becoming ICREA professor always have to include a Host Institution willing to add the researcher to their staff. The expressed degree of commitment of the Host Institution is a factor in the selection criteria.

This peculiar organisation fills a gap in the Catalan research system: most public research organisations are severely constrained by legal rules and administrative procedures when it comes to recruiting staff. Salaries are predefined and far from competitive internationally. Teaching is required for university positions, which goes along with a requirement of competence in local languages. As a result, the system tends to bestow local candidates with an advantage that is not entirely justified by scientific excellence alone.

ICREA has served as a model to circumvent these restrictions. Over the years, it has become a landmark for excellence in talent attraction, and an example of a 'lean administration'. ICREA's rigorous selection process, based on external, impartial and international committees has provided an inspiring example for other administrations and research organisations in our country

Additionally, pressure to lower labour costs in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis has led to a reduction of, or a total lock on, the number of researchers hired by public institutions in Spain. The independence of ICREA has allowed the system to maintain a turnover that albeit small, has proved instrumental for attracting or retaining excellent researchers.

Since ICREA researchers work outside the ICREA premises, many of the issues of a standard HR policy do not apply to ICREA. In the present document, we have tried to focus on those issues that are both relevant and that fall within the management competencies of ICREA.

3. ACTIONS

Please provide a list of all actions to be undertaken in this HR strategy. The list must be accompanied by an extended version in which the actions are described in more detail. The overview must contain at least the following headings: Title action – timing – Responsible Unit – Indicator(s) / Target(s).

We have summarised in this section the main issues identified and addressed by the work group and the reactions to the questionnaire, structured along the lines of the Euraxess template. As explained above, due to the particular features of ICREA and its

relationship with the host institutions, only the relevant sections of the template have been addressed, and whenever possible, headings have been grouped together.

3.1 Ethical and professional aspects

This section deals with the very basic principles of research: freedom, responsibility and professional attitudes. It encourages questioning whether ICREA respects, endorses and promotes the fundamental values that make research possible and productive.

It also covers some broad legal issues about social accountability and non-discrimination, and touches briefly on public awareness, dissemination and evaluation procedures.

A number of issues for improvement were identified in the discussions. A main one is that although the information and adherence to the many codes and regulations was assumed by all, there are no explicit statements in the official documentation of ICREA. Following is the list of actions and a detailed description of the conclusions of each subsection.

Actions identified:

- 1. Official declarations about fundamental policy topics should be made publicly available through ICREA's website. This includes the Memoirs, the Bylaws and the framework agreements with Host Institutions.*
- 2. The latest versions of our Code of Best Practices should be always available on the intranet.*
- 3. Notify the ICREAs of the importance of dissemination and communication efforts. Highlight and disseminate examples through newsletter and website.*
- 4. Clarify the position of ICREA regarding exploitation of research results.*
- 5. Make an institutional declaration about non-discrimination and post it on ICREA's website.*

3.1.1 Research freedom, Ethical principles, professional responsibility and professional attitude

ICREA allows researchers total freedom of research and encourages the adoption of the highest ethical principles; It has become apparent that the assumption that researchers had to adhere to the strictest ethical principles is not explicitly stated anywhere. Therefore ICREA has decided that these principles will be explicitly mentioned in a document available to all ICREAs.

ICREA has a *Code of Best Practices in Research* covering topics on patents, evaluation of research performance, integration in the host institution, fulfilment of research protocols and safety obligations. The group felt that even though all ICREAs are given these documents at the moment of joining the institution, not everyone may be aware of the information they contain. This was confirmed by the results of the poll: a significant fraction of the researchers did not even know that these documents existed.

Although they are provided in the welcome interviews, it is easy to see that many people simply forget about them once they are 'deployed' at their Host Institutions. Another reason is that they did not exist during the early years of ICREA.

3.1.2 Contractual and legal obligations, accountability, good practices in research, dissemination, public engagement, exploitation of results

This section covers various topics. Most of these are directly under the responsibility of the host institutions, and therefore are not addressed here. One issue stands out, however, namely dissemination and public engagement of ICREA. In this respect, the question was raised whether it might be good if ICREA would be more active in promoting itself in society in general, and Catalan society in particular.

The results of the questionnaire show that researchers are mostly in agreement here, although it was pointed out by a few that the rationale for addressing specifically the 'Catalan society' was not clear, and suggested that a broader aim should be sought.

As a matter of fact, it is the Catalan Society alone that pays and supports ICREA, so there is a very clear need to communicate back to it. It is therefore important to keep reminding ICREA researchers that it is only through the sustained effort of our society that our research gets funded, and that widespread social support is essential to make it possible.

As for the exploitation of results, it seems necessary to clarify that it should never be placed above excellence in research.

3.1.3 Evaluation/appraisal procedure

ICREA has a well-established promotion procedure that was discussed by the group here. Although the degree of knowledge that the ICREAs have about this procedure varies considerably, the questionnaire revealed that the degree of trust placed in it is very high. Nevertheless, it became clear that efforts to explain the details of the promotion process are necessary, since it is this section of the questionnaire the one that generated the largest amount of comments. Further discussion on this topic can be found below, *judging merit*.

3.1.4 Non-discrimination

The non-discrimination principle is part of ICREA's core values, even though it is not publicly stated anywhere. Non-discrimination principles apply to hiring, evaluation and dissemination activities, and are integral to every decision on people's careers.

3.2 Recruitment

The main aspects covered in this section include the recruitment process and its details, notably criteria for evaluation, the profile of the committee members, and feedback about the decision to non-selected applicants. Also here appeared some of concerns

about the ICREA internal evaluation system. Following is the list of actions and a detailed description of the conclusions of each subsection.

Actions identified:

1. A priori recusal of evaluators.
2. Candidates should be allowed to exclude certain evaluators from their selection processes. This feature already exists for the promotion process
3. Include a section for 'personal circumstances' for candidates. This section could be used to add information about pregnancy, long-term illness, career breaks, etc., for the consideration of the committee.
4. The processes and criteria for selection of candidates should be made clear: The working group recommends the preparation of a document containing the main aspects of the recruitment process, notably, the profile of committee members, for how long they serve as members, the selection criteria that they use, and how they arrive at decisions.
5. ICREA should provide feedback to non-selected candidates explaining briefly why they were not selected.
6. Implement a mechanism to disclose the identity of selection committee members after they have finished this role.

3.2.1 Selection

The selection of researchers is *the core competence* of ICREA as an institution. The consensus in the working group was that both the mechanism and criteria for the selection of candidates are satisfactory, albeit insufficiently clear to those involved.

The questionnaire detected considerable confusion among ICREA Research Professors as to the relative value of criteria used in the selection process. A set of goals and actions has been proposed to address those issues. The main shortcomings detected are summarized here:

Feedback

Up till now, ICREA has not provided systematic feedback to applicants about the reasons for rejection. Many researchers expressed that some kind of feedback should be provided to applicants, although they also expressed their concerns that this could create a very heavy administrative burden to ICREA. At the time of completion of this action plan, a mechanism to provide feedback is being implemented and tested.

Criteria

A general feeling expressed by the respondents was that so far ICREA has done extraordinary work in terms of selection, and that any attempts to turn the current system into something more structured might do great damage to its functioning. For instance, the questionnaire revealed a common vision that publishing a detailed list of standardized or numerical indicators would hurt the system far more than it would

benefit. The same applies to disclosing the identities of the evaluators while they are serving in the panels.

The working group recommends the preparation of a document containing the main aspects of the recruitment process, notably, the profile of committee members, for how long they serve as members, the selection criteria that they use and how they arrive at decisions. This information should be made available to all ICREAs applicants for an ICREA position.

3.2.2 Judging merit

It seems that it is necessary to clarify the criteria and the weight of different factors in the selection process. After the poll, it transpired that many ICREAs were not aware of the detailed mechanism of the evaluation process. This is a relevant issue, since ICREA places a great value on the evaluation process and its implications.

The mechanism is generally stable, although some of its details have been improved: from streamlining the intranet procedures to expanding the number of online reviewers. This has resulted in a fair number of minor changes over time.

Since ICREAs go through their evaluation every five years (and after 3 years the first time), many ICREA Research Professors were rather ignorant of the details of the process. In particular, there were several questions about the role of the ICREA Scientific Director, the weight of several factors like age, or the role of the Host Institution, and so forth. A thorough report on the current process, which will be followed by regular updates in the future, is part of this action plan.

3.3 Working conditions and social security

Since ICREA is an open institution, many of the items included in the standard questionnaire of Euraxess on this topic are not applicable.

Those that do relate to working conditions, creating and sustaining a stimulating research environment, job stability, salaries, fringe benefits, career development, industrial property rights, and a few other topics. Following is the list of actions and a detailed description of the conclusions of each subsection.

Actions identified:

1. The current life insurance for ICREAs should be better explained to the ICREA researchers.
2. Plans should be made to provide an additional pension scheme when conditions allow.
3. The rules for sabbaticals and stays of research abroad should be better communicated.
4. Implement a procedure to identify interests in developing management skills through training courses (leadership, communication skills, conflict resolution...).
5. There should be a training programme for the ICREA administration.

6. The working group recommends the preparation of a document containing the main aspects of the evaluation process, notably the profile of committee members, the evaluation criteria used, the roles of the ICREA Director and ICREA administration in the process.

3.3.1 Research environment, working conditions and fringe benefits.

The main defining trait of ICREA in this respect is the fact that the physical research environment is provided by the Host Institutions. However, ICREA does provide substantial elements that constitute the backbone of the academic career of the researchers. The working group agreed that ICREA has many strong points that must be acknowledged:

- ICREA Research Professors are fully recognised research professionals.
- Their salaries are higher than the equivalent level in the national system.
- Contracts are permanent.
- The prestige and recognition of ICREA researchers in the global research community is high.

However, there are some aspects that could be improved, which are described below. Some attention was also given to fringe benefits. The only provision in this respect is a life insurance for all ICREAs. There are no additional pension schemes on top of the pension provided by the Spanish public system.

3.3.2 Recognition of the profession, Stability

ICREA offers only permanent positions. All ICREAs are Research Professors and should be considered as having a standing equivalent to that of Full Professors in universities. This is well known and accepted in the Catalan research system.

3.3.4 Gender Balance, fringe benefits, conditions

ICREA has a gender imbalance, similar to that of other academic research institutions. Despite many discussions and debates, there is no clear solution for this problem. The actual proportion of male to female researchers is 80/20.

ICREA allows female researchers to take maternity 'career breaks' in the form of a one-year postponement in their scheduled evaluations.

Among the other suggestions the two most chosen ones were to improve salaries so as to make sure they remain competitive internationally and the implementation of an institutional retirement pension scheme. Also, international schooling, and medical care in English appeared in several of the suggestions. Both are in line with the needs of a community of researchers that includes 28 nationalities. However, at the time of writing this, it is not clear how ICREA can offer these kinds of fringe benefits given its status as a public institution and the current legal framework with which it operates.

3.3.5 Career issues.

ICREA has earned a reputation of being flexible in terms of allowing sabbaticals and stays of research abroad. The working group agreed that researchers are very well looked after. ICREA is always swift in responding to any request. One possible shortcoming is that there are neither training plans available nor a protocol to identify training needs. This affects both ICREA researchers and members of the ICREA administration. The recommendations under this heading are generally minor, and include mechanisms to try and identify training needs.

3.3.6 Complains – Appeals

There is currently no mechanism in place to deal with complaints about ICREA itself, although personal access to the director may be considered to partially address this. In fact, ICREA researchers have direct access to both the Director and the Executive Director to consult about promotion results, issues with Host Institutions, and other things.

The ICREA administration is extremely easy to reach and is very responsive to all questions, suggestions and remarks. Despite a suggestion in the questionnaire, there was no special need to create additional contact opportunities.

3.3.7 Participation in decision-making bodies

ICREA has such a small administration that there is no distance between the board of trustees and the Director. The administrative structure is extremely flat, having only two levels between the board and the staff: Director and Executive Director.

As for participation in decision-making bodies, ICREA encourages its researchers to 'push, pull and shake the Catalan system' which means that any participation in government boards, direction of centres or departments, etc. is highly encouraged.

3.3.8 Other issues

ICREA already has regulations in place that deal with industrial property ownership, exploitation and returns.

Teaching is not part of the obligations of ICREA researchers, although many, especially those at universities, teach courses and provide seminars on a regular basis.

3.4 Training

Managerial duties can be an important part of the activities/tasks of a senior ICREA researcher. By this we do not mean administrative duties, but rather the management that comes with leading a team of researchers at different stages of their research career. Such obligations are implicit, but the working group felt they might be explicitly stated as it would be beneficial if everyone knew what is expected of ICREA researchers in terms of such leadership.

The responses to the questionnaire suggested including the importance of mentoring in the manual of best practices. This initiative gathered considerable support. However, it

became obvious in the analysis that the weight and importance of mentoring in the *promotion process* was unclear. We will therefore include specific actions to address this issue and clarify the fact that the ICREA promotion *does* recognise mentoring of PhD students:

Actions identified:

1. Include in our manual of Best Practices information on the importance of supervision and mentoring of younger researchers.
2. Include in the documentation about the Promotion process a description of the importance of supervision and mentoring of younger researchers.

3.5 Detailed Workplan: lists and tables

Following is a list of the intended actions with their responsible organ, timeframe and indicators. Some actions are short term interventions while others will take several months to implement. In the case of actions that affect the call system, the actions have been timed to coincide with the relevant calls on which they have an effect.

I. Ethical and Professional Aspects				
-	<u>Action</u>	<u>Responsible organ</u>	<u>Timeframe</u>	<u>Indicators</u>
1	<u>Official declarations on fundamental policy topics should be made publicly available through ICREA's website. This includes the Memoirs, the Bylaws and the framework agreements with Host Institutions.</u>	<u>Direction/communications</u>	<u>Q3 2017</u>	<u>Documentation & dissemination</u>
2	<u>The latest versions of our Code of Best Practices should be always available on the intranet.</u>	<u>Direction/administration</u>	<u>Q1 2018</u>	<u>Documentation & dissemination</u>
3	<u>Notify the ICREAs of the importance of dissemination and communication efforts. Highlight and disseminate examples through newsletter and website.</u>	<u>Direction/communications</u>	<u>Q2 2017 to Q4 2020</u>	<u>Documentation & dissemination</u>
5	<u>Clarify the position of ICREA towards the exploitation of research results.</u>	<u>Direction</u>	<u>Q2 2017 to Q4 2020</u>	<u>Documentation & dissemination</u>
6	<u>Make an institutional declaration about non-discrimination and post it on ICREA's website.</u>	<u>Direction/communications</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>Documentation & dissemination</u>

II. Recruitment				
-	Action	Responsible organ	Timeframe	Indicators
1	Implement a mechanism for <i>a priori</i> recusal of evaluators.	Direction/administration	Q1 2018	Senior call forms
2	Include a section for 'personal circumstances' for candidates.	Direction/ administration	Q1 2019	Senior call forms
3	Preparation of a document containing the main aspects of the recruitment process	Direction	Q2 2019	Documentation & dissemination
4	Implement a system to provide feedback to non-selected candidates with a motivation of non-selection.	Direction /administration	Q1 2018	Intranet forms
5	Implement a mechanism to disclose the identity of selection committee members after they have finished serving for ICREA.	Directon /Administration	already implemented	Web site disclosure

III. Working conditions and social security				
-	Action	Responsible organ	Timeframe	Indicators
1	The current life insurance for ICREAs should be better explained to the ICREA researchers.	Direction	Q3 2017	Documentation & dissemination
2	Plans should be made to provide an additional pension scheme when conditions allow	Direction/Board of Trustees	Already established, pending implementation and legal changes	Contributions

3	The rules for sabbaticals and stays of research abroad should be better communicated.	Administration	Q1 2018	Documentation & dissemination
4	Implement a procedure to identify interests in developing management skills through training courses (leadership, communication skills, conflict resolution...).	Administration	Q4 2018	Questionnaire/dissemination
5	Training programme for the ICREA administration	Direction/Administration	2018 - 2020	Training
6	Preparation of a document containing the main aspects of the evaluation process	Direction/Administration	Q4 2017	Documentation & dissemination

	<u>IV. Training</u>			
	Action	Responsible organ	Timeframe	Indicators
1	Include in our manual of Best Practices information on the importance of supervision and mentoring of younger researchers	Direction	Q2 2018	Documentation & dissemination
2	Include in the documentation about the Promotion process a description of the importance of supervision and mentoring of younger researchers.	Direction	Q2 2018	Documentation & dissemination

As the establishment of an Open Recruitment Policy is a key element in the HRS4R strategy, please also indicate how your organisation will use the Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment Toolkit and how you intend to implement/are implementing the principles of Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment. Although there may be some overlap with a range of actions listed above, please provide a short commentary demonstrating this implementation.

If your organisation already has a recruitment strategy which implements the principles of Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment, please also list the web link where this strategy can be found.

ICREA already has a recruitment strategy which implements the principles of Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment.

Publicity is open, in mainstream scientific journals and websites. The selection is geared towards research excellence and does not take into account any other factor: as far as we can tell, it is unbiased. Our evaluators are required to comply with our ethical code and required to maintain confidentiality and to declare possible conflicts of interest. All evaluators are always from outside the Catalan research system. The process has two stages: an online, individual phase and a face to face meeting where hiring decisions are made by consensus of the panel.

Our guidelines for evaluators are public, and available on our website here:

<https://www.icrea.cat/en/icrea-selection>

Most of the shortcomings of the selection and recruitment process identified during the Gap Analysis had to do with the level of awareness of the candidates and the feedback that they receive. This action plan includes several items directly addressing those issues.

4. IMPLEMENTATION (MAX. 1 PAGE)

Please provide an overview of the expected implementation process. You can use the following questions as a guideline in your description:

There is a steering committee in place since the beginning of the process in 2015. Awareness and involvement of our research community is expected to continue throughout the implementation of the strategy thanks to:

- Inclusion in our newsletter of the latest changes and improvements.
- Consultation and update with the work group.
- Regular communication of the changes and actions taken via intranet.

How will your organisation ensure that the proposed actions will also be implemented?

How will you monitor progress?

The Steering committee will prepare progress reports to be included in the regular Board meetings. The Board of Trustees will oversee the evolution of the indicators during the general meetings, which are held twice a year.

Is there evidence of any alignment of the HRS4R with organisational policies? For example, is the HRS4R recognized in organisation's research strategy, overarching HR policy?

The HRS4R policy is already well aligned with ICREA principles and with ICREA recruitment and selection processes. It has not been officially stated so far, as noted earlier. Several actions in the plan are directed towards addressing this (for instance actions I.1, I.2, and I.6)

How do you expect to prepare the internal and external review?

An internal review will be carried out, led by the steering committee and shared with the work group before submission. The external review will be determined by the evaluator's requests and suggestions.

FINAL REMARKS

ICREA wishes to express its thanks to all ICREA Research Professors who have contributed to the preparation of this document with their opinions and support. A special mention goes to the members of the work group, without whose invaluable commitment this work could not have been accomplished.

Thanks go also to the administration team at ICREA, a dedicated group of people who always go the extra mile to assist our researchers in achieving extraordinary things.