# AGAUR OTM-R POLICY DOCUMENT

This document is aimed to describe AGAUR's policy procedures concerning the Transparent, Open, and Merit-based Recruitment (OTM-R) for the HR funding programs it manages, which involves the selection of researchers ranging from R1 to R2, through open calls.

The Agency for Management of Universities and Research Grants (AGAUR) is a public funding body within the Ministry of Universities and Research of the Government of Catalonia. AGAUR implements the Catalan Government university and scientific policy, which is based on competitiveness in R&D with excellence at the core.

With 20 years of experience, AGAUR runs annually scholarships and grants amounting to 200 million EUR, which contribute to the promotion of university education, research, and knowledge transfer in Catalonia. AGAUR obtained the quality certification ISO 9001:2008 for its grant management performance in 2012 and the European "HR Excellence in Research Award" in 2014.

It further develops activities to support the Government of Catalonia research strategic international programs; to foster wider research cooperation and researchers' mobility with other countries/regions; to promote the external relations of Catalan institutions and facilitate talent attraction; to attract European funds for research; to support and enable R&I agents in project management and valorization of research. AGAUR further promotes mutual learning working groups between the R+I community stakeholders in Catalonia, and is a Euraxess Service center, supporting researchers' career development.

## 1. Context

AGAUR is public education and research funding body. Its enacting Law (Law 7/2001) establishes that the agency is committed to executing the policies of the Ministry of Universities and Research, established in article 38.4 of Law 30/1992, of November 26, on the legal system of the public administrations and the common administrative procedure

Moreover, AGAUR abides with all the current legislation in force in Catalonia, which includes manifold policies to ensure it commits "to achieve equality in opportunities",  non-discrimination for gender, race, or any other reason, transparency, and responsibility in the use of public funds.

The EU 'HR Excellence in Research' seal underlines its Openness, Transparency, and Merit-based selection procedures for the selection of the best candidates and allows continuous monitoring of its outcomes.

Considering that AGAUR is a funding body that does not hire research personnel directly, the purpose of this OTM-R policy is to encompass AGAUR's HRS4R strategy towards the core principles of the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. The essential steps involved in the recruitment

of researchers are focused on its selection process through the grant management and the evaluation regulations. It comprises the different phases: Advertising and application phase; the Evaluation and selection phase; Appointment phase. This ensures the internal procedures to select the applications that are best suited to the requirements of the grant programs and enables the implementation of its assessment system. The updated evaluation regulation came into force in 2020 and it's implemented for the different competitive calls of the grants that it manages.

The assessment system is published on AGAUR's website, to select the applications that are best suited to the requirements and the assessment criteria of the different competitive calls of the grants that it manages. It follows the principles of independence, externality, quality, and transparency to our grants' allocation. The procedures are improved regularly, considering the OTM-R principles specific self-assessment, the inputs of the coordinators taking part and are subject to approval from the Catalan Ministry's policymakers.

## 2. Advertising and application phase

AGAUR advertises and publishes in open, transparent, and accessible ways its calls for applicants to reach targeted populations through different channels:

- **Official publication:** all calls are published in the Government of Catalonia Official Journal (DOGC) publicly available and easily accessible through the Government of Catalonia website. The texts are published, both in Catalan and Spanish.
- **AGAUR's website**[1]: all calls are announced through a specific scholarships and grants webpage which provides information about the calls objectives, submission and evaluation criteria, selection process, and results.
- **The Ministry of Universities and Research** website: and the Ministry of **Foreign Affairs and Open Government** website[2]:
- **EURAXESS jobs** website: the HR fellowship programs are announced, including information from the local contact points, formed by more than 50 affiliated Catalan organizations from the Euraxess Catalonia network.
- **Social networks:** social community's sites (LinkedIn, Twitter) – with more than 50,000 followers altogether[3].
- **Distribution lists**: information about the calls within AGAUR's distribution lists for dissemination purposes, with around 22.000 stakeholders, including national and international contacts.
- **Targeted audiences**: info days with the information on calls are organized for specific calls once the call is about to open.

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[1] https://agaur.gencat.cat/en/inici/index.html
[2] https://exteriors.gencat.cat/en/inici/index.html
[3] http://universitatsirecerca.gencat.cat/ca/actualitat/xarxes-socials/.
Among other: twitter (@recercat; @universitatscat; @coneixementcat; @euraxesscat)

- **International dissemination**: through active participation in international research and education conferences such as APAIE; NAFSA, ESOF, EARMA & STS Forum (Japan).

**For the application phase:** AGAUR provides clear and transparent information on the whole application and selection process and an indicative timetable.

AGAUR main webpage facilitates indications on how to submit a grant or scholarship and how should organisations submit their applications. The application for a grant or scholarship is formalized by submitting the application form and, usually, attaching the documentation provided for in the rules of the call. All applications must be submitted through the electronic Gencat procedures portal. It indicates how to identify yourself electronically through any system that has a previous registration as a user to guarantee the identity. This latter procedure is meant to be followed by legal entities (universities, research centres, foundations, etc.) if they wish to apply for a grant when the call includes this possibility. It includes information on the submission of applications; Deadline; The procedures and the place where the applications can be submitted and the list of official registries for the submittal of applications in paper format, if relevant.

The HR calls advertisement and description of requirements are concise and include detailed information according to the principles of "Recruitment" and "Transparency" of the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. Applicants may find information on the call texts on: Candidates specific requirements with the career profiles and the required competencies, including knowledge and professional experience; Period of execution and duration with specifications and starting date; Amount of the grant, which includes number of available positions and working conditions and type of contract; the Award procedure; Evaluation and selection process with specific selection criteria and their respective weight and thresholds; Examining body and decision; Evaluation of ethical aspects; Publicty of Results; Acceptance of the grant; Rights and obligations; Payments and Justification and deadlines; Suspensions; Renunciation and Substitutions; Changes and Incidents; Incompatibilities; Advertising and dissemination; Verification and Control; Other relevant activities for professional development and career development prospects such as: Teaching, stays, monitoring.

AGAUR has a yearly calendar for the call's opening and disclosure. Nevertheless, the calendar depends on policy-making decisions and is used as an internal tool for program managers to inform and disseminate the calls promptly.

## 3. Evaluation and Selection: Ensuring fair and transparent recruitment and selection

Following AGAUR's evaluation regulations, the general principles governing the assessment activities are 'Objectivity, Independence, and Quality of evaluations' within an effective public-funded

management framework that AGAUR brings to all its actions, which are publicly available through its webpage[4].

Regulations of the evaluation system were approved by the AGAUR's Board of Management on the 28th of January of 2020, covering Principles, the Standard evaluation procedure; Remunerations; Language; Ethical control; Disclosure evaluators; Meta-evaluation and inspection; Collaboration with other institutions; External commissions; Gender principles.

**3.1. Selection criteria**. the specific evaluation criteria and thresholds are mentioned in each open call text, established to meet the goals indicated in the specific call object.

AGAUR ensures that applications do not infringe any ethical basis, which is a reason for exclusion from selection or the evaluation process.

**3.2 Evaluators.** the selection of experts is based on the merits of their recent scientific career and the number of research steps accrued. They are selected from different science fields, and sectors (academic or private entities) with high-level experience and in their area of expertise, well-known internationally in their fields of knowledge, and capable of understanding applications at least in the Catalan language, if the call does not indicate any other.

At least one of the experts selected should be linked professionally to the Catalan ecosystem and another must come from outside the Catalan science and technology system. To avoid conflicts of interest they cannot belong to the same institution of the application being evaluated.

Information and details of evaluators are kept in a database, in an electronic file maintained by AGAUR, which is periodically updated. The database includes at least a full CV of each evaluator, as well as information about his or her area of expertise and keywords. The database is updated per current regulations of data protection in force in Catalonia and is specifically compliant with the Regulation 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons regarding the processing of personal data and the free movement of such data.

The expert's selection process is open, any individual with the skills and abilities who is not previously included in the database described above may submit their CV anytime.

**3.3 Assignment.** the allocation is made using a random selection process, which optimally assigns applications to the evaluators from the database. This process is based on a computerized procedure that ensures transparency at all levels of awarding and a balance and homogeneity in evaluation tasks, including gender equality, whenever possible. The system ensures that evaluators are not over-burdened with work by assigning them no more than ten files to each expert, avoiding conflict of interest (cannot evaluate researchers from its same institution). Assignment in successive evaluation processes is governed by the principle of rotation, whenever possible.

If the random computerized procedure does not assign evaluators to all applications, they are manually selected under the supervision of AGAUR's evaluation management staff.

**3.4 Conflict of interest and confidentiality.** the proposed evaluators must complete a statement before evaluating, declaring that they have no conflict of interest with the applications to be evaluated

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[4] https://agaur.gencat.cat/en/beques-i-ajuts/index.html

and they undertake to keep confidentiality of information made available for the evaluation purposes. Through this document, evaluators authorize AGAUR to periodically disclose their identity on an aggregated basis.

**3.5. Evaluation process.** the evaluation of applications is based on assessing the fulfillment of the criteria and requirements set out in the call. The evaluation begins once the deadline for submitting applications expires.

Firstly, AGAUR's Grant management team carries out an eligibility check of the criteria of the application. If there are no administrative defects that lead to the application's exclusion, there are 10 days for requesting complementary information, if deemed necessary.

All applications are classified by fields Areas for enabling their allocation to the corresponding evaluators. Each field Area has an Area Coordinator, who supervises the thematic field suitability and the selection of the evaluation team.

Keywords are used in a standardized way as a means of classifying applications and for the assignment of the evaluation experts. In this sense, there is an agreement with Termcat[5] and the Catalan Universities to create a thesaurus of keywords. This classification replaces or complements the classification by areas of expertise in the calls for research and improves the assignment of the evaluation experts.

To guarantee gender parity in the selection processes AGAUR ensures at least 40% presence of the less represented gender in every panel.

**3.6 Evaluation scoring.** AGAUR evaluations are undertaken using an online application. Instructions for evaluating files are published on its website and evaluation guidelines for each call are available for the experts, to explain the object and the criteria of the call and to ensure maximum coherence among the evaluators acting individually.

The experts rate a numerical score, according to the criteria established in the call text in the different blocks, together with qualitative remarks which must be consistent with the expressed score. The qualitative evaluation is compulsory and is used to justify the scores obtained to the applicants, as appropriate.

In the case of evaluations that are significantly divergent (15% of the difference in scores) the corresponding Area coordinator, based on the considerations of the evaluation team, may propose another evaluation.

The final scoring system of the evaluations is based on the sum of the different values obtained for each of the criteria blocks evaluated. The aggregate total has a value between 1 and 7. Other scales can be used if previously stated by the call text. The evaluation criteria and thresholds are defined for each call text.

The Area Coordinators meet to achieve a consensus-based on the evaluation final scores and budget availability and prepare a proposal to submit to the Selection Committee.

They consider the quality and suitability of the applications following the evaluation scores, and they take a consensus that includes the final decision on the proposal, which is forwarded to the President of the corresponding grant committee.

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[5] https://www.termcat.cat/en

**3.7 Panel of Evaluators.** depending on the nature of the call, AGAUR might consider appointing a panel of experts who will act as evaluators and assess the different applications on a consensus basis or reviewing the previous individual evaluation process, already carried out to support the Area Coordinators. The Panel of evaluators meets in different sessions. This technique is applicable for those calls on specific topics which only address one area or those in which the CV of the researchers or the research group has a very relevant specific weight. Whereas, in those in which there is a very low number of applications or are highly competitive calls may require a double evaluation phase. The Panel of Evaluators may also complement a simple peer-review in calls in which a comparative vision of all the applications is needed.

**3.8 Evaluation of the social sciences and humanities.** Considering the particularities of these areas of expertise and the demands of the groups that take part in them and the different nature of the institutions may require the implementation of various actions to improve and promote its internationalization and impact. The research tradition in the areas of Catalan studies, particularly, the CARHUS Plus+ project (classification of journals in humanities and social sciences), which updates its data every two years, is also highlighted as a tool to improve assessment processes of journals. As well the book chapter evaluation project, both with a previous proven track and continuity.

**3.9 Disclosure of evaluators.** AGAUR's expert evaluators' names are disclosed in an aggregate way on AGAUR's website every year, with their previous consent as a purpose of transparency.
Similarly, the identification of the Area Coordinators, who are engaged for a two-to-five-year period and their tasks, are also published systematically on the website.

**3.10 Meta-evaluation and inspection.** There is a general assessment of the experts who participate in AGAUR's evaluation process through mechanisms of reviewing and monitoring their work, both from the technical and scientific points of view. This later review includes advice from the Area Coordinators. Each year internal and external audits are carried out by an independent certification body, throughout the evaluation and selection system of evaluators, in accordance with the requirements of the ISO 9001 standard, for a quality management system.

**3.11 Rebuttal period.** Applicants have the right to complain if they feel that there were shortcomings in the way their application was evaluated and that this affected the results of the eligibility check or the final decision.

## 4. Appointment phase: Taking an objective decision.

The criteria and mechanisms of assessment and selection of the grant or a scholarship are specified in the corresponding call text for applications, which are following AGAUR's general assessment principles.

The selection of the applications corresponds to a Selection Committee, appointed by the president of the organization with competence for taking the decision or the person delegated by the latter. The composition of this Selection Committee is determined specifically in each one of the calls texts for applications. This Committee is a deed of its deliberations and refers its proposal to the organization with competence to issue a decision. The Selection Committee may appoint external experts, which may interview the applicants to obtain complementary information to be furnished. They may issue a stand-by list of the applicants that did not receive an award for lack of funding reasons, for possible replacements, if the call for applications provides this possibility.

The decision of the award, either positive or for the rejection of the grant or scholarship, is duly justified and notified individually. The notification is by electronic means by default, per Law 39/2015 of Common Administrative Procedure, within the term of ten working days as of the date of the decision of awarding or rejecting the grant or scholarship.

Due to the high volume of the applications, the individual notification may be replaced by publication in the DOGC or the AGAUR notice board. The organism with competence for approving the call for applications will agree on the form of notification that will be used and which is expressly explained on the corresponding decision for granted. AGAUR's executive director guarantees the proper execution of the agreements.

Decisions are published in the official bulletin DOGC. It must indicate the beneficiary, the amount awarded, the purpose of the subsidy, and the budget which has been allocated.

Without prejudice to the provisions of the preceding and for the sake of greater dissemination, the general decision of the grants, calls for applications, and awards publication are disseminated on AGAUR's website.

The right to appeal is granted by Law 39/2015 with the legal procedure in force for all public administrations.

## 5. Revised OTM-R

AGAUR OTM-R system related to AGAUR's internal procedures of grants management, which are determined by the quality management ISO procedures. This is used a step-by-step guide by AGAUR's staff for ensuring a coherent and transparent management of the grants. AGAUR recognizes the importance of continuously updating and improving its recruitment procedures according to its strategy, whereas the whole assessment process is periodically reviewed. The Area Coordinators are key to ensuring the quality of the assessments and the Meta-evaluation and inspection process, which is also fed by the inputs of the participating experts. The evaluation staff also run periodical meetings with the calls management staff to discuss the latest developments and report any discrepancies.

The following actions are being developed to enhance the OTM-R practices:

- Keeping the administrative burden for the candidate to a minimum (proof of qualifications, translations, number of copies required, etc.). Significant progress has been achieved in this area due to the use of online application tools. General information has been introduced on its website[6] on how to submit applications with electronic administration, describing the steps for the submission procedure and the conditions for each type of grant.

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[6] https://agaur.gencat.cat/en/lagaur/procediment-de-presentacio-de-persones-juridiques/

- Considering the inclusion of explicit pro-active elements for underrepresented groups. AGAUR is working on a Gender Action Plan which will include, among other, measures to prevent any bias based on gender differences in the evaluation and selection activities. General measures to avoid any distortion in accessing the grants due to situations related to gender or other family or social circumstances are already covered. Assessment tools on an unconscious bias are being developed.

- Strengthening the institutional policy on languages. AGAUR is obliged to follow the general rules for the administration regarding the official languages policy (Catalan and Spanish) but it making strong efforts to manage applications and other administrative documents in English.

- Following new trends on research assessment. Keeping track of the DORA recommendations on new developments in research assessment to improve the content and structure of the CVs assessment and the progress towards responsible research assessment. What types of research assessment policies are being developed and what tools are the community creating to support policy development.

- Promoting measures towards responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) and to respond to the Catalan strategy commitment to promote Open Science practices. At a strategic level the concrete actions are included in the HRS4R Action Plan to tackle the need to improve the social responsibility of AGAUR funding programs and recruitment, and to carry out actions to raise awareness of ethics and sustainability, as well as to provide tools for the care of people and diversity.

These measures respond to the desire to promote cultural change towards the global trends and priorities to enhance impact and social responsibility and make research and innovation more transparent, reflective, adaptive with sustainable results. At the same time, it allows to carry out its mission of 'Promoting a more egalitarian and freer society through knowledge, helping to make people's passions and dreams come true'.

## 6. Publishing the OTM-R policy

AGAUR's OTM-R procedure is published on the institution's website[7], accessible from the main webpage with the organization information, together with the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) Action plan**.** It was published on AGAUR's website in 2017 and already 3 versions have been updated.

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[7] https://agaur.gencat.cat/en/lagaur/estrategia-de-rh-per-a-investigadors-/index.html

## 7. Quality control system

As AGAUR's OTM-R principles are related to internal procedures of its' grants management, they are related to the quality management ISO procedures, which are externally assessed on an anual basis.

AGAUR is further working on In itinere and ex-post evaluation of its procedures to improve and adapt them to the context of the Catalan science and technology system. The inspection activities on the different calls for applications allows to document and evaluate in itinere the development of the different projects or actions and correcting inadequate dynamics if any. The assessment of results obtained individually in each funding action provides very significant information about the implementation and its impact. Ex post-evaluation actions consider different aspects:

- The suitability of the results for the target specified in the call for applications.

- Monitoring the quality of results.

- The development of a methodology to assess the impact of the results at the socioeconomic level in the Catalan context.

## 8. To adapt an internal OTM-R guide

AGAUR OTM-R is related to AGAUR's grant funding management. Concise information is published for each call for potential candidates in a specific webpage on Scholarships and Grants[8] from its website main menu. Each call includes the required application requirements, templates, and statistics of previous calls. All call announcements provide concrete information on the target audience, the funder, the Regulation, and related documentation for applying to the grant: Requirements, Amendments to call (if any); Guide for applicants; FAQS; Acceptance document; Authorisation forms (if required); Career development plans; Scientific report template.

AGAUR's recruitment process embodies the OTM-R principles and ensures the highest standards for admission and selection with complete transparency based on a merit peer-review assessment, conducted by external independent experts. The information is available for applicants on AGAUR's specific assessment webpage[9]. It provides access to the assessment procedures: Regulations of the evaluation system; FAQs; Calls for reviewers; Evaluators who have participated in previous years; and Area Coordinators' information; Areas of expertise as well as Instructions for performing the evaluation and Remunerations for

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[8] https://agaur.gencat.cat/en/beques-i-ajuts/
[9] https://agaur.gencat.cat/en/avaluacio/index.html

evaluation.

## 9. Training and awareness raising within the institution

AGAUR training program for its grant management and assessment staff includes updating on global trends on grants management and assessment, gender, ethics, and integrity, and Open Science issues. Any changes on these matters are included and published in guidelines for beneficiaries and evaluators to keep them updated, which are issued[10] for each call assessment to guarantee efficient evaluation procedures.

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[10] https://agaur.gencat.cat/web/.content/Documents/Documentacio-Documents-dinteres/english_instructions_2018_.pdf

**ANNEX**

## AGAUR's evaluation and selection process