



ValER call evaluation guidelines

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1. OVERVIEW

The **ValER** call offers FIVE permanent positions in the Valencian Research system. The selected researchers will be hired by ValER as ***distinguished researchers*** (equivalent to tenure) and therefore will become employees of ValER working in a host research institution of the Valencian Community. ValER researchers go through an evaluation process (the promotion) at regular intervals throughout their entire career.

The success and impact of ValER 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 ValER is extremely grateful that you have accepted to assist us.

The selection of candidates for ValER 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 underlying 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 output, but rather on the highly informed judgement of the experts in recognizing excellence. We look for quality, not quantity.

Evaluators cannot be members of the local scientific community to warranty independency in the evaluation process.

ValER fully endorses and shares the principles of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (**SFDORA**), by which it discourages evaluators to rely only on scientific 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, ValER considers the value of all research outputs, including qualitative indicators of research impact such as influence on practice and its projection for the future.

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 ValER – 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.

ValER 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.

2. AREAS AND PANELS

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

1. Life and Health Sciences.
2. Experimental Sciences and Mathematics.
3. Engineering.
4. Social and Behavioral Sciences.
5. Humanities

Panels covering different subdisciplines (usually between five and nine people) will be elaborated under the guidance of ValER Scientific Advisory Board. 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.

6. GOALS OF THE CALL AND SELECTION CRITERIA

The ValER 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.

7. AGE

Applicants of all ages are welcome. There is no age limitation in ValER call, outside current legal and labour regulations.

The main purpose of ValER is to recruit outstanding experts whose research can make a difference in our research system. Hiring candidates approaching retirement age is perfectly possible, provided the Committee sees them as fully active, productive and capable of making novel breakthroughs.

8. GENDER AND MINORITIES

We at ValER take gender equalities seriously. Although it is a general issue the fact that the number of male researchers is higher than that of female researchers across all knowledge areas – even more marked in

STEM areas (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) – we keep on working to improve the matter.

Although the question seems unanswerable at the moment, we will 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.

9. QUOTAS

There are no pre-assigned quotas to the number of researchers to be selected in each area. In fact, ValER operates with no quotas whatsoever. Thus, there are no quotas for universities *versus* other research centres, for female *versus* male researchers, for nationals *versus* foreigners, no quotas for different disciplines within areas, and again, no quotas at all.

10. SELECTION PROCEDURE

ValER evaluations have 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.

- First evaluation round: individual assessment

Special care is taken to ensure that online assessments truly reflect individual opinions of each member of the committee. To that end, the identity of the other members is not disclosed in the online phase, and the remarks and comments remain disclosed 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 relatively close to their expertise (although this can be broad at times). This distribution helps to reduce the overall workload, since the least competitive applications need not to 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).

The scoring system is listed in the next Table:

Track record of the candidate & research plans for the future	
Scores	Description
1	Generally research outputs with quality that is recognized internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigor. Minor doubts about personal contribution to outputs and ideas in joint work. Some experience in leading research projects. Minor evidence of engagement with internationally recognized groups. Minor strategic planning of research.
2 to 3	Mostly outputs of research quality that is recognized internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigor; and also possible research outputs of quality that is internationally excellent. No doubts about personal contribution to outputs and ideas in joint work. Experience in leading research projects. Some engagement with the international community in the field. Some thought given to planning of research.
3 to 5	Clear outputs with research quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigor, but which falls short of the highest standards of excellence. Some evidence of personal contribution to ideas in joint outputs. Demonstrated ability to propose and conduct national research projects. Some national awards or prizes. Good engagement with the international community in the field. Adequate planning of research producing results of international excellence.
5 to 7	The large majority of outputs are of research quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigor, but which falls short of the highest standards of excellence. Demonstrated ability to propose and conduct national and international research projects. Research project timely, innovative research, and well planned, which will certainly be of international excellence.
7 to 9	Publication record contains outputs with research quality at the highest standards of excellence. Clear evidence of personal contribution to ideas. Demonstrated ability to propose and conduct international research projects. Some national and international awards and prizes, and obvious record of international esteem and leadership. Research project timely, innovative research, and well planned, which will certainly be of international excellence and likely to be world-leading.
10	Clear record of outputs and clear evidence of personal contribution to research quality that is world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigor. Demonstrated ability to propose and conduct international research projects. Exposure to world leading research teams. Very impressive record of international awards and esteem. Research project highly innovative and timely, and planned in careful detail, that will definitively produce world-leading research.

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.

- Short 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 short list 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 short list 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 and consensus on the ranking based on the selection criteria explained above.

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

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

11. FEEDBACK

Applicants will receive a short report from the panel, highlighting the aspects that may benefit from further improvement. For this purpose, each 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** sentence and polite remarks, as well as constructive critical comments. Offensive remarks, shall be always avoided, as shall be any mention to personal details of the candidates (gender, family status, nationality, and the like). Finally, do not refer to specific numerical scores (h-index, number of publications, thesis, etc) since those are already known by the applicants and seldom help the 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.

12. APPOINTMENT OF EXPERTS

Panels are made *ad hoc* by invitation each year. Panel members accept the participation terms of the process by signing the corresponding contract via the evaluation platform. The panel members' identities are not made public to candidates prior to the evaluation process.

Information about the 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 ValER 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 ValER immediately.

13. 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 ValER staff as soon as possible, 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 candidate is selected
- b) has a close family or personal relationship with any person representing a candidate
- c) has close family ties (spouse, domestic or non-domestic partner, child, sibling, parent etc.) or other close personal relationship with the candidate
- d) has or has had during the last five years, a scientific collaboration with the candidate
- e) has or has had a relationship of scientific rivalry or professional hostility with the candidate
- f) has or has had in the past, a mentor/mentee relationship with the candidate

14. 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 ValER staff.

15. MOBILITY AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Committee members should consider mobility as a valuable experience. Thus, for ValER it is always necessary that candidates have had a substantial international exposure.

16. FURTHER QUESTIONS

ValER 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.