Evaluators' guidebook

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1. Overview

The purpose of this guidebook is to show how the candidate assessment process for a post-graduate fellowship from "la Caixa" Foundation functions and present the guidelines and evaluation criteria to be followed to score a fellowship application.

"la Caixa" Foundation has established that the following principles should govern all assessment processes for its post-graduate fellowships programmes:

- TRANSPARENCY. Candidates as well as evaluators and the general public have access to the basic principles that govern the process of evaluating and selecting candidates and procedures followed for that purpose. In addition, candidates receive timely information on the status of the application at each stage of the process and, where appropriate, feedback on the outcome of the evaluation of their application.

- EQUITY. Applications are evaluated based only on the merits candidates have accredited in relation to the aspects evaluated in each stage of the process without taking into consideration any other factor. All candidates are treated equally and according to the same evaluation criteria. All candidates must pass an assessment process conducted by expert, independent evaluators.

- EFFICIENCY. The "la Caixa" Foundation Fellowships Programme is characterised by the thoroughness with which the candidate assessment process is conducted and rigour in complying with the stipulated procedures. Punctuality in meeting deadlines, which are published, and hence, known by applicants, is of the utmost importance. The system has been designed in such a way that evaluators can have sufficient time to perform their scoring with quality standards.

- QUALITY. "la Caixa" Foundation fellowships are merit fellowships and, thus, are granted solely based on the criteria of academic or professional quality. Assessment of candidates is the most important element of the entire process. For this reason, and to ensure the adequacy of the evaluators, they are appointed in accordance with both their previous experience in this type of evaluation processes and their merits. They are accredited according to conventional formulas for measuring academic and/or scientific productivity.

The evaluation and selection of applications is carried out taking into consideration the recommendations of the European Science Foundation published in the *Peer Review Guide*.

The assessment process of an application is comprised of three steps:

1. **Eligibility screening:** The "la Caixa" Foundation Fellowships Programme examines all applications received and rejects those that do not meet the criteria published in the call guidelines.

2. **Remote evaluation (pre-selection):** Each eligible application is sent to an evaluation panel composed of at least two evaluators with experience in the discipline of the application and with a solid CV of publications and/or contributions in the said area. Applications receiving the highest scores in each panel will be submitted for the following stage.

3. **Final evaluation (selection) by face-to-face interviews:** Applicants whose applications have passed the remote assessment will be invited to a face-to-face assessment interview before a multidisciplinary committee, composed of evaluators with extensive experience in peer review assessment processes.

2. Step 1: Eligibility screening

The administrative office of the "la Caixa" Foundation Fellowships Programmes checks, for each call and programme, the suitability of the applications submitted within established deadlines. In particular, this office ensures that requests sent to the evaluators are eligible in regard to:

- Compliance with the formal requisites of the call (nationality, required documentation, academic situation, etc.)
- Accreditation of prior studies to enter post-graduate programmes.
- Level of knowledge of a foreign language.
- Type of studies and centre of destination.

Therefore, the evaluators must consider as formally eligible all applications submitted to them for examination and scoring.

3. Step 2: Remote evaluation (pre-selection)

INTRODUCTION

Applications that meet the requirements of the call and, therefore, pass the eligibility examination are submitted to evaluation panels comprised of independent evaluators.

The panels are formed according to fields of discipline. Applications are assigned to the corresponding panels in response to the applicant's choice, expressed in their application. The list of fields of discipline can be found in Annex 1 of this document.

PANELS

The panels are formed from the database of evaluators maintained by the "la Caixa" Foundation Fellowships Programme Office. These evaluators have both expressed their willingness to be part of the evaluation panels as well as their adequacy in the disciplinary field to which they are assigned.

The organisation of the programme follows a suitable rotation of evaluators that are part of the assessment panels each year. In general, and for a six-year period, the same evaluator may not participate in more than three calls (each call corresponds to one year).

Similarly, the Programme Office will ensure that at least one third of the pool of evaluators who participated in the previous call's assessment process is renewed annually.

Panels will be composed in accordance with criteria of scientific competence and diversity. As far as possible, gender parity and diversity of origin, both geographical and academic, will be intended. In the same manner, the diversity of types of institutions to which evaluators belong, will also be promoted. A balance will be sought between universities, research centres and, where appropriate, representatives from professional sectors. Participation of former "la Caixa" Foundation fellows will especially be promoted, provided they can accredit the levels of knowledge and experience required to be part of the assessment panels.

Evaluators involved in the remote assessment process sign an agreement with "la Caixa" Foundation by which they undertake to maintain the confidentiality of applications examined. Similarly, these evaluators undertake not to make any other use of the information they are provided with other than that which corresponds to the examination and evaluation of the applications.

To guarantee that evaluators can score the applications free from pressure and with maximum independence, the composition of the evaluation panels is, in no case, made public as long as evaluation processes are open. However, once the fellowships of all programmes in the same call have been awarded, the complete list of evaluators (by name and surname, position and institution they belong to) who have intervened in the assessment process is published on the "la Caixa" Foundation website, without specifying in which part of the process they have been involved or on which selection panel they have taken part.

Aggregation or disaggregation of panels

To ensure that evaluators involved in the remote assessment process of candidates are not required to score an inordinate number of applications, the process for forming panels takes into consideration aggregation or disaggregation of disciplinary groups to which candidates have pre-assigned their applications.

Thus, it has been established that a disaggregation process is activated when, for the same programme, self-assigned candidates within the same discipline exceed a certain number. Thus, the process ensures that evaluators do not receive more than the maximum number of applications that have been established.

Similarly, when the number of applications assigned to the same discipline is very low, the remote assessment procedure includes the possibility to add to the same panel applications from different disciplines, provided there is a certain affinity and/or proximity between them.

EVALUATION OF AN APPLICATION

Each application is assigned to an evaluation panel consisting of at least two evaluators trained in the candidate's discipline or in a closely related area. These evaluators independently review each of the applications, without there being contact or discussion between them.

The remote assessment process is performed via an online platform specifically designed for this purpose.

When the remote assessment process opens, evaluators are provided with passwords that give them access to the information and documentation for each of the applications assigned to the panel to which they belong.

Evaluation of an application is comprised of three parts:

a) The scoring of each aspect for which evaluation is required.
b) Indication of the level of familiarity with the subject evaluated.
c) Rationale for the scores.

a) The scoring of the aspects for which evaluation is required

Evaluators who conduct the examination and the scoring of applications in the remote assessment process must score the applications under the following three criteria:

1. Qualifications and Curriculum (50%): the candidate's scores, considering, in particular, their relative position within their graduating class (if this information is available) and the academic and/or professional curriculum in relation to the stage of their career they are in and the opportunities, in this respect, they may have had.

2. Motivation and Statement of Purpose (30%): the excellence of the statement of purpose submitted, considering its originality, innovative nature and its potential impact and the quality and suitability of the chosen institution and the academic merits of the thesis supervisor, if applicable.

3. Reference letters (20%): the reference letters received in support of the candidate, taking into account both the specificity of their content regarding the candidate's statement of purpose, as well as the profile of the people who write them.

Each of these aspects receive a different weighting and is scored according to a scale containing the following eight values:

- Exceptional
- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- Normal
- Mediocre
- Poor

- Very poor

Each one of these values corresponds to a score that ranges from 1 (very poor) to 8 (exceptional). A final grade is reached by adding the scores assigned to each criterion, taking into account as well the weight assigned by each evaluator to each criterion.

In addition, a qualitative score of some additional aspects must also be given. This scoring will be shown to the evaluators who are part of the assessment committees and, if necessary, will be used to break a draw between candidates with the same score.

Applications are evaluated in the remote assessment process based on a two-stage procedure.

Stage 1: scoring

In this first stage, evaluators complete their scores for each application and, once all the applications assigned to them have been reviewed and scored, they are submitted to the "la Caixa" Fellowships Programme Office.

Stage 2: review

The system monitors the consistency of evaluations between evaluators who examine and score the same applications, and also take into account the mean of each evaluator's score for the total number of applications evaluated. If a significant deviation between the scores of evaluators occurs, a second review stage is activated.

In this stage, applications that show a significant deviation in scores are sent to evaluators again. Evaluators are advised of the existence of this deviation and are asked to review their qualifications if they consider it appropriate.

b) Indication of the level of familiarity with the subject evaluated

Evaluators should indicate, for each application examined, their level of familiarity with the discipline of the application.

When the level of familiarity expressed is not homogeneous among evaluators who score an application, each evaluator's score will, as appropriate, be overweighted or underweighted, so that the more expert the evaluator is, the greater impact this will have on the final grade for the application.

In any case, evaluators should take into account that applications examined correspond to early stages of scientific and/or professional careers, which is why the scope of the concept of "familiarity" must be interpreted in a broad sense.

c) Rationale for the scores

Evaluators must give a rationale for each application with a short, concise written brief, which includes the reasoning behind their evaluation and overall impression given by the candidate.

The "la Caixa" Foundation Fellowships Programme Office will not review or filter any observations, which is why evaluators should be extremely careful with their wording and respectful of the candidate. In any case, comments should have a strictly professional tone and a constructive spirit.

In no case should comments:

- Give information about the identity of the evaluator.
- Contain offensive, discriminatory or improper statements.
- Not correspond or be inconsistent with the numerical score.
- Improperly justify the numerical evaluation.

These comments will be accessible to members of the assessment committee, together with the overall aggregate score of the application.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EVALUATOR

- Before starting to evaluate an application, the best practice is for evaluators to familiarise themselves with the evaluation criteria and how the process functions in general.

- Before starting to score, evaluators should examine a certain number of applications (between four and six) to get an idea of the information provided and the correspondence between the information contained in each application and the aspects scored in their evaluation.

- Furthermore, before assuming the evaluation is complete and sending the scores to the Programme Office, it is a good idea to review the first applications evaluated and check that there is in no bias in their scores.

- Evaluators should aim to evaluate applications in response to the cognitive context of each discipline. This means that applications must be evaluated according to the epistemological and methodological standards that prevail in the applicant's discipline.

REMOTE ASSESSMENT OF APPLICATIONS

All remote assessment panels are grouped in large discipline-based committees. Depending on the size of the programme and the number of fellowships called, this grouping can be in one, two, three or four committees, as shown below:

Committees	Disciplines			
1 committee	All disciplines			
2 committees	Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences		Life Sciences, Applied Sciences, Experimental Sciences	
3 committees	Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences		Life Sciences	Physical Sciences, Mathematics and Engineering
	Arts and Humanities	Social Sciences	Life Sciences, Applied Sciences, Experimental Sciences	
4 committees	Arts and Humanities	Social Sciences	Life Sciences	Physical Sciences, Mathematics and Engineering

Considering the score resulting from the aggregation and/or weighting of the scores assigned by the evaluators to each application, a ranking of candidates, sorted from the highest to lowest score is established in each remote assessment panel.

The "la Caixa" Foundation determines, through the Programme Office, a maximum number of assessable candidates for each committee. This number is broken down between the different panels grouped under the same committee, according to a criterion that combines proportional allocation for each panel with an overall rating from standard scores of all applications from the same committee. Thus, the number of applications that will advance to the next stage is obtained for each remote assessment panel.

Applications with a weighted and/or aggregated score lower than 5 points (equivalent to a "good" value) cannot move to the next stage, even if they are classified within the group of the best scores.

In the event of draws involving two or more applications located at the cut-off point, these will be resolved taking into account the priority assigned to the aspects evaluated, as well as the weighting according to the evaluator's level of familiarity, as follows:

Aspect evaluated	Priority
Candidate's scores and curriculum	1
Excellence of the statement of purpose submitted	2
Reference letters received in support of the candidate	3

If there are still draws, they will be resolved by introducing, as another weighting factor, the qualitative mark given by each of the evaluators who have evaluated the applications with equal scores.

INFORMATION TO EVALUATORS AND CANDIDATES

As discussed above, transparency is one of the core principles of the candidate assessment process of the "la Caixa" Foundation Fellowships Programme. For this reason, the Programme Office seeks to make as much information available as possible to the various stakeholders involved.

Information to candidates

When the candidate remote assessment process has finished, candidates receive information on the total number of submissions to the call; the total applications assigned to their remote assessment panel; the total number of candidates who pass on to the next stage and the total number of applications assigned to the same panel who, likewise, pass on to the next stage.

They are also informed of the score received by their application and the resulting classification of that score in the panel to which they were assigned.

Finally, candidates obtain information on the quartile in which their application is situated, for each aspect evaluated, in comparison to the rest of applications evaluated by the same panel.

Information for remote assessment evaluators

When the remote assessment process ends, each evaluator has, in turn, access to marks and comments from the rest of the experts of their panel for each application evaluated. Anonymity of all parties is maintained in all cases.

Information to evaluators involved in the final face-to-face assessment interview

Candidates who pass remote assessment progress to the last stage of the process, which is a personal interview before a multidisciplinary assessment committee.

Evaluators that take part in these committees will also have access to the scores and comments of the evaluators who, during the remote assessment, scored the applications. The anonymity of all parties is maintained in all cases.

4. Step 3: Final evaluation by face-to-face interviews

INTRODUCTION

The last stage of the assessment process is a face-to-face interview in which the candidate has the opportunity to defend their statement of purpose before a multidisciplinary assessment committee.

The overall purpose of the interviews is to better evaluate the consistency and strength of the statements of purpose of candidates who passed the remote assessment process and the candidate's suitability according to programme objectives.

Typically, the interview lasts no more than 20 minutes and is carried out following this format:

- The "la Caixa" Foundation representative welcomes the candidate.

- The candidate presents, as briefly as possible (no more than two or three minutes) a summary of their statement of purpose.

- The members of the assessment committee ask whatever questions they consider appropriate to evaluate the excellence of the statement of purpose and the applicant as a whole.

INTERVIEW

The representative of "la Caixa" Foundation will ensure that the interviews are carried out according to the planned schedule, so that the candidates are called in on time.

There are no specific guidelines on how to conduct an interview. It is the prerogative of the members of each face-to-face assessment committee to establish their own dynamics and tone, depth and scope of the questions asked to each candidate.

In general, the questions should be brief and it should be the candidate who holds the floor most of the time.

It is not necessary that all members of the face-to-face assessment committee ask the candidate questions, although it is advisable that questions are distributed evenly throughout the process.

Preparation of the interview

Evaluators receive information about the candidates who will be interviewed far enough in advance to prepare the interviews.

The Fellowships Programme Office will send passwords to each evaluator to log in to the computer platform that gives them access to the candidates' files, as well as the evaluations assigned and comments provided in the remote assessment process.

Committee members will also have information on the total number of applications submitted in the call; the total number of applications assigned to the remote assessment panel for each candidate and the total number of applications assigned to the panel of candidates who have passed on to the next stage.

They will also be informed of the aggregated score received by each application and the resulting classification of that score in the panel to which they were assigned.

Evaluators should carefully consider the information contained in each application and prepare in advance a provisional list of questions for the candidates.

Indication of the level of familiarity with the subject evaluated

Evaluators should indicate, for each application examined, their level of familiarity with the discipline of the application.

When the level of familiarity expressed is not homogeneous among evaluators who score an application, each evaluator's score will, as appropriate, be overweighted or underweighted, so that the more expert the evaluator is, the greater impact this will have on the final grade for the application.

In any case, evaluators should take into account that applications examined correspond to early stages of scientific and/or professional careers, which is why the scope of the concept of "familiarity" must be interpreted in a broad sense.

Recommendations to the evaluator

- It is advisable to score interviews as they take place, although it is convenient to review the initial scores once a certain number of interviews have taken place (four to six), to adjust them considering the development of the evaluation.

- It is also useful to take notes on each interview, since they may be necessary later to remember the details of the applications the face-to-face assessment committee intends to discuss.

- If possible, conventional questions or those that candidates can typically expect should be avoided.

- On the other hand, it is advisable to ask questions that may lead to answers that may provide guidance on aspects to be evaluated in this stage (originality, methodological rigour, expository clarity, feasibility of the proposal and adaptation to the reality of the estimated impact, academic and professional curriculum regarding the stage of the career the candidate is in, etc.).

- Avoid dealing differently with those candidates whose statements are within the field of discipline with which the evaluator is more familiar. The depth and scope of the issues raised should be the same for all applicants interviewed.

- Avoid asking questions for which the applicant has already provided answers in their application.

- It is advisable, however, to ask questions that allow the information provided in the application to be treated more in depth, or clarify issues that, according to the evaluator, are not sufficiently explained in the documentation provided.

- At least part of the interview should be held in English (Depending on the programme, interviews will be held entirely in English)

EVALUATION OF AN APPLICATION

Evaluators who conduct the evaluation of applications in the face-to-face assessment process must score the following three aspects of an application:

- Candidate's potential (40%): the candidate's potential, paying particular attention to the candidate's interpersonal skills, such as clarity and consistency of discourse, expression of ideas, ability to present complex reasoning, teamwork, capacity for independent reasoning, originality, entrepreneurship and leadership will be evaluated.

- Motivation and Statement of purpose (30%): the impact of the candidate's statement of purpose, understood in its broadest sense:

  o Capacity for this statement to contribute to transformation and improvement in areas such as the economy and the creation of wealth, society, culture, science, the quality of life of citizens, the environment or public policy.

  o Potential impact of the grant on the candidate's studies, i.e. the scientific, social or economic opportunity cost if the candidate could not follow the proposed studies.

- Academic and Professional background (30%): the academic and professional background of the candidate in relation to the stage of the career they are in and opportunities, in this respect, they could have obtained.

Each of these aspects receives a different weighting and is scored according to a scale containing the evaluation concepts and the following scores:

Qualification	Score
Exceptional	8
Excellent	7
Very Good	6
Good	5
Normal	4
Mediocre	3
Poor	2
Very poor	1

EVALUATION PROTOCOL

At the end of each interview, evaluators should score each candidate, according to the aspects stated above.

Committees may not and should not jointly agree to scores as interviews progress. On the contrary, each member must individually assess candidates examined based on their own impressions arising from the interview.

After all the interviews are completed, committee members must inform the "la Caixa" Foundation representative of their scores for each candidate interviewed. A provisional classification list will result from these initial scoring, and it will be communicated to the committee members.

For a detailed description of the face-to-face assessment procedure at this stage of the process, please refer to the document *Face-to-face assessment procedures*.

Aspects to take into account

- The final list of candidates must be obtained without regard to any other aspect other than those explicitly established for evaluating an application.

- In this regard, chance factors may not be taken into consideration when determining the final list of candidates awarded a scholarship and, in particular, the following should be avoided:

  o Considering geographical origin, or university of provenance, university or country of destination or any other aspects that cannot be linked to an assessment exclusively based on criteria of excellence.

  o Any corporate bias, either to promote or penalise candidates that, in any manner, may be associated with committee members due to the field of their discipline, specific subject of the project, university of destination or provenance, etc.

AWARD OF FELLOWSHIPS

The "la Caixa" Foundation shall communicate, in an initial meeting with members from all committees that will be held before the first interview, the number of fellowships assigned to each committee and the number of candidates on the waiting list and their order.

The determination of the candidates awarded a fellowship for each committee will result from the classification obtained based on the scores assigned by each evaluator for each application. Only candidates with the highest scores in the rankings will be awarded a fellowship.

The members of each committee should express their agreement with the outcome of the process by signing a document that includes the final classification of the candidates evaluated and the corresponding award of fellowships and candidates on the waiting list.

It will not be possible to award fellowships to candidates who obtain an aggregate final score lower than 6. If a committee does not have enough candidates with the minimum score required to be eligible as fellowship holders, it will release the fellowships not awarded. These fellowships would then be reassigned by the "la Caixa" Foundation among the other committees.

If all committees consider the level of the candidates interviewed does not reach the minimum required for being awarded a fellowship, these fellowships will be declared void.

Committees that do not grant all the fellowships may not call on candidates on their waiting list.

ETIQUETTE

There is no protocol specifically established to conduct interviews or to ask questions. It is assumed that questions will be raised politely and with respect and that the process will be conducted within the limits commonly considered as reasonable and correct.

Keep in mind, however, that it is quite natural that candidates attend the assessment interview in a highly tense and sensitive state. It is, therefore, recommended that evaluators, at least in the opening minutes, establish a cordial atmosphere that encourages the candidate to relax.

At any rate, that does not mean evaluators should not ask difficult questions or lead candidates away from their comfort zone, provided it is considered necessary for a more effective evaluation.

The entire time reserved for the interview should be used.

Avoid mentioning the previous interview when a new candidate is entering the interview room, or giving any information about previous candidates or interviews.

Notes taken on other candidates or documents with their scores should also be kept out of reach of candidates.

Committee members should not, under any circumstance, inform candidates of their judgments regarding the statements of purpose discussed, nor suggest their qualification or predict the outcome of their application.

5. Annex 1: Remote assessment panels

Humanities and Arts Committee	
Remote assessment panel	Disciplines
Humanities and Arts 1	Languages, Linguistics, Philology, Translation and Interpretation
Humanities and Arts 2	Architecture, Urban and Landscape Planning
Humanities and Arts 3	Philosophy, Literary Studies, Gender Studies, Cultural Studies, Semiotics and Communication Studies, Humanities in General
Humanities and Arts 4	History, Archaeology, History of Art, Cultural Management
Humanities and Arts 5	Plastic and Visual Arts
Humanities and Arts 6	Cinema and Audiovisual Communication (applied disciplines)
Humanities and Arts 7	Music and Performing Arts
Humanities and Arts 8	Psychology (except Clinical) and Pedagogy

Social Sciences Committee	
Remote assessment panel	Disciplines
Social Sciences 1	Sociology and Anthropology
Social Sciences 2	International Cooperation, Social Development and Change
Social Sciences 3	International Relations
Social Sciences 4	Political and Governmental Sciences, Geography, Regional Studies
Social Sciences 5	Economics
Social Sciences 6	Businesses and Enterprises
Social Sciences 7	Law
Social Sciences 8	Journalism

Life Sciences Committee	
Remote assessment panel	**Disciplines**
Life Sciences 1	Medicine, Public Health, Sport Sciences, Nutrition, Clinical Psychology, Health Management
Life Sciences 2	Animal, Plant, Environmental Biology, Physiology, Ecology and Conservation
Life Sciences 3	Human Biology, Microbiology, Molecular Biology, Genetics, Cellular Biology, Genomics and Proteomics, Biochemistry
Life Sciences 4	Agriculture, Veterinary Science, Animal Production, Forestry
Life Sciences 5	Biotechnology, Bioinformatics, Pharmacy, Food Technology

Physical Sciences, Mathematics and Engineering Committee	
Remote assessment panel	**Disciplines**
Physical Sciences, Mathematics and Engineering 1	Theoretical and Applied Mathematics, Computer Sciences
Physical Sciences, Mathematics and Engineering 2	Physics
Physical Sciences, Mathematics and Engineering 3	Geology, Earth Sciences, Environmental and Atmosphere Sciences, Mines, Geological Engineering, Oceanography, Hydrology
Physical Sciences, Mathematics and Engineering 4	Civil and Construction Engineering, Energy, Nuclear Energy and Renewable Energy Engineering
Physical Sciences, Mathematics and Engineering 5	Chemistry and Chemical Engineering
Physical Sciences, Mathematics and Engineering 6	Telecommunications, Electronics, Robotics, Biomedical Engineering, Automation Engineering, ICT
Physical Sciences, Mathematics and Engineering 7	Industrial Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Metallurgy, Materials, Nanotechnology, Aeronautical, Naval and Aerospace Engineering