

Code of conduct

Introduction

This document contains the general principles to be followed by evaluators when assessing and scoring the applications that are subject to scrutiny in the selection process of the “la Caixa” Foundation Fellowships Programme. It addresses common sense considerations already spontaneously practiced by the evaluators involved in the selection process.

These principles, which are intended to ensure compliance with requirements such as transparency or equal treatment of all applicants, are collated in this document, with a dual purpose:

- Firstly, as a formal compilation that can be used as a reminder by the evaluators.
- And, secondly, to make the principles governing the assessment process of the call for applications to fellowships available to applicants by publishing them.

In addition, the document includes a second section, which explains the situations in which a conflict of interest may possibly arise.

General principles

1. The evaluator must complete the tasks assigned to him in complete confidentiality and by examining each candidate fairly, impartially and fairly, in accordance with the instructions for assessment provided by the “la Caixa” Foundation.
2. Each evaluator must carry out their work independently. They must not represent any organisation, region, country, group or discipline.
3. If the evaluator has a direct or indirect interest in the assessed application, or a personal or family relationship with the applicant, they should bring the matter before the “la Caixa” Fellowships Programme Office (See below: "Conflict of interest").
4. Evaluators should not discuss with anyone, let alone with the candidate himself, the contents of an application.
5. Evaluators participating in the remote assessment processes (pre-selection) and evaluating the same applications should avoid contact with each other in regard to the applications examined.
6. Similarly, evaluators should maintain the confidentiality of the process and avoid contact, in relation to the applications examined, with people who have written letters of

- support for applicants assessed, or the doctoral advisors who guided their thesis or research project.
7. No evaluator should tell anyone until the end of the assessment process when the names of the candidates awarded a scholarship are published, the names of the other evaluators that have participated on the examining boards or panels.
 8. Evaluators must ensure maintenance of the integrity and confidentiality of the documents to which they are given access via technological channels, and make certain that this is inaccessible to third parties, whether these are interested or not in how the assessment process is progressing.
 9. The sole purpose of the documentation provided is to enable assessment of the candidates. Therefore, it must not be used for any other purpose.
 10. Copies, notes, hardcopy documents or in electronic format obtained by or provided to the evaluator during the remote assessment process or participation in face-to-face examination boards, must be destroyed or returned to the Programme Office upon completion of the assessment process.
 11. The completion of tasks assigned within the stipulated times is an element of utmost importance in each call. The successive stages of an assessment process cannot be started until previous ones have been completed in their entirety. Therefore, the possible tardiness of a single evaluator compromises the work of everyone else.
 12. A ”la Caixa” fellowships programme assessment process affects thousands of candidates and mobilises hundreds of evaluators. It is an exercise of respect and responsibility for all parties to comply with the commitments taken on in regard to a call.
 13. The Programme Office contacts sufficiently in advance those evaluators who will compose the evaluation panels and examining board for interviews for each programme and each call. Acceptance to participate in the process implies that the Programme Office assumes that position is covered. From that time onwards, any resignation of an evaluator will seriously hinder the management of the assessment process, and to an even greater degree the closer the end of the process is.

Conflict of interest

A conflict of interest has to do with the possibility of misuse or abuse (whether real, apparent, perceived or potential) of the confidence the general public, candidates and the ”la Caixa” Foundation place in the evaluators who have to score applications; therefore, evaluators the decisions of whom will determine which candidates finally receive a fellowship.

A conflict of interest is a situation in which financial, personal or professional considerations can compromise or bias the neutrality, impartiality and objectivity of an individual whose position is likely to affect directly or indirectly the result of an assessment process.

Evaluators are obliged to notify the Programme Office of the appearance of a possible conflict of interest while carrying out their task in the assessment process.

A conflict of interest exists when:

- The evaluator has actively participated in the preparation of the candidate's application.
- The evaluator will be the advisor of the candidate requesting a scholarship to pursue a Ph.D.
- The evaluator has family ties with the candidate.
- The evaluator has family ties to the advisor of the candidate requesting a scholarship to pursue a Ph.D.
- The evaluator finds himself in regard to the application or the candidate, in any other situation that, both in its own opinion or in the opinion of a third party, could compromise its neutrality when examining the application.

A conflict of interest may exist when:

- The evaluator has written a letter of support for the candidate's application he or she is evaluating.
- The evaluator has had or has a close personal or professional relationship with the candidate.

The existence or possibility of a conflict of interest does not imply that the evaluator is unable to complete the examination of the application. The Programme Office will determine, based on the particular circumstances of each case, whether or not the conflict compromises an evaluator's activity.

Should the Programme Office and the evaluator decide that the potential conflict of interest does not compromise the task of the latter, controls will be established *a posteriori* to ensure that, effectively and reasonably, ratings have not been affected in any way.

The following situations may be considered as conflict of interest if the responsible Agency staff so decides (in consultation with the ERC Scientific Council) , in view of the objective circumstances, the available information and the potential risks:

- (a) employment of the expert by one of the applicants (or linked third parties or other third parties involved in the action) in the last three years;
- (b) involvement of the expert in a contract, grant, prize or membership of management structures (e.g. member of management or advisory board etc.) or research collaboration with an applicant, a linked third party or another third party involved in the action in the last three years;
- (c) any other situation that could cast doubt on his/her ability to participate in the evaluation impartially, or that could reasonably appear to do so in the eyes of an outside third party.

In this case, the responsible Agency staff may decide (in consultation with the ERC Scientific Council) to exclude the expert from the evaluation (and on the scope, i.e. only for the proposal(s) concerned or also for competing proposal(s) or the entire call) and, if necessary, to replace him/her and organise a re-evaluation.