

CERCA Evaluations – Frequently asked questions

CENTRES UNDER EVALUATION

What experts should I suggest for the review of publications and projects?

Experts proposed as reviewers must have a recognized track record in the scientific field relevant to the items under evaluation and, in particular, must be free from conflicts of interest. Conflicts of interest are deemed to exist for any individuals affiliated with the centre being evaluated (including researchers, members of boards or committees like the External Advisory Board or equivalent), staff from other CERCA centres, and individuals directly involved in the items under assessment, such as article authors or principal investigators of the projects. No individual who has had such a relationship with the centre at any time during the evaluation period will be accepted as a proposed reviewer.

However, it is acceptable to nominate experts with whom the centre has previously collaborated, as this is common practice in specialised research fields. In such cases, the relationship will be assessed to determine whether an independent and objective evaluation can be guaranteed.

Which items should I submit for peer review?

Centres must select the 15 items that best represent their scientific excellence during the evaluation period: 10 scientific publications and 5 research projects (competitively funded).

Publications must have already been published and peer reviewed. A link providing access to the content should be included, preferably through open access.

For projects, the full proposal should not be provided. Instead, centres should include links to accessible and sufficiently informative sources, such as institutional websites, CORDIS or other public repositories. Please avoid submitting projects for which no additional information is publicly available.

As most of the reviewers are international, it is important that the information provided is available at least in English.

Do I need to use the templates provided by the CERCA Institution?

Yes. The templates provided for peer reviewer nominations, scientific items, and the self-assessment report must be used. Standardised formats are essential to support administrative management, ensure comparability across centres, and guarantee transparency and traceability throughout the evaluation process.

Is it possible to extend the deadlines?

Deadlines are important to ensure the coordination of all stages of the evaluation process. If you anticipate any difficulties in meeting them, please let us know as early as possible so that potential alternatives can be considered.

Who pays for the evaluation?

The evaluation represents a cost of around €10.000 per centre. For CERCA centres, the CERCA Institution covers the entire cost.

Centres that are being evaluated to become a CERCA centre are required to cover the full cost of the process, including peer review, travel, accommodation and subsistence expenses for the Evaluation Committee (EC).

What are the logistical requirements for the day of the visit?

A few days before the visit, the CERCA Institution will share with the evaluated centre the final agenda, the composition of the Evaluation Committee, and all relevant logistical details.

The centre should provide a meeting room that is sufficiently large for the evaluation sessions. It is important that the room has a stable internet connection, adequate power outlets, and the necessary audiovisual equipment for presentations.

The main room will host the Evaluation Committee, the CERCA Institution team, and any centre representatives the centre considers appropriate.

The deliberation session, attended exclusively by the Evaluation Committee and the CERCA Institution team, may take place in the same room or in a separate room with similar electrical and connectivity requirements. It is recommended that lunch take place in the same room where deliberation takes place, if possible.

Which people from the centre should participate on the evaluation visit?

Any individuals whom the evaluated centre considers relevant may attend.

The Evaluation Committee may also request additional meetings with specific professional profiles during the visit (postdoctoral researchers, doctoral researchers, unit managers, etc.).

Who else participates in the Evaluation Committee visit?

In addition to the centre staff designated by the evaluated centre, the visit will involve the members of the Evaluation Committee and staff from the CERCA Institution, who will act as rapporteurs and coordinators of the entire process. A few days before the visit, the CERCA Institution will confirm to the centre the number of participants who will take part in the visit.

Should we prepare a presentation?

Yes. The visit typically begins with an institutional presentation delivered by the centre. It is recommended to follow the structure of the self-assessment form. The presentation should be shared with the CERCA Institution a few days in advance, as this constitutes the 4th deliverable indicated in the evaluation procedure.

How can I contact the CERCA Institution?

All communications related to the Evaluation process must be sent by email to institucio.cerca@gencat.cat. The CERCA Institution team will respond to and manage any questions, concerns, or requests for clarification you may have.

PEER REVIEWERS

Which is the language of the visit of the evaluation committee?

All parts of the EC visit will develop in English. This will also be the language used for presentations and interviews.

What am I expected to evaluate?

You will evaluate scientific publications (mostly articles) and competitively funded research projects. Your role is not to perform a full scientific peer review, but rather to provide an expert assessment of the scientific quality, originality, impact and international relevance of each one of the assigned items. We will aim to keep the workload reasonable by distributing items among a pool of reviewers. The usual workload ranges from 2 to 7 items.

Is there a template I can use?

No. With the item assignment you will also receive a link to an online form where you will be able to submit a short comment, typically no longer than half a page per item, following the guidance provided.

Do I need to read the entire paper or project?

Not necessarily. For each item, you will receive a one-page summary together with the relevant links. You may consult whatever documentation you consider necessary in order to provide a robust and well-founded evaluation, whether this is limited to the summary provided or includes any additional information available about the item.

When will I be paid?

Payments are processed once the evaluation process for the corresponding panel has been completed. In most cases, payments are issued within two months following the completion of the last panel.

How much will I be paid?

The compensation is €120 gross per item, corresponding to approximately two hours of work. Applicable tax deductions will be applied.

Why do I need to provide personal documents?

We require identification and banking documentation in order to verify your identity and process payments correctly. A tax residence certificate is also required to ensure that the appropriate tax regulations are applied. This is particularly important for individuals who may be tax residents in a country different from the one where they primarily carry out their professional activities.

Do I need to visit the centre?

No. Peer review evaluations are conducted entirely remotely.

What will happen to my comments? Why must they be written in English?

Your comments will be incorporated into a scientific report that will be used by the Evaluation Committee during its assessment of the centre.

As the evaluation panels are mostly international, English is the working language throughout the evaluation process.

Is it possible to extend the deadlines?

We appreciate receiving evaluations as early as possible. If you require additional time, please contact us in advance so that we can consider possible alternatives, such as an extension or the reassignment of items to another reviewer.

Evaluations submitted after the established deadline will not be reimbursed unless there is a written extension issued by the CERCA institution.

Can I evaluate more than one centre?

Assignments are usually concentrated within a single centre. However, in exceptional cases, reviewers may be assigned items from different centres when highly specialised expertise is required.

I may have a conflict of interest. What should I do?

Please inform us as soon as possible through the Acceptance Form or by email. We will assess the situation together to determine whether you can continue evaluating the item objectively or whether it should be reassigned to another reviewer.

My circumstances have changed and I can no longer evaluate my assigned items. What should I do?

Please inform us as soon as possible so that we can reassign the items and avoid delays in the evaluation process.

Will my identity remain confidential?

Personal information will be handled confidentially and used solely for purposes related to the evaluation process and the associated administrative management.

Neither the evaluated centres nor the Evaluation Committee will be informed of the identity of the reviewers assigned to the scientific items.

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EVALUATION COMMITTEE

How is travel and accommodation arranged?

The CERCA Institution will coordinate travel and accommodation arrangements, taking your preferences into account whenever possible (these can be indicated in the Acceptance Form). All local transportation related to the evaluation will be organised by the CERCA Institution.

Can I extend my stay or travel with a companion?

Yes. However, any additional costs arising from such arrangements must be covered personally by the member of the EC. Please let us know at your earliest convenience so that we can coordinate the necessary arrangements. Accompanying people may not participate in the evaluation process.

What am I expected to evaluate?

The evaluation focuses on the centre's overall performance during the previous four years.

The assessment is based on the self-assessment report, the scientific report derived from the peer-review process, the interviews conducted during the visit, centre's presentation, and the site visit.

What does a typical evaluation day look like?

The day begins with the collection of Evaluation Committee members from their hotel (approximately 07:00–07:30) by CERCA staff, followed by transfer to the evaluated centre.

Upon arrival, the programme starts with a short briefing (around 08:30), followed by the centre's presentation.

Throughout the day, the committee participates in interviews, question-and-answer sessions and a tour of the facilities. Afterwards, the Evaluation Committee holds a deliberation session to agree on conclusions and recommendations.

Evaluation visits usually conclude between 16:00 and 17:00, after which CERCA staff accompany committee members back to their hotel or onward destination.

Do I need to write a report? How is the final report prepared?

No. The CERCA Institution team drafts the report based on the recommendations and conclusions agreed upon by the Evaluation Committee during the afternoon deliberation session. The report integrates conclusions and recommendations relating to scientific performance, strategy, management, innovation, open science and other relevant areas to the EC.

A first draft is prepared during the deliberation session and shared first with the Evaluation Committee and subsequently with representatives of the centre, which may have the opportunity to provide brief feedback. The document is then reviewed remotely by the Evaluation Committee before its final approval and distribution to the evaluated centre and its relevant governing bodies.

How is the final rating decided?

The Evaluation Committee is responsible for proposing the final rating, attending the grading system described in the Evaluation Guidelines.

To ensure consistency across evaluations, this decision is usually taken only after all centres within the same panel have been evaluated.

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