

# Open, Transparent and Merit- based Recruitment (OTM-R) Policy and Recruitment Strategy

## HR Excellence in Research



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

**IRTA**<sup>R</sup>

Institute  
of Agrifood Research  
and Technology



**Generalitat de Catalunya**  
Government of Catalonia

## Content

1. Purpose.....	2
2. Scope .....	2
3. OTM-R principles at IRTA.....	2
4. Recruitment process.....	3
4.1 Workforce planning and vacancy definition .....	3
4.2 Advertisement and application phase.....	3
4.3 Selection committees and assessment .....	4
4.4 Interviews and decision-making.....	4
4.5 Appointment and onboarding .....	4
5. Roles and responsibilities .....	5
6. Equal opportunities and inclusive recruitment .....	5
7. Monitoring and continuous improvement.....	5
8. Link with the HR Excellence in Research Action Plan 2026-2029 .....	6

# 1. Purpose

IRTA is committed to applying Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment principles in the recruitment and selection of researchers. This policy describes the principles, procedures and responsibilities that guide recruitment at IRTA and explains how these practices are aligned with the European Charter for Researchers and the HR Excellence in Research process.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that recruitment processes are fair, transparent, inclusive and based on merit, while supporting IRTA's capacity to attract, select and retain research talent. The policy also provides a framework for continuous improvement in recruitment, assessment and appointment practices.

IRTA understands OTM-R as a key element of its institutional strategy for researchers. Recruitment is not treated only as an administrative process, but as part of a broader approach to talent attraction, career development, research excellence and responsible research assessment.

# 2. Scope

This policy applies to the recruitment and selection of administrative and research staff at IRTA, including researchers across the R1–R4 profiles and other research-related positions where applicable. It is also relevant for the units and bodies involved in recruitment planning, vacancy definition, selection committees, candidate communication, appointment and onboarding.

The policy is implemented in accordance with IRTA's legal and institutional framework. As a public research organisation, IRTA must also consider the applicable public-sector requirements and planning constraints, including structural growth limits and replacement-rate criteria established by the Government of Catalonia where applicable.

# 3. OTM-R principles at IRTA

IRTA applies the principles of Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment throughout the recruitment process.

**Open recruitment** means that vacancies are advertised through appropriate channels and are accessible to potential candidates. IRTA seeks to increase the visibility of research positions and to attract diverse and qualified candidate pools, including international candidates where relevant.

**Transparent recruitment** means that candidates receive clear information on the position, requirements, selection process and expected conditions. IRTA aims to ensure that recruitment procedures, selection stages and communication with candidates are clear and traceable.

**Merit-based recruitment** means that candidates are assessed according to criteria related to the requirements of the position, their qualifications, experience, competences, potential and fit with the research and institutional context. Merit is understood broadly and may include research achievements, technical expertise, mobility, intersectoral experience, leadership potential, collaboration, supervision, knowledge transfer and other relevant contributions.

IRTA also integrates equal opportunities, non-discrimination and responsible assessment principles into recruitment. In line with its Equality Plan and CoARA commitments, IRTA works to strengthen inclusive recruitment practices and to recognise diverse research trajectories, including career breaks, mobility experience and non-linear career paths.

## 4. Recruitment process

IRTA's recruitment process is structured to ensure clarity, consistency and traceability. The process includes workforce planning, vacancy definition, publication, application management, selection, decision-making, appointment and onboarding.

IRTA uses an ATS-based recruitment workflow to support the management of recruitment processes. The ATS contributes to improving traceability, communication and consistency. It supports communication not only with candidates, but also with the members of the selection committee and other people involved in the process, facilitating the exchange of information, documentation and follow-up throughout the recruitment stages.

The recruitment process is progressively reviewed and improved through the HR Excellence in Research Action Plan and through coordination between the People department, Scientific Direction and the relevant research leadership structures.

### 4.1 Workforce planning and vacancy definition

Recruitment needs are identified according to IRTA's scientific strategy, programme needs, available funding and institutional planning. For researcher positions, recruitment needs are planned by the Heads of Programme and submitted for approval by Scientific Direction and its team. This ensures that vacancies respond to scientific priorities and are aligned with IRTA's research strategy.

As a public research organisation, IRTA also considers the applicable public-sector framework for structural growth. This includes the replacement-rate criteria and authorisation mechanisms established by the Government of Catalonia where applicable. These requirements influence the planning of structural positions and are considered before vacancies are launched.

Once a recruitment need is confirmed, the position profile is defined, including the main tasks, required and desirable qualifications, competences, career profile, working conditions and selection criteria. The People department supports the preparation of the vacancy and ensures consistency with recruitment procedures and OTM-R principles. Scientific Direction and the relevant research leadership structures contribute to defining the scientific and technical requirements of the position.

### 4.2 Advertisement and application phase

IRTA publishes research vacancies through appropriate internal and external channels to ensure openness and visibility. Job advertisements provide relevant information about the organisation, the recruiting unit or programme, the position, tasks, requirements, selection criteria, working conditions, contract type and application procedure.

IRTA works to make job advertisements clear, accessible and inclusive. During the 2026–2029 period, IRTA will further review job advertisements from an inclusive-language perspective and will continue improving the way information on working conditions, support services and career development opportunities is presented to candidates.

Applications are managed through the recruitment workflow. Candidates are informed about the process and, where possible, about the main stages and expected timeline. IRTA aims to keep the administrative burden for candidates proportionate to the stage of the process and to request only the documentation needed for a fair and effective assessment.

## 4.3 Selection committees and assessment

Selection committees are established according to the nature of the position and the requirements of the recruitment process. The composition of the committee aims to ensure relevant expertise, objectivity and fairness. Members of the committee assess candidates according to the criteria defined for the position.

The ATS supports coordination and communication among committee members, helping to share information, structure the process and improve traceability. It also contributes to a more consistent management of applications, shortlisting and candidate communication.

Assessment is based on merit and on the requirements of the position. Depending on the profile, the assessment may include scientific and technical expertise, professional experience, potential for development, communication skills, leadership capacity, teamwork, project management, knowledge transfer, mobility, supervision experience or other relevant competences.

IRTA recognises that research careers may follow different trajectories. The institution works to strengthen assessment practices that take into account career breaks, mobility, intersectoral experience and non-linear career paths. This approach is aligned with IRTA's commitment to responsible research assessment and with the principles promoted by CoARA.

## 4.4 Interviews and decision-making

Shortlisted candidates may be invited to interviews or other assessment activities depending on the position. For research positions, short presentations may be used to assess scientific expertise, communication skills, motivation, independence, strategic fit and potential contribution to IRTA.

Scientific Direction maintains a strategic role in final interviews for relevant research positions. This ensures that recruitment decisions are aligned with IRTA's scientific strategy and long-term talent development priorities. The People department supports the process by ensuring procedural consistency, communication, documentation and compliance with recruitment principles.

Final decisions are based on the assessment criteria established for the position and on the evaluation carried out during the selection process. IRTA aims to ensure that decisions are objective, evidence-based and properly documented.

## 4.5 Appointment and onboarding

Once a candidate is selected, the appointment process is managed in coordination with the People department and the relevant research unit. Candidates receive the information needed to complete the appointment and prepare their incorporation into IRTA.

Onboarding is considered an important part of the recruitment process. IRTA provides welcome and integration activities for newly recruited researchers and continues to strengthen onboarding for R1–R4 profiles. Introduction to IRTA sessions, institutional information, good research practice materials and access to support services help new researchers understand IRTA's research environment, policies and available resources.

During the 2026–2029 period, IRTA will continue consolidating onboarding practices, collecting feedback and improving the visibility of institutional support services for newly recruited and international researchers.

## 5. Roles and responsibilities

Recruitment for researchers at IRTA involves several actors with complementary responsibilities.

The **Heads of Programme** identify and plan recruitment needs for research and technical development positions, according to programme priorities, available resources and scientific needs.

**Scientific Direction** approves research development recruitment needs and ensures alignment with IRTA's scientific strategy. It also maintains a strategic role in final interviews for relevant research positions and contributes to the development of researcher career pathways.

The **People department** coordinates the recruitment process, supports vacancy preparation, manages the recruitment workflow, communicates with candidates and selection committee members, ensures consistency of procedures and contributes to the implementation of OTM-R principles. A dedicated HR profile supports recruitment and training for R1–R4 researchers in close coordination with Scientific Direction.

The **selection committee** assesses candidates according to the criteria established for the position and contributes to fair, objective and evidence-based decision-making.

Other institutional units, such as Communication, Equality, Data Management or legal/administrative support services, may contribute when relevant, particularly in relation to outreach, inclusive language, international researcher support, data protection, working conditions or institutional policies.

## 6. Equal opportunities and inclusive recruitment

IRTA promotes equal opportunities and non-discrimination in recruitment. Recruitment processes are expected to respect principles of fairness, inclusion and transparency. The Equality Plan provides an institutional framework for strengthening inclusive practices and for addressing gender equality and non-discrimination across the organisation.

IRTA works to improve inclusive communication in job advertisements and recruitment materials. During the 2026–2029 period, the institution will further review job advertisements from an inclusive-language perspective and will monitor candidate pools by sex and profile where possible. These actions aim to improve awareness, detect possible imbalances and support more inclusive recruitment practices.

Selection committees are encouraged to apply fair and objective assessment criteria and to avoid bias. IRTA will continue strengthening recruitment safeguards, including conflict-of-interest declarations, data protection guidance, interview-boundary guidance and training or guidance for selection participants.

## 7. Monitoring and continuous improvement

IRTA monitors and improves recruitment practices through the HR Excellence in Research Action Plan, the OTM-R checklist, recruitment data, feedback mechanisms and internal coordination between the People department, Scientific Direction and other relevant actors.

The ATS provides a basis for improving traceability and monitoring recruitment processes. It supports the collection of information on recruitment stages, communication with candidates and selection committee coordination. During the 2026–2029 period, IRTA will further develop recruitment monitoring through indicators such as candidate pools, use of recruitment channels, feedback from selection processes, inclusive job-advert review and process documentation.

Continuous improvement is also linked to IRTA's CoARA commitments and to the broader reform of research assessment. Recruitment and progression practices will continue to be reviewed to ensure that

they recognise diverse contributions to research, responsible use of indicators, career diversity and the value of mobility and intersectoral experience.

The OTM-R policy is therefore understood as a living framework. It describes current recruitment practices and provides a basis for further improvement through the 2026–2029 Action Plan. IRTA will update or refine this policy when required by institutional developments, monitoring results, stakeholder feedback or future HR Excellence in Research assessments.

## 8. Link with the HR Excellence in Research Action Plan 2026-2029

The OTM-R Policy is directly connected with IRTA's HR Excellence in Research Action Plan 2026–2029. Several actions in the plan address recruitment and assessment practices, including the improvement of recruitment safeguards, the review of job advertisements, the diversification of outreach channels, the monitoring of candidate pools, the strengthening of ATS-based workflows and the alignment of recruitment and progression with responsible research assessment principles.

The Action Plan also connects recruitment with broader talent development mechanisms, including *IRTA Consolida*, *IRTA Atrau*, *IRTA Mobilitat*, career development support, mentoring, onboarding and international researcher support. This reflects IRTA's understanding that recruitment is part of the full researcher lifecycle and must be connected with career development, working conditions and institutional support.

Through this policy and the related Action Plan, IRTA aims to consolidate recruitment as an open, transparent, merit-based and strategically coordinated process that supports research excellence and the development of sustainable research careers.

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