

CRIS Excellence Programme.

Call for Applications 2024.

Introduction

In the development of new therapies, it is essential to have scientists and doctors with translational training who can make a real impact in the treatment and management of patients. Their first-hand knowledge of clinical practice and hands-on experience with patients, combined with their in-depth understanding of scientific research, means that these professionals offer great potential to develop new treatments and therapies. Unfortunately, this profile is hard to find, for different reasons:

- A scientific career is a limitation when it comes to finding a job that is paid in accordance with a person's merits.
- There are few training programmes for doctor-researchers. Doctors and researchers require specific training, and it is difficult to achieve this combination.
- Young scientists encounter limitations when it comes to translating their hypotheses into clinical practice due to the lack of multidisciplinary programmes in institutions dedicated to cancer research.

The **CRIS Excellence Programme** hopes that this type of researcher will lead the creation of internationally important research groups.

- A scientific career is a limitation when it comes to finding a job that is paid in accordance with a person's merits.
- To promote the development of research by young outstanding physicians and scientists in cancer research programmes with projects of significant clinical impact.
- To ensure these researchers have the support they need to develop independence and creativity.
- To turn these professionals into elite doctor-researchers, able to develop transformative research.
- To allow these kinds of researchers to drive the transformation of their host hospitals and research institutions into world-leading centres.
- To provide competitive financial conditions and incentives to stabilise their careers in Spain.

Call for Applications

Every year, CRIS Cancer offers 2 grants as part of the **CRIS Excellence Programme**. This programme offers grants for between 3 and 5 years. The duration of the grant shall be determined via regular assessments of the recipient throughout the duration of the programme.

One of the cornerstones of the CRIS Cancer strategy is to promote translational and clinical projects led by physician researchers. Therefore, in each call for **CRIS Excellence Programmes**, at least one of the beneficiaries must be a clinical scientist, provided that the evaluation panel considers that the clinician's proposal meets the call's criteria for excellence.

This programme is open to:

- Scientists and physician researchers of any nationality who wish to develop their scientific and/or medical activity in Spain. The research team must be located in Spain.
- The candidate does not necessarily have to be employed by the host institution at the time of application. However, the institution must issue a letter agreeing that the candidate may develop their activities there.
- Applications must be submitted by the candidate, who will hold ultimate scientific responsibility, supported by the host institution.
- Candidates must have received their first PhD between 2 and 15 years (18 years for women researchers and physicians) prior to the year in which this call is published.
- This period since receiving their first project can be extended if any of the circumstances set out in the Observations section at the end of this document apply.
- With the support of the host institution, candidates should devote a minimum of 60% of their research time to this project.
- In the case of clinical scientists with a care workload, the latter may not exceed 50% of their working day and may intensify their working hours up to 100%.

The candidate and the host institution should have an employment contract signed to let the programme become effective. Beneficiaries must join and/or **accept their place on the programme between 1 February and 30 June 2025**. Under duly justified circumstances, their incorporation may be delayed until 31 December 2025. The start date must be communicated to the CRIS Cancer prior to that date. In duly justified cases of force majeure, this incorporation may be postponed. Each case will be assessed by CRIS Cancer on an individual basis. CRIS Cancer reserves the right to move the place or even leave it vacant in the event that the beneficiaries do not meet the requirements for joining the institution or the period until joining is too long.

The programme runs for three years and may be renewed for a further two years up to a maximum of five years, provided that the progress reports, requested annually, and the mid-term evaluation, carried out after the second year, are favourable.

The call for applications opens on **1 March 2024** and closes on **15 May 2024** at 23:59 (Central European Time - CET).

Programme resources

The maximum grant awarded will be **€ 1,250,000**, which will be spread over **five annual instalments of up to €250,000** a year which include:

- a. **Salary:** A maximum of €70,000 gross to cover the total costs of employing the researcher incurred by the host institution or hospital. This amount includes Social Security contributions and any other amounts payable by the host institution or hospital, as well as the gross remuneration of the beneficiary.

In the event that the candidate is already employed at the host centre, the financial subsidy may be used as:

- **Salary supplement** up to a maximum of €70,000 per annum. If the candidate is part of a programme to attract talent such as the Ramón y Cajal, Juan de la Cierva, Juan Rodés, Río Hortega or Miguel Servet programmes, there is a possibility to supplement their salary up to €70,000 and devote the rest to cover costs associated with the project.
- **Intensification of their working day** in their working hours in order to develop research in the case of a physician in a hospital.

- b. **Costs associated with the research project**, including:

- Recruitment of staff linked to the development of the project.
- Acquisition and maintenance of scientific equipment and consumables.
- Travel costs and associated expenses, registration fees at congresses, seminars, and scientific conferences.
- Management costs for industrial and intellectual property rights related to the project, costs of patents.
- Other expenses related to the development of the project.
- Travel costs associated to the trip to the CRIS Cancer annual event.

Note:

- For a new hired candidate, that receives a full gross salary of €70,000, the available funds for the project expenses will be up to €180,000.
- For a candidate that receives a salary supplement or intensification of their working hours, this maximum will be €250,000.

c. **Moving assistance (optional)** of €5,400 to cover the cost of relocating to the city at the start of the programme, for beneficiaries who are joining a new centre from another city. These funds are deducted from the costs associated with the project.

d. **Family support (optional)** of €1,200 gross per annum for each of the researcher's dependent children, up to a maximum of €2,400 and as long as they are under 18 years of age (or can prove a dependency certificate). Family support will be determined on the date the researcher joins the centre and will be reviewed annually at the time of programme renewal. These funds are deducted from the costs associated with the project and its implementation will be adjusted to the administrative particularities of each institution.

The annual amount of the budget proposal should not exceed a maximum of €250,000 per year. Part of the funds may be carried over to subsequent years because the planned expenditure has not been incurred, but this must be duly justified in the budget of the annual report.

This subsidy will be managed by the centre on behalf of the beneficiary and must be justified independently.

In **no case may include indirect costs** associated with the project by the recipient institution.

These amounts will be subject to the corresponding legal tax retention.

CRIS Cancer will sign an agreement with the host institution, which will receive the financial subsidy directly and be responsible for covering all the costs related to the project.

The contractual relationship between the beneficiary and the research centre shall comply with the legal provisions in force at any given time.

The named recipient or beneficiary of the programme shall be the researcher, who shall be recruited by the host institution.

Requirements for applicants

Training

Applications will be accepted from **physician researchers and scientists** who have completed their first **Doctorate between 2 and 15 years** (18 years for women researchers and physicians) prior to the year of the call for applications (between January 2009 and December 2022 for men; between January 2006 and December 2022 for women). The date on which the candidate

defended their PhD thesis will be taken as the date on which they completed their PhD and earned the title of doctor. Therefore, a document must be provided that accredits the date on which the candidate defended their thesis. In the event that the applicant holds more than one doctorate, the above period will be calculated on the basis of the first title obtained.

These periods can be extended should any of the circumstances described in the “Observations” section apply, provided they are suitably accredited and documented.

Research Career

The candidate must have **at least 15 publications in scientific journals and must be the first or last author for 3 such publications in Q1 journals**. Only articles with a Pubmed ID will be considered. The classification of the journal in the first quartile will be verified using the last published Journal of Citation Report list as the criterion. When calculating the total number of publications, abstracts from congresses shall not be taken into account, neither will preprints, articles submitted or in review, or book chapters. In addition, extra consideration will be given to candidates who have authored at least one patent.

Project

Candidates must provide an overview of the research strand associated with the call for applications and which will be the object of the funding associated with the programme. The project should demonstrate a high level of scientific and technical quality.

In the event that the candidate has applied to the **CRIS Excellence Programme** on at least two previous occasions with the same project, the candidate may apply only if he/she submits a different proposal.

Mentor

The candidate must propose a mentor and provide his/her background with the application.

Given the research independence of the candidates, this mentor need not necessary be a supervisor of the project, but rather a reference figure to guide the candidate in achieving his/her scientific and career goals.

This mentor can be from any institution, including those outside Spain.

Nationality

The **CRIS Excellence Programme** is open to post-doctoral researchers of all nationalities as long as their project is carried out at a centre in Spain.

Restrictions

The following restrictions apply to the submission of applications:

→ A researcher **may apply just to one CRIS Research Programme (CRIS Excellence, Emerging Leader, or Traslational Physician Talent Programme)** in the same call for applicants.

- An applicant that has been **awarded** in any previous CRIS Research Programme's call for applicants **cannot reapply to the same CRIS Research Programme**. He/she may only apply to a **different CRIS Research Programme during the last year of the grant**. So, the awardees of the CRIS Investigator Talent Programme call at 2019, or CRIS Out-Back Fellowship call 2020 could apply to the CRIS Excellence Programme call for applicants 2024.
- Only Hospitals, universities, and research centres in Spain can be the beneficiary of the CRIS Excellence Programme.
- For each call there can only be one beneficiary of this programme per institution.
- **(only for clinical scientists)** The candidate's care workload may not under any circumstances exceed 50% of their working day.
- Members of the scientific evaluation board will not be able to apply for these programmes.
- If an applicant has been rejected previously due to a lack of scientific integrity, they may not reapply.

Documentation required for the application

Candidates or their institutions may raise any question about the **CRIS Excellence Programme** call for applications at www.criscancer.org/programascris or emailing convocatorias@criscancer.org.

All applications must be completed on-line using the app, which will be made available to candidates at www.criscancer.org/programascris during the application submission period for the 2024 programme. Applicants must register as users on the app, which will send them a confirmation email allowing them to access their application.

All applications must provide two blocks of documentation, which **must be completed entirely in English**.

Part A: Administrative Form

Part B: Documentation

Part A: Administrative Form

This questionnaire is available at the application on the candidate website. You will not be able to fill in the rest of the documentation without first completing this form. This section must be **filled out entirely in English**.

The form includes the following elements:

- a. **General information about the candidate:** Name and surname, identification document, year of birth, academic degree, and contact information.
- b. **Details about the current institution:** Name and address
- c. **Details about the host institution:** Name and address
- d. **Details of the Mentor:** First and last name, institution, and contact details.
- e. **Details of the Research Project:** Title, code, research area, type of cancer, topic, and duration.

Part B: Documentation

The templates for several of the documents in this section are provided on the candidacy website and the app itself. **These templates must be used; any other format will not be accepted.** Each page will have a header indicating the name of the candidate and an acronym for their candidacy. This section **must be filled out entirely in English.** None of the documents may exceed 4 Mb in size.

- a. **Curriculum vitae** of the candidate using a standardised summarised format (**CVA, in its 4-page format**), following an abbreviated template of standard forms for public calls for applications (<https://cvn.fecyt.es/>). This document must be provided **in English.** The FECYT or Instituto de Salud Carlos III templates are valid.
- b. **Doctoral certificate** and the date on which the applicant defended his/her first PhDs. If the candidate does not have this certificate, must provide an official document stating the date on which the doctorate was awarded.
- c. If the applicant has requested an **extension for the validity of your candidacy** on account of matters such as illness, parental leave, military service, or other causes, must attach documentation that accredits such circumstances. The accepted circumstances are shown at the Observations section, at the end of this document.
- d. **Research Project.** The provided **template** must be used (**Maximum 10 pages**).

The report must not exceed 10 pages. The bibliography and figures do not count for the maximum number of pages. The format of the text should be as follows:

- Din A4.
- Calibri, Times New Roman, Arial or Helvetica.
- Font size 11 or 12.
- Single line spacing.
- Margins: 2 cm on either side.

- e. **Project budget.** The provided excel **template** must be used. A **financial audit** at the end of the project may be included in the budget. **Indirect costs cannot be included.**

- f. **Candidate's track record**, reflecting key events in the researcher's career and the candidate's experience in the field of study. The provided **template** must be used. (**Maximum 3 pages**)
- g. **Letter of acceptance from the Mentor** pledging to support the future development of the candidate's research activity in the project area and at the proposed institution. The provided **template** must be used.
- h. Standardised and summarised **curriculum vitae of the Mentor** following the abbreviated template of standardised models of national public calls for proposals (CVA). This document must be provided **in English**.
- i. **Letter of acceptance from the host institution** signed by the managing director or scientific director of the centre guaranteeing institutional support for the researcher and the research strand of the particular project. This document is indispensable for a candidacy to be validated. The provided **template** must be used.
- j. **Declaration on ethical issues**. The **template** provided must be used.

Documents uploaded to the app in PDF format must be clear and legible. In addition, each page of the original document must correspond to a page of the PDF document. These documents may be provided in the language in which they were issued, but if they are in a language other than English or Spanish, they must be accompanied by a certified translation.

The candidates selected as beneficiaries shall be given a reasonable amount of time to confirm their interest in the institution they indicated as their first option. During this time, they will also be able to explore alternative possibilities that might be better suited to their personal project. However, they must inform CRIS Cancer of these changes and obtain its agreement.

In any case, the research strand selected by the candidate to carry out their research project, if different from the area stipulated originally in their application, must not be too far removed from their initial preference, in terms of content, field or discipline. They must inform CRIS Cancer of these changes and obtain its agreement.

Selection process

The selection process is designed to identify outstanding candidates regardless of their origin, gender, nationality, or other aspects that could skew the selection. The goal is to ensure transparency, fairness, and impartiality throughout the process.

The members of the screening and selection committee choose candidates who, according to their own criteria, provide evidence of the greatest merits and abilities.

Stages of evaluation and expert panels

All applications that meet the necessary conditions will be evaluated by expert scientists.



There are three independent rounds of evaluation:

1. Administrative Evaluation. Eligibility Check.

When evaluating eligibility, all applications received will be evaluated by the CRIS cancer Scientific Office, and those that do not meet the **criteria and requirements** set out in the terms and conditions of the call for applications will be rejected.

There will then be a period during which any outstanding documentation will be requested, or any corrections or clarifications should be made.

All rejected applications will receive an email detailing the reason for rejection.

2. Second Evaluation. Written Proposal Evaluation.

A second round will be screened by a **panel of experts** of an external evaluation agency to CRIS Cancer, and different from the final evaluation.

Candidacies shall be reviewed and evaluated by **two different evaluators**, in accordance with the criteria specified below in the section on **General evaluation criteria**.

A score from 1-100 will be awarded.

The 10 highest scoring applications or those in the top-scoring 20% will go onto the final evaluation stage.

At the end of this evaluation stage, all candidates that have gone through to the next round will be contacted via email or telephone.

3. Final Evaluation.

a. ISC Written Proposal Evaluation

The [CRIS International Scientific Committee](#) will be in charge of the final phase of the evaluation process and will be composed of scientists from various disciplines of maximum international impact.

The evaluation committee shall consist of a Chairperson, a Vice Chair, other members participating in the evaluation, a representative of CRIS, and the technical secretary of the committee.

The evaluation committee shall receive the finalist applications from the second evaluation phase. Each application shall be evaluated by **two evaluators**, in accordance with the criteria specified below in the section on [General evaluation criteria](#).

Applications will be awarded a score between 1-100. This score is independent of the score obtained in the second stage of evaluation.

Important note: The Evaluation by the International Scientific Committee is independent of the previous evaluation stages. i.e. A very positive evaluation in previous stages does not necessarily guarantee a good evaluation at this stage or to get selected to the interview stage.

b. [CRIS Strategy](#)

CRIS cancer Scientific Office shall assign a score to each application considering the CRIS strategy.

c. [ISC Interviews](#)

The 5 best candidates will be given an online **interview** by the evaluators. The criteria applied in this interview are set out in the [General evaluation criteria](#).

The evaluation committee will meet to examine the candidates put forward, discuss the most relevant aspects of the project, and prepare the questions to be asked during the interview phase of the candidates selected for interview.

Candidates who are offered an interview should take into account the following:

- Interviews will last about 15 minutes.
- Candidates must **summarise their candidacy**, briefly commenting on their career, their project proposal, the technical approach and the expected results and impact **in 5 minutes**.
- They will be asked questions related to their career and the project, their capacity to develop the proposal, additional resources, etc.
- The candidate must respect the confidentiality and identity of the evaluators that participate in the interview session.

The **Technical Secretary**, in addition to coordinating and monitoring the evaluation process, will perform the following tasks:

- Distribute the candidacies to the evaluators taking into account the expertise of each evaluator and the research area of the candidate.
- Ensure that each evaluator prepares a summary evaluation report for each application received.
- Ensure the evaluators who participate in the evaluation process do not present a conflict of interest with the candidates.
- Draw up a final report. The evaluation committee will meet at the end of the evaluation process and draw up a report listing the chosen candidates.

The best candidates evaluated in this interview stage will be selected for the **CRIS Excellence Programme**.

All candidates who make it into the last assessment round will be notified of the comments resulting from the final discussions of the **International Scientific Committee**.

General evaluation criteria

In general, three main questions will be taken into account:

- the quality, innovation, and potential of the project
- the excellence, capability, creativity, and potential of the candidate
- the impact of the candidacy.

These criteria will be applied both in the Second Evaluation and in the Final Evaluation.

1. PROPOSAL (50%)

- a. Originality, innovation, and transformative nature of the project.
- b. Adequacy and degree of innovation of the methodology proposed for the development of the project.
- c. Inter/multidisciplinarity, gender dimension and statistical robustness of the research.
- d. Feasibility of the research project, in terms of expected resources and schedule.
- e. Suitability of the proposed mentor to ensure the success of the project and candidate's growth.
- f. Capacity of the host institution to implement the project.

2. CANDIDATE (30%)

- a. Candidate's motivation and ability to conduct original and creative research.
- b. Candidate's ability to carry out the project independently.
- c. Previous relevant contributions in his/her current or past fields of research.
- d. The candidate's potential to make significant advances in the treatment of cancer.

- e. Candidate's experience and ability to train new researchers.
- f. The candidate's ability to generate intellectual property and develop patents.

3. IMPACT (20%)

- a. Degree of translationality of the project and potential impact on clinical practice.
- b. Impact of the project for the future professional development of the candidate, both within and outside academia.
- c. Definition of a dissemination plan, both to the scientific community and to the general public.

In the evaluation of the applications by the [International Scientific Committee](#), which defines the candidates for the **interview**, will also be taken into account whether the project is adequately aligned with the scientific strategy of CRIS Cancer and the strategic centres for CRIS Cancer, that can be downloaded at www.criscancer.org/es/programascris and will be accessible also to candidates through the application. The formula used for the selection of candidates to the final interviews is:

- Evaluation of the application by the [International Scientific Committee](#) (according to the General Evaluation Criteria): 85%.
- Suitability to the strategy of CRIS cancer and its strategic centres: 15%

Appeals

Following notification of rejection, there will be a period of 5 calendar days in which candidates may lodge an appeal through the platform or via e-mail to convocatorias@criscancer.org.

The appeals procedure will be strictly confidential. In any case these appeals will result in a scientific re-evaluation by the panel. The independence and objectivity of the assessment is guaranteed by the selection and evaluation process.

Any appeals submitted shall be resolved by an Appeals Committee, which shall notify the candidate of its findings by e-mail within 30 calendar days from the date the appeal is received.

Appointment

The list of Beneficiaries chosen by means of the Evaluation Stage shall be published on the website of CRIS Cancer in the **CRIS Excellence Programme** section, as of **31 December 2024**.

In the event that the chosen beneficiaries decide not to take part in the programme, the respective grant shall be awarded to the next highest-scoring candidate as ranked by the Final Evaluation Committee.

The Final Evaluation Committee and CRIS Cancer reserve the right to declare a post null and void, if none of the highest-scoring candidates fulfils the requirements of the programme.

The beneficiaries must begin work at their respective centre by 30 June 2024, the latest. In duly justified cases of major force, this incorporation could be postponed. Each case will be assessed by CRIS Cancer on an individual basis.

Once the contract is in place, the project could be transferred to another institution. A formal transfer request must be submitted along with all the documentation requested in the terms and conditions of the call for applications, in addition to an official acceptance from the new host centre. CRIS Cancer must evaluate the transfer request and issue its approval.

Incompatibilities

Candidates must run the research project in person, at the host research centre. Clinical practice and research must be carried out on a full-time basis at the host research centre.

The candidate may perform teaching activities, provided they notify CRIS Cancer, and such activities are for a maximum of 80 hours per year.

Any chosen candidates who decide not to take part in the programme may not reapply to subsequent programmes unless their reasons are duly justified and documented.

Any candidates who have been in contact with any member of the evaluation committee regarding issues related to the programme will be immediately excluded from the process and will not be able to reapply in the future.

Taking part in this programme is not compatible with a permanent full-time employment contract at any other institution other than the host centre.

Any breach of ethical considerations will lead to immediate termination of funding and said individuals will not be allowed to reapply to the programme.

Obligations

The beneficiary shall undertake to collaborate in communication activities and events organised by the CRIS Cancer related to these programmes.

Except for reasons of force majeure, the recipients will undertake to attend the official awards ceremony for the Programmes.

CRIS Cancer will request from the host institution a detailed economic report breaking down the costs of activities carried out by the candidate. This report is required annually and at the end of the programme.

The host institution receiving the candidate will manage and administer the funds allocated annually by CRIS Cancer to this programme.

At any time, CRIS Cancer reserves the right to request accreditation, asking the candidate to provide the original documents or certified copies of any document indicated in the application or curriculum.

The candidate must submit annually a scientific-technical report in relation to the development of the project. This report must be submitted annually for the duration of the programme. **The report submitted after the second year point will be evaluated by an external agency for funding to continue.**

CRIS Cancer will ask the receiving institution for a detailed financial report of the costs of the activities carried out by the candidate. This report will be delivered each year at the signature of the agreement and at the end of the programme. CRIS Cancer reserves the right to request partial justifications of the economic report in case it needs to present this information to other collaborating entities. At the end of the programme, candidates must submit an economic audit report justifying the allocation of this funding. This amount can be included in the candidate's budget.

Data protection and privacy

CRIS Cancer fully complies with current legislation on the protection of personal data.

The personal data of the researchers or any other individual listed in the application documents will be incorporated onto the CRIS database and will only be used for the evaluation of proposals or CRIS information and further grant dissemination. By applying, the participant agrees for information about the Project to be incorporated onto the CRIS database.

For the application and programme evaluation procedure to be conducted, anyone who applies will need to provide their personal data for incorporation onto our database. The purpose of this is to send out notifications concerning the programme and application procedure.

To learn more about the transfer of data and how applicants may exercise their rights, you may request additional information by emailing convocatorias@criscancer.org and you may also exercise your rights of access, correction, or erasure of your personal data, as well as limit or oppose the processing of said data.

Observations

The timeframes and times contained in these terms and conditions are understood to refer to mainland Spain (Central European Time CET).

The period for having the first project awarded can be extended in the event that any of the following situations is duly accredited:

- Maternity/paternity leave following childbirth, permanent adoption, or foster care (provided that the date of birth or judicial/administrative resolution occurred during the scientific career of the candidate, stipulated in the terms and conditions). To be applied:
 - 1 year per child in the case of men.
 - 3 years per child in the case of women.
- Temporary disability during pregnancy for related reasons. 4 weeks of extension will be applied for each week of leave justified by means of the appropriate documentation.
- Temporary disability due to other causes. A maximum of 1 year extension will be applied.
- Exemptions or reductions in the candidate's working hours due to family illness, dependency, gender-based violence, or terrorist violence. 4 weeks will be applied for each week of activity as a non-professional caregiver justified by means of the appropriate documentation. .
- In the case of non-Spanish candidates, participation in compulsory military service. The extension that will be applied corresponds to the period justified by means of the appropriate documentation.

The submission of an application to this programme presupposes the candidate's express acceptance of these terms and conditions, as well as the criteria and decisions adopted by the CRIS Cancer regarding any queries in the interpretation of the requirements and conditions set forth herein.

If the candidate is found to have breached the terms and conditions set out herein, regardless of when this occurs or which stage of the application process or programme the candidate has reached, their candidacy shall be terminated, and any funding granted will be revoked. If the beneficiary does not comply with the aforementioned commitments - or any others included in the conditions indicated herein-, CRIS Cancer reserves the right to proceed as appropriate, and even request that the beneficiary repays any funding received.

The awarding of funding through this programme, as well as the amount awarded may be conditioned or modified in accordance with the actual resources available to CRIS Cancer at the time of the award.

Under no circumstances may funding for these research programmes be used to cover indirect costs, as CRIS Cancer derives its research funding from contributions from partners, donors, corporations, and legacies.