

# **IGNITION**

## **From Neuroinflammation to Neurodegeneration**

### **Call**

## **GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS**

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## 1. About the IGNITION Doctoral Program

IGNITION is an established transnational consortium created to implement a doctoral training program in the field of neuroimmunology and neurodegenerative diseases. The scientific framework of the program builds on the discovery of **anti-IgLON5 disease** in 2014: a rare, life-threatening neurological disorder that has become an emerging model to study the interplay between neuroinflammation and neurodegeneration. While this scientific context provides the foundation, the primary mission of IGNITION is to **train a new generation of skilled, resilient, and interdisciplinary researchers**.

The program brings together **ten beneficiaries across eight European countries**, supported by **13 associated partners**, including universities, hospitals, research centres, small and medium enterprises (SME), large companies, a patient organisation, and a specialised training provider. This balanced network offers a highly interdisciplinary environment in which Doctoral Candidates receive comprehensive scientific training, hands-on experience across sectors, and structured professional development.

The consortium integrates expertise in neurology, neuropathology, neuro-immunobiology, fluid biomarkers, OMICs, basic science, and animal models of autoimmune disorders. Through this diversity, IGNITION ensures a collaborative and international ecosystem that exposes candidates to cutting-edge methodologies as well as clinical and industrial perspectives.

IGNITION aims to equip Doctoral Candidates with the skills and scientific leadership needed to address urgent questions in the field. The program's scientific objectives include:

- ◇ Address unmet clinical challenges in the diagnosis and monitoring of anti-IgLON5 disease
- ◇ Determine the contribution of chronic inflammation to neurodegenerative processes
- ◇ Develop and characterise innovative mouse models to evaluate therapeutic strategies
- ◇ Clarify the physiological and pathological role of IgLON5, and promote awareness of anti-IgLON5 disease among clinicians, researchers, and society.

These objectives are pursued through complementary 13 **Individual Research Projects (IRPs)** embedded in a collaborative training framework that includes secondments, cross-disciplinary supervision, and network-wide courses.



## 2. Call

The present international project offers **13 positions** for highly motivated predoctoral researchers. IGNITION will train excellent junior scientists to carry out original PhD projects in the field of neuroimmunology and neurodegeneration. Recruited through an open, merit-based international competitive call, the Doctoral Candidates will benefit from high quality co-supervision, international mobility, and a dynamic research and innovation environment across Europe. IGNITION expects these predoctoral fellows to conduct a **36-month research project** within one of the 13 Individual Research Projects hosted by 10 institutions in 8 different countries.

### 2.1 Key dates

The call will open on **February 2nd 2026** until **April 2nd 2026**. Only applicants accomplishing eligibility criteria will be considered for the established 2-step evaluation. Applicants will be notified at the **start of May 2026** if their candidature has passed the first evaluation phase. Afterwards, interviews will take place online via Zoom or similar. The results from the subsequent selection will be published at the **beginning of June 2026**. The candidates will have 1 week to accept the offer and are expected to start the fellowship from **June to September 2026**. The candidates will be invited to join IGNITION as soon as possible after the publication of the final resolution. The exact date of incorporation will be agreed with the beneficiary institution once the fellowship is granted. However, the researcher can join IGNITION later if a personal reason justifies it, being evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

### 2.2 Application process

We highly recommend to carefully read all this Guide for Applicants, as well as check out [IGNITION website](#) for further information. Be sure that you comply with the **eligibility criteria** for this program (see section 2.3), otherwise your application will not be accepted for evaluation. The application steps for the IGNITION program will go as follow:

1. You should submit the requested information through the [online application tool](#), available on the [IGNITION website](#), too. It is a safe tool that ensures full protection on personal data to all applicants. Proposals must be written in English.
2. Once the online application form has been submitted, an automatic Pdf file will be generated and sent to your e-mail address. To finalize the application, you must send this document to IGNITION'S Project Management ([IGNITION@recerca.clinic.cat](mailto:IGNITION@recerca.clinic.cat)) along with the academic records and the other documents asked for. This



information may vary depending on where you completed your previous studies (see section 2.2.3).

This last step is **mandatory** to complete the process, as all applications must be sent to the official channel established in the call. If the documents to be included are missing, the candidate will be considered ineligible in a provisional way and will be given one week only to send the documents.

### 2.2.1 Online application form

The application consists of an online form with the following sections. You can check them in advance to better prepare them in the Form Template (in the [IGNITION website](#)).

- |                         |                                    |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Personal information | 6. Additional skills               |
| 2. Eligibility criteria | 7. Application priorities          |
| 3. Academic experience  | 8. Motivation and future prospects |
| 4. Research experience  | 9. Reference letters               |
| 5. Mobility experience  | 10. Legal aspects                  |

All these sections include instructions to help the candidate go through the application process. Some questions are mandatory for everyone, but others are optional. Take into consideration the **character limit** (including spaces) that must be respected in some answers.

### 2.2.2 Recommendation prior starting the online application

We invite all potential Doctoral Candidates to check the following steps before applying to IGNITION program:

- ◇ Confirm your **profile** is the one this call is directed to
- ◇ Confirm you comply with the **eligibility criteria** (see section 2.3)
- ◇ We recommend you downloading and checking out the **Form Template** available in advance in the [IGNITION web](#), so you can better prepare your answers. Bear in mind that there are several steps and it takes time to complete. Prepare or compile the **letters** asked for in the application (motivation letter, reference letters).
- ◇ Consider that the online application form must be completed in **one** session (it cannot be saved for later).
- ◇ We recommend examining the Individual Research Projects before starting the online application form, as you can select only **three** different IRP priorities.



### 2.2.3 Documentation to prepare

We also recommend preparing the documentation you will need to attach to the mail in the final step. Take into account that academic documents must be in English or with a legalized translation attached. The **mandatory documents** are:

- ◇ University degree title: should be presented in English or attached to their translation in English.
- ◇ Master/equivalent degree title: should be presented in English or attached to their translation in English.
- ◇ Pdf file of the application form: will be sent to your e-mail when you submit it.
- ◇ Two reference letters: must provide two reference letters from different referees. These letters should be certified and include an electronic signature. Each letter must also include the referee's contact information (affiliation, email and phone number).

Additionally, the candidate may need to attach **additional documents**. Bear in mind that the additional documents are **mandatory** if you comply with the conditions by which you are obliged to hand the documentation. These are the following:

- ◇ English certificate: if you have one, it can prove the candidate's English level. *Whether or not the candidate holds the certificate, they will be required to demonstrate their level during the interview.*
- ◇ If you come from a Non-European Higher Education System, we advise that you present a letter from the University confirming you are an eligible PhD candidate in the country of your studies (we provide a **Certification of eligibility Template** for this in the [website](#)) or any other document certifying your eligibility. However, it is not mandatory.
- ◇ The documents to certify the accomplishment of the eligibility should be presented in English or attached to their translation in English.

**No other documents can be included (such as CVs with other formats, among others)** as the information for evaluation must be homogeneous for all candidacies.

### 2.2.4 Selection of the Individual Research Projects

IGNITION Doctoral Network program offers 13 Individual Research Projects (IRPs) that are distributed across 10 host institutions in 8 different countries. Each IRP addresses specific scientific and technological challenges aligned with the overall objectives of the network.

The description of each IRP can be found in [IGNITION website](#) and includes detailed information about the participating research groups, institution, country and



planned secondment. Candidates are strongly encouraged to carefully review the information provided for their selected projects.

The progress of the IRPs will be internally and externally assessed. The Doctoral Candidates and their local supervisors will be responsible for the monitoring and they will ensure project's efficient and timely implementation. Regular evaluation of each project will be also performed together with secondary supervisors, which will assess and update their progress.

At the online application form, candidates **can select up to three positions**, ranking them in order of preference: first, second, and third. Only one research line is mandatory to be selected at application phase. If an applicant is not selected for any of their chosen positions, there will be a **reallocation option**: their application may be considered for other available positions within the consortium. In such cases, the applicant will be contacted and asked whether they wish to be considered for a different position.

If the application progresses to later evaluation stages, candidates will have the opportunity to revise this order of priority.

Upon commencement of the 36-month contract, the specific research project will be jointly defined by the co-supervisors and the fellow. This finalized project will be required for its implementation during the rest of the contract, as well as, for the formal registration in the doctoral program at the university.

## 2.3 Eligibility

Candidates **must** meet the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions-Doctoral Network (MSCA-DN) eligibility criteria at the time of the **call deadline**. Eligibility must be proven and demonstrated to be hired at IGNITION program. The documents to certify the accomplishment of the eligibility should be presented in English or attached with their translation in English.

If one or more of the eligibility criteria is not fulfilled, the candidate will be declared ineligible, and their proposal will be withdrawn from any further consideration.

### 2.3.1 Eligibility criteria

Applicants must:

1. Not already possess a Doctoral degree. *This will be declared at the online application form.*
2. Not have resided or carried out the main activity (studies, work) in the country of the recruiting beneficiary for more than 12 months in the 36 months prior the call deadline. This is in accordance with the mobility rule of the MSCA program.



*Documentation related to this issue can be asked for before enrolling in IGNITION program.*

3. Have studies that allow them to access the doctoral studies in European Union (EU). You can find yourself in two situations:

- ◇ European Higher Education System: university Degree and Master or equivalent education are at least 300 ECTS, and allows the candidate access to a PhD program in EU.
- ◇ Non-European Higher Education System: university degree that gives access to doctoral studies in the Country of issue (certified by the competent body). All the documentation must be delivered both legalised and officially translated to English (if applies) (see section 2.2.3).

*Documentation related to this issue must be submitted at the application stage.*

4. Have a good English level to apply to the program. *The proficiency must be proved at the application phase and during the online interview process.*

## **2.4 Selection process and evaluation criteria**

All beneficiaries have procedures in place to support Doctoral Candidates with relocation and integration, with four institutions already holding the **HR Excellence in Research award (HRS4R)**. The Supervisory Board will ensure that all welcome measures are properly implemented. This accreditation guarantees alignment with Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment (OTM-R) principles, the MSCA Guidelines for the Inclusion of Researchers at Risk, and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (CCRR). At the selection process start, IGNITION supervisors will receive dedicated training on the CCRR.

The coordinator and most beneficiaries have endorsed the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct, and the consortium will encourage partners not yet meeting these standards to begin the HRS4R process by sharing best practices.

The selection process is divided into 3 phases (see timeline next page):

**1st.** Eligibility check: determines whether a candidate fulfills the eligibility criteria.

**2nd.** Evaluation phase: selects the best eligible candidates in terms of excellence.

**3rd.** Oral online interview: assesses the candidate's scientific knowledge, motivation and overall alignment with the IGNITION program.





The whole evaluation will follow a peer-review process aligned to the OTM-R policy with well-established evaluation criteria (see them below).

#### 2.4.1 Evaluation criteria

At each evaluation phase, the candidates will be informed of their result and if they move to the next stage of the selection process. Both stages will be evaluated by a diverse **Selection Panel**, which is conformed by 2 supervisors and 1 relevant member of the Individual Research Project.

The evaluation criteria of the *Background phase* will be:

Recruitment phase	Criteria	Sub-criteria	Score	Weight
Background evaluation	Candidate's Curriculum	Academic record and grades	0-5	50
		Research experience	0-5	
		Fellowships and awards	0-5	
		Other merits (publications, teaching, event organization, committees, outreach activities...)	0-5	
		Compliance with the desirable criteria	0-5	
	Candidate's Motivation	Motivation letter to the specific individual project	0-10	40
		Motivation to work in IGNITION consortium	0-10	
		Adequacy to the project	0-10	
		Career Prospects	0-10	
	Reference letters	At least two reference letters from independent referees	0-5	10

In the **background phase**, each application will be reviewed and will receive a score from 1 to 5 for each predefined criteria. The scale used is the following:

- 1 – Poor: application not adequately aligned with the project; additional experience or qualifications advisable
- 2 – Fair: application meets basic requirements; limited experience in key areas
- 3 – Good: well qualified application; experience appropriate for project requirements

4 – Very good: highly qualified application; experience above average in relevant areas

5 – Excellent: outstanding application; exceptional qualifications and experience for the project

You will be considered eligible for the next stage of the selection process if the average score exceeds the **quality threshold** of 3. Nevertheless, only 5 to 10 candidates per position will be invited to the oral interview phase, based on academic merits and the gender equality policy. Thus, surpassing the quality threshold does not necessarily mean that the candidate will move to the next stage.

**Please note:** if you have selected more than one preferred positions and your application ranks highly for more than one, you may be invited to interviews by different panels in parallel, as each research group will do its own selection process. **In cases where you are ranked at the top for multiple positions, you will have the freedom to choose the option that best suits you.**

The **oral interviews** aim to evaluate the candidate's scientific and disease-oriented knowledge, motivation, and alignment with the program and the selected research project and group. Conducted in English, the interviews will specifically include: a brief presentation on the candidate's prior research experience; and an interview to explore the candidate's scientific knowledge and future plans. Following the panel interviews, each member of the Selection Panel will individually score the interviewed candidates using the following scoring system.

The evaluation criteria of the *Interview phase* will be:

Recruitment phase	Criteria	Sub-criteria	Score	Weight
Interview stage	Demonstrated knowledge and scientific potential	Scientific expertise and skills acquired during previous education and research experience	0-5	50
		Ability to clearly present results in the oral communication of their previous research	0-10	
		Capacity to discuss the results with the evaluators; to think independently and critically	0-5	
		Ability to understand scientific methods, demonstrating awareness of methodological rigor needed	0-5	
	Candidate's Motivation	Motivation to join IGNITION and your group	0-10	40
		Motivation on the specific field of study and long-term career perspective	0-10	
English Level	Good working knowledge of English	0-10	20	

The **final resolution** will be published after the evaluation of the call and the candidates passing the quality threshold but initially not offered a fellowship will be placed on a **reserve list** in case the selected candidates decline the offer. Selected candidates will receive an official offer to join the IGNITION Program and they will have a *1-week window to accept it*.

*How will biases be avoided?* All evaluators will receive CCRR training, candidates participate in structured and standardised interviews, and the evaluation criteria together with the weighting of merit points are publicly available on the Guide for applicants to ensure full transparency and fairness.

Within 7 days from the publication of the results of the eligibility checking, the background evaluation and/or the final resolution of the call, candidates may submit a **request for revision** by sending an email at [ignition@recerca.clinic.cat](mailto:ignition@recerca.clinic.cat) if they feel that there has been a mistake in the evaluation. The revision procedure will be strictly confidential and will be answered by the party responsible for the object referred in the reject within one month from the reception.

## 2.5 Online informational session

For more information on the eligibility criteria and the evaluation process, connect to our **online informational session** on **March 3rd, 1:00PM (CET)**, at the following Zoom link: <https://clinic.zoom.us/j/91206459152>

## 3. Conditions of the IGNITION program

### 3.1 Offer

- ◇ Each candidate will sign a 36-month full-time contract at the host institution, including the same conditions as the other employees on the hosting institution (holidays, personal matters, public holidays...)
- ◇ The fellows may take time off from the IGNITION program due to illness, pregnancy-related illness, and maternity/paternity leave, in line with statutory provisions. Extension of the contract is not ensured but can be determined on a case-by-case basis.
- ◇ The fellow will be granted full social security cover (national insurance contribution)
- ◇ They will be offered specific information/support for the geographical mobility of the fellows or arrival to any of the hosting institutions. Other administrative help in procedures related to the recruitment will be also provided.

#### Salary (MSCA Allowances)

All recruited Doctoral Candidates will receive a salary and allowances compliant with the **MSCA-DN rules**. The candidate's monthly **salary** results from the combined payment of the Living Allowance and the Mobility Allowance (and, where applicable, the Family Allowance), which are both paid on a monthly basis. The information below aims to provide transparency while acknowledging that the *final net salary*



may vary depending on national regulations and the personal situation of each candidate.

1. **Living allowance:** represents the total cost of the researcher, including both the amount received by the fellow and the employer's mandatory contributions. It is a **gross amount**, subject to all compulsory deductions under the national legislation of the recruiting institution (employer and employee social security contributions, income tax).

This allowance is adjusted through the Country Correction Coefficient (CCC) applicable to the country where the researcher is employed (check it at this official [link](#)).

In summary, final net salary will vary among institutions and applicants should be aware that the living allowance is a gross amount before deductions.

2. **Mobility allowance:** This allowance is intended to cover the private mobility-related costs of the researcher, including travel and accommodation costs. This contribution does not cover travel for professional or research purposes. The allowance is 8.520€ per year (710€/month), and is not adjusted by the CCC but may be taxable depending on the country.

3. **Family allowance:** if applicable. This allowance must be officially proved and is provided for married researchers, as well as for researchers with a status equivalent to marriage recognized by the country in which the relationships were formalized. Researchers with dependent children are also eligible for receiving family allowance. Family allowance status may change during the PhD thesis. The allowance is 5.940€ per year (495€/month), and is not adjusted by the CCC but may be taxable depending on the country.

4. **Long-term leave allowance:** this allowance covers the costs of a researcher's leave for a long period due to personal circumstances (depending on the hosting institution and country), such as maternity/paternity leave, long sick leave, or other special leaves longer than thirty consecutive days. The contribution can be requested against a reported need.

5. **Special needs allowance:** the special needs allowance is provided for researchers with disabilities, whose long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments are certified by a national authority. The allowance covers costs related to the fellow's disability which are necessary for participation in the action. The special needs allowance can be requested against a reported need.

Other doubts and requests can be sent to: [IGNITION@recerca.clinic.cat](mailto:IGNITION@recerca.clinic.cat).



## 3.2 Training and career development opportunities

IGNITION offers an advanced training program aimed at preparing the next generation of neuroimmunology leaders. It follows the *Principles of Innovative Doctoral Training*, combining research excellence, strong institutional environments, interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral exposure, international networking, and measures for quality and sustainability. Doctoral Candidates will receive high-level technical training and supervision to conduct cutting-edge and original research projects within leading academic and industrial institutions.

- ◇ Scientific and research skills: Doctoral Candidates receive institute-specific doctoral training, including hands-on courses, seminars, and locally offered external activities.
- ◇ E-training: the program includes more than a dozen online training events and conferences hosted by different partners on topics such as career planning, bioinformatics, workplace mindfulness, and communication.
- ◇ Transversal skills training: each institution provides courses to strengthen soft skills, including experimental design, scientific communication, statistical methods...
- ◇ Annual Network Doctoral Schools: four yearly 3–4-day schools will promote collaboration across the network, combining scientific modules with complementary skills, team building, and strategies for research exploitation.
- ◇ Annual Consortium meetings: Doctoral Candidates, supervisors, experts, and the external advisor board will meet annually to monitor project progress, address challenges, and exchange feedback, including an informal session on the PhD experience.
- ◇ Congresses and international courses: Doctoral Candidates will participate in relevant congresses and international training events throughout the project.
- ◇ Secondments and short visits: all Doctoral Candidates will complete secondments of 2 weeks to 3 months and may undertake additional short visits to enhance knowledge exchange across the network.
- ◇ Career Development Plan: the **Career Development Plan** ensures that they are not only equipped with deep research expertise but also with the skills, strategies, and resources needed to succeed in diverse career paths after completing their PhD. Moreover, they will participate in mock interviews to receive feedback and refine their skills, as well as training on building a professional online profile, or other interesting skills.

You can take a closer look at the Training program in the [IGNITION website](#).

Additionally, apart from the Training program, the researchers will be **co-supervised** by two researchers from their institution that have a direct implication



in the project and that will do a regular follow-up. Moreover, they will be **mentored** by a senior researcher that will provide advice and guide through the PhD path.

### 3.3 Responsibilities and obligations of the fellow

The researchers must comply with the requirements of the specific institution, as well as with the ones from MSCA Grants. Some of the responsibilities are:

- ◇ Obligation of the researcher to work exclusively for the action
- ◇ Yearly enrolment to a doctoral program at the designated university, which will be covered by the fellowship.
- ◇ Design the project at the initial stage with the supervisors support the specific project and the personal Career Development Plan.
- ◇ Fully comply with current legislation and regulations of the hosting institution and country.
- ◇ Respect the fundamental ethical principles, scientific practise and national, international and institutional regulations concerning ethical and integrity issues in research.
- ◇ Participate in all the training and career development opportunities offered by the IGNITION program.
- ◇ Undertake an international and/or intersectoral secondment at another institution
- ◇ Report the research and career activity to the IGNITION Program Project manager when required.
- ◇ Report any aspect that may affect the correct implementation of the program at any of the phases.
- ◇ Acknowledge IGNITION program in any scientific or communications authored by them.

## 4. Other

### 4.1 Legal regime

All awardees will be subjected to the legal regime according to the law in force at the time of concluding the contract.

*The Data Controller of your personal data is the FUNDACIÓ DE RECERCA CLÍNICA BARCELONA- INSTITUT D'INVESTIGACIONS BIOMÈDIQUES AUGUST PI I SUNYER, with Tax Identification Number (CIF) G59319681 (hereinafter, the "Entity"), located at Carrer Rosselló, 149-153, postal code 08036, Barcelona. The collection of your personal data is based on your explicit consent, which may be revoked at any time. The Entity will process and/or store your personal data solely for the purpose of managing the selection processes and employment contracts that may be carried out. This information will be used by the Entity's administrative*



*and HR services, each within their respective competencies, and may be partially or fully shared with official bodies that, for legal reasons, may require access to your personal data. The data provided will be retained for a period of one year from the date of receipt, or for the time necessary to comply with legal obligations. Your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties, nor will it be subject to international data transfers. You have the right to access your personal data, request the correction of inaccurate data, or, where appropriate, request its deletion. You may also limit its processing, object to it, and withdraw your consent. These rights may be exercised by contacting the email address [protecciodades@recerca.clinic.cat](mailto:protecciodades@recerca.clinic.cat), where you may also request the forms needed to exercise your rights. Likewise, you are informed of your right to file a complaint with the Catalan Data Protection Authority if you believe that any action by the Entity violates your rights.*

## **4.2 Fellowship award**

Detection of fellows' noncompliance of the eligibility criteria or other requirements, regardless of when this occurs, will result in automatic cancellation of the application or the fellowship. Should the research fellow not comply with any obligation included among the terms and conditions of the fellowship, IGNITION Consortium reserves the right to act as it deems appropriate, including requesting the return of the amounts received.

## **4.3 Disclaimer**



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