



Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment

Action Plan

2024

1. Background

Palacký University (PU) Olomouc is an internationally respected Central European university. It is the second oldest university in the Czech Republic and among the top three Czech universities in the global context. The mission of Palacký University Olomouc is to disseminate education, carry out independent scientific research and artistic creation, and care for the cultural and educational development of human society. Every year, 23 thousand students study at PU in eight faculties offering study programs from teaching, law, theology, physical education and sports, humanities, arts, and social, natural, medical, and health sciences. In 2021, the Czech Advanced Technology and Research Institute (CATRIN) was established. PU also fulfils the so-called third role in society and educates the public through educational and socio-cultural events.

PU signed the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (ARRA) in July 2023, thereby committing to the need to change the culture in the R&D area and R&D evaluation, which is still overly focused on metrics, inappropriately in at least some research fields. Although some necessary steps towards this change have already been taken before joining ARRA (i.e., the first and comprehensive international peer-review evaluation based on self-evaluation in 2023, work on a strategy for Open Science and responsible Research data management is in the process thus far), we feel the philosophy of ARRA needs to be declared officially and further developed and anchored at PU.

In Czechia, mandatory national R&D assessment is carried out at five-year intervals according to the M17+ methodology issued by the RVVI (Research, Development, and Innovation Council in the Government of the Czech Republic). This evaluation methodology consists of five pillars with different weights in the final grade: I. Quality of Selected Results, II. Research Performance, III. Social Relevance, IV. Viability, and V. Strategy and Policies. The grade obtained affects the allocation of each research institution's annual budget. RVVI also signed the ARRA in 2023, and it is expected that the Core Commitments of ARRA should be, for the first time, reflected in the currently revised methodology for the upcoming national assessment for 2025 (e.g., the principle - moving away from quantity to quality). The following years could be substantial for reviewing and further developing R&D evaluation practices in Czechia.

As a signatory of ARRA, PU needs to develop the ACTION PLAN, the strategy document for the next five years (July 2024 – July 2029), anchoring the goals we are to work towards. This Action Plan will be shared with the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) community after its recognition by the PU leadership to make our efforts transparent and possibly available to other interested research institutions.

2. The Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment

ARRA synthesises and expands upon existing initiatives to create a comprehensive document related to responsible research assessment with defined commitments and collaborative structures. The commitments include:

- the four “core commitments”:

1. **Recognise the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research** in accordance with the needs and nature of the research.
2. **Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation** for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators.
3. **Abandon inappropriate uses in research assessment of journal- and publication-based metrics**, in particular inappropriate uses of Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and h-index.
4. **Avoid the use of rankings** of research organisations in research assessment.

- the six “supporting commitments”:

5. **Commit resources to reforming research assessment** as is needed to achieve the organisational changes committed to.
6. **Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes.**
7. **Raise awareness of research assessment reform** and provide transparent communication, guidance, and training on assessment criteria and processes as well as their use.
8. **Exchange practices and experiences** to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition.
9. **Communicate progress** made on adherence to the principles and implementation of the commitments.
10. **Evaluate practices, criteria and tools** based on solid evidence and the state-of-the-art in research on research and make data openly available for evidence gathering and research.

3. Transformation steps

3.1 Allocate resources

A new *Working Group* was established to successfully implement ARRA commitments. *Working Group* will cooperate on this Action Plan and all further strategic activities related to ARRA implementation. It will further map the best practices, existing tools, and guidelines and cooperate on developing appropriate evaluating science and research methodology. The group will meet at least four times a year.

The *Working Group* consists of the following members:

- 3 Representatives from the Rectorate: Vice-rector for Research, Department of Research Conception and Support
- 8 Vice-Deans from all faculties
- 1 representative of CATRIN institute

3.2 Identify and analyse

Possible areas of interest have to be identified across the University in which the ARRA commitments should be integrated. The state-of-the-art will be revised, and strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities should be identified. Measures will be proposed to improve the situation as well as who will be responsible for their implementation. Methodological support, meetings, and discussions with responsible persons will be necessary.

Areas to be focused on:

- current methodology for international research evaluation of R&D (also in the separate chapter 5 of this Action Plan),
- evaluation of PhD students,
- PU Grant Board,
- HR,
- Information System for Academic Staff Performance Evaluation (IS HAP),
- institutional accreditation,
- habilitation procedure and procedure for appointment as professor,
- distribution of budget for R&D within the PU units,
- guidelines defining the scope and roles of the Scientific Councils and Commissions,
- internal evaluators of external organisations,
- career paths, allocation of rewards based on performance.

3.3 Disseminate

Internal awareness-raising ensures that all staff know about the transformation process by the ARRA commitments and understand why and how the goals should be achieved. The *Working group* is the intermediary between PU units and the Rectorate in the commitment integration process.

Further needs:

- Establish a new website on upol.cz for the R&D agenda, which will be the central point for the publication of information relating to ARRA.
- Publish the PU Action Plan on the PU website and Zenodo repository.
- Communicate progress and share the relevant documents and links with staff and students regularly on the R&D website and zurnal.upol.cz website, via PU electronic newsletters, HR newsletters, and printed and electronic PU journals.
- Include a chapter concerning the ARRA implementation in the Guidance of Good Research Practice

- Develop a missing strategy plan for R&D at PU for good practice in conducting research, scientific publishing and responsible research evaluation.

3.4 Exchange practices

The developments, accepted principles, and approaches to R&D evaluation at other domestic and foreign universities will be followed, especially those who have joined CoARA or ARRA. We will also draw on their experience and knowledge with evaluation, with the introduction of alternative evaluation criteria. We will follow the already published Action Plans of other universities so we can also build on diverse approaches when incorporating ARRA principles into practice.

In this respect, it is beneficial for the PU co-operation with other universities within the AURORA network of which we are a member. The ongoing Aurora 2030 project can be helpful in mutual sharing of experiences within Workpackage 5 (WP5), dedicated to “Enhancing Quality of Research through an Aurora Research and Innovation Community”. Part 5.1 “Towards Reforming Research Assessment” aims to share experiences conducting bottom-up research assessment procedures and criteria.

3.5 Evaluate

Progress will be assessed annually within the monitored period (2024 – 2029). Improvements for the next period will be proposed in those areas where shortcomings have been identified. Evaluation can be carried out in several different ways:

- Conduct a formal evaluation of the reformed procedures to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for further improvement.
- Get feedback from the scientific community (through a questionnaire).
- Get feedback from the evaluators (through a questionnaire).

Finally, review and summarise the primary outcomes achieved in this monitoring period and use them as a starting point to decide how the research assessment practice will be further developed or innovated after 2029. Suggest adjustments.

4. Responsibility

Compliance with the ARRA commitments is the responsibility of the university management and PU units leadership.

The *Working group* will be responsible for

- establishing this Action Plan,
- promoting the core principles of responsible research assessment across all PU units,
- implementing reforms to research assessment methodology,
- and promoting transparency in research assessment,
- annual progress review.

5. Assessment methodology

The methodology for the first international peer-review evaluation was prepared when we first learned about ARRA commitments, thus the methodology preparation was undoubtedly influenced by Reforming Research commitments. This R&D evaluation concept transformation process has still not, however, been completed. It will therefore be further developed and enhanced so that the subsequent international peer-review evaluation will align with ARRA commitments and the new principles described in 3.1. For this purpose, we will:

- Evaluate the last evaluation process and identify the areas for improvements so that different roles and an even larger variety of merits in research will be recognised and fair assessment practices for all staff and PU units will be ensured. Feedback from the evaluators, as well as from the evaluated PU units from the last evaluation process, will be used.
- A modified evaluation methodology will be developed to replace the previous one. Best practices collected from other institutions, such as from the AURORA Alliance members, can be used.
- After the evaluation process, reflection on whether the new modifications have brought about the desired shift in the approach to R&D evaluation will be carried out.

The new methodology should respect the diversity of all units of the University, and their priorities and requirements. It will be developed on the basis of regular meetings of the *Working group* so that representatives of all PU units are involved in the methodology process and are thus responsible for representing the interests of their employees. The evaluation results are to serve the university management, heads of departments and all staff in the further development of the university. The PU units should define the purposes and interests of the evaluation process. It should not, however, create incentives for behaviours that are contrary to our values and goals. The evaluation methodology should reflect this and other specific requirements of the University units.

6. Timeline

PU is committed to undertaking the activities necessary to achieve our objectives by the fifth year of Action Plan development. The proposed procedures are outlined approximately, with the understanding that they may change or be modified during the period, or there may be some time shifts. We also know that changing the mindset may take much longer.

The following five-year period for the implementation of the reform can be divided into two phases:

- 2024-2027: Establish and Engage

The following steps will be implemented during this period:

- Establishing an institutional *Working group* to develop the Responsible Research Assessment Framework and lead on delivery of the Action plan.
- Bringing the Action Plan for the period 2024 – 2029 into force.
- Raising awareness of research assessment reform at PU via all possible channels.
- Identification of areas at PU where principles of ARRA are concerned.
- Analysis of areas at PU where principles of ARRA commitments need to be integrated, in which points and how.

- Identification of weak points in research assessment. Development of a framework for responsible research evaluation (implementation of a reformed method for RD assessment).
- 2028-2029: Review and Evaluate
 - Review the reforming process throughout the monitored period (2024 – 2029).
 - Evaluate the reformed procedures to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for further improvement.
 - Continue to refine the reformed procedures where required, based on emerging feedback from those involved.