



UNIVERSITÀ DI PISA



# COARA Action Plan

**Introduction:** At the University of Pisa, we're embarking on a journey to reshape how we evaluate research. Our goal is to ensure that our assessment practices align with modern values and support a diverse and inclusive research environment.

**Guiding Principles:** First and foremost, we're prioritizing quality over quantity when it comes to evaluating research output. We believe that in today's world of overpublication, it's essential to focus on the impact and significance of research rather than sheer volume.

We're also committed to inclusivity. We recognize that research contributions extend beyond traditional publications and aim to support and reward all forms of research activity, including public engagement and technology transfer.

Equitable distribution of resources is another key principle for us. We want to ensure that younger researchers and underrepresented groups have fair opportunities to thrive in our academic community.

And of course, we're dedicated to fostering equal opportunities without discrimination based on factors such as gender, academic age, or research field.



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**Addressing Challenges:** We recognize that there will be challenges along the way, but we're prepared to meet them head-on. We understand that change can be daunting, especially in a bureaucratic environment, but we're committed to demonstrating the benefits and minimizing burdens wherever possible.

We're also mindful of legal and regulatory requirements that we must adhere to, ensuring that our reforms are in line with national evaluation standards.

One of our biggest challenges is to establish a centralized database/repository to track diverse research contributions effectively. We're working on this diligently, knowing that it's essential for the success of our reforms.

And of course, there will be the necessity of addressing conflicts of interest and biases in our assessment processes.

**Stakeholder Engagement:** We're involving the relevant stakeholders in this process, from faculty members to administrative staff. Open communication and feedback are crucial for the success of these reforms.

We're holding discussions and seeking approval for reforms in our governing bodies, such as the Senate and Administrative Council. We're also engaging when appropriate with research committees and departmental representatives to ensure that the technical aspects of implementation are well-understood and supported.

Importantly, we'll be soliciting feedback and suggestions from the entire university community through question times and other forums formats.



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**Implementation Strategy:** Our approach to implementing these principles is gradual and collaborative. We understand that change can be met with resistance, so we're taking small steps to minimize disruption and ensure buy-in from the community. In practice:

- From this year we have started integrating the assessment of societal and economic impact into our resource allocation processes, and we plan to slowly increase the weight and breadth of these factors in the following years.
- We're revising our hiring regulations to focus more on the quality of research rather than relying solely on numerical factors. In addition, we're working on establishing clear guidelines for assessment committees to ensure that they consider a wide range of research outputs and avoid biases.
- We are progressively reforming the evaluation guidelines of internal funding distribution, privileging high quality research output over sheer numerical productivity and examining a more review-based, external assessment of research proposals.



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**Recognition of Diverse Contributions:** We're taking concrete steps to ensure that diverse research contributions are recognized and valued within our institution.

We have started to integrate the evaluation of "third mission" activities in the resource allocation processes for personnel among the various Departments, at the moment with a 10% weight, but with an objective to gradually increase it over time to reach a 20% target. We're enhancing our informatics resources to track and trace these contributions more effectively, investing in the necessary software and hardware.

In the following years, compatibly with the university budget situation, we plan to introduce this aspect also in the evaluation of staff productivity for the distribution of basic internal funds.

We also intend to reformulate our guidelines for the hiring committees to explicitly consider non-traditional research outputs, ensuring that all forms of research connected activities, including refereeing and monitoring, are taken into account.

**Learning from Research on Research:** We're committed to learn from the latest research on assessment approaches and methods and to incorporate best practices into our own evaluation processes.

We're shifting towards a quality-based approach in our internal funding distribution, focusing on the impact and significance of research outputs rather than sheer quantity.

We're also collaborating with working groups in COARA (like those on responsible use of indicators and evaluation of research proposals) to explore alternative evaluation approaches and ensure that our practices are informed by the latest research.



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**Mitigating Reliance on JIF and h-index:** We recognize the limitations of metrics like Journal Impact Factor and h-index and are taking steps to mitigate their reliance in our assessment processes.

We're discouraging their explicit use in hiring and evaluations and encouraging a more holistic approach to evaluating research impact.

We're also focusing on product-specific metrics and assessments of their scientific quality to ensure that all forms of research activity are valued.

**Mitigating Reliance on Organization Rankings:** While we may respond to organization rankings when necessary, we're not relying on them in our internal processes.

We're revising our guidelines to discourage their use in decision-making processes and ensure that evaluations of external people / collaborations are based on merit rather than rankings.

**Resource Allocation:** We've allocated the necessary budget to support our reform efforts, including investments in software and hardware for tracking diverse research contributions.

We're also investing in committees dedicated to research assessment and providing the support and resources they need to succeed.



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**Piloting New Assessment Criteria:** While we may not have full control over career progression procedures, we're implementing minor modifications to ensure that diverse research contributions are recognized and valued.

We will be providing training and guidance to assessment committees to ensure that they understand and implement these changes effectively.

**Training and Support:** We intend to establish a training and support programme to assessment panels, committees, and juries to ensure that they understand and adhere to our assessment processes.

We will also continue to raise awareness of Open Science practices and COARA principles within the academic community, ensuring that everyone is informed and engaged.

**Exchange of Good Practices:** We're actively sharing our experiences and best practices within our institution and regional network, fostering collaboration and learning from each other.

We're also contributing to national and international discussions on research assessment reform (for instance through the COARA National Chapter), sharing our insights and learning from others in the field.



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**Transparent Communication:** We're committed to transparent communication of our research evaluation processes both within and outside the organization.

We're ensuring that regulations and guidelines are easily accessible through our website and other channels. And we're implementing innovative tools like artificial intelligence to facilitate navigation and understanding of this complex information.

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** We're continuously monitoring and evaluating our assessment criteria, tools, and processes to ensure their effectiveness and alignment with our goals.

We're assessing progress and impact on a yearly basis, gathering feedback and making adjustments as needed. And we're involving all relevant stakeholders in this evaluation process, ensuring that everyone has a voice in shaping the future of research assessment at the University of Pisa.

**Conclusion:** In conclusion, the University of Pisa is committed to reforming research assessment practices to support a diverse, inclusive, and impactful research environment. Through collaborative efforts and ongoing evaluation, we're confident that we can achieve our goals and foster a culture of excellence in research.