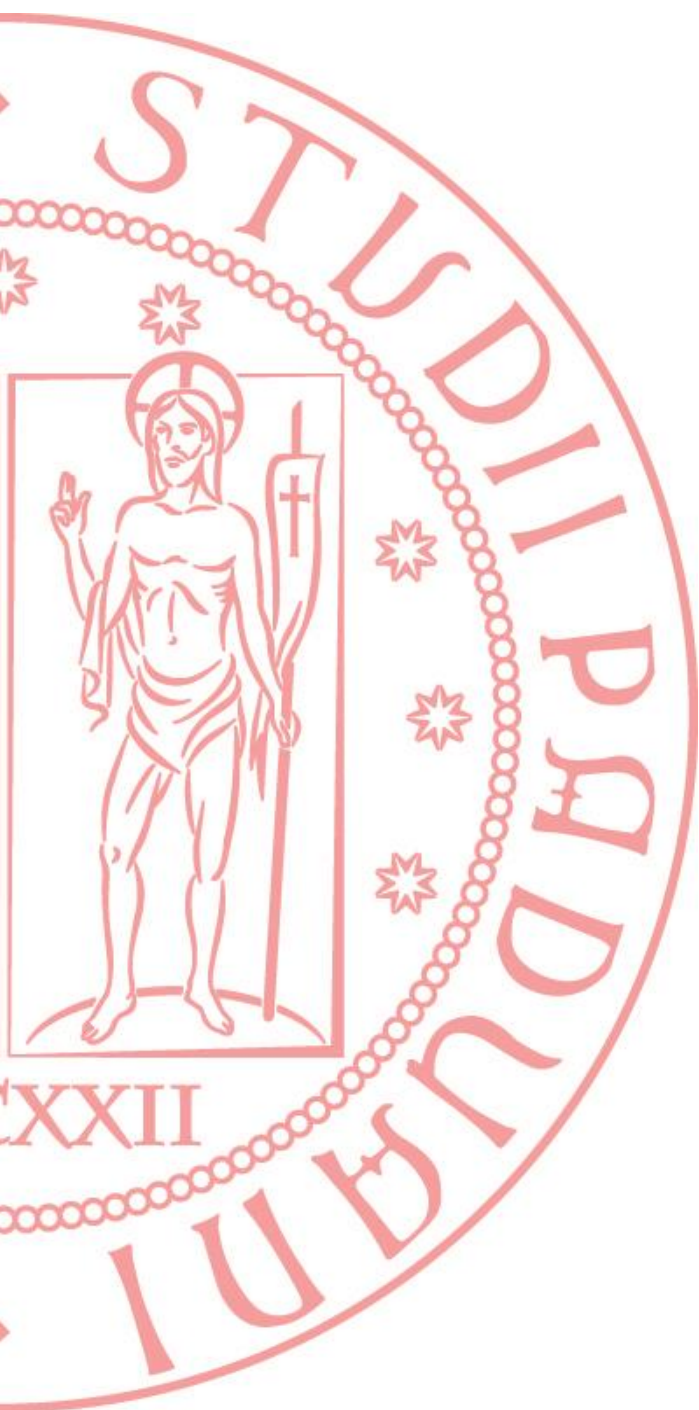




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University of Padua

**CoARA Action Plan
2024 – 2027**



Introduction

The University of Padua (Unipd) joined the activities that led to the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) in early 2022 and signed the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (ARRA), becoming a member of CoARA, on 17 November 2022. For Unipd, this is another important step forward in contributing to the international efforts for improving research assessment and in aligning its research practices with those of the best international institutions. It follows and accompanies other initiatives that Unipd has recently undertaken, in accordance with the principles and values of its Strategic Plan 2023-2027, to promote high-quality, impactful, diverse, socially responsible, inclusive and sustainable research. They encompass, for example:

- issuing and promoting the widest distribution of both a Code of Ethics and a Research Integrity Code;
- approving and implementing the 2024-2026 Action Plan for the Human Resource Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R), whose principles Unipd has been proactively supporting since 2009;
- establishing an Open Science Committee, promoting and financing the transition to Open Access and Open Data;
- leading a Work Package on Alternative Assessment Approaches within the Horizon 2020 project ARQUS Research and Innovation (Arqus R.I. – G.A. 101017448), a Coordination and Support Action evolving from the Arqus European University Alliance, of which Unipd is a funding partner.

Thanks to CoARA, Unipd has been increasing its focus on research assessment. Although our level of compliance with the CoARA commitments is already very good, we consider this Action Plan a precious opportunity to: (i) review our current practices towards their improvement and revise them when needed; (ii) communicate the CoARA principles to our local academic community and engage it at all levels; (iii) develop training activities for all those who will be either evaluators or subject to evaluation.

In this Action Plan, we must take into account the context in which we operate. Only a limited amount of research evaluation is conducted locally, sometimes with flexibility in establishing the local rules (small research grants on internal funds, local research infrastructures), sometimes under binding national rules that leave little room for local adjustments (hiring and promotions), whilst a large fraction of research evaluation is conducted nationally by the Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes (ANVUR) and by the Ministry of University and Research (MUR). This Action Plan then consists in a number of local actions to be implemented in the period 2024-2027, some of which have already started. Suggestions for actions at the national level will be channelled through the CoARA Italian National Chapter (NC), of which Unipd is a member.

Actions are grouped along the 10 CoARA commitments. For each commitment, after recalling its purpose as stated in the ARRA, we list the planned actions, specifying their timing and labelling them according to three main types: (i) Review/Revision; (ii) Communication and Engagement; (iii) Training. A final table summarises our planned actions according to the commitments and types, as well as time frame of implementation.

This Action Plan was drafted, after a preliminary gap analysis, by a dedicated Unipd Task Force including: the two Unipd representatives in CoARA; members of the Unipd governance; the Unipd International Research Office, in particular the contact person in the NC; the Unipd representative responsible for HRS4R; the Unipd delegate for equal opportunity policies; Unipd researchers, whose expertise covers the three main research domains (Life Sciences - LS, Physical Sciences and Engineering - PE, Social Sciences and Humanities - SH), in particular those who are participating in five of the international CoARA Working Groups. The progress in the drafting of the Plan was communicated, also to collect comments and suggestions, to: the elected Unipd Scientific Committee (CSA); the appointed Unipd Committee for Quality Assessment in Research (CPQR); the Unipd governance (rector, director general, vice-rectors and delegates); the consultative assembly of department directors (Consulta dei Direttori di Dipartimento). The Action Plan was finally approved by the Academic Senate (SA – Senato Accademico) and by the Administrative Board (CdA – Consiglio di Amministrazione) in September 2024. As to best monitor the implementation of the Action Plan, a permanent Working Group and a Steering Committee will be established, whose tasks include the periodic reporting to the Unipd governing bodies on both the progress of the single initiatives and the overall institutional engagement with the CoARA commitments.

Actions grouped by ARRA commitment

1. Recognise the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research.

Purpose: This commitment will broaden recognition of the diverse practices, activities and careers in research, considering the specific nature of research disciplines and other research endeavours.

Actions:

1.1 Enlarge the spectrum of contributions to research eligible for evaluation by reviewing local regulations and introducing further improvements/adjustments compatible with the national rules.

Timing: 2024-2026

Type of action: Review/Revision

1.2 Elaborate a template of narrative CV. Organise informative events on how to write and evaluate a narrative CV. (see also Action 6.3)

Timing: 2024-2027

Type of action: Review/Revision + Training

2. **Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators.**

Purpose: This commitment will enable the move towards research assessment criteria that focus primarily on quality, while recognising that responsible use of quantitative indicators can support assessment where meaningful and relevant, which is context dependent.

Actions:

2.1 Perform an internal survey of the criteria adopted so far by the departments in assigning the research funds they receive from the Unipd budget.

Timing: 2024

Type of action: Reviews/Revision

2.2 Elaborate guidelines to encourage an increased use of peer review beyond quantitative indicators in evaluation activities.

Timing: 2024-2025

Type of action: Review/Revision

3. **Abandon inappropriate uses of journal- and publication-based metrics (in particular, Journal Impact Factor, JIF, and h-index) in research assessment.**

Purpose: This commitment will reduce the dominance of a narrow set of quantitative journal- and publication-based metrics.

Actions:

3.1 Disseminate to the internal research community the results of the work on Alternative Assessment Approaches, led by Unipd, within the Horizon 2020 project ARQUS R.I., fostering their exploitation.

Timing: 2024-2025

Type of action: Communication and engagement

3.2 **Inform** evaluation **committees** on the need to avoid the misuse of quantitative indicators.

Timing: 2025-2026

Type of action: Training + Communication and engagement

4. **Avoid the use of rankings of research organisations in research assessment.**

Purpose: This commitment will help avoid that metrics used by international rankings, which are inappropriate for assessing individual researchers, trickle down to research and researcher assessment. It will help the research community and research organisations regain the autonomy to shape assessment practices, rather than having to abide by criteria and methodologies set by external commercial companies. This could include retaining control over ranking methodologies and data.

Actions: No action needed, Unipd does not use rankings of research organisations in research assessment.

5. **Commit resources to reforming research assessment as is needed to achieve the organisational changes committed to.**

Purpose: This commitment will ensure that organisations allocate the necessary resources, whether in the form of budget or staff capacity, to improve research assessment practices within their agreed timeframe.

Actions:

5.1 Appoint and establish a **Steering Committee, a Working Group** and a **Coordinator** for the smooth implementation of the Action Plan and the monitoring of the actions, making sure that all profiles of researchers and all pertinent administrative areas are adequately represented.

Timing: 2024

Type of action: Review/Revision

5.2 Allocate the necessary **resources** for the implementation of the actions and the organisation of training and communication/dissemination activities.

Timing: 2024-2027

Type of action: Communication and engagement

6. **Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes.**

6.1 Criteria for units and institutions

With the direct involvement of research organisations and researchers at all career stages, review and develop criteria for assessing research units and research performing organisations, while promoting interoperability.

Purpose: This commitment will ensure that national / regional / organisational authorities and evaluation agencies review and, where needed, develop criteria for the assessment of research performing units and organisations, in accordance with the Principles. It will foster the responsible use of metrics in assessing research performing units and organisations, and help to prevent contradictions or incompatibilities between the assessment of research, researchers and research performing organisations. It will also safeguard the interoperability of adapted or newly developed assessment processes.

No action foreseen: Italian research units and institutions are mostly assessed by an external authority, ANVUR. Unipd carries out only limited assessments concerning its departments, complementary to the major Evaluation of Research Quality (VQR), performed by ANVUR at the national level every five years, which also evaluates departments. No actions are foreseen in this plan, although they may be considered in the future.

6.2 Criteria for projects and researchers

With the direct involvement of researchers at all career stages, review and develop criteria, tools and processes for the assessment of research projects, research teams and researchers that are adapted to their context of application.

Purpose: This commitment will enable recognition of the diverse research activities and practices through the revision and development of assessment criteria, tools, and processes. It will ensure that organisations review their processes and make tangible changes by developing existing or new assessment approaches, individually or in collaboration with others, in accordance with the Principles.

Actions:

6.2.1 Perform a gap analysis comparing the CoARA commitments with the current Unipd documents containing local guidelines and regulations for research quality assessment, distribution of research funds, hiring and promotions, in view of possible future revisions.

Timing: 2025

Type of action: Review/Revision

6.2.2 Analyse and translate into Italian the European Competence Framework for Researchers (ResearchComp), for wider dissemination among Unipd researchers.

Timing: 2025

Type of action: Review/Revision + Communication and engagement

6.2.3 Perform training activities for the Unipd scientific community on how to write and evaluate a narrative CV, taking into account ResearchComp (see also action 1.2).

Timing: 2025-2027

Type of action: Training

7. **Raise awareness of research assessment reform and provide transparent communication, guidance, and training on assessment criteria and processes as well as their use.**

Purpose: This commitment will ensure that organisations raise awareness of the reform among all actors. It will ensure that organisations transparently communicate the criteria, tools and processes used for research assessment and train researchers and assessors in their use.

Actions:

7.1 Disseminate through a dedicated web space and raise awareness on this Action Plan, therefore promoting the CoARA commitments and good practices at all levels in Unipd.

Timing: 2024-2027

Type of action: Communication and engagement

7.2 Organise dissemination activities to inform the Unipd scientific community about the **ongoing changes in research evaluation** and enable an exchange of questions and answers.

Timing: 2026-2027

Type of action: Training + Communication and engagement

7.3 Submit annual reports to the Unipd governance, for transmission to the SA and the CdA and for dissemination, to update the Unipd community on the progress in the implementation of the Action Plan and to receive feedback in view of possible future revisions.

Timing: 2025-2027

Type of action: Review/Revision + Communication and engagement

8. **Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition.**

Purpose: This commitment will ensure organisations exchange and make use of information for mutual learning. It will help avoid fragmentation, contribute to the coherence of assessment practices between organisations, and enable researcher mobility. It also will allow those further ahead to share approaches and lessons learned, to benefit those who have further to go on their reform journey.

Actions:

8.1 Maintain an **active participation in CoARA** Working Groups and in the NC.

Timing: 2024-2027

Type of action: Communication and engagement

8.2 Promote national/international mobility of Unipd researchers and administrative staff for the exchange of CoARA good practices.

Timing: 2025-2027

Type of action: Communication and engagement

9. **Communicate progress made on adherence to the principles and implementation of the Commitments.**

Purpose: This commitment will ensure organisations update one another on the progress made. It will foster careful self-reflection and monitoring of their own adherence to the Principles and progress towards meeting the Commitments.

Actions:

9.1 **Inform** annually the partner institutions in the NC of the progress made by Unipd, and collect information from the NC on the progress made by the other Italian institutions, to consider possible improvements of the Unipd Plan.

Timing: 2024-2027

Type of action: Review/Revision + Communication and engagement

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.**

Purpose: This commitment will ensure that assessment approach decisions are evidence informed. It will help organisations reflect on their own processes, gain understanding about whether assessment practices achieve the desired goals, and engage in evolutive assessment based on new evidence as it becomes available. It will also help to ensure control and ownership of research assessment data by the research community.

Actions:

10.1 Identify and **engage experts** in “research on research” to establish a proactive exchange of **good practices** and recommendations.

Timing: 2026-2027

Type of action: Review/Revision + Communication and engagement

Overview of actions by commitment, type, and time frame of implementation

Commitment	Action	Type of Action ¹			Timeframe of implementation			
		R	C&E	T	2024	2025	2026	2027
1	1.1	Enlarge the spectrum of contributions to research eligible for evaluation by reviewing local regulations and introducing further improvements / adjustments compatible with the national rules.						
		●			■	■	■	
	1.2	Elaborate a template of narrative CV. Organise informative events on how to write and evaluate a narrative CV (see also Action 6.3).						
		●		●	■	■	■	■
2	2.1	Perform an internal survey of the criteria adopted so far by the departments in assigning the research funds they receive from the Unipd budget.						
		●			■			
	2.2	Elaborate guidelines to encourage an increased use of peer review beyond quantitative indicators in evaluation activities.						
		●			■	■		
3	3.1	Disseminate to the internal research community the results of the work on Alternative Assessment Approaches, led by Unipd, within the Horizon 2020 project ARQUS R.I., fostering their exploitation.						
			●		■	■		
	3.2	Inform evaluation committees on the need to avoid the misuse of quantitative indicators.						
			●	●		■	■	
4	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	
5	5.1	Appoint and establish a Steering Committee, a Working Group and a Coordinator for the smooth implementation of the Action Plan and the monitoring of the actions, making sure that all profiles of researchers and all pertinent administrative areas are adequately represented.						
		●			■			
	5.2	Allocate the necessary resources for the implementation of the actions and the organisation of training and communication/dissemination activities.						
			●		■	■	■	■
6	6.2.1	Perform a gap analysis comparing the CoARA commitments with the current Unipd documents containing local guidelines and regulations for research quality assessment, distribution of research funds, hiring and promotions, in view of possible future revisions.						
		●				■		
	6.2.2	Analyse and translate into Italian the European Competence Framework for Researchers (ResearchComp), for wider dissemination among Unipd researchers.						
		●	●			■		
	6.2.3	Perform Training activities for the Unipd scientific community on how to write and evaluate a narrative CV, taking into account ResearchComp (see also Action 1.2).						
				●		■	■	■

¹ **R** identifies “review or revision” actions, **C&E** identifies “communication and engagement” actions, **T** identifies “training” actions.

Commitment	Action	Type of Action ¹			Timeframe of implementation			
		R	C&E	T	2024	2025	2026	2027
7	7.1	Disseminate through a dedicated web space and raise awareness on this Action Plan, therefore promoting the CoARA commitments and good practices at all levels in Unipd.						
			●					
	7.2	Organise dissemination activities to inform the Unipd scientific community about the ongoing changes in research evaluation and enable an exchange of questions and answers.						
			●	●				
	7.3	Submit annual reports to the Unipd governance, for transmission to the SA and the CdA and for dissemination, to update the Unipd community on the progress in the implementation of the Action Plan and to receive feedback in view of possible future revisions.						
		●	●					
8	8.1	Maintain an active participation in CoARA Working Groups and in the NC.						
			●					
	8.2	Promote national/international mobility of Unipd researchers and administrative staff for the exchange of CoARA good practices.						
			●					
9	9.1	Inform annually the partner institutions in the NC of the progress made by Unipd, and collect information from the NC on the progress made by the other Italian institutions, to consider possible improvements of the Unipd Plan.						
		●	●					
10	10.1	Identify and engage experts in “research on research” to establish a proactive exchange of good practices and recommendations.						
		●	●					