University of Palermo

CoARA Action Plan
2024-2027

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The **University of Palermo (UniPa)** officially joined **CoARA (Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment)** in November 2022, by signing the European Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (ARRA). Even before adhering to **CoARA**, the **University of Palermo** had initiated procedures and adopted internal regulations in line with the guiding principles of the agreement on the reform of the research assessment system. Activities carried out at both central (university governance) and decentralized level (each single department) ensure constant monitoring of processes related to Research assessment, in line with national legislation. Also, the *Gender Equality Plan* and the ongoing activities of the implementation European Charter and Code Principles by the HRS4R Group, which was established since 2010 and for which **UniPa** was awarded the **'HR Excellence in Research'** certificate, further support the fulfilment of **CoARA** commitments.

After a phase of internal analysis of the evaluation methods applied to individual researchers and research departments, concerning funding, staff selection, hiring, and academic career progression, the **UniPa**-**CoARA** representatives have identified research evaluation processes and procedures that could be revised or improved in line with the **CoARA's** ten commitments.

At this first stage the actors involved were the Vice-Rector for Research (prof. *Andrea Pace*), the Rector's Delegate for Research in Humanities (prof. *Annamaria Bartolotta*), the Vice-Rector for Quality (prof. *Stefana Milioto*), the Vice-Rector for Inclusion, Equal Opportunities and Gender Policies (prof. *Beatrice Pasciuta*), PQA (Quality Assurance Committee), the Library System (*Maria Stella Castiglia*, *Maria Francesca D'Asaro*, *Maria Concetta Stella*, *Vittorio Tranchina*), the Research and Technology Transfer Area (*Luciano Tropea, Valeria La Bella*), the Human Resources Area (*Simona Viola*), the Third Mission Unit (*Patrizia Marcella Scalisi*), the *HRS4R Steering Committee Coordinator* (prof. *Clelia Dispenza*) and the HRS4R Charter & Code Working Group Coordinator (*Simona Viola*), the Representative and member of the Mission Board "Research, Innovation and Transfer" and of WP8 of the FORTHEM Alliance for the years 2022-2026 (prof. *Maria Luisa Saladino*); at decentralized level, the analysis involved the Directors and the Research Delegates of each Research Department.

Based on the guiding questions provided by the **European Coalition Committee**, the **UniPa**-**CoARA** action plan describes the key actions the University is taking to further improve responsible research and researcher assessment procedures, foster an evalu-

ation culture that emphasizes the quality and impact of research, value diversity among researchers and in research itself, promote good and responsible research practices.

The table below describes the roadmap including the **10 CoARA** commitments and their related actions as well as the key responsibilities and timeline for implementing tasks.

The **UniPa**-**CoARA** roadmap has a 4-year duration, with a review process to take place within the second year of its adoption. The plan is shared in open access according to the **CoARA** instructions.

Commitment	State-of-the-Art and Scopes	Actions	Timeframe and Responsibility
1. Recognise the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research	Within the scope of its autonomy, in the recognition of careers for salary increases and incentives, as well as in recruitment planning by the Departments, the University of Palermo (UNIPA) values and acknowledges not only scientific production but also tasks, functions and roles academics fulfil over the course of their career, including activities such as teaching, managerial or institutional tasks and positions, internationalization (including Erasmus actions), 'third mission', with careful attention to valuing the specificities of individual scientific-disciplinary sectors (SSD) or scientific areas.	Submitting all incentive and reward calls (including departmental calls) for review by the Quality Assurance (AQ) committee to ensure greater uniformity and alignment to CoARA commitments	Starting from 2026 Departmental AQ-Committees
	A specific attention is reserved to early career researchers (Rtd-A) (regardless of their age), by differentiating their contribution compared to that of professors (full, associate, RTT) in the distribution of University Research Funds (FFR).	Increase resources for early career researchers, by allocating additional funds devoted to them compared to professors (FFR)	2024 Vice-Rector for Research, CdA, Research and Technology Transfer Administrative Area
	To support the visibility and recognition of the quality of the activities of its researchers, Unipa has introduced a co-financing measure for open access publications (fund of EUR 400,000 for the years 2023-2024) The University regularly provides a nursery service at a workplace within the University campus, in order to support equal gender opportunities for researchers at all career level.	Re-propose the co-funding measure for open access publications	Vice Rector for Research, Rector's Delegates for Research, CdA

Commitment	State-of-the-Art and Scopes	Actions	Timeframe and Responsibility
2. Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators	In compliance with the national legislation, which governs the recruitment of researchers and professors, the University is able to act at a local level for direct calls of external fixed-term professors and researchers. In this case, the internal evaluation criteria only partially take quantitative indicators into account, while including other qualitative indicators such as innovation and internationalization of the proposed research; autonomy and organizational skills in research; ability to attract research funds; ability in technology transfer or third mission activities; any experience in innovative and inclusive teaching. The internal regulation for salary increments evaluates not only research, but also teaching, managerial, administrative, and third mission commitment of professors and researchers.	Reflecting on, and updating the current internal use of bibliometric indicators and peer review to evaluate individual researchers for funding (FFR) and salary progressions	Starting from 2026 Research Committee of the Academic Senate
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	In the university's internal evaluation procedures, the use of bibliometric indicators is not the only parameter considered. The peculiarities of specific areas or fields are taken into account, supporting a responsible use of quantitative indicators with a peer-review process	no additional actions proposed	
4. Avoid the use of rankings of research organisations in research assessment	Rankings of research organisations are not used in internal research assessment	no modification	

Commitment	State-of-the-Art and Scopes	Actions	Timeframe and Responsibility
5. Commit resources to reforming research assessment as is needed to achieve the organisational changes committed to	UNIPA contributes to the CoARA reform by encouraging the active participation of human resources in the discussion within the National Chapter. The University provides specific financial resources for the activities of the HRS4R Group for the European Charter & Code for Researchers principles and for the establishment of a National Community of Practise to identify critical areas of intervention at local and national level, based on the 'Recommendation on a European framework for attracting and retaining research, innovation and entrepreneurial talent in Europe' issued in December 2023. To facilitate access to competitive calls at European level the University has funded a subscription with the Agency for the Promotion of European Research (APRE).	Re-allocation of financial resources for the activities of the HRS4R Group	Ongoing
6. Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes	UNIPA complies with national regulations and suggests a CV that includes not only research, but also teaching, internationalization, management activities, institutional tasks and positions, third mission activities (public engagement, etc.)	Enabling the creation of the scientific curriculum through a specific module within the institutional repository (IRIS), which would allow a report of all the diverse activities carried out by researchers	Starting from 2026 Research and Technology Transfer Administrative Area University Information Systems (SIA) University Quality Committee (PQA)
7. Raise awareness of research assessment reform and provide transparent communication, guidance, and training on assessment criteria and processes as well as their use	UNIPA intends to involve research staff, but also technical, administrative and library staff in training on issues related to CoARA commitments, European Charter for Researchers, OTM (Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment of Researchers), Open Science, Equal Opportunities, Research Ethics, and inclusive teaching. A Doctoral School was established in 2023 with the task of carrying out transversal training activities and supporting the interdisciplinary research of Ph.D. students	Training seminars, workshops, mentoring (also specific for new recruits), to involve the research community on a regular basis	Starting from 2024 HRS4R Group Vice Rector for Inclusion, Equal Opportunities and Gender Policies

Commitment	State-of-the-Art and Scopes	Actions	Timeframe and Responsibility
8. Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition	UNIPA actively participates in CoARA WP1 - task 1.3 'Communication and Engagement' of the Italian National Chapter	Dissemination of the results of the National Chapter's activities both internally (HRS4R Group) and externally (European Forthem Alliance Group), with a special focus on young researchers, PhD students and research fellows Ongoing participation in National Chapter tasks	Starting from 2025 HRS4R Group Administrative staff for the Institutional Repository Forthem Alliance WP8 Group CoARA group
9. Communicate progress made on adherence to the Principles and implementation of the Commitments	UNIPA disseminates through official communication channels and its website all the ongoing activities, making the academic community aware of the progress of activities and implementation of the Commitments	Creation of a 'CoARA sub-section' within the institutional web page Publishing our CoARA roadmap on Unipa webpage Regular updating of ongoing activities	Starting from 2025 Research and Technology Transfer Administrative Area HRS4R Group University Quality Committee (PQA)
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	Monitoring will take place by means of a survey sent to all researchers The progress made and the implementing activities of the action plan will be monitored every two years The University Library System (SBA) promotes an Open Science culture for the academic community through its official website	Initial survey on the research evaluation system specific Open Science training and guidelines for PhD students and early-stage researchers	2024 Forthem Alliance WP8 Group Starting from 2026 University Library System (SBA)

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