



2024/2027

CoARA Action Plan

Action Plan by ANVUR to implement the ten commitments of the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (ARRA)

Approved October 3, 2024

THE NATIONAL AGENCY FOR THE EVALUATION OF UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH INSTITUTES (ANVUR)

ANVUR is the independent national Agency responsible for quality assurance in universities, research institutes and AFAM institutions. The Agency was established in 2006 and began its operations in 2011, marking the culmination of a multi-annual reform process that aimed to strike a balance between the autonomy granted to universities and the implementation of internal and external QA procedures, designed to monitor and enhance the teaching and research activities of the institutions.

ANVUR is an independent legal public body that possesses organisational, administrative, financial and accounting autonomy. ANVUR's mandate encompasses both the initial and periodic accreditation of universities and their study programmes, including PhD programmes, as well as the periodic (five-year) evaluation of research outputs and third mission/knowledge enhancement activities conducted by universities and research institutes. Additionally, ANVUR is responsible for defining indicators and benchmarks at the Ministry's request; these are used for allocating of public funding, assessing its effectiveness and efficiency, and for other purposes, such as classifying scientific journals for the National Scientific Qualification (ASN) procedure. For the ASN the Agency has also a consultative power with respect to the Ministry in defining the criteria and indicators. ANVUR is also mandated to coordinate the internal QA work carried out by the University Evaluation Boards, to develop uniform procedures for the collection of student opinions and to evaluate performance plans drafted by universities and research institutes. ANVUR is committed to conducting its activities in line with its core values, as outlined in its Code of Ethics. These values include independence, impartiality, professionalism, confidentiality, and transparency.

ANVUR'S ACTIVITIES INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH ASSESSMENT REFORM



Evaluation of Research Quality. The Evaluation of Research Quality (VQR) is a comprehensive exercise conducted by ANVUR every five years. Its purpose is to evaluate the research and societal impact outcomes of public and private universities, research institutes, and private institutions that voluntarily participate. The assessment is carried out through a peer review process, where groups of experts evaluate research products. Bibliometric indicators may also be used when appropriate for the evaluation of publications. In addition, the evaluation includes the assessment of selected projects related to knowledge transfer activities. The most recent evaluation (VQR 2015-19) involved the assessment of over 180,000 research products by a panel of over 650 selected experts and 11,000 external national and international reviewers. Additionally, 676 case studies related to knowledge transfer activities were evaluated by a mixed panel composed of experts from academia, professions, and civil society. The new evaluation exercise concerning the period 2020-2024 (VQR 2020-2024) has been started at the end of 2023 and will be completed by June 2026.



ANVUR role in the National Scientific Qualification. The National Scientific Qualification (ASN – Abilitazione Scientifica Nazionale) is an essential preliminary requirement for applying to permanent positions of full and associate professor in Italian universities. ANVUR is responsible for evaluating full professors who apply to become members of the national committees tasked with examining candidates for both positions. ANVUR also proposes a set of indicators to the Ministry, which are used to establish the minimum qualitative and quantitative standards of scientific production that candidates must meet in order to participate in the qualification procedure. Moreover, ANVUR oversees maintaining disciplinary-specific lists of Scientific and Excellent (A-Class) journals that are used in the context of ASN procedures.



Initial and Periodic Accreditation of Academic institutions and their study programmes, including PhD Programmes. ANVUR is also in charge of the initial and periodic evaluation of teaching, research and internationalisation activities of Italian universities. Evaluation concerns the strategic planning and procedures put in place to enhance the quality of research and teaching activities, and their human resources management practices. Initial and periodic accreditation of PhD programmes involves a comprehensive evaluation process to ensure that these programs meet established standards of quality and excellence. Initial accreditation assesses new PhD programs to verify they have the necessary resources, faculty, curriculum, and infrastructure to provide a high-quality educational experience. Periodic accreditation, on the other hand, involves regular reviews of existing PhD programmes to ensure they continue to meet these standards and are effectively contributing to academic and professional fields. This process typically includes self-assessment reports, site visits, and evaluations by external experts.

ACTIONS FOR 2024-2027

ANVUR is committed to implement the action foreseen by [Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment \(ARRA\)](#) and has already started to reform its activities in the light of the ten commitments. In what follows the activities already carried out will be presented as well as the next steps planned for the period of 2024-2027. These are listed on the basis of the corresponding ARRA commitment. ANVUR Action Plan aims to contribute to develop a coherent approach to research evaluation both with reference to institutions, their internal scientific organization and to the careers of individual researchers. The Action Plan may also be considered as a reference standpoint for all Italian institutions that are active in the national research ecosystem.

Commitment 1

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

MAIN INNOVATIONS ALREADY IMPLEMENTED:

- **VQR.** The current national research assessment exercise (VQR 2020-2024) is allowing a more complete consideration of different aspects of research and research-related activities:
 - Inclusion of a broad spectrum of research outputs beside the standard publications, such as datasets, software, workflows, protocols, prototypes, intellectual property rights, standards, editorships, technical reports.
 - Evaluation of research outputs for scholars having obtained a PhD in the Institution under evaluation, independently from their current affiliation, and calculation of a specific evaluation profile concerning the building of research capacities through the maintaining of PhD programmes.
 - Consideration of the possibility for interdisciplinary publications to be evaluated in collaboration among different disciplinary areas.
 - Consideration of knowledge transfer activities in the evaluation of Institutions, with a better specification of the thematic areas and fields of action according to which case studies are classified.
 - Consideration of the capacity to attract competitive funding in the evaluation profile of Academic Institutions and Public Research Organizations (PROs).

PLANS FOR FUTURE INTERVENTIONS:

- **Reform of academic career procedures and recruitment practices.** Identify potential improvements to the criteria and indicators used in the context of academic career procedures, to better recognize:
 - diverse contributions to the research environment at the different stages of academic career, including for example peer review and knowledge transfer activities;
 - the specific value of interdisciplinary research.
- **Consideration of different career stages in the initial and periodic accreditation of academic institutions.** Take into consideration the strategies according to which universities promote and evaluate researchers according to the different stages of their careers.

Commitment 2

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

MAIN INNOVATIONS ALREADY IMPLEMENTED:

- **VQR.** Peer review based on well-defined criteria is confirmed as the standard evaluation method in the VQR 2020-2024. Peer review may be informed, where appropriate for the characteristics of the disciplinary field, by suitable quantitative indicators. However, quantitative indicators should not substitute for peer review. Specifically, according to the most recent regulation, ANVUR will continue to responsibly use citations and journal metrics as a support for the evaluation; however, the combined use of citations and journal-level indicators will NOT result in a predetermined suggested classification for the research output under evaluation.
- **Expert selection.** The selection of experts in charge of evaluation in various procedures (VQR, accreditation of PhD Programmes, journal assessment) is based on an analysis of their CVs, which include some narrative elements, rather than relying automatically on quantitative indicators.
- **Journals classification.** A qualified group of disciplinary experts oversee the evaluation of SSH journals to be included in the ANVUR lists, on the basis of pre-determined criteria. The group resort to the external expertise of national and international peer reviewers to assess the scientific qualification of the journals.
- **PhDs.** The evaluation of PhD programmes for accreditation is supported, on an experimental basis and only for new PhD courses, by a group of disciplinary experts who oversee evaluating the programme proposal and training activities.

PLANS FOR FUTURE INTERVENTIONS:

- **Reviewers Database.** Create a database of reviewers to improve their selection in the context of all the evaluation activities of the Agency. The new database will be also at disposal of the national community at large (the Ministry, other relevant stakeholders) to improve the selection of reviewers at the national level.
- **PhDs.** Extend the use of experts to evaluate PhD programmes to all the PhD programmes under accreditation.
- **Journal classification.** Promote reflections and exchanges at the international level on the criteria for journal classification in SSH.

Commitment 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.

MAIN INNOVATIONS ALREADY IMPLEMENTED:

- **VQR.** In the first and second Evaluation of Research Quality exercise, and, partly, also in the third one (VQR 2015-19), a combination of citations and journal indicators was used to pre-assign any given research output to a specific class of merit. In the new VQR 2020-24, ANVUR continues to promote a responsible use of bibliometric indicators, merely as a tool to support qualitative evaluation, placing greater emphasis on the role of peer review also in bibliometric areas. Furthermore, the number of scientific products per researcher required has been reduced from 3 to 2.5, as part of a gradual shift towards placing a higher emphasis on quality rather than quantity.
- **Journals classification.** Base the journal evaluation on the scientific assessment of peers, with only a very limited role played by journal indicators.

PLANS FOR FUTURE INTERVENTIONS:

- **VQR.** Commitment to further emphasize the qualitative aspect of the evaluation, also considering a further reduction of the number of products to be evaluated.
- **Peer-review training for all ANVUR activities.** Provide guidance to peer-reviewers, instructing them to consider journal-level indicators only in the context of a thorough analysis of the scientific output under consideration, and not as a value per se, also taking into account the international debate.
- **Reform of academic career procedures.** Work in close relation with the Italian Ministry to reform the current rules presiding academic career procedures, according to which a relevant role is still currently attributed to the h-index of individual candidates (albeit limited to STEM and Life Sciences disciplines).

Commitment 4

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

MAIN INNOVATIONS ALREADY IMPLEMENTED:

ANVUR provides rankings of academic Institutions, derived from its periodical research assessment exercises, aimed at the continuous improvement of research at the academic system level. Rankings are specific to each discipline and to the size of the Institutions under consideration. In this context, rankings are considered by the Agency as an appropriate tool to represent in a synthetic way evaluation results to the public.

However, ANVUR does not make use of general rankings produced by third parties for its own assessment of research outputs, or in any other evaluation procedure performed by the Agency.

Commitment 5

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

MAIN INNOVATIONS ALREADY IMPLEMENTED:

- **External Experts.** Starting from VQR 2015-2019, the evaluation process is evaluated by an external group of Experts, in charge of producing an independent evaluation report on the main strength and weakness of the evaluation exercise.
- **CoARA WGs.** ANVUR contributes actively to four CoARA Working Groups (Multilingualism and language biases in research assessment; Reforming Academic Career Assessment; Improving practices in the assessment of research proposals; Evaluating Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) research globally) and to the Italian National Chapter.
- **AGORRA.** ANVUR contributes actively to the global observatory on responsible research assessment (AGORRA), established within the Research on Research Institute (RORI).

PLANS FOR FUTURE INTERVENTIONS:

- **CoARA WGs.** ANVUR will continue to contribute actively to the functioning of CoARA, by participating in CoARA Working Group activities.
- **Improving Research Assessment.** In-kind resources will be dedicated for the internal work needed to review and develop improved research assessment criteria, tools and processes.
- **Further projects.** ANVUR will consider supporting further projects as appear necessary and valuable.

Commitment 6

Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes.

MAIN INNOVATIONS ALREADY IMPLEMENTED:

- **Revision of VQR Criteria.** ANVUR has revised the criteria for its periodic Evaluation of Research Quality (VQR). Specifically, the methodology for evaluating research outputs has been updated to consider efforts to ensure reproducibility, transparency in methods and procedures, and open access to data. This aims to fully valorise the entire research process leading to the final output.
- **Selection and training of reviewers.** For VQR 2020-2024, selection of experts in charge of evaluation has been based on a qualitative evaluation of their scientific merit based on a thorough analysis of their curriculum vitae. Experts are expected to participate to training sessions at the beginning and during the evaluation process.
- **Revisions of criteria for journal assessment.** The new regulation for journal assessment pays growing attention to research ethics, requiring journals to be classified by ANVUR to respect specific ethic rules. Particular attention is also devoted to preventing the inclusion of predatory journals in the ANVUR lists.
- **Revisions of criteria for the initial and periodic assessment of institutions and study programmes.** Growing attention is given to the strategic planning of research activities, introducing institution-departments top-down requirements, paired with department-institution bottom up feedbacks, in order to better define institutional strategies (see the AVA 3 procedures, the so-called Ambito E).

PLANS FOR FUTURE INTERVENTIONS:

- **Continuous updating of evaluation criteria.** ANVUR will continue reviewing research assessment criteria, tools and processes to ensure that these are in line with the ARRA principles and commitments, also in collaboration with national and international stakeholders.
- **National Scientific Qualification (ASN).** ANVUR will work in close contact with the Italian Ministry on reforming career assessment criteria, to promote the correct assessment of inter- and trans-disciplinary research and the responsible use of bibliometric indicators.

Commitment 7

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

MAIN INNOVATIONS ALREADY IMPLEMENTED:

- **VQR Expert Training.** In the new national research assessment exercise, ANVUR has explicitly committed to provide adequate training to the experts in charge of the evaluation. This training is administered both in advance with respect to the starting of the research assessment exercise, and during the assessment process, in order to ensure a common understanding of the criteria set by the Agency and their correct application. The training will also focus on ethical issues concerning evaluation practices, with a particular emphasis on the managing of conflicts of interest and avoiding possible evaluation biases.
- **VQR Transparent Communication.** For the new VQR, ANVUR has made an effort to publish well in advance the general rules presiding the evaluation. More specifically, the Call for the new VQR has been published more than one year ahead of the end of the period that will be considered in the evaluation. Moreover, specific rules set out by disciplinary experts have been published more than six months in advance with respect to date in which the Institutions will start to submit research products for evaluation.

PLANS FOR FUTURE INTERVENTIONS:

- **VQR.** ANVUR will take particular responsibility for addressing ethical issues throughout the evaluation process, ensuring that the rules set out in the provided guidelines will be respected throughout the VQR assessment.
- **Training.** ANVUR will encourage and support Universities to include training on research evaluation methods, open science and research integrity, especially for PhDs and early career researchers.

Commitment 8

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

MAIN INNOVATIONS ALREADY IMPLEMENTED:

- **CoARA WGs.** ANVUR participates to 4 CoARA Working Groups as outlined above, in order to allow exchanging practices and experiences and enable mutual learning.
- **G7.** ANVUR participates to the G7 informal Working Group on research assessment. The member agencies of the Working group organize an annual meeting of their senior representatives responsible for evaluating research/S&T performance. The working group was initially tasked with of exchanging information on systems of research assessment and keeping the Heads apprised of best practices. Since that time, the group has continued to meet to share research assessment/ evaluation practices. These meetings provide a unique opportunity to engage colleagues from evaluation Agencies and granting councils, and to share challenges and best practices.
- **Bilateral and multilateral exchanges.** ANVUR is committed to enhance its international network, promoting collaborations and exchanges with other research evaluation agencies, within and beyond the Coalition.

PLANS FOR FUTURE INTERVENTIONS:

- **Future engagement.** ANVUR will continue to be engaged in various national and international groups that discuss research evaluation practices.
- **Bilateral and multilateral exchanges.** ANVUR will continue to seek and promote exchanges and collaboration with other agencies on a bilateral basis.

Commitment 9

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

PLANS FOR FUTURE INTERVENTIONS:

- **Diffusion of the Action Plan.** This Action Plan will be published on the Agency website and will be officially sent to the Ministry and to all the Italian Institutions, in order to raise awareness on the Agency' commitment to the adherence to CoARA principles and to the implementation of CoARA recommendations.
- **Progresses.** ANVUR will produce a report on a yearly basis on the progress made with this Action Plan within the timeline established in the ARRA.

Commitment 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.

MAIN INNOVATIONS ALREADY IMPLEMENTED:

- **VQR 2015-2019 External Assessment.** Starting from the Evaluation of Research Quality exercise referred to the period 2015-2019 (VQR 2015-2019), ANVUR has appointed a group of international experts in order to provide an external expert assessment of evaluation practices and criteria. The report produced by the experts has been published on the ANVUR website, together with an internal ex-post assessment of evaluation procedures.
- **VQR 2020-2024.** For the next evaluation exercise, referred to the period 2020-2024, ANVUR has formally committed to produce an external assessment at the end of the evaluation, appointing a renewed group of external international experts.
- **Networking.** ANVUR regularly participates in major international scientific conferences worldwide on research evaluation practices, including those organised by [ISSI](#), [AESIS](#), [CHER](#), [STI](#). This participation allows ANVUR officials to stay updated on the state-of-the-art of research in the field and exchange relevant practices.
- **Open Access.** ANVUR provides access to the list of publication outputs and case studies evaluated in the context of the periodical national research assessment exercise, providing open access to the full text when available, to facilitate evidence gathering and research.

PLANS FOR FUTURE INTERVENTIONS:

- **VQR & Open Access.** ANVUR will publish all the relevant details on the publications and case studies submitted for the evaluation in the last periodical research assessment exercise, together with the list and the full descriptions of research infrastructures that will be evaluated in the next research assessment.
- **Networking.** ANVUR will continue to engage in the international scientific debate on research evaluation, in order to use state-of-the-art methodologies in ANVUR current evaluation practices.
- **Insights.** ANVUR will identify the main contributions and recommendations from the projects the Agency is involved with, for research assessment reforms and CoARA work.
- **Further actions.** ANVUR will Identify potential new research and innovation actions needed.



Via Ippolito Nievo, 35 – 00153 Roma

Tel. 06/58317.203

Fax. 06/58317.219 - 122

E-mail segreteria@anvur.it

anvur@pec.anvur.it



www.anvur.it



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