

HR Excellence in Research

Action Plan

Action Plan

Case number

2025IT300593

Name Organisation under review

Università degli Studi di Ferrara

Organisation's contact details

Via Ariosto, 35, Ferrara, Italy, 44121, Italy

1. Organisational Information

Please provide a limited number of key figures for your organisation. Fields marked with * are compulsory.

STAFF & STUDENTS	FTE
Total researchers = staff, fellowship holders, bursary holders, PhD students either full-time or part-time involved in research *	1852
Of whom are international (i.e. foreign nationality) *	181
Of whom are externally funded (i.e. for whom the organisation is host organisation) *	267
Of whom are women *	894
Of whom are R3 or R4 = established or leading researchers with a large degree of autonomy (e.g. holding the status of principal investigator or professor) *	563
Of whom are R2 = recognised researcher (e.g. postdoctoral researcher, junior researcher) *	414
Of whom are R1 = first stage researcher (e.g. doctoral candidate, research apprentice) *	875
Total number of students (if relevant) *	28710
Total number of staff (including management, administrative, teaching, and research staff) *	1403
RESEARCH FUNDING (figures for the most recent fiscal year)	€
Total annual organisational budget	26769812,35
Annual organisational direct government funding (designated for research)	14836030,42
Annual competitive government-sourced funding (designated for research, obtained in competition with other organisations – including EU funding)	7343608,08
Annual funding from private, non-government sources, designated for research	4590173,85

ORGANISATIONAL PROFILE (a very brief description of your organisation, max. 100 words)

The University of Ferrara is a public, multidisciplinary institution, deeply rooted in its territory and oriented toward research, education, and the 'third mission'. Unife promotes a culture of quality, evaluation, and continuous improvement, actively involving students, staff, institutions, and external stakeholders. The University offers 72 degree programs, 14 doctoral programs, and 39 specialization schools, and is organized into 13 departments and one faculty. In the healthcare sector, it plays a strategic role in training medical and healthcare personnel, also within the framework of the evolution of Ferrara's hospital and territorial healthcare system.

2. Strengths and weaknesses of the current practice

Please provide an overview of the organisation in terms of the current strengths and weaknesses of the current practice under the four thematic headings of the European Charter for Researchers at your organisation.

Note: Click on the name of each of the four thematic headings of the European Charter for Researchers to open the editor and provide your answer.

Strengths and Weaknesses (max. 800 words)

Unife presents a solid institutional framework regarding ethics, research integrity, gender equality, and open science. The University has adopted a Code of Ethics and Conduct applicable to the entire university community and, since 2018, a Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, supported by a committee tasked with assessing potential violations. More recently, the Research Ethics Committee was established, aiming to safeguard the rights, dignity, integrity, and well-being of human beings involved in research activities, ensure respect for living organisms and environmental protection, and promote scientific freedom and ethics.

Overall, the implementation of policies concerning ethics, integrity, gender, and open science can be considered advanced at the institutional and regulatory level, but still in an operational consolidation phase. Indeed, while the University already has active codes, bodies, tools, and procedures, some measures were introduced only recently and require further dissemination, training, and monitoring to be fully internalized by the academic community. From this perspective, the Action Plan plays a central role in transforming the existing regulatory framework into operational practices that are shared and permanently integrated into university life.

A significant strength lies in research freedom, which is enshrined in the Statute and the Code of Ethics and confirmed by internal perception: 80% of researchers believe that Unife guarantees the freedom to formulate research questions, develop theories, and utilize appropriate methodologies. Scientific integrity is recognized as a cornerstone of researchers' professional conduct, founded on rigor, transparency, and responsibility. Furthermore, the University provides tools and procedures for intellectual property management and occupational safety, also through dedicated platforms such as Sosia and Unifesicura.

However, certain areas for improvement remain. The Code of Conduct for Research Integrity needs updating to fully incorporate the most recent national and European guidelines, and to make it more accessible to the international community through an English version. In addition, internal surveys highlight that awareness of the Code of Ethics, the European Charter for Researchers, and dedicated research integrity tools is not yet fully widespread. For this reason, the Action Plan includes training activities aimed at PhD students and researchers on ethical principles, research integrity, and European, national, and internal regulations. Unife also intends to strengthen oversight on research security and dual-use issues by analyzing the MUR (Ministry of University and Research) guidelines, defining internal procedures, establishing a dedicated working group, organizing training activities, and drafting University guidelines.

Regarding gender equality, Unife has integrated its policies into its main strategic documents, particularly into the PIAO (Integrated Activity and Organization Plan), which includes the Gender Equality Plan and the Positive Action Plan. Safeguard bodies and figures are active, including the Vice-Rector for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, the Single Guarantee Committee (CUG), the Equality Council, and the Confidential Counsellor. Planned actions include diversity management training, initiatives to promote inclusive work environments, the progressive integration of a gender perspective into teaching, and measures supporting parenthood and caregiving

activities. The latter include agreements with daycares, preschools, summer camps, and sports clubs, the dissemination of information on parental leave protections—with a specific focus on fathers—and priority criteria in teaching schedules for staff returning from maternity or paternity leave, or who act as caregivers.

A distinctive initiative is the AURORA anti-violence desk, a free and confidential service aimed at women in the university community experiencing situations of violence, even outside the academic context. The Action Plan intends to enhance the dissemination of information regarding the desk, reporting procedures for discriminatory behavior, harassment, and sexual harassment, and other available support channels. Nevertheless, some critical issues remain: although 73% of the staff perceives equality as substantially achieved, objective data show a higher concentration of women in more precarious positions and at the lower levels of the hierarchy. It is therefore necessary to investigate the structural causes of this gap, also in relation to the lower female presence in certain STEM areas, and to take action to smooth out the existing disparity.

Finally, Unife boasts a long tradition of adherence to Open Access principles, as evidenced by its signing of the Messina Declaration and the Berlin Declaration. Key tools include the SFERA research catalog, the UnifeZen community on Zenodo for data deposition according to FAIR principles, the Open Science Commission, and the fund for ethical Open Access publications. The University also participates in CoARA, promoting a responsible research assessment oriented toward quality, integrity, and collaboration.

Strengths and Weaknesses (max. 800 words)

Unife presents a recruitment and career progression system founded on a solid regulatory, procedural, and digital basis. Hiring and advancement procedures are governed by national legislation, specifically Law 240/2010, and are inspired by OTM-R principles, meaning open, transparent, and merit-based recruitment. One of the University's main strengths is the digitalization of procedures, which ensures the traceability, publicity, and accessibility of the various selection phases through dedicated portals. Calls for applications include information on admission requirements, applicants' rights and duties, salary levels where applicable, committee composition, and evaluation criteria. This information is published in the "Selection Calls" section of the institutional website, in compliance with administrative transparency regulations. Furthermore, candidates can access competition records in accordance with regulations on the right of access to administrative documents.

An additional positive element concerns the focus on inclusivity. Selection procedures include specific provisions for candidates with disabilities or specific learning disabilities (SLD), aiming to guarantee equal opportunities during examinations and evaluation. The University thus possesses a formally sound procedural framework, consistent with the principles of impartiality, transparency, and accessibility. The academic career path, from early-stage researchers to full professors, is also embedded within the national framework of the tenure track and National Scientific Qualification (ASN). In this context, Unife also registers a high employment success rate among its PhD graduates, standing at 96.1% according to AlmaLaurea data, a figure that confirms the University's capacity to train qualified profiles highly marketable within the research and labor system. Selection committees are established according to criteria of competence, transparency, and impartiality. The University is also committed to promoting gender balance in committee composition, in line with national legislation and the University Code of Ethics. This structure represents a strength, as it contributes to reinforcing the quality and legitimacy of the procedures. However, the presence of external members could be further incentivized to increase the perception of independence, openness, and scientific exchange in selection and advancement procedures. Similarly, information on how to access the full evaluation of the committee could be made more explicit in the calls, thereby offering candidates clearer feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of their applications. Regarding evaluation, Unife has initiated a process aimed at moving beyond approaches based exclusively on quantitative indicators, such as the number of publications, citations, or H-index. The objective is to recognize a broader range of activities and skills, including the quality of scientific output, research group management, participation in multidisciplinary projects, international mobility, patent development, technology transfer, the Third Mission, and Public Engagement. This approach is consistent with the most recent European trajectories regarding responsible research assessment. This is an important transition, as it allows for the enhancement of the diversity of academic profiles and prevents career progression from being driven solely by bibliometric metrics.

Nevertheless, some critical areas remain. A primary area for improvement concerns the internationalization of recruitment. Although PhD procedures are effectively bilingual, several calls for senior positions are still published predominantly or exclusively in Italian. This language barrier can limit the University's ability to attract international candidates and reduce the visibility of career opportunities abroad. Added to this is the need to make career prospects, working conditions, and professional development opportunities more explicit in position descriptions. The goal should not be limited to the translation of calls but should include a more active promotion of Unife as an international, competitive, and attractive research environment. A second critical element relates to the fragmentation of pre-role pathways and job insecurity. Recent legislative changes have introduced a more complex contractual framework, with short-term appointments and contracts that can make medium-to-long-term scientific planning more difficult. In this scenario, the University is called upon to strengthen support measures for early-career figures, also through onboarding actions, orientation, mentoring, competitive grant writing training, and support for international mobility. The latter, in particular, is not yet consistently and formally recognized as a specific professional value, just as room for improvement remains in the recognition of intersectoral mobility, CV discontinuities, and the variety of individual career paths. Overall, Unife possesses a solid, transparent, and digitalized recruitment and advancement system, with clear regulatory foundations and tools aligned with OTM-R principles. The main areas for improvement concern the internationalization of procedures, greater visibility of career prospects, the strengthening of external presence on committees, and the consolidation of qualitative and multidimensional evaluation criteria. From this perspective, the Action Plan can contribute to transforming a framework that is already robust at the regulatory level into a system that is more open, attractive, and consistent with European best practices.

Strengths and Weaknesses (max. 800 words)

The University of Ferrara presents an articulated framework regarding working conditions, characterized by a solid regulatory, organizational, and technological foundation. The University operates in compliance with national legislation, specifically Law 240/2010, regarding contract types and academic career paths, including RTD-A (junior assistant professor), RTD-B (senior assistant professor), and RTT (tenure-track assistant professor). These instruments define regulated tenure-track pathways and access to permanent positions. Doctoral scholarships have also been adjusted to ministerial standards, confirming the University's commitment to ensuring conditions consistent with the national regulatory framework. Alongside these positive elements, however, critical issues remain concerning recent legislative developments. Law 79/2025 introduced short-term research appointments lasting between one and three years, contributing to making the academic career path more fragmented and less stable in the long term. Such a scenario can affect the continuity of scientific activities, project planning capacity, and the possibility—especially for early-career figures—of building predictable and sustainable professional paths.

Unife has updated its internal regulations concerning intellectual property and possesses advanced technological tools for safety and risk prevention. These include the Sosia platform, dedicated to the mapping of spaces, premises, and risks, and Unifesicura, designed for e-learning training in occupational health and safety. These tools represent a strength as they contribute to making safety management in work and research environments more systematic, traceable, and accessible.

Furthermore, the University has developed structured policies for the dissemination and exploitation of research results. Key measures include the mandatory deposition of scientific outputs in the SFERA catalog, the use of the UnifeZen community on Zenodo for research data deposition, and dedicated funds for Open Access publishing. These tools foster transparency, traceability, and accessibility of scientific production, improving researchers' operational conditions and strengthening the visibility of research results.

Public Engagement (PE) at Unife is recognized as a strategic component of the Third Mission, rather than a mere voluntary dissemination activity. PE activities are subject to periodic evaluation by ANVUR and contribute to measuring the social impact of research, the University's prestige, and the overall assessment of its activities. Unife supports these initiatives also through dedicated funding, particularly in contexts where the valorization of research is closely linked to public and territorial involvement.

Although over 74% of researchers perceive encouragement from the University to communicate their results, a fully widespread awareness of the concrete opportunities available has not yet emerged. This critical issue is also attributable to the fact that many tools and funding opportunities were introduced only recently and have not yet been fully internalized by the academic community. Therefore, the Action Plan includes training activities aimed at strengthening the awareness of Public Engagement as a form of research valorization—not as an additional activity, but as a tool to increase the impact, visibility, and social value of scientific work.

In terms of inclusion, well-being, and equal opportunities, Unife possesses structured safeguard figures and bodies, including the Officer for the integration of people with disabilities, the Single Guarantee Committee (CUG), and the Confidential Counsellor. Numerous actions from the Gender Equality Plan are also integrated into the HRS4R Action Plan, aiming to improve the working conditions and practices of teaching and research staff. These include the Aurora desk, dedicated to reporting discriminatory behavior and sexual harassment, measures supporting the return from maternity leave, funds to encourage participation in conferences and academic activities, priority in establishing teaching schedules for those returning from maternity or paternity leave or performing caregiving duties, and the possibility of delivering up to one-third of university ECTS credits through online teaching.

In addition to these initiatives, there are agreements with daycares, preschools, summer camps, and sports clubs, aimed at offering parenting support services during school closure periods. However, results from the internal questionnaire reveal a still limited knowledge of certain aspects related to social security, sick leave, and leaves of absence. The University intends to progressively bridge this information gap through specific training actions outlined in the Action Plan. Furthermore, a public tender is currently underway for a health insurance policy in favor of research staff, with the objective of strengthening the internal welfare system and further improving working conditions.

Strengths and Weaknesses (max. 800 words)

The University of Ferrara supports research career development through a set of instruments oriented toward professional growth, mobility, transversal training, and collaboration with the productive system. The University promotes pathways that accompany researchers and PhD students through the various stages of their careers, from the doctoral level to more advanced roles, fostering access to educational, project, and professional opportunities both within academia and outside the university. From this perspective, talent development is understood not only as advancement within the academic career but also as the capacity to build competitive scientific profiles open to internationalization, multidisciplinary, and interaction with the territory and businesses.

A significant strength lies in the promotion of international, intersectoral, and intranational mobility. PhD students can carry out periods abroad through scholarship increases, research budgets, Erasmus+ funds, and the *Fondo Giovani* (Youth Fund); in certain doctoral programs, international experience is integrated as an essential part of the curriculum. Research contract holders may also spend periods abroad, subject to authorization, and the University encourages participation in competitive European programs, such as the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, which foster experiences in other countries and sectors. Furthermore, Unife hosts visiting professors, visiting researchers, and fellows, thereby strengthening the international openness of the research environment.

Particular attention is also paid to collaboration with the business world and applied research. Thanks to PON and PNRR funds, numerous researchers and PhD students have been able to undertake training periods within companies, often lasting at least six months. The University also promotes industrial doctorate and higher apprenticeship pathways, in which training is co-designed with companies and can include a placement within the enterprise lasting from 12 to 18 months. During these experiences, support tools such as the reimbursement of mission costs, tutoring, and dual supervision are guaranteed. These initiatives contribute to strengthening the professional profile of young researchers and fostering their employment integration into non-academic contexts as well. Career support is further structured through supervision, mentoring, and training activities. Researchers are supported by scientific supervisors who guide them in defining research objectives, accessing competitive calls, and developing scientific project design. For PhD students, the "PhD Skills Maps" pathway is active, aiming to map acquired competencies, guide their utilization relative to professional opportunities, and stimulate the drafting of individual career plans. The University also offers training in transversal and soft skills, with the goal of making research profiles more flexible, self-aware, and marketable across diverse employment sectors. Access to national and European funds from the earliest stages of the career represents an additional element supporting researchers' growth.

Nevertheless, certain critical areas remain. A primary area for improvement concerns the adequate recognition of Third Mission activities within the career path. Technology transfer, public engagement, collaboration with the territory, and knowledge valorization are not yet fully considered within professional advancement criteria. This critical issue is partly linked to the national framework, in which

such activities do not always find adequate recognition within evaluation, funding, and progression mechanisms. At the local level, this requires awareness-raising actions and the progressive integration of these aspects into the University's evaluative culture.

A second critical issue involves the balance between teaching and research activities. Results from the internal questionnaire reveal that approximately 60% of researchers believe teaching commitments are not fully compatible with the timelines required to carry out scientific activity. This figure signals the need to carefully monitor the distribution of workloads, especially for early-career figures, for whom the continuity of scientific output, participation in competitive calls, and the construction of international networks are essential elements of professional development.

The Action Plan outlines targeted measures to address these critical issues. On one hand, Unife intends to strengthen awareness of the value of the Third Mission as an integral part of the researcher's profile, promoting communication campaigns also aimed at private companies to raise awareness of the research staff's skills and to increase the number of partnerships and collaborations with external stakeholders. On the other hand, actions are planned to review the organization of teaching activities, taking into account both the number of hours dedicated to frontal teaching and the overall sustainability of the educational offering. The University also intends to evaluate the possibility of introducing reward mechanisms for the quality of teaching and research, in compatibility with current legislation. Overall, the objective is to build a more integrated, multidisciplinary, and attractive ecosystem, capable of valorizing researchers at all stages of their professional path.

3. Actions

The Action Plan and HR Excellence in Research strategy must be published in an easily accessible location of the organisation's website.

Please provide the web link(s) to the organisation's action plan / strategy for the implementation of the principles of the European Charter for Researchers. Multiple links must be comma-separated.

Please fill in the list of all individual actions to be undertaken in your organisation's HR Excellence in Research strategy to address the weaknesses or strengths identified in the gap analysis. It is recommended that the listed actions are concise but detailed enough for the assessors to determine the level of ambition, engagement, and planning for the implementation process. Please ensure that you provide a detailed plan, with precise and quantifiable KPIs, not just an enumeration of the institution's action.

Note: Choose one or more of the principles automatically retrieved from the gap analysis with their ratings.

Proposed actions

Action 1

Updating of the Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, in order to incorporate the most recent national and European guidelines on research ethics and integrity, and preparation of the English-language version.

GAP Principle(s)

(+/-) 1. ETHICS AND RESEARCH INTEGRITY

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

1.1, S2 2026; 1.2, S2 2027

Responsible

Unit

Indicator(s) / Target(s)

Vice-Rector
for
Research;
Director of
the
Research
and Third
Mission Area

Code of Conduct for Research Integrity updated and published on the institutional website (sub-action 1.1);
English-language version of the Code published on the institutional website (sub-action 1.2)

Proposed actions

Action 2

Analysis of the MUR (Ministry of University and Research) guidelines on research integrity and security, aimed at defining a procedural workflow for managing dual-use research cases and drafting University guidelines

GAP Principle(s)

(+/-) 1. ETHICS AND RESEARCH INTEGRITY

(+/-) 15. CONTRACTUAL AND LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

2.1, S2 2026; 2.2, S2 2026 and S2 2027; 2.3 and 2.4, S2 2027

Responsible

Unit

Indicator(s) / Target(s)

Vice-Rector for Research; Director of the Research and Third Mission Area

Working group formally established by decree/appointment (sub-action 2.1); two training sessions organized during the two-year period (sub-action 2.2); University guidelines drafted and approved/published (sub-action 2.3); webpage launched to provide visibility to the adopted measures and intranet section activated to share templates and operational documents (sub-action 2.4)

Proposed actions

Action 3

Training aimed at PhD students and researchers on ethical principles and research integrity, and on the relevant European, national, and internal Unife regulations

GAP Principle(s)

(+/-) 1. ETHICS AND RESEARCH INTEGRITY

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

S2 2026; S2 2027;
S1 2028

Responsible

Unit

Indicator(s) / Target(s)

Director of
the Institute
for Advanced
Studies
(IUSS);
Director of
the
Research
and Third
Mission Area

At least 1 training session delivered per year, with materials made available to participants, tracking of attendance by target category, and administration of a satisfaction/learning questionnaire.

Proposed actions

Action 4

Assessment of the extension of the University Fund for Open Access publishing incentives to additional types of research outputs, such as monographs and book chapters, and assessment of the consequent expansion of the Fund's allocation, subject to available resources

GAP Principle(s)

(+/-) 3. OPEN SCIENCE

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

4.1 and 4.2, S1 2028

Responsible

Unit

Indicator(s) / Target(s)

Chair of the Open Science Committee; Director of the Research and Third Mission Area

Extension of the Fund to monographs and book chapters assessed and, where approved, incorporated into the relevant regulation/notice (sub-action 4.1); proposal for the expansion of the Fund's allocation prepared and submitted to the competent bodies, subject to available resources (sub-action 4.2)

Proposed actions

Action 5

Valorization of research through training and information activities dedicated to Open Science, the dissemination of research results, the correct use of available tools, and the design of Public Engagement initiatives

GAP Principle(s)

(+/-) 3. OPEN SCIENCE

(+/-) 16. DISSEMINATION AND EXPLOITATION OF RESULTS

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

S2 2026; S2 2027;
S1 2028

Responsible

Unit

Indicator(s) / Target(s)

Vice-Rector
for
Research;
Director of
the
Research
and Third
Mission Area

At least 2 training sessions delivered per year, also capitalizing on the training session already active on the design of Public Engagement initiatives, with materials made available online and tracking of attendance by target category

Proposed actions

Action 6

Support for parenting and caregiving activities through: the signing of agreements with nurseries, kindergartens, summer camps, and sports clubs aimed at teaching and research staff (sub-action 6.1); the creation and dissemination of information material on legal and procedural protections regarding the use of parental leave, with particular attention to fathers (sub-action 6.2); the promotion—consistent with teaching organization and current regulations—of priority criteria in defining teaching schedules for teaching and research staff returning from maternity/paternity leave or acting as caregivers, including through the use of online teaching up to the limit of one-third of the university credits (CFUs) of the study programme, where applicable (sub-action 6.3)

GAP Principle(s)

(+/-) 4. GENDER EQUALITY

(+/-) 13. WORKING CONDITIONS, FUNDING AND SALARIES

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

6.1, 6.2 and 6.3, S2 2026 and S2 2027

Responsible

Unit

Indicator(s) / Target(s)

Vice-Rector for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policies Coordination Office

At least 1 agreement signed per year (sub-action 6.1); at least 1 annual communication or the creation/updating of an intranet page dedicated to the use of parental leave and parenting support tools (sub-action 6.2); annual monitoring of the submitted requests for scheduling/teaching flexibility and of the organizational solutions adopted, consistent with teaching, regulatory, and organizational constraints (sub-action 6.3)

Proposed actions

Action 7

Raising awareness on gender equality through: training aimed at managerial staff and individuals with organizational responsibilities, focused on diversity management and the promotion of inclusive working environments (sub-action 7.1); organizing thematic events to promote awareness and implementation of the Gender Equality Plan (sub-action 7.2); progressively integrating a gender perspective into teaching, in order to foster a cultural shift right from the beginning of the university path (sub-action 7.3)

GAP Principle(s)

(+/-) 4. GENDER EQUALITY

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

7.1 and 7.2, S2 2026 and S2 2027; 7.3, S1 2028

Responsible Unit

Indicator(s) / Target(s)

Vice-Rector for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Inclusion Policies Coordination Office

At least 1 event/training session per year aimed at managerial staff and/or individuals with organizational responsibilities (sub-actions 7.1 and 7.2); at least 1 course, training module, or educational initiative introduced or updated annually incorporating contents related to the gender perspective (sub-action 7.3).

Proposed actions

Action 8

Promotion of measures supporting equal opportunities in career development, through the allocation of funds earmarked for equal opportunity projects to teaching and research staff returning from maternity leave, in order to incentivize participation in conferences and other academic activities.

GAP Principle(s)

(+/-) 4. GENDER EQUALITY

(+/-) 13. WORKING CONDITIONS, FUNDING AND SALARIES

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

8.1, S2 2026; 8.2, S2 2026 and S2 2027

Responsible

Unit

Indicator(s) / Target(s)

Vice-Rector for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Inclusion Policies Coordination Office

Support measure activated and communicated to the academic community (sub-action 8.1); annual monitoring of requests submitted, evaluated, and accepted, as well as of the resources allocated to support participation in conferences and other academic activities by teaching and research staff returning from maternity leave, with the objective of accepting the highest possible number of eligible requests, subject to available resources (sub-action 8.2)

Proposed actions

Action 9

Strengthening knowledge and awareness of the regulations and procedures governing the role and responsibilities of researchers, working conditions, safety, and the proper conduct of research activities (sub-action 9.1), as well as obligations related to intellectual property and research funding strategies and mechanisms (sub-action 9.2)

GAP Principle(s)

(+/-) 6. THE RESEARCHER

(+/-) 13. WORKING CONDITIONS, FUNDING AND SALARIES

(+/-) 15. CONTRACTUAL AND LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

9.1 and 9.2, S2 2026, S2 2027 and S1 2028

Proposed actions

Responsible Unit	Indicator(s) / Target(s)
Deputy Rector and Director of the Human Resources, Performance, and Simplification Area (sub-action 9.1); Vice-Rector for Research and Director of the Research and Third Mission Area (sub-action 9.2).	At least 1 training/information session per year aimed at PhD students and researchers, focusing on working conditions, safety, professional responsibilities, and contractual and legal obligations, with materials made available to participants and tracking of attendance by target category (sub-action 9.1). At least 1 training/information session per year aimed at PhD students and researchers, focusing on research funding strategies and opportunities, and intellectual property, with materials made available to participants and tracking of attendance by target category (sub-action 9.2).

Proposed actions

Action 10

Incentivizing and valorizing mobility experiences through: the mapping and valorization of measures already active for the international mobility of PhD students, including the annual mobility call, the dedicated budget, and its recognition in the doctoral career path/supplement (sub-action 10.1); assessment of the budgetary provision of specific funds to promote the extra-EU mobility of additional categories of researchers, subject to available resources (sub-action 10.2); drafting of internal guidelines for the recognition of international, intersectoral, and interdisciplinary mobility experiences in professional development and career paths, within the limits allowed by current regulations (sub-action 10.3)

GAP Principle(s)

(-/+) 7. FREE CIRCULATION OF RESEARCHERS

(-/+) 17. VALUING DIVERSE RESEARCH CAREERS

(+/-) 18. CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND ADVICE

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

10.1, S2 2026; 10.2, S2 2027; 10.3, S1 2028

Responsible Unit Indicator(s) / Target(s)

Vice-Rector for the Internationalization of Research;
Director of the Human Resources, Performance, and Simplification Area

Mapping of active measures for PhD student mobility and relative annual reporting (sub-action 10.1); feasibility study for the possible establishment or strengthening of dedicated funds for extra-EU mobility for additional categories of researchers (sub-action 10.2); internal guidelines drafted for the recognition of international, intersectoral, and interdisciplinary mobility experiences in professional development and career paths (sub-action 10.3).

Proposed actions

Action 11

Establishment of a working group, in coherence with the principles of CoARA and responsible research assessment, aimed at analyzing the evaluation, selection, and career progression practices of researchers, and identifying ways to valorize—within the limits of current regulations—research quality, collaboration, interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, mobility, non-linear career paths, Open Science practices, Third Mission, and other relevant scientific and professional contributions.

GAP Principle(s)

(-/+) 9. RESEARCHERS' ASSESSMENT

(+/-) 10. RECRUITMENT

(+/-) 11. SELECTION

(-/+) 17. VALUING DIVERSE RESEARCH CAREERS

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

11.1, S1 2027; 11.2, S1 2028

Responsible

Unit

Indicator(s) / Target(s)

CoARA Delegate; Director of the Research and Third Mission Area

Working group established and formalized (sub-action 11.1); analysis document prepared, including a mapping of the applicable regulatory framework and a proposal of internal recommendations to valorize a plurality of contributions in evaluation, selection, and career progression procedures, within the limits allowed by current regulations (sub-action 11.2)

Proposed actions

Action 12

Strengthening the publicity, accessibility, and international attractiveness of recruitment procedures through: the drafting of calls, notices, or essential information in English for positions aimed at researchers, with particular attention to R2–R4 positions; the publication of opportunities on international channels, where relevant; the improvement of links to University regulations and relevant legislation; and the progressive reduction of administrative, linguistic, and economic obstacles that may complicate applications from foreign researchers

GAP Principle(s)

(+/-) 10. RECRUITMENT

(+/-) 11. SELECTION

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

12.1, S2 2027; 12.2, S1 2027; 12.3, S1 2028

Responsible

Unit

Indicator(s) / Target(s)

Deputy Rector; Director of the Human Resources, Performance, and Simplification Area

Preparation of a bilingual format or a substantial summary in English for calls aimed at researchers and, for R2–R4 procedures, publication of the job vacancy on EURAXESS or other international channels with the relevant information in English (sub-action 12.1); inclusion in the calls or dedicated pages of updated links to University regulations and relevant legislation, also in English where available (sub-action 12.2); mapping of the requirements for international candidates and identification of possible measures for simplification, digitalization, and the reduction of economic or administrative burdens, within the limits allowed by current regulations (sub-action 12.3).

Proposed actions

Action 13

Promotion, where compatible with current regulations, of greater openness and diversification of selection committees, through the presence of external members from outside Unife, potentially from foreign institutions, and the monitoring of gender balance in the composition of the committees, with particular attention to procedures less constrained by national legislation

GAP Principle(s)

(+/-) 11. SELECTION

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

13.1, S2 2027; 13.2, S1 2028

Responsible

Unit

Indicator(s) / Target(s)

Deputy Rector; Director of the Human Resources, Performance, and Simplification Area

Mapping of 2024 and 2025 procedures to verify the presence of external members, potential international members, and members of different genders on selection committees (sub-action 13.1); drafting of internal guidelines or operational instructions to foster, where possible, a more open and diversified composition of selection committees, in compliance with current regulations (sub-action 13.2)

Proposed actions

Action 14

Promotion of further transparency practices in selection procedures, through the strengthening of the information available in calls and dedicated pages, with particular reference to evaluation criteria, stages of the procedure, communication of results, and procedures for accessing administrative documentation

GAP Principle(s)

(+/-) 11. SELECTION

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

S2 2027

Responsible

Unit

Indicator(s) / Target(s)

Deputy Rector;
Director of the Human Resources, Performance, and Simplification Area

Inclusion in the calls and/or dedicated pages of clear instructions on the procedures for accessing administrative records, evaluation criteria, stages of the procedure, and communication of results

Proposed actions

Action 15

Promotion of the valorization of mobility experiences in selection and career advancement processes, through a feasibility study on the application—within the limits of current regulations—of the provisions of Article 5 of Ministerial Decree 330/2022 regarding the recognition of research activities and results obtained during secondment periods at companies

GAP Principle(s)

(-/+) 7. FREE CIRCULATION OF RESEARCHERS

(+/-) 12. CAREER PROGRESSION

(-/+) 17. VALUING DIVERSE RESEARCH CAREERS

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

S1 2028

Responsible

Unit

Indicator(s) / Target(s)

Deputy Rector;
Director of the Human Resources, Performance, and Simplification Area

Report on the feasibility study prepared, including an analysis of the applicable regulatory framework and the identification of any operational methods to valorize mobility and secondment experiences at companies in selection and career advancement procedures, where allowed by current regulations

Proposed actions

Action 16

Dissemination of existing procedures for reporting discriminatory behavior, harassment, and sexual harassment, as well as information regarding the University Anti-Violence Desk 'AURORA' and other available support channels

GAP Principle(s)

(+/-) 4. GENDER EQUALITY

(+/-) 13. WORKING CONDITIONS, FUNDING AND SALARIES

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

16.1 and 16.2, S2 2026, S2 2027 and S1 2028

Responsible

Unit

Indicator(s) / Target(s)

Vice-Rector for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Inclusion Policies Coordination Office

At least 1 information communication per semester and/or 1 training/information event per year (sub-action 16.1); webpage/intranet updated with reporting procedures, contacts, available services, and informative materials, also in English where relevant (sub-action 16.2).

Proposed actions

Action 17

Coordinated dissemination of information regarding the services available at Unife, the rights and duties of researchers, the main safeguards and applicable procedures, as well as the tax incentives provided for the return of professors and researchers from abroad

GAP Principle(s)

(-/+) 7. FREE CIRCULATION OF RESEARCHERS

(+/-) 13. WORKING CONDITIONS, FUNDING AND SALARIES

(+/-) 15. CONTRACTUAL AND LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

17.1, S2 2026 and S2 2027; 17.2, S1 2028

Responsible

Unit

Indicator(s) / Target(s)

Deputy Rector; Director of the Financial Management Area

At least 1 training/information session per year aimed at PhD students and newly hired staff, with materials made available online (sub-action 17.1); creation of a webpage/intranet or an updated document repository, also in English where relevant, to consult integrated information on available services, safeguards, rights/duties, procedures, and tax incentives (sub-action 17.2)

Proposed actions

Action 18

Strengthening of actions in favor of improving working conditions through: a feasibility study for the activation or strengthening of co-working spaces and tools to support research activity, collaboration, and organizational well-being (sub-action 18.1); activation of forms of supplementary healthcare in favor of teaching and research staff, in coherence with current regulations and the determinations of the competent bodies (sub-action 18.2).

GAP Principle(s)

(+/-) 13. WORKING CONDITIONS, FUNDING AND SALARIES

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

18.1, S2 2027; 18.2, S2 2026

Responsible

Unit

Indicator(s) / Target(s)

Deputy

Rector;

Director of the Human Resources, Performance, and Simplification Area

Feasibility study for a pilot project concerning co-working spaces and support tools for research activity prepared (sub-action 18.1); administrative procedures launched and supplementary health insurance policy activated for teaching and research staff (sub-action 18.2)

Proposed actions

Action 19

Promotion of the valorization of Third Mission activities, technology transfer, public-private collaboration, and sustainability-oriented research in the professional development of researchers—within the limits allowed by current regulations and applicable evaluation criteria—through communication campaigns aimed at private companies and external stakeholders, with the purpose of raising awareness about the expertise of Unife research staff, increasing partnership opportunities, and strengthening existing collaborations. The action also includes the mapping and valorization of research products, projects, and expertise linked to environmental, economic, and social sustainability, including through institutional tools for research monitoring and cataloging

GAP Principle(s)

(+/-) 12. CAREER PROGRESSION

(+/-) 16. DISSEMINATION AND EXPLOITATION OF RESULTS

(-/+) 17. VALUING DIVERSE RESEARCH CAREERS

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

19.1 and 19.2, S2 2027; 19.3, S1 2028

Responsible

Unit

Indicator(s) / Target(s)

Vice-Rector for Third Mission; Director of the Research and Third Mission Area

At least 1 new partnership or public-private collaboration launched during the two-year period (sub-action 19.1); implementation of at least 1 communication or networking initiative aimed at private companies and external stakeholders to promote the expertise of Unife research staff (sub-action 19.2); mapping of research products/projects/expertise linked to environmental, economic, and social sustainability prepared or updated, including through institutional tools for research monitoring and cataloging (sub-action 19.3)

Proposed actions

Action 20

Implementation of continuous professional development for researchers and PhD students through: organization of structured training sessions on transferable skills, professional development, career planning, and skills useful both within and outside the academic context (sub-action 20.1); review of the organization of teaching activities, taking into account both the number of hours dedicated by researchers to frontal teaching and the overall sustainability of Unife's educational offering, as well as the balance between teaching, research, and training (sub-action 20.2); a feasibility study for the introduction of reward mechanisms for the quality of teaching, research, and institutional activities, financed by University funds and in compliance with current regulations (sub-action 20.3); strengthening of supervision and mentoring practices through the drafting of operational guidelines and/or training sessions aimed at supervisors, tutors, and scientific coordinators, with particular attention to supporting R1–R2 researchers, periodic feedback, conflict management, and professional development (sub-action 20.4)

GAP Principle(s)

(+/-) 13. WORKING CONDITIONS, FUNDING AND SALARIES

(+/-) 18. CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND ADVICE

(+/-) 19. CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

20.1, S2 2026 and S2 2027; 20.2, S1 2028; 20.3, S2 2027; 20.4, S1 2028

Responsible

Unit

Indicator(s) / Target(s)

Deputy Rector; Director of the Human Resources, Performance, and Simplification Area

At least 2 training sessions per year on transferable skills and professional development, with materials made available online and attendance tracking by target category (sub-action 20.1); report on the outcomes of the review of teaching activity organization and on the balance between teaching loads, research activities, and the sustainability of the educational offering (sub-action 20.2); feasibility study prepared on the introduction of reward mechanisms financed by University funds, in compliance with current regulations (sub-action 20.3); operational guidelines and/or a dedicated training session on supervision and mentoring prepared/implemented, with reference to supervisors, tutors, and scientific coordinators of R1–R2 researchers (sub-action 20.4)

Proposed actions

Action 21

Strengthening the skills of faculty members with institutional or managerial responsibilities in public administration management applied to research, with particular reference to administrative procedures, contracts, procurement, funding management, reporting, transparency, anti-corruption, and privacy.

GAP Principle(s)

(+/-) 6. THE RESEARCHER

(+/-) 13. WORKING CONDITIONS, FUNDING AND SALARIES

(+/-) 15. CONTRACTUAL AND LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)

S2 2027 and S1 2028

Responsible

Unit

Indicator(s) / Target(s)

Deputy Rector; Director of the Human Resources, Performance, and Simplification Area

At least 1 training/update session per year aimed at faculty members with institutional and managerial responsibilities, with materials made available and attendance tracking

Unselected principles:

(++) 2. FREEDOM OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH (++) 5. EMBRACING DIVERSITY (++) 8. SUSTAINABILITY OF RESEARCH

(+/-) 14. STABILITY OF EMPLOYMENT (++) 20. SUPERVISION AND MENTORING

The establishment of an open recruitment policy is a key element in the strategy for the implementation of the principles of the European Charter for Researchers. Please also indicate how your organisation will use the OTM-R toolkit and how you intend to implement / are implementing the principles of OTM-R. It is helpful to include a brief commentary demonstrating this implementation even if there is some overlap with the actions listed above. If this is the case, please link the OTM-R checklist with the overall action plan (max. 1000 words).*

Ecco una traduzione precisa, rigorosa e formalmente allineata al lessico istituzionale utilizzato dalla Commissione Europea per la rendicontazione dei processi *Human Resources Strategy for Researchers* (HRS4R).

The definition of an open, transparent, and merit-based recruitment policy represents a central element for Unife within the HRS4R process and the implementation of the principles of the European Charter for Researchers. The University does not currently have a single, standalone document dedicated exclusively to the OTM-R policy; however, these principles are already incorporated into the applicable national legislation, the Statute, internal regulations, and administrative practices governing the recruitment of professors, researchers, research fellows, contract holders, and PhD students. All regulations and procedures-related information are published online, ensuring accessibility and transparency. The OTM-R checklist has therefore allowed for the systematization of existing practices and, at the same time, the identification of areas for improvement to be linked directly to the HRS4R Action Plan.

A primary strength concerns the digitalization of procedures. Unife utilizes e-recruitment tools, specifically the PICA platform, for the submission of applications and document management. This reduces the administrative burden for candidates, improves the traceability of procedures, and reinforces the integrity of the process. Calls for applications are published on the main institutional and national channels, including the University website, the Ministry of University and Research website, the Official Gazette (*Gazzetta Ufficiale*) where required, the EURAXESS portal, and the PICA platform. Procedures regarding doctoral programs are available in both Italian and English, whereas for other positions, the checklist highlights the need to further strengthen the international dimension of communication.

In terms of transparency, the procedures provide for the publication of key information relating to the selection, including admission requirements, duration and characteristics of the appointments, rights and duties, salary levels, committee composition, and evaluation criteria. Committees define specific criteria during their first meeting, and these criteria are subsequently published to ensure the verifiability and traceability of the process. Upon completion of the procedures, the outcomes, ranking list, final report, and decree approving the proceedings are published. Furthermore, candidates can access the full documentation through a formal request for access to records, in accordance with national legislation.

The checklist also confirms the existence of a quality control system for OTM-R procedures. Each selection process is overseen by a Sole Procedure Manager (*Responsabile Unico del Procedimento* - RUP), while the Anti-Corruption and Transparency Officer, the Evaluation Board (*Nucleo di Valutazione*), the Human Resources Office, and the Quality Assurance Board contribute, each within their respective competencies, to monitoring the correctness, transparency, and effectiveness of the processes. Administrative staff involved in these procedures receive periodic updates, particularly on transparency, national regulations, and legislative amendments relevant to recruitment.

However, the OTM-R analysis highlighted several areas to be strengthened. The first concerns international attractiveness. Although positions are also published on EURAXESS, many calls for applications are still predominantly in Italian. The Action Plan therefore provides for the preparation of English-language formats and information sheets to be linked to the calls and the EURAXESS portal, making the content, requirements, working conditions, and administrative procedures clearer for international candidates. This intervention aims to move beyond a logic of mere formal vacancy publication and to make recruitment genuinely more accessible to an international audience.

A second area concerns the composition of selection committees. Appointment rules are defined by internal regulations, and committees are composed according to criteria of competence, merit, and transparency; the University is also committed to promoting gender balance. The Action Plan provides for incentivizing, whenever possible, the presence of members external to Unife, aiming to strengthen openness, impartiality, multidisciplinary, and the quality of the assessment.

A third area for improvement relates to feedback for candidates. Currently, the full evaluation can be consulted through a formal request for access to records. To make the process more immediate and transparent, the Action Plan provides for including explicit instructions in the calls for applications on how to access the comprehensive evaluation, thereby better informing candidates about the strengths and weaknesses of their applications.

Finally, the link between the OTM-R checklist and the Action Plan also concerns the quality of merit assessment. Unife intends to promote broader and more qualitative criteria, capable of valorizing not only scientific productivity but also non-linear career paths, multidisciplinary experiences, international and intersectoral mobility, Third Mission activities, technology transfer, Open Science, and social impact. This approach is consistent with adherence to HRS4R and CoARA, and with the objective of moving beyond an assessment based exclusively on quantitative indicators.

Overall, the implementation of OTM-R principles at Unife is already substantially guaranteed by a robust regulatory, procedural, and digital framework. However, the Action Plan allows for the transformation of this compliance into a more integrated and recognizable strategy, intervening in internationalization, accessibility, committee composition, candidate feedback, staff training, and evaluation criteria. Monitoring will be ensured through defined administrative responsibilities, specific indicators and targets, periodic reviews, and the coordination of the International Research Office with the HRS4R Steering Committee, so as to permanently link the OTM-R checklist to the overall improvement of researcher management and development policies.

If your organisation already has a recruitment strategy which implements the principles of OTM-R, please provide the web link where this strategy can be found on your organisation's website. Multiple links must be comma-separated.

URL:

4. Implementation

General overview of the expected overall implementation process of the action plan (max. 1000 words).

The HRS4R Action Plan of the University of Ferrara was approved by the University's Academic Bodies, the Academic Senate and the Board of Directors, during their sessions on May 27, 2026. This approval represents the formal step that allows for the initiation of the implementation phase of the planned actions, ensuring their full institutional recognition and their integration into the University's decision-making and planning processes.

Unife intends to progressively integrate the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers into the University Strategic Plan 2027-2029 and into other University planning documents, some of which are scheduled for approval in the coming months. This choice responds to the need to avoid HRS4R being perceived as a separate administrative burden, placing it stably instead within the strategic, organizational, and managerial planning of the University. The objective is to make the Action Plan an operational tool to strengthen policies concerning recruitment, professional development, integrity, equal opportunities, working conditions, open science, responsible research assessment, and the valorization of researchers.

The implementation phase will be overseen by the same Steering Committee appointed for the coordination and supervision of the initial phase of the HRS4R process. This continuity guarantees consistency between the analysis phase, the definition of actions, and their practical realization. The Steering Committee is composed of key figures from both academic and administrative governance: the Rector of the University of Ferrara; the Vice-Rector for Research and President of the Academic Council for Research and the Third Mission; the Director General; the Vice-Rector for Planning, Budget, and Public Value Creation; the Director of IUSS (Institute for Advanced Studies); the Coordinator of the Quality Assurance Board; the President of the Ethics Committee; the Vice-Rector for the Third Mission; the Vice-Rector for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity; and the Coordinator of the Evaluation Board.

The involvement of these figures since the beginning of the HRS4R process constitutes a strength for the implementation of the Plan. Indeed, the members of the Steering Committee have gained direct knowledge of the Gap Analysis, the OTM-R checklist, the results of the internal questionnaire, and the priorities that emerged from consultations with the research community. This awareness will allow the implementation to be guided in a manner consistent with the needs actually identified, fostering the connection between individual actions and the overall policies of the University.

In parallel, the operational implementation will be entrusted to the administrative team that contributed to the Gap Analysis and the drafting of the Action Plan. The group is composed of the managers of the areas, divisions, and offices most involved in HRS4R themes: the Director of the Personnel, Performance, and Planning Area; the Head of the Marketing and Communication Division; the Head of the Inclusion Policies Coordination Office; the Head of the IUSS Office; the Head of the Third Mission Division; the Head of the Educational Technologies Division; the Head of the Payroll Division; the Director of the Teaching and Student Services Area; and the Director of the Research and Third Mission Area.

Each responsible unit will manage the implementation of the actions within its competence, in coordination with the governance members most directly involved in the respective thematic areas. This model will allow for the assignment of clear responsibilities, the enhancement of the technical expertise of the offices, and the guarantee of a constant link between political-strategic direction and administrative implementation. Actions will therefore be developed according to an integrated approach, avoiding duplications and ensuring consistency with internal regulations, planning documents, and instruments already active within the University. The entire process will be coordinated and monitored by the Research and Third Mission Area, which will have the task of ensuring the full and correct implementation of the Action Plan, fostering coordination among the various structures involved, verifying the progress of activities against deadlines, indicators, and targets, and supporting the preparation of the documentation required for subsequent HRS4R monitoring and reporting phases. This central coordination role will be essential to guarantee continuity, traceability, and consistency throughout the entire process.

The Researchers' Focus Group, already appointed and involved in the initial phase of the process, will continue to serve as a qualified interlocutor during implementation. The group will be consulted whenever its contribution is deemed useful to verify the effectiveness of the actions, gather feedback from the research community, identify potential implementation criticalities, and propose corrective measures. In this way, the implementation of the Plan will maintain a participatory character oriented toward continuous improvement.

The implementation process will therefore be based on a multi-level model: direction and oversight by the Steering Committee, operational execution by the competent administrative structures, cross-cutting coordination by the International Research Office, and involvement of the research community through the Focus Group. This setup will allow for the progressive monitoring of the advancement of actions, the evaluation of the achievement of the planned indicators, and, if necessary, the introduction of adjustments along the way.

Overall, the HRS4R Action Plan will be implemented as an integral part of University policies for the valorization of researchers and the improvement of the research environment. Its integration into strategic and planning documents, combined with clear governance and a structured monitoring system, will allow Unife to consolidate the path initiated and to translate the principles of the European Charter for Researchers into stable, verifiable, and shared organizational practices.

Make sure you also cover all the aspects highlighted in the checklist below, which you will need to describe in detail.

Note: Click on each question of the checklist to open the editor.

How will the implementation committee and/or steering group regularly oversee progress?*



Detailed description and justification (max. 500 words)

The progress of the HRS4R Action Plan's implementation will be monitored through a structured process based on cooperation among the International Research Office, the Director of the Research and Third Mission Area, the Units Responsible for individual actions, and the Steering Committee. The monitoring will aim to verify compliance with timelines, the achievement of the planned indicators and targets, the potential presence of implementation criticalities, and the necessity of introducing corrective measures.

The Responsible Units will be tasked with the operational execution of the actions outlined in the Plan. Each unit will oversee the activities within its competence and will periodically report to the Research and Third Mission Area on the state of advancement, signaling any deviations from the timeline, organizational difficulties, or need for support. The International Research Office will collect this information, monitor the implementation of activities, deadlines, and indicators associated with each action, and maintain regular dialogue with those responsible for the individual measures.

Monitoring will be conducted on a semi-annual basis to allow for a periodic and timely verification of the Plan's overall progress. This schedule will make it possible to assess the progress made, identify any delays or critical issues, and propose, where necessary, corrective interventions aimed at achieving the established objectives. The choice of regular monitoring is consistent with the approach already adopted by the University in other areas of quality assurance and transparency, which involve defined responsibilities, traceability of procedures, and verification of the effectiveness of actions. The OTM-R checklist, for instance, highlights the existence of quality control systems involving the Anti-Corruption and Transparency Officer (RPCT), the Evaluation Board, the Sole Procedure Manager (RUP), and the Quality Assurance Board, to guarantee the correctness and transparency of the processes.

How do you intend to involve the research community, your main stakeholders, in the implementation process?*



Detailed description and justification (max. 500 words)

Unife intends to permanently integrate the HRS4R (Human Resources Strategy for Researchers) into its strategic and organizational planning, recognizing it as the general framework of reference for policies aimed at researchers. In particular, the Strategy will be incorporated into the University Strategic Plan 2027-2029 and into other University planning documents, so as to guarantee its consistency with institutional priorities and ensure its effective and continuous implementation.

Indeed, the actions outlined in the HRS4R Action Plan are consistent with and functional to other planning instruments already adopted or currently being updated, including the Gender Equality Plan, the Integrated Activity and Organization Plan (PIAO), and the planning tools relating to quality assurance, research, the Third Mission, inclusion, and staff valorization. This integration will make it possible to avoid overlaps and to place the HR Excellence in Research pathway within a unified system of governance, monitoring, and continuous improvement.

A central role will be played by the Steering Committee, whose composition guarantees the necessary link between HRS4R and the main University policies. In addition to the Rector and the Director General, it includes figures with direct responsibility in the areas most affected by the strategy: the Vice-Rector for Research, the Vice-Rector for the Third Mission, the Vice-Rector for Planning, Budget, and Public Value Creation, the Vice-Rector for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, the President of the Ethics Committee, the Coordinator of the Quality Assurance Board, and the Director of IUSS. The presence of these figures ensures full institutional support for the process and fosters the integration of HRS4R actions into the general policies of the University.

Furthermore, the actions of the Action Plan will be included in the PIAO 2027-2029, a document required by national legislation for Public Administrations, which integrates administrative planning, performance, personnel policies, transparency, training needs, and organization. This step is particularly significant because it allows for the connection of HRS4R with the University's ordinary planning, implementation, and monitoring mechanisms, reinforcing its nature as an institutional policy rather than a separate initiative. In this way, Unife intends to ensure that the HR Excellence in Research process is recognized as a cross-cutting policy for the management and development of human resources in research. The objective is to make the principles of the European Charter for Researchers an integral part of the University's research strategy, with concrete effects on recruitment, working conditions, professional development, integrity, equal opportunities, responsible assessment, internationalization, and the attractiveness of the research environment.

How do you proceed with the alignment of organisational policies with the HR Excellence in Research award process? Make *
sure it is recognised in the organisation's research strategy as the overarching HR policy. ✓

Detailed description and justification (max. 500 words)

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In this way, Unife intends to ensure that the HR Excellence in Research process is recognized as a cross-cutting policy for the management and development of human resources in research. The objective is to make the principles of the European Charter for Researchers an integral part of the University's research strategy, with concrete effects on recruitment, working conditions, professional development, integrity, equal opportunities, responsible assessment, internationalization, and the attractiveness of the research environment.

How will you ensure that the proposed actions are implemented?*



Detailed description and justification (max. 500 words)

The implementation of the actions outlined in the Action Plan will be guaranteed through their integration into the University's main strategic and managerial planning instruments. As previously indicated, certain actions will be incorporated into the Integrated Activity and Organization Plan (PIAO) 2027-2029, while others are already consistent with or integrated into existing planning documents, such as the Gender Equality Plan and the planning tools relating to research, the Third Mission, quality assurance, inclusion, and human resources valorization.

This alignment will allow for the connection of HRS4R actions with the University's ordinary planning, implementation, and monitoring processes. Indeed, the University's strategic and planning documents provide for specific objectives, indicators, and targets, which are subject to periodic review. The consistency between the Action Plan measures and the general objectives of the University will therefore foster effective integration during both the execution phase and the evaluation of results.

Each action will be formally assigned to a Responsible Unit, identified among the administrative structures competent in the matter. The implementation of these actions will become an integral part of the ordinary activities and performance plans of the offices involved. Furthermore, for each action, an administrative contact person will be designated—responsible for operational execution—alongside one or more political or institutional figures, tasked with ensuring alignment with the overall strategy of the University and the relevant governance mandates.

Compliance with the timeline will be verified through interim monitoring, aimed at assessing the progress of activities, the achievement of the planned indicators, and the potential presence of critical issues. Monitoring will be entrusted to the International Research Office, operating in coordination with the Director of the Research and Third Mission Area. The Office will periodically collect information from the Responsible Units, verify progress against deadlines and targets, and prepare updates to be submitted to the HRS4R governance bodies.

Any critical issues, delays, or deviations from the objectives will be shared with the members of the HRS4R working group and the Steering Committee. The latter will evaluate any corrective measures to be adopted, ensuring the necessary strategic direction and institutional coordination. In this way, the implementation of the Action Plan will be supported by defined responsibilities, periodic monitoring, integration into the University's ordinary processes, and the continuous involvement of both academic and administrative governance.

How will you monitor progress (timeline)?*



Detailed description and justification (max. 500 words)

The HRS4R Action Plan will be supported by Unife's governance and implemented in synergy with the University's strategic planning. The International Research Office will monitor the overall progress of the Plan, while the Responsible Units and the contact persons for individual actions will guarantee the operational execution of the assigned activities.

To ensure effective timeline control, a clear schedule will be defined, consistent with the targets and deadlines indicated in the Action Plan. The Plan is expected to commence in the second half of 2026 and conclude in the first half of 2028. Within this timeframe, interim monitoring will be scheduled close to the main semi-annual deadlines in order to verify the progress of activities, compliance with the planned calendar, and the progressive achievement of the indicators associated with each action.

The International Research Office will periodically collect updates from those responsible for the actions, verifying any deviations from the timeline and highlighting any critical issues that arise. To this end, periodic alignment sessions will be organized, including short operational meetings with the involved structures and contact persons, to share the implementation status of the Plan, assess the effectiveness of the completed activities, and promptly identify any obstacles.

Should delays or implementation difficulties emerge, appropriate corrective measures will be defined in coordination with the Responsible Units and the Director of the Research and Third Mission Area. These measures may involve the reshaping of operational activities, the strengthening of administrative support, the updating of execution methods, or, where necessary, the revision of specific timelines, while respecting the general objectives of the Plan.

Furthermore, an update will be provided annually to the Steering Committee, which will evaluate the overall state of progress of the Action Plan and the potential need for strategic direction interventions. In this way, timeline monitoring will be conceived not as a merely formal check, but as a continuous management tool aimed at ensuring consistency, effectiveness, and timeliness in the implementation of the planned actions.

How will you measure progress (indicators) in view of the next assessment?*



Detailed description and justification (max. 500 words)

The progress in the implementation of the HRS4R Action Plan will be measured through the specific indicators and targets associated with each planned action. Indeed, every action listed in the Plan is linked to one or more outcome indicators, defined according to the nature of the intervention, the implementation timeline, and Unife's organizational context. The achievement of the targets is scheduled within 24 months from the granting of the "HR Excellence in Research" award, in consistency with the overall implementation calendar.

The measurement of progress will be primarily entrusted to the Units Responsible for the individual actions, which will have the task of monitoring operational advancement, collecting the necessary evidence, and verifying the achievement of the planned targets. The Responsible Units may involve other structures of the University should the implementation of the action require cross-cutting competencies or contributions. This will ensure a precise evaluation based on data, documents, produced outputs, completed activities, and results actually achieved.

The International Research Office will oversee the entire implementation process, periodically collecting the information transmitted by the Responsible Units and verifying the consistency among completed activities, indicators, and targets. Constant dialogue between the contact persons for the actions and the representatives of the involved units will allow for the timely identification of any impediments, delays, or critical issues that could affect the achievement of the objectives. In the presence of deviations, corrective measures may be proposed to be submitted to the HRS4R governance bodies.

In view of the subsequent evaluation, Unife will conduct a new internal review aimed at verifying whether the implemented actions have effectively contributed to bridging the gaps identified during the initial Gap Analysis phase and within the OTM-R checklist. This review will not be limited to a formal check of the indicators but will also analyze the substantive effectiveness of the adopted measures and their impact on the University's policies and practices regarding researchers.

The internal review process may involve both the administrative working group appointed for the initial phase and the Researchers' Focus Group. This involvement will allow for the combination of the technical-administrative assessment with the perception of the scientific community regarding the implementation of the principles of the European Charter for Researchers. In particular, evidence may be gathered on the effectiveness of the actions, the degree of awareness regarding the introduced tools, the improvement of procedures, and the actual capacity of the measures to respond to the identified needs.

The evidence collected through the monitoring of indicators and the internal review will be shared with the Steering Committee, which will evaluate the overall state of progress of the Plan and identify the most appropriate strategy in view of the subsequent evaluation. In this way, the measurement of progress will be conceived as an integrated process of verification, learning, and continuous

improvement, oriented not only toward achieving the targets but also toward the structural consolidation of the HRS4R within University policies.

Additional remarks/comments about the proposed implementation process (max. 1000 words)