

Research Assessment Reform

Action Plan 2024-2028



Institute
of Agrifood Research
and Technology

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General Overview

IRTA is a research institute owned by the Government of Catalonia ascribed to the Ministry of Climate Action, Food and Rural Agenda. It is regulated by Law 04/2009, passed by the Catalan Parliament on the 15th of April 2009, and it is ruled by private regulations. It is part of the CERCA centres system of Catalonia.

IRTA's mission is to contribute to modernising, improving, boosting competitiveness, and fostering sustainable development in the sectors of agriculture, food, agroforestry, aquaculture, and fishing, as well as in all areas of activity directly or indirectly related to the supply of healthy, high-quality foodstuffs to end-consumers, while also contributing to food safety and safe processing of foodstuffs and in general enhancing the health and well-being of the population.

Its general objectives are to promote research and technological development in agri-food, to facilitate the transfer of scientific advances and to evaluate its own technological advances whilst seeking the utmost coordination and collaboration between the public and private sectors.

Since it was founded, IRTA has sought to establish long-lasting collaboration agreements with other public bodies that operate in Catalonia in the areas of technological research and development. This approach has led to the creation of a consortium network of centres (involving IRTA, universities, CSIC, public-sector bodies, etc.), which is, in effect, an R&D cooperative system.

Since 2015, IRTA holds the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) award provided by the European Commission. The award identifies the institutions and organizations as providers and supporters of a stimulating and favourable working environment. The award holders are committed in developing an HR Strategy for Researchers, designed to bring the practices and procedures in line with the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (Charter and Code).

Two Action Plans have been defined and conducted since 2015. The first one comprised the period of 2015-2018 and it was based on establishing the bases and framework of the excellence in HR for Researchers. Actions such as the development of the Ethics Code and the Gender Balance Plan, the update of the Procedure for Recruitment and a specific Training Program for researchers were conducted. The second Action Plan, comprising the period of 2019-2021, mainly focused on the Career Development of researchers R3-R4 and R1. This Career Development included a specific plan to establish their aspirations and motivations at IRTA, a specific Training Plan for Researchers, an Annual PhD Seminar, a FAQs documents for PhD candidates, updates in the procedure for Recruitment and the definition of the PhD position at IRTA in the Collective Agreement.

The current Action Plan 2022-2024 has been defined with focus on broadening the Career Development project for R1-R4 including temporal postdocs, improving the development of the Annual Training Plan as well as including specific training in Open Science, for example regarding FAIR data, expanding the recruitment sites and strategies to attract talent such creating an Alumni network.

During most part of its history, IRTA has had a promotion system for researchers and for personnel that support the research activity. In 2019, IRTA begun a vast internal revision on how this promotion system was conducted and how the evaluation of the development of its employees could be determined in an objective and qualitative fashion. In the case of researchers, participation and leadership of competitive projects is highly valued as well as their scientific production, their contribution to supervision of PhD candidates and undergraduate students and their capacity to attract funding.

Aligned with this commitment to continuously revise, develop, and advance in research assessment and thus upgrade the quality and the impact of the research carried out at IRTA, in 2023 IRTA signed the agreement with CoARA.

Joining CoARA has brought the framework and the opportunity to set a first Action Plan for the coming years to design, implement and improve IRTA's vision on research assessment with its reality. This Action Plan was created executing a gap analysis on the main actions that IRTA conducts on assessing its research considering the 10 commitments that establish a common direction for the reform. The Scientific Direction of IRTA has led the task and has consulted to all agents involved such as HR, the Innovation department, the Data Management department, and the HRS4R coordinator, among others.

Action Plan 2024-2028 for the Research Assessment Reform

CoARA commitment	Action	Indicator	Responsible	Calendar
Commit resources to reforming research assessment as is needed to achieve the organizational changes	Implement a Working Group including representatives of R1-R4, HR, Scientific Coordination team and the Innovation team to monitor the execution of the Action Plan as well as contribute to the continuous advances in the research assessment reform.	Terms of Reference of the Working Group	Researcher Development Coordination	Q4 2024
Abandon inappropriate uses in research assessment of journal- and publication-based metrics, in particular inappropriate uses of Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and h-index	Sign the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)	Signed DORA Agreement	Scientific Direction	Q4 2024
Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition	Join the CoARA National Chapter	Enrolment of the NC	Researcher Development Coordination	Q4 2024
Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators & Abandon inappropriate uses in research assessment of journal- and publication-based metrics, in particular inappropriate uses of Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and h-index & Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes	Assessment of the current promotion process for researchers regarding its use of h index and the possibility to introduce other ways of evaluation of researchers.	New internal procedure regarding the promotion system of researchers	Scientific Direction	Q2 2025
Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators & Abandon inappropriate uses in research assessment of journal- and publication-based metrics, in particular inappropriate uses of Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and h-index & Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes	Continue working on the Action Plan of the HRS4R as well as work on the second renewal of the award	Visit of the experts for the renewal of the HRS4R award	HR and Scientific Direction	Q2 2025
Evaluate practices, criteria and tools based on solid evidence and the state-of-the-art in research, and make data openly available for evidence gathering and research	Design and carry out a campaign to promote the capacity of IRTA regarding Open Science practices as well as the specific service provide by our own Data Steward and her team.	2 promoting events & Internal training on the Annual Training Plan for researchers	Scientific Direction and IRTA's Data Steward	Q4 2025
Recognize the diversity of contribution to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of research	Establish a sound and objective support system to bring together the ambitions and contributions of IRTA's personnel and the new strategic plan for 2024-2027	Establishment of Career Development Plans for IRTA's personnel	HR	Q3 2026

Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition	Encourage the exchange of practices and experiences among the CERCA research institutes to boost the advances on the reform	Exchange of experiences with at least 2 CERCA institutes	HR and Scientific Direction	2025 - 2027
Raise awareness of research assessment reform and provide transparent communication, guidance, and training on assessment criteria and processes as well as their use	Host and coordinate RDI & webinars related to the CoARA Action Plan, the reform on research assessment and the update on the actions related to HRS4R	Communicate progress made on adherence to the principles and implementation of the Commitments	Department of Communication, HR, and Scientific Direction	2025 - 2027



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