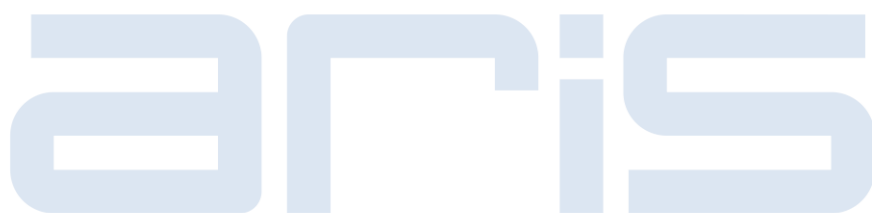


EVALUATION GUIDE

**External institutional evaluation of research
institutions receiving block research funding
in the period of 2022–2027**



Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency

Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS)

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0. PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION GUIDE

This guide has been prepared to support external experts participating in the pilot external institutional evaluation. The evaluation constitutes a core element of the block funding system introduced in Slovenia in 2022 and is being conducted as the first six-year contractual funding period approaches its conclusion.

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess research institutions against three key criteria: scientific excellence, societal impact, and the institutional research environment. Accordingly, the guide provides an overview of the Slovenian block funding system and offers detailed guidance on the evaluation criteria, indicators, and their interpretation.

The guide is primarily intended for external experts serving as peer reviewers, who play a central role in the evaluation process. These experts have been selected on the basis of their recognised research expertise as well as their experience in the strategic leadership and management of research institutions.

This guide should be read in conjunction with the Criteria, Indicators, and Sub-criteria (Appendix I), the Score Grid (Appendix II), and the Structure of the Self-Evaluation Report (Appendix III). Taken together, these documents form a comprehensive framework and practical toolbox to support a consistent, transparent, and robust pilot external institutional evaluation.

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1. ABOUT BLOCK FUNDING AND RESEARCH ASSESSMENT IN SLOVENIA

1.1. INTRODUCTION OF BLOCK RESEARCH FUNDING AND EVALUATION

In 2022, a new **Scientific Research and Innovation Activities Act** came to force in Slovenia, introducing a 6-year contract-based block (stable) funding as a major change in the funding system for scientific research activities. This new funding mechanism has aimed to:

- provide a stable environment that enables research institutions to define strategic objectives, develop long-term plans, and conduct scientific research effectively;
- grant institutions a greater degree of autonomy and flexibility in managing their resources;
- introduce a new evaluation framework as an integral component of the funding model.

The block research funds in Slovenia are allocated by the **Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency** (hereinafter: **ARIS**), amounting to more than 65% of the total public expenditure on scientific research distributed through ARIS. The funds are provided within six-year contractual periods under three fundamental funding pillars:

- **Institutional Pillar:** funding of infrastructure, management and support activities, and other institutional infrastructure;
- **Programme Pillar:** funding of research programmes¹ and young researchers²;
- **Development Pillar:** promoting the development of scientific research and infrastructure activities in terms of quality, creativity and innovation, internationalisation, openness, knowledge transfer, and cooperation with the environment.

¹ **Research Programmes** are a form of organising research activities funded through six-year block funding schemes. Unlike project-based funding, research programmes are not tied to short-term objectives but focus on sustained scientific excellence and development. Within the block funding scheme, research institutions retain autonomy to establish, discontinue, merge or divide research programmes throughout the six-year contractual funding period. The research programmes may be carried out by the research institution alone or in the cooperation between several institutions. In this case, one institution is the parent research institution and the others are the partner institutions that carry out their activities on a limited FTE scope.

² The **Young Researchers Programme** is a Slovenian national funding mechanism that supports the training of early-career researchers through doctoral studies. Under this scheme, research institutions receive funding to employ junior researchers while they pursue a PhD, enabling structured doctoral training under the supervision of established researchers.

There are currently 53 institutions that receive block research funding in Slovenia: universities and independent higher education institutions, public research institutes, clinics, and other smaller public or private non-profit institutions. It is crucial to understand that these institutions vary significantly in size, volume of funding, number of research fields, organizational structures, and other elements. These specificities and diversities of each research institution should be considered throughout the evaluation procedure.

1.2. RESEARCH ASSESSMENT REFORM

Alongside the block funding system, a new research assessment framework was introduced in 2022 to externally evaluate the quality of strategically funded research, considering scientific excellence, societal impact, and the institutional research environment. Structured procedures were established to ensure a transparent analysis of publicly funded research institutions.

The assessment of research institutions that receive block research funding grants is designed as a multi-stage process that includes:

- **external evaluation of research programmes by ERC panel fields,**
- **institutional self-evaluation, and**
- **external institutional evaluation.**

The two external evaluations are mutually reinforcing and, together with self-evaluation, constitute the institutional evaluation framework. These three evaluation methods collectively provide a comprehensive approach for assessing research institutions' scientific performance, the societal impact of their work, and the quality of their research environments.

Both external assessments primarily serve formative purposes, offering guidance for institutions as they pursue improvements or further development. Accordingly, the focus of the Evaluation Report is to deliver a descriptive assessment, thereby providing a robust foundation for the sustained support and advancement of excellent and socially relevant research. The descriptive assessment is accompanied by a numerical score, which is used to determine the redistribution of a limited portion of block research funding. The legislation allows for a maximum redistribution of 5% of the overall

block funding, with no research institution losing more than 3%. The precise proportion allotted for redistribution is determined by the minister responsible for research.

1.3. PILOT EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION

External institutional evaluation is the first to be implemented in 2026, initially as a pilot version. It builds directly upon the process of institutional self-evaluation carried out by the research institutions receiving block research funding. While self-evaluation functions as a continuous, internally driven process of reflection on the mission, strategic objectives, and quality of the research and support environment, external institutional evaluation introduces an external, independent assessment layer to ensure accountability, comparability, and strategic alignment at the national level. It plays a decisive role in ensuring both quality enhancement and responsible public investment in research.

External institutional evaluation is implemented for the first time in 2026, taking place in the fifth year of the first six-year contractual block funding period. It is based on:

- **Self-Evaluation Reports**, and
- **site visits**.

Prior to the site visit, the Assessment Panel reviews the Self-Evaluation Report to inform and prepare its evaluation. Based on this review, the Panel identifies and highlights the key issues requiring particular attention during the institutional visit.

The pilot external institutional evaluation assesses three core dimensions (**criteria**):

- **scientific excellence**,
- **societal impact**, and
- **quality of the institutional research environment**.

The three criteria are further broken down into **indicators** and **sub-criteria** (see Appendix I).

As the 2026 exercise will constitute the first (pilot) external institutional evaluation, it must be recognised that not all research institutions will yet have fully established and functioning elements, such as internal mechanisms, structures, standards, policies, procedures, and systematic practices across all indicators of the criterion *quality of the institutional research environment*. Namely, many institutions are still in the process of developing internal rules, support structures, and practices. In cases where comprehensive evidence of past practice is not yet available, reviewers should therefore focus on the suitability of the designed system, progress achieved to date, the credibility and coherence of strategic plans, the concrete steps envisaged for further development, and the proposed timeline for implementation (see Appendix II).

During site visits, research institutions will have the opportunity to clarify the stage of development of individual quality-support mechanisms. Reviewers are expected to explicitly take these circumstances of the first contractual period into account in their assessment, ensuring that the evaluation appropriately reflects the developmental and pilot nature of the 2026 exercise.



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2. EVALUATION PROCEDURE

2.1. ASSESSMENT PANEL, ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND PROCESS

Each research institution is assessed by an international Assessment Panel consisting of **at least 5 members**. The Assessment Panel evaluates each research institution based on a pre-defined list of criteria, indicators, and sub-criteria. It examines the Self-Evaluation Report and performs a site visit (more details in Chapters 2.4 and 2.5, as well as in Appendix III). To distribute the workload, each Assessment Panel divides into subgroups of at least two reviewers who draft Evaluation Reports, jointly conduct site visits, and report to the full Panel. All decisions are taken by the Assessment Panel as a whole.

The members of the Assessment Panels are appointed as independent experts. They work in a personal capacity and do not represent any country or organisation. The members of the Assessment Panel are expected to provide an impartial, objective, accurate, and consistent assessment.

The Assessment Panel produces **Final Evaluation Reports** as part of the evaluation procedure. These reports include:

- **descriptive assessments,**
- **numerical scores, and**
- **recommendations.**

The responsibilities for the process are shared between Assessment Panel, Chair, research institutions, ARIS staff, research assessment experts, and local experts.

Each **Assessment Panel** assesses a specific group of research institutions, providing descriptive assessments, numerical scores and recommendations for every institution in that group. Every institution receives its own individual report. Panel members are given a high degree of autonomy to organize their work. One of the members of the Assessment Panel acts as **Chair of the Panel**: He/she is responsible for overseeing the overall functioning of the Assessment Panel and chairing the Panel meetings, as well as submitting the Final Evaluation Reports.

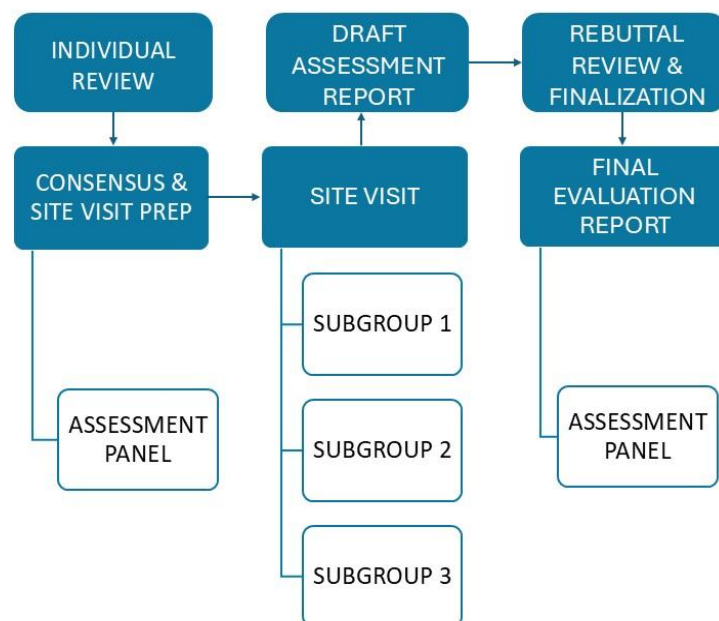
Research institutions receiving block research funding are responsible for preparing the Self-Evaluation Report and any relevant supporting documentation. They also organise and host the site visit, providing reviewers with the necessary inputs and context to make informed assessments.

Research assessment experts review and edit the Evaluation Reports, highlighting any issues or inconsistencies, and provide suggestions for necessary corrections.

The process is complemented by local experts and ARIS staff. The **ARIS staff** is responsible for managing the evaluation procedure, monitoring its progress, and providing the Assessment Panel with full online and on-site assistance. The **local experts** include stakeholders and research policy experts. They meet with the Panel Chairs before the evaluation process begins and provide contextual information on the Slovenian research system, including its legal framework, relevant policies, historical development, and perspectives from early-career researchers and industry.

The evaluation process is conducted partly online, through e-mail communication, the Sync cloud storage, and appropriate virtual conference platforms, and partly on-site, as it also includes a visit to the research institution assessed.

A basic flowchart of the evaluation procedure is shown below.



2.2. EVALUATED INSTITUTIONS

The pilot external institutional evaluation is dedicated to the institutions that perform at least one research programme within the block funding system as a parent research institution. For the purposes of the evaluation process, research institutions have been grouped into four categories reflecting their institutional characteristics:

- **higher education institutions:** public and private universities, other institutions of tertiary education and research;
- **public research institutes:** institutes established by the Republic of Slovenia for the purpose of independent implementation of scientific research activities;
- **clinics:** public medical centres, hospitals, and other healthcare facilities conducting research activities in parallel with patient care;
- **other institutions:** other small- or medium-sized non-profit research institutions, museums, public health institutes, etc.

2.3. EVALUATION CRITERIA, INDICATORS, AND SUB-CRITERIA

The evaluation material is assessed based on the three **criteria** specified below. Each criterion is further subdivided into **indicators** and **sub-criteria**, as set out in Appendix I.

ARIS uses the following definitions for the three core elements of its evaluation system:

Criterion: a fundamental element of assessment.

A broader aspect of scientific research that is observed. It defines what is evaluated or assessed.

Indicator: an element of assessment within a specific criterion.

An element of assessment used to determine performance (supported by sub-criteria). It determines how the criterion is interpreted in practice.

Sub-criterion: an element of assessment within a specific indicator.

It defines the qualitative assessment of performance through expert peer review. It specifies the aspects of the indicator that are subject to assessment.

The evaluation criterion is a fundamental component of the ARIS evaluation framework. The framework comprises three principal criteria, each carrying a distinct weight in the final assessment.

Evaluation criterion	Weighting
I. Scientific excellence	35%
II. Societal impact	25%
III. Quality of institutional research environment	40%

Descriptive assessments and numerical scores are assigned at the level of individual indicators.

Where an indicator comprises two or more sub-criteria, the available evidence may vary across those sub-criteria in terms of strength, completeness, and persuasiveness. In practice, this may for example be reflected in situations where:

- Some research outputs are strong, while others are weaker or only loosely relevant;
- Evidence is convincing in one field, department, faculty, or organizational unit, but limited or lacking in another;
- A research institution provides strong examples of good practice, but these are not sufficient to demonstrate a consistent institution-wide pattern;
- Some claims are supported by data or documentation, while others remain mainly descriptive;
- Interviews conducted during the site visit confirm certain aspects, but not others.

This may be particularly evident in large research institutions with multiple organizational units, such as university faculties, or in institutions undertaking a broad range of research activities. Such uneven performance should be reflected in the assessment, especially when it cannot be explained by the institution's strategic orientation.

I. Scientific excellence

Members of the Assessment Panel should assess the actual contribution of the institution's research to the generation of new knowledge and development of the scientific field(s), examining the quality, originality, relevance, and rigour of research outputs.

To support the assessment of scientific excellence, research institutions were invited to provide a selection of exemplary research outputs (results) in their Self-Evaluation Reports. The inclusion of

explanatory descriptions for individual outputs was optional. Therefore, the absence of such descriptions should not be interpreted negatively or influence the assessment. Any additional context regarding the significance, quality, or impact of the selected outputs should be explored during the site visit.

ARIS recommended a maximum number of exemplar outputs based on the size of the institution, measured in full-time equivalents (FTE). These outputs are intended to substantiate the institution's self-evaluation and help reviewers prepare for the site visit. Where necessary, institutions should provide further explanation of the listed outputs during the site visit, including their significance, scholarly influence, and broader context. In the pilot institutional evaluation, individual research outputs are not assessed separately. Rather, the assessment of scientific excellence under the two relevant indicators should be based on the findings, planned follow-up measures, and other relevant information presented in the Self-Evaluation Report, considered alongside the exemplar research outputs and evidence gathered during the site visit. Reviewers should evaluate the institution's research performance in its broader context and critically assess the information provided by the institution.

A **research output** is understood as an outcome of scientific research work that contributes to progress within a specific scientific field, discipline, or area of study, including topics that integrate multiple disciplines. It is based on the conduct of research using appropriate methodologies or approaches.

Only research outputs that were first disclosed or publicly disseminated during the evaluation period are considered valid. A wide range of output types may be included, but atypical outputs should be clearly described to enable proper assessment by reviewers. Outputs that do not contain original research, such as textbooks, teaching materials, popular science pieces, reports, commentaries, or opinion columns, are not regarded as research outputs.

Institutions were asked to highlight research outputs generated through research activities financed or co-financed by block (stable) funding. The extent to which research activities are supported by stable funding varies across institutions, with some institutions receiving a substantial share of their research funding from other sources. As research outputs are often the result of multiple, interconnected funding streams, drawing strict boundaries between funding sources is neither practical nor meaningful. Accordingly, ARIS did not require institutions to attribute outputs exclusively

to stable funding. Nevertheless, evaluators should bear in mind that the research outputs presented in the Self-Evaluation Reports may not fully reflect the overall research performance of an institution. Institutions may have produced additional high-quality or outstanding research outputs outside the scope of activities covered by the report.

Research outputs and achievements must be evaluated based on their intrinsic merit, rather than on the prestige of the journal in which they are published, its impact factor, or other journal-related metrics. Quantitative indicators should be used solely as supplementary information to support a qualitative assessment and must not be treated as standalone indicators of quality.³

Moreover, the Assessment Panel is expected to evaluate the institution's capacity for critical reflection on its own performance, including the identification of strengths and weaknesses and the adoption of concrete measures to improve scientific excellence. Particular attention should be given to the extent to which the research institution provides a thorough, evidence-based, and self-critical evaluation of its performance in implementing its mission, strategy, and objectives in relation to achieving and strengthening scientific excellence.

II. Societal impact

The Assessment Panel should assess the extent to which the research institution is fit to support the transfer of knowledge into practice and demonstrates a proven and evidenced societal impact at the local, national, or international level. Particular attention should be given to tangible outcomes and impacts, such as technological progress, innovation, solutions to societal and environmental challenges, improved understanding of complex phenomena, and demonstrable changes in practices, legislation, strategies, behaviour, etc.

Research institutions were also encouraged to include a selected number of impact case studies in their Self-Evaluation Report to substantiate the institution's self-assessment and to inform the reviewers' preparation for the site visit. ARIS recommended a maximum number of case studies proportionate to the size of the institution, measured in full-time equivalents (FTE). These individual impact cases are not assessed separately. Rather, the assessment of societal impact should be based

³ ARIS evaluation follows the principles endorsed by the international research community, as reflected in CoARA and European Research Area documents.

primarily on the institution's Self-Evaluation Report, supported by the impact case studies provided and complemented by the findings and evidence gathered during the site visit.

Societal impact is defined as a tangible and verifiable contribution to technological progress, innovation, the resolution of significant societal or environmental challenges, the understanding of phenomena, changes in practices, legislation, strategies, habits, or to the well-being of society, communities, and the environment at the local, national, or international level. Societal impact reflects knowledge transfer and can be reasonably attributed to the research conducted or to specific research outputs. It may manifest across a wide range of areas, including political, legal, educational, health, cultural, artistic, technological, economic, environmental, and spatial domains. Societal impact may also be co-created with the recipient's external partners, stakeholders, social groups, or other relevant actors.

Societal impact presented must be grounded in research conducted by the research institution, and the link between this research basis and the resulting impact must be clearly demonstrated. Activities such as science communication, public engagement, or teaching in higher education do not count as societal impact unless they lead to demonstrable, traceable effects beyond the academic sphere. Likewise, influence within the scientific community itself is not considered societal impact, as it is assessed under scientific excellence. A patent alone is also insufficient, since it does not necessarily indicate actual application or knowledge transfer.

Where **societal engagement** is presented as evidence of societal impact, the underlying research basis from which the activity derives must also be explained, together with a verifiable and tangible trace of the societal impact resulting from that engagement. In evaluations conducted within the framework of ARIS block funding, activities such as the popularisation of science, dissemination of results, presentations, lectures, science communication, and other interactions with publics, groups, or audiences do not in themselves constitute societal impact unless they produce discernible or demonstrable effects, practical use, or a traceable impact in the societal environment.

Moreover, the Assessment Panel is expected to evaluate the institution's capacity for critical self-assessment in the area of knowledge transfer and societal engagement, including concrete actions taken to address identified shortcomings and strengthen impact, as well as how effectively the institution implements its mission, strategy, and objectives with regard to achieving and enhancing societal impact.

III. Quality of institutional research environment

The Assessment Panel should evaluate the institution's capacity to support high-quality and impactful research, focusing on its procedures, structures, strategies, policies, internal mechanisms, and standards. The eight aspects of research support environment are addressed in separate sub-chapters of Chapter 4 in the Self-Evaluation Report and align with the eight indicators under Criterion III – *Quality of institutional research environment*. The Panel should review how various aspects outlined below are implemented.

Within this set of indicators, some aspects may be demonstrated through institutional strategic documents, procedures, standards, contracts, or similar evidence. Where necessary, such materials may be requested in advance as part of the preparation for the institutional visit.

Strategic management

Each research institution is required by law to define its strategy, including its research implementation plan and strategic, long-term, and development objectives, for the six-year contractual period of block research funding. Examine the relevant section of the Self-Evaluation Report and discuss the institution's strategic orientation with its senior management, researchers, and support staff to assess the adequacy, coherence, realistic achievability, level of ambition, and overall quality of these elements as a basis for strategic management.

For this institutional indicator, the institution's critical self-assessment is essential, as it should provide the basis for discussion during the site visit. Consider whether progress towards the defined targets is monitored and achieved, and whether appropriate follow-up actions have been taken in response to the findings of the critical self-assessment, particularly with regard to improvements in strategic management.

Review how the institution implements its strategy and objectives across all evaluation criteria. Institutions were encouraged to assess their strategy and objectives thoroughly and systematically in the Self-Evaluation Report, which is therefore expected to serve as the primary source of information. Provide explicit recommendations on the institution's future strategy, including its research implementation plan and strategic, long-term, and development objectives.

Human resources policy, rejuvenation of the research community, and PhD training

The Assessment Panel should assess the institution's approach to recruiting, developing, and retaining researchers across career stages. Review whether strategy and plans include the actions taken based on self-evaluation findings as well as encourage diversity of research careers, attract new talent, provide high-quality doctoral training, and involve first-stage (R1)⁴ and recognized (R2)⁵ researchers in meaningful research activities. Consider whether diverse researchers' contributions are fairly evaluated and rewarded in line with open science principles and European Research Area guidelines. This might manifest in internal procedures for recruitment, career promotions, distribution of funds, etc.

The Assessment Panel should examine whether the institution's procedures for research assessment and career development are aligned with EU and international principles, recommendations, and guidelines on responsible research assessment, with particular reference to documents issued by CoARA, Science Europe, and the European Research Area. The Slovenian legislative framework incorporates open science principles into research assessment and career promotion; accordingly, consider elements such as qualitative assessment, the responsible use of metrics, and the rejection of commercially driven indicators, including journal impact factors, as standalone measures of quality. Moreover, devote attention to whether researchers' diverse contributions, outputs, and career paths are appropriately recognised, whether emerging talent and early-career researchers are supported, and whether assessment practices encourage openness and a broad range of research activities in line with responsible research assessment principles.

The internationally aligned approach to responsible research assessment has been introduced into the Slovenian system only relatively recently. The rules on career promotion, including research titles, entered fully into force in May 2026, following an 18-month transition period. For many research institutions, these approaches are still new, and the reform remains at an early stage of implementation. Institutions that are already leading in this area should be duly recognised by the assessment and scores; however, robust, comprehensive, and realistic reform plans, supported by discussions with institutional staff, should also be acknowledged and appropriately evaluated.

⁴ **R1 – First Stage Researcher:** Researchers doing research under supervision up to the point of a PhD or equivalent level of competence and experience. (European Framework for Research Careers).

⁵ **R2 – Recognised Researcher:** Researchers with a PhD or equivalent level of competence and experience who have not yet established a significant level of independence in developing their own research, attracting funding, or leading a research group (European Framework for Research Careers).

Research Infrastructure and Equipment

The Assessment Panel is expected to assess the quality, suitability, and accessibility of research infrastructure and equipment necessary for advancing the institution's strategy and objectives. Determine whether the institution maintains appropriate plans for strategic upgrades or modernization, as indicated by self-evaluation or other internal reviews. Where relevant, address whether infrastructure is effectively shared with external partners to facilitate collaboration and maximise the public investment.

When assessing this indicator, it is particularly important to consider the equipment and infrastructure check during the site visit. The assessment should be based on a comparison between the institution's self-evaluation, the related findings and corrective or development actions, and the evidence examined during the visit, including information obtained through interviews.

Collaboration, knowledge transfer, and diversity of funding sources

The Assessment Panel should examine evidence of active collaboration with other research institutions at national, international, or local level, including interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary projects. Exchanges of researchers, permanent cooperation structures such as alliances and consortia, and other forms of research cooperation should be evident from both the Self-Evaluation Report and the site visit. Academic cooperation may also include collaboration in managerial and quality management matters, such as the exchange of external reviewers, mutual assessments, and the sharing of managerial practices.

Similarly, the institution should demonstrate cooperation with societal stakeholders, which may include societal engagement, innovation, knowledge transfer, communication of relevant discoveries or findings, and cooperation in conducting research, experimentation, or citizen science projects. The types of evidence relevant to this dimension may vary significantly.

Because the criteria and indicators apply across all fields, differences between fields should be considered when assessing cooperation. In some cases, regional or local cooperation may provide stronger evidence of quality and relevance than international links or formal contracts.

Knowledge transfer and innovation should be demonstrated and examined separately, particularly in relation to the systematic, strategically oriented and effective staff support to researchers in this matter. The alignment of institutional support for knowledge transfer and societal impact with the institution's own strategy and objectives should be tested. The Assessment Panel should also assess

the extent to which societal considerations are integrated at an early stage of research planning and the degree to which funding sources are diversified beyond core block funding. Diversification of funding may be reflected in different ways, including success in obtaining competitive and prestigious public funding and attracting private funds where the institutional orientation is applied or society focused. The composition of funding sources may also provide insight into the institution's cooperation orientation and external engagement.

Internal system for ensuring the quality of research

The Assessment Panel should review the procedures, structures, and standards for institutional self-evaluation and monitoring of scientific excellence, societal impact, and research environment quality. Assess whether appropriate personnel or committees are assigned to this work and whether actions are systematically implemented based on internal or external evaluation recommendations. Consider the robustness of process for defining strategic, long-term, and development objectives.

The requirement to establish an internal evaluation and improvement system is new. The stage of implementation among institutions varies considerably and for many research institutions the process has only started recently. Existing, well-functioning systems should be recognised, while credible plans to develop an internal quality management system should also be considered. The Assessment Panel should pay particular attention to evidence of implementation, institutional commitment to strengthen quality culture, the robustness of mechanisms and methods, the feasibility of the implementation plan, and the allocation of responsibilities within the institution.

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Open science principles

Open science has become well embedded in the Slovenian research system, particularly since 2022, through national legislation and institutional strategic documents. Research institutions are gradually assuming responsibility for implementing its main principles and elements, thereby playing a central role in the transition to open science.

The Assessment Panel should consider how the institution implements open science through policies, staffing, and practices, especially in relation to the findings of self-evaluation. Investigate how well the institution takes care of open access to publications and research data management according to FAIR principles, and additional practices supporting transparency, such as citizen science, early data sharing, open methodologies, and science communication.

The Assessment Panel should also consider whether the institution encourages active engagement in open scholarly communication infrastructure, including open peer review, editorial work, diamond open-access publishing, especially in community-governed or publicly owned publishing platforms, repositories etc.

Principle of equal opportunities

The Assessment Panel should assess whether the institution has strategies and actions to promote equality, such as gender equality plans, and whether dedicated personnel or bodies ensure effective implementation. Consider how equal opportunities are integrated into recruitment, career progression, and institutional culture and how the findings of self-evaluation are reflected in actions and future plans.

Ethics and integrity

The Assessment Panel should review internal procedures addressing research ethics and integrity, including mechanisms for preventing misconduct, managing conflicts of interest, protecting intellectual property, and safeguarding whistleblowers. Consider how the self-evaluation findings are reflected in future plans and examine the efforts to ensure ethical publication practices and the overall culture of responsible research conduct.

2.4. SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

The main document to be reviewed during the pilot external institutional evaluation is the institutional Self-Evaluation Report. This report is prepared after the research institution completes a thorough self-reflection, examining its research successes, societal impact, and the support systems it uses to assist high-quality research and to meet both external criteria and its own long-term strategic goals. The Self-Evaluation Report is meant to be more than just background information for external reviewers; its primary purpose is to support the institution's ongoing internal quality improvement and strategic planning.

It is essential that the Self-Evaluation Report primarily addresses research undertaken within the scope of block research funding (Criteria I and II). Nonetheless, the research institution may also highlight its broader activities and detail how these relate to efforts supported through block funding, particularly within the introductory chapters of the report. The indicators under Criterion III are institutional in nature and therefore address the institution as a whole, irrespective of block research funding. It is

vital to maintain an understanding that research should be systematically organized and predominantly executed, irrespective of the sources of funding.

The structure of the Self-Evaluation Report is established according to the criteria, indicators, and sub-criteria (see Appendix III). The report also includes introductory and concluding chapters with SWAT analysis (namely, a presentation of the research institution and its approach to self-evaluation, as well as an executive summary), which are intended to provide reviewers with an understanding of the institution's core mission, key characteristics, as well as the broader institutional and strategic context.

Research institutions were encouraged to follow a set of guidelines issued by ARIS when preparing their Self-Evaluation Reports. The Assessment Panel should take these guidelines into account when reviewing and assessing the reports.

Length and proportionality of the Self-Evaluation Report: Institutions were advised to keep their reports concise and to aim for a length of approximately 40 pages, appendices excluded, to ensure that the evaluation materials remain manageable and comparable. Some institutions have exceeded the recommended length. **The volume of the report should not constitute an advantage nor result in a more favourable assessment.**

Supporting documentation: Institutions were explicitly requested to submit two supporting appendices: Impact Case Studies and a List of Research Outputs. These appendices form an integral part of the core evaluation documentation and should be reviewed by the Assessment Panel. Some institutions have chosen to provide additional supplementary appendices. The review of such supplementary materials is optional and may be undertaken where reviewers consider them helpful in informing their assessment. However, **as these appendices were neither required nor envisaged as part of the evaluation framework, their presence or absence must not influence the assessment outcome in any way.**

Description of research outputs: Research institutions were instructed to provide only a list of research outputs in their Self-Evaluation Report. Some institutions also included descriptions or additional information about individual outputs, although this was not required. The Assessment Panel should review any additional information provided; however, its presence or absence should not influence the assessment. Institutions will have the opportunity to provide further explanation of individual research outputs during the site visit, if needed.

Self-evaluation as critical reflection: ARIS strongly emphasised that self-evaluation should be a process of critical self-reflection. Consequently, reports should include a review of findings, including identified shortcomings, weaknesses, challenges, and unrealised potential, together with the presentation of corrective actions and improvement measures. The overarching purpose of the self-evaluation process is to strengthen the culture of quality within institutions, enabling research organisations and their communities to identify, analyse, and address their own challenges and development potential. Some institutions have demonstrated a high degree of openness and precision in identifying weaknesses, limitations, and strategic challenges. **Such self-awareness and institutional learning capacity should be recognised as a strength in the assessment process and should be reflected in the assessment outcome.** Conversely, in some cases, reports may resemble promotional documents that primarily highlight achievements and successes rather than providing a balanced and critical appraisal of institutional performance. Such an approach may indicate insufficient attention to areas requiring improvement or a limited capacity to identify shortcomings, analyse their underlying causes, and propose meaningful corrective measures. Where appropriate, such issues may warrant further exploration during the site visit.

Responsible research assessment: The Slovenian regulatory framework requires the implementation of responsible research assessment principles. Institutions were therefore guided to adhere to these principles and encouraged to draw upon the recommendations and policy documents of the European Research Area (ERA) and CoARA. Institutions were instructed to limit the use of quantitative indicators, including bibliometric measures, and to employ them only as complementary sources of information. Quantitative evidence should always be accompanied by appropriate narrative explanations and contextualisation. Some institutions may report their positions in rankings or present various favourable proxy quantitative indicators of quality, occasionally without sufficient contextual interpretation. Such information should not in itself confer an advantage in the assessment process nor lead to a higher evaluation outcome.

Evaluation against institutional objectives and strategy: Institutions were encouraged to evaluate their progress and achievements in relation to their own strategic objectives and development priorities. Over time, this approach should become the primary basis for assessing institutional performance and development. The long-term strategic and development objectives, as well as the research implementation plan, constitute integral components of the six-year block research funding contract. The Self-Evaluation Report should therefore demonstrate how the institution's activities, achievements, and development efforts relate to these commitments. Should the Assessment Panel

consider it necessary, ARIS may provide the relevant lists of strategic objectives and the research implementation plans to support the evaluation process.

2.5. SITE VISIT

The **site visit** is an integral part of the evaluation process and takes place after the Assessment Panel has examined the Self-Evaluation Report. **The visit is organised by the evaluated research institution and is carried out by at least two reviewers from each Assessment Panel.** Its main purpose is to enable reviewers to clarify and investigate issues identified during their assessment of the Self-Evaluation Report, verify the research infrastructure and equipment, and gain a deeper understanding of the institution's structure, activities, governance, strategic direction, support mechanisms, and research achievements. Through discussions with senior management, researchers, heads of research programmes, early career researchers, and support staff, reviewers can assess how the institution manages resources, promotes research excellence and career development, and ensures an effective research environment, while also identifying good practices, contextual factors influencing performance, and challenges that may not be fully evident from the written documentation.

Before the site visit, the Assessment Panel is required to submit follow-up questions, highlight specific topics they would like to discuss, ask for documents that they would like to examine, or indicate particular facilities or infrastructure they would like to see during the visit. ARIS will communicate these requests to the research institution in advance, allowing the institution to prepare relevant information, organise meetings with appropriate staff, and ensure that any requested facilities or resources are accessible.

For the purpose of conducting the visits, the Assessment Panel is divided into smaller subgroups, each composed of at least two Panel members. Each subgroup carries out the visit to an assigned institution, prepares the initial draft of the evaluation report for that institution, and reports its observations and findings back to the full Panel to support the preparation of the final evaluation.

Site visits last from 3 hours to 3 days, depending on the size and complexity of the research institution. The specifics of the site-visit programme are determined by the institution's type, size, and the scope of its research activities. The visits typically include **consultations with representatives of the research institution**, including senior management, researchers, heads of research programmes, early-career

researchers, and support and administrative personnel. These discussions focus on topics such as the institution's strategic priorities, governance and organisational practices, research outputs and collaborations, supervision and career development, the functioning of support services, and the overall quality of the research environment. The site-visit programme also features a guided **tour of selected research infrastructure, research equipment or facilities**, which enables reviewers to assess the adequacy, accessibility, utilisation, and long-term sustainability of the facilities and equipment that underpin the institution's research activities. Institutions select the infrastructure to be presented, taking into account the Panel's expressed interests and the time available.

The practical organization of the visit is jointly coordinated by the evaluated research institution and ARIS. Reviewers do not arrange logistical aspects independently; all matters related to travel and accommodation are handled in coordination with an external service provider. Reviewers will receive all necessary practical instructions and detailed logistical information regarding the visit in a timely manner from the ARIS staff.

2.6. DESCRIPTIVE ASSESSMENT

The main purpose of the descriptive assessment is to provide a structured, evidence-based narrative that explains how an institution performs in relation to the defined criteria, indicators, and sub-criteria. Its primary function is to support informed decision-making by identifying strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement, thereby guiding actions, enhancements, or strategic changes within the evaluated institution.

The descriptive assessment is divided into sections in accordance with the evaluation criteria and indicators. In each section, all sub-criteria should be taken into account in the descriptive assessment. For more details, please refer to Chapter 2.3 and Appendix I.

The descriptive assessment should be:

- ☒ based solely on the merit of the evaluation material and site visit, with concrete justification;
- ☒ specific to the relevant evaluation criterion and indicator, considering all relevant sub-criteria;
- ☒ clear, precise and substantial;
- ☒ consistent with the numerical score awarded;
- ☒ of an adequate length and in an appropriate tone.

The descriptive assessment should NOT be:

- ☒ a summary of the evaluation material;
- ☒ based on assumptions;
- ☒ non-related to the criterion in question;
- ☒ ambiguous, inaccurate, vague, and subject to interpretation;
- ☒ contradictory statements.

2.7. NUMERICAL SCORES

The numerical score is a quantitative rating that reflects the reviewers' overall judgement of how well an institution meets a specific indicator, based on the descriptive assessment. It should always be interpreted together with the qualitative analysis that provides its context and justification.

A score from 0 to 4 shall be assigned for each indicator within individual evaluation criteria. **Please see Appendix II (Score Grid) for more detailed guidance on the interpretation of individual scores.**

0	MISSING OR INSUFFICIENT
1	WEAK
2	FAIR
3	VERY GOOD
4	EXCELLENT

The numerical score should accurately reflect the descriptive assessment. The numerical scores assigned by the Assessment Panel are used by ARIS to calculate the quality index for research institutions undergoing external evaluations. The quality index serves as the basis for the redistribution of up to 5% of total block research funding; however, no institution may lose more than 3% of its block funding.

2.8. OTHER NARRATIVE SECTIONS AND GUIDELINES

The Evaluation Report includes an **introductory section** where the Assessment Panel may provide general comments, findings, and conclusions regarding the main strengths and weaknesses of the evaluated research institution.

The Evaluation Report must include **recommendations for future actions and improvements**. These recommendations should be formulated under each individual indicator, ensuring that they are directly linked to the specific findings of the descriptive assessment.

Another mandatory section of the report is a **response to the rebuttal of the research institution**, where the Assessment Panel concisely addresses the key points raised in the research institution's rebuttal. The response should focus on clarifying the original evaluation or reflect any changes in the Evaluation Report, referring only to relevant evidence and criteria.

The Assessment Panel is reminded to remain aware of potential **unconscious bias** and how it can affect the assessment process.⁶ The Panel is also reminded to follow relevant guidelines on the **responsible use of artificial intelligence**⁷ when drafting the descriptive assessment. AI tools may be used to support clarity and structure, but the final content must reflect the Assessment Panel's own expert judgement. Reviewers remain fully responsible for the accuracy, integrity, and confidentiality of the assessment and should critically review any AI-assisted output to avoid errors, bias, or misrepresentation.



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⁶ For example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYaK1WphTuk>.

⁷ [Living guidelines on the responsible use of generative AI in research](#) (ERA Forum stakeholders' document).

3. EVALUATION PHASES IN DETAIL

3.1. KICK-OFF MEETING AND TRAINING



The chairs of the Assessment Panels participate in an **online kick-off meeting**, where ARIS presents the procedure, criteria, indicators, methodology, etc. The main purpose of this meeting is calibration, i.e. ensuring a consistent approach and a shared understanding of all the key aspects of the evaluation. The meeting is also attended, in an advisory capacity, by experts on early-career researchers, innovation, and the Slovenian research and evaluation system, who provide contextual information on the Slovenian research system, including its specific characteristics, strategic background, historical development, recent changes, and the perspectives of different stakeholders.

The evaluation process comprises an **online training** where all the members of the Assessment Panel are introduced to the evaluation system, workflow, timeline, objectives and other details of the evaluation procedure. The training also provides the members of the Panel with an opportunity to raise any questions and ask for clarifications.

3.2. INDIVIDUAL REVIEW



Each member of the Assessment Panel reviews the Self-Evaluation Reports submitted by the research institutions assessed and prepares rough drafts of the Evaluation Reports, highlighting key points, observations, and issues for alignment within the Panel, as well as inputs for the discussion and planning of the site visits.

Depending on the number of institutions assessed, the members of the Assessment Panel have up to four weeks to review the Self-Evaluation Reports before aligning on their findings.

3.3. CONSENSUS & SITE-VISIT PREP



After the members of the Assessment Panel examine the Self-Evaluation Reports individually, the Panel proceeds to a discussion and an exchange of views to reach a consensus on initial findings.

At this stage, the Assessment Panel begins preparing for the site visit. Based on its preliminary conclusions and findings, **the Panel identifies key issues requiring further clarification, specifies the institutional documents (procedures, strategies, policies, etc.) it wishes to review, and agrees on the main topics to be addressed during the visit.** This may include defining specific questions for the research institution, identifying whom the Panel would like to meet, and indicating any infrastructure, equipment or facilities they wish to examine in more detail. The Panel sends this information to ARIS, which forwards it to the research institution in advance of the visit.

The Chair of the Assessment Panel has considerable discretion as to how the process of reaching a consensus and preparing for the site visit is organized. The aim at this stage is to reach agreement on the initial findings and site visit highlights. The Chair should be in regular contact with the ARIS staff, who provides the Panel with technical and administrative support (e.g. by hosting the meetings on virtual conference platforms, if needed).

3.4. SITE VISIT



The site visit represents an integral part of the evaluation process, providing the Assessment Panel with an opportunity to validate and complement the information presented in the Self-Evaluation Report through direct interaction with the research institution. **Each institution is visited by a subgroup of the Assessment Panel composed of at least two members.** The visit typically includes meetings with the senior management of the research institution, researchers at different career

stages, and, where relevant, support staff and other stakeholders, as well as a tour of selected infrastructure and facilities. Further details on the site visits are provided in Chapter 2.5.

3.5. DRAFT EVALUATION REPORT



After the completion of the site visit, the Assessment Panel draws up a Draft Evaluation Report for each research institution assessed. **At this stage, the report includes the Panel's agreed descriptive assessment and recommendations. Numerical scores must not yet be assigned** and the report section responding to the rebuttal report should remain unfilled. The individual Draft Evaluation Reports are prepared by the subgroup that conducted the site visit, which then presents its findings, key observations, and proposed formulations to the full Panel for discussion and alignment. Further details on the preparation of the reports can be found in Chapters 2.3 and 2.6, as well as in Appendices I and II.

The Chair of the Assessment Panel should collect all the Draft Evaluation Reports and is responsible for guiding the process to ensure that a harmonised and coherent draft is prepared. The Chair then collects all the Draft Evaluation Reports and delivers the reports to the ARIS staff by uploading them to the Sync cloud storage. **The members of the Assessment Panel have up to three weeks following the conclusion of the last site visit to submit the Draft Evaluation Reports, depending on the number of reports to be prepared.**

Following the submission, Draft Evaluation Reports are reviewed by ARIS and an external research assessment expert, who examine the reports for any administrative or procedural inconsistencies, as well as for any discrepancies in the application of evaluation criteria, indicators and sub-criteria, and may suggest necessary corrections or improvements. **Upon receiving any suggested revisions, the Assessment Panel has one week to incorporate them and re-submit the Draft Evaluation Reports to ARIS.**

3.6. REBUTTAL REVIEW & FINALIZATION



The ARIS staff forwards the reviewed Draft Evaluation Reports to the research institutions assessed to offer them an opportunity to check the report and the descriptive assessment and to highlight any major inconsistency, ambiguity or inaccuracy. **Each research institution has 10 days to deliver their rebuttals of the Draft Evaluation Reports.** Then, the ARIS staff uploads the rebuttals to the Sync cloud storage.

After all the rebuttals are collected, the Assessment Panel reviews the responses submitted by the research institutions. The Panel considers the rebuttals alongside the Draft Evaluation Reports, addresses any critical observations in the dedicated rebuttal section of the report, agrees on any necessary adjustments or modifications, and **assigns numerical scores for each indicator** based on the outcome of this final round of deliberation.

3.7. FINAL EVALUATION REPORT



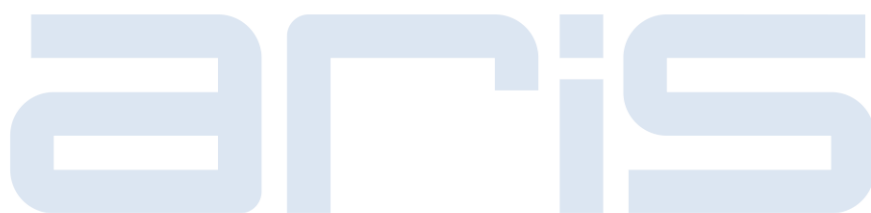
Finally, the Chair of the Panel collects the agreed Final Evaluation Reports and uploads them to the Sync cloud storage. The other members of the Panel confirm their agreement with the Final Evaluation Reports by signing a statement and submitting it to the ARIS staff, formally endorsing the descriptive assessment and the assigned numerical scores. **The Chair of the Assessment Panel must submit the Final Evaluation Reports by the deadline set by ARIS.**

If necessary, the reports are then reviewed again by the ARIS official and the external expert, who focus on ensuring consistency between the numerical scores and the descriptive assessments. **Upon receiving any suggested revisions, the Assessment Panel has one week to incorporate them and re-submit the Final Evaluation Reports to ARIS.**

4. APPENDICES

The Evaluation Guide includes the following appendices, which provide guidance and tools to support a consistent and transparent assessment process:

- **APPENDIX I – Criteria, Indicators, Sub-Criteria** – sets out the evaluation framework, detailing the criteria, indicators, and sub-criteria used to assess research institutions;
- **APPENDIX II – Score Grid** – provides a standardized format for recording numerical scores and descriptive assessments, ensuring clarity, transparency, and comparability across evaluations.
- **APPENDIX III – Structure of the Self-Evaluation Report** – defines the required structure and content of the self-evaluation report prepared by the research institution, providing a standardized framework.



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APPENDIX I: Criteria, Indicators, Sub-Criteria

Criterion	Indicator	Sub-criteria
I. Scientific excellence	1. Contribution to the advancement of science and knowledge	1.1. Proven contribution to the advancement of science and knowledge with a representative set of research outputs.
	2. Critical self-assessment, actions and implementation of strategic directions regarding scientific excellence	2.1. An appropriate critical assessment of the research organisation's scientific excellence, including actions taken to eliminate any shortcomings and improve scientific excellence. 2.2. An appropriate assessment of the results of evaluations of research programmes by ERC panels and external institutional evaluation, adoption of the necessary actions to address the findings and recommendations. 2.3. An appropriate critical assessment of the research organisation's performance in implementing its mission and strategy as well as its strategic, long-term and development objectives in terms of scientific excellence.
II. Societal impact	1. Contribution to the well-being of society and the environment	1.1. Proven contribution to the transfer of knowledge and research outputs into practice (i.e. technological progress, innovation, solutions to societal and environmental challenges, understanding of phenomena, changes in practices, legislation, strategies, habits) at the local, national or international level with a representative set of impact case studies.
	2. Critical self-assessment, actions and implementation of strategic directions regarding societal impact	2.1. An appropriate critical assessment of the research organisation's performance in knowledge transfer, creating societal impact or social engagement, including actions taken to eliminate any shortcomings and improve societal impact. 2.2. An appropriate assessment of the results of evaluations of research programmes by ERC panels and external institutional evaluation, adoption of the necessary actions to address the findings and recommendations. 2.3. An appropriate critical assessment of the research organisation's performance in implementing its mission and strategy as well as its strategic, long-term and development objectives in terms of societal impact.
III. Quality of institutional research environment	1. Strategic management	1.1. Appropriateness, coherence, ambition, and the feasibility of the research organisation's strategy, research implementation plan, and strategic, long-term and development objectives. 1.2. Performance in achieving the indicator targets set by the research organisation.
	2. HR policy, rejuvenation of the research community, PhD training	An appropriate human resources management strategy in line with the strategic direction of the research organisation and the appropriate professional support, particularly through introduction or acquisition of the HR Excellence in Research award (Human Resources Strategy for Researchers – HRS4R). 2.2. Actions to rejuvenate the research community (e.g. diversity in researchers' career stages), including to attract new generations of researchers and to ensure a high-quality training for young researchers and the monitoring of doctoral candidates. 2.3. The effective involvement of R1 and R2 researchers ¹ (including the mechanism of young researchers) in research activities and outputs (e.g. (co-)authors of publications and other outputs).

¹ The European Framework for Research Careers describes four broad profiles on the researchers' career development:

- **R1 – First Stage Researcher:** Researchers doing research under supervision up to the point of a PhD or equivalent level of competence and experience.
- **R2 – Recognised Researcher:** Researchers with a PhD or equivalent level of competence and experience who have not yet established a significant level of independence in developing their own research, attracting funding, or leading a research group.
- **R3 – Established Researcher:** Researchers with a PhD or equivalent level of competence and experience who are able to independently develop their own research, attract funding, and lead a research group.
- **R4 – Leading Researcher:** Researchers with a PhD or equivalent level of competence and experience who are recognised as leading their research field by their peers.

		2.4. Appropriate procedures to assess researchers' activities (e.g. when promoting to a higher academic rank or recruiting new research staff), taking into account the diverse range of activities and contributions of researchers in accordance with the principles of open science and the guidelines of the European Research Area.
	3. Research infrastructure and equipment	3.1. Proven quality and appropriateness of research infrastructure and equipment. 3.2. An appropriate planned strategic upgrading and modernization of research infrastructure and equipment. 3.3. Mechanisms allowing research equipment and infrastructure sharing with external researchers.
	4. Collaboration, knowledge transfer and diversity of funding sources	4.1. Proven scientific collaboration and actions to encourage collaboration with other research organisations (projects, programmes, strategies, processes) at the national, international or local level, including transdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research. 4.2. Proven collaboration and social engagement as well as actions to encourage social engagement and collaboration with organisations, institutions, companies and other partners from the social environment at the national, international or local level. 4.3. Appropriate professional support for the transfer of knowledge into the social environment to achieve societal impact. 4.4. Actions to encourage and implement early planning of knowledge transfer and to include potential societal impact in research design; 4.5. Diverse funding sources outside the block research funding system (e.g. industry, public sources (ministries, agencies, local communities), international projects).
	5. Internal system for ensuring the quality of research	5.1. Appropriate internal institutional self-evaluation standards and procedures based on the criteria of scientific excellence, societal impact and quality of the institutional research environment, as well as on the implementation of the principles of open science, equal opportunities, and ethics and integrity (including mechanisms for identifying weaknesses and opportunities); 5.2. Appointed personnel, working bodies or committees in charge of conducting institutional self-evaluation, including appropriate representation of R1 and R2 researchers in these working bodies and committees, if relevant. 5.3. Mechanisms for adopting and implementing actions based on the conclusions of institutional self-evaluation and recommendations of external evaluations (evaluations of research programmes at the level of ERC panels and external institutional evaluation), including the appropriateness of the actions themselves. 5.4. Procedures for defining strategic, long-term, and development objectives, strategy documents and a research implementation plan.
	6. Open science principles	6.1. Appropriate internal policies and procedures to implement the principles of open science (e.g. rules, action plan, strategy). 6.2. An appropriate staffing structure for implementing the principles of open science (including, for example, a designated responsible person, data curator and data steward). 6.3. Appropriate actions or practices regarding open access to publications and other research outputs (such as the growth trend and the percentage of open-access scientific publications and research data) as well as data management (e.g. a research data management plan, research data management in accordance with FAIR ² principles). 6.4. Other appropriate actions and support for the implementation of open science (e.g. science communication, citizen science, science popularisation, open methodologies, open peer review, early and open exchange of research information).
	7. Principle of equal opportunities	7.1. An appropriate strategy and actions to implement the principle of equal opportunities (e.g. a gender equality plan and its implementation). 7.2. An appropriate staffing structure for implementing the principle of equal opportunities (including, for example, a designated responsible person and a working group/committee).

² The **FAIR** acronym refers to the principles for data handling:

- **F – Findable:** Metadata and data should be easy to find for both humans and computers. This includes the use of unique and persistent identifiers (e.g. DOI).
- **A – Accessible:** Once the user finds the required data, they need to know how they can be accessed, even if protected. It is important to use open and standardized protocols.
- **I – Interoperable:** The data need to be integrated with other datasets and tools, which means using standard formats and controlled vocabularies.
- **R – Reusable:** Data should be well-described and licensed so that they can be reused for other research and purposes.

	8. Ethics and integrity ³	8.1. Appropriate internal policies or procedures to address research ethics and integrity (REI) systematically (e.g. assessment of research ethics, violation of REI principles, and appropriate sanctions). 8.2. Actions to safeguard REI (e.g. scientific rigour, disclosure of conflicts of interest, responsible protection of intellectual property rights, prevention of intellectual property theft, protection of whistleblowers). 8.3. Efforts to respect ethical aspects of publication (e.g. data authenticity, avoiding questionable journals or publishers).
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³ The fundamental principles of the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity:

- Reliability in ensuring the quality of research, reflected in the design, methodology, analysis, and use of resources.
- Honesty in developing, undertaking, reviewing, reporting, and communicating research in a transparent, fair, full, and unbiased way.
- Respect for colleagues, research participants, research subjects, society, ecosystems, cultural heritage, and the environment.
- Accountability for the research from idea to publication, for its management and organisation, for training, supervision, and mentoring, and for its wider societal impacts.

APPENDIX II: Score Grid

This document provides a working framework for developing progressive assessment tables for indicators and criteria related to the quality of scientific research and institutional support in the evaluation of research institutions in Slovenia. Descriptive assessments and numerical scores are assigned at the level of individual indicators.

Assessment Scale

Score	Rating
0	MISSING OR INSUFFICIENT
1	WEAK
2	FAIR
3	VERY GOOD
4	EXCELLENT

I. SCIENTIFIC EXCELLENCE

1. Contribution to the advancement of science and knowledge

Sub-criteria:

1.1: Proven contribution to the advancement of science and knowledge with a representative set of research outputs.

Score	Reference description
0	No convincing evidence is provided that the research institution has contributed to the advancement of science and knowledge. Research outputs are absent, insufficient, not representative, or not clearly linked to scientific progress, and the findings from the site visit do not provide relevant additional support.
1	The institution provides limited evidence of contribution to science and knowledge. The exemplar set of research outputs is narrow or only marginally relevant to the field, with limited indication of originality, significance, or scholarly influence. Evidence gathered during the site visit provides only limited additional confirmation.
2	The institution demonstrates a credible but moderate contribution to the advancement of science and knowledge. A representative set of research outputs is provided, although the evidence of originality, quality, significance, or influence is uneven across outputs or fields.

	Findings from the site visit may support the assessment, but do not fully resolve the unevenness of the evidence.
3	The institution demonstrates a strong and well-substantiated contribution to the advancement of science and knowledge. The representative set of research outputs shows clear quality, originality, relevance within relevant scientific fields. This assessment is further supported, where appropriate, by findings from the site visit, including interviews and examination of relevant research conditions or equipment.
4	The institution demonstrates an outstanding and clearly evidenced contribution to the advancement of science and knowledge. The representative set of research outputs is of high quality. The assessment is coherently supported by evidence from the site visit, including interviews and, where relevant, examination of equipment. The institutional research output shows originality and significance. Compelling evidence was found about substantial scholarly influence, including contributions that shape or advance the relevant field internationally.

2. Critical self-assessment, actions and implementation of strategic directions regarding scientific excellence

Sub-criteria:

2.1: An appropriate critical assessment of the research institution's scientific excellence, including actions taken to eliminate any shortcomings and improve scientific excellence.

2.3: An appropriate critical assessment of the research institution's performance in implementing its mission and strategy as well as its strategic, long-term and development objectives in terms of scientific excellence.

Score	Reference description
0	No convincing evidence is provided that the institution critically assesses its scientific excellence or its implementation of mission, strategy, strategic, long-term and development objectives in relation to scientific excellence. Shortcomings, corrective actions, and strategic progress are absent, unclear, or insufficiently documented.
1	The institution provides a limited or mainly descriptive self-assessment of scientific excellence and strategic implementation. Identified shortcomings, related actions, and links to the mission, strategy, or strategic, long-term and development objectives are weakly developed, unevenly evidenced, or insufficiently connected to improvement.
2	The institution demonstrates an adequate but uneven critical assessment of scientific excellence and of progress in implementing its mission, strategy, strategic, long-term and

	development objectives. Some shortcomings are identified and actions are described, but the evidence of systematic follow-up, prioritisation, and improvement in scientific excellence is only partial.
3	The institution provides a clear, evidence-based, and substantially critical assessment of scientific excellence and strategic implementation. Shortcomings are identified, actions are adopted and followed up, and there is credible evidence that these actions support improvement in scientific excellence and progress towards mission, strategy, and strategic, long-term and development objectives.
4	The institution demonstrates a comprehensive, rigorous, and well-evidenced critical self-assessment of scientific excellence and strategic implementation. Shortcomings are systematically identified, prioritised, and addressed through effective actions, with strong evidence of continuous improvement, strategic learning, and substantial progress towards mission, strategy, and long-term, strategic and development objectives in scientific excellence.

II. SOCIETAL IMPACT

1. Contribution to the well-being of society and the environment

Sub-criteria:

1.1: Proven contribution to the transfer of knowledge and research outputs into practice (i.e. technological progress, innovation, solutions to societal and environmental challenges, understanding of phenomena, changes in practices, legislation, strategies, habits) at the local, national or international level with a representative set of impact case studies.

Score	Reference description
0	No convincing evidence is provided that the institution has contributed to the transfer of knowledge or research outputs into practice. Impact case studies are absent, insufficient, not representative, or do not demonstrate a clear link between research activities and benefits for society or the environment. Findings from the site visit do not provide relevant additional support.
1	The institution provides limited evidence of knowledge transfer or societal and environmental contribution. The impact case studies are narrow, weakly documented, mainly descriptive, or only marginally connected to research outputs, with limited evidence of uptake, use, change, or benefit at local, national, or international level. Evidence gathered during the site visit provides only limited additional confirmation.

2	The institution demonstrates a credible but moderate contribution to the transfer of knowledge and research outputs into practice. A representative set of impact case studies is provided, but the evidence of concrete uptake, practical use, innovation, policy or behavioural change, environmental benefit, or wider societal relevance is uneven or only partly substantiated. Findings from the site visit may support the assessment, but do not fully resolve the unevenness of the evidence.
3	The institution demonstrates a strong and well-substantiated contribution to society and the environment through the transfer of knowledge and research outputs into practice. The impact case studies provide clear links to underlying research, evidence of uptake, other forms of tangible trace in practice or meaningful benefits. This assessment is further supported, where appropriate, by findings from the site visit, including interviews and relevant evidence.
4	The institution demonstrates an outstanding, clearly evidenced, and significant contribution to the well-being of society and the environment. The representative set of impact case studies shows substantial and traceable transfer of knowledge and research outputs into practice, with compelling evidence of durable, wide-reaching, or highly influential effects on technology, innovation, societal or environmental challenges at local, national, or international level. The assessment is coherently supported by evidence from the site visit, including evidence that consideration of impact is embedded in the institutional research culture.

2. Critical self-assessment, actions and implementation of strategic directions regarding societal impact

Sub-criteria:

2.1: An appropriate critical assessment of the research institution's performance in knowledge transfer, creating societal impact or social engagement, including actions taken to eliminate any shortcomings and improve societal impact.

2.3: An appropriate critical assessment of the research institution's performance in implementing its mission and strategy as well as its strategic, long-term and development objectives in terms of societal impact.

Score	Reference description
0	No convincing evidence is provided that the institution critically assesses its performance in knowledge transfer, societal impact, social engagement, or the implementation of its mission, strategy, and long-term development objectives in relation to societal impact.

	Shortcomings, corrective actions, strategic progress, and improvement measures are absent, unclear, or insufficiently documented.
1	The institution provides limited or mainly descriptive self-assessment of knowledge transfer, societal impact, social engagement, and strategic implementation. Identified shortcomings and actions are weakly developed, unevenly evidenced, or insufficiently connected to mission, strategy, long-term, strategic and development objectives, or improvement in societal impact.
2	The institution demonstrates an adequate but uneven critical assessment of knowledge transfer, societal impact and progress in implementing its mission, strategy, and long-term development objectives. Some shortcomings are identified and corrective actions are described, but evidence of systematic follow-up, prioritisation, learning, and improvement in societal impact is only partial.
3	The institution provides a clear, evidence-based, and substantially critical assessment of its performance in knowledge transfer, societal impact, social engagement, and strategic implementation. Shortcomings are identified, relevant actions are adopted and followed up, and there is credible evidence that these actions support improvement in societal impact and progress towards mission, strategy, and long-term, strategic and development objectives.
4	The institution demonstrates a comprehensive, rigorous, and well-evidenced critical self-assessment of knowledge transfer, societal impact, and strategic implementation. Shortcomings are systematically identified, prioritised, and addressed through effective actions, with strong evidence of continuous improvement, strategic learning, and substantial progress towards mission, strategy, and long-term, strategic and development objectives in societal impact.

III. QUALITY OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

1. Strategic management

Sub-criteria:

1.1: Appropriateness, coherence, ambition, and the feasibility of the research institution's strategy, research implementation plan, and strategic, long-term and development objectives.

1.2: Performance in achieving the indicator targets set by the research institution.

Score	Reference description
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0	No convincing evidence is provided that the institution has an appropriate, coherent, ambitious, or feasible strategy, research implementation plan, or strategic, long-term and development objectives. Indicator targets are absent, unclear, not measurable, or there is no evidence of performance in achieving them. Findings from the site visit do not provide relevant additional support.
1	The institution provides limited evidence of strategic management. The strategy, research implementation plan, or long-term and development objectives are weakly developed, insufficiently coherent, only partly feasible, or lack ambition. Indicator targets are only partly defined, and evidence of progress towards them is limited, fragmented, or weakly documented. The Self-Evaluation Report is mainly descriptive or/and shows limited evidence of collective institutional deliberation about the mission and strategic orientation. Evidence gathered during the site visit provides only limited additional confirmation.
2	The institution demonstrates an adequate but uneven approach to strategic management. The strategy, research implementation plan, and strategic, long-term and development objectives are generally appropriate and feasible, but their coherence, ambition, or prioritisation is only partly convincing. Performance against indicator targets is reported, but achievement is uneven or only partially substantiated. Findings from the site visit may support the assessment, but do not fully resolve the unevenness of the evidence. The Self-Evaluation Report shows some initial steps towards a more effective system in which self-reflection of the staff and leadership on strategic orientation leads to follow-up action.
3	The institution demonstrates a clear, coherent, ambitious, and feasible strategic management framework. The strategy, research implementation plan, and strategic, long-term and development objectives are well aligned and supported by credible evidence. Indicator targets are defined and mostly achieved, with documented progress and a clear basis for monitoring performance. This assessment is further supported, where appropriate, by findings from the site visit. Self-evaluation is solid, reflects the inclusion of all institutional staff and leads to continuous improvements.
4	The institution demonstrates an excellent, integrated, and evidence-based strategic management framework. The institutional research culture is highly developed, with collective self-reflection and a shared commitment to optimising and further developing the institution's strategic orientation. Consequently, the strategy, research implementation plan, and strategic, long-term and development objectives are highly appropriate, coherent, ambitious, feasible, and mutually reinforcing, and are consistently reflected in implementation evidence across relevant criteria and indicators. Indicator targets are

clearly defined, systematically monitored, and convincingly achieved or exceeded, providing strong evidence of effective strategic steering and institutional development. The assessment is coherently supported by the Self-Evaluation Report and by evidence from the site visit, including interviews.

2. HR policy, rejuvenation of the research community, PhD training

Sub-criteria:

2.1: An appropriate human resources management strategy in line with the strategic direction of the research institution and the appropriate professional support, particularly through introduction or acquisition of the HR Excellence in Research award (Human Resources Strategy for Researchers – HRS4R).

2.2: Actions to rejuvenate the research community (e.g. diversity in researchers' career stages), including to attract new generations of researchers and to ensure a high-quality training for young researchers and the monitoring of doctoral candidates.

2.3: The effective involvement of R1 and R2 researchers (including the mechanism of young researchers) in research activities and outputs (e.g. (co-)authors of publications and other outputs).

2.4: Appropriate procedures to assess researchers' activities (e.g. when promoting to a higher academic rank or recruiting new research staff), taking into account the diverse range of activities and contributions of researchers in accordance with the principles of open science and the guidelines of the European Research Area.

Score	Reference description
0	No convincing evidence is provided that the institution has an appropriate human resources management strategy, professional HR support, or alignment between HR policy and strategic direction. Measures for rejuvenating the research community, attracting or training young researchers, supervising doctoral candidates, involving R1 and R2 researchers in research activities and outputs, or assessing researchers' diverse contributions are absent, unclear, or insufficiently documented. Findings from the site visit do not provide relevant additional support.
1	The institution provides limited evidence of a coherent HR management strategy and related professional support. Actions to rejuvenate the research community, support PhD training, supervise doctoral candidates, and involve R1 and R2 researchers in research activities and outputs are fragmented, mainly descriptive, or inconsistently implemented. Plans for reform towards responsible researcher assessment are still under development. Assessment procedures, for example in recruitment, promotion, or allocation of funds, only

	partly or poorly recognise diverse research activities, open science principles, or European Research Area guidelines, and there remains significant reliance on proxy indicators such as journal impact factors or similar metrics. Evidence gathered during the site visit provides only limited additional confirmation. The Self-Evaluation Report is mainly descriptive or/and shows limited evidence of self-reflection on the human resource management leading to concrete follow-up action.
2	The institution demonstrates an adequate but uneven approach to HR policy, rejuvenation of the research community, and doctoral training. The HR strategy is generally aligned with institutional priorities, but implementation is only partial or inconsistently evidenced. Actions to attract and support younger researchers, supervise doctoral candidates, and involve R1 and R2 researchers in research activities and outputs are present, but their effectiveness varies. Reform of researcher assessment (for e.g. recruitment, promotion, and allocation of funds) is well planned, realistic, and acknowledges diverse researcher contributions and open science principles in line with international recommendations. However, implementation is still at an early stage, although the research community is aware of the planned changes and findings from the site visit support the credibility of the reform direction. So does the Self-Evaluation Report.
3	The institution demonstrates a clear, coherent, and well-supported HR policy that is aligned with its strategic direction and supported by appropriate professional structures. It has effective actions to rejuvenate the research community, attract and train young researchers, supervise doctoral candidates, and involve R1 and R2 researchers meaningfully in research activities and outputs. Reform towards responsible assessment of researchers is convincingly planned and well under way, with progress substantiated in the Self-Evaluation Report and observed during the site visit through interviews, with particular attention to young researchers in the R1 and R2 career stages. Self-evaluation practice is solid, long-term oriented and supports the decisions on continuous improvements.
4	The institution demonstrates an excellent, integrated, and evidence-based HR policy framework that strongly supports its strategic direction and research development. The institutional research culture is highly developed, with critical self-reflection informing management decisions and well-planned long-term action. HR management and professional support are systematically embedded, monitored, and improved. The institution provides compelling evidence of successful rejuvenation of the research community, effective attraction and development of new generations of researchers, high-quality PhD training, systematic supervision of doctoral candidates, and strong involvement

	of R1 and R2 researchers in research activities and outputs. Reform towards responsible researcher assessment is at an advanced stage and, for example in recruitment and promotion procedures, is consistently implemented and fully recognises diverse researcher contributions in line with open science principles and international recommendations. The assessment is coherently supported by evidence from the site visit, including interviews, especially with researchers at the R1 and R2 career stages.
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3. Research infrastructure and equipment

Sub-criteria:

3.1: Proven quality and appropriateness of research infrastructure and equipment.

3.2: An appropriate planned strategic upgrading and modernization of research infrastructure and equipment.

3.3: Mechanisms allowing research equipment and infrastructure sharing with external researchers.

Score	Reference description
0	No convincing evidence is provided that the institution has research infrastructure and equipment of appropriate quality or relevance to its research activities and strategic objectives. Plans for upgrading or modernisation are absent, unclear, or not strategically justified, and mechanisms for sharing infrastructure or equipment with external researchers are absent or insufficiently documented. Findings from the site visit, including examination of equipment and infrastructure, do not provide relevant additional support.
1	The institution provides limited evidence of the quality, appropriateness, or strategic relevance of its research infrastructure and equipment. Available infrastructure appears uneven, outdated, insufficiently maintained, or only partly aligned with research needs. Upgrade plans are fragmented, weakly prioritised, or not clearly linked to strategic objectives, and sharing mechanisms with external researchers are informal, limited, or weakly implemented. Evidence gathered during the site visit, including examination of equipment and other infrastructure, provides only limited additional confirmation. The Self-Evaluation Report is mainly descriptive or/and shows limited evidence of self-reflection leading to concrete follow-up action in improving the infrastructure and equipment.
2	The institution demonstrates an adequate but uneven research infrastructure and equipment environment. The quality and appropriateness of infrastructure are generally supported by evidence, but gaps remain in coverage, accessibility, maintenance, or alignment with research priorities. Strategic upgrading and modernisation are planned, but prioritisation, resources, timelines, or implementation evidence are only partly convincing.

	Mechanisms for external sharing exist, but their accessibility, transparency, or use by external researchers is limited or uneven. Findings from the site visit, including examination of equipment and other infrastructure, may support the assessment but do not fully resolve the unevenness of the evidence. The Self-Evaluation Report shows some initial steps towards a more effective system in which self-reflection leads to follow-up action and improvement.
3	The institution demonstrates good-quality and appropriate research infrastructure and equipment that are clearly aligned with its research profile, strategic objectives, and development needs. The findings from the site visit, including examination of equipment and other infrastructure confirmed this. Upgrade and modernisation plans are coherent, prioritised, and supported by credible evidence of implementation. Mechanisms for sharing infrastructure and equipment with external researchers are defined, accessible, and used in practice, contributing to collaboration and efficient use of resources. Self-evaluation is solid and supports the decisions on continuous improvements.
4	The institution demonstrates excellent, high-quality, and strategically appropriate research infrastructure and equipment that strongly support current and future research excellence, collaboration, and institutional development. The institutional research culture is on high level, including self-reflection and constant care for appropriate support in terms of infrastructure and equipment. Strategic upgrading and modernisation are systematic, well prioritised, realistically resourced, and clearly linked to long-term objectives. Infrastructure and equipment sharing with external researchers is governed by transparent, effective, and well-used mechanisms, providing strong evidence of openness, accessibility, collaboration, and efficient use of research resources.

4. Collaboration, knowledge transfer and diversity of funding sources

Sub-criteria:

4.1 Cooperation — academic collaboration: Proven scientific collaboration and actions to encourage collaboration with other research organisations (projects, programmes, strategies, processes) at the national, international or local level, including transdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research.

4.2 Cooperation — external partners and stakeholders: Proven collaboration and social engagement as well as actions to encourage social engagement and collaboration with organisations, institutions, companies and other partners from the social environment at the national, international or local level.

4.3 Knowledge transfer and innovation – professional support: Appropriate professional support for the transfer of knowledge into the social environment to achieve societal impact.

4.4 Knowledge transfer and innovation — early planning: Actions to encourage and implement early planning of knowledge transfer and to include potential societal impact in research design;

4.5 Funding sources: Diverse funding sources outside the block research funding system (e.g. industry, public sources (ministries, agencies, local communities), international projects).

Score	Reference description
0	No convincing evidence is provided for academic cooperation, cooperation with external partners and stakeholders, knowledge transfer, early planning of societal impact, or diverse funding outside block research funding. Scientific collaboration, social engagement, professional support for knowledge transfer, integration of impact into research design, and success in relevant national, international, industry, public, or prestigious funding schemes are absent, unclear, or insufficiently documented. Findings from the site visit do not provide relevant additional support.
1	The institution provides limited or fragmented evidence across the main dimensions of this indicator. Academic collaboration and cooperation with external partners are mostly occasional, individual-based, or weakly supported by institutional actions. Professional support for knowledge transfer is limited, and early planning of knowledge transfer or potential societal impact is not yet systematically embedded in research design. Funding outside the block research funding system is narrow, unstable, weakly evidenced, concentrated in only one or a few units, or lacks success in more competitive or prestigious schemes. The Self-Evaluation Report is mainly descriptive or/and shows limited evidence of self-reflection leading to concrete follow-up action in the items of this indicator.
2	The institution demonstrates an adequate but uneven approach to cooperation, knowledge transfer, innovation, and funding diversification. Academic cooperation with research organisations and cooperation with external partners or stakeholders are present, including some institutional actions to encourage collaboration, but their scope, intensity, interdisciplinarity, or strategic relevance varies. Professional support for knowledge transfer exists, and some attention is given to early planning of knowledge transfer and societal impact in research design, but implementation is partial or inconsistent. Funding sources outside the block research funding system are present, including some public, international, industry, or stakeholder-based sources, but diversification and success in highly competitive or prestigious funding schemes remain limited or uneven. Findings from the site visit may support the assessment, but do not fully resolve the unevenness of the evidence. The Self-

	Evaluation Report shows some initial steps towards a more effective system in which self-reflection leads to follow-up action and improvement.
3	The institution demonstrates a strong and well-supported approach to cooperation, knowledge transfer, innovation, and funding diversification. Academic cooperation is active, strategically encouraged, and includes relevant national, international, local, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, or transdisciplinary collaboration. Cooperation with external partners and stakeholders is well evidenced and contributes to social engagement and the practical relevance of research. Professional support for knowledge transfer is clearly organised, and early planning of knowledge transfer and potential societal impact is increasingly embedded in research design. Funding sources outside the block research funding system are diverse and credible, with evidence of success in competitive national or international funding and, where relevant, industry, public-sector, stakeholder-based, or prestigious schemes. The Self-Evaluation Report reflects a solid culture of continuous improvement through self-reflection and follow-up action.
4	The institution demonstrates an excellent, integrated, and evidence-based system for cooperation, knowledge transfer, innovation, and funding diversification including a robust mechanism of continuous improvement based in self-evaluation. Academic cooperation and cooperation with external partners are strategically steered, institutionally supported, broad in scope, sustained over a longer period, and demonstrably effective across relevant local, national, and international contexts, including interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary collaboration. Knowledge transfer is supported by strong professional structures, while early planning of knowledge transfer and potential societal impact is systematically embedded in research design and institutional practice. Funding outside the block research funding system is diverse, sustainable, and strategically important, with compelling evidence of success in competitive national and international sources and relevant prestigious funding schemes, as well as cooperation with industry, public bodies, local communities, or other stakeholders, where appropriate.

5. Internal system for ensuring the quality of research

Sub-criteria:

5.1: Appropriate internal institutional self-evaluation standards and procedures based on the criteria of scientific excellence, societal impact and quality of the institutional research environment, as well as on the implementation of the principles of open science, equal opportunities, and ethics and integrity (including mechanisms for identifying weaknesses and opportunities);

5.2: Appointed personnel, working bodies or committees in charge of conducting institutional self-evaluation, including appropriate representation of R1 and R2 researchers in these working bodies and committees, if relevant.

5.3: Mechanisms for adopting and implementing actions based on the conclusions of institutional self-evaluation and recommendations of external evaluations (evaluations of research programmes by ERC panels and external institutional evaluation), including the appropriateness of the actions themselves.

5.4: Procedures for defining strategic, long-term, and development objectives, strategy documents and a research implementation plan.

Score	Reference description
0	No convincing evidence is provided that the institution has an effective internal system for evaluation and improvement. Internal self-evaluation standards and procedures, responsible personnel or bodies, mechanisms for identifying weaknesses and opportunities, procedures for adopting actions based on self-evaluation or external evaluation recommendations, and procedures for defining strategic objectives and implementation plans are absent, unclear, or insufficiently documented. Research staff and other non-senior staff are unaware of a functioning quality assurance system.
1	The institution provides limited evidence of an internal quality system. Self-evaluation standards and procedures are incomplete, mainly descriptive, and not systematically connected to improvement. Responsible personnel or bodies may exist, but their roles, composition, or representation of R1 and R2 researchers are unclear. Follow-up actions and strategic planning procedures are vague, fragmented, inconsistently implemented, or weakly connected to evaluation findings. Evidence gathered during the site visit indicates only partial or superficial familiarity with the system. The involvement of research staff, especially early-career researchers, is uneven or minimal.
2	The institution demonstrates the existence of an internal system for ensuring quality, although it is still under development. Self-evaluation standards and procedures cover the main evaluation dimensions and relevant principles, but their depth, consistency, and practical use are only partly convincing. Personnel, committees, or working bodies are appointed, but there is weak or no evidence of appropriate representation, where relevant. Mechanisms for adopting and implementing actions based on self-evaluation and external evaluation recommendations exist, but follow-up, prioritisation, monitoring, and evidence of effectiveness are only partially substantiated. Procedures for defining strategic objectives and implementation plans are present or under development, but they remain separate from, or not yet fully integrated into, the quality system. During the site visit, interviewed

	research and support staff were aware of the system, but their participation appeared uneven, or the effectiveness of the process was not clear to them.
3	The institution demonstrates a solid internal quality assurance system or a strong commitment to implementing a well-structured, coherent, and realistic development plan for such a system. Evidence gathered during the site visit address the elements covered by the sub-criteria. The responsible bodies are, or are becoming, appropriately and inclusively composed, including representation of R1 and R2 researchers, where relevant. There is a clear connection between evaluation conclusions, external recommendations, and follow-up actions. The institution has recently adopted, or is developing, adequate procedures for defining strategic, long-term and development objectives and research implementation plans. The Self-Evaluation Report, together with interviews, reflects a commitment to strengthening the institutional quality culture.
4	The institution demonstrates a highly developed research quality culture and an advanced, integrated, and evidence-based internal system for ensuring the quality of research. Self-evaluation standards and procedures are comprehensive, systematic, and effectively applied. Personnel, committees, or working bodies responsible for self-evaluation are clearly mandated, competent, appropriately composed, and inclusive of R1 and R2 perspectives, where relevant. Weaknesses and opportunities are systematically identified, translated into well-prioritised actions, implemented, monitored, and improved in response to internal conclusions and external evaluation recommendations. Strategic, long-term and development objectives and strategy documents are defined through a coherent quality cycle that supports continuous institutional learning and improvement. The Self-Evaluation Report and evidence gathered during the site visit, including interviews, consistently confirm the maturity and effectiveness of this quality system.

6. Open science principles

Sub-criteria:

6.1: Appropriate internal policies and procedures to implement the principles of open science (e.g. rules, action plan, strategy).

6.2: An appropriate staffing structure for implementing the principles of open science (including, for example, a designated responsible person, data curator and data steward).

6.3: Appropriate actions or practices regarding open access to publications and other research outputs, such as the growth trend and percentage of open-access scientific publications and research data, as

well as data management, including research data management plans and research data management in accordance with FAIR principles.

6.4: Other appropriate actions and support for the implementation of open science, including science communication, citizen science, science popularisation, open methodologies, open peer review, and early and open exchange of research information.

Score	Reference description
0	No convincing evidence is provided that the institution has internal policies, procedures, staffing, actions, or support structures for implementing open science principles. Actions or strategies to support open publishing and access to publications or other research outputs, research data management, FAIR-related practices, and other open science actions are absent, unclear, or insufficiently documented. Findings from the site visit do not provide relevant evidence of institutional commitment to open science.
1	The institution provides limited evidence of implementation of open science principles. Policies or procedures are incomplete, mainly declarative, or weakly connected to institutional practice. Staffing responsibilities are unclear or insufficient. Open access, research data management, and FAIR-related practices are fragmented, inconsistently applied, or poorly monitored. Broader open science actions are occasional or weakly supported. Evidence gathered during the site visit provides only limited additional confirmation of the commitment to implement the principles of open science.
2	The institution demonstrates an adequate but uneven approach to open science. Internal policies, procedures, action plans, or strategies are present and generally appropriate, but implementation, monitoring, and institutional uptake are only partly convincing. Staffing structures for open science exist, although roles, responsibilities, or capacity may be limited. Open access practices and research data management, including FAIR-related principles, are developing, with some evidence of progress in promoting open-access publishing, research data management, or data management planning. Additional open science actions are present but not yet systematic across the institution. Interviews during the site visit indicate a certain level of commitment to open science, although this commitment is uneven and in some cases appeared mainly declarative.
3	The institution demonstrates a clear, coherent, and well-supported implementation of open science principles. Policies, procedures, action plans, or strategies are appropriately developed and connected to institutional practice. Staffing responsibilities, including relevant open science and research data management roles, are defined and functional. Publishing in open access platforms and open access to publications and other research

	outputs is actively supported and monitored, and research data management practices, including FAIR-oriented planning and support, are well established. Additional open science practices are meaningfully supported where relevant. Interviews reveal a strong commitment to transformations towards open science.
4	The institution demonstrates an excellent, integrated, and evidence-based open science framework as part of the institutional research culture. Policies, procedures, action plans, and strategic measures are comprehensive, systematically implemented, monitored, and improved. Staffing structures are clearly defined, competent, and sufficient, including effective responsibility for open science and research data management roles, such as data curator or data steward, where appropriate. Open access to publications and other research outputs shows strong and demonstrable progress, while research data management and FAIR-oriented practices are embedded in research workflows. The institution also provides compelling evidence of broader open science culture.

7. Principle of equal opportunities

Sub-criteria:

7.1: An appropriate strategy and actions to implement the principle of equal opportunities (e.g. a gender equality plan and its implementation).

7.2: An appropriate staffing structure for implementing the principle of equal opportunities (including, for example, a designated responsible person and a working group/committee).

Score	Reference description
0	No convincing evidence is provided that the institution has an appropriate strategy, actions, or implementation mechanisms for equal opportunities. A gender equality plan or comparable framework is absent, unclear, not implemented, or insufficiently documented, and there is no clear staffing structure, designated responsibility, working group, or committee to support implementation.
1	The institution provides limited evidence of commitment to equal opportunities. Strategy documents, actions, or a gender equality plan are mainly declarative, incomplete, weakly implemented, or poorly connected to institutional practice. Staffing responsibilities are unclear, insufficient, or informal, and any working group or committee has a limited mandate, visibility, continuity, or evidence of effective activity. There is weak evidence that equal opportunities are treated as a priority within the institutional research culture.
2	The institution demonstrates an adequate but uneven approach to equal opportunities. A strategy, gender equality plan, or comparable framework is present and generally

	appropriate, and some actions are being implemented, but monitoring, follow-up, institutional uptake, or evidence of practical effects is only partial. A designated responsible person, working group, or committee exists, but roles, resources, authority, or continuity may be limited or inconsistently evidenced. Findings from the site visit may support the assessment, but do not fully resolve the unevenness of the evidence.
3	The institution demonstrates a clear, coherent, and well-supported approach to equal opportunities. The strategy, gender equality plan, and related actions are appropriately developed, implemented, and connected to institutional policies and practices. Staffing responsibilities are clearly assigned, and a responsible person, working group, or committee has a defined role, sufficient visibility, and credible evidence of activity, follow-up, and contribution to implementation. Interviews indicate a genuine commitment to implementing actions that strengthen equal opportunities.
4	The institution demonstrates an excellent integration of the principle of equal opportunities into its institutional research culture. A structured framework for implementing equal opportunities is clearly established. The strategy, gender equality plan, and related actions are comprehensive, systematically implemented, monitored, evaluated, and improved, with strong evidence of institutional uptake and practical effects. Staffing and governance structures are clearly defined, appropriately resourced, and effective, including a designated responsible person, active working group or committee with a clear mandate, continuity, accountability, and demonstrable contribution to advancing equal opportunities across the institution. The assessment is coherently supported by interviews.

8. Ethics and integrity

Sub-criteria:

8.1: Appropriate internal policies or procedures to address research ethics and integrity (REI) systematically (e.g. assessment of research ethics, violation of REI principles, and appropriate sanctions).

8.2: Actions to safeguard REI (e.g. scientific rigour, disclosure of conflicts of interest, responsible protection of intellectual property rights, prevention of intellectual property theft, protection of whistleblowers).

8.3: Efforts to respect ethical aspects of publication (e.g. data authenticity, avoiding questionable journals or publishers).

Score	Reference description
0	No convincing evidence is provided that the institution has appropriate internal policies, procedures, actions, or publication-related safeguards for research ethics and integrity. Systematic assessment of research ethics, handling of violations, sanctions, safeguards for scientific rigour, conflicts of interest, intellectual property rights, prevention of intellectual property theft, whistleblower protection, data authenticity, and avoidance of questionable journals or publishers are absent, unclear, or insufficiently documented.
1	The institution provides limited evidence of a systematic approach to research ethics and integrity. Policies or procedures are mainly declarative, incomplete, weakly implemented, or poorly connected to institutional practice. Actions to safeguard aspects such as scientific rigour, manage conflicts of interest, protect intellectual property rights, prevent intellectual property theft, and protect whistleblowers are fragmented, informal, or weakly evidenced. Publication ethics practices, including assurance of data authenticity and avoidance of questionable journals or publishers, are occasional, uneven, or insufficiently monitored. Self-Evaluation Report and the findings during the visit indicate weak or no attention to the improvement.
2	The institution demonstrates an adequate but uneven approach to research ethics and integrity. Internal policies or procedures are present and generally appropriate, including processes for research ethics assessment, handling of violations of research ethics and integrity principles, and use of sanctions, but implementation, consistency, or monitoring is only partly convincing. Safeguards for aspects such as scientific rigour, conflict-of-interest disclosure, responsible protection of intellectual property rights, prevention of intellectual property theft, and whistleblower protection exist but vary in effectiveness or documentation. Publication ethics is addressed, including data authenticity and avoidance of questionable journals or publishers, but practices are not yet fully systematic across the institution. Commitment for improvement is modestly present in the self-evaluation practice.
3	The institution demonstrates a clear, coherent, and well-supported framework for research ethics and integrity. Internal policies and procedures are appropriately developed, implemented, and connected to institutional practice, including research ethics assessment, procedures for addressing violations, and proportionate sanctions. Actions to safeguard various aspects such as scientific rigour, disclose and manage conflicts of interest, protect intellectual property rights responsibly, prevent intellectual property theft, and protect whistleblowers are defined and credible. Ethical publication practices are actively promoted

	and monitored, including attention to data authenticity and avoidance of questionable journals or publishers. The Self-Evaluation Report reflects considerable efforts to improve the system and its practices.
4	Ethics and integrity are central elements of the institutional research culture. The institution has an excellent, integrated, and evidence-based system for research ethics and integrity. Policies and procedures are comprehensive, systematically implemented, monitored, evaluated, and improved, covering research ethics assessment, prevention and handling of violations of research ethics and integrity principles, and transparent and appropriate sanctions. Safeguards for various aspects of ethics and integrity are embedded in institutional practice and supported by clear responsibilities, guidance, and follow-up. Publication ethics is strongly and consistently safeguarded, with compelling evidence of practices that ensure data authenticity, responsible publication behaviour, and effective avoidance of questionable journals or publishers across the institution. The Self-Evaluation Report and evidence gathered during the site visit consistently confirm the maturity and effectiveness of this system.

APPENDIX III: Structure of the Self-Evaluation Report

1. INTRODUCTION – PRESENTATION OF THE RESEARCH ORGANIZATION

2. PRESENTATION OF THE SELF-EVALUATION APPROACH

3. SELF-EVALUATION OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

3.1. Scientific excellence

The Self-Evaluation Report includes research institution's critical self-assessment of its performance in pursuing scientific excellence, with particular attention to research outputs. The assessment is expected to be conducted at the level of relevant organizational units. To strengthen the credibility of the report and provide a sound basis for the site visit, the research institution is advised to substantiate its claims, findings, and proposed measures by referring to a selected set of research outputs¹ produced since 2022. Within ARIS's assessment of research excellence, significant emphasis is given to the originality and relevance of research outputs, their contribution to scientific progress and scholarly understanding, as well as adherence to methodological rigour.

The self-evaluation should also address the alignment of research activities and outputs with the institution's strategic orientations, examining the coherence of its scientific work and outputs with its mission and evaluating its effectiveness in implementing its strategy and achieving its strategic, long-term, and developmental objectives in the field of scientific excellence. The report should further outline the measures envisaged to address identified findings, remedy potential weaknesses, and, where necessary, adjust or reorganize the institution's strategic direction.

3.2. Societal impact

The research institution should provide a critical assessment of the broader societal impact generated over the past six years through the transfer of knowledge arising from its researchers' scientific work. The self-evaluation may also include knowledge transfer resulting from broader societal engagement activities. The report should evaluate and describe the relevance, reach, and potential visibility of the

¹ Please note that the number of research outputs the research institution is expected to present has been limited by ARIS, depending on the size of individual research institution.

contribution to society, the environment, and/or public well-being at the local, national, or international level. To strengthen the credibility of the report and provide a solid basis for the site visit, the research institution is encouraged to substantiate its statements, findings, and measures with concrete examples of societal impact, i.e. impact case studies².

Moreover, the research institution should conduct a critical assessment of how effectively it has implemented its strategic orientations related to societal impact, including the achievement of its strategic, long-term, and developmental objectives in the field of societal impact. The research institution should specify concrete steps, plans, and other measures it has defined in response to identified shortcomings, opportunities, or findings from the self-evaluation concerning the societal relevance of its scientific research activities.

4. QUALITY OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

4.1. Strategic management

The research institution should critically assess its strategic management of research activities, including progress in achieving the strategic, long-term, and developmental objectives set out in the block research funding contract. The Self-Evaluation Report should examine the coherence, relevance, and ambition of the research institution's strategy and research implementation plan, assess progress during the current contractual period, and evaluate performance against agreed indicators. The report should specify required improvements and detail the actions to be implemented, as well as outline the planned adjustments, enhancements, or changes for the subsequent contractual period.

4.2. HR policy, rejuvenation of the research community, PhD training

The research institution should critically assess the sustainability and future perspective of its research activities in relation to its human resources policy. This includes evaluating progress in rejuvenating the research community, ensuring active involvement across career stages, and assessing the adequacy of HR policies for both research and support staff. The research institution should outline measures to address weaknesses, describe planned improvements, and evaluate the implementation of a long-term

² Please note that the number of impact case studies the research institution is expected to present has been limited by ARIS, depending on the size of individual research institution.

career development approach aligned with its strategic goals, including fair and comprehensive evaluation criteria and appropriate support structures.

The institution should also assess the inclusion and measurable contributions of early-career researchers (R1 and R2), review internal evaluation processes, and propose concrete improvements. Particular emphasis should be placed on compliance with open science regulations and alignment with ERA principles, especially by moving beyond journal-based metrics toward assessing the substantive quality and broader impact of research achievements, including knowledge transfer, leadership, mentoring, and societal engagement.

4.3. Research infrastructure and equipment

The research institution should critically assess the quality and adequacy of its research infrastructure and equipment in supporting high-quality research outputs. This includes evaluating both the current state and the strategic perspective for future development, upgrading, and modernization. It should also assess incentives for the efficient use of infrastructure and equipment, shared use with external users, and collaboration in line with open science principles. Furthermore, the institution should evaluate the effectiveness of existing sharing mechanisms in practice (e.g. booking systems and agreements with other institutions or companies).

4.4. Collaboration, knowledge transfer and diversity of funding sources

The research institution should critically assess its national, international, and local engagement in terms of scientific collaboration and societal involvement. It should focus on key forms of cooperation and concrete examples (e.g. joint projects, contracts, outputs), including partnerships beyond the research sector. The institution is expected to evaluate the intensity and effectiveness of collaboration with partner institutions, research groups, and individual researchers, as well as reflect on cooperation within the institution itself. Particular attention should be given to measures that promote interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary research.

In addition, the research institution should assess its support for knowledge transfer and the integration of societal impact considerations into the early design of research activities. This includes describing relevant support structures, mechanisms, and practices, and evaluating the overall coherence of its approach to knowledge transfer as an integral dimension of research. Finally, the institution should present the diversity of funding sources beyond block research funding, outline their

respective shares, and assess their strategic importance and contribution to the long-term sustainability and development of its research activities.

4.5. Internal system for ensuring the quality of research

The research institution should critically reflect on its research and quality culture, presenting self-evaluation as a continuous process that supports institutional autonomy and strengthens internal quality assurance of the research environment, processes, standards, and practices. Where the system is still developing, it should outline the planned system in terms of e.g. structures, standards, procedures, techniques and mechanisms; where it is already established, it should assess its effectiveness, the adequacy of criteria and structures, the impact of resulting measures, and the involvement of the research community in fostering a culture of quality.

The report should clearly outline internal quality standards, procedures, responsible parties, and their effectiveness. The Self-Evaluation Report should also include the review of early-career researchers (R1 and R2) involvement in the internal quality management and the mechanisms for improvements based on self-evaluation findings, as well as present its processes for setting strategic, long-term, and development objectives and research implementation plan.

4.6. Open science principles

The research institution should critically assess its performance in the direction of open science, taking into account the relevant national legal and policy framework. The self-evaluation should reflect on the current level of implementation of open science principles, supported by evidence such as examples of practices and the share of open access publications, and assess the adequacy of planned measures based on strategic documents and action plans. It should also reflect on the effectiveness of existing practices and outline planned improvements and strategic steps for further development.

The assessment may address several aspects of open science implementation, including internal policies and procedures, organisational structure and staff support for open science, as well as practices related to open access to publications and other research outputs, research data management in accordance with FAIR principles, and the use of data management plans. The report may also cover activities such as science communication, citizen science, science popularisation, open methodologies, open educational resources, responsible research assessment, participation in open peer review, and support for early-career researchers in engaging with open science.

4.7. Principle of equal opportunities

The research institution should critically assess its performance in ensuring equal opportunities and equal treatment, taking into account relevant national and international legislation as well as relevant international recommendations and legal acts (e.g. [Directive \(EU\) 2024/1499](#) and [Directive \(EU\) 2024/1500](#)). The self-evaluation should analyse the current situation in the institution and assess existing strategies, practices, and measures for promoting equal opportunities (e.g. gender equality plan), including their level of implementation, effectiveness and impact on organisational culture. It should also outline planned improvements and assess the adequacy of staffing and institutional support dedicated to implementing the principle of equal opportunities.

4.8. Ethics and integrity

The research institution should critically assess the adequacy of its standards, bodies, procedures, and mechanisms for ensuring and strengthening the principles of ethics and integrity in research. In doing so, it may refer to relevant national and international guidance (e.g. [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#)). The self-evaluation should consider how the institution ensures research quality and reliability, transparency and honesty in, for example, conducting and reporting research, respect for research participants, society and the environment, and responsibility throughout the research process from idea to publication.

The assessment may address internal policies and procedures related to research ethics and integrity, including mechanisms for ethical review and the handling of alleged breaches. It may also evaluate measures promoting responsible research practices, such as appropriate authorship attribution, disclosure of conflicts of interest, protection of intellectual property, prevention of plagiarism and support for whistleblowers, as well as efforts to promote ethical publication practices and publishing with trustworthy journals and publishers.

5. SUMMARY AND SWOT ANALYSIS

6. APPENDICES

6.1. Appendix 1: List of research outputs

6.2. Appendix 2: Impact case studies