



## Department of Business Programme Document 2022-2024

### The three-year period 2019-2021: objectives and achievements

2021 marked the end of the three-year period covered by the Department of Business's 2019-2021 Programme Document. This document complies with requirement R4.B formulated by ANVUR in points B.1, B.2, B.3, and B.4, defining the Department's research strategy and Third Mission. On this topic, it should be re-emphasised that the University's internal organisation assigns all tasks relating to teaching to the faculties, thus leaving to the departments only tasks relating to research and some of the tasks relating to the Third Mission - a set of activities monitored and coordinated by the Rector's Delegate.

The objectives that the Department had set itself, in line also with the University's Strategic Plan, can be summarised as follows:

- 1) Improve the quality of research products, preferring publications that, by editorial placement and in line with the characteristics of each SSD, ensure appreciation, visibility and impact in the relevant scientific community. Since for most of the Department's SSDs preference should be given to publications in international and national journals with IF (band A journals or journals published on Scopus) and to refereed monographs, the number of products of this type, by researcher, was indicated as a possible quantitative indicator of improvement.
- 2) Improve the degree of internationalisation. The presence of publications in international journals was already considered satisfactory, so participation in European and, more generally, public tenders was indicated as an area for improvement. This objective's measurement was identified in the number of projects won in the three-year period and the amount of resources thus collected.
- 3) Improve research financed by third parties concerning the research centres' work and with *ad hoc* projects. Consequently, the decision was confirmed (Council Resolution of 11/10/2017) to devote 5% of the Department's funds as an incentive for teachers who had activated funded research, redistributing this sum to the funded projects themselves in proportion to the amount of funding obtained. The measurement of this objective was identified in the number of projects acquired and the amount of resources collected.
- 4) Improve the consistency of research products with the University's topics of interest. On this subject, in the previous University Strategic Plan, the Departmental Council was



asked, when evaluating the departmental projects to be financed, to consider the interdisciplinary nature of the projects, the number of researchers involved, and the subjects related to topics of clear relevance to the University.

Although it had identified criteria of a quantitative nature that could be used as metrics to assess the degree of achievement of the objectives identified, the 2019-2021 Programme Document did not set quantitative targets, believing that a qualitative assessment would be sufficient, given the already good results the Department had achieved in the past.

Before going into the activities carried out, it is also appropriate to recall the structure of the Department of Business. The number of teachers belonging to the Department remained unchanged over the three-year period, with 31 tenured teachers, including five full professors (six at the beginning of the period), 16 associate professors (15 at the beginning) and ten researchers. It should be pointed out that in addition to the tenured teachers, the Department also has a large number of freelance teachers who, in some cases, also contribute to research activities, particularly by collaborating with the research centres and observatories, which will be discussed shortly. There are 102 contracted teachers for official course teaching activities, plus nine doctoral students and three research fellows, totalling 144 members.

The Department's resources come from three distinct sources. The first is made up of departmental funds made available by the University, the second from resources collected through research promoted by the research centres/observatories or by individual teachers, and the third from participation in national or international public tenders. The latter two sources will be discussed shortly; concerning the first - University funds - the Business Department obtained € 86,954.30 in 2019, € 103,816.20 in 2020 and € 102,906.86 in 2021.

In line with University regulations, the Department has a Departmental Council whose main tasks are to propose to the Council an allocation of the resources allocated annually for research by the University and to carry out specific activities as delegated by the Council. For two years, the Department was also structured into five sections - Marketing and Communication, Law, Economics, Economics and Business Organisation, and Behaviour and Consumption - sections later reduced to four in 2021 with the creation of one Economics and Law section.

One of the characteristics of the Department is also the presence of a large number of research centres/observatories. In fact, in 2019, the following centres/observatories belonged to the Department:

- Centre for Neuromarketing Research "Behavior & Brain Lab"
- Centre for Employee Relations & Communication (CERC)
- Centre for Strategic Communication Research (CECOMS)



- Observatory on Public Communication, Public Branding and Digital Transformation

The four listed were then joined by the following three over the three-year period:

- Center for International Marketing & Sales Communication
- IULM Wine Institute (IWI)
- Retail Brand Communication Observatory

An overall assessment today of the results achieved by the Department over the past three-year period for the formulation of the new Programme Document must inevitably be prefaced by considering how two of the three years were strongly conditioned by the ongoing pandemic. It led to conditions of low mobility and slowed down existing projects, with an effect that was all the more negative the greater their complexity in terms of the number of researchers involved and the universities or other institutions cooperating in the work.

Concerning the first objective, the following table summarises the publication activity of the Department's teachers over the past three years. Out of a total of 374 publications, 79 were in refereed A-range or equivalent journals (Scopus publications), another 100 in other journals, 110 contributions in collective works and 33 monographs. Considering the number of teachers in the Department, it can be concluded that the objective of improving the quality of research products by preferring publications in high-level international journals has been fully achieved. 79 products from 31 teachers means an average of 2.5 products per teacher, thus very close to a standard of one A-grade publication per year. Considering all the publications, this standard rises to about four products per year on average; this is a very high level that, looking at the disciplinary areas in the Department, seems difficult to exceed, also taking into account the inevitable different productivity that individual teachers may have at certain times in their careers and personal lives. It is hoped that the results of the ongoing VQR, yet to be known, will confirm the assessment just made.

	Articles published or approved for publication in Band A journals	Articles published or approved for publication in other journals	Book chapters	Monographs	TOTAL products
2019	21	32	48	12	129
2020	28	47	44	13	150
2021	30	21	18	8	95
Total	79	100	110	33	374



The second objective concerned the internationalisation of the Department with particular reference to participation in European research tenders. The focus on publications in international journals was deemed to be an achieved result, as is confirmed by the nature of the publications in the three-year period. The activity on this front can be summarised in the participation in two European Horizon 2020 tenders (H2020-SC4-TRANSFORMATIONS 2020 and H2020, topic SC1-PHE-CORONAVIRUS 2020-2C), which was, however, unsuccessful.

On the other hand, the third objective, improving third-party-funded research concerning the work of the research centres/observatories and with *ad hoc* projects, was very successful, especially considering the difficulties that the pandemic has created in the last two years. It has already been mentioned that the number of centres/observatories rose from four at the beginning of 2019 to seven, which demonstrates a notable liveliness on this research front. This is confirmed by the number of projects activated and the resources they brought to the Department, summarised in the table below. A total of 43 projects in the three-year period amounted to € 1,177,755. The number of projects and the resources activated, which fell slightly in the two pandemic years compared to 2019, are still considerable for a small department.

Year of contract	Number of projects	Total amount €
2019	17	451,043
2020	13	437,322

Year of contract	Number of projects	Total amount €
2021	13	289,390
Total	43	1,177,755

The fourth objective, to improve the consistency of the research products with the University's subjects of interest, in line with the Strategic Plan's recommendations, and to encourage the interdisciplinary nature of the projects and the number of researchers involved in them, was pursued during the preliminary analysis phase of the projects submitted for funding from departmental funds carried out by the Departmental Council. Thanks also to the breadth of the subjects of interest to the University set out in the Strategic Plan for the three-year period 2019-2021, the first part of the objective was largely achieved, with research mainly relevant to the University's areas of specialisation. The interdisciplinary nature of research projects, on the other hand, is an objective that is more difficult to produce given the strong disciplinary



specialisation that is nowadays required to aspire to the publication of research results in international A-range journals (or published on Scopus). On the contrary, the publication of contributions with different and complementary approaches is more widespread in the case of chapters in monographs whose authors are teachers from other departments who are often personally involved in conferences of national and international importance held at IULM. In terms of the number of teachers involved in the individual projects, the characteristics of the projects presented inevitably had to take into account the constraints on personal interaction imposed by the pandemic.

Overall, two of the objectives the Department had set for the three-year period 2019-2021 - qualitative improvement of publications and research funded thanks to research centres/observatories - have been fully achieved. A third one, concerning the coherence of research topics, has been adequately completed. On the international research tenders front, an effort has been made but has yet to collect resources.

Finally, concerning the Third Mission - a set of activities originating from university, faculty and departmental initiatives monitored and assessed centrally by the Rector's Delegate - given the heterogeneity characterising these activities, the Department has not set specific quantitative objectives. During the three-year period, an attempt was made to encourage Third Mission initiatives, particularly by asking those submitting research proposals on departmental funds to explain the actions planned for disseminating research results beyond mere publication. Since this constituted an element of merit in the evaluation, the resources earmarked for research were also partially used in communicating results with Third Mission initiatives. In addition, from 2020 onwards, it was decided to include contract research as an activity that contributes to the Third Mission. In fact, in the specific activity of the Department of Business, contract research activity, mainly carried out by the research centres/observatories, appears as a substantial contribution in this respect. Over and above what is done at the university level (seminars, conferences, open lectures, other initiatives) and by individual teachers independently and noted as such by the Rector's Delegate, this type of activity characterises the Department's contribution. As we have seen, this is a significant set of research initiatives that have made it possible to use the Department's expertise to benefit companies, associations and public administrations. By way of example, we would like to mention the research carried out for the Sicilian Region, some municipal administrations and some business associations.

### **The University's Strategic Plan 2022-2024 and recommendations on research objectives**

The most relevant reference document for defining departmental planning over the next three years is the University's new Strategic Plan 2022-2024, released in December 2021. The Plan contains a series of research guidelines that directly affect the activities of the Departments. For convenience, below are some statements included in the Strategic Plan that are most directly relevant to research policies (underlining ours).



-“The University's objective over the next three years is to increase and improve its researchers' production. The University's task is to make it increasingly systematic, facilitating interdisciplinary grafts to build opportunities for a fruitful dialogue between different fields, experiences, and research paths. To provide tools for contact and the hybridisation of knowledge, the University is and wants to be the promoter of a methodological and cultural renewal that fosters dialogue between the humanistic and philosophical and economic and managerial disciplines, a vital link between different approaches." (p. 57)

- "From the point of view of public perception as well as scientific production, the aim is to increasingly position IULM not only as a centre of excellence in communication and language training but also as a "University of Cultural and Creative Industries and Contents" (ICC)...”(p. 58)

- “The University intends to:

- maintain and increase research funding [...];
- sensitise the Departments so that they increasingly adopt a policy aimed at quality publications, helping teachers to identify classes of journals and locations of publications of recognised national and international importance;
- evaluate the lines of action to be implemented in Departments when the results of the VQR are known;
- stimulate the individual commitment of teaching staff and the establishment of research groups including inter-departmental and inter-university groups, improving the level of interaction with teachers from other universities and research bodies;
- encourage participation in competitive, national and international tenders for proposals [...];
- improve the annual reporting of research activity with the support of the Research Group to analyse results from Departments, SSDs and research areas." (pp. 58-9)

- " The University has the ambition to work within the framework of the research perspectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (UN Agenda 2030), the National Recovery and Sustainability Plan (PNRR) and the areas included in the National Research and Innovation Programme (PNRR) 2021-2027." (p. 59)

- [Research Centres] "They must increasingly become a preferred channel for fundraising, not only as an activity of raising resources for the benefit of IULM researchers but also as a moment of comparison with companies and civil society on their needs that the University can meet. They must also strengthen the University's ability to intervene in public debate while enhancing its Rome site." (p. 61)

Summarising the considerations that qualify the University's research commitments and ordering them from the more general to the more specific, it can therefore be concluded that:



- a general objective of interdisciplinarity and dialogue between humanistic and philosophical and economic and managerial disciplines is defined within a positioning of the University that is broadened to include, in addition to communication and languages, also the cultural and creative industries;
- as specific objectives, the increase in international and national scientifically qualified publications, the establishment of interdisciplinary and inter-university research groups, participation in competitive tenders, and the alignment of research with the UN Agenda SDGs and the PNRR initiatives; when the results of the VQR are known, possible interventions will also be defined;
- the central role of the research centres/observatories is confirmed, also as particular moments for the enhancement and dissemination of the Department's research results (Third Mission).

Some of the objectives the University has set itself correspond to those already set out in the Department's first three-year plan. In particular, the quality of research, verified and quantified in terms of publications that, in the SSDs prevailing in the Department of Business, are now primarily international journals. This is an objective that can only be confirmed and on which the results of the VQR, which should be available soon, will provide external feedback. Bearing in mind that these are objectives on which the academic careers of individual teachers, the Ministry's evaluation of departments and the University's position in international rankings depend, there can be no doubt that this is the first objective to be consolidated.

The strategic plan's central role to the Research Centres also responds to the intentions that the Department has set itself in the past, which can only be confirmed for the future. If we consider that seven of the nine Centres listed in the Strategic Plan refer to the Department of Business, it is clear that they are one of its greatest strengths and constitute a specific expression of its activities. Moreover, the research centres' scientific dissemination activities by activating third-party projects represent an essential form of enhancing research, in line with the University's Strategic Plan concerning the Third Mission. The numerous initiatives by individual teachers in the Department represent other vital moments of scientific dissemination. Again, quoting the University's Strategic Plan:

Therefore, the University's Third Mission translates into activities aimed at disseminating the research produced in the University and delivering public goods of a social, educational and cultural nature. In addition to initiatives related to sustainability, equal opportunities, inclusivity, the dissemination of a culture of peace and solidarity, the promotion and protection of cultural heritage, the enhancement of spin-offs and start-ups, and research with third parties, this last activity also includes public engagement carried out by the University's teachers, many of whom are recognised as leaders in their respective disciplines and as qualified interlocutors of civil society on the most diverse topics.”

(p. 65)





Compared to the past three-year period, the partly new aspects that emerge from the University's Strategic Plan and on which further reflection is needed are, therefore, the call for stronger interdisciplinarity, defined in the dialogue between humanistic and philosophical and economic and managerial disciplines, and as a reference topic, the call for greater attention to be paid to the alignment with the major themes raised by the UN Agenda's SDGs and the initiatives linked to the PNRR. In addition, attention should also be drawn to funded research projects, an objective already present in the past but on which the Department's results could have been more satisfactory and which constitutes its greatest weakness.

In addition to the recommendations of the University's Strategic Plan, there are the considerations made by the Evaluation Board following the audit carried out in December 2021. The Board's report concludes with the following assessments of the audit conducted on the three points of analysis:

R4.B.1 - Definition of strategic lines: "The Department of Business Law Economics and Consumer Affairs has clearly and consciously defined its research strategy, setting clear and achievable objectives."

R4.B.2- Evaluation of results and improvement interventions: "The Department of Business, Law, Economics and Consumer Affairs has adopted an appropriate working method over the three-year period, which has enabled it to consciously define objectives over the years that are appropriate both to the changing context and to the results achieved (or not achieved)."

R4.B.3- Definition and publicising of the criteria for the distribution of resources: "The Department of Business, Law, Economics and Consumer Affairs has adopted a formal mechanism for the distribution of resources which, although transparent in its general outline, could be improved and more detailed, also and above all given a possible increase in the duration of the projects."

Finally, the following recommendation is made at the conclusion of the audit:

"Build on the experience gained in the previous three years and initiate the organisational changes that could give further impetus to the Department's activities (role of the centres/observatories and role of the sections)."

The mention of organisational changes refers to an emphasis on the role of the Sections and the uncertainties, institutional and not only departmental, concerning the part of the research centres in the Third Mission objectives. Moreover, the Board delivers a further remark on the methods of departmental fund allocation to research projects that is worth reporting. In the words of the Board:





"The Board suggests adopting an evaluation grid that can be communicated before the submission of proposals. Analysing the funding tables, it can be seen that a large number of projects are submitted (almost 100% of teachers apply) for minimal amounts. A better and clearer definition of the minimum requirements for each project could support this planning activity."

It is suggested, therefore, that a more explicit evaluation grid be adopted, which could also be translated into a scoring system, where there is a place for theme objectives on which the department expresses a priority address.

### **Planning objectives of the Department of Business for the three-year period 2022-2024**

A planning document synthesises the resources available and the opportunities that can be seized with them. Before formulating the objectives for the next three-year period, it is therefore appropriate to briefly recall the resources that belong to the Department and the organisational structure it has given itself to activate them.

The Department's organisational structure is well established and functions adequately. In addition to the director and deputy director, it is built around a Departmental Council whose task is to facilitate the work of the Council by drawing up summaries and preliminary assessments that allow for faster decision-making. In addition to the director and deputy director, the Departmental Council includes a representative of the tenured teaching staff, a representative of the freelance teachers and a representative of each of the four sections. The four sections - Marketing and Communication, Economics and Law, Economics and Business Organisation, and Behaviour and Consumption - adequately represent the various disciplinary components present in the Department, and it is proposed that they be confirmed for the role they play within the Council, in making the relationship between the Department's various disciplines fluid. As already noted, the sections are entitled by regulation to 10% of the funds that the University transfers to the Department, but in recent years, it has been decided to use these funds not by distributing them *pro rata* but by allocating them to activities of common interest, e.g. the purchase of software. This choice is also confirmed. It is also recalled that a characteristic feature of the Department is the presence of seven research centres/observatories that carry out their activities with a high degree of independence, both in collecting funding and conducting their research work. The Department naturally has two QA contact persons and, following a decision taken at the Council meeting of 22/11/2021, has designated a person responsible for the Third Mission entrusted with monitoring these activities and liaising with the Rector's Delegate. Finally, in support of the Department's activities, mention should also be made of the work carried out by the internal secretariat and the all-round support provided to all University departments by the Research Office.



As already stated above, 31 tenured professors currently staff the Department, and it is not expected that this number will be increased over the three-year period in such a way as to transform its current structure. It will, therefore, remain a small department that should realistically allocate its resources to the various activities on which they can be deployed. Another notable feature of the department is the number of non-structured teachers working in it, 102. This is a significant resource, activated mainly on teaching, which could also be more committed to research.

The Department's organisational structure and human resources should focus on a set of objectives that largely confirm those that characterised the past three years. Considering the experience gained and the considerations set out so far, these objectives can be expressed in a more explicit order of priority. The Department's two fundamental objectives for research activities can be summarised as follows:

1. Consolidate the qualification of publications resulting from the Department's research. The centrality attributed to the validation of research through publications in qualified international journals (band A, published on Scopus) is confirmed, although remembering and taking into account that for some of the SSDs in the Department, the evaluation criteria are partially different, with a greater weight of national publications, consistently qualified, and monographs. For the other publications, the monitoring that is already being done will continue, but without assigning specific objectives to them. In quantitative terms, it is believed that the 'productivity' parameters achieved cannot be significantly passed, as this could contradict the pursuit of high quality. Therefore, the aim must be to maintain the current publications standards by teacher, if only by trying to help teachers less published in qualified journals.
2. Consolidate the activity of the research centres/observatories. The centrality of the research/observatory centres in the Department's activities is confirmed since they are a multiplier of initiatives that activate not only internal but also external resources, making a significant contribution to meeting the objectives assigned to research by the University, both transversally and thematically, and to the Third Mission. They also represent a concrete way of involving non-tenured teachers in the Department's activities. Therefore, the decision taken by the Council resolution of 11/10/2017 to dedicate 5% of the Department's funds as an incentive for teachers who have carried out research - funded through the centres/observatories or in their own right - is confirmed, redistributing this sum to the funded projects in proportion to the amount of funding obtained. The evaluation of the activity carried out on this objective will be quantitative - resources obtained - and qualitative, i.e. whether or not it corresponds to the recommendations on transversality and subjects proposed by the University will be



checked. A specific assessment will then be made of the Third Mission implications of the research conducted by the centres/observatories.

In addition to these two main objectives, which will guide the Department's activities over the next three years, a third relates to funded research, particularly European. As already noted, on this front, the Department did not achieve the objectives it had set itself in the past three years, and greater attention will therefore have to be paid to the opportunities offered by public tenders for proposals, also relying on the support provided in this regard by the Research Office. Given the size of the Department, the activity on funded research will mainly be carried out in partnership with other departments of the University and with other Italian and foreign universities.

As far as Third Mission activities are concerned, the Department believes that the commitment to the enhancement and dissemination of the research results of centres/observatories and the work of individual teachers is the most significant contribution that can be made. Since such research is already one of the Department's two fundamental objectives, we can only add that all the remaining initiatives carried out collectively and by individual teachers will be monitored according to the recommendations from the Rector's Delegate.

As in past years, part of the research funds available to the Department will come from the University. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the allocation procedures that will be used to distribute these funds to the projects presented by the teachers. Here, too, we will move in line with the past, seeking to improve the existing procedures. If the funds available annually are of the same order of magnitude as in the past three years, around €3,500 per teacher, and if they continue to be bound to be used within the year, it is believed that the most productive use will not be to concentrate resources on a few projects, but to help teachers complete the personal research in which they are engaged, with funds that will enable them to finalise them for publication (translation and revision of texts, participation in conferences). For more extensive research, centrally administered research funds are available, as well as those that it is hoped will be acquired through taking part in publicly funded research tenders. On these two fronts, as well as in the activities of the centres/observatories, a greater interdisciplinary anchorage of research along the lines set out in the University's Strategic Plan is most likely to be achieved. The objective set out in point (1) is more often achieved thanks to a strong specialisation that makes it challenging to construct interdisciplinary research that can simultaneously find a place in international journals qualified for more than one discipline.

As in the last two years, it is possible to attempt to carry out more extensive projects by resorting to biennial research - a confirmed method - as it has yielded appreciable results. It is recalled that, following the decision of the Departmental Council of 21 December 2020, the possibility of submitting biennial projects was experimented with, indicating for each year the



relevant expenditure commitment and with the obligation of presenting at the end of the first year a document illustrating the progress of the work and the first results achieved. It is understood that the budget forecasts for the second year will be defined by committing overall resources that prudently take into account the resources that will presumably be available and, in any case, with the commitment to make any budget revisions that may be necessary should these resources not be sufficient.

In the current procedure for evaluating projects submitted for the allocation of departmental funds, based on a form summarising the expected results concerning the Department's objectives, a more explicit reference to thematic priorities identified in the University's Strategic Plan will be included. A requirement will, therefore, be inserted to explain which of the themes included in the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN Agenda and in the PNRR guidelines the research intends to contribute to.

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