

## Working Group on Reforming Academic Career Assessment

### Case study “Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA)”

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<b>Country</b>	<b>Country/Region/International</b> International
<b>Name</b>	<b>Official name of the initiative</b> Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA)
<b>Institution</b>	<b>Name of the institution(s) responsible for the initiative</b> CoARA centres around the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment. This document was originally drafted through a participatory process led by a core team involving Science Europe, the European University Association (EUA), the European Commission, as a facilitator and Dr Karen Stroobants (in her individual capacity as researcher with expertise in research on research). The Agreement was drafted in consultation with over 350 organisations from 40 countries, representing the diversity of the research community across Europe.
<b>Stakeholders</b>	<b>Names of other organisations/communities involved</b> CoARA members include universities and their associations; research centres, research infrastructures, and their associations; academies, learned societies, and their associations, and associations of researchers; national/regional authorities or agencies that implement some form of research assessment and their associations; public or private research funding organisations and their associations; other relevant non-for-profit organisations involved with research assessment, and their associations. Currently, over 700 organisations have signed the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment and joined CoARA. The list can be found in CoARA's list of coalition members:

	<a href="https://coara.eu/coalition/membership/">https://coara.eu/coalition/membership/</a>
<b>Year</b>	<b>When the initiative was launched</b> 2022
<b>Documentation</b>	<b>Link to the main document describing the initiative</b> <a href="https://coara.eu/agreement/the-agreement-full-text/">https://coara.eu/agreement/the-agreement-full-text/</a>
<b>Website</b>	<b>Link to the website of the initiative (if available)</b> <a href="https://coara.eu/">https://coara.eu/</a>
<b>Summary</b>	<p><b>Brief description of the initiative</b></p> <p>CoARA is a global not-for-profit initiative. Its vision is that the assessment of research, researchers and research organisations recognises the diverse outputs, practices and activities that maximise the quality and impact of research. This requires basing assessment primarily on qualitative judgement, for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators.</p> <p>The Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment, which is the foundation of CoARA, sets a shared direction for changes in assessment practices for research, researchers and research performing organisations. The Agreement includes the principles, 10 commitments, and a timeframe for reforms, and lays out the principles for CoARA members willing to work together in implementing the changes.</p> <p>CoARA members, in signing the Agreement, commit to working together to enable systemic reform on the basis of common principles within an agreed timeframe, and to facilitate exchanges of information and mutual learning between all those willing to improve research assessment practices.</p> <p>CoARA members commit to share progress on research assessment reforms within 1 year and 5 years of signing the Agreement.</p> <p>CoARA membership is open for target organisations across the globe (requirements to join the coalition are available at <a href="https://coara.eu">coara.eu</a>).</p> <p>CoARA was officially launched on 1 December 2022. The Secretariat of CoARA is provided by the European Science Foundation – Science Connect (ESF-SC).</p>
<b>Target audience</b>	<b>Description of the main target audience of the initiative</b>

	<p>CoARA's target audience include all stakeholders that are directly involved in the definition and implementation of research assessment processes for research, researchers and research performing organisations. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities and their associations</li> <li>• Research centres, research infrastructures, and their associations</li> <li>• Academies, learned societies, and their associations, and associations of researchers</li> <li>• Public or private research funding organisations and their associations</li> <li>• National/regional authorities or agencies that implement some form of research assessment and their associations</li> <li>• Other relevant non-for-profit organisations involved with research assessment, and their associations.</li> </ul> <p>While CoARA membership is restricted to organisations and not individuals, the coalition is committed to facilitating dialogue and discussion on research assessment reform with all interested parties, regardless of their membership status.</p>
<b>Geographical Scope</b>	<p><b>Description of the primary geographical scope of application</b></p> <p>Global</p>
<b>International potential:</b>	<p><b>Description of the international potential for adaptation</b></p> <p>CoARA is a global initiative centred around a shared direction for changes in assessment practices for research, researchers and research performing organisations. The coalition aims to be an inclusive and collaborative space, offering a platform for piloting and experimentation, developing new assessment criteria, methods and tools, and for joint, critical reflection, exchange of good practices and mutual learning, while fully respecting the autonomy of organisations.</p> <p>Although the initiators of the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment and the creation of CoARA were mostly European-based, CoARA's membership is open to organisations across the world.</p> <p>Although for now most of CoARA's membership is located in Europe, current members also include organisations from Northern America, Latin America, Africa and Oceania. CoARA has defined the following international outreach goals: to have at least 1 CoARA member in</p>

	<p>each continent by the end of 2023;</p> <p>by the end of 2025, organisations from all categories from all continents have signed the agreement and joined CoARA and an adequate number of non-European members sit on the Steering Board; by the end of 2027, there should be significant representation of all continents as signatories and members.</p>
<b>Goal</b>	<p><b>Description of the intended change</b></p> <p>CoARA's goal is to contribute to a cultural change in research assessment, moving beyond restrictive traditional quantitative indicators.</p> <p>CoARA's vision is that the assessment of research, researchers and research organisations recognises the diverse outputs, practices and activities that maximise the quality and impact of research. This requires basing assessment primarily on qualitative judgement, for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators.</p> <p>CoARA members commit to implementing the commitments laid out in the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment, within a specific timeframe. Members enjoy full autonomy in conducting this process, i.e., organisations decide on the steps to take to implement the commitments and the pace in their reform journey, which can vary depending on the context (for example, national, disciplinary or assessment of individual researchers, research units and research organisations or research projects) and the strategic goals and mission of each organisation.</p> <p>The Coalition aims to be an inclusive and collaborative space to advance together towards a higher quality, more impactful and more efficient and inclusive research system.</p>
<b>Relevance</b>	<p><b>Description of the key elements that are relevant for reforming career assessment</b></p> <p>The Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment, which forms the basis of CoARA, sets a shared direction for changes in assessment practices for research, researchers and research performing</p>

	<p>organisations, with the overarching goal to maximise the quality and impact of research. The Agreement is addressed to the scholarly community, namely to universities, research centres, research infrastructures, academies, learned societies, associations of researchers, research funding organisations and national/regional authorities or agencies that implement some form of research assessment.</p> <p>The 10 commitments outlined in the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment include four core commitments and six supporting commitments.</p> <p>The core commitments include two commitments to enable better recognition of the diverse practices and activities that maximise the quality of research, as well as two commitments to enable a move away from the inappropriate uses of metrics, with a definition of inappropriate uses. The supporting commitments include three commitments to pilot and enable the move towards new criteria, tools and processes for research assessment, as well as three commitments to facilitate mutual learning, communicate progress and ensure that new approaches are evidence-informed.</p> <p>The full list of commitments can be found at: <a href="https://coara.eu/">https://coara.eu/</a></p>
<b>Qualitative</b>	<p><b>Description of recommendations regarding qualitative assessment</b></p> <p>The Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment includes one commitment specifically focusing on qualitative assessment:</p> <p>“2. Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators</p> <p>Purpose: This commitment will enable the move towards research assessment criteria that focus primarily on quality, while recognising that responsible use of quantitative indicators can support assessment where meaningful and relevant, which is context dependent.</p>

	<p>Scope: Research assessment should rely primarily on qualitative assessment for which peer review is central, supported by responsibly used quantitative indicators where appropriate. Peer review is the most robust method known for assessing quality and has the advantage that it is in the hands of the research community. It is important that peer review processes are designed to meet the fundamental principles of rigor and transparency: expert assessment, transparency, impartiality, appropriateness, confidentiality, integrity and ethical considerations, gender, equality and diversity. To address the biases and imperfections to which any method is prone, the research community re-assesses and improves peer review practices regularly. Revised, or potentially new, criteria, tools and processes appropriate for assessing quality could be explored alongside peer review. Moving towards assessment practices that rely more heavily on qualitative methods may require additional efforts from researchers. Researchers should be recognised for these efforts and their contributions to reviewing peers' work should be valued as part of their career progression.</p>
<b>Quantitative</b>	<p><b>Description of recommendations regarding quantitative assessment</b></p> <p>The Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment includes one commitment discouraging the use of journal and publication-based metrics for the purposes of research assessment and another commitment on avoiding the use of rankings of research organisations in research assessment.</p> <p>"3. Abandon inappropriate uses in research assessment of journal- and publication-based metrics, in particular inappropriate uses of Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and h-index</p> <p>Purpose: This commitment will reduce the dominance of a narrow set of quantitative journal- and publication-based metrics.</p> <p>Scope: Inappropriate uses of journal- and publication-based metrics</p>



	<p>in research assessment should be abandoned. In particular, this means moving away from using metrics like the Journal Impact Factor (JIF), Article Influence Score (AIS) and h-index as proxies for quality and impact. 'Inappropriate uses' include: relying exclusively on author-based metrics (e.g. counting papers, patents, citations, grants, etc.) to assess quality and/or impact; assessing outputs based on metrics relating to publication venue, format or language; relying on any other metrics that do not properly capture quality and/or impact.</p> <p>4. Avoid the use of rankings of research organisations in research assessment</p> <p>Purpose: This commitment will help avoid that metrics used by international rankings, which are inappropriate for assessing researchers, trickle down to research and researcher assessment. It will help the research community and research organisations regain the autonomy to shape assessment practices, rather than having to abide by criteria and methodologies set by external commercial companies. This could include retaining control over ranking methodologies and data.</p> <p>Scope: Recognising that the international rankings most often referred to by research organisations are currently not 'fair and responsible', the criteria these rankings use should not trickle down to the evaluation of individual researchers, research teams and research units. Research organisations should also be mindful that public communication (e.g. the active advertising of an institution's rank) can contribute to the perception that research quality conflates with ranking positions.</p> <p>Where ranking approaches are deemed unavoidable, as may be the case in forms of evaluation beyond the scope of this Agreement such as benchmarking and performance reviews of countries or institutions, the methodological limitations of such approaches should be acknowledged, and institutions should avoid trickle-down effects on research and researcher assessment.</p>
<b>Diversity</b>	<b>Description of how initiative recognizes and supports consideration</b>

	<p><b>of diversity contributions, outputs and impacts</b></p> <p>The principles underlying the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment include diversity, inclusiveness and collaboration. In addition, the Agreement includes one commitment on recognising the diversity of contributions:</p> <p>"1. Recognise the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research</p> <p>Purpose: This commitment will broaden recognition of the diverse practices, activities and careers in research, considering the specific nature of research disciplines and other research endeavours.</p> <p>Scope: Changes in assessment practices should enable recognition of the broad diversity of: valuable contributions that researchers make to science and for the benefit of society, including diverse outputs beyond journal publications and irrespective of the language in which they are communicated; practices that contribute to robustness, openness, transparency, and the inclusiveness of research and the research process including: peer review, teamwork and collaboration; activities including teaching, leadership, supervision, training and mentoring.</p> <p>It is also important that assessment facilitates the recognition and valorisation of diverse roles and careers in research, including: data steward, software engineer and data scientist roles, technical roles, public outreach, science diplomacy, science advice and science communicator roles to name a few. It is recognised that current practice is often too narrow and limiting, so the goal cannot be to replace the narrow criteria we wish to move away from with different but equally narrow criteria. Instead, the aim is to allow organisations to broaden the spectrum of what they value in research, while acknowledging that this may vary across disciplines and that each individual researcher should not be expected to contribute to all activities at once."</p>
<b>Intersectoral</b>	<b>Description of how initiative recognizes and supports consideration of intersectorality</b>



	<p>The commitments outlined in the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment are based on a set of principles, including diversity, inclusiveness and collaboration:</p> <p>“Use assessment criteria and processes that respect the variety of scientific disciplines, research types (e.g. basic and frontier research vs. applied research), as well as research career stages (e.g. early career researchers vs. senior researchers), and that acknowledge multi-, inter-, and trans-disciplinary as well as inter-sectoral approaches, when applicable. Research assessment should be conducted commensurately to the specific nature of scientific disciplines, research missions or other scientific endeavours.”</p>
<b>Career-stage</b>	<p><b>Description of how initiative recognizes and supports consideration of career-stage</b></p> <p>The acknowledgement of differences based on career-stage are an integral part of the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment. Thus, consideration for career-stage is embedded in several parts of the Agreement, for example, in the principles and in the commitments (e.g. commitment 5 ‘Commit resources to reforming research assessment as is needed to achieve the organisational changes committed to’, commitment 6 ‘Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes’ and commitment 7 ‘Raise awareness of research assessment reform and provide transparent communication, guidance, and training on assessment criteria and processes as well as their use’).</p>
<b>Career-path</b>	<p><b>Description of how initiative recognizes and supports consideration of career-paths</b></p> <p>The Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment considers different career-paths, as part of the principles (“Acknowledge and valorise the diversity in research roles and careers, including roles outside academia”) and the commitments (e.g. commitments 1, 6). The recognition of the diversity of career-paths is an integral feature of the Agreement and the Coalition.</p>
<b>Toolbox</b>	<p><b>Description of related practical guides and toolkits</b></p> <p>The Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment includes a toolbox with practical tools to support the implementation of the 10 commitments (see Annex 4 of the Agreement). This toolbox is subject to continuous development.</p>

	<p>Upon signing the Agreement, signatories need to produce, within one year, an Action Plan on how the organisation aims to tackle and implement the commitments. Upon five years of signing the Agreement, signatories need to demonstrate progress towards reviewing, developing and evaluating the criteria, tools and processes that fulfil the commitments. Signatories of the Agreement commit to sharing their progress publicly.</p>
<b>Implementation</b>	<p><b>Description of implementation process</b></p> <p>Signatories of the Agreement commit to implementing the 10 commitments. As this process involves adequate resources and time from organisations, the Agreement stipulates a timeframe of five years for signatories to demonstrate the progress made in reforming research assessment processes.</p> <p>In addition, members of the coalition also work together through Working Groups and National Chapters, whose membership is voluntary. Working Groups operate as ‘communities of practice’, providing mutual learning and collaboration amongst the members and aim to facilitate knowledge exchange, mutual learning, discussion and development of outputs to advance research assessment and help implement members’ commitments. Working Groups are proposed bottom-up by members and selected by CoARA’s Steering Board. The list of current Working Groups is available: <a href="https://coara.eu/coalition/working-groups/">https://coara.eu/coalition/working-groups/</a></p> <p>National Chapters aim at facilitating the exchange of knowledge, mutual learning and discussions on CoARA-relevant issues specific to different types of organisations of a given country or group of countries. National Chapters are proposed at the initiative of CoARA members. National Chapters should comprise at least half of the CoARA member organisations from the country. In addition, mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that a broader range of organisations, including from outside CoARA, can contribute to and benefit from the National Chapter.</p> <p>The CoARA governance structure includes the General Assembly of Members, which is the highest-level decision-making body. Its responsibilities include electing the Steering Board and approving the overall strategy of the coalition, its annual work plan and budget. The</p>

	<p>CoARA Steering Board is composed of a maximum of 11 members, who are responsible for the overall oversight and strategy of the coalition. The CoARA Secretariat supports the administrative and logistical activities of the coalition. More information on CoARA's governance is available: <a href="https://coara.eu/coalition/governance/">https://coara.eu/coalition/governance/</a></p> <p>CoARA is financially supported by the EU-funded CoARA Boost project and aims to strengthen the coalition's operational capacity. More information is available: <a href="https://coara.eu/coalition/coara-boost-project/">https://coara.eu/coalition/coara-boost-project/</a></p>
<b>Uptake</b>	<p><b>Description of implementation uptake</b></p> <p>Since its launch at the end of 2022, the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment has gathered over 800 signatures. As of November 2024, over 700 organisations from across the world also became a member of CoARA. The membership of CoARA has increased exponentially since the coalition's inception and continues to grow.</p>
<b>Challenges</b>	<p><b>Description of identified implementation challenges/obstacles.</b></p> <p>Research assessment systems are complex and involve diverse stakeholders across organizations, both nationally and internationally. In addition, reforms in research assessment are subject to a variety of legal and regulatory frameworks across countries and individual organisations enjoy varying degrees of autonomy in the definition and implementation of such reforms. Recognizing this complexity, CoARA understands that sustainable changes will require time. One challenge is maintaining and enhancing momentum in reform efforts and discussions on both national and international stages. Additionally, supporting coalition members in their reform endeavours and fostering knowledge exchange among them is crucial. CoARA also aims to engage with organizations, regions, and stakeholder groups where resistance to reform persists.</p> <p>Additional challenges include limited capacity and resource availability at different levels, including the CoARA Secretariat, Working Groups and National Chapters, as well as individual CoARA members in relation to the institutional implementation of the coalition's commitments.</p>
<b>Benefits</b>	<p><b>Description of identified implementation benefits.</b></p>

As CoARA is a relatively recent initiative, having started at the end of 2022, most of its members are at an early stage of implementing their research assessment reform processes. The implementation of the commitments outlined in the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment will also vary depending on the country and type of organisation.

Expected benefits from CoARA relate to a large-scale cultural change in research assessment, in which there is a proper recognition and valorisation of diverse outputs, practices and activities that maximise the quality and impact of research. This goes hand-in-hand with basing assessment primarily on qualitative judgement, for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators.

Reforming research assessment can also serve as a catalyst for achieving broader objectives, such as advancing open science, enhancing inclusion and diversity, and diversifying career pathways.