



CoARA Action Plan of Utrecht University, 2 February 2025

In 2022 Utrecht University signed the Coalition on Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) agreement, which includes ten commitments with regards to reforming research assessment. The commitments and a detailed explanation for each commitment can be found on [this webpage](#).

CoARA has asked each signatory organisation to deliver an action plan to share with the CoARA community how their organisation has started the process of implementing the core commitments in the agreement. In this action plan Utrecht University will share to what extent each commitment has been implemented within its own institution and which actions still need to be taken. All commitments have been implemented to some degree. Matters to be worked on in 2025 and 2026 are listed according to milestones per commitment.

Commitment 1: Recognize the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research.

This has been addressed on a national level through the [Dutch Recognition & Rewards programme](#) aimed at creating room within all Dutch universities for the diversification of profiles and vitalisation of career paths for academics in order to create more room for their individual motivations and talents (see [position paper 'Room for everyone's talent', UNL 2019](#)). This concretely means that academics should be given more room to not only focus on research, but also on activities in the domains of education, impact, leadership and professional performance (such as patient care at University Medical Centres). This doesn't mean that academics need to excel in all these domains, but that more room needs to be given for a diversity of career paths in which academics can make their own choices. All Dutch universities, university medical centres, KNAW and research funding organisations participate in the Recognition & Rewards programme.

Within Utrecht University, the TRIPLE model has been developed as a translation of the national ambitions with regards to Recognition & Rewards. The TRIPLE model is part of UU's [vision on Recognition & Rewards](#), and can be used as a tool for putting the principles of Recognition & Rewards into practice. The TRIPLE model is applicable to all UU employees, both at the individual and team levels. Teams can use it to discuss

everyone's contribution to goals. UU's Development and Careers Framework (FLOW) describes how the TRIPLE model is applied in career policies at UU. The Recognition & Rewards principles have been integrated into UU's leadership program, several workshops focused on Recognition & Rewards have been developed for all employees, and an updated toolkit with conversational guidelines for managers has been published.

In 2023 the university board has announced that UU will no longer maintain the strict division into academic staff (WP) and support and administrative staff (OBP), but that starting from the academic year 2023/2024 UU will speak of university staff (UP). This concept has recently been incorporated in the FLOW policy.

Milestones to be reached:

Each faculty has developed their own career policies within the framework provided by TRIPLE and the Development and Careers Framework (FLOW). The faculties have specifically done this for assistant professors, associate professors and full professors and supporting staff. What still needs to be done is:

- Internalising TRIPLE for early career academics (PhD's and postdocs)
- Working on better facilitating combined positions (i.e. positions based on two job profiles)
- Evaluating and further improving the use of TRIPLE by promotion committees for assistant and associate professors, by collecting and sharing best principles and by connecting promotion committees to each other to exchange insights and ideas

Commitment 2: Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators.

This is being done through the national Strategy Evaluation Protocol (SEP) 2021-2027: https://storage.knaw.nl/2022-06/SEP_2021-2027.pdf. The SEP is used to evaluate the quality, relevance and viability of research in public institutions in the Netherlands. The SEP has been drawn up by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and Dutch universities. In conformity with this protocol Utrecht University ensures that all its research institutes are assessed by external expert assessment committees once every 6 years. This protocol was established in 2003 and has since been further developed. The current SEP 2021-2027 pays more attention to Open Science, PhD policy, academic culture and diversity. Also, the final assessment of the review committee no longer consists of a final grade for each of the subtopics, but a **qualitative assessment** including recommendations for future improvements. UU SEP research assessments are published on the [UU public website](#).

In addition to that, UU signed the Barcelona Declaration on Open Research information, which implies that UU commits to transparency of information being used in research assessments and that UU collaborates in using and developing research information and assessment infrastructures that are diverse and not selective.

Commitment 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.

The Strategy Evaluation Protocol (SEP) 2021-2027 states the following:

“The research unit should take into account that it is not allowed to use the **Journal Impact Factor** in a SEP evaluation. The Journal Impact Factor was not created as a measure of the scientific quality of research in an article. It has a number of well-documented deficiencies as a tool for research assessment. The use of the h-index is advised against because 1) it is sensitive to age and experience (so young scholars always have low h-index values), 2) it is not field-normalised, which makes comparison across fields – sometimes even within fields – based on the h-index impossible and 3) it is an author-level metric, while SEP assessments evaluate research units.”

The SEP refers to the 2012 San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment to which UU, among others, is a signatory: <https://sfdora.org/read/>

In addition, [UU's vision on Recognition & Rewards](#) includes the TRIPLE model, which is a tool for recognising and rewarding UU academics more broadly; not only based on their research achievements, but also on the basis of impact (public engagement), teaching and/or professional performance (i.e. patient care) and on the basis of teamwork and the development of various forms of leadership (personal, organisational and/or strategic leadership).

Milestones to be reached:

- Monitor the use of the Journal Impact Factor by faculties and research institutes through the organisation of an Open Science monitor with focus groups in 2025 and 2026.

Commitment 4: Avoid the use of rankings of research organisations in research assessment

Utrecht University (UU) no longer provides the required data to be included in rankings as of 2023 and is therefore missing from the Times Higher Education Ranking as of 2024. UU made this decision, first of all, because of the questionable methods used by some rankings (no 'responsible use of quantitative indicators'). [Research](#) shows that rankings are often based on self-reported data by universities and on methodologies that are not very transparent. Secondly, the quality of rankings is complex: it is almost impossible to capture the quality of an entire university, with all its different education,

research, and impact, in one number. Lastly, UU prioritises collaboration and Open science (which are its guiding principles) while rankings put too much stress on scoring and competition.

The UU supports initiatives that resist the dominance of rankings such as [CoARA](#) and [More than Our Rank](#). UU's decision with regards to rankings is supported by the advisory report 'Ranking the university' that has been drawn up by Universities of the Netherlands (UNL):

https://www.universiteitenvannederland.nl/files/publications/Ranking_the_university_ENG.pdf

UU participates in a national working group of UNL in which national actions with regards to moving away from university rankings are being coordinated.

Milestones to be reached:

- International collaboration, agenda-setting, visibility and knowledge exchange in order to encourage partner universities worldwide to move away from university rankings. UU currently works on an internationalisation strategy for Open Science where the subject of University Rankings will remain one of the core topics to be addressed in an international context. Sharing of experiences with counterparts Zürich University and Université de Lorraine, who have also decided to no longer provide the required data to be included in rankings, will be continued and possibly intensified in this internationalisation strategy.

Commitment 5: Commit resources to reforming research assessment as is needed to achieve the organisational changes committed to

Between 2019 and 2023, an Open Science programme ran aimed at bringing UU-wide and (inter)national attention to Open Science and stimulating Open Science initiatives on five themes: Open Access, FAIR data and software, Public Engagement, Open Education and Recognition and Rewards. Approximately 3.5 million has been released by the Executive Board to take steps on these themes, which also includes implementing the commitments in the CoARA action plan. The Open Science program was executed by a central Open Science programme team, which consisted of six people and ten track leaders (two per Open Science theme).

Currently, a new phase for Open Science has started. The Open Science programme has ended and many Open Science related activities (such as the execution of the Strategy Evaluation Protocol) have been integrated within directorates of the central administration (such as the university library, HR, Communication, IT, policy) and faculties, but work still needs to be done in the following areas:

- stimulating the application of specific Open Science principles in the workplace
- advancing Open Science in a national and international context
- monitoring the progress of the adoption of Open Science principles in the workplace,

(1) to identify the effects of Open Science on the organisation and (2) to evaluate the effectiveness of the central implementation strategy (so adjustments can be made in this strategy if necessary)

This is in line with the UU Strategic Plan 2025-2030 in which Open Science remains one of the guiding principles. A compact [Open Science Office](#) (four people) led by a Chief Open Science has been formed to coordinate the new phase for Open Science within UU in 2025 and 2026. The Open Science Office will work on the execution of their goals in close collaboration with the [Open Science experts](#) (at least one per Open Science theme). The [Open Science Intervention and Advice Team](#), with representatives from each directorate and each faculty, will provide solicited and unsolicited advice to the Open Science Office regarding the implementation of its goals. Open Science is being funded through internal university resources, and through grants from the [Dutch Research Council \(NWO\)](#).

Commitment 6: Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes

This is being done through the national Strategy Evaluation Protocol (SEP) 2021-2027: https://storage.knaw.nl/2022-06/SEP_2021-2027.pdf. In conformity with this protocol UU ensures that all its research institutes are assessed by independent external expert assessment committees once every 6 years. The SEP includes assessment criteria and a description of the assessment process.

One of the assessment criteria mentioned in SEP is Talent Management, which includes offering “opportunities for diverse career paths”. This aligns with the ambitions of the [Dutch Recognition & Rewards programme](#) aimed at creating room within all Dutch universities for the diversification of profiles and vitalisation of career paths for academics in order to create more room for their individual motivations and talents (see [position paper 'Room for everyone's talent', UNL 2019](#)).

As described under Commitment 1 in this document, UU has developed the [vision on Recognition & Rewards](#) as a translation of the national ambitions regarding Recognition & Rewards. UU's vision on Recognition & Rewards includes the TRIPLE model which is a tool for recognising and rewarding UU academics more broadly; not only based on their research achievements, but also on the basis of impact (public engagement), teaching and/or professional performance (i.e. patient care) and on the basis of teamwork and the development of various forms of leadership (personal, organisational and/or strategic leadership). UU's Development and Careers Framework (FLOW) describes how the TRIPLE model should be applied in career policies at UU and thus addresses the process for implementing the principles mentioned in the vision on Recognition & Rewards.

Next to TRIPLE, another tool has been developed within UU to implement the principles of Recognition & Rewards: a new conversation guide for managers and employees to discuss the different elements of TRIPLE with each other or within the team.

Milestones to be reached:

- adjusting and improving the Assessment & Development (A&D) cycle (currently consisting of one A&D meeting per year per employee for which an A&D form has to be filled in by both the employee and their manager). Seven pilots have already been held in various teams.
- further developing the notion of Team spirit (T in TRIPLE) in relation to FLOW

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

The Open Science Programme that ran between 2019 and 2023 focused on amongst other topics on creating awareness within and outside of UU regarding the themes: Open Access, FAIR data and software, Public Engagement, Open Education and Recognition and Rewards.

Also, the new national Strategy Evaluation Protocol (SEP) 2021-2027, which has been drafted by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and Dutch universities, has been announced and promoted on a national level as well as on the level of universities and faculties. SEP research assessments of all UU research institutes are published on the [UU public website](#), to ensure transparency. In addition to that, UU signed the Barcelona Declaration on Open Research information, which implies that UU commits to transparency of information being used in research assessments.

The new SEP 2021-2027 pays more attention to Open Science, specifically Open Access, FAIR Data and software, Public Engagement (the SEP term is “Societal Relevance”) and Recognition & Rewards (the SEP term is “opportunities for diverse career paths”). These Open Science aspects have been included in SEP as assessment criteria for both the external assessment committees and the self-evaluation of the research institutes. Within UU the following guidance and training is available for putting these assessment criteria into practice:

- For **Open Access** guidance is provided by the University Library, team Publishing Support, which supports and advises faculties in their Open Access publishing strategies. Team Publishing Support has also developed a [Publishing Toolkit](#) with an overview of the different options for Open Access publishing and their opportunities and challenges. This Publishing Toolkit is being used by faculties to develop their own publishing strategy, which they currently work on. Furthermore, team publishing support organises training sessions on Open

Access publishing for researchers from all faculties. Lastly, team Publishing Support provides faculties with advice on how to increase the diversity of publication formats and how to publish in open venues that lack impact metrics.

- For **FAIR Data and software** guidance is provided by the University Library, team Research Data Support, in collaboration with the ITS department and Data Support Teams in the faculties. Team Research Data Support, ITS and Data Teams in the faculties advise researchers in how to make their research data FAIR. Together the support teams have developed so-called “Cheatsheets” that provide researchers with practical guidelines for making their data and software FAIR. Furthermore, Team Research Data Support and ITS have installed a Digital Competence Centre which provides researchers with training regarding making research data FAIR. Lastly, ITS has shared tips & tricks with researchers and research support in faculties for how to develop FAIR code and software.
- For **Public Engagement** guidance is provided by the [Centre for Science and Culture](#) of UU. This Centre offers tailored support to researchers who are interested in sharing their research with the general public through science communication or public programmes. Also, the Centre offers several training sessions for UU staff on public engagement.
- For **Recognition & Rewards** the HR department has developed and hosts several training sessions to encourage UU staff to work with TRIPLE. First of all, there is a leadership track for all senior managers and department heads. The Recognition and Rewards principles have been integrated in this and other leadership programmes. Second, there is a workshop for all UU employees focused on Recognition & Rewards. The central HR department coordinates a so-called knowledge circle in which HR advisers from faculties all come together to discuss matters regarding FLOW and the Recognition and Rewards transition.

Milestones to be reached:

- Publication Strategies for each faculty and/or research institute
- promote the workshop on Recognition & Rewards to increase the number of participants
- a more uniform support organisation in each faculty for impact and public engagement
- Improving guidance for UU employees with how to develop narrative cv's

Commitment 8: Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition

UU exchanges practices and experiences on a national level through:

- the monthly meeting of all Chiefs Open Science in the Netherlands (each university has one Chief Open Science), which is being coordinated by Universities of the Netherlands (UNL)

- UNL Recognition & Rewards Programme
- UNL Working group 'Open Science, Impact and Valorisation'
- UNL Working group 'Public Engagement'

UU exchanges practices and experiences internationally through:

- LERU working groups (amongst others the Doctoral Studies Working Group, the Open Science Working Group and the Working Group Next Generation Metrics)
- Coimbra Group
- Knowledge Equity Network (KEN)
- International Association of Universities (IAU)
- CHARM-EU
- Hosting visits from partner institutions (for example, in 2025 UU hosted a visit from IAU focused on Open Science which facilitated mutual learning and exchange)
- Participating in panels (for example, UU's Chief Open Science participated in a panel on university rankings organised by the European CESAER alliance)

Milestones to be reached:

- Installation of a Dutch National Chapter for CoARA (UNL currently coordinates this process)
- An internationalisation strategy for UU for Open Science, which contains specific conferences to visit and to submit proposals for, networks to participate in and partner universities to visit in order to reach Open Science goals internationally

Commitment 9: Communicate progress made on adherence to the Principles and implementation of the Commitments

Communication about the progress UU made on adherence to the CoARA Principles and implementation of the CoARA commitment is being done through sharing this Action Plan. Furthermore, Universities of the Netherlands (UNL) is currently coordinating the process of installing a Dutch National Chapter for CoARA so universities can exchange and update each other about the progress made with regards to the CoARA principles and commitments.

Commitment 10: Evaluate practices, criteria and tools based on solid evidence and the state-of-the-art in research on research, and make data openly available for evidence gathering and research

UU has evaluated its Open Science practices (including those related to Recognition & Rewards, Open Access, FAIR Data and software, Public Engagement and Open Education) by an internal Open Science monitor in 2020 and 2022. This Open Science monitor consisted of a survey that all UU employees were asked to fill in. The goal of this Open Science monitor was to gather solid scientific evidence on the progress of UU Open Science. However, the response rates were low. In 2020 11% of academic staff

completed the survey. In 2022 the survey was completed by 14% of academic staff. 16% of colleagues in non-academic roles completed the monitor. The results of the Open Science monitor have been widely shared (within and outside of UU) and can be found [here](#).

The current Open Science Office is planning to continue the Open Science Monitor, but in a different form. As the response rate for the previous Open Science monitors was quite low, and therefore not representative for the progress of Open Science principles within UU, the 'new' Open Science monitor will work with questionnaires that will be filled in 'live' with focus groups. In this way more qualitative input can be gathered. The goal of the Open Science monitor will be (1) to identify the effects of Open Science on the organisation and (2) to evaluate the effectiveness of the central implementation strategy (so adjustments can be made in this strategy if necessary). The Open Science monitor of UU will take place in 2025 and 2026.

Next to the Open Science monitor, UU has an Open Access output dashboard through which the percentage of Open Access publications can be followed by faculties, departments and research institutes in real time.

Next to the UU Open Science monitor, several national monitors have taken place that UU has contributed to:

- National monitor for Recognition & Rewards
- National strategy monitoring Open Access for university and national libraries

Milestones to be reached:

- The Chiefs Open Science of Universities of the Netherlands (UNL) have discussed a national Open Science monitor. Having a national Open Science Monitor is one of the ambitions that UNL has incorporated in its [Open Science Agenda 2030](#). A next milestone for UU is to execute a national Open Science Monitor in collaboration with other Dutch universities.