Action plan 2024–2027

1. Organisation	Laurea University of Applied Sciences
2. Responsible person	Vice President Mari Vuolteenaho mari.vuolteenaho@laurea.fi
3. Contact person	Grant Writer Tiina Kelkka tiina.kelkka@laurea.fi
4. Other persons contributing to the Action Plan	HR Director Tiina Päivärinne RDI Director Sanna Juvonen Senior Researcher Leena Forma (Project evaluation)

1. Adherence to the core commitments of CoARA

Full agreement can be accessed: CoARA Full agreement

1.1 The Core Commitments of CoARA

1. Recognise the **diversity** of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research.

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

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.

4. Avoid the use of **rankings** of research organisations in research assessment.

5. Commit **resources** to reforming research assessment as is needed to achieve the organisational changes committed to.

6. **Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes.**

7. **Raise awareness** of research assessment reform and provide transparent communication, guidance, and training on assessment criteria and processes as well as their use.

8. **Exchange** practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition.

9. **Communicate** progress made on adherence to the Principles and implementation of the Commitments.

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

1.2 Universities of Applied Science – special characteristics

The main challenges that underlie the CoARA process stem from the academic research tradition. While for example, the inappropriate use of bibliometric indicators is a severe problem in some fields of science, it affects the RDI functions in the UASs much less. The unique characteristics of UAS-driven RDI work include a strong emphasis on **development-oriented projects, translational research, and interdisciplinarity**. As stated in the Finnish law, UASs have an important position in the **regional trade and industry ecosystem**. These cornerstones direct our functions toward **impact** quite naturally, which is reflected in our evaluation practices, recruitment processes as well as in career development.

Although impact and diversity are embedded in many of our evaluation practices, it is important to **put the current practices into words and to further refine them**. This will help us to provide our staff with **transparent and fair evaluation processes** as well as to **disseminate** our best practices to other kinds of research organizations and environments. In the long term, this has the potential to facilitate researchers to move between different research organizations more flexibly.

The UASs are still somewhat young RDI operators in Finland. UAS-driven RDI operations increase steadily, and it has become evident that more systematic and transparent evaluation criteria are needed. The CoARA process provides us an excellent opportunity to carefully **define our strengths and to communicate them** to other RDI actors, authorities, and funders both nationally and internationally as well as develop our procedures.

1.3 Laurea University of Applied Sciences

The RDI operations in Laurea have received a **Quality Label for Excellence** from the Finnish Education Evaluation Center **(FINEEC)** after a rigorous evaluation process in 2023. This shows that Laurea has developed its RDI functions toward operation culture that emphasizes societal interaction and impact creation. The evaluation also acknowledged our long-term development work to operate in national and international networks to promote innovation.

Our RDI activities are divided into **three research programmes**: a) Coherent security b) Sustainable and versatile social and health care and c) Service business and circular economy. These programmes direct and coordinate our RDI operations and give support to individuals working on our RDI projects. Research teams, thematic teams, and RDI support functions further strengthen our RDI operations and enable multi-professional collaboration to ensure impact.

Our RDI work is a true mixture of research, development, and innovation and all these functions are tightly integrated with teaching. Teachers participate in RDI as well as bring their students to join the projects. Our Learning by Developing (LbD) – model ensures optimal **integration of teaching, learning, and RDI**. We also have a structured system to communicate with our stakeholders in regional advisory boards, steering groups, our international advisory board as well as our alumni advisory board.

Our RDI volume is constantly growing. Thus, we also need to adapt our organization, and operations to match the growing demands. In addition to the personal level challenges in **researcher evaluation**, we see the CoARA process as an excellent opportunity to review and further develop **our organization-level RDI evaluation and reporting practices**.

1.4 Key goals

The CoARA process aims to reform the assessment practices on three levels:

1) Research, **2)** Researchers and other persons working on research, and **3)** Research Organizations. Thus, during the 4-year CoARA implementation period, we will evaluate and update our assessment practices covering all three levels. We need to ensure that our assessment **practices include qualitative methods** (not based on metrics or counting papers/citations or similar numerical indicators) and

encourage our employees to aim at impactful RDI work that is of the **highest possible quality**.

On an individual level, we ensure that the merits of individual researchers and other persons involved with research are evaluated in a **transparent and fair process**. We will evaluate our current processes carefully and, if needed, implement novel evaluation strategies and tools that help us recognize an even **larger variety of research and research-associated merits**. While being a university of applied sciences, the career paths in our organization differ significantly from the traditional academic mono-rail type of career path. We will assess the current career paths and based on the results, decide on whether we need to develop novel ways to accommodate a more diverse array of talents and achievements in the career progression pathways of researchers and RDI experts.

As an organization, Laurea is continuously being evaluated by the authorities and RDI funding bodies. Our funding depends on the evaluation results, and we accommodate our functions to line up with the external demands. We look forward to the CoARA-inspired changes in the evaluation practices and will line up our internal processes with the future external evaluation framework as it is being formed. We will **actively discuss our special position** in the RDI field with funders and authorities to ensure that the novel, adjusted organization-level evaluation practices will recognize high quality over quantity and reward for impact.

2. Objectives

1. ***Documentation and evaluation*** *of our internal research and researcher evaluation processes in Laurea. (WP2 and WP3)*

2. *Based on the evaluation results, we will **identify** possible areas of improvement in our evaluation processes and decide on **which issues are the most important to align with the CoARA principles**. (WP4)*

3. *As an organization, we **will develop, pilot, and apply** novel evaluation practices to replace/complement the old ones. (WP1 and WP4)*

4. *We will actively lobby UAS-specific needs and characteristics as an individual organization as well as a member organization in **a CoARA Working Group (WG**, Towards Transformations: Transdisciplinarity, Applied/Practice-Based Research, and Impacts), **National Chapter Finland (NC)** and in collaboration with **the network of RDI Leaders of the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences.** (WP5)*

3. Current situation

Commitment: Laurea UAS has signed the CoARA agreement and, thus, is committed to evaluating and developing research and research assessment practices according to CoARA principles.

Contact Person: To actively engage in the reform, a contact person, who is responsible for timely engagement in the actions has been named. The contact person communicates with the management as well as representatives of different personnel groups working with diverse research-related tasks in the organization. The contact person will also actively participate in the Working Group (*Towards Transformations: Transdisciplinarity, Applied/Practice-Based Research, and Impacts)* and National Chapter activities. The person is also encouraged to follow the outputs from other CoARA working groups.

Planning: An Action Plan is being formulated by the end of 2023. We will pay special attention to

the unique characteristics of the UAS environment. We will communicate these differences and accommodate our actions to ensure fair assessment practices for all our RDI staff.

Project evaluation: The process is presented in WP2, Task 1. Our experts have already collected theoretical information on the best practices of project evaluation and this information is now widely being disseminated in the organization. The next steps include the creation of a practical approach, that is easy to perform and within the limits of sensible use of resources. The approach will be carefully aligned with the principles of CoARA and communicated with other Finnish UASs already during the piloting phase both via personal communications as well as publications in appropriate journals.

4. Work packages (actions)

WP1. Engagement, project management, and dissemination

Task 1. Resources. The first task is to allocate resources to complete all the listed actions in this Action Plan. We will identify responsible persons for each WP and task and agree on the division of labour.

Task 2. **Dissemination**.

Internal awareness-raising ensures that our personnel know about the process and understand why and how the evaluation framework evolves both within our organization and more broadly. Presentation of the process in Laurea's home page and intranet. Presentations in RDI events online and on-site. Topics covered: researcher evaluation, project evaluation, CoARA goals – focus on the special characteristics, strengths, and challenges of the UASs. Articles in Laurea Journal.

External dissemination is mainly described **in WP5** as a part of Laurea's role in national and international CoARA consortia. In addition to the joint efforts, we identify possible dissemination channels as an individual organization and e.g., publish articles describing the CoARA process and its advances in relevant professional, national, and potentially international journals.

Task 3. **Meetings.** We will organize a **kick-off** meeting to discuss and review the content of this Action Plan and to confirm the resources and responsibilities. We will organize an **annual** online event for all internal key stakeholders (management, persons participating / interested in the CoARA process) to update the progress in specific WPs and Tasks. Depending on the needs and timing, these events may focus on a narrow task or cover a larger topic. A **mid-term** review will be performed at the end of 2025 and the **final evaluation** at the end of 2027.

Task 4. Updating the Action Plan. The Action Plan will be **reviewed and updated annually.** The Action Plan will be complemented with insights and guidelines that arise from the CoARA working groups and the national chapter. We also align the plan to respond to the needs arising from Laurea's internal process.

Task 5. The next steps. We will summarize the main actions and learning outcomes from the 4-year CoARA process. This information is communicated in our organization and used as the starting point to decide how the research assessment practices will be further developed after the year 2027.

WP 2. Research evaluation in Laurea UAS

We will document our internal processes regarding RDI assessment and reporting on project, team, and organization levels. **Organization-level** evaluation practices are included in **WP5**, where we describe participation in national and international CoARA activities and interactions with funders and other interest groups.

Task 1. RDI project evaluation. The majority of Laurea's RDI projects aim at developing novel practical solutions to tackle societal challenges and, thus, are in an excellent position to deliver impact. Differently from the academic research environment, where publications are the primary outcome of most projects, our focus is more concrete, and bound to practice. Laurea's RDI portfolio is diverse. On the other end, we have projects with almost purely academic ambitions, while the majority of our projects aim at developing real-life solutions to support the regional business community as well as second-, third-, and fourth-sector actors. This versatility makes evaluation challenging – different projects with different aims need to be evaluated with different assessment criteria. Yet, the same process should apply to all.

Project evaluation processes are currently being formulated and this work will continue during the coming years. The process will be piloted and integrated into our routine RDI operations and aligned with the CoARA principles.

RDI projects are also reviewed to reveal their potential for future applications. Their potential for the renewal of RDI operations as well as their commercial development are systematically evaluated in-house.

Task 2. Research groups and thematic teams. Research groups and thematic teams are a tool to coordinate and organize RDI operations in Laurea. The current evaluation practices are collected and discussed with the group leaders and RDI leaders more broadly.

Task 3. **Research proposal** evaluation. Before any RDI funding proposal is submitted from Laurea, it must pass our internal evaluation. The process includes an assessment of the idea, funding instrument, and the preparation team as well as a preliminary SDG assessment. The process will be documented for discussion in WP4.

WP3. Researcher evaluation in Laurea UAS

Task 3.1. Target group. In Annex 2 – Glossary, Researchers are defined to cover all career stages, including doctoral students. For the UAS community, this definition might prove too narrow as in our RDI projects, PhDs and doctoral candidates constitute only a part of our RDI teams. A doctoral degree/ academic training is not always a prerequisite (or even beneficial) for the successful implementation of our RDI projects. We want to ensure that the same fair, diverse, and transparent assessment criteria are applied to persons without formal academic training who participate RDI activities. We do not wish to make a too sharp line between non-academic and academic career paths, but to encourage all to aim at high quality and impact in RDI.

Task 3.2. Evaluation: for what purpose? By discussing with HR, management, research leaders as well as unit representatives, and researchers themselves, we will build a comprehensive understanding of what kind of situations researcher assessment is applied in our organization. Possible situations include recruitment, career development, redefining salaries, and allocation of other rewards based on performance (such as compensation for publications).

Task 3.3. Key merits – what are the merits that are presently considered in researcher assessment? Different roles in our organization require different skills and, thus, the assessment criteria vary between different groups. Researchers are split into appropriate sub-groups and the main evaluation criteria are documented.

Task 3.4. Self-evaluation, peer review. We will identify situations, where our researchers can include self-evaluation in their assessment. Also, we will examine whether peer review processes are used to complement internal evaluation.

WP4. Analysis of the results and piloting of novel approaches

Task 4.1. **Analysis** of the results – **Research Assessment**. All collected information will be analyzed and discussed to identify the most severe challenges in our processes. The main challenges will be selected for intervention. In addition to the severity of the conflict, we also evaluate whether internal intervention is enough to tackle the challenge and align the challenges with feedback from CoARA WGs and NCs. 1-3 challenges are selected for intervention – either within Laurea or together with our collaborators from WGs and the NC. Experts from HR, management, departments, and research programs together with researchers will be involved in the process.

Task 4.2. **Analysis** of the results – **Researcher assessment**. A similar analysis, challenge selection, and consultation process will be performed to ensure proper alignment with the CoARA principles regarding researchers' assessment.

Task 4.3. **Interventions.** Based on the evaluation and the following analysis and selection, a total of 2-5 challenges will be selected. The interventions can be small pilots or larger changes in the organization-level assessment policies. The pilots may include cases of project evaluation or testing of new ways to document team/personal merits. Each pilot is evaluated and decisions will be made on whether the novel process will become part of our internal routines as such or if it needs further development.

WP5. Participation in the National Chapter (NC), international Working Groups (WG), and the Finnish UAS network

Task 5.1. National Chapter. Laurea has committed to joining the Finnish National Chapter. We will actively participate in the discussion and promote topics that are of special interest to the UAS sector. The National Chapter facilitates the discussion between different research organizations, funders and authorities to formulate common criteria for research and researcher evaluation. Interaction with the actors of this forum will also enrich our internal work with new ideas and views. NC will produce concrete outputs during a timeframe of two years.

Task 5.2. Working Group. Laurea UAS is a founding member of the CoARA working group Towards Transformations: Transdisciplinarity, Applied/Practice-Based Research, and Impacts. The Working Group will operate for two years, starting from the beginning of 2024.

Task 5.3. The Finnish UAS network. Laurea UAS is an active member of the Finnish UAS network. Continuous discussions ensure timely and efficient implementation of CoARA principles on a national level. This network is a permanent collaboration platform that facilitates the implementation of advances in research assessment even after the active working period of the NCs and WGs.

Schedule

		2024		2025		2026		2027	
WP1. Engagement, project management, and dissemination									
T1.1	Resources	▨							
T1.2	Dissemination	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨
T1.3	Meetings	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨
T1.4	Updating the plan		▨		▨		▨		
T1.5	Next steps							▨	▨
WP 2. Research evaluation in Laurea UAS									
T2.1	RDI project evaluation	▣	▣	▣	▣	▣	▣		
T2.2	Research group /thematic team evaluation	▣	▣	▣	▣				
T2.2	Research proposal evaluation	▣	▣	▣	▣				
WP3. Researcher evaluation in Laurea UAS									
T3.1	Target group	▨	▨	▨					
T3.2	Evaluation: for what purpose?	▨	▨	▨					
T3.3	Key merits	▨	▨	▨					
T3.4	Self-evaluation, peer review	▨	▨	▨					
WP4. Analysis of the results and piloting of novel approaches									
T4.1	Analysis - Research assessment				▣	▣			
T4.2	Analysis - Researcher assessment				▣	▣			
T4.3	Interventions						▣	▣	▣
WP5. Participation in NC, WG, and Finnish UAS network									
T5.1	National Chapter	▨	▨	▨	▨				
T5.2	Working Group	▨	▨	▨	▨				
T5.3	Finnish UAS network	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨