

## CoARA Action plan 2024–2027

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### 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-of-the-art in research on research and make data openly available for evidence gathering and research.

## 1.2. The implementation of CoARA core commitments in the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS)

Universities of applied sciences (UAS) are regionally-embedded higher education institutions, which participate actively in developing the regional innovation ecosystem. Through research-integrated education and practice-oriented research, UAS conduct knowledge transfer and valorisation based on real-world challenges. Following characteristics of UASs apply to their RDI work:

- UASs respond to transdisciplinary challenges and create regional impact;
- UASs form the link between basic and applied research, market application of new innovations and inclusive tackling of societal challenges;
- UASs act as important drivers of innovation ecosystems because of their regional embeddedness; and
- UASs follow a practice-based approach which promotes competences related to innovation and entrepreneurship.

The research, development, and innovation (RDI) activities of the Finnish UASs include a strong emphasis on multi-disciplinary development projects, applied research and innovations. UASs have a significant role in their regional ecosystems, which directs their RDI activities towards impact in the region quite naturally and is reflected in the assessment practices of RDI activities and personnel involved in RDI, recruitment processes as well as in career development.

Although impact and diversity are embedded in many of the existing RDI related assessment practices, it is important to evaluate the current practices and to further develop and refine them. This will help to provide RDI personnel with transparent and fair assessment processes of RDI activities as well as to disseminate best RDI assessment practices to other research organizations and environments. In the long term, this can support the career development of RDI personnel. The aim is also to support flexible movement of RDI personnel between different research organizations.

The UASs are comparatively young RDI organisations in Finland. However, the RDI activities increase steadily, and more systematic and transparent RDI assessment criteria are thus needed. The CoARA process provides the Finnish UASs an excellent opportunity to carefully define their strengths and to communicate them to other RDI actors, authorities, and funders both nationally and internationally as well as develop their procedures.

## 1.3 Lapland University of Applied Sciences

Lapland UAS is an RDI oriented UAS. Lapland UAS comprises of multidisciplinary competence groups, which belong to two schools: The School of Northern Well-being and Services and The School of Arctic Natural Resources and Economy. Strategic focus areas direct the RDI activities, which are a mixture of research, development, and innovation. All these functions are integrated with teaching as lecturers participate in RDI as well as bring their students to join the RDI activities. Hence, the RDI personnel of Lapland UAS comprises of various actors such as teachers, senior and principal lecturers, RDI experts and RDI project workers. Interdisciplinary collaboration

between competence groups also enables multi-professional collaboration. Based on the RDI volume, Lapland UAS is positioned among the top five UAS's in Finland. The RDI volume of Lapland UAS has increased during the past four years, which means that there is a need to adapt the RDI and HR activities and processes to match the growing demands.

Lapland University of Applied Sciences passed the evaluation of the quality system conducted by The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) in 2023. According to the evaluation quality work is an integral part of the everyday activities in the Lapland UAS. The processes operate in a multi-disciplinary manner and their development is systematic and continuous. Assessment area 2, which includes the evaluation of the quality work in RDI activities, received the level *excellent*, which means that the UAS shows evidence of long-term and effective enhancement work of its RDI processes. The enhancement activities also create substantial added value for the HEI, stakeholders, or both. However, the core commitments of CoARA offer an excellent opportunity to review and further develop the organization-level RDI and HR processes.

#### 1.4 Objectives

The CoARA process aims to reform the assessment practices of research, researchers and research organizations. During the 4-year CoARA implementation period, Lapland UAS evaluates and updates the assessment practices covering all three aspects and ensures that the assessment practices include qualitative methods and encourages RDI personnel to aim at impactful RDI work. Current RDI processes are evaluated and, if needed, novel evaluation strategies and tools that help the UAS to recognize larger variety of research and research-associated merits are developed and implemented.

The objectives are

1. To recognize the diversity of contributions and qualitatively evaluate RDI and personnel involved in RDI activities to complement the quantitative assessment criteria.
2. To broaden the assessment to include the diversity of the activities, outcomes and impact of RDI in Lapland UAS.
3. To renew the assessment criteria and recruiting processes of RDI personnel
4. To lobby UAS-specific RDI evaluations

The career paths in RDI work differ significantly from the traditional academic mono-rail type of career path. The current career paths of RDI personnel are assessed and if needed, novel ways to accommodate a more diverse array of talents and achievements in the career path are developed and implemented.

As an organization, Lapland UAS is continuously being evaluated by the authorities and RDI funding bodies. The external funding of RDI activities depends on the evaluation results, and the RDI functions are accommodated to line up with the external demands. Together with different stakeholders, Lapland UAS aims at ensuring that novel organization-level evaluation practices will recognize high quality

of RDI activities over quantity and reward for impact. It is also important to consider the diversity of the RDI activities in the Finnish UASs when developing novel approaches for RDI evaluations.

## 1.5 Current situation

Lapland UAS has signed the CoARA agreement in June 2023 and, thus, it is committed to deliver an action plan within one year of signing the agreement. Lapland UAS has a vibrant RDI-oriented culture, fostering an environment where competence groups and RDI personnel actively engage in a variety of RDI activities. The organisation has identified three strategic focus areas that align with its mission and regional priorities.

Lapland UAS ensures that RDI activities align with the strategic goals and SDG-indicators. The selection of relevant RDI personnel contributing to the RDI activities takes place without a pre-set procedure. The planning of RDI activities at Lapland UAS is seldom linked to the RDI personnel assessment process.

Currently the RDI personnel assessment is based on development discussions, which emphasizes RDI activities and contributions related to strategic focus areas and regional collaboration. It excludes traditional metrics such as publications, citations, and impact factors. Lapland UAS places a strong emphasis on working life collaboration, both internally and externally. RDI personnel is encouraged to collaborate across disciplines within the UAS and establish partnerships with external stakeholders, including industry, government agencies, and other organisations. However, the ability to collaborate with the stakeholders at Lapland UAS is not linked to the RDI personnel assessment process as such.

Lapland UAS RDI personnel are actively involved in delivering impactful contributions through RDI activities. The focus is on the practical applications and benefits that these activities bring to the region and beyond. Ability to communicate the RDI results to stakeholders at Lapland UAS is awarded by publication fees, but otherwise there is no link to the RDI personnel assessment process.

When implementing the core commitments of CoARA, a special attention is paid to the unique characteristics of the UAS's RDI environment. These differences are communicated to ensure fair assessment practices for research and RDI personnel. The process of implementing CoARA core commitments is presented in chapter 4 as work packages.

## **1.5 Work packages (actions for 2024 - 2027)**

### **WP1. Engagement, project management, and dissemination**

#### Action 1.1. Establishing an internal working group and appointing a co-ordinator

The internal working group co-ordinates the implementation of the core commitments of CoARA in collaboration with other working groups involved in developing the assessment practices of research and RDI personnel.

To actively engage in the reform, a co-ordinator, who is responsible for timely engagement in the actions will be appointed. 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 National Chapter activities and follow the outputs from other CoARA working groups.

#### Action 1.2. Resource allocation

This action relates to resource allocation to complete all the listed actions in this Action Plan. Responsible persons for each WP and task are identified and the division of labour is agreed on an annual basis.

#### Action 1.3. Awareness-raising and engagement of RDI personnel

This action ensures that the personnel of Lapland UAS is aware of the CoARA implementation process and understands why and how the evaluation framework evolves. The process is presented in the www-pages and intranet. Awareness-raising and engagement is supported by presentations in RDI events online and on-site and by workshops. Topics covered: research assessment, RDI personnel assessment, CoARA goals – focus on the special characteristics, strengths, and challenges of the UASs.

#### Action 1.4. Training of the RDI personnel

Training sessions and meetings are arranged to discuss and review how the new criteria, processes and tools for research and RDI personnel assessment are implemented. An annual online event for all internal key stakeholders (management, persons participating/ interested in the CoARA process) is held 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.

#### Action 1.5. 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 working groups and the CoARA national chapter. The plan is also aligned to respond to the needs arising from the internal development process.

#### Action 1.6. Dissemination

The main actions and learning outcomes from the 4-year CoARA process are disseminated throughout the development process. This information is communicated and used as the starting point to decide how the research assessment practices will be further developed after the year 2027.

## **WP 2. Development of the RDI assessment in Lapland UAS**

### Action 2.1. The evaluation of existing RDI processes and assessment criteria

Most Lapland UAS RDI activities aim at developing novel practical solutions to tackle societal challenges and thus to deliver impact. Competence groups and thematic RDI teams are a tool to coordinate and organize RDI operations. RDI development managers co-ordinate the RDI activities on a UAS level.

Differently from the academic research environment, where publications are the primary outcome of most activities, the focus of RDI activities is more concrete, and bound to practice-based solutions. The RDI portfolio of Lapland UAS is diverse. Most of the activities aim at developing real-life solutions to support the regional business as well as second-, third-, and fourth-sector actors while some of the activities also have a stronger academic ambition.

This versatility makes research assessment challenging – different activities with different aims need to be evaluated with different assessment criteria. Yet, the same process should apply to all. The current assessment practices are analyzed with the RDI managers, competence group managers and RDI team leaders more broadly.

### Action 2.2. Developing a new internal framework for RDI processes

The RDI processes of Lapland UAS have been renewed in 2022, and mainly the processes are already in place. However, there are development needs for tailoring the processes to cover diversity in RDI. In order to achieve this, a comprehensive internal framework for different types of RDI activities will be developed. The development work continues during the coming years, and will be aligned with CoARA principles. Relevant stakeholders are involved in developing the new internal framework for RDI activities.

### Action 2.3. Developing research assessment criteria

This development work is based on the results of action 2.1. Developing research assessment criteria continues during the coming years, and it is linked to action 2.2. Relevant stakeholders are involved in developing research assessment criteria. Based on the analysis, tools and processes for research assessment are revised and aligned with the CoARA principles.

### Action 2.4. Piloting novel approaches in RDI assessment

The pilots may include case examples or testing of new ways to document outputs. Each pilot is evaluated, and decisions will be made on whether the novel process will become part of internal RDI framework as such or if it needs further development.

## **WP3. Development of RDI personnel assessment in Lapland UAS**

### Action 3.1. Defining the target groups for RDI personnel assessment

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 the RDI activities, PhDs and doctoral candidates constitute only a part of the RDI teams. A doctoral degree/ academic training is not always a prerequisite for the successful implementation of the RDI work. Distinct roles in RDI work require different skills and, thus, the assessment criteria vary between diverse groups. RDI personnel is grouped into different categories based on the RDI activities and the main assessment criteria and framework are documented.

### Action 3.2. Developing the assessment criteria for RDI personnel

By engaging HR, management, research leaders as well as unit representatives, and RDI personnel themselves, the existing assessment practices of RDI personnel are analysed. This analysis includes the evaluation of career development, checking of salary assessment practices, and allocation of other rewards based on performance (such as compensation for publications). Relevant stakeholders are involved in the revision of assessment criteria, processes and tools.

It is important to ensure that the same fair, diverse, and transparent assessment criteria are applied also to those participating in RDI activities who do not have a formal academic training. It is also important to encourage all to aim at high quality and impact in RDI.

### Action 3.3. Developing the recruiting process

By discussing with HR, management and other relevant stakeholders, the existing recruitment practices of RDI personnel are analyzed. Based on the analysis, tools and processes for recruitment are revised and aligned with the CoARA principles.

### Action 3.4. Piloting novel approaches in RDI personnel assessment

The pilots may include cases of self-assessment, peer-assessment 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 the assessment framework as such or if it needs further development.

## **WP4. Participation in external networks**

### Action 4.1. CoARA National Chapter

Lapland UAS has committed to joining the Finnish National Chapter. The National Chapter facilitates the discussion between different research organizations, funders, and authorities to formulate common criteria for research and RDI personnel assessment. Interaction with the actors of this forum will also enrich the internal development work with latest ideas and views.

### Action 4.2. Collaboration in the Finnish UAS RDI network

Lapland UAS is a member of the Finnish UAS RDI network. This network is a permanent collaboration platform that facilitates the implementation of advances in research assessment. Continuous discussions ensure timely and efficient implementation of CoARA principles on a national level.