

Aalto University's Commitments to Developing the CoARA Action Plan

Aalto University is a multidisciplinary, research-oriented university. It consists of six disciplinary schools, each having 3-6 departments.

Aalto University is committed to working actively to follow and develop further its practices related to responsible researcher and research evaluation and principles set in CoARA guidelines. Aalto University is committed also to participating in the national work, i.e., in the national chapter and other non-formal networks to build a joint national understanding of the vision and implementation set in the CoARA agreement. In addition, Aalto University participates in the activities of selected CoARA Working Groups.

Aalto University signed the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment and joined the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment on November 22nd, 2022.

Current assessment principles at Aalto University

Aalto University regularly evaluates the quality of its research and artistic activities, and its societal impact. The assessment is based on internationally agreed best practices and peer review. The quality and merits of research activities are assessed through peer review using criteria relevant to the field in question.

Assessment principles at the individual level

At Aalto University, we work with assessment of researchers on daily basis: our six schools are constantly recruiting researchers for different levels of careers, and researchers are advancing in their careers. In both nodes, individuals are assessed by their peers. The guiding documents for researcher evaluation are career policy documents, mainly the tenure track policies and procedures. It includes the principles and practical measures for advancing on career paths and guidelines for implementation of activities. Other important guidelines setting the frame in the assessment are Aalto Code of Conduct and relevant HR policies. Aalto University has

had the European Commission's HR Excellence in Research award (HRS4R) since 2012.

In February 2023, we published the new version of Aalto Tenure Track Policies and Procedures which sets the bases of researcher evaluation in all career steps. According to the document, the researcher assessment in our university is:

- Based on holistic qualitative evaluation where peer evaluation plays a key role
- Based on reliable data, facts and narrative text produced by the applicant
- Transparent: criteria are publicly available
- Work is done ethically, which means diversity, equality and non-discrimination are promoted in all our activities. We also maintain a high integrity in our work, and only impartial persons participate in the processes.
- Flexibility: each school may have their additional criteria based on the discipline specific requirements.

The tenure track policies and procedures document is available on the Aalto university's website: [aalto-tenure-track-policies-and-procedures](#).

Assessment principles at the institutional level

According to section 87 of the Universities Act, Finnish universities are required to evaluate their education, research and artistic activities and the impact thereof, and take part in external evaluation of their activities and quality assurance systems on a regular basis.

Aalto university's unique evaluation programme is a common multi-year programme, according to which internal and external evaluation of university activities and the processing of the related schedules are carried out. This long-term evaluation programme plays a key role in ensuring that Aalto's core activities are evaluated systematically and continuously and that quality management procedures are well-institutionalised at the university.

Internal evaluations

The internal evaluation takes place in the review process (University Review). The goal of the self-evaluations of the University Review is to support the achievement of the strategic goals Aalto and its schools has set and help to identify our internal and external strengths and areas for improvement.

The realization of the strategic goals is monitored and reported by utilizing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which are numerical measures of school and

department level activities. KPIs in use are described and defined in the Indicator Handbook, which is systematically updated annually during the University Review process based on inputs from the Aalto community. The Indicator Handbook and the annually calculated KPIs are openly available to the entire Aalto community. Individual researchers are not analysed via these KPIs.

External evaluations

At the institutional level, peer review is done through regular research assessments, during which an international panel assesses the research quality at the school and department level. At the school level, development is monitored by a Scientific Advisory Board or Scientific and Artistic Advisory Board (S(A)AB), comprised of international experts in fields relevant to the school. In biennial meetings, the S(A)ABs review and support the research and artistic activities and plans of the school and provide recommendations for further development. The next meeting takes place in autumn 2024.

In addition, an assessment of the entire university's Research, Art, and Impact (RAI) is carried out every seven to eight years. The next evaluation of research (RAI) takes place in 2027, and updated guidelines for implementation are planned to be formulated by then.

Aalto University's institutional research assessment procedures are described in Aalto university's website: <https://www.aalto.fi/en/research-art/research-assessments>

The assessment principles of research and researchers are based on the following national and international commitments:

- Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment & Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) (2022)
- Recommendation for the Responsible Evaluation of a Researcher in Finland (2020)
- Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK guidelines, especially the guidelines on research integrity (2023), the recommendation on the Curriculum Vitae (2020) and the recommendation on agreeing on authorship in research publications (2018).
- The Leiden Manifesto (2015)
- The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) (2013)

The current guidelines advise that in the assessment of research and researchers, a variety of research and artistic outputs, practices and activities are recognized as merits. Also, differences in the career paths are appreciated, and the quality and impact of research and artistic activities plays the main role.

How does the assessment reform develop? Who are involved?

Reforming the evaluation processes has been a long-term development path, and it has been ongoing for years hand in hand with developing national and international recommendations.

Our approach to reform is to integrate the responsible assessment into our current procedures.

At the researcher level assessment, the process is led by the provost who leads the Academic career's management team which is the task force and responsible for developing the researcher assessment practices. Policies and recommendations related to the institutional level evaluations, including the Scientific and Artistic Advisory Boards (S(A)AB) and Research, Art and Impact Assessment (RAI) are handled at the Research Steering Group, led by the Vice President for Research, and also brought to Aalto president's management team if needed.

Any new guidelines, before the approval in the Aalto president's management team, are widely discussed in our community in a co-creation spirit, for example in the Academic Career's Working Group, Research Steering Group, HR Manager's network, in the schools' tenure track committees and if relevant, also in the teaching competence assessment committees of the schools. The researchers at different career levels, including professors, are members in these groups.

Recent updates in our practices related to CoARA

The guidelines for researcher recruitment, and career advancement processes have been updated, considering the new assessment guidelines and their commitments. Aalto University has updated the key career path documents Aalto Tenure Track Policy and Procedures (February 2023); Aalto Lecture Career System (June 2023), and Aalto Other Academic Policies (August 2022).

Few examples of the recent renewals in our policy documents:

- Researcher is asked to provide a narrative research/artistic portfolio, which is a concise self-reflection on the merits and a long-term vision of the research.
- Researcher may raise up 5 most important publications or artistic/professional work outputs and describe their significance and own contribution.

The current Aalto wide guidelines are that publication metrics may be used, if relevant for the recruitment, and are used only to support qualitative evaluation. In addition to the Aalto wide criteria, each school may have additional field specific tenure track criteria. Sometimes discipline specific habits may slow down the reform.

The common principles in the use of publication metrics when assessing individual researchers are:

- Publication metrics are used only when relevant for recruitment, and only to support qualitative evaluation.
- Differences between disciplines are considered.
- The data and methods used, and the results of the publication metrics are as open and transparent as possible.
- Publication metrics are always based on the consent given by the applicant and are based on the list of publications provided by the applicant.
- Those being evaluated have the right to review and, if necessary, request correction of the data used and the results of the publication analysis.
- Specific expertise is ensured in publication metrics production.

One of the updates on institutional level evaluation practices relates to the better consideration of the merits of open science. We have included the percentage of open access publications as one of the department-level Key Performance Indicators (KPI), and in this way highlighting our appreciation towards open science activities which in the end are done by researchers themselves. The KPIs are not used in researcher-level assessments.

The CoARA commitment number 4 (use of organization rankings) has also been addressed at discussions at the university. However, the current understanding is that since ranking data is processed only for communication purposes, we can continue to use it at such a general level to describe our own activities. In contrast, while recruiting new researchers from outside the university, the ranking of an applicant's university is not used as an assessment criterion.

Milestones for CoARA development and implementation 2022-2026

Setting the baseline – paving the way for the reform	
Updates on the career policy documents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introducing narrative research/artistic portfolio as one of the documents used in the assessment of researchers. - Removing the requirement of publication-based metrics as a tool on assessment of researchers. 	2022-2023
Updates on internal guidelines and templates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Template for Dean's proposal - Template for Departmental committee's proposal - Guidelines for Departmental committees for recruitment - Guidelines for Departmental committees for advancements 	2023
Updates on other researchers' assessment related guidelines and templates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Instructions for external reviewer: e.g., including ensuring <i>impartiality document</i> and a notion to <i>appreciate diverse career paths</i>. - Introducing the use of narrative research portfolio (teaching portfolio already in use) 	2023
First presentations and discussions on CoARA commitment and its purpose at different forums of the University: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research Steering Group - ACRIS Network Event (Aalto Current Research Information System) - Academic Careers Working Group 	2023
Active participation in several national networks, e.g., in the preparation of the national Chapter Application.	2023-
Cultural change towards responsible assessment	
Encouraging and supporting six Aalto schools to update their assessment guidelines in the light of the reform.	2024
More measures to internal communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guidance and implementation of new practicalities (e.g., induction of recruitment/promotion committees with the responsible assessment of the researcher). 	2024
A regular follow up of the CoARA implementation at different forums of the University, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research Steering Group - ACRIS Network Event (Aalto Current Research Information System) - Academic Careers Working Group 	2024

Start the discussion of Aalto specific recommendations for the responsible use of publication metrics. The recommendations will consider the intended use of publication metrics and different disciplines and career stages. The discussion also includes the responsible use of the H-index and journal-based metrics (Finnish publication forum classification, Association of Business Schools Classification, FT Research Rank and Journal Impact Factor) when evaluating the performance of an individual researcher.	2024
Actively monitor the development of open data sources (e.g., OpenAlex) and analysis tools related to publication metrics alongside with the commercial ones (Web of Science, Scopus).	2024
Continue to follow, review (and pilot if relevant for Aalto) new national and international research assessment recommendations, criteria, and tools (for example, Finnish Career Assessment Matrix FIN-CAM).	2024
Actively participate and share good practices in the CoARA National Chapter and in other national and international networks related to responsible assessment.	2024
Living the culture of responsible assessment	
Revising the full professors merit pay model to comply with CoARA principles.	2025
Guidelines for assessing research. The next Research, Art, and Impact Assessment (RAI) takes place in 2027 and will be performed together with the Teaching and Learning Evaluation Exercise (TEE).	2026
HRS4R review with site visit, where e.g., OTM-R policies are evaluated.	2026
Continue to develop processes to produce high-quality and open data to enable better recognition of the diverse practices and activities of our university and its units. Encourage researchers to input such activities in ACRIS (Aalto Current Research Information System).	2026
Continue the discussions on CoARA commitment and its purpose at different forums at the University.	2025-2026
Continue the active participation in national and international responsible evaluation networks and working groups.	2025-2026

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