

h_da

CoARA Action Plan (May 2024)

V1.0

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Introduction

The Hochschule Darmstadt (h_da, Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences) signed the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (ARRA) and joined the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) in November 2022. As a member of CoARA, Darmstadt University of Applied Science has committed to playing an active role in the reform of the Research Assessment System and welcomes the initiative.

In accordance with the vision of CoARA, h_da agrees to recognise diverse research outputs, practices, and activities when evaluating and assessing research, researchers, and research units. This is done with the objective of optimising the quality and impact of research. Furthermore, the assessment acknowledges and values the diverse career paths and individual circumstances.

By signing the CoARA Agreement and implementing the CoARA principles, h_da acknowledges the recommendations set forth in the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA). In line with its commitment to CoARA, Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences intends to sign DORA at a later stage in the process.

The following document provides a brief profile of h_da, outlines the activities of the CoARA working group to date, and describes the action plan that h_da has committed to implement between 2024 and 2027.

h_da profile

Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences is one of the largest Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) in Germany. As a research-intensive university that was included in the "Innovative University" funding programme in 2017, h_da focuses on current issues relating to changes in society and economy. Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences is organised into two main divisions: the central service and administration area and the twelve faculties, which collectively represent the diverse range of subjects taught at the university.

The overall objectives of the h_da are to provide support to talented researchers at all stages of their careers, to facilitate the exchange of scientific information and to help create a research environment to the highest standards of scientific inquiry.

Consequently, research assessment is a crucial area in which the h_da will continue to invest efforts to contribute to its mission. The commitment to CoARA represents a central concern in the further embedding and reforming of research assessment across the university.

The declaration to CoARA underlines the ambition of the University Darmstadt to continue to develop and build on measures already introduced, such as the DFG Code of Conduct (Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice), Open Science, Third Mission and internationalisation. As one of nine partner universities in the "European University of Technology (EUt+)" alliance, h_da is working towards a technology-oriented European university. The EUt+ alliance has declared its intention to adhere to the principles of DORA and CoARA and to implement those principles in a unified EUt+ approach.

CoARA working group

The designed action plan is the result of a CoARA working group established in 2023. The group consisted of representatives from various administrative and academic departments, and its purpose was to facilitate an internal analysis, consultation, and participation process. This document is the first internal Action Plan that will be revised and edited over the implementation period from 2024 and 2027.

The working group understands the process of developing and constantly adapting the action plan as a participatory and dynamic process. In addition to the necessity of reaching consensus on content and measures with relevant interest groups, university committees and the administration, it is also essential to conduct ongoing reviews of the quality, implementation and relevance of these measures.

As a preliminary step, the CoARA Group has developed a general timeline for the University Darmstadt, which has been approved by the Presidential Board. As a next step, the action plan will undergo further revisions and will then be finalised. In order to achieve this objective, the working group will be expanded to include additional stakeholders within the university, committees and departments will be engaged, and the university's public will be consulted. For further details, please refer to the action plan.

The CoARA working group is responsible for providing support, structure and monitoring of the reform efforts at h_da in accordance with the CoARA principles. The CoARA working group initiates and invites all university members to participate in the CoARA process. As part of this participatory approach, the thematic working groups are planning the following activities for the Action Plan:

- Analysis of the status quo
- Identification of the relevant stakeholders and their involvement
- Identification and prioritisation of CoARA-related topics
- Definition of the responsible units
- Identification of the processes for reforms and the necessary or available resources.
- Formulation of the measures and objectives
- Support of the responsible units in implementing the measures defined in the action plan
- Documentation and monitoring of progress in implementation
- Continuous evaluation and improvement of the action plan
- Ensuring the sustainability of reforms and maintaining the competitiveness of researchers and institutions
- Communicating the progress made to all member of the university and to the CoARA coalition

The working group has identified a number of core areas in which it plans to concentrate its efforts. These include:

- Recognition, consideration and appreciation of a wide range of research profiles, career paths and individual circumstances
- Further development of the assessment system for scientific careers (at all career stages)
- Development of a responsible instrument for the use of quantitative indicators for research assessment and academic careers
- Evaluation and consideration of practice-oriented/applied/transdisciplinary research and development and its innovation impact

- Consideration of open science contributions and practice in the assessment of research outcomes and impact

Action Plan 2024-2027 (V1.0)

All measures in this plan are based on commitments 1 to 4 of the CoARA agreement, which constitute the core of the reform proposal:

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 organization in research assessment

In accordance with the CoARA core principles, h_da is dedicated to fostering and facilitating research that advances equality and has a significant impact. The measures presented are in line with the recommendations provided by the CoARA Steering Board (https://coara.eu/app/uploads/2023/10/Action-plan-guidelines-October-2023_Incl.-Table.pdf).

Each of these core areas addresses different levels of stakeholders/relevant levels that are autonomous but closely interlinked: individual researchers; research units within the university (e.g. research groups, research centres, departments); the university as a whole.

In the initial phase (November 2022 to May 2024), h_da defined its role within CoARA and initiated the development of a preliminary action plan (V1.0). In a second phase (June 2024 – June 2025), all relevant h_da stakeholders will be invited to participate in a discussion regarding the action plan, which will be further specified along this process (V2.0). From mid-2025 onwards, h_da will implement the planned activities with the overall objective of achieving the defined measures (V3.0). Finally, the framework will be implemented and evaluated in a final phase by the end of 2027. A more detailed schedule is provided in the following table.

Time period	Activities, measures, milestones
Nov 2022	Signing the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment
Since Apr 2023	Joining the CoARA - Meetings
Aug – Dec 2023	Establishment of the CoARA working group and preparatory work (analysing status quo, internal discussions, identifying existing preparatory work, identifying relevant stakeholders) at the university in order to plan and develop an action plan
Dec 2023	Commitment to joining and participating in the National Chapter Germany
Jan – May 2024	Constitution of the extended CoARA working group and preparation of the first draft of the university action plan

May 2024	Draft Action Plan V1.0 - General procedure (communication via the CoARA network: upload the Action Plan to the CoARA Zenodo platform)
Jun – Dec 2024	Involve relevant stakeholder groups (departments, graduate schools, research support, etc.) to identify specific assessment practices and potential for reform in line with the commitments; adopt a DORA policy
Jan – Mar 2025	Specify the action plan (V2.0) with concrete goals and measures, as well as the necessary resources and responsible bodies
Apr – Jun 2025	Confirmation of the CoARA action plan by the relevant university bodies
Jul 2025	Communication of the updated action plan in the internal and external CoARA network
Jul 2025 – Jun 2026	Implementation of the reforms and measures defined in the action plan (implementation phase I)
Jul 2026	Evaluation of the implemented measures and discussion with relevant stakeholders
Aug – Oct 2026	Refinement of the action plan (V3. 0) and confirmation by the relevant university committees
Nov 2026	Communication of the updated action plan in the CoARA network
Dez 2026 – Nov 2027	Implementation of the reforms and measures defined in the action plan (implementation phase II)
Oct 2027	Evaluation of the implemented measures (incl. practice, criteria and instruments)