



Vaasan yliopisto
UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

CoARA Action Plan 2024

University of Vaasa, Finland



Table of contents

1	Starting point	3
1.1	Assessment principles at the University of Vaasa.....	3
1.2	Strategy and change approach and key challenges	7
2	Operational action plan for a 5-year time frame	8
2.1	Core commitments.....	9
2.2	Supporting commitments.....	10
	List of contributors	12



1 Starting point

University of Vaasa has signed the CoARA commitment November 8th 2022.

1.1 Assessment principles at the University of Vaasa

The assessment principles of the University of Vaasa are based on national and international declarations on responsible research and researcher assessment:

- Agreement on the Reform of Research Assessment & Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA)
- DORA San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment
- Leiden Manifesto
- Recommendation for the responsible evaluation of a researcher in Finland

The University of Vaasa has integrated and developed several of these CoARA commitments already in the internal evaluation processes and research evaluations and assessments. We have focused on reforming the research assessment of researchers, research projects, research units and research organisations to maximise the quality and impact of research and assessment processes.

Assessments at the unit level

University evaluates regularly the quality of the research and societal impact. University evaluates the research activities regularly as a part of the annual reporting. Indicators are doctoral degrees, amount and quality of the scientific publications, international mobility of the researchers, scientific and societal impact and research funding.

The University of Vaasa regularly evaluates the quality of its research, the research environment and the conditions of doing research. The aim of the external evaluations is to strengthen the quality of the research internationally, to advance academic and societal impacts of the research, and to further develop prerequisites for the research activities.

Our goal is that the assessment of research and researchers recognises all types of research outputs, practices, and activities, and consider different career stages. Various research outputs (publications, external funding, collaboration, scientific and non-academic activities, societal engagement, and impact), the amount, type and quality are taken into consideration.

The University of Vaasa is committed to following the guidelines of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity for responsible conduct of research and DORA declaration which improves the ways in which the output of scientific research is evaluated by funding agencies, academic institutions, and other parties.

Evaluating research responsibly follows the principles of SCOPE model. It emphasises context, different options for evaluating, deep and multidimensional evaluation.





When Dora was signed, all the key processes were investigated and improved according to those principles. In line with CoARA overarching principles, the University of Vaasa seeks to improve the transparency and reproducibility of research assessment processes also regarding the research information (e.g. citation data).

The university will follow closely and decide on its commitment to the new Barcelona declaration on open research information that means commitment to:

- making openness the default for the research information we use and produce
- working with services and systems that support and enable open research information
- supporting the sustainability of infrastructures for open research information
- supporting collective action to accelerate the transition to openness of research information

The University of Vaasa participates in several external accreditations and rankings. The University of Vaasa uses accreditations as a means of improving the quality of its activities via different self-assessments and impact cases.

Diversity, meaningfulness, and focus on the future were important features of the recent international research evaluation in 2022. This latest research assessment exercise (RAE Univaasa 2022) already renewed the evaluation policies, it focused on research groups but also on schools and platforms as well as the university as a whole. It was carried out as a multilevel and multidimensional evaluation targeting research environment, research cooperation and funding, publications, and scientific activities including societal impact.

The University of Vaasa evaluates its research activities (RAE) regularly through external peer review. The evaluation is based on background material and visits and is carried out by independent international scientific experts. The aim of the evaluation is to examine the university's research activities and the quality of research in relation to international research and to improve research activities.

RAE investigates widely from different perspectives and criteria the efficiency and impact of the research. Not just from the perspective of scientific impact and scholarly metrics but also from the perspective of openness, collaborations, internationalisation, other scientific activities (not just publishing), societal impact, etc.

Based on the SCOPE model and RAE:

- Evaluations are only made to those issues, that can be evaluated
- The whole community and researchers are involved
- Evaluation is carried out with the experts and with same methods as scientific research
- Starting point should be what we value (is what we evaluate)
- Context is explained (maturity, resources, external environment etc.)
- Who and why are carefully explained in all parties
- Both quantitative and qualitative methods are used
- The consequences and unwanted outcomes still need to be considered
- Evaluating the evaluation process





Assessments at the researcher level

The Recommendation for the responsible evaluation of a researcher in Finland provides guidance on how to carry out the researcher's assessment from start to finish responsibly. The University of Vaasa has committed to these guidelines.

The University has committed to adhering to the European Charter for Researchers and its Code of Conduct when recruiting teachers and researchers. The Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment (OTM-R) section pays particular attention to practices related to the recruitment of researchers. *"OTM-R ensures that the best person for the job is recruited, guarantees equal opportunities and access for all, facilitates developing an international portfolio (cooperation, competition, mobility) and makes research careers more attractive."*

The University of Vaasa systematically takes care of the conditions for conducting research and the work of researchers. The university has also received recognition for actively enhancing researchers' working conditions and career development. The university participates in the European Commission's quality program (HRS4R). The related external evaluation awarded the university the HR Excellence in Research quality label for the first time in 2014. For receiving the quality label, the university commits to the common European recommendations and principles in all its practices aimed at improving the working conditions of researchers. In the re-evaluation in the spring of 2023, the university again performed successfully. According to the evaluation team, the University of Vaasa offers the opportunity to build a successful university career in an international and diverse community.

At the University of Vaasa, teaching and research staff progress in their careers following an innovative career model which gives staff diverse possibilities to gain competence. The career model recognises the three different career paths in the university. The academic career paths include a tenure track path that qualifies for a professorship, a path in project and research work, and a path that emphasises teaching. The objective of the career structure model is to provide a transparent, predictable, and equal career for researchers and teachers, as well as to support their career development.

There is a second career path for researchers outside of the tenure track, which allows researchers to progress based on research merits in the areas of impactful research projects and stakeholder engagement etc.

In the first phase of the career path, research is carried out as a doctoral researcher or a project researcher in a research project. After the completion of the doctorate, the title of research-focused tasks is post doc researcher. As a post doc researcher, the goal is to deepen competence in research and prepare for a career as a researcher. On the research-focused career path, it is then possible to apply for the tenure track path (an assistant professor and an associate professor) or the position of a senior researcher and further as a research director.



On the teaching-focused career path, it is possible to advance from a university teacher to a university lecturer and a senior university lecturer. The aim is that this career model enables staff to focus on either research or teaching but also change their focus during their career.

In addition to general eligibility requirements such as education and language skills, the assessment for teaching and research positions takes as applicable into account merits in research and teaching, international experience and cooperation, activities in the scientific community, project management and leadership skills, as well as supervision. The evaluation of research takes into account the content of the candidate's published production (e.g. research topics, methodologies and the significance of the results) and the quality as a whole.

Similarly, when assessing skills in teaching, the candidate's merits are assessed as a whole taking into consideration practical experience of teaching and supervision, pedagogical studies, teaching demonstrations, teaching material production, as well as experience and demonstration of teaching planning and curriculum leadership.

Those on a teaching career are given an opportunity to conduct research, but their evaluations take into account that research is not the main area of their tasks.

The assessment in recruiting a researcher to the tenure track path and their promotion in the tenure track path is based on the tenure track selection and assessment criteria of the University of Vaasa. All candidates are assessed in the following areas: 1. Scientific output, scientific impact of research and external funding, 2. Research plan for the tenure track period, 3. Teaching and supervision and 4. Activities in scientific communities and societal impact.

The assessment is carried out by the Appointment Committee, which requests statements based on the above-mentioned areas from external scientific experts for each assessment process. In assessing the research, DORA guidelines are used to examine the scholarly output in terms of research topics, methodologies, scientific merit, and quality as a whole. The researcher's competence is assessed in relation to their field of study. The aim is to carry out a broad assessment of the researcher and the scientific impact of their work, keeping in line with field-specific qualitative, quantitative and research impact assessment.

The university follows the national general collective agreement for universities and, on the basis of the agreement, changes in the salary of the university personnel are made based on an assessment discussion between the employee and the supervisor. Insofar as the salary assessments of teaching and research staff assess research merits, the assessment is based on the use of the above-mentioned versatile evaluation criteria.

To ensure equal and fair evaluation of the candidate's merits, candidates are required to prepare their CV according to good scientific practice as outlined by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK). The template ensures a comprehensive description of a candidate's merits incl research output, research funding and grants, research supervision and leadership experience, teaching merits as well as scientific and societal impact.

The development discussion is a confidential evaluation discussion once a year between an employee and a supervisor/manager held on a regular basis. Topics such as work tasks, targets and competence development needs are covered in the development discussion. In the discussion covering several years, objectives are set for the following:

- research,
- the completion of postgraduate studies,
- teaching,
- university administrative tasks and societal impact, and
- other agreed matters, such as the development of language skills, pedagogical training, the development of project management skills, familiarisation with practical working life and other professional development.

The University of Vaasa is monitoring the activities of the societal impact of the research of all the researchers and teachers on a yearly basis. Activities are divided in to four categories that are *Policy related*, *Economics and business related* and *Society and culture related and other professional activities*. All other scientific activities, e.g. conference presentations, tasks in scientific journals, scientific leadership tasks and supervision tasks are reported via the research database.

Performance-based rewarding at the University of Vaasa consists of four components: publication reward, education reward, project reward, and other rewards.

1.2 Strategy and change approach and key challenges

The University has a Research Council, which is the administrative body responsible for the quality of research. It has members of all the career stages, including students and doctoral students. The duty of the Research Council is to among other tasks take responsibility for developing the University's research as well as monitoring its quality and related practices at the university level; monitor and develop the university's publishing activities as well as the practices of research ethics, good scientific practice, open science and research communication; monitor and develop procedures related to the career structures of research tasks at the university level; monitor research services at the university level and to make related suggestions for development and handle other matters related to research and issue relevant statements.

To reach our goals and continuously improve our university, we regularly evaluate the quality and effectiveness of education, research, and societal impact through external and internal evaluations. Since the university has already integrated and developed several of these CoARA commitments in the evaluation processes and research evaluations and assessments as described above, the challenge is to have a cultural change towards the responsible assessment, which begins from the very top management (rectors, deans, leaders and managers, university board) of the university leading the way through whole faculty.

The challenge is to have an overall awareness of the principles of research assessment in the researcher and organisational level for all the actors in the university ecosystem. Also, clear instructions for academic evaluators are needed, internal and external.

We will integrate these CoARA principles to our strategy and strategy implementation plan in a more visible way. The Research Council will monitor the process of the action plan execution and are willing to do the adjusting of the processes and guidelines as we see the need for it.

The Open Science working group advises on open science principles in research assessment. Other key actors in the administrative are the university services units, which include research services, human resources, communication unit, library services etc. Since this is an issue regarding various actors and levels of the university, the coordination and responsibilities have to be defined more clearly.

The challenge is to have enough resources to provide information and training on responsible evaluation practices. Also, the availability and quality of data (incl. citation data) for evaluation purposes is somewhat challenging.

Strategy for change in general level could include the following steps:

- Forming a powerful leading team, who has the resources to make things happen
- Creating a communicated vision and clearly stated reasons for change
- Making this your joint issue to promote
- Realising that change is not easy and some resistance will appear
- Leading the change with persistence to the goal

These challenges are also taken into consideration in the following operational action plan section in this document.

2 Operational action plan for a 5-year time frame

More detailed development plans with clear roles, target, measures, goals, indicators will be formulated by the responsible actors as a part of their own development plans for the future according the following principles.

Timetable for all the actions is ongoing and continuous.

It is also evident that within the five-year time frame some of our planned actions might and will change. The revisions to this action plan are made when necessary.

2.1 Core commitments

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

We will continue to use the measures and action already in place on the recognition of diverse contribution of research as mentioned earlier. We will develop the Research Portfolio to include diversity.

We will carry out the independent scientific evaluation in the RAE. In RAE the metrics is only one of the perspectives, but still needed when outputs are compared to the level of international research in the discipline. More qualitative methods are used in impact case and self-evaluations.

We will open up our university's recruitment policy even better. Career model and development discussion format will be developed further with the faculty. Impact portfolio will be piloted and the use of narrative CV's is examined.

We will utilise the Research Comp as the basic format to provide the training, since this is the skillset which researchers need and will be evaluated. We will inform young researcher on these evaluation principles at the beginning of their academic career.

We will have the internal discussions with the faculty via Research Café events.

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

We will investigate all our assessment processes based on CoARA principles and adjust the processes and guidelines accordingly. We will further develop the tenure track criteria. Peer-review practices are still in the very heart of the evaluations.

Next research assessment exercise will be carried out as a multilevel and multidimensional evaluation targeting research environment, research cooperation and funding, publications, and scientific activities including societal impact. It will be based on the peer-review evaluation of the international experts in our fields of science. This process will start in Autumn 2024.

We will organize training, guidance and non-formal discussions on responsible research and researcher evaluation principles to enable mutual learning and to raise awareness among researchers and professional faculty at all career stages.

Guidelines for the reviewers are formulated in more detailed matter.

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

We will use several appropriate quantitative indicators to support qualitative assessment. Journal- or publication -based metrics, such as Journal Impact Factors or h-indexes will not be used as surrogates for the quality and impact of individual research articles, to assess an individual scientist's contributions, or in hiring, promotion, or funding decisions.

We will be explicit about the criteria used to reach hiring, tenure, and promotion decisions, clearly highlighting, especially for early-stage researchers, that the scientific content of a paper is much more important than publication metrics or the identity of the journal in which it was published. For the purposes of research assessment, we will consider the value and impact of all research outputs (incl. datasets and software) in addition to research publications and consider a broad range of impact measures including qualitative indicators of research impact, such as influence on policy and practice.

We will continue in-house communications on the limitations of the h-index and the limited coverage of citation indexes (e.g. language and regional coverage)

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

University of Vaasa has not used the rankings per se in the RAE or in any other evaluation as a background material, we do not provide this information to evaluators and we ask them not to use them.

2.2 Supporting commitments

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

It is encouraged each operating unit to have resources for promoting and executing these principles to the processes. Mainly this is the time of the specialists for promoting, training, rewriting the guidelines and communicating.

We will effectively use the Research Council as the decision-making body promoting CoARA principles.

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

Next research assessment exercise will be carried out as a multilevel and multidimensional evaluation targeting research environment, research cooperation and funding, publications, and scientific activities including societal impact. It will be based on the peer-review evaluation of the international experts in our fields of science.

University's own reward culture will be further developed: what do we evaluate and reward in research and how are we doing this to shape the culture.





National and international development and new initiatives are followed.

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

Overall, we will continue the internal communication and training on these principles and responsible evaluation practices. Especially training for the responsible evaluation of the researchers in tenure track is provided.

We will further develop the review practices at all levels and processes.

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

We will participate national and international level networks. Participation in the international and national level events is encouraged. There is a permanent representative of the university in the national CoARA chapters.

We can do our best to promote CoARA principles in all other accreditation and rankings as well.

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

The Research Council will monitor the implementation of the commitments. Minutes of the meeting are internally available. With the university's communication unit the notices and pieces of news will be formulated internally as well as for our ecosystem partners.

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

University's strategy and action plan with several communication tools will create the platform for publishing news about our impactful research.

Evaluation of the actions is an essential part of the action plan. We will monitor the execution of this action plan annually in the Research Council and have their feedback and evaluation for development. The execution of the mentioned processes and tools is a part of our development work.

Some of the assessment data is already openly available in the SoleCRIS research database. We will develop other tools for systematic data collection and data visualisations.





List of contributors

Virpi Juppo
Anne Lehto
Oona Andrejeff
Charlotta Paschinsky

