



Responsible researcher assessment in Tampere University

Action plan for 2024–2028

(Corrected version 2024-05-22)

Introduction

In October 2022, Tampere University, Finland, signed the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment. This Action Plan clarifies how the University is committed to responsible research assessment and, more specifically, how the University is implementing the Agreement.

Tampere University is committed to all relevant international and national agreements, guidelines and recommendations concerning responsible research assessment, and complies with them in its operations. Signing the Agreement was a natural continuation of the work done in the University, and in Finnish higher education as a whole, to develop and institutionalise responsible research assessment principles and practices.

Specialists of responsible research assessment in HR services, the University library and Research and innovation services have prepared the document. The University has officially accepted the Agreement, and this operational Action Plan is intended to guide its implementation.

In Finland, responsible science and responsible research assessment has actively been promoted at national and institutional level.

In global and European comparison, the Finnish higher education system is rather uniform and consistently regulated by national legislation. The Government and the Ministry of Education and Culture guide higher education institutions via various information (data of volume, inputs and outputs), regular negotiations and four-year contracts that emphasise pre-set objectives and results.

The abovementioned relatively unified environment in the higher education enables, encourages, and nourishes Finnish universities' cooperation in matters where common benefits are sought, although institutions partly compete for the same resources. Traditionally, the universities cooperate to promote issues where common principles and procedures are useful. For example, research ethics (research integrity, ethical review etc), quality management (a uniform auditing model for institutions) and open science have long been promoted with national projects and in national coordination. This has been seen the best way to ensure self-regulation of science, to get views of the research community heard and to help the implementation of guidelines and practices.

In recent years, also responsible research assessment has been promoted in national coordination. In spring 2020, the steering group, hosted by the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies, approved the [Recommendation for the responsible evaluation of a researcher in Finland](#). According to it, the general principles of researcher assessment are transparency, integrity, equity, competence, and diversity. They shall apply to the good practices in building an assessment process, actual assessment, diversity of activities and researcher's role in the assessment process. Finnish universities, universities of the applied sciences, state research institutes as well as the Research Council of Finland and Universities Finland (UNIFI) have approved the Recommendation and are committed to complying with it. Specialists from Tampere University have been actively involved in drafting the national Recommendations.

Responsible researcher assessment is closely linked to the promotion of open science: researchers are willing to make their results, other outputs, and methods open, if they can trust that they will be rewarded for it when they are assessed. In Finland, research organisations promote open science in [national coordination](#) and they have jointly [published](#) an open science declaration as well as various open science policies and recommendations. Based on them, Tampere University has published an up-to-date [Open Science Policy: Tampere University is a responsible and open societal influencer and partner](#) (in Finnish and English).

In addition, extensive nationally coordinated work is underway to create a reference architecture for open science. There, development targets for researcher assessment have been identified at the international, national and universities level. Finnish universities are planning activities to tackle the identified development needs.

In October 2020, Tampere University Academic Board approved the General principles for monitoring and evaluating research in Tampere University. The guidelines consist of a brief backgrounding, purposes of monitoring and assessing research, and general principles to be followed in all assessment activities. The principles (which are explained in more detail in the document) are as follows:

1. Evaluations advance high-quality science and research.
2. Evaluation systems must reflect the diversity of different disciplinary needs and approaches.
3. Evaluation should reflect accountability.
4. Focus on all dimensions of scientific productivity.
5. Judgement will always be involved.
6. Evaluation should promote the consideration of impact as an integral part of the research process, rather than only as an act of measurement in the assessment phase.
7. Evaluation should also consider the quality of the university's research environment as a site for research work.
8. Evaluation should be cost-effective.

The Action Plan below, for one's part, shows how these principles have already been taken into account and how Tampere University's research assessment operations are further developed based on them.

Action plan

Tampere University Action Plan for ensuring the implementation of the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment follows the CoARA Action Plan Guidelines, considering the nature of the University and the national higher education framework.

Abovementioned measures at the national level are not repeated in the table below unless they also are an essential part of the University's own toolkit.

Regarding the schedule below, it should be noted that things are not promoted as a separate project but as part of the University's normal operation, management, and development. The question is largely about gradually changing the culture.

In addition, Tampere University actively participates in national coordination and development work, and naturally progresses according to its schedule. For these reasons, the University does not, at this stage, precisely schedule measures.

Alongside with this general action plan, the University will prepare a more detailed and concrete list of actions, describing measures, their responsible parties and a more precise schedule. The document will be updated as necessary. In addition, the University will monitor the progress of responsible researcher assessment and will make an overall review of the implementation of CoARA in 2028 at the latest.

Reflection point	Tampere University's actions	Schedule
1. Reflection on Tampere University strategy and change approach	<p>All activities and developments in Tampere University are guided by Finnish and European Union legislation, other agreements to which the University is committed, the University's own instructions and guidelines and the University's strategy. The strategic goal to be “an internationally esteemed research university” cannot be achieved without responsible research assessment: it ensures a transparent, predictable, and fair view of how to progress in a research career, for both employees and job seekers.</p> <p>The University is implementing the current research assessment reform in accordance with its own values: Courage, Critical thinking, Diversity, Erudition (Bildung), Learner-centredness, Openness and Responsibility. The values fit well with the principles of responsible research assessment. Especially since the University is exercising official authority and using taxpayer funds, it is necessary to follow the Principles of Good Governance at Tampere University.</p> <p>A large part of what the Agreement aims for is already in operation in Tampere University. In that sense, the Agreement implementation is more about developing and strengthening existing processes and raising awareness than introducing new principles or practices. Still, a systematic examination of how each principle works in practice and how things can be further improved is needed.</p> <p>Improving the state of practices is partly rather simple administrative work and partly adoption of good new practices and learning from others. The University places special emphasis on developing the academic staff's skills and ensuring their awareness. This applies to those who assess or make decisions as well as those being assessed.</p> <p>It helps here that the University already has an internal policy Research competence at Tampere University: General principles (on the intranet), which defines the competences required of the researcher and how the University supports in acquiring them.</p>	2024-2028
2. Involving institutional community in the change process	<p>Involving key actors in the process is well underway. The University community has been informed about the matter via internal news, and there is up-to-date information on the intranet.</p> <p>The topic has been discussed, for example, in the Science Council, the research management group (consisting of the Vice Deans), the open science steering group, research and innovation services, HR-services, the library, and with the President.</p> <p>The discussion continues, on various forums. Alongside with the President, the Deans are key actors in implementation and its steering. The University management group is acting as the tenure track steering group and has a kernel role, too.</p> <p>A multi-professional working group, with representation from research and innovation services, HR services and the library, is coordinating the development at the University level.</p> <p>We know from experience, for example HRS4R, that involving researchers requires a lot of effort. Involving them in the cultural change is mainly the responsibility of the faculties, but the University senior management and services support them.</p>	2024-2028

	<p>In the faculties, the Vice Deans have a key role, and they already have a good awareness of the matter. Finland has many years of experience in national cooperation in promoting responsible researcher assessment. The guideline Good practice in researcher evaluation. Recommendation for the responsible evaluation of a researcher in Finland was published in 2020. Tampere University's specialists were actively involved in its preparation. In Finland, there is also a CoARA National Chapter, the mission of which is "to support the entire Finnish research community in its journey towards a quality focused assessment culture that recognises the full diversity and impact of academic work". To put briefly, the main objectives are 1) to raise awareness and discussion, 2) to engage all types of stakeholders in the movement for change, 3) to discover most responsible assessment approaches, and 4) to facilitate effective and timely implementation of CoARA commitments and other supporting and related recommendations. Tampere University is actively participating in the National Chapter and its activities.</p> <p>Plans how to share good practices internally are currently underway. One possible tool that the University can use is the faculties' annual planning: the faculties can be tasked with reporting on the current state of responsible researcher assessment and how they plan to improve the situation. Nationally, good practices will be shared through the National Chapter.</p>	
3. Identifying key challenges to address	<p>In the extensive discussions mentioned above, Tampere University has well identified the key needs for change. A general conclusion so far is that the Agreement is a rather abstract guideline, and its principles need always to be contextualised. Assessment situations and purposes vary, and it is important to identify each need and plan the assessment accordingly.</p> <p>The state of responsible researcher assessment in the University is not worrying, but it is good to recognise what still needs to be developed. So far, following has been identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments are not planned as carefully and strategically as would be desirable and useful. • The choice of assessment methods is based more on established practices than on reflection on what kind of appointment is in question. • Publication metrics is used generally everywhere, and the H-index in some disciplines. The application form used in recruitments has already been changed so that neither of them is asked by default. • Along with scientific publications, for example, societal interaction – communication aimed at the general public as well as acting in various positions in science and society – could better be recognised as merits in research career. • As some methods of assessment are identified as harmful, it is necessary to develop better ones in their place. New methods and criteria will be developed primarily in national and international co-operation. <p>Tampere University tenure track instructions have been renewed, and a new career model for teaching-focused staff has been launched. In those processes, the questions about</p>	2024-2025

	<p>responsible researcher assessment were of vital importance and were carefully considered.</p> <p>The national work for a reference architecture for open science helps the University to reflect its possible shortcomings and development needs.</p> <p>To sum up: In question it is partly a change in procedures, but largely also a change in culture.</p>	
Reflection point	Tampere University's actions	Schedule
4. Recognising the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research	<p>As stated above, Tampere University cannot alone develop new methods or criteria for researcher assessment. On the other hand, the University strategy emphasises societal interaction and societal impact, and more diverse contributions to research than publications alone are rewarded.</p> <p>The University is aware that when appointing people to different positions, the criteria may also be different. This requires good judgment in the planning and implementation of each appointment. The diversity of potential merits has already been recognised, both in the University and at the national level; now it's about making good use of this spectrum.</p> <p>The University will instruct the faculties on how different merits can be considered. This applies both to the criteria and, at least in some cases, to the assessment methods.</p> <p>In Finland, criteria and methods are mostly developed in national cooperation. This is to ensure that researchers from different universities have equal opportunities to advance in their careers and can plan their careers with confidence.</p>	2024-2026
5. Basing research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicator	<p>In all researcher assessment, Tampere University uses qualitative methods. Wherever independent evaluation is needed, the University uses peer reviews. These principles are made known throughout the University, and training and support are organised for those working in assessment tasks.</p> <p>In pre-screening, however, quantitative¹ methods will also be used to deselect applications that are completely out of the question.</p> <p>Additionally, as the national HEI funding model is largely based on publication metrics, the University is obliged to produce such data, too, but it is not used at individual researcher level.</p>	2024-2026
6. Abandoning inappropriate uses in research assessment of journal- and publication-based metrics, in particular inappropriate uses of Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and h-index	<p>Tampere University clarifies to its staff, but also to applicants and peer reviewers, that the University has a clear intention to reduce the use of Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and H-index. Therefore, the application form does not require them.</p> <p>The University, on the other hand, understands that JIF and H-index have a certain value and usefulness, especially in some disciplines, and they are not completely forbidden. When their use is justified, the reasons must be expressed to applicants, peer-reviewers, and decision makers.</p> <p>The support services ensure that the use of JIF and H-index is as responsible as possible and that even then assessment shall mostly be done qualitatively.</p>	2024-2025
7. Avoiding the use of rankings of research	<p>In Tampere University, no university ranking is used in research or researcher assessment. However, success in certain university rankings is one of the strategy indicators. To</p>	-

¹ In the original version (<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11103969>), the word was incorrect: "qualitative".

organisations in research assessment	monitor Tampere University's reputation, the Board follows the development of the University's performance in selected university rankings.	
8. Committing resources to reforming research assessment as is needed to achieve the organisational changes	<p>Generally, the University uses normal organisation and management to implement the change, and the development is carried forward with the existing staff. The coordination is assigned to certain specialists working in the services. They co-operate and work in close interaction with the University's senior management and the faculties.</p> <p>The Vice Deans play a key role, leading activities in their own faculties. They meet regularly under the leadership of the Vice President.</p> <p>The institutional development of responsible researcher assessment also utilises national resources and national cooperation in the National Chapter and other national coordination.</p>	2024-2028
9. Reviewing and developing research assessment criteria, tools, and processes	<p>In Finland there is a consensus that research assessment criteria, tools and processes shall be developed in national and international co-operation, not separately in different HEIs. This is because all researchers everywhere should have similar preconditions to plan and advance their careers.</p> <p>Later, Tampere University will presumably participate in the piloting of national models. Various options, such as the narrative CV, with its advantages and problems, have already been discussed.</p>	2025-2028
10. Raising awareness of research assessment reform and providing transparent communication, guidance, and training on assessment criteria and processes as well as their use	<p>This very important issue has already been partly tackled: the University community has been informed about cultural and practical changes, and guidelines have been and are being compiled on the intranet. Training is currently being planned for key groups: reviewers, appointment committees, decision makers and support services. The University is also preparing detailed instructions for international peer reviewers.</p> <p>The matter is made visible in many ways. In the key bodies such as the Science Council and the Academic Board, the topic has been discussed and will be discussed several times in the following years.</p>	2024-2026
11. Exchanging practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition	At national level, the exchange of practices and experiences takes place mainly through the National Chapter. Specialists also discuss nationally in various working groups and networks and directly with foreign partner universities. The National Chapter's duty is to take care of efficient information exchange in Finland, especially among the signatories of the Agreement.	2024-2028
12. Communicating progress made on adherence to the principles and implementation of the Commitments	The principles of responsible researcher assessment will be communicated in an efficient and comprehensible manner on Tampere University's public website. The renewal of the website in this regard is still in progress. The principles and goals are communicated to everyone involved in the process with each recruitment.	2024-2028

13. Evaluating practices, criteria and tools based on solid evidence and the state-of-the-art in research on research, and making data openly available for evidence gathering and research	<p>Tampere University monitors the outcomes and impact of its operations in accordance with the Plan-Do-Check-Act quality loop. A detailed quality loop for the implementation of responsible researcher assessment will be drawn up. It clarifies the targets, procedures, how development and change are monitored, how necessary corrective measures are taken, who has the main responsibility for leading the matter, and the schedule.</p>	<p>2025-2028</p>
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------