

CoARA – UNIVERSITY OF FRANCHE-COMTÉ'S ACTION PLAN

In November 2022, as one of its founding members, the University of Franche-Comté signed the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment agreement. Based on ten commitments, this agreement defines a common policy to make the way of assessing research, researchers and research teams evolve, the main objective being to optimize the quality and the impact of research. This agreement comprehends principles, commitments, as well as a timetable for reforms, and it defines the bases of a Coalition of organizations willing to implement such changes.

Commitments are as follows:

1. Acknowledging the diversity of contributions and of careers in research depending on the needs and the nature of the research.
2. Founding research assessment mostly on quality evaluation, for which peer review is essential, and on a sensible use of quality indicators.
3. Relinquishing the inappropriate use, when it comes to research assessment, of indicators based on journal impact factors (JIF) and h-index.
4. Avoiding the use of research organizations' rankings for research assessment.
5. Committing the resources which are necessary for the reform of research assessment in order to make the desired organizational changes happen.
6. Examining and developing the criteria, the tools and the processes of research assessment.
7. Fostering awareness of the research assessment reform, communicating in a transparent way, providing advice and training about assessment criteria and processes as well as the ways to use them.
8. Sharing practices and experience in order to develop mutual learning among the coalition members and beyond.
9. Communicating about the progress that is made in the acceptance of principles and the implementation of commitments.
10. Assessing practices, criteria and tools on the grounds of convincing data and on the state of research on research itself, and making the data openly available for the collection of proofs and for further research.

The timetable states that an action plan must be made public during the year following the signature (although first signatories were granted a delay). The signatories of this agreement accept to regularly present their progress in the revision, the development and the assessment of criteria, tools and processes that meet the fundamental commitments. A contact point is to be set up within five years following the signature of the agreement, when all have completed at least one cycle of revision and development of the criteria, tools and processes of assessment.

A UNIVERSITY IN TRANSITION

First called Dole University in 1423, then University of Besançon in 1691, and eventually University of Franche-Comté as from 1976, our establishment is currently undergoing an unprecedented process of transformation with the creation of a regional EPE (établissement public expérimental: experimental public establishment) that is to become effective by 1 January 2025.

This EPE which binds together the University of Franche-Comté, UTBM, Supmicrotech-ENSMM, the Agro Institute and ENSAM, is a project aiming at addressing tomorrow's challenges and responding to the strategic issues facing us such as, more particularly:

- Increasing the appeal of higher education to young people;
- Securing the students' higher education path and their professional integration;
- Strengthening centres of excellence and awareness of our institution; improving our international reach;
- Consolidating our links with the local community and increasing collaboration with our environment and its actors (cross-border actors included);
- Being a place of innovation and experimentation by relying on the quality of our teaching and of our research.

The collective task awaiting us in the months ahead will also have to take into account the methods of research assessment.

Because the current structuration of our various establishments creates a specific context, we are here introducing an action plan for 2024 designed to extend the University of Franche-Comté's commitment within the future EPE, that is to say: including EPE into CoARA by 2025 and writing out an action plan applying to the period of 2025 to 2029.

ACTIONS TAKEN IN 2024 AND BEFORE

Over the past few years the University of Franche-Comté has taken a few steps meeting the CoARA pledges. In 2024, a first reviewing of the documents pertaining to the assessment of projects and careers was conducted.

RS4R

In order to obtain the HRS4R label and ever since 2015, the University of Franche-Comté has pledged to improve its practices in terms of recruiting and working conditions of research academics.

It promotes the Inter-regional Equity Lab Project (PILE: Projet Interrégional laboratoire de l'égalité) along with the University of Geneva, with a view to guaranteeing quality job opportunities for women, durable professional integration and access to managerial posts.

Taking disabled people in is one of the University of Franche-Comté's priorities, which is why a policy for the recruiting, the induction and the assistance of disabled people was set up.

In terms of recruitment, some of the actions initiated during the 2022-2025 plan have already come through:

- Translating job offers into English systematically
- Setting up a yearly meeting for all members of staff chairing recruiting committees
- Adding broader criteria to the Principal's annual guidelines letter for recruiting committees.

The uniformization of research teams' rules of procedure is under way.

QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS

In the assessment of academic projects and careers, the University of Franche-Comté does not rely on measures based on journals and publications such as JIF or the h-index. Nor does it resort to the ranking criterion of research organizations.

ASSESSING PROJECTS

Assessing projects is based on peer-reviewing (assessment carried out by two members of the research committee). It is based on quality criteria (Commitment 2). No quantity criteria are mentioned in the documents. The process of assessment is transparent: all researchers receive an email explaining the procedure and the criteria used (Commitment 7).

The analysis of project assessment documents has made it possible to evidence axes for improvement such as the addition of references to CoARA and to its principles, as well as better training for assessors. In the future, criteria will have to encourage projects that imply researchers at various levels of their career, projects promoting diverse research activities, diverse productions and languages (Commitment 1) as well as quick sharing of data and results (open science).

CAREER ASSESSMENT

It devolves on the University Principal to distribute the functional component of the teaching and research staff allowance (RIPEC: régime indemnitaire des personnels enseignants et chercheurs) and to attribute the individual bonus. Bonuses aside, research academics are assessed with regards to their advancement or recruitment.

The attributing procedure of the individual bonus is transparent: during an online meeting organized by the Research Vice President the procedure is explained in details to the eligible members of staff after they have applied (Commitment 7).

WITHIN CoARA AND BEYOND

The University of Franche-Comté (UFC) has a representative at CoARA's National Chapter and stays informed on the progress of work groups.

UFC is also committed to research in the field of research information systems (Commitment 10). The open e-Tic project which analyses the impact of open science on research information systems, more specifically from the point of view of ethics, has been submitted to ANR (AAP RESO). It involves researchers from Lille University (among whom the project initiator), from UFC (ELLIADD research team), from CNAM, URFIST Paris and University of Paris Nanterre. UFC's representative at CoARA is Françoise Chambefort who is in charge of research data for the whole project.

ACTIONS TO COME

The main challenges to be taken up will have to do with the assessment of academic projects and careers. It will be about making good practices sustainable and making criteria, tools and processes evolve while full disclosure as well as diversity of contributions and careers are fostered.

The University of Franche-Comté pledges to pursue the ongoing process of reforming the assessment of research within the EPE which will be created at the onset of 2025. In the first instance, this will happen through:

- joining the coalition as new member,
- setting up a steering committee or a work group in charge of defining the action plan and implementing it,
- engaging the community of researchers and increasing awareness among them.

The creation of a new establishment is an opportunity to reconsider more freely and collectively the assessment of research in line with the commitments of CoARA.

