

## CoARA Action Plan 2024 – 2027 of the Rhine-Main Universities alliance

The [Rhine-Main Universities](#) (RMU), an alliance of Goethe University Frankfurt, Technical University of Darmstadt, and Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, was founded in 2015 and is active in all university missions: research, teaching, IP & knowledge transfer, as well as human resources and administration. RMU creates spaces for innovation, opportunities and interaction aimed at boosting synergies based on existing complementarities.

The alliance's partner universities each possess strong international networks spanning all their academic endeavours. They are partner to two European university networks: [UNITE!](#), coordinated by TU Darmstadt, and [FORTHEM](#), coordinated by Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz in the first pilot phase. Goethe University Frankfurt hosts the [Structural Genomics Consortium](#) (SGC). Researchers from all three universities actively engage in competitive funding schemes on a European level, including the ERC, Horizon Europe MSCA and other European funding schemes.

Promoting excellence in research, both among established scientists and working groups and among and with the community of early career researchers, is our primary goal. We provide our scientists – especially our ECRs – with the best possible support, which includes raising awareness for the need and the advantages of different assessment criteria. This involves considering the new evaluation criteria, guidelines for academic CVs, and assessment of career paths provided by the [German Research Foundation](#) (DFG), as well as the recently updated evaluation criteria for applications to the European Research Council – both of which add to our own initiatives in bringing about changes in research assessment.

### Our approach to the CoARA commitments

The Rhine-Main Universities alliance signed the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (ARRA) in November 2022 and joined the Coalition on Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA). The RMU board of directors is responsible for defining the scope of the reform process within the alliance and for implementing the agreed-upon actions.

The RMU has joined CoARA's Working Group: [Reforming Academic Career Assessment](#) to actively share best practices and gain inspiration from other members, with a special focus on researchers in the early career phase – a group that will be significantly affected by the Reforming Research Assessment movement and stands to greatly benefit from it. In addition, the RMU participates in and benefits from the information exchange and mutual learning of CoARA's German National Chapter. We explore how to integrate new methods, tools, and measures such as Open Science, transfer, science communication and other civil society outreach activities into academic performance, both individually and for working groups, now and in the future.

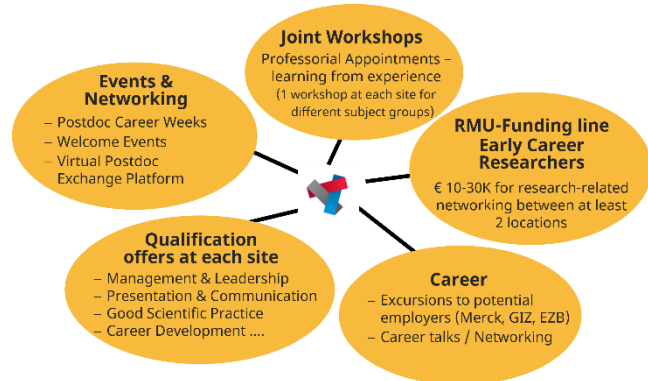
Since promoting ECRs is a priority for the strategic alliance, the RMU's action plan focuses on developing CoARA-based criteria within the RMU Research Initiative Fund, which supports collaborative research projects and consists of three funding lines (Fig. 1). It is particularly well suited for developing and piloting new criteria for the evaluation of funding applications.

In addition, we also raise awareness for the research assessment reform process and share information through established platforms, e.g. the RMU Hub for ECRs (Fig. 2), established in 2023 as a platform for networking and events, workshops, skills training, and career development.

Fig. 1 - RMU Funding Schemes

Funding Lines		
Start-up funding for RMU collaborative projects	Funding of RMU networking in innovative projects	Early Career Researchers
Up to €50.000 for a max. of 1 year	Up to €40.000/ year for a max. of 2 years	Up to €30.000 for a max. of 2 years

Fig. 2 - RMU Hub for Early Career Researchers



The research assessment reform process will greatly affect other fields of action within the alliance, including but not limited to coordinated appointments of professors as well as human resource development policies. That is why we will map initiatives, processes, and criteria relevant to research assessment and evaluate the need to reform our existing tools.

Building on the broad portfolio of existing and completed actions with respect to a responsible research assessment, the RMU's work on implementing the CoARA commitments will consist of the measures outlined in the table below:

Milestones referring to the commitments	Planned actions	Timeframe
<p>Commit resources to assess and implement CoARA-rules</p> <p>Communicate progress along the CoARA implementation plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The board of vice presidents responsible for research and early career researchers coordinates actions along our CoARA commitments within the RMU.</li> <li>– Disseminate information and best practices from the Coalition within the RMU alliance. Create a contact point for RMU members and working groups dealing with research assessment.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;">ongoing</p>
<p>Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes</p> <p>Develop stringent criteria to allow a balanced evaluation based on qualitative and quantitative indicators</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Map current and planned RMU initiatives, processes, and criteria that deserve new research assessment tools.</li> <li>– Develop assessment criteria for the R1 to R3 RMU ECR research support line <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Taking the results from CoARA Working Groups into account.</li> <li>▪ Run a pilot phase to evaluate new criteria.</li> </ul> </li> <li>– Develop guidelines for evaluators using quantitative and qualitative indicators based on the results from the CoARA working groups.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;">Q3 + Q4/2024</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2025 – 2027</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2026 – 2027</p>
<p>Raise awareness of the research assessment reform, communicate any new rules and provide training for developing assessment criteria</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Establish information channels within the RMU for reporting on CoARA and its developments.</li> <li>– Raise awareness, provide information and specific training in workshops towards qualitative and quantitative research measures.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;">ongoing</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2026 – 2027</p>
<p>Recognize the diversity of careers in research and teaching</p> <p>Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Raise awareness for different career paths in science at the Open Science Festival in September 2024.</li> <li>– Actively engage in CoARA Working Group: Reforming Academic Career Assessment and the National Chapter Germany.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;">Q3/2024</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ongoing</p>