

# University of Central Lancashire

## CoARA Action Plan

### Introduction

Research is a key pillar of the University of Central Lancashire's Strategic Plan 2021-2028. [Priority 4: Real World Research and Innovation](#) describes how we will "establish ourselves as a leader in research, innovation and enterprise within the modern university sector". This is directly supported by [Priority 3: Our People Experience](#), which seeks to "continue to attract and retain the very best talent and enable everyone to do their best work". This will be done through nurturing an environment of high performance and high support, where leaders provide direction and guidance, and colleagues are engaged and empowered to deliver their best work. Central to this, we are committed to building a culture of belonging through equality, diversity and inclusion.

The University has held the [HR Excellence in Research Award](#) since 2011 and we are a signatory to [The Concordat to Support the Development of Researchers](#) and [Technician Commitment](#).

We have developed our support for and commitment to Responsible Research Assessment (RRA) practices since 2019. In collaboration with our staff, we drafted our [institutional statement on the responsible use of research metrics](#) and became a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment.

We became a signatory to the [Coalition on Advancing Research Assessment \(CoARA\)](#) in March 2023. As a signatory to the [Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment](#) that underpins the Coalition, the University commits to sharing how we have started the process of reviewing and developing criteria, tools and processes in line with the core Commitments through establishment of an action plan with defined milestones, within one year of signing the Agreement.

RRA is overseen by the University's Research and Knowledge Exchange EDI Group (established June 2022), with onwards reporting to the University Research, Knowledge Exchange and Ethics Committee.

Whilst we have started our journey to reform research assessment, much work remains to be done. Our commitment to CoARA is a key step in further embedding RRA across the University.

In producing this Action Plan, we have reviewed the various approaches taken by other Universities. Our Action Plan adopts the format taken by Loughborough University<sup>1</sup>.

Version 1.3 March 2024

---

<sup>1</sup> Loughborough University CoARA Action Plan. Elizabeth Gadd, 2023.  
[https://repository.lboro.ac.uk/articles/online\\_resource/Loughborough\\_University\\_CoARA\\_Action\\_Plan/24260686](https://repository.lboro.ac.uk/articles/online_resource/Loughborough_University_CoARA_Action_Plan/24260686)

COMMITMENT	SCOPE	ACTION	TIMEFRAME
<p><b>1. Recognise the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research.</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> This commitment will broaden recognition of the diverse practices, activities and careers in research, considering the specific nature of research disciplines and other research endeavours.</p>	<p>Changes in assessment practices should enable recognition of the broad diversity of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>valuable contributions that researchers make to science and for the benefit of society, including diverse outputs beyond journal publications and irrespective of the language in which they are communicated;</li> <li>practices that contribute to robustness, openness, transparency, and the inclusiveness of research and the research process including: peer review, teamwork and collaboration;</li> <li>activities including teaching, leadership, supervision, training and mentoring.</li> </ul> <p>It is also important that assessment facilitates the recognition and valorisation of diverse roles and careers in research, including: data steward, software engineer and data scientist roles, technical roles, public outreach, science diplomacy, science advice and science communicator roles to name a few. It is recognised that current practice is often too narrow and limiting, so the goal cannot be to replace the narrow criteria we wish to move away from with different but equally narrow criteria. Instead, the aim is to allow organisations to broaden the spectrum of what they value in research, while acknowledging that this may vary across disciplines and that each individual researcher should not be expected to contribute to all activities at once.</p>	<p>1.1 Develop a new Responsible Research Assessment Policy that makes explicit the requirements of the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment.</p> <p>1.2 Review the institutional Use of Responsible Research Metrics statement.</p> <p>1.3 Review and update Open Research policies to require that fair attribution is given to all technical and other support, for example, using the CRediT system.</p>	<p>December 2024</p> <p>July 2024</p> <p>September 2024</p>
<p><b>2. Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators.</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> This commitment will enable the move towards research assessment criteria that focus primarily on quality, while recognising that responsible use of quantitative indicators can support assessment where meaningful and relevant, which is context dependent.</p>	<p>Research assessment should rely primarily on qualitative assessment for which peer review is central, supported by responsibly used quantitative indicators where appropriate. Peer review is the most robust method known for assessing quality and has the advantage that it is in the hands of the research community. It is important that peer review processes are designed to meet the fundamental principles of rigor and transparency: expert assessment, transparency, impartiality, appropriateness, confidentiality, integrity and ethical considerations, gender, equality and diversity. To address the biases and imperfections to which any method is prone, the research community re-assesses and improves peer review practices regularly. Revised, or potentially new, criteria, tools and processes appropriate for assessing quality could be explored alongside peer review. Moving towards assessment practices that rely more heavily on qualitative methods may require additional efforts from researchers. Researchers should be recognised for these efforts and their contributions to reviewing peers' work should be valued as part of their career progression.</p>	<p>2.1. Develop CRIS (or other system) capacity to collect and profile diverse types of information on academic contribution to research and knowledge exchange, including peer review activities.</p> <p>2.2. Develop training for researchers and research managers on the Resumé for Researchers (or equivalent) to support broader assessment approaches.</p> <p>2.3. Review appraisal guidance to ensure that researchers are recognised for contribution to peer review internally and externally.</p> <p>2.4. Develop discipline-specific training around peer review and quality assessment.</p> <p>2.5. Provide guidance on open peer review and peer review credit systems.</p> <p>2.6. Ongoing peer review of outputs to underpin REF2029 preparations, with clear advice on appropriate use of metrics.</p>	<p>December 2025</p> <p>July 2024</p> <p>September 2024</p> <p>December 2024</p> <p>December 2024</p>

<p><b>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</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> This commitment will reduce the dominance of a narrow set of quantitative journal- and publication-based metrics.</p>	<p>Inappropriate uses of journal- and publication-based metrics in research assessment should be abandoned. In particular, this means moving away from using metrics like the Journal Impact Factor (JIF), Article Influence Score (AIS) and h-index as proxies for quality and impact. 'Inappropriate uses' include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>relying exclusively on author-based metrics (e.g. counting papers, patents, citations, grants, etc.) to assess quality and/or impact;</li> <li>assessing outputs based on metrics relating to publication venue, format or language;</li> <li>relying on any other metrics that do not properly capture quality and/or impact.</li> </ul>	<p>3.1. Review the institutional Use of Responsible Research Metrics statement.</p> <p>3.2. Annual refresh and review of web resources and training material to improve engagement levels, including compelling examples of bad practice.</p> <p>3.3. Monitor staff awareness of Open Research and Responsible Research Assessment developments via biennial researcher survey.</p>	<p>July 2024</p> <p>July 2024</p> <p>December 2024</p>
<p><b>4. Avoid the use of rankings of research organisations in research assessment</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> This commitment will help avoid that metrics used by international rankings, which are inappropriate for assessing researchers, trickle down to research and researcher assessment. It will help the research community and research organisations regain the autonomy to shape assessment practices, rather than having to abide by criteria and methodologies set by external commercial companies. This could include retaining control over ranking methodologies and data.</p>	<p>Recognising that the international rankings most often referred to by research organisations are currently not 'fair and responsible', the criteria these rankings use should not trickle down to the evaluation of individual researchers, research teams and research units. Research organisations should also be mindful that public communication (e.g. the active advertising of an institution's rank) can contribute to the perception that research quality conflates with ranking positions.</p> <p>Where ranking approaches are deemed unavoidable, as may be the case in forms of evaluation beyond the scope of this Agreement such as benchmarking and performance reviews of countries or institutions, the methodological limitations of such approaches should be acknowledged, and institutions should avoid trickle-down effects on research and researcher assessment.</p>	<p>4.1. Join More Than Our Rank initiative.</p> <p>4.2. Raise awareness on the limitations of rankings and ensure that all materials that refer to league tables or rankings clearly acknowledge their limitations.</p>	<p>September 2024</p> <p>September 2024 and ongoing commitment</p>
<p><b>5. Commit resources to reforming research assessment as is needed to achieve the organisational changes committed to</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> This commitment will ensure that organisations allocate the necessary resources, whether in the form of budget or staff capacity, to improve research assessment practices within their agreed timeframe.</p>	<p>Resource allocation by assessment authorities and research funding and performing organisations is a necessary condition for reforming assessment practices. Resources should be allocated as is needed for each organisation to achieve the changes that will enable adherence to the Principles and to implement the Commitments. This includes resources to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>implement changes in research assessment, including planning and progress monitoring;</li> <li>raise awareness among all actors;</li> <li>educate, train and support researchers and any other staff involved in assessment, including peer-reviewers and assessors; and</li> <li>support the necessary infrastructure such as tools and services for the transparent collection and processing of data on research assessment practices.</li> <li>Particular attention should be paid to making resources available to enable the engagement of researchers at all career stages in reforming research assessment.</li> </ul>	<p>5.1. Research and KE EDI Group to review relevant policies and guidance annually.</p> <p>5.2. Responsible research assessment to be included as a standing item on Research and KE EDI Group meetings.</p> <p>5.3. Open and responsible research practices are included in researcher training and development programmes, ensuring coverage across career levels.</p> <p>5.4. Support for responsible research assessment to be included in relevant Professional Services and Academic job descriptions.</p> <p>5.5. Participate in REF2029 consultations around reforming research assessment, including pilot exercises.</p>	<p>July 2024 and ongoing</p> <p>April 2024 and ongoing</p> <p>June 2024</p> <p>December 2024</p> <p>2023-2026</p>

<p><b>6. Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes</b></p> <p><u>6.1 Criteria for Units and Institutions</u></p> <p>With the direct involvement of research organisations and researchers at all career stages, review and develop criteria for assessing research units and research performing organisations, while promoting interoperability</p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> This commitment will ensure that national / regional / organisational authorities and evaluation agencies review and, where needed, develop criteria for the assessment of research performing units and organisations, in accordance with the Principles. It will foster the responsible use of metrics in assessing research performing units and organisations, and help to prevent contradictions or incompatibilities between the assessment of research, researchers and research performing organisations. It will also safeguard the interoperability of adapted or newly developed assessment processes.</p> <p><u>6.2 Criteria for Projects and Researchers</u></p> <p>With the direct involvement of researchers at all career stages, review and develop criteria, tools and processes for the assessment of research projects, research teams and researchers that are adapted to their context of application</p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> This commitment will enable recognition of the diverse research activities and practices through the revision and development of assessment criteria, tools, and processes. It will ensure that organisations review their processes and make tangible changes by developing existing or new assessment approaches, individually or in collaboration with others, in accordance with the Principles.</p>	<p>Criteria for the assessment of research performing units and organisations, including universities, research centres, and research infrastructures, should be reviewed and adapted, and new criteria developed where needed, based on evidence. This should be done in close collaboration with assessors and those that will be assessed, including research organisations and researchers. The changes should increase the ability to assess quality by enabling recognition of all contributions to quality research by research units and institutions. Such recognition includes that of early sharing of data and results, open collaboration, teamwork; and consideration of contributions to the research ecosystem, knowledge generation and scientific, technological, economic, cultural and societal impact. National / regional / organisational authorities and evaluation agencies should coordinate to ensure their methodologies and processes are interoperable, while simultaneously respecting the necessary adaptation to each context.</p> <p>Criteria, tools and processes should be reviewed and developed together with researchers in different disciplines and at different career stages; and should enable recognition of the diversity of research activities and practices that contribute to research quality, including diverse outputs in different languages. This should increase the ability to assess quality by enabling recognition of all contributions to quality research from research projects and by researchers and research teams. This includes recognition of early sharing of data and results, open collaboration, and teamwork. Reformed practices for assessing individual researchers should consider future potential alongside track record and take into account researchers' individual contexts and careers. They should also recognise that researchers cannot excel in all types of tasks and provide for a framework that allows researchers to contribute to the definition of their research goals and aspirations. Research assessment by research funders should consider disciplinary, multi-, inter-, and trans-disciplinary research as well as contributions to knowledge generation and scientific, technological, economic, cultural and societal impact.</p>	<p>6.1 Review current research assessment criteria and their implementation, ensuring that these are robust and comply with responsible research assessment principles.</p> <p>6.2 Develop Institute and School dashboards in collaboration with leaders that capture a range of contributions to research and knowledge exchange.</p> <p>6.3 Develop CRIS capacity/reporting functionality that allows consistent and accurate monitoring of a range of qualitative and quantitative information, where staff can easily view, amend or challenge information relating to them.</p> <p>6.4 In collaboration with staff, develop a Code of Practice for REF2029 that embeds the principles of responsible research assessment.</p>	<p>December 2024</p> <p>December 2025</p> <p>June 2025</p> <p>2025 to 2026</p>
<p><b>7. Raise awareness of research assessment reform and provide transparent communication, guidance, and training on assessment criteria and processes as well as their use</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> This commitment will ensure that organisations raise awareness of the reform among all actors. It will ensure that organisations transparently communicate the criteria, tools and processes used for research assessment and train researchers and assessors in their use.</p>	<p>Without widespread awareness of the reform and training of those assessed and, crucially, assessors, progress will be slow - if not impossible. Organisations should be clear and transparent about assessment processes and the tools and criteria they use. They should make guidance on their assessment approaches openly available and train those involved in the assessment process. They should allow those assessed to have access to the criteria, data and reviews or deliberation outcomes used in their assessment within the limits of confidentiality. Particular attention should be paid to raising awareness among researchers at all career stages.</p>	<p>7.1 Include information on Open and Responsible Research practices in researcher development and training programmes.</p> <p>7.2 Review and refresh web resources and training materials at least annually to ensure external and internal sector developments are captured and that content is easy to find, relevant and engaging.</p>	<p>March 2024</p> <p>July 2024</p>

<p><b>8. Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> This commitment will ensure organisations exchange and make use of information for mutual learning. It will help avoid fragmentation, contribute to the coherence of assessment practices between organisations, and enable researcher mobility. It also will allow those further ahead to share approaches and lessons learned, to benefit those who have further to go on their reform journey.</p>	<p>While respecting each other's autonomy, organisations should share practices and experiences to facilitate mutual learning. This exchange should include contributing to the development of guidance and common approaches in order to minimise contradictions or incompatibilities between the assessment practices used by different organisations. It should also include sharing of lessons learned to ensure continuous mutual improvements.</p>	<p>8.1 Head of Impact and Outputs Unit/Open Research Manager to participate in CoARA meetings/events.</p> <p>8.2 Head of Impact and Outputs Unit/Open Research Manager to participate in the UK Chapter and one other CoARA Working Group.</p> <p>8.3 Senior Academic and Professional Services representatives to participate in requirements of the UKRN's OR4 project on Open and Responsible Researcher Reward and Recognition, including completion of the pilot Maturity Self-Assessment.</p>	<p>Ongoing commitment</p> <p>Ongoing commitment</p> <p>December 2024</p>
<p><b>9. Communicate progress made on adherence to the Principles and implementation of the Commitments</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> This commitment will ensure organisations update one another on the progress made. It will foster careful self-reflection and monitoring of their own adherence to the Principles and progress towards meeting the Commitments.</p>	<p>Demonstrating progress made towards implementing the Commitments and adherence to the Principles is an important part of this initiative. Organisations should commit to regularly update each other and their communities on their adherence and progress. This process involves being open to scrutiny from their own communities, sharing successes as well as challenges, and communicating their experiences to facilitate collective progress.</p>	<p>9.1 Publish our CoARA Action Plan on UCLan web pages once approved.</p> <p>9.2 Responsible Research Assessment is a standing item on Research and Knowledge Exchange EDI Group meetings.</p>	<p>April 2024</p> <p>April 2024 and ongoing</p>
<p><b>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</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> This commitment will ensure that assessment approach decisions are evidence informed. It will help organisations reflect on their own processes, gain understanding about whether assessment practices achieve the desired goals, and engage in evolutive assessment based on new evidence as it becomes available. It will also help to ensure control and ownership of research assessment data by the research community.</p>	<p>Growing evidence shows that current assessment processes that rely on publication- and journal-based metrics are prone to multiple biases. As approaches using more qualitative research assessment are piloted by several organisations (e.g. narrative and evidence-based CVs, new assessment frameworks and indicators), it is important to evaluate and monitor their impact based on evidence and rigorous methods. Organisations should contribute to the evidence base on research assessment in order to make this possible. For example, it could be achieved by making data that can be used for research on research available, by participating in research on research, or by funding research on research. Data sharing should be the minimum commitment and data should be shared through open infrastructure, while respecting personal data protection.</p>	<p>10.1 Head of Impact and Outputs Unit to keep abreast of developments in best practice in RRA, through participation in ARMA, OR4 and CoARA events, and other relevant activities.</p>	<p>Ongoing commitment</p>