



CoARA 5-Year Action Plan

2025-2029



Introduction

Åbo Akademi University (ÅAU) is committed to advancing responsible and qualitative research assessment in accordance with the *Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment* (ARRA, 2022), as part of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA). ÅAU signed the agreement in June 2023 and is dedicated to promoting diversity, fairness, transparency, and inclusiveness in research assessment, thereby supporting researchers and research projects across various career stages and disciplines.

In addition to CoARA's principles (2023), ÅAU adheres to the *Declaration on Research Assessment* (DORA, American Society for Cell Biology, 2012) and the *Recommendation for the Responsible Evaluation of a Researcher in Finland*, including the *Recommendation for Responsible Use of Research Metrics* (Federation of Finnish Learned Societies, 2020). These commitments reinforce ÅAU's dedication to fostering responsible and progressive research assessment practices.

By adopting the European Commission's *Human Resources Strategy for Researchers* (HRS4R), ÅAU also strives to continuously enhance and sustain a stimulating work environment for researchers. This commitment encompasses the purposeful development of working conditions and a strategic approach to recruiting new employees into the work community. Aligned with the *Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers*, ÅAU's recruitment processes adhere to the OTM-R (Open, Transparent, and Merit-based Recruitment) policy.

ÅAU actively participates in several key networks, including CoARA, the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK), the Finnish Association of Research Managers and Administrators (Finn-ARMA), the European University Association (EUA), the Challenge-driven, Accessible, Research-based, Mobile European University Alliance (CHARM-EU Alliance), and the Coimbra Group. These networks foster collaboration and knowledge exchange on research assessment practices.

ÅAU recognises that transitioning to more inclusive research assessment practices may present challenges, such as resistance to change and the necessity for capacity building. These challenges will be addressed through ongoing dialogue with the university community and targeted training for evaluators and stakeholders. ÅAU will continue its strong tradition of collaboration with other Finnish universities to share knowledge and strategies for overcoming these challenges.

Building on previous work within the organisation, various guidelines and tools have already been developed. However, there remains a need for continuous enhancement of evaluation practices and support for the research evaluation culture in alignment with the CoARA agreement. The current action plan identifies development areas aimed at advancing reform in fairness, diversity, inclusion, and transparency.

ÅAU's approach to research assessment is guided by the following overarching principles:

- Diversity and inclusivity – We recognise a wide range of research outputs and contributions, including teaching, mentorship, and societal engagement, among others.
- Transparency and openness – We promote clear, transparent, open, and fair criteria in research assessment, ensuring non-discriminatory practices.
- Qualitative evaluation – We emphasise qualitative peer review as the central method of assessment, complemented by the responsible use of metrics.
- Support for open science – We advocate for openness in research practices, including data sharing and cross-disciplinary collaboration.

Action Plan

This Action Plan is structured around the ten commitments of the CoARA agreement. It provides an overview of ÅAU's background and initial position for each commitment and outlines the measures to be implemented.

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

ÅAU aims to foster an academic environment that values diverse contributions and career paths. This includes acknowledging various research outputs and societal impact, as well as teaching, leadership roles, and acknowledging possible variations in research output between different disciplines. The university also embraces multiple career trajectories, recognizing that contributions can come from different forms of engagement, interdisciplinary work, interculturality and non-traditional roles. ÅAU seeks to develop a clear and context-specific assessment framework that rewards various forms of scholarly activity while taking into consideration that the requested documentation from the applicants should be kept at an appropriate level.

Aligned with Commitment 1, ÅAU supports an academic environment that embraces diversity, inclusion, equality, equity, and interculturality. The university values diverse backgrounds, experiences, abilities, and perspectives in research, ensuring that contributions from underrepresented groups are acknowledged. By promoting inclusivity in research assessment, ÅAU aims to fairly recognize scholars from cultural, linguistic, social, and professional backgrounds, fostering a richer and more diverse academic landscape.

Action:

In announcements for research and teaching staff the university continues to emphasize the importance of recognizing a broad range of research outputs, as well as societal assignments, positions of trust, leadership, administrative merits, cross and/or interdisciplinary experience. The university also continues to develop the appropriate evaluation tools.

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

ÅAU aligns with Finnish and European recommendations by prioritising qualitative peer review in research assessment. To ensure the responsible use of quantitative indicators, ÅAU will also clarify the measurement criteria. In collaboration with national and international peers, ÅAU integrates relevant research findings into its assessment processes. The university synchronises updates to its evaluation mechanisms with its core values, ensuring that all stakeholders are adequately informed. Recruitment committees are composed of experts from the relevant disciplines and are firmly embedded within the scientific community of the faculty.

Action:

ÅAU aims to develop and communicate a clear, contextually relevant assessment framework and, where appropriate, pilot a narrative CV to support the responsible and contextual use of quantitative metrics.

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

ÅAU recognises the limitations and potential misuse of journal- and publication-based metrics, such as the Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and h-index, in evaluations. ÅAU has undertaken significant steps to ensure a more holistic and qualitative evaluation of research and researcher merits. This commitment aligns with both international and national principles for good practices in research assessment, emphasising transparency, diversity, and the promotion of open science.

Action:

ÅAU increases awareness of the limitations of the JIF and h-index, whilst maintaining peer review processes as the primary means of assessment.

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

ÅAU is committed to reducing any reliance on institutional rankings in research assessments. While rankings may provide some useful insights, they often fail to capture the diverse outputs and contributions recognised by CoARA principles.

Action:

The university ensures that assessments focus on the quality and impact of the research itself, rather than the prestige of associated institutions or journals. These reforms are implemented in consultation with national and international bodies to ensure alignment with broader trends in research assessment.

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

ÅAU is committed to reforming research assessment at an organisational level. This requires the allocation of resources and the implementation of change management strategies to ensure the effectiveness of the reforms.

Action:

The university utilises existing staff and resources through a collaborative approach involving HR, research services, academic leadership, and faculty representatives. The strategic council for research oversees the operational work and reports to the rector's board as necessary. The deans at the faculty level are responsible for implementing policies related to the assessment of researchers. This work is coordinated nationally by TENK, with ÅAU serving as an active coalition member.

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

ÅAU adheres to national guidelines outlined by TENK and the HRS4R accreditation and continues to refine assessment practices and criteria for researchers at all career stages. Additionally, ÅAU follows and contributes to the national and international development of research assessment criteria, tools, and processes.

Action:

ÅAU ensures alignment between its values and evaluation mechanisms by conducting a systematic inventory and updating these mechanisms as part of the process of revising its research strategy. This work is led by the Vice-Rector for Research.

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

It is essential that research assessment adheres to the principles and guidelines of the university, which encompass rigorous peer review practices and the systematic handling of assessment issues, such as conflicts of interest.

Awareness and understanding of responsible assessment practices, including maintaining a continuous dialogue on bias mitigation, the application of qualitative assessment methods, and the responsible use of metrics, are crucial for evaluators. Providing clear guidelines and ensuring targeted training are key to maintaining alignment with CoARA's evolving standards.

Action:

The university continues to develop evaluation guidelines and materials, ensuring that members of review committees have access not only to written guidelines but also to subject matter experts within the organisation. Guidelines supporting evaluation processes are made available across the community to uphold these standards. This documentation also serves as a foundation for further development.

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

ÅAU is committed to fostering a culture of mutual learning and the exchange of best practices both within and beyond the Coalition. This commitment is demonstrated through active participation in national and international networks dedicated to research assessment.

Action:

ÅAU actively engages in both national and international networks focused on research assessment and quality assurance. Specifically, ÅAU continues its involvement in key networks such as TENK, Finn-ARMA, EUA, CHARM-EU, the Coimbra Group, and CoARA.

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

ÅAU is dedicated to ensuring comprehensive, transparent, and accessible communication regarding the CoARA commitments and its Action Plan, both within the institution and to external stakeholders.

Action:

Internally, the primary communication channel will be an intranet page, which will host relevant information, including documents, instructions, and guidelines for ease of access. Additionally, updates will be disseminated through the staff newsletter to keep stakeholders informed.

Externally, a summary of these updates will be published on the university's website to maintain public transparency and demonstrate ÅAU's ongoing commitment to these standards.

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

ÅAU is committed to ensuring that its reforms are continuously monitored and evaluated for effectiveness. Transparency is upheld through published guidelines and annual progress reports, which track advancements and incorporate feedback from researchers and staff. This approach fosters the ongoing development and refinement of research assessment practices.

Action:

To strengthen the feedback mechanism for assessment processes, ÅAU explores the introduction of a formalised system that enables evaluators, candidates, and scholars to provide input on evaluation criteria and procedures. This system is intended to support the continuous refinement and enhancement of assessment practices, informed by both internal and external perspectives.

Conclusion

The ÅAU Strategic Council for Research is responsible for developing and overseeing the implementation of this Action Plan. The council ensures the involvement of key stakeholders across different career stages, including researchers, doctoral students, administrative staff, and support personnel, in the change process. Additionally, the council is responsible for the dissemination of the Action Plan both internally and externally, thereby promoting transparency and accountability throughout the reform journey.

The implementation of this Action Plan will take place over five years, from 2025 to 2029. In 2025, the primary focus will be on creating internal and external webpages for communication and planning feedback mechanisms within the recruitment system. Subsequently, the focus will shift to participation in relevant networks and the updating and evaluation of current practices based on received feedback and developments within research assessment networks. From 2027 to 2029, efforts will concentrate on expanding these reforms across departments, ensuring the integration of CoARA principles into the university's research assessment practices.

Through this five-year plan, ÅAU is committed to fostering an inclusive, transparent, and responsible research assessment system. By implementing CoARA principles and engaging with the wider academic community, the university aims to enhance its research culture and ensure that diverse contributions are recognised and valued.

Table of Deliverables (2025-2029)

Deliverable	Responsible Parties	Timeline (Years)
Guidelines on research assessment practices	HR Department, Strategic Council for Research,	2025: Initial review and planning 2026-2027: Implementation of guidelines
Regular training on responsible research assessment	HR Department	2025: Develop training session 2026-2029: Incorporate training sessions in recruitment processes
Piloting narrative CVs	HR Department	2025-2026: Develop and pilot narrative CVs 2027: Adoption where suitable
Incorporate research assessment updates in the Research Strategy	Vice-rector	2025 and in every update of the Research Strategy
Participation in networks	Vice-rector, Director for Research, Faculty Leaders	2025-2029: Participation and collaborations in named networks
Communication through internal webpage	Strategic Council for Research	2025: Development of the page 2026-2029: Evaluation and updating
Communication through external webpage	Strategic Council for Research	2025: Development of the page 2026-2029: Evaluation and updating
Development of feedback mechanisms in recruitment processes	HR Department	2025: Design and pilot feedback mechanism 2026: Full implementation and monitoring

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Key documentation

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