

# CoARA Action Plan

2024-2027

UOC

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# CoARA Action Plan - UOC 2024-2027

## 1. Background

The Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC) has been a member of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment ([CoARA](#)) since its creation on 1 December 2022. Part of the commitment to CoARA is the development of a **four-year institutional action plan** to fulfil the [Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment](#), which was signed by the UOC when it joined CoARA in December 2022.

This document describes the action plan that the UOC undertakes to carry out between 2024 and 2027, which was approved by the Executive Board on 4 March 2024, following a process of internal consultation and participation.

The CoARA Action Plan 2024-2027 was first drafted by a small working group and then cross-checked, reviewed and validated. The recommendations provided in [Support for CoARA signatories in the preparation of action plans](#) were taken into account when preparing this action plan.

### 1.1. Context

The [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment \(DORA\)](#) was drafted during the 2012 Annual Meeting of the American Society for Cell Biology in San Francisco, in response to a call from the community to rethink the way research is assessed. DORA's mission is to advance research assessment, and a fundamental tenet of its approach is that the journal's impact factor should not replace a qualitative assessment of the published work itself or of the individual contributions of researchers or their careers. DORA is a global, cross-disciplinary initiative that has now been signed by more than 24,000 individuals and organizations (universities, research centres, funders, regulators, publishers, scientific societies, scholarly associations, etc.) from more than 160 countries. However, it is not the only initiative of its kind. Others, such as the [Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics](#) (2015) and the [joint statement](#) issued by the European University Association (EUA) and Science Europe (2019), have also expressed the urgency of a thorough review of the assessment of research careers, research projects and the institutions that carry them out.

Against this background, the European Commission (EC) included a mandate to reform the research assessment system in its strategy, under Action 3 of the [European Research Area](#)

[Policy Agenda: Overview of Actions for the Period 2022-2024](#) (2021). This mandate was initially accompanied by a scoping report on how to carry out this reform: [Towards a reform of the research assessment system: Scoping report](#) (2021). With the aim of improving the quality, performance and impact of European research, this report set out the principles on which assessment criteria and processes should be based: quality and impact, diversity, inclusion and collaboration. Months later, after a broad participatory process, the EC published the institutional agreement of all organizations willing to actively participate in the reform: [Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment](#) (2022).

On 1 December 2022, the **Coalition for the Advancement of Research Assessment (CoARA)** was formally established as an international European association comprising all signatory institutions (around 370). Today, more than 640 organizations are members of CoARA, including universities, research centres and associations, research funding bodies, national and regional research assessment agencies, as well as scientific associations and academic staff. Building on the discussions and consensus of the international community, CoARA aims to systemically reform research assessment and improve assessment practices through the application of common principles and clear commitments that should yield results in the coming years.

During its first year of activity, CoARA's work was organized into groups dealing with specific topics (e.g. academic careers, infrastructure, multilingualism, and accountability metrics) and into national chapters. In Spain, the Spanish Chapter was created under the leadership of the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA), the Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities (CRUE) and the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC), with the support of the Ministry of Universities and later the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, and with the participation of more than 70 organizations, including the UOC. The Spanish Chapter has taken into account the contributions made in the National Forum on Reforming Research Assessment,<sup>1</sup> which met for the first and only time in January 2023 at the University of Barcelona (UB).

In 2023, notable contributions and regulatory changes were made to academic assessment in Spain. Firstly, the new Organic Law on the University System ([LOSU](#)) includes changes to the accreditation of teaching staff (later articulated in [Royal Decree 678/2023](#)) and specific criteria for the promotion of open science that quality assurance agencies must include in their assessments. Secondly, one of the strategic objectives of the first [National Open Science Strategy \(ENCA\) 2023-2027](#) is the establishment of new research assessment mechanisms and a system of incentives and recognition to promote open science practices. ANECA has created the [Committee for the Review and Monitoring of the National Accreditation Procedure](#) in order to integrate these regulatory changes, adapt the current assessment system and fulfil the commitments made with DORA and CoARA.

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<sup>1</sup> [Concept note](#) (in Spanish)

## 1.2. Research assessment at the UOC

As part of its [Open Knowledge Action Plan](#), approved at the beginning of 2019 after a participatory process that lasted throughout 2018, the UOC is committed to the "transformation of research assessment towards a more qualitative system that ensures ongoing learning and transformation", highlighting this point as one of its main lines of action. The UOC's first action in this regard was to sign the DORA and embody this issue in a [specific action plan](#) (2018), in order to set out its "commitment to the transformation of research assessment to a system that is more qualitative, transparent and fair, diverse and inclusive". The UOC was featured as a [case study](#) in the analysis produced by DORA, together with the EUA and SPARC Europe. The DORA principles are also in line with initiatives already under way at the UOC, such as the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) and the Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment of Researchers (OTM-R).

As a result of this commitment, the UOC has updated its internal research grant calls. This affects the recruitment of postdoctoral researchers, funding for research stays and interdisciplinary research awards. The journal's impact factor is no longer mandatory for assessing publications, and qualitative and contextual assessment items have been introduced relating to the scientific excellence of the article's content, its social impact or its interdisciplinary nature. In calls, scientific quality is expressed in a brief qualitative description of the applicant's career and research achievements. While citations and alternative metrics are allowed, they are not essential. Consideration is also given to prominent positions in authors lists as part of responsible authorship practices. Institutional fit, diversity of results beyond publications, and openness or compliance with the FAIR principles for data are also assessed.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequently, the UOC included research assessment reform in its [Strategic Plan 2022-2025](#), specifically in the UOC Insight section for the promotion of high-quality, transformative research. This took shape as the Plan for the Advancement of Research Assessment. In 2022, the UOC translated DORA's [SPACE](#) rubric, a tool for analysing the strengths and weaknesses of an institution's research assessment reform, into Catalan and Spanish. The UOC used this rubric as a [questionnaire](#) sent out to its research community. Of the hundred or so responses received, almost half came from UOC research group leaders. The questionnaire allowed us to gather input from our teaching and research staff on the need to change our research assessment practices. This group emphasized the importance of recognizing the diversity of research outputs (merits, profiles, roles, careers, subject areas, etc.) and of using quantitative metrics more responsibly to provide more context where and when it is needed. As a university, we had two objectives: (1) to better understand what we were already doing, and (2) to look

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<sup>2</sup> Llorenç Arguimbau reviewed the progress made by the UOC in terms of research assessment for the period 2019-2022, and published his findings in [UOC research calls \(2019-2022\): Analysis of assessment according to the DORA principles](#) (in Catalan)

closely at our current research assessment practices and our institutional readiness and capacity to assess research using alternative methods in line with the CoARA principles.

The results of the questionnaire also painted a clear picture of the current climate in relation to our move towards research assessment reform. When considering such an important cultural and organizational change, it is imperative that the teaching and research staff are able to express their views, concerns, reservations and anxieties about the changes that CoARA is promoting. The results also show that many researchers already have considerable experience in alternative methods, although specific training and skill-building in this area are also needed, as well as greater transparency in the criteria of some internal calls and assessment tools, such as the UOC's internal pool of assessors.

## 2. Action Plan 2024-2027

### 2.1. Underlying principles

The Action Plan 2024-2027 is the first internal proposal to improve research assessment at the UOC, aiming to promote and support research of higher quality and impact, in line with the CoARA commitments. For this reason, it is based on the **following principles**:

- **Commitment to CoARA.** All actions in the plan include commitments 1 to 4 of the CoARA agreement, which form the core of the reform proposal:
  1. *Recognize the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research.*
  2. *Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators.*
  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.*
  4. *Avoid the use of rankings of research organizations in research assessment.*
- **Principle of prudence.** The regulatory changes introduced by the LOSU and Royal Decree 678/2023 are beginning to affect certain criteria for assessing teaching and research staff, and this is expected to continue to develop over the next few years. Given that these changes will have to be incorporated, after due consideration, into the internal assessment processes for research staff, the actions of the Action Plan 2024-2027 do not at this point include proposals related to the assessment of individual research activities of UOC teaching and research staff. However, this approach may be updated in the course of the plan's annual reviews.

- **Principle of reality.** Instead, the focus will be on reviewing and improving the UOC's own competitive research-related calls, such as research projects or the selection of predoctoral and postdoctoral researchers, as well as on assessing research groups and units, in order to continue the work started years ago under the Open Knowledge Action Plan, the Plan for the Advancement of Research Assessment, and the IN3 Strategic Plan.
- **Participation and internal debate.** The involvement of stakeholders in the discussion, drafting, implementation and assessment of the plan is a key factor in the overall reform process. Therefore, the people concerned and involved in these proposals will be included throughout the life of the plan, with particular emphasis on the following groups:
  - Researchers at different stages of their careers.
  - Research support staff (technicians, administrators, etc.).Teaching and research staff from different disciplines and research backgrounds must also be involved, and the gender perspective must be incorporated in line with the current Equality Plan.
- **Assessment and continuous improvement.** The timing of this plan coincides with the international reform movement that CoARA has been building since 2023, with the launch of its working groups and national chapters, and that the European Commission has been driving with its policy agenda for 2022-2024. Between 2024 and 2027, it is expected that good practices will be developed at Catalan, national, European and international levels, which will feed into and inspire the proposals in this plan. For this reason, pilot actions, which will undergo assessment before being scaled up, are proposed. Activities will also be carried out to enable the exchange of good practices, both within the organization and externally.

## 2.2. Proposed action plan

The priority actions of the UOC Action Plan 2024-2027 are summarized in the following table, which sets out the CoARA commitments, the related action lines, the actions included in these lines, the timeline and owner of each action, and the method of assessment.

CoARA commitments	Action lines	Actions	Timeline	Owner	Assessment method
5. Commit resources to reforming research assessment as is needed to achieve the organizational changes committed to	Preparation, implementation and monitoring of the UOC's CoARA Action Plan	Action Plan Implementation and Update Group (CoARA Committee)	2024-2027	CoARA Committee	Meetings every six months and validation of the semi-annual and annual reports
		Annual monitoring: Executive Board; Research, Innovation and Knowledge Transfer Committee; and Academic Committee	2024-2027	CoARA Committee	Presentation of the annual monitoring report
		Annual budget for the implementation of the actions set out in the CoARA Action Plan 2024-2027	2024-2027	Office of the Deputy General Manager for Research and Knowledge Transfer	
6. Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes	Review and update of internal calls (criteria, documents, guides for applicants, assessments, etc.) in	Internal calls for research projects	2024-2027	Research, Innovation and Knowledge Transfer Committee (RIKTC)	Annual review by the CoARA Committee of the published call (criteria and documents to be submitted) and an overall analysis of its results from a CoARA perspective
		Research accelerator for internal calls	2024-2027	RIKTC	

	accordance with the CoARA principles	Internal calls for predoctoral and postdoctoral candidates	2024-2027	RIKTC	
		Assessment of the IN3's research groups	2024-2027	RIKTC	
7. Raise awareness of research assessment reform and provide transparent communication, guidance and training on assessment criteria and processes as well as their use	Internal strategy for popularizing the CoARA principles	Open debate among UOC teaching and research staff to disseminate the CoARA principles and discuss their internal application at the UOC	2024-2027	CoARA Committee	Actions to promote academic debate (meetings, seminars, webinars, etc.)
		Preparation of guides for the presentation of CoARA-adapted internal calls	2024-2027	CoARA Committee	Guides for each of the adapted internal calls
	Strategy for the internal communication of the Action Plan	Development of a designated communication plan for the Action Plan	2024	Technical secretariat	Communication plan
		Implementation of the internal communication actions set out in the communication plan	2024-2027	Technical secretariat	Internal communication actions
		Implementation of the internal communication actions set out in the communication plan	2024-2027	Technical secretariat	External communication actions
	Training on the CoARA principles	Training actions related to all research assessment situations: research periods and accreditations, projects, etc.	2024-2027	Technical secretariat	Annual training activities (at least one)



8. Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond CoARA	Communication and feedback with CoARA	Participation in CoARA's General Assembly	2024-2027	CoARA Committee	Annual summary of participation in CoARA
9. Communicate progress made on adherence to the Principles and implementation of the Commitments		Participation in CoARA's Spanish Chapter	2024-2027	CoARA Committee	Annual summary of participation in the Spanish Chapter
		Participation in other CoARA working groups and committees or other national or international research assessment groups	2024-2027	CoARA Committee	Annual summary of participation in working groups and other CoARA spaces
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	Monitoring of success stories or innovative assessment proposals	Running of pilot assessment projects as a basis for testing and analysis Publication of results	2024-2027	CoARA Committee	Annual review by the CoARA Committee

## 2.3. Governance and monitoring

The actions to reform research assessment are sponsored by Xavier Vilajosana, Vice Rector for Research, Knowledge Transfer and Entrepreneurship, and are implemented within the budget and objectives of the Office of the Deputy General Manager for Research and Knowledge Transfer.

The CoARA Action Plan 2024-2027 was initially drawn up by a small working group coordinated by Pastora Martínez Samper (Office of the Rector) and composed of Julie Wilson (Faculty of Economics and Business), Víctor Garcia Font (Faculty of Computer Science, Multimedia and Telecommunications), Israel Rodríguez Giralt (IN3) and Bego Aguilera (Office of the Deputy General Manager for Research and Knowledge Transfer). The plan was also:

- Shared and discussed with the members of the team working on the Plan for the Advancement of Research Assessment;
- Opened for consultation with the UOC community in November and December 2023;
- Reviewed and approved by the Research, Innovation and Knowledge Transfer Committee on 23 November 2023;
- Reviewed and approved by the faculty deans and research centre directors on 27 February 2024; and
- Approved by the Executive Board on 4 March 2024.

The CoARA Action Plan Implementation and Update Group (i.e., CoARA Committee) will be responsible for the annual implementation, monitoring and updating of the plan. The CoARA Committee will build on the previous work of the team working on the Plan for the Advancement of Research Assessment and the working group that drew up the CoARA Action Plan. It is therefore composed of members of both groups, as well as of the teams responsible for certain actions in the plan (e.g., the Office of the Deputy General Manager for Research and Knowledge Transfer). The Open Science unit will act as the plan's technical secretariat.

Every six months, the plan's technical secretariat will present to the CoARA Committee the details of the actions undertaken in collaboration with the faculties, research centres and Doctoral School, as well as the relevant departments and units. During the following six months, all completed and planned actions will be reviewed.

The actions of this plan will be reviewed every year by the CoARA Committee, which may update or eliminate actions and include new ones according to the needs of the UOC. In addition, the annual report on activities and any changes to the plan must be submitted to the Research, Innovation and Knowledge Transfer Committee, the Academic Committee and the Executive Board, as well as to CoARA.