

Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA)

Introduction

Our first Research Cultures Action Plan was agreed by University Executive in February 2023. This plan sets out our commitment to foster an environment where research, researchers, and those who support them, can thrive. It has five Underpinning Values – Citizenship; Wellbeing; Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI); Ethics and integrity; and Learning, and five Drivers for Change - Career pathways and progression; Targeted support; Responsible research; Communication & engagement; Governance & data. Responsible research assessment and our commitment to CoARA is embedded in our action plan.

We aim to realise a research lifecycle where research culture, research integrity and fair research assessment are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Taken together, these elements create an environment in which researchers, and those who enable research, thrive and can produce world-leading research and innovation. This plan outlines activity already underway and signals our long-term plans through our holistic approach to delivery across multiple complementary commitments and action plans.

We welcome the opportunity to assess our progress so far having signed the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) in May 2019. Our CoARA commitments provide us with the opportunity to review and recommit to responsible research assessment throughout our research community, and both link to and complement actions undertaken as part of other plans and commitments.

Complementary Commitment	More information
Our Research Cultures Action Plan	Research Cultures Action Plan University of Edinburgh
Universities UK Research and Integrity Concordat	Research integrity Edinburgh Research Office
Technician Commitment	Technician Commitment Support for Technicians
Concordat to support the Career Development of Researchers	The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers The University of Edinburgh
Concordat on Open Research Data	Research Data Management Policy University of Edinburgh
Open Research Roadmap	Open Research Roadmap University of Edinburgh

Our CoARA Action Plan

Our action plan below lists each of the ten CoARA commitments with a summary against each, covering:

- What we are already doing and progress underway;
- Our longer term plans;
- Associated milestones or where we will embed continuous improvement.

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

What we are already doing, and progress underway

Through our Research Cultures Action Plan and the supporting concordats and initiatives, we are committed to continuously working towards recognising the many and varied contributions to research. As well as the diversity of roles that contribute, and the diversity of formats and languages, we recognise that over the many disciplines in the university the outputs and outcomes of research can look very different. Recognising and valuing the variety of research, impact, education and innovation outputs we produce, and the contributions of all staff, students and our partners to those outputs is core to our approach.

Examples include:

- Learning and development opportunities provided in the university are not limited to academics, and we ensure opportunities are clearly available to all that may benefit. Several technical and professional services staff have applied for, and secured, research grants now funder eligibility criteria have widened.
- We hold an annual [Technician Week](#) to recognise the contribution of our Technical staff.
- Several of our Research Staff Societies run events annually during [Post-doc Appreciation Week](#), with support from our Schools and Colleges and our Institute for Academic Development.
- In our REF 2021 submission 1.4% of our selected outputs were non-traditional e.g. art works, performances, datasets, code, protocols. As part of our REF 2029 preparations, we have convened a Diverse Research Outputs Working Group to understand selection processes for non-traditional outputs and produce guidance for assessors.
- Our Library research team are leading on the development of inclusive authorship guidance and associated resources. Our [College of Medicine & Veterinary Medicine](#) has developed guidance to support correct authorship attribution and policies for specific staff groups within the College.
- Across the University we hold a number of award and recognition schemes to celebrate the contribution and excellent work of our colleagues. All three Colleges and Central Services Groups hold staff awards, we hold [Postdoc Appreciation Week Awards](#), and hold [Technician Awards](#) and our [Student Association hold Teaching Awards](#). We also run recognition campaigns as part of our annual Good Research Practice Week, and our [InFrame Research Cultures](#) project.

Longer-term plans

- We are working with our research repository provider, Pure, to support the inclusion of the CReDIT taxonomy in their software, allowing our researchers to more consistently acknowledge the wide range of contributions to their research outputs. We have added our core facilities as entities in Pure so output records can be linked to their profiles.
- As part of our REF 2029 preparations, guidance and training will be provided to reviewers and selectors to recognise the wider contributions to knowledge and understanding, as well as recognising non-journal and non-single author monograph research outputs, and ensure these are valued at parity to more traditional output types.
- Our three Colleges are working to network our current research staff and PGR societies and encourage new societies to develop. Our College of Medicine held a [Research Staff symposium in 2024](#) and this event will also be adopted by our College of Science & Engineering.

Continuous Improvement

- Increase engagement from staff and students in our existing activity, providing both local support from Schools and sharing good practice across the University.

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

What we are already doing, and progress underway

We have a variety of practice within the University currently, moving towards qualitative evaluation is a process of continuous improvement. Our academic promotion process and professional service staff recruitment is already based on qualitative evaluation of contributions. There is flexibility in our academic recruitment system with some individuals, groups, or major recruitment processes already requesting narrative CVs for academic positions. However, there are areas where our HR team, candidates and assessors need support to understand how to get the best out of qualitative evaluation and understand what is and isn't a responsible use of metrics; this will be the focus of future work.

Examples include:

- Our [REF2021 Code of Practice](#) stated that those in roles with responsibility for output selection were expected to use discipline-appropriate established quantitative and qualitative information across the full range of research activity to support the evaluation of outputs and not to rely on a single metric. We will be developing our REF2029 Code of Practice in line with our CoARA commitments.
- In 2024/25 we are undertaking a review of our academic promotion process. We will update our process to encourage the considering of any form of research output, including creating an innovation promotion pathway to explicitly recognise contribution and outputs in this area. All guidance and training for promotion candidates and reviewers will be updated to support the responsible use of metrics during this process. We will be including a new promotion criterion of Collegiality across all grades.
- Our academic promotion application form requests a narrative description of contributions, and we will continue to request narrative description broadening this to a wider range of contributions across academic responsibilities as part of our review of this process.
- Our Institute for Academic Development and Edinburgh Research Office have developed training and resources to support our researchers to develop their own narrative CVs. As part of our Research Cultures Action Plan we are developing options for piloting and implementing a narrative CV in recruitment.
- Our College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences uses reports drawn from our research information system, Pure, to inform researcher annual reviews. As well as publications these reports also include conferences, editorial work, public engagement, press or media contributions, and prizes.
- There is work ongoing in our College of Medicine & Veterinary Medicine and College of Science & Engineering to implement or improve current workload models, to make more accurate information available to staff and managers.

Longer-term plans

- Building on the options outlined for implementation of a narrative CV in recruitment we plan to test and pilot recommendations and develop resources to support recruiters and candidates.
- We will be working to embed responsible use of metrics beyond policy documents, into recruitment, P&DR and 1:1 conversations through our College Deans of Research and their Research Committees.
- As Open Research and FAIR Research Outputs become the norm, we will develop resources to ensure that these practices are recognised and rewarded appropriately.

Milestones

- Publication of our REF 2029 Code of Practice relating to outputs
- Implementation of our academic promotion process review
- Delivery of Narrative CV implementation routes report

Commitment 3: Abandon inappropriate uses of research assessment of journal- and publication-based metrics, in particular uses of Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and h-index

What we are already doing, and progress underway

Undertaking research assessment responsibly means assessing the quality of the research undertaken and its outputs directly. Relying on metrics such as a journal impact factor, a researcher's h-index, or inferring research quality from the ranking of a researcher's institution isn't responsible in our view. Our aim is to avoid the use of proxies to assess research, and the researchers that have undertaken it, and instead use peer review and our judgement based on the research itself.

We are committed to discontinuing the inappropriate uses of journal- and publication-based metrics through continuous improvement, and in tandem with the actions outlined against Commitment 2.

Examples include:

- In 2019 we published our [Statement on the Responsible Use of Research Metrics](#) setting out a set of principles on the use of research metrics and guide research assessment across the University.
- In 2024/25 we are undertaking a review of our academic promotion process. We will update our process to encourage the considering of any form of research output, including creating and innovation promotion pathway. All guidance and training for promotion candidates and reviewers will be updated to support the responsible use of metrics during this process. We will be including an additional essential criterion of Citizenship across all grades.
- Our College of Medicine & Veterinary Medicine has recently trialled anonymous applications for an internal fund – all names were removed, and publications were listed by DOI, rather than journal name. We will be working to share the outputs of this trial across the University.
- Our [REF2021 Code of Practice](#) stated that those in roles with responsibility for output selection were expected to use discipline-appropriate established quantitative and qualitative information across the full range of research activity to support the evaluation of outputs and not to rely on a single metric. We will be developing our REF2029 Code of Practice in line with our CoARA commitment.

Longer-term plans

- We will be working to embed responsible use of metrics beyond policy documents, into recruitment, P&DR and 1:1 conversations through our College Deans of Research and their Research Committees.
- Training and guidance for decision-makers in the REF 2029 preparations will include the risk factors and biases associated with publications-based metrics. These materials will be used beyond REF to support our staff.

Milestones

- Update responsible research assessment and use of metrics web and SharePoint pages.
- Responsible metrics guidance for use in academic promotions process.
- Publication of a REF 2029 Code of Practice and communication of the appropriate ways of working and decision-making in preparing the submission.

Commitment 4: Avoid the use of rankings of research organisations in research assessment

What we are already doing, and progress underway

We recognise that the methodologies used to determine international rankings of research organisations are not fair and responsible. Despite placing well on these international rankings, we also acknowledge that there are significant parts of our mission as a university that are not considered in these rankings but are fundamental to our value as an institution and contribution to society.

We are committed to avoiding the use of rankings of research organisations in individual research assessment through continuous improvement, and in tandem with the actions outlined against Commitments 2 and 3.

Examples include:

- Our [REF2021 Code of Practice](#) stated that those in roles with responsibility for output selection were expected to use discipline-appropriate established quantitative and qualitative information across the full range of research activity to support the evaluation of outputs and not to rely on a single metric. We will be developing our REF2029 Code of Practice in line with our CoARA commitment.
- As part of our Research Cultures Action Plan, we are developing options for piloting and implementing a narrative CV in recruitment.
- Our Communications & Marketing team have produced guidance on [communicating rankings responsibly](#).

Longer-term plans

- Building on the options outlined for implementation of a narrative CV in recruitment we plan to test and pilot recommendations and develop resources to support recruiters and candidates.
- We will be working to embed responsible use of metrics beyond policy documents, into recruitment, P&DR and 1:1 conversations through our College Deans of Research and their Research Committees.

Milestones

- Responsible metrics guidance for use in academic promotions process.
- Publication of a REF 2029 Code of Practice and communication of the appropriate ways of working and decision-making in preparing the submission.
- Training and guidance for decision-makers in the REF 2029 preparations will include the risk factors and biases associated with publications-based metrics. These materials will be used beyond REF to support our staff.

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

What we are already doing, and progress underway

We have invested in positions and teams to support work that will contribute to reforming research assessment and the associated organisational change.

Examples include:

- We have appointed a Head of Research Cultures in 2024. This role leads the monitoring of the Research Culture Action Plan which includes actions related to investigating the implementation of a narrative CV, and developing our CoARA action plan.
- Each of our Colleges have appointed Deans of Research Cultures, to develop College level activities, priorities and plans appropriate to their disciplinary context.
- We have appointed a Head of REF, Research Planning & Performance in 2024 who will lead our preparations for REF and monitor our institutional and department research performance in line with our CoARA commitments to responsible research assessment.
- We have appointed a Researcher Developer within IAD in 2024 to design and deliver resources to support our researcher leaders in understanding and developing their skills including in responsible research assessment.
- We continue to participate in the UK Reproducibility Network through our appointment of new institutional Co-Leads in 2024.
- We established a short life working group to outline our initial approach to responsible use of metrics as part of our commitment to DORA. This committee was drawn from both academic and professional services staff.

Longer-term plans

- Reforming research assessment is supported by several of the strands of the Research Cultures Action Plan. We will be refreshing our action plan for the new 2026-2029 period and including actions to support our CoARA commitments.
- Reviewing PGR training and research staff induction to increase awareness and appropriate use of Open and FAIR research practices, increasing the availability of non-traditional research outputs.

Milestones

- Approval of our 2026-2029 Research Cultures Action Plan.

Commitment 6: Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes

What we are already doing, and progress underway

We are undertaking and engaged in discussions on reviewing, developing and sharing research assessment criteria, tools and processes. These relate to our own processes to assess individual contributions, and to national and international assessments. Where our local processes are reviewed or evaluated, we will continue to draw input from across the University both by discipline, career stage and role type.

Examples include:

- In 2024/25 we are undertaking a review of our academic promotion process. The project group membership is drawn from across career stages, role types and disciplines. The project has collected views from across the university on their perceptions of the current process, and suggested improvements via a survey open to all staff on academic contracts. Interviews and focus groups have discussed our current process and how it should be updated. We have collected survey responses on perceptions of our current process; the survey was sent to all staff on academic contracts for their contributions.
- We are engaged with the REF 2029 consultation processes and PCE pilot panels, contributions and participation from academic and professional services staff are ongoing.
- Our School of Biological Sciences focus on Open Data sharing has supported the fraction of their research articles that shared all relevant data rising from 7% in 2014 to 45% in 2023 (Deeb et al. 2025 doi: 10.1101/2024.02.18.580901)
- We are evaluating routes to monitor the uptake of Open and FAIR research practices. We will use the outcomes of this evaluation to develop an open research dashboard to allow us to understand uptake of open research practice and provide support to increase this.

Longer-term plans

- We will evaluate the changes to our academic promotions process after implementation.
- We will continue to use staff and student surveys to understand the perceptions of research assessment by our community.
- We will continue to engage with national and international discussions on review and developing research assessment processes.

Milestones

- Implementation of our academic promotion process review
- Evaluation of our 2024/25 changes to our academic promotion process

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

What we are already doing, and progress underway

Maintaining awareness of research assessment reform is a continuous process, providing guidance to new managers, recruiters and assessors including for specific assessments such as REF.

Examples include:

- As part of our annual Good Research Practice Week, Open Research Conference and Digital Research Conference sessions are presented on aspects of recognition and reward, research cultures and responsible metrics.
- Our bi-annual Research Cultures Survey requests feedback on P&DR, and is a route to share links and information on our Research Cultures work.
- We have updated our [Responsible Research Assessment & Use of Metrics](#) SharePoint page [login required] to share information, tools and resources.

Longer-term plans

- Our statement on responsible use of metrics will be reviewed and updated in 2025
- As part of the implementation of our review of academic promotions process we will be refreshing guidance and training for both candidates and assessors including responsible research assessment.
- As part of our REF 2029 preparations we will be developing guidance and training to support staff and assessors to abide by our Code of Practice.

Milestones

- Publication of our REF 2029 Code of Practice
- Publication of our updated statement on Responsible Use of Metrics
- Publication of guidance and training associated with academic promotions and REF 2029 preparation.

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

What we are already doing, and progress underway

We are engaged in the exchange of practice and sharing research assessment criteria, tools and processes, from local processes to assess individual contributions to national and international assessments.

Examples include:

- We are partners in [UK Reproducibility Network \(UKRN\)](#) projects aiming to understand and develop reward and recognition criteria and processes, and to improve the monitoring of Open and FAIR Research practices.
- We are contributing to the [UKRI Narrative CV Alternative Uses group](#), learning from and sharing good practice in this area.
- We are active members of [Association of Research Managers & Administrators \(ARMA\)](#) special interest groups including Research Evaluation and Research & Innovation Cultures groups.
- We are active members of [Universities Human Resources \(UHR\)](#), exchanging good practice and learning in HR processes specific to Higher Education.
- We are engaging with REF 2029 consultations, and are involved in the People, Culture & Environment Pilot Panels to support national reform of research assessment.
- We are members of the CoARA National Chapter sharing and learning from the work of others.
- We are members of the [League of European Research Universities](#) (LERU) contributing to and learning from the Research, Research Integrity, Information & Open Access, Open Science Ambassadors Group and Careers of Researchers & HR sub-groups regularly.
- We host an annual [Open Research Conference](#) that attracts attendees from across University of Edinburgh, other UK research institutions and international institutions. The conference encourages the discussion of open research methods appropriate to all research areas, bringing new communities into open research such as technical staff and the broader research cultures changes that need to be realised to incentivise open research.
- We are working with University of Glasgow and University of St Andrews on our joint Wellcome Funded Research Cultures project [InFrame](#). The project will develop a leadership framework for all participants in the research community, fund projects to explore aspects of research leadership and test activities to improve them, and run a recognition campaign to celebrate all aspects of research leadership. We will also be engaging to share best practice across the UK through the Wellcome convened activities associated with this funding.

Longer-term plans

- We will continue to share and learn by engaging and supporting individual projects and engaging with networks.

Continuous Improvement

- Continue to engage, share and learn through our existing and appropriate new networks.

Commitment 9: Communicate progress made on adherence to the principles and implementation of the commitments

What we are already doing, and progress underway

We will continue to transparently communicate progress on our CoARA commitments via quarterly updates on progress on our Research Cultures Action Plan. Where other action plans contribute to CoARA commitments progress will be reported via their website and other public reporting routes.

Examples include:

- Continue to share our Research Cultures Action Plan Progress publicly with updates shared quarterly through the [Research Cultures Delivery Group Committee](#) site.
- The development of a dashboard to allow interrogation of our Research Cultures Survey outputs by staff and students in the University.

Longer-term plans

- We will add a webpage to our [Research Cultures website](#) focused on Responsible Research Assessment and reporting on progress against our commitments.
- Our statement on responsible use of metrics will be reviewed and updated in 2025

Milestones

- Publication of Responsible Research Assessment webpage
- Publication of our updated statement on responsible use of metrics

Commitment 10: Evaluate processes, criteria and tools based on solid evidence and the state of the art in research on research, and make data openly available to evidence gathering

What we are already doing, and progress underway

We are committed to evaluating progress to ensure we are making the change we want to see, both at individual intervention level and across our whole community.

Examples include:

- We conduct a bi-annual Research Cultures Survey to assess the engagement, understanding and perception of our research culture and make the analysis of this available on OSF.
- We will draw on wider all staff surveys and student surveys to augment our understanding of our research cultures.
- We will continue to evaluate training courses and resources to understand if they are meeting our goals and the needs of participants.
- We are developing an open research dashboard to allow us to understand uptake of open research practice and provide support to increase this.
- We will continue to partner with University of Glasgow and University of St Andrews on our research culture project, [InFrame](#), sharing our findings openly.
- We will continue to participate in research on research project such as [Action Research on Research Cultures](#) led by University of Cambridge, and [Open & Responsible Researcher Reward & Recognition](#) led by King's College London.
- We will continue to support our existing research on research expertise across the University in areas such as open research, impact & evaluation, responsible research & innovation, research integrity & reproducibility, international partnering and metascience. Our expertise is located across our colleges in our [Science, Technology & Innovation studies](#) department, our School of Biological Sciences, our [Edinburgh Neuroscience](#) cross College network, and our [Centre for Science, Knowledge & Policy](#) and others.

Longer-term plans

- Create a virtual centre linking our existing expertise on research on research across the University
- Engage, where possible and appropriate, in research on research activity led by others

Milestones

- Interrogate and act on the insight provided by our Open Research dashboard.
- Agreement of an oversight plan to report progress to our Research Strategy Group.

Milestone Summary

Milestone	Owner	Related action / work plan	Timeframe	CoARA
Continuous Improvement: Increase engagement from staff and students in our existing activity, providing both local support from Schools and sharing good practice across the University.	Various	Business as usual	From 2025	1
Delivery of Narrative CV implementation routes report	Professor Jen Ross	Research Cultures Action Plan (2023-25)	2025	2
Publication of our REF 2029 Code of Practice	Head of REF & Research Performance: Charlotte Brady	REF 2029 preparation	2025	2, 3, 4, 7
Update responsible research assessment and use of metrics web and SharePoint pages.	Head of Research Cultures: Alex Peden	CoARA	2025	3
Implementation of our academic promotion process review	Human Resources: Susan McNeil	Research Cultures Action Plan (2023-25)	2025/26	2, 6
Responsible metrics guidance for use in academic promotions process	Human Resources: Susan McNeil	Research Cultures Action Plan (2023-25)	2025/26	3, 4
Publication of guidance and training associated with REF 2029 preparation ways of working.	Head of REF & Research Performance: Charlotte Brady	REF 2029 preparation	2025/26	3, 4, 7
Approval of our 2026-2029 Research Cultures Action Plan	Head of Research Cultures: Alex Peden	Business as usual	2025	5
Evaluation of our 2024/25 changes to our academic promotion process	Human Resources: Susan McNeil	Business as usual	2028/9	6
Continue to engage, share and learn through our existing and appropriate new networks.	Various	Business as usual	From 2025	8
Publication of Responsible Research Assessment webpage	Head of Research Cultures: Alex Peden	CoARA	2025	9
Publication of our updated statement on responsible use of metrics	Research Strategy Group: Christina Boswell / Susan Cooper	Business as Usual	2025	9

Interrogate and act on the insight provided by our Open Research dashboard.	Open Research Team: Kerry Miller	CoARA	2025	10
Agreement of an oversight plan to report progress to our Research Strategy Group	Research Strategy Group: Christina Boswell / Susan Cooper	CoARA	2025	10