



CoARA Action Plan

VELUX FONDEN and Villum Fonden - 2024

Introduction to ARRA and CoARA

The Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (ARRA) was drawn up in 2022 as an EU initiative with the intention of setting “*a shared direction for changes in assessment practices for research, researchers and research performing organisations, with the overarching goal to maximise the quality and impact of research.*” The aim is to achieve recognition of diverse output, activities and practices and to uphold that research assessment primarily is done by qualitative judgements supplemented with a responsible use of quantitative indicators.

<https://coara.eu/agreement/the-agreement-full-text/>

CoARA is the coalition of organisations who are willing to work together in implementing the changes. At the moment more than 600 members internationally and 12 Danish research organisations and funders have joined the coalition.

CoARA is a cause both VELUX FONDEN and Villum Fonden find it important and meaningful to be a part of. Hence the two foundations both signed the ARRA agreement in 2023. Both foundations agree to be a part of an inclusive and effective science ecosystem in collaboration with similar entities (funders and universities) and we will use this opportunity to try out new tools and share our experiences on research assessment processes with other organisations.

VELUX FONDEN and Villum Fonden implementation

By signing the ARRA agreement, we are committed to drawing up an action plan, and we have decided to create a joint action plan for both foundations with the following four work packages. The action plan has a duration of five years, and we will evaluate the progress we make annually.

The ARRA agreement is based on ten commitments which are addressed in the four work packages below. The work packages are structured by:

- A. What we have already done** – here we present the initiatives in action
- B. What we plan to do** – here we present what we have decided to act on

CoARA commitments

1. *Recognise 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 organisations in research assessment*
5. *Commit resources to reforming research assessment as is needed to achieve the organisational changes committed to*
6. *Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes*
7. *Raise awareness of research assessment reform and provide transparent communication, guidance, and training on assessment criteria and processes as well as their use*
8. *Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition*
9. *Communicate progress made on adherence to the Principles and implementation of the Commitments*
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*

Work package 1: Provide relevant and updated templates to accommodate a diverse applicant pool

Meets the commitments:

1. *Recognise 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*
6. *Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes*

Work package 1.1 Applicant

A: What we have already done:

- Introduced a single new CV template used for all scientific calls
 - The aim is to reduce bias and inappropriate use of quantitative indicators, specifically the h-index.

B: What we plan to do

- Implementation of a revised application guidelines to accommodate a diverse applicant pool
- Look for ways to include experience from periods of leave of absence in CVs and in the review/research assessment process. Leave of absence could be, e.g., paternal leave, working in industry or creating spinouts.

Work package 1.2 Reviewer/committee

A: What we have already done

- Provide guidelines for committees before assessment of applications: e.g. definition of excellence, data on gender, budget etc.

B: What we plan to do

- Develop more formalised training for reviewers and committees
- Update reviewer “terms of reference” to guide reviewers and committee members
- Develop specific reviewer guidelines and templates to make sure intended areas are covered

Work package 2: Transparency – provide information to the science community and be open to share experience with organisations similar to the foundations

Meets the commitments:

5. *Commit resources to reforming research assessment as is needed to achieve the organisational changes committed to*
7. *Raise awareness of research assessment reform and provide transparent communication, guidance, and training on assessment criteria and processes as well as their use*
8. *Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition*
9. *Communicate progress made on adherence to the Principles and implementation of the Commitments*

Work package 2.1 Networking – national and bilateral

A: What we have already done

- Annual or biannual meetings with the secretariat at the Danish Independent Research Foundation to share experiences on research assessment practices. Areas covered: CoARA, Impact Assessment, Feedback.
- Initiation of a national Reforming Research Assessment/CoARA network: Together with Danish Independent Research Foundation and Aalborg University we have initiated the first meeting in a national network on Reforming Research Assessment principles for the universities and the public and private research funding foundations. Here we plan to discuss and share experience on how we perform research assessment, new ideas and tools, as well as identify alignment possibilities.

B: What we plan to do

- Initiate new networking opportunities when needed

Work package 2.2 Communication

A: What we have already done

- Initiation of targeted workshops and information meetings in connection to programme calls being launched
 - to help improve the understanding of the content of the call

B: What we plan to do

- Targeted communication on criteria and principles we follow, e.g. how is leave of absence considered when applications are assessed and when extension a of project is requested
- Communicate: how do we provide feedback (what can be expected by applicants)
- Website: Enhance accessibility of guidelines and ensure communication is targeting the research community in Denmark
 - Previous call texts should be accessible (at all times).
- Impact Assessment: Impact report (Villum Fonden) should be readily accessible on the website
- Evaluation reports on funding programmes (VELUX FONDEN)

Work package 3: Evaluation

Meets the commitments:

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

A: What we have already done

- Use of independent observers at committee meetings
 - Evaluate how committees act as a group and how their behaviour affects the process
 - Made efforts to expose unconscious bias
- Conduct meetings with head of departments at the Danish universities to discuss practices and suggest new directions

B: What we plan to do

- Applicant survey (application portal)
- Reviewer/committee member survey on evaluation criteria

Work package 4: The sandbox

Critical reflections, emerging dilemmas, inconvenient truths.

The foundations are committed to reflect and challenge our practices and procedures. This is done by discussing emerging dilemmas and challenges that we face in our daily work. Our aim is that this approach will generate new directions and new plans which can be shown in the action plan as we update the sections of 'what we plan to do'.

Meets the commitments:

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 organisations in research assessment*
5. *Commit resources to reforming research assessment as is needed to achieve the organisational changes committed to*
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A: What we have already done

- (internal) VELUX FONDEN and Villum Fonden secretariats meet regularly to discuss practices – acting as each other's 'critical friends'

B: What we plan to do

- Visits to research organisations in Denmark and abroad to discuss practices

HFK/TNF November 2024