

Annex III - Topics description

- **Core Commitment 4: Avoiding the use of university rankings in research assessment**

Avoiding the use of rankings of research organisations in research assessment is one of the four core commitments of the [Agreement on Reform Assessment](#). As such, it is a key component of the shared direction that has been agreed and endorsed by over 700 research organisations, funders, assessment authorities, professional societies, and their associations globally. Whilst all signatories committed to implementing changes in line with this Commitment within their organisations, it remains the least addressed core commitment of the Agreement so far in both Action Plans and exiting Working Groups.

Signatories of the Agreement recognise that the international rankings most often referred to by research organisations are currently not 'fair and responsible', nor do they always accurately reflect universities' value propositions and the diversity of their missions. Rankings prioritise publication-based metrics and simplistic notions of excellence over understanding regional and local contexts, particularly those in the global south. Consequently, the criteria used by these rankings should not be used in the evaluation of individual researchers, research teams, and research units.

This commitment helps the research community and research organisations regain the autonomy to shape their assessment practices, rather than having to abide by criteria and methodologies set by external, commercial companies. This could include regaining control over institution-level assessment methodologies and data. In cases 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.

Signatories of the Agreement are encouraged to redefine what they value in research based on the grounding principles, values and mission of each signatory organisation. This step is

essential towards a more differentiated, more accurate and a more holistic picture on where and how high-quality research is being produced.

Expected outputs of Working Groups addressing commitment 4 include solutions, toolboxes or sets of actionable recommendations for universities to:

1. Raise awareness of the limitations associated with university ranking
2. Showcase alternative forms of university-level assessment
3. Prevent trickle-down effects of university rankings to the assessment of units, research teams and individuals
4. Gain inspiration from a collection of impact case studies showcasing and analysing instances where universities have moved away from rankings, with special sensitivity to regional and national flavours.

- **Qualitative Assessment and Research Quality Frameworks**

Commitment 2 of CoARA calls on signatories to base research assessment primarily on qualitative assessment supported by the quantitative use of indicators. However, to date there has been a lack of focus on guidance and concepts for qualitative assessment and for the assessment of the quality of research. More work is needed as to how assessors might successfully understand and define the quality of research, and how they might evaluate it in a robust and meaningful way. This might incorporate the development and piloting of frameworks and practices relating to qualitative assessment, including the need for more rigorous guidance and training for qualitative assessors. **A related question relates to how best to combine qualitative and quantitative forms of assessment as specified by Commitment 2.** In which contexts might which indicators be responsibly used to support qualitative forms of assessment, and how might they be combined to provide a fair and responsible form of assessment?

Expected outputs from Working Groups on this topic might include solutions, toolboxes or sets of actionable recommendations to:

1. Enable assessors to define and/or understand research quality in a particular setting
2. Develop and/or pilot frameworks and practices relating to qualitative assessment

3. Combine qualitative and quantitative forms of assessment in specific contexts.

- **The assessment of team science, interdisciplinarity, intersectoral, and multisectoral aspects of work experience and roles outside academia**

This thematic area directly supports the goals of ARRA Commitment 1 by enabling fairer, more holistic recognition of modern scientific contributions across roles and sectors. Modern research increasingly relies on collaborative, interdisciplinary efforts that span sectors and roles beyond traditional academic boundaries. However, current academic assessment systems remain largely optimised for individual competition and linear academic trajectories, often failing to fairly recognize and credit these diverse contributions. **This thematic area of the 2nd Call for Working Groups aims to address these challenges by fostering actionable solutions that support researchers engaged in team science, interdisciplinary work, and multi-sectoral career paths.**

Working Groups are expected to deliver outputs that help shift evaluation practices toward inclusivity and fairness, such as:

1. Inventories and pilot projects exploring formal evaluation processes that foster effective interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration.
2. Toolkits and implementation scenarios to promote transparency in author contributions and support career development in collaborative research environments.
3. Recommendations for academic institutions to recognise collaborative work in hiring, promotion, and tenure decisions, moving beyond traditional individual-focused metrics.
4. Evaluation frameworks that acknowledge the diverse roles within large, cross-sectoral research teams and value varied career trajectories across academia, industry, public administration and entrepreneurship.
5. Case studies and resources that enhance the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers across different sectors, promoting mobility and diversity in research pathways.