



The University of Manchester: CoARA action plan

Introduction and institutional context

The University of Manchester is a large, research-intensive UK university with a long-standing commitment to advancing knowledge for the public good. Our research seeks to address some of the most pressing challenges facing society, supported by a diverse community of researchers, professional support staff and partners, and underpinned by a strong culture of responsibility, openness, and social impact. This scale, diversity and ambition provide both the opportunity and the responsibility to lead in shaping how research quality, contribution, and careers are recognised and assessed.

The Agreement on Advancing Research Assessment Reform

The university signed the [Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment](#) in March 2025 to publicly affirm our ongoing commitment to recognising and rewarding research on the basis of quality, contribution, and impact. The Agreement provides a shared international framework for reforming how research, researchers, and research organisations are assessed. It reinforces the university's values of supporting high-quality research, fostering a positive research culture, and ensuring that assessment practices are fair, responsible, and fit for the diverse ways in which research contributes to society.

Signing the Agreement aligns closely with the university's long-standing ethos and commitment to responsible research assessment. The university was one of the first UK signatories of the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment \(DORA\)](#), and is a financial supporter of DORA at 'sustainer' level, indicating our commitment to furthering the principles of research assessment reform. From 2026, our Institutional Lead for Open and Reproducible Research, Professor Andrew Stewart, is a member of the DORA Steering Committee. The university has well-established practices outlined in our academic promotions criteria and [Statement of Research Contribution Expectations](#) which focus on research quality and the centrality of peer review, as well as recognising impact beyond academia. Our [Office for Open Research](#) offers advice and training on the [responsible use of research metrics](#) and on embedding open research practices.

By joining the Agreement, the university makes a clear public statement of its willingness to contribute actively to sector-wide reform and to build on the substantial work already underway. The Agreement facilitates the university to work collectively with other research organisations, funders and sector bodies to shape the future of research assessment. Participation in the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment enables shared learning, mutual support and the exchange of best practice in an area of growing international importance.

From Manchester for the World

Our CoARA action plan (2026-31) dovetails with the launch of The University of Manchester's strategy to 2035, '[From Manchester for the world](#)'. This strategy sets out a vision of a **values-led, socially responsible, research-intensive university** that focuses its strengths on addressing the world's most pressing challenges through outstanding research, people, and partnerships.

The Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment provides an enabling framework that supports the university's strategy.

- **Supporting research excellence with impact:** Our CoARA action plan places research quality and impact at the centre of assessment, promotes assessment practices that recognise originality, rigour, openness and societal contribution, valuing impacts emerging over different timescales and across diverse disciplines.
- **Valuing people, careers and research culture:** *From Manchester for the world* emphasises the centrality of inclusive, supportive and rewarding research careers. Our action plan seeks to further recognise the full range of contributions and roles that underpin high-quality research. Aligning with our [Research Culture and Environment \(RCE\) Framework](#), our CoARA action plan supports assessment practices that acknowledge different career stages and trajectories, helping to create a positive, inclusive and responsible research culture.
- **Promoting openness, responsibility and integrity:** The university's strategy commits to being values-led and socially responsible, including leadership in open and responsible research. The steps in our action plan will continue to embed these principles by promoting openness, transparency, research integrity and responsible use of metrics as core elements of assessment.

CoARA action plan

Our action plan sets out 13 actions to further embed the commitments and spirit of the Agreement over the next five years. The actions codify and consolidate existing good practice undertaken across the university, while offering an opportunity to deepen and further embed our commitment to research assessment reform over the next five years. Our actions cover four main areas:

- **Policy, Governance, and Institutional Alignment:** The university will align policies, governance, and reporting with CoARA principles by updating key statements and policies, embedding research assessment reform within institutional frameworks, and reporting progress transparently through established committees.
- **Guidance, Tools, and Capability Building:** The university will support responsible research assessment by developing clear guidance and practical tools and training for researchers, including REF-related guidance and updated resources on authorship and metrics.
- **Embedding Responsible Assessment in Practice:** The university will integrate responsible assessment approaches into core processes such as recruitment, promotion, funding, and REF preparations, ensuring recognition of a broad and diverse range of research outputs.
- **Communications, Culture, and Community Building:** The university will promote cultural change by ensuring responsible communication of research performance, contextualising the use of rankings, and connecting research-on-research activity to support shared learning and evolutive assessment.

Internal governance

The development and delivery of the CoARA action plan is led jointly by The Office for Open Research and the Research Strategy Team. Oversight of the implementation of the actions is provided via the Open Research Strategy Group.

CoARA ACTION PLAN (2026-31)

Action	Action owner and contributors supporting delivery
Core commitments (1-4)	
Commitment 1: Recognise the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research <i>Purpose: This commitment will broaden recognition of the diverse practices, activities and careers in research, considering the specific nature of research disciplines and other research endeavours.</i>	
1.1 Refresh the university statement on the responsible use of metrics.	Office for Open Research Research Strategy Team Research Committee
1.2 Produce guidance on the responsible use of research metrics, detailing and explaining the metrics that can be used to inform research performance assessment, and how these should be used in conjunction with other information.	Office for Open Research Research Strategy Team Research Committee People Directorate Planning Office
1.3 Implement guidelines on the responsible use of metrics effectively and consistently by embedding them in relevant policies and guidelines. This will include in key documents, processes, and guidance such as the Statement of Research Contribution Expectations, recruitment, (including of PGRs), promotions, award criteria for internal competitions for research funding (including PGR studentships), guidance on improving researchers' visibility, and processes which assess one or more aspect of research performance e.g. the Research Review Exercise for output selection for the REF submission.	Office for Open Research Research Strategy Team Research Committee People Directorate Planning Office EDI Directorate
1.4 Research Indicators team (within the Office for Open Research) to continue to review and update guidance and training on the responsible use of metrics, to strengthen staff understanding of appropriate and inappropriate use. In particular, we will make clear that citation-based indicators can be unreliable proxies for individual research performance, and will avoid providing individual-level metrics (e.g., h-index) in support of researcher assessment or comparison, and ensure that ranking information of an applicants current institution should not be considered in	Office for Open Research

recruitment (including of PGRs). Any use of quantitative indicators will be responsible, contextualised, and complemented by qualitative and contribution-based approaches	
1.5 When the university's Publications Policy is due for update and renewal, ensure diverse ranges of contribution are reflected and acknowledged. This is to ensure that the policy is appropriately aligned with the CoARA principles relating to recognition of the full range of research outputs, activities, and practice.	Associate Director, Office for Open Research Head of Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity
1.6 Develop guidance to support REF UoA leads and RRE reviewers in reviewing and submitting a diverse range of research outputs in RRE and REF 2029.	Research Culture and Assessment Manager Faculty REF Managers UoA leads
1.7 Develop 'My Research Essentials' toolkit on recognition in authorship (e.g. CRediT), content developed via RAPIIDs 2 (Raising Academic Profiles and Implementing IDs) project	Office for Open Research
1.8 Ensure join up with outcomes of 'Research Software Project', part of the institutional Research Lifecycle Programme . This Project aims to develop a Research Software Policy for the University which will support development, sharing and visibility of software and code as first-class research outputs.	Associate Director, Office for Open Research
Commitment 2: Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators <i>Purpose: This commitment will enable the move towards research assessment criteria that focus primarily on quality, while recognising that responsible use of quantitative indicators can support assessment where meaningful and relevant, which is context dependent</i>	
2.1 Cross reference to actions 1.2 and 1.3 , with particular reference to RRE guidance (central and local reviewer guidance), promotions panels, and use of dashboards, emphasising the current integrated approach of narrative assessment looking at all areas of research and impact, supplemented with quantitative metrics where appropriate.	
Commitment 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 <i>Purpose: This commitment will reduce the dominance of a narrow set of quantitative journal- and publication-based metrics.</i>	
3.1 Cross reference to actions 1.2 and 1.3 , with particular reference to local promotions guidance.	
Commitment 4: Avoid the use of rankings of research organisations in research assessment <i>Purpose: This commitment will help avoid that metrics used by international rankings, which are inappropriate for assessing researchers, trickle down to research and researcher assessment. It will help the research community and research organisations regain the autonomy to shape assessment practices, rather than having to abide by criteria and methodologies set by external commercial companies. This could include retaining control over ranking methodologies and data.</i>	

4.1 Work with university Comms and Marketing team to develop guidance for comms staff to ensure our communication on UoM's performance in rankings is measured in tone and consistent with our commitment to CoARA.	Research Strategy Team Comms and Marketing
4.2 Adding text to university websites where ranking positions are mentioned to make clear we recognise their limitations. Ensure consideration of our CoARA commitments are included in the work of the Global Rankings Taskforce.	Research Strategy Team Comms and Marketing Office for Open Research
Supporting commitments (5-10)	
Commitment 5: Commit resources to reforming research assessment as is needed to achieve the organisational changes committed to	
No new actions. The university invests resources via the Office for Open Research which includes responsible metrics in its remit, as well as other professional support posts including the Research Culture and Assessment Manager, and training provision available to staff and students.	N/A
Commitment 6: Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes	
6.1 Cross reference to actions 1.2 and 1.3 , with particular reference to ensuring that when promotions guidance is due for renewal, the Research Culture and Assessment Manager is consulted to ensure this continues to recognise a diverse range of activities.	
Commitment 7: Raise awareness of research assessment reform and provide transparent communication, guidance, and training on assessment criteria and processes as well as their use	
7.1 Research assessment reform is an important aspect of the 'upholding responsible and ethical research' theme in our Research Culture and Environment Framework and will therefore be included in the regular communications around this work.	Research Strategy Team Comms and Marketing
7.2 Cross reference to actions 1.2 and 1.3 , with particular reference to reviewing the detail provided to all staff on how and why we use metrics in RRE and REF.	
7.3 Cross reference to action 6.2 re training provision on responsible research assessment and assessment reform.	
Commitment 8: Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition	
No specific actions, beyond committing to be active members of the Coalition and the Office for Open Research's ongoing work to share best practice and support peer-to-peer support, for example through the Open Research Skills Framework.	N/A

Commitment 9: Communicate progress made on adherence to the principles and implementation of the Commitments	
9.1 Progress and reflection on adherence to the principles and implementation of the Commitments to be reported annually to Open Research Strategy Group (ORSG) and Research Committee, and these updates to be cascaded widely across the university.	Associate Director, Office for Open Research Research Strategy Team
Commitment 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	
10.1 Undertake a mapping of pockets of ‘research-on-research’ activity underway across the university and explore opportunities to bring these staff together to share best practice and engage in evolutive assessment based on new evidence as it becomes available.	Research Strategy Team