

COARA Action Plan 2025-2029

Roadmap for Implementing the Agreement for Reforming Research Assessment at University of Ljubljana

Introduction

University of Ljubljana (Univerza v Ljubljani, UL) signed the COARA Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (ARRA) committing itself to continuously develop, reform and improve its research assessment ecosystem according to the principles of this Agreement and to foster diversity, impact and quality of research and research careers respecting the highest standards of research ethics and integrity. With this COARA Action plan UL is defining the main goals, challenges and commitments that will be implemented in the period of 2025 to 2029 to meet the agreement's core principles.

Research at University of Ljubljana

University of Ljubljana is the oldest, largest, and internationally best-ranked university in Slovenia. The university was founded in 1919 and encompasses 23 faculties, 3 art academies, and 4 associated members. It covers all scientific fields – natural sciences, engineering, social studies, humanities and arts. The University of Ljubljana is renowned for its quality social and natural sciences and technical study programmes as well as art programmes. In terms of the number of employees, UL ranks as medium-sized HEI and employs more than 6.800 employees, including around 4.600 academic staff.

UL is very active in national and international R&D programmes and creates almost half of the research results of Slovenia cooperating yearly in about 210 national research programmes, 370 national and 650 European and international research projects.

UL provides infrastructural support to research via the infrastructure program of University of Ljubljana »Network of Research and Infrastructural Centres UL (MRIC UL)« that includes 31 infrastructural centres within 14 member faculties of UL. The infrastructure program plays an important role in supporting UL participation in international infrastructure projects of the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI). All research infrastructure is open also to researchers outside UL on equal terms.

From 2008 UL is committed to respecting the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for Recruitment of Researchers, which led to the award of the “HR Excellence in Research” in 2013. Since then UL implemented Human Resources Strategy for Teachers and Researchers and its actions plans through which it reinforced its efforts to improve the transparent recruitment in accordance with the principles of OTM-R, strived for equal working conditions for teachers and researchers and inclusive, open and diversified career system, as well as introduced different measures for increasing the quality and integrity of research.

To protect the university intellectual property developed through the public financed research projects and to improve the technology and knowledge transfer from the university to the industry and society, a central university Technology Transfer Office was established in 2007. University Incubator and Institute for Innovation and Development and the Slovenian Innovation Hub are three other units in which UL supports innovation, development and strives to increase the economic and social impact of research and innovation in different ways.

The UL cooperates with organizations from economy and service in public and private sector, with state organizations, local communities, and civil society. With this cooperation UL accelerates the use of own research and educational achievements and contributes to the social development. With active responses to events in the environment represents the critical conscience of the society.

UL has an active membership in different European and international networks and alliances and its development and communication actions regarding the COARA principles and action plan will be shared and conducted within those networks' platforms and professional groups as well as within the Coalition.

Prioritized areas of reforming research assessment criteria

Based on the guiding principles of:

- Research quality and impact
- Ethics and integrity
- Diversity, inclusiveness and collaboration
- Freedom of scientific research
- Respect of the autonomy of organisation
- Open data and infrastructure

the UL Roadmap 2025-2029 focuses on five ambitions:

Research Assessment based on Qualitative Evaluation and Peer Review

Up to 2022 the research at UL was funded only from national and international competitive calls. Since 2022 when the new Scientific Research and Innovation Activity Act (ZZrID) was introduced in Slovenia, UL is receiving the stable research funding for research programs, doctoral researchers and for the development of new research initiatives. Since 2023 on UL started to develop its own internal pilot methodology for assessing research programs and researchers for the purpose of allocating the funding internally and this methodology already respected the COARA principle to evaluate research programmes on qualitative peer-review with the responsible use of quantitative indicators. The pilot methodology will be further updated yearly based on the previous experiences.

Acknowledge More Varied Research Outputs in Research Careers by allowing and recognizing a broader spectrum of research outputs and activities for dissemination, communication and engagement in recruitment of researchers and career progression.

One area we still need to implement the changes are habilitation criteria. Although in principle, assessment during habilitation procedure should be also qualitative in addition to quantitative criteria, the assessors often rely too much on quantitative indicators. Therefore, we are preparing a reform of habilitation procedure by uncoupling quantitative and qualitative assessments with major impact of qualitative assessment. We already have a draft plan for this reform, which will start to implement in 2025 and should be fully implemented in 2026. UL will incorporate the new criteria and methodologies in its HRS4R process for the development of improved and more transparent recruitment process based on OTM-R principles.

Stimulating Open Science Practices of UL researchers.

Open science is included in the legal framework of the University of Ljubljana as follows: The statutes of UL; Strategy of UL 2022-2027; Digital strategy of UL 2024-2027; Rules on stable funding of UL scientific research activities; Rules on doctoral studies at UL. Infrastructure for open science at UL consists of: Repository of UL; Social Science Data Archives; CLARIN.SI.

56 scientific journals are published at UL as open access journals, as well as the majority of scientific monographs. APC vouchers in 12 Read-and-Publish agreements with scientific publishers can be used by UL-affiliated researchers. To support management of research data for FAIR and as open as possible, UL has employed five data stewards with PhD degrees and established a network for RDM support, consisting also of contact persons at faculties where stewards are not employed. As part project activities, UL will carry out other activities as well to align its processes with the principles of open science. A lot of attention is given to train researchers and PhD students on different aspects of open science.

Awareness Raising of Research Assessment reform

UL is very decentralized university, and all the processes are all the time communicated with the academic community at UL member faculties and with the UL formal bodies. The implementation of the reform process of

research assessment will require a highest involvement of the academic community at all levels from the start. UL will involve leads and researchers from different disciplines and stages in the development of reform through different steps of the process.

Skills Development for Early Career Researchers

UL will pay a special attention to educate and train the new generation of early career researchers with the COARA principles and new models of research assessment.

The UL Roadmap for Implementing the Agreement for Reforming Research Assessment will follow the steps of

- 1) reviewing the internal assessment processes and methodologies;
- 2) defining the gaps and practices that are not in-line with COARA principles;
- 3) developing new tools, methodologies and criteria;
- 4) accepting and confirming reformed methodologies at the internal formal bodies (Committees, Senate);
- 5) implementing new tools and methodologies.

Core Commitments and their implementation

UL action plan starts from the beginning of 2025 and lasts until the end of 2029. The table below reflects UL roadmap and time plan according to the COARA action Plan Guidelines.

Phase	Reflection / Commitment	Roadmap with aims and goals	Time plan
Starting phase	Reflect on your strategy and change approach	<p>UL approach to assessment reform follows the guiding principles of: Research quality and impact, Ethics and integrity, Diversity, inclusiveness and collaboration, Freedom of scientific research, Respect of the autonomy of organisation, Open data and infrastructure.</p> <p>To overlook and lead the process of reviewing its internal assessment processes and implementing COARA principles and tools the Assessment Policy Committee will be established in cooperation with different departments (Rector's office, HR, research, quality and strategic management, open science, communications).</p>	2025-2026
	Involve your institutional community in the change process	<p>COARA principles and action plan will be communicated with Senat's committees, deans and heads of departments, researchers at different levels and support staff at their meetings. All internal stakeholders are involved in the process through the meetings and focus groups.</p> <p>UL will also actively participate with the Slovene branch of COARA activities.</p>	2025-2026
	Identify key Challenges to address	<p>UL research assessment needs to be aligned with the assessment of the national research agency and their quantitative and qualitative criteria for allocating the funding so UL will cooperate closely with the national funding agency.</p> <p>Some resistance from researchers who are used on quantitative assessment.</p>	2025-2028

<p>Operational action plan for years 2025- 2029</p> <p>CoARA Core Commitments listed 1-10</p>	1. Recognise the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research	UL will change the habilitation procedures and criteria for progression with an emphasis on qualitative evaluation and acknowledging more varied research outputs HR recruitment procedures and criteria for the recruitment will be updated and remodelled according to COARA principles based more on qualitative criteria and varies research outputs and experiences	2025-2027
	2. Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators	The UL already implemented Methodology for assessing research and researchers for the purpose of allocating the funding internally is predominantly based on peer review and will be further updated every year. Improved and responsible metrics will be introduced into the assessment system with lesser impact on final score than qualitative assessment.	2025-2029
	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	In internal research assessment the JIF and h-index are not of essential importance, but national research assessment system and national research agency still uses some of the quantitative criterial for assessing the research applications.	N/A
	4. Avoid the use of rankings of research organisations in research assessment	We do not apply rankings of research organisations in research assessment.	N/A
	5. Commit resources to reforming research assessment as is needed to achieve the organisational changes committed to	A large number of human resources will be activated in the reform process. Besides the Assessment Policy Committee the deans, Senate's committees (Committee for Research and Development, Habilitation Committee) and support offices (research, HR, legal, quality and strategic management, PR, knowledge transfer, artistic activity) will participate in activities for organisation changes.	2025-2029

CoARA Core Commitments listed 1-10	6. Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes 6.1 CRITERIA FOR UNITS AND INSTITUTIONS With the direct involvement of research organisations and researchers at all career stages, review and develop criteria for assessing research units and research performing organisations, while promoting interoperability 6.2 CRITERIA FOR PROJECTS AND RESEARCHERS With the direct involvement of researchers at all career stages, review and develop criteria, tools and processes for the assessment of research projects, research teams and researchers that are adapted to their context of application	UL will closely cooperate with the national research agency in reforming the assessment of research performing organisations UL will review its internal assessment processes, criteria and tools and update existing and develop new assessment approaches with accordance with COARA principles together with the researchers from different disciplines and at different career stages	2025-2028 2025-2028
	7. Raise awareness of research assessment reform and provide transparent communication, guidance, and training on assessment criteria and processes as well as their use	A special part of UL webpage will be dedicated to the COARA Action plan and assessment reform. The COARA Communication Toolkit will be shared with our Communication department. To inform the academic and non-academic community about the research assessment reform we will also use internal newsletter "e-Univerzitetnik" and the social media Facebook and LinkedIn. There will be guidance available to assessment panels and members of the committees and involved researchers	2025-2029
	8. Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition	UL will cooperate, exchange practices and experiences, and foster debate in national assessment consortia and in European alliances (ex. EUTOPIA) or associations (ex. The GUILD) as well as with the Coalition	2025-2029
	9. Communicate progress made on adherence to the Principles and implementation of the Commitments	We will inform the internal academic and non-academic community about the progress through the internal communication channels (newsletter, intranet) and external national and international community through the webpage.	2025-2029

	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	The evaluation of the new criteria, practices and tools will be done using the SCOPE framework for Research Evaluation	2028 - 2029
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