

POLICY BRIEF

# FROM PRINCIPLE TO PRACTICE IN REFORMING RESEARCH ASSESSMENT

CONCLUSIONS FROM THE DANISH EU PRESIDENCY  
HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON REFORMING RESEARCH  
ASSESSMENT, COPENHAGEN 3-4 DECEMBER 2025

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AALBORG  
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<https://www.cerra.aau.dk>

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<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Conference Outcomes</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Key Themes from Panels</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Research Assessment as a Driver for Change</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Research on Research Assessment</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Leadership for Change</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Balancing Competition with Collaboration</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Global Values Underpinning Research Assessment</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Promising Practices</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Outlook and Spin-off Activities</b>	<b>24</b>

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Danish EU Presidency High-Level Conference on Reforming Research Assessment (CeRRA 2025) marked a shift from consensus to coordinated implementation of research assessment reform in Europe. With over 300 participants from 40 countries, the conference underscored that the key challenge is no longer defining principles but operationalising them across diverse institutional, national, and disciplinary contexts.



*“What is truly broken is not the scientific culture, but the incentive structures surrounding it and the culture they create.”  
Cristina Egelund, Danish Minister for Higher Education and Science (December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2025)*

Reforming research assessment has become a defining element of the European Research Area (ERA) policy agenda. The conference confirmed the global call for responsible assessment, while emphasising the need for faster progress, measurable outcomes, and stronger policy alignment between the European Commission, Member States, and the research community.

## Strategic priorities emerging from the conference

1. **Leadership and coordination.** Effective reform requires leadership commitment and multi-level governance. Member States are encouraged to establish national steering groups and to align The Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) and European Research Area (ERA) policy actions to ensure consistency and mutual recognition of new assessment models.

2. **Implementation at scale.** Member States, universities, and funders must move from pilot projects to systemic change. The next phase requires clear organisational mandates, timelines, and measurable indicators for reform progress and impact.
3. **Alignment of incentives with EU policy goals.** Assessment systems should reward Open Science, collaboration and societal impact – key enablers of innovation, competitiveness, and trust. The European Commission is expected to integrate assessment reform into funding frameworks, legislation, and the ERA monitoring system.
4. **Learning and monitoring.** Funders and universities must invest in policy evaluation and monitoring to assess behavioural and cultural change, identify unintended consequences, and build a shared evidence base for reform.
5. **Connect European and global reform agendas.** The ERA should promote dialogue with global partners to ensure interoperability of research assessment systems, uphold academic freedom and integrity, and strengthen Europe’s position in shaping international norms.

## Looking ahead

Over the next 24 months, Europe faces a window of opportunity to consolidate progress. The forthcoming ERA Act, together with Horizon Europe’s successor framework, can embed reform principles into the legal and financial architecture of European research policy. CoARA serves as a key implementation vehicle – linking political ambition with institutional practice. Success will depend on credible monitoring, institutional commitment, and sustained support from organisational change.

Successful science is dependent on strong international collaborations to address global challenges and achieve scientific breakthroughs. However, in the current geopolitical climate, increasing attention is directed towards research security. It is critical to ensure that researchers share knowledge openly, safely, and responsibly. Enforcing responsible sharing of findings and methods is a condition for global collaboration. Reforms of research assessments are crucial for establishing shared values and guidance to enable continued global collaboration as a driver for scientific progress and mutual trust.<sup>1</sup>

As Mario Draghi highlighted in his report to the European Commission, research and innovation are essential for driving Europe’s growth.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the EU must protect research that fosters peace, democracy, and enlightenment. One concern in the current policy discussions is that focusing too narrowly on immediate priorities risks losing sight of the broader principles that underpin European society. As argued by Enrico Letta, Europe should embrace a “fifth freedom” - the free movement of knowledge – to strengthen collaboration and ensure that innovation serves society rather than narrow competition.<sup>3</sup>

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1 <https://www.oecd.org/en/blogs/2025/11/what-is-research-security-and-why-does-it-matter-for-global-science.html>

2 Draghi, M. (2024). The Future of European Competitiveness—A Competitiveness Strategy for Europe. [https://commission.europa.eu/document/97e481fd-2dc3-412d-be4c-f152a8232961\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/document/97e481fd-2dc3-412d-be4c-f152a8232961_en)

3 Letta, E. (2024). Much More Than a Market: A Report on the Future of the Single Market. European Commission.. Brussels.

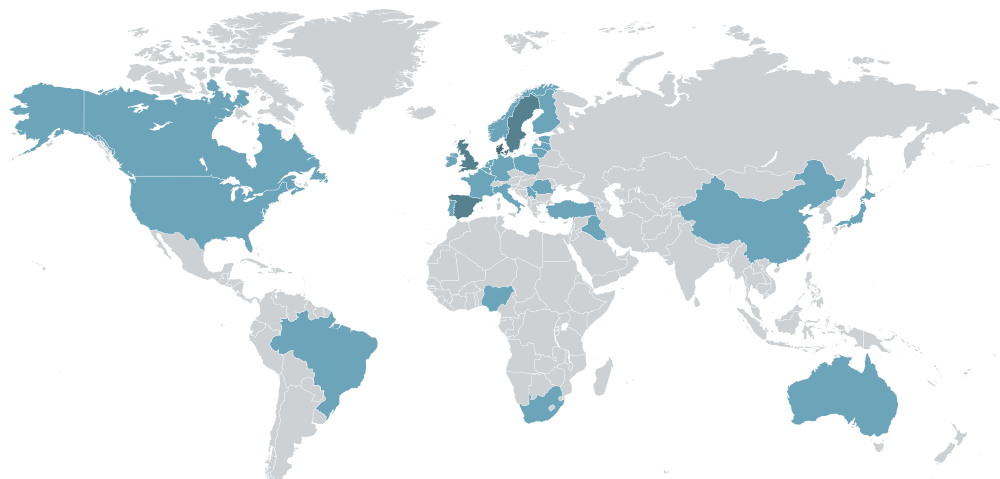
Consequently, reforming how research is assessed is central to Europe’s ability to foster excellence, trust, and societal relevance in science. CeRRA 2025 demonstrated that the momentum is strong – but that sustained political leadership is now essential to turn shared commitments into structural change.

The organising team would like to thank all participants, speakers, and sponsors at the conference. We are grateful to the following colleagues for comments and suggestions to this Policy Brief: Josephine Bøgen Theilgaard (AAU), Olivia Karlsson Hansen (AAU), Rita Morais (EUA), Francesca Bucci (LERU), Giovanna Lima (DORA), Kelly Cobey (DORA), Ginny Barbour (DORA), Rebecca Lawrence (DORA), James Morris (Science Europe), Karen Skytte Larsen (Villum Foundation), Karen Stroobants (CoARA), Mattias Björnmalm (CESAER), and Lisbet Crone (DFF).

## Facts about CeRRA 2025

#CeRRA2025 on social media	
Posts	126
Likes	5053
Comments	133
Reposts	415
Impressions	40.000

## Geolocation for Participants at the Conference



Australia	1	Finland	6	Japan	1	Serbia	1
Austria	2	France	10	Latvia	2	Slovenia	1
Belgium	14	Georgia	1	Lithuania	1	South Africa	3
Brazil	1	Germany	12	Luxembourg	1	Spain	17
Canada	9	Greece	1	Netherlands	13	Sweden	22
China	1	Hungary	4	Nigeria	1	Switzerland	5
Croatia	1	India	1	Norway	14	Türkiye	1
Czechia	3	Iraq	1	Poland	3	United Kingdom	20
Denmark	108	Ireland	7	Portugal	2	USA	8
Estonia	1	Italy	5	Romania	4		

## CeRRA International Stakeholder Committee

Professor David Budtz Pedersen, Aalborg University (chair)

Mr. Poul Meier Melchiorson, Senior Consultant, Aalborg University Library

Dr. Kathrine Bjerg Bennike, Special Consultant, Aalborg University Library

Dr. James Morris, Senior Policy Officer, Science Europe

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Ms. Karen Skytte Larsen, Head of Programme, Villum Foundation

Ms. Lisbet Crone, Special Advisor, Independent Research Fund Denmark

Associate Professor Bertil Dorch, Library Director, The University Library of Southern Denmark

Dr. Karen Stroobants, Vice-Chair, CoARA

Dr. Erzsébet Tóth-Czifra, Program Manager, CoARA

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Dr. Rebecca Lawrence, Vice-Chair, DORA

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Dr. Rita Morais, Adviser for Research & Innovation, EUA

Ms. Silvia Gomez Recio, Secretary General, YERUN

Dr. Elwin Reimink, Data and Impact Analysis Adviser, COST Association

# BACKGROUND

At the High-Level Conference on Reforming Research Assessment (CeRRA) on 3-4 December 2025 in Copenhagen, the international community of research funding and research-performing organisations met to discuss leadership and recent progress in research assessment. The conference featured 300 delegates from 40 countries, and some 290 online participants.

Since 2022, the adoption of the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (ARRA) has served as a common framework for stimulating reforms of research assessment in Europe. Research assessment is a central steering mechanism of the European Research Area (ERA). What is assessed and rewarded determines researchers' behaviour, culture, institutional priorities, and ultimately the quality, openness, and impact of research. A strong evidence base shows that continued reliance on narrow quantitative indicators (such as publications, journal prestige, and citation metrics) undermines EU objectives: scientific excellence, open science, attractive research careers, interdisciplinary collaboration, and societal impact.<sup>4</sup>

Europe has become a global leader in responsible research assessment reform. Initiatives such as the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) and Science Europe's work on research cultures demonstrate both political commitment and practical implementation. The CeRRA 2025 conference confirmed clear consensus on key challenges and promising practices. The question is no longer *whether* to reform research assessment, but how to *embed and scale reform* across ERA.

Driven by an ambition to bridge the academic community and the community of policymakers and funding agencies, the CeRRA conference ignited a new pan-European and global dialogue on rethinking research assessment and promoting inclusive and collaborative research cultures. The key message from the conference was that various initiatives and programmes are underway in the EU and beyond with varying degrees of maturity and commitments. Reforming research assessment is high on the organisational agenda among research funding organisations and research-performing organisations.<sup>5</sup>

Among other factors, implementation should focus on the following key themes as highlighted by CeRRA participants and speakers:

1. **Accelerating research assessment reform** as part of a broader EU policy lever to shape research practices, meet societal expectations, and create equitable research careers based on a systemic commitment to open science, collaboration, and integrity. Delivering innovation and societal impact needs to be an integral part of assessment.
2. **Coordination of national systems of research and innovation** to enable common framework conditions in the EU and beyond that support greater researcher mobility, transfer of knowledge, valorisation, and more sustainable research cultures.

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4 Pedersen, D.B. (2025). Great science happens in great teams – research assessments must try to capture that. *Nature* 648, 8 (2025) [doi.org/10.1038/d41586-025-03910-y](https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-025-03910-y)

5 Pedersen et al. (2025). Emerging Practices in Research Assessment: [Cross-Case Analysis of 10 International Funders, Aalborg University. 10.54337/aau.epra2025](https://www.aalborgu.dk/10.54337/aau.epra2025)

3. **Focusing reforms on implementation** plans and working models, e.g., models of assessment that include research culture, environment, people, and skills, and which foster recognition of both individual and collaborative successes and contributions.
4. **Using EU funding instruments and legislation** to incentivise and monitor reform, creating leverage for regions and institutions to implement and adopt CoARA commitments in responsible assessment policies and practices locally (e.g., incentivising the use of narrative CVs, recognizing diverse contributions, emphasising team efforts, and highlighting diversity and equity in hiring and promoting).<sup>6</sup>
5. **Monitoring success and building promising practices** are key to the transition towards implementation of research assessment reforms, learning from other organisations, utilising the broad knowledge pool of “research on research”, and creating a European dashboard of tools, models, and frameworks for responsible research assessment.<sup>7</sup>

The CeRRA Presidency Conference reconfirmed that the ways in which research-performing organisations and funding agencies assess research have fundamental consequences for the ability of researchers to deliver on their social contract and generate benefits to society. Alignment of incentives and rewards are crucial tools for developing a future-proof scientific ecosystem capable of contributing to innovation, security, and democracy. In addition, CeRRA highlighted that a thriving research culture in which members of the research community experience a fair balance between tasks, efforts, and rewards is essential for healthy knowledge environments.

Building on previous international initiatives and frameworks to advance research assessment reform, such as the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA), San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (2013), the Leiden Manifesto (2015), and the Hong Kong Principles (2019), the CeRRA conference brought together key stakeholders across academia, government, funding, and industry to discuss assumptions, models, and leadership for change.

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6 CoARA Core Commitments: <https://www.coara.org/agreement/the-commitments/>

7 Emerging compliance frameworks include National Action Plans for CoARA National Chapters, and institutional Action Plans for institutional CoARA members. Such Action Plans are made publicly available, and their implementation should be encouraged and monitored by common standards.

# CONFERENCE OUTCOMES



The conference focused on European as well as global reforms of research assessment and provided specific examples of institutional policies and practical examples of peer learning and policy harmonisation. Across the conference, the different tracks provided various concrete examples of methodologies and frameworks for assessing and rewarding research outputs, contributions, capacities, and skills.

Conference delegates agreed that the European Commission and Member States have a special role to play in putting research assessment at the heart of the political agenda for a renewed and integrated ERA.

In preparation of the 10<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme for Research and Innovation and in anticipation of the ERA Act, the European Commission and Member States are committed to building an overarching legislative layer to promote new and better framework conditions for research and innovation in Europe. The Commission plans to adopt the European Research Area (ERA) Act in 2026, as announced in the Competitiveness Compass for the EU. This initiative comes as a response to longstanding challenges in the EU's research and innovation ecosystem, including fragmented regulatory frameworks, uneven R&D investment, and barriers to knowledge sharing and careers. The process towards an ERA Act builds on the progress made through the ERA Policy Agendas, and will set up four overall milestones:

- **Investment target:** The ERA Act is expected to focus on national commitments to reach a 3% R&D investment target relative to GDP.
- **Alignment of policies:** Enhanced coordination of investments and policies will be promoted between the EU and Member States.

- **Research framework improvements:** The initiative aims to improve conditions for researchers by improving careers, mobility, and open science.
- **Safeguarding values:** ERA Act seeks to uphold fundamental values, including scientific freedom, ethics, integrity, gender equality, and equal opportunities.

In addition to the ERA Act, reforming research assessment in EU is mentioned as a key element of the existing ERA Actions under the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027 including: (1) enabling open science, strengthening research infrastructures, gender equality, research careers, **assessment systems**, knowledge valorisation, global engagement; (2) creating equity in open science, (3) advancing the European Science-for-Policy ecosystem, (4) facilitating and accelerating the responsible use of AI in science, (5) enhancing research security, and (6) accelerating R&I investments for Europe's industrial transformation and competitive sustainability.

CeRRA succeeded in supporting these aims by creating increased awareness and engagement with respect to national and transnational research assessment practices and reforms and by promoting a pan-European and global dialogue among policymakers, funders, R&I experts, and scientific institutions. The aim of the conference was to highlight and celebrate progress made on implementation of the CoARA Commitments, supporting, mapping, and analysing emerging assessment frameworks and promising practices, as well as identifying remaining gaps and key measures still needed for cultural change at the institutional, national, and transnational level.<sup>8</sup>

In doing so, the CeRRA Presidency Conference concluded that:

- (1) Policymakers and representatives from diverse scientific institutions and communities need to work together to stress global values underpinning research assessment, including a call to strengthen autonomy, integrity, and public-interest science.
- (2) European and global policymakers need to coordinate and align mechanisms for evaluating researchers and researchers to promote high-quality and impactful knowledge to the benefit of society.
- (3) Open and collaborative science combined with sustainable research careers and recognition of diverse contributions and skills will create better solutions and more innovative scientific outputs.
- (4) Investment in monitoring of progress and collection of evidence (metascience) is needed to navigate an increasingly complex landscape of actors and practices enabling policy evaluation and impact assessment of reforms.

As part of these conclusions, it is crucial to consider how and to what extent existing practices of research assessment and evaluation are fit for purpose and capable of sustaining and accelerating European and international leadership in science and technology.

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8 Pedersen et al. (2025). Emerging Practices in Research Assessment: Cross-Case Analysis of 10 International Funders. Aalborg University. [10.54337/aau.epra2025](https://doi.org/10.54337/aau.epra2025)



## KEY THEMES FROM PANELS

The conference addressed five topics with the purpose of capturing and addressing the complexities of the reform process and present solutions and examples of best practices for moving from policy to practice by operationalising concrete mechanisms and tools at the regional and institutional level.

### **Research Assessment as a Driver for Change**

In the Opening Plenary Panel, the speakers took stock of current and future dimensions of research assessment to boost the quality and impact of research and innovation. Urgent imperatives included the need for incentives that reward a diversity of contributions – from production to transmission and implementation of knowledge and innovation – by equipping individual researchers, universities, and funding agencies with the necessary infrastructures and frameworks. Speakers represented a range of voices from academia and the science funding ecosystem. The panel explored how evolving expectations of European and global researchers play an active role in securing competitiveness, democratic values, and scientific autonomy. The speakers addressed these topics by emphasising the current momentum for reforming research assessment – through CoARA, DORA, national frameworks, and ERA policies. Speakers addressed the current need for building incentive structures that value diversity as an integrated part of scientific excellence. These reflections are essential for the inclusion of research assessment reform in the coming ERA Act, including how to ensure that the Act achieves this ambition.

## Key observations from the session

The panel discussed the need for diversification of funding instruments and career trajectories. Not all funding instruments need to encourage the same type of research and innovation. Excellence and research culture often mean something different in different contexts and needs to be nurtured locally and integrated with the mission statement and purpose of the individual institution. One size does not fit all. All panel members agreed that reforms are taking place across Europe and worldwide. It is important to have global conversations and support progress while acknowledging local differences and cultures. Autonomy of nations, institutions, and funders are not an obstacle to common standards or coordination but rather vehicles that enable these to place focus on their particular key areas and priorities.

From the perspective of individual scholars, it is important to stress that not everyone should perform equally well on all parameters: for early-career researchers it poses great personal challenges to perform on traditional parameters of success while at the same time engaging in innovation, networking, collaboration, and dissemination. Several panel members mentioned that innovation needs to play a more significant role in assessment and rewards, while research-performing organisations and funding agencies are moving forward to deliver on competitiveness and security. It was generally noted that diversification of rewards and recognition of contributions should not lead to an 'expectation explosion' in which scholars are asked to deliver on more performance indicators. CoARA includes an emphasis on portfolio based assessment, which should lead to more context-sensitive understanding of the research field and research agenda under review. This, together with an increased focus on teams (and team assessment), ideally will highlight different competences, contributions and strengths across the research environment.<sup>9</sup>



9 Pedersen, D.B. (2025). Put research culture at the heart of assessments. *Nature* 648, 8 (2025) <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-025-03910-y>

## Research on Research Assessment

Research that focuses on research assessment, indicators, and drivers of cultural and behavioural change is crucial for providing evidence-informed learning and documentation of reform processes. The session took stock of progress and promising practices based on selected research projects. More specifically, the session presented approaches to research assessment and their impact on academic practices and career development. To support cultural change, research on research studies is needed to analyse researchers' attitudes, behaviours, publication practices, impact, and collaborative abilities. The session provided an overview of evidence relating to assessment reforms. By providing these insights and engaging in conversations and discussions on the topic, the session mapped research assessment activities that are tested, developed and implemented through on-going projects.

### Key observations from the session

The panel explored how research assessment and research culture are deeply interconnected, emphasising that assessment practices shape the values and behaviours within the research ecosystem. The speakers stressed that current systems often rely heavily on quantitative indicators and the inclusion of more qualitative indicators at times risks being a “checkbox” exercise; undermining quality, interdisciplinarity, and societal relevance. The speakers noted that simplistic assumptions in evaluation perpetuate inequalities, such as the Matthew effect, language bias, and discrimination against non-mainstream topics. These challenges are compounded by the fact that research operates globally while policies and assessments remain largely national, creating systemic disparities.

The panel agreed that moving beyond metrics is essential. They discussed the need for complementary and contextual measures that can drive cultural change rather than reinforce existing norms. Concrete examples from Japan on co-creation and democratic models, involving researchers at all career stages, were presented as promising approaches to build trust and engagement. The discussion stressed the importance of clear communication and genuine involvement around openness, data sharing, and knowledge security, particularly considering rapid changes such as AI. Assessment, they argued, should act as a catalyst for better research rather than an end in itself, aligning with global ethical frameworks and drawing on evidence from research on research to inform reforms.

The panel emphasized shifting the focus from volume to outcomes and usefulness, prioritising integrity, diversity, and equity. Narrative CVs were highlighted as tools to reflect diverse contributions and foster inclusivity. Participants also underscored the role of research in serving society, noting that evaluation systems should support knowledge translation and strengthen the science-to-policy interface. This was exemplified by the argument that large organisations like the UN and WHO rely on research to inform decision-making and that research on research is a key tool in this ecosystem. Ultimately, the panel stressed the importance of ensuring that reforms are grounded in evidence as well as being responsive to the evolving global landscape.



## Leadership for Change

Leadership is a precondition for reforms to gain momentum and create genuine cultural change. Highlighting the need for integrity, rigor, quality, and impact in science, the panel placed focus on the institutions that work on developing and implementing new indicators and evaluation frameworks. The session promoted peer learning and inspiration to embark on similar exercises and experiments at the local and national levels. A key element in developing and implementing new models and tools for evaluation is to lead by example and to accept initial mistakes and to consider these part of the learning exercise to reach a better end-goal. Resultingly, institutional leadership and leading by example were the guiding principles for the session.

### **Key observations from the session**

The panellists underscored the complexity of moving from developing a new framework or policy to achieving effective implementation. They highlighted that challenges arise at both management and individual levels, and that these challenges vary across organisations. The panel also discussed the role of reluctance to change—ranging from uncertainty about whether a new framework will work, to concerns about who will benefit, the scale of required behavioural changes, and the additional workload associated with transition. The panel offered concrete examples of these tensions. Hence, the panel described examples of how some individuals at their institutions considered proposed reforms too ambitious, while others viewed them as insufficient, creating friction between those advocating for substantial change and those who are more comfortable with existing systems.

The discussion also explored approaches to enabling change within organisations and at the global level, including through initiatives such as DORA and CoARA. These discussions further highlighted how Open Science is an interconnected part of the reform process, but that this in itself can be a complex goal to pursue. In particular, the panel discussed whether reforms should be driven top-down or bottom-up. There was broad agreement among panellists and participants that meaningful reforms require a combination of both approaches. However,

all emphasised that effective leadership is essential to ensure that change is coherent, sustained, and implemented across all levels of the organisation. Finally, the panel noted that tools, incentives, and assessment practices must be recognisable and compatible at the international level for reforms to succeed. Leadership must therefore ensure that new approaches support skills and practices that are transferable across borders.



## Balancing Competition with Collaboration

In today's knowledge economies, competition serves as a key driver for new inventions and scientific breakthroughs. Researchers are competing for funding. Universities are competing for visibility and impact. Countries compete for talent. However, healthy competition requires standardised principles and openness for collaboration. While competitive behaviours continue to drive scientific breakthroughs, collaboration and networks based on trust and inclusion are necessary components for the advancement of scientific creativity, innovation, and excellence. Speakers addressed the balance between competition and collaboration as a cornerstone of healthy, connected scientific institutions. As part of the conversations, speakers discussed how competition among some of the major geopolitical regions has led to a race in science and technology, for instance in AI, quantum, and security. The global emphasis on open collaboration and knowledge sharing is increasingly challenged by new patterns of trusted partnerships and regional collaboration. Addressing how universities, funders, and researchers navigate in a world of increasing competition while staying collaborative in their own practice and strategy, is essential for progress. In the discussion, speakers addressed how to avoid a situation in which competition is harming collaboration. Instead, the session concluded that the EU and global partners should strike a balance between "healthy competition" and collaboration.

### Key observations from the session

Among the panelists there was a shared acknowledgement that trust, inclusion, and

collegiality are preconditions for excellence and scientific breakthroughs. Nevertheless, there are few rewards structures for collaboration. Emphasis is most often placed on competition and individual rewards. The panel agreed on the need for broadening what is valued in science and assessment alongside publications, i.e. team science, diversity in outputs, and societal impact. One of the panellists referred to a statement made by a researcher and put it like this: "I should never again have to choose between what is good for science versus what is good for my career".<sup>10</sup>

Although the panel identified an emerging agreement on the importance of fostering scientific collaboration and advancing science for the public interest, panellists also expressed concerns about the priorities by national research ministries. The logic of high-level policymaking is still today captured by a competitive market model in which countries compete for wealth among other countries, and in which policy areas compete with each other for funding. In this hyper-competitive environment, the logic of scientific collaboration and openness can be hard to articulate. Thus, creating stronger narratives and translating the value of open, collaborative research into policy evidence is – according to the panel – a key priority. Supporting collaboration as a vehicle for scientific breakthroughs and innovation necessitates a clear and concise evidence base. Moving the dialogue forward on sustaining and fostering global collaboration and encouraging healthy competition requires engaging with the issue at the micro, meso, and macro levels. As each level encompasses different actors, differentiated approaches are necessary to achieve successful and lasting change.



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10 Bonn NA, Pinxten W (2020). Advancing science or advancing careers? Researchers' opinions on success indicators. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.06.22.165654>

## Global Values Underpinning Research Assessment

Discussions on reforming research assessment have gained significant momentum on the global scene. Worldwide, research-performing organisations and funding agencies have addressed the need for reform of rewards and recognition. In Europe, the CoARA has captured and embodied the call for inclusive and responsible assessment. However, for reforms to be impactful, they need to be based in a global conversation on foundational values and promising practices. The design and direction of research careers, incentives, rewards, and metrics are highly co-dependent across countries and regions. Hence, the closing plenary panel offered a platform to discuss – and challenge – the idea of transferable credentials and rewards, and the values underpinning global reforms. The closing panel featured representatives from North America, Europe, Asia, and Latin America to discuss emerging global approaches to research assessment including the role of global funding agencies in creating inclusive and responsible global assessment cultures.



### Key observations

Speakers addressed how the global landscape is shaped by different academic traditions, incentives, and policy pressures resulting in diverging approaches to how research quality and impact are defined. As reform efforts become increasingly global through initiatives like DORA, CoARA, and the UNESCO's Open Science Framework, there is a need to find the right balance between global alignment and local autonomy. The panel discussed if the goal is a truly equitable research ecosystem, mobility, and recognition across borders. Or to what extent metrics, tenure systems, and notions of excellence remain deeply entrenched in national or institutional cultures. There is a need to make research credentials and reward structures genuinely transferable, without reinforcing existing hierarchies between regions and institutions.

A key perspective in this discussion is the tension between the internationalisation of science and the continued national anchoring of research-performing organisations. On the one hand, scientific knowledge production is becoming more global, which means that research funding increasingly moves beyond national borders. On the other hand, research-performing organisations remain embedded in nationally defined evaluation and funding frameworks. This perspective highlights a structural misalignment that may limit Europe's ability to fully leverage its integrated research landscape and to advance more coherent reforms in research assessment.



## PROMISING PRACTICES

It was mentioned several times during the CeRRA conference that European and global universities, funders, and research organisations are experiencing a shared call for action towards accelerating reforms of research assessment. In the following sections, practical examples of reforms are presented. The list is indicative of reform and reflects the geographical span of the conference and the majority of delegates:

- **Recognition & Rewards – Room for Everyone's Talent.**<sup>11</sup> The Netherlands' Recognition & Rewards programme has been shaped during a collaborative process reaching back to 2019 where the position paper was launched. The programme has a broad foundation in the Netherlands and focuses on one of the CoARA commitments: Recognition of diverse contributions to, and careers, in research. The Dutch Research Council has promoted the programme as part of an effort to facilitate a wider variety of possible career paths and

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<sup>11</sup> <https://recognitionrewards.nl/>

profiles, in order to recognise and reward a greater range of competences and talents and better align with the core tasks of the knowledge institutions and the challenges facing society.

- **NOR-CAM – A toolbox for recognition and rewards in academic careers.**<sup>12</sup> To foster more transparency, greater breadth, and comprehensive assessments, a working group appointed by Universities Norway (UHR) has developed a toolbox for assessing academic results, competence, and experience for academic staff. The toolbox has been developed over a number of years, beginning in 2021 and is rooted in the NOR-CAM network, which includes universities as well as large funders. Initially, a working group was appointed by Universities Norway (UHR) mandated to recommend guiding principles for the assessment and evaluation of research(ers) in light of the transition to Open Science. The ambition has been to develop guidelines that adopt three core principles for assessment: more transparency, greater breadth, and comprehensive assessments as opposed to one-sided use of indicators. Among key instructions in the framework is the emphasis that research quality needs to be assessed based on peer review and with limited use of bibliometric indicators.
- **Luxembourg National Research Fund (FNR) Narrative CVs.** According to the Luxembourg National Research Fund (FNR), assessment should be based on qualitative evaluation and review. In 2021, the FNR introduced a narrative-style CV template for Principal Investigators (PIs) and Co-PIs requesting funding from FNR programmes, currently called the “Individual Narrative Profile”. There have been two major drivers of this reform: a streamlining and simplification of FNR’s evaluation procedures, as well as a move towards aligning with the principles of DORA, CoARA, and the goals of responsible research assessment. The narrative-style CV is an attempt to reduce bias in evaluation through responsible research assessment, as well as a drive towards a more inclusive research culture in Luxembourg. General feedback remains positive, showing a continuing acceptance of the narrative profile among both applicants to FNR funding programmes and reviewers evaluating the proposals.<sup>13</sup>
- **Villum Foundation’s use of qualitative assessment and narrative CVs.** The qualitative assessment of Villum Foundation in Denmark includes narrative descriptions of achievements, research ambitions, and long-term vision. In recent years, Villum Fonden has aligned itself with international reform efforts. It is a member of CoARA and jointly with Velux Fonden has committed itself to the principles of ARRA, adopting a five-year joint CoARA Action Plan. The plan commits the foundations to annual evaluations and outlines four work packages addressing diversity, peer review quality, transparency, and experimentation with new tools. The foundation explicitly commits to avoiding inappropriate use of publication-based metrics such as Journal Impact Factor and h-index, and to strengthening qualitative, person-centred evaluation through structured CVs

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12 <https://www.uhr.no/en/news-from-uhr/nor-cam-a-toolbox-for-recognition-and-rewards-in-academic-careers.5780.aspx>

13 <https://www.fnr.lu/narrative-cv/>

and narrative self-assessment.<sup>14</sup> Bibliometric measures are formally prohibited in the CV template, although reviewers may still consult public profiles such as Google Scholar at their own discretion.

- **A shared Catalan research impact and assessment strategy.**<sup>15</sup> The four Catalan research assessment agencies — AQU, AQuAS, AGAUR and iCERCA — are progressively reinforcing their collaboration, together with science policymakers, in the context of the international ongoing reform of research assessment. What initially emerged as organisation-specific initiatives has gradually evolved into a more coordinated and mutually informed approach that seeks to contribute to the development of a shared Catalan research impact strategy. Concretely, AQU and AQuAS have removed the obligation to report journal impact factors, broadened the range of recognised research contributions and introduced narrative-based CV formats; AQU has updated institutional-level criteria to better integrate research quality, research culture and social impact; iCERCA has undertaken a learning-oriented international evaluation of research centres' impact narratives and updated its centre evaluation model accordingly; and AQuAS has implemented a formative impact assessment approach across the life cycle of health research funding programmes. Taken together, these developments reflect a gradual transition towards recognising diverse research trajectories, integrating narrative evidence where appropriate, reducing overreliance on bibliometric indicators, valuing multilingual and interdisciplinary research, and strengthening attention to societal impact. Through their joint coordination framework, the agencies are laying the foundations for a coherent, multi-level and system-aware approach to research assessment that may progressively contribute to broader policy dialogue and cross-sectoral alignment. In doing so, they are closely following developments undertaken by peer organisations across Spain and Europe, with a clear willingness to collaborate and to engage in mutual learning
- **FOLEC Project: Quality of research and allocation of research funds in the Global South.**<sup>16</sup> This project was carried out by the Latin American Forum for Research Evaluation (FOLEC) in 2022. The project aimed to understand how various approaches and methodologies for assessing research quality affect the way research funds are allocated in the Global South. The project aimed to explore how progressive research evaluation can facilitate funding schemes and decisions that promote inclusive research through the participation of traditionally excluded groups and regions (and institutions) with less established research capacities. During the course of the project, an online platform was developed that included an open database with case studies, an international survey, and interviews with users.
- **Aalborg University Research and Innovation Indicator.**<sup>17</sup> While both DORA and CoARA promote a stronger emphasis on open science principles and qualitative assessment, conventional bibliometric indicators remain necessary to capture both the scale and scope of research activity. The AAU indicator – developed in 2022 – therefore comprises two complementary components: Part A, focusing on scientific publications assessed

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14 <https://www.audxp-cms.aau.dk/media/0uejihgl/pedersen-et-al-emerging-practices-in-research-assessment-2025.pdf>

15 <https://www.aqu.cat/en/doc/Publicacions/CoARA-Action-Plan-2025-2029>

16 <https://www.clacso.org/folec/research/>

17 <https://vbn.aau.dk/en/publications/aauforskningsoginnovationsindikator-til-fremme-af-aaus-vidensk/>

through bibliometric methods; and Part B, which reflects research performance from an open science perspective. Part B operationalises this approach across three dimensions: Collaboration, Visibility, and Openness.

- **Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA): A Practical Guide to Implementing Responsible Research Assessment (2025).**<sup>18</sup> The guide provides action-oriented guidance, resources, and illustrative examples, for research performing organisations who are looking to shape and deliver responsible research assessment practices. This includes research organisations who are looking to create a reform strategy, organizations wanting to reform existing practices, and organizations wanting to take steps towards more holistic and inclusive approaches to assessment. DORA has endorsed a set of values closely aligned with CoARA.
- **ARRA Commitment 4: Avoid the use of rankings of research organisations in research assessment.**<sup>19</sup> This commitment is intended to help avoid that metrics used by international rankings trickle down to research and researcher assessment. The fourth Commitment helps the research community and research organisations to regain autonomy to shape assessment practices, rather than having to abide by criteria and methodologies set by external commercial companies. CoARA encourages research organisations to be mindful that public communication (e.g. the active advertising of an institution’s rank) can contribute to the perception that research quality conflates with ranking positions. Several universities have recently withdrawn from rankings: Sorbonne University<sup>20</sup> (France), University of Zurich<sup>21</sup> (Switzerland), Rhodes University<sup>22</sup> (South Africa), Utrecht University<sup>23</sup> (The Netherlands) and the Indian Institutes of Technology<sup>24</sup> (India) are examples as well as the INORMS REG group initiative “More Than Our Rank” (MTOR)<sup>25</sup>.
- **Malmö University Policies and Procedures.**<sup>26</sup> Malmö University has published its CoARA Action Plan 2024–2027 including explicit implementation of the four CoARA core commitments. Malmö University values are founded on the human, democratic, and academic values that have emerged from the ideals of an open society, freedom of speech, and critical thinking. The view of the university is that the choice of assessment should be adapted to the evaluation level and evaluation object. Peer review is particularly suitable for assessment on individual and project level. Responsible use of quantitative indicators can be integrated in peer review at more aggregated levels (such as research

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18 <https://sfdora.org/resource/practical-guide/>

19 <https://www.coara.org/agreement/the-commitments/>

20 <https://www.sorbonne-universite.fr/en/news/sorbonne-university-decides-withdraw-times-higher-education-world-university-rankings>

21 <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/education/university-of-zurich-quits-international-university-ranking/73693006>

22 [https://www.ru.ac.za/latestnews/a\\_decade\\_later\\_rhodes\\_university\\_says\\_we\\_told\\_you\\_so\\_on\\_rankings\\_obsession.html](https://www.ru.ac.za/latestnews/a_decade_later_rhodes_university_says_we_told_you_so_on_rankings_obsession.html)

23 <https://sciencebusiness.net/news/universities/utrecht-university-withdraws-global-ranking-debate-quantitative-metrics-grows>

24 <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20240423081048420>

25 <https://inorms.net/more-than-our-rank/>

26 <https://mau.se/contentassets/75d82edad20e43e78ea3dea0dcf62f7b/malmo-university-coara-action-plan-2024-2027l.pdf>

environments and organisational level). In some cases, qualitative assessments can include quantitative elements, but these should always be interpreted and contextualised in relation to norms in the particular scientific field. Peer review is a fundamental tool for promoting and assessing research quality across the university. It is used, for example, in the context of funding and award applications, assessment in postgraduate education, and decisions about employment, promotion, and admission.

- **Ghent University Guideline for Responsible Evaluation.**<sup>27</sup> When working with research evaluation in practice at the university, Ghent University adheres to eight principles, which together ensure that research can be evaluated in a responsible and high-quality manner: (i) Evaluation is necessary, (ii) evaluation has a clear purpose, (iii) evaluation methods, criteria and indicators are consistent with the objective of the evaluation, (iv) high-quality evaluation methods, criteria and indicators are used, (v) evaluation takes into account the complexity of the research and the diversity among researchers, (vi) evaluation is feasible, (vii) evaluation is conducted by experts, and (viii) evaluation is conducted with openness and transparency. With these principles, Ghent University defines 'responsible evaluation' across all the different evaluation sites and practices at the university. A practical guide has been published describing how Ghent University implements responsible research assessment in practice, which rejects inappropriate use of quantitative indicators in research evaluation.
- **COMON: Kyoto University's dialogue-based research assessment system for co-creating new academic commons.**<sup>28</sup> Kyoto University has launched COMON as a university-wide initiative designed to build a sustainable research ecosystem through collaboration and co-creation by researchers. The name of the initiative refers to "shared ground" or "a public good." A university, as a public good for society, is expected to generate academic value and contribute to society by fostering diverse connections with people in the wider community. The COMON framework involves five dimensions represented by the following perspectives: Cumulative foundation, Originality, Maturing excellence, Outreach & Impact, and Network centrality. With the articulation of five core values, the university seeks to uphold a common starting point for dialogue. Research organisations can begin internal discussions about their own future visions and strategies, grounded in the shared values of COMON. For the university management, the COMON framework provides a platform to assess research outcomes based on an interactive dialogue about the driving values and visions for the future – thus enabling a coherent university-wide strategy that connects strategic planning with outputs and incentives.

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27 <https://onderzoektips.ugent.be/en/tips/00002239/>

28 <https://www.research.kyoto-u.ac.jp/en/comon/>

# OUTLOOK AND SPIN-OFF ACTIVITIES

The CeRRA 2025 conference was designed as a launching pad for a global dialogue on progress in reforming research assessment. The conference featured numerous institutional, national and international initiatives, and created a common framework for future conversations across the EU and the world, and across CoARA, DORA, and similar initiatives. The conference documented that progress is happening at the local and regional level but also that systemic measures are needed for future harmonisation, learning, and implementation. OECD and UNESCO have been early adopters of the Open Science agenda and have contributed significantly to global impact and progress. A next step for international organisations such as these is to address directly the need for better rewards and incentives that reflect the societal expectations and roles that research funding and research-performing organisations are intended to manifest.

Simultaneously, the CeRRA 2025 conference was a launching pad for the Danish CoARA national Chapter, which was granted by the CoARA Steering Board in November 2025. The Chapter includes co-leads from the Independent Research Fund Denmark, Villum Foundation, and Aalborg University and comprises 40+ stakeholders and experts across universities, funders, academies, and stakeholders.

Outcomes of CeRRA 2025 includes this policy brief in addition to outputs, reports and statements from valuable partners:

- **Conference report:** *Emerging practices in research assessment: Cross-Case Analysis of 10 International Funders*. Aalborg University.
- **Christina Egelund, Danish Minister for Higher Education and Science:** *“The beauty of it all”*. Opening speech at the CeRRA conference on 3 Dec 2025.
- **DORA statement:** *Co-Creating the Future of Research Assessment: Highlights from DORA's RFO workshop on 2 Dec 2025 at Aalborg University*.
- **Villum white paper:** *Emerging Research Leaders and Assessment Reform. Takeaways from workshop 2 Dec 2025, Aalborg University*. Villum Foundation.
- **DFF conference statement:** *How to Fail at Reform – or A Guide to What to Avoid*. Independent Research Fund Denmark. Copenhagen.
- **Nature Comment:** *Great science happens in great teams — research assessments must try to capture that*. Nature 648: 8 (2025).
- **CoARA Side-Event:** Blog on the outcomes of the CoARA side-event on 3 Dec 2025 at Aalborg University.

Stay updated with news and videos on-demand from the conference panels and plenaries at the website: <https://www.cerra.aau.dk/>

Link to all videos on-demand: [www.youtube.com/@CeRRA2025](http://www.youtube.com/@CeRRA2025)



Get in touch at [cerra@id.aau.dk](mailto:cerra@id.aau.dk) and read more about the EU Presidency High-Level Conference on Reforming Research Assessment December 3-4, 2025: <https://www.cerra.aau.dk>

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