CoARA (Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment)

University of Groningen Action Plan 2025-2027 to the Commitments of The Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment

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The University of Groningen (UG) is a comprehensive research university where education and research are inextricably linked. We operate internationally and use our innovative strength to tackle academic and societal challenges, to train global citizens and to strengthen and shape the regional knowledge ecosystem. We are committed to building a culture of collaboration and creating a research and teaching environment founded on academic freedom, integrity, inclusivity and transparency. These core values also guide the assessment of our academic staff, taking into account their contributions, not only to research, but also to teaching, societal impact and team performance. Our HR and Quality Assurance policies focus on all four aspects and are already quite well aligned with the CoARA commitments. Since 2019, all Dutch universities support a national *Recognition & Rewards* (R&R) programme, which aims at a more balanced evaluation of academic staff, stimulating recognition of contributions to all four performance aspects, as well as to Open Science practices. In addition, the national *Strategy Evaluation Protocol 2021-2027* (SEP) for the independent external assessment of universities' research units once every six years, obliges them to adhere to the recommendations of the *San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment* (DORA), and strongly encourages research assessment tailored to the mission and vision of the research unit. However, actual change of culture and behaviour of our researchers requires continued effort and periodic evaluation, as well as international alignment. That is why UG welcomes the CoARA initiative to exchange and stimulate best practices and to monitor progress.

Below, we outline our main policies and actions already taken to meet the 10 commitments of the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment, before signing the agreement September 2022. However, all require continued effort and monitoring, and periodic evaluation to determine whether additional actions or adjustments are needed. We do so by tailored surveys, such as the UG Culture Barometer for R&R, and via national and internal midterm evaluations of the SEP.

Commitment 1: *Recognise the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research*

UG position:

Assessment of individuals

Our academics have a broad and varied set of duties. Besides teaching and research skills, we set great store by our staff possessing leadership qualities, creating societal impact, being creative, and participating in public debate. While we do not require academics to excel in every domain, we do encourage them to develop a variety of competencies, so as to allow everyone's talent to thrive. A first priority of our Groningen Recognition & Reward programme, therefore, was to pay greater attention to contributions to teaching, societal impact, and team performance. Our university wide guidelines, and the diverse ways our eleven faculties implement these, can be found at our R&R

web pages.
Regarding the assessment of staff contributions to research, their annual *Research & Development* interviews not only take into account the number of publications and other outputs (including datasets, software, and patents, but also their impact, where appropriate supported by responsible metrics, such as field normalised article-level citation impact). In addition, also other contributions to research (such as peer review activities), societal impact, team performance and *Open Science* (including citizen science) are part of the entire portfolio evaluated. To that end, we have published the *University of Groningen Responsible Research Assessment Principles* (see explanation here and full pdf) and a *Guidance for hiring, evaluations and award panels* [pdf].
Since June 1, 2025, the University of Groningen (UG) has been participating in a national program to embed recognition and rewarding of Open Science practices into hiring and promotion criteria. As part of this initiative, the UG is piloting a project at the Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE), focused on FAIR compliance, with criteria tailored to the FAIR-maturity level of each discipline. The pilot is designed to develop, test, and implement research assessment criteria that recognize individual contributions to advancing FAIR data and software compliance in the researcher's specific discipline. This includes efforts to raise awareness, advocate for FAIR-compliant publication requirements, and improve existing infrastructures or advocate for necessary developments at institutional, national, or EU levels. The approach explicitly acknowledges and accounts for disciplinary differences by recognizing the relative difficulty for individual researchers to adhere to FAIR practices. By piloting these criteria, the UG aims to incentivize actions that not only support individual career development but also drive broader systemic change. The project will conclude in May 2026, with one key output being scalable advice for other institutions seeking to implement similar initiatives.

Assessment of research units

UG research is currently organized in 24 units of assessment, our SEP institutes, each with its own mission and vision, all of which are evaluated every six years by independent international Peer Review Committees following the national guidelines of the *Strategy Evaluation Protocol* (SEP). The SEP, and its implementation as laid down in the *Groningen Research Assessment Protocol* (GRAP, see here), are fully compliant with DORA and our own RRA principles, and explicitly require the institutes to provide a narrative description of their mission and vision, research over the past period, strategy for future research, and their policies regarding Academic Culture (ethics, integrity, diversity), Open Science and HR. The evaluation panels are requested to take all these aspects into account in their assessment of quality, impact and viability of the research institute.

Commitment 2: *Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators*

UG position:

This is already standing practice, as outlined in our *RRA Principles* (Nr.1: Use research performance metrics to support, not replace qualitative or peer assessment), our *Guidance for hiring, evaluations and award panels*, and as prescribed by the SEP.

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*

UG position:

This is already standing practice, as outlined in our *RRA Principles* (Nr.7c: Use article-level metrics to

assess the impact of research articles or individuals. Do not use journal-based metrics as a surrogate measure of the quality of articles or in hiring and promotion decisions.), our *Guidance for hiring, evaluations and award panels*, and as prescribed by the SEP.

Commitment 4: *Avoid the use of rankings of research organisations in research assessment*

Position UG:

We have never used the outcome of university rankings as a substitute for the peer review assessment of our research institutes following the SEP. At the same time, we have not ignored the major rankings, given their assumed impact on international reputation. After initial attempts to help improve some rankings by active participation, we have come to realise that most are driven by commercial interests that don't meet our own standards for benchmarking. This led to our active participation in the *Universities of the Netherlands* working group that authored the 2022 advice report, *Ranking the University. On the effect of rankings on the academic community and how to overcome them* (DOI). UG fully supports the recommendations provided, and has taken these measures since:

- At our Rankings page, we explicitly mention the limitations and limited significance of global university rankings.
- We stopped our active participation in QS-WUR and THE-Impact.
- We contribute to more sophisticate and responsible alternatives to benchmark university performance, such as the *European Higher Education Sector Observator* (EHESO, formerly U-Multirank) and Open Alex.

Commitment 5: *Commit resources to reforming research assessment as is needed to achieve the organisational changes committed to*

Position UG:

UG has allocated budgets for:

- Our Recognition & Rewards (R&R) programme.
- Our *Open Science* (OS) programme.
- A dedicated Research Intelligence Services team (RISe), offering training, support and advice on quantitative analysis of research and societal impact.

Commitment 6: *Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes*

Position UG:

We do so, both nationally and locally, as part of our R&R and OS programmes, both with their own steering board and working groups, and by continuous further development of relevant expertise in and tools of our Research Intelligence teams. All measures and activities are broadly communicated within our university and shared nationally in the Dutch CoARA chapter, the Universities of the Netherlands (UNL), the Dutch Association of Institutional Research (DAIR), and the Research Intelligence Network Netherlands (RINN), and internationally in selected CoARA working groups.

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*

Position UG:

We do so, as apparent amongst other things from these examples:

- A R&R website where relevant results and developments are publicly shared.
- Sharing and exchange of Faculty initiatives at this public website.
- Active stimulation of staff to follow leadership training modules, and to exchange career ambitions and development experiences in our Corporate academy or online.
- The UG-wide internal newsletter frequently addresses R&R experiences and progress, e.g. example 1, example 2, example 3.
- Active participation in national R&R events, such as the R&R forum, NL Culture Barometer, R&R E-Magazine., annual R&R Festivals.
- Periodical discussion of R&R progress in management meetings of the University Board with all Faculty Boards, in the University Council, Faculty Councils, and Advisory committees, see Administrative organization.

Commitment 8: *Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition*

Position UG:

We do so, see commitment 6.

Commitment 9: *Communicate progress made on adherence to the Principles and implementation of the Commitments*

Position UG:

We do so, by sharing all relevant documents on the UG intranet, and as apparent from the links to UG web pages provided above.

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*

Position UG:

Besides the monitoring and periodical evaluations of our R&R and OS programmes, and of implementation at SEP institute level via SEP evaluations, our RISe team has developed several innovative bibliometric approaches (see case studies), some of which will be published in peer reviewed OA journals. Our Digital Competence Centre (DCC) provides support for FAIR data archiving and to make data suitable for re-use. April 2025, UG signed the Barcelona Declaration on Open Research Information.