

FAQ's: Understanding responsible research assessment

Q1. What is responsible research assessment (RRA)?

It means assessing research and researchers based primarily on qualitative, expert judgement, peer review supported, where appropriate, by the responsible use of quantitative indicators rather than driven by them. Work is judged on its actual merits and contributions, not on where it was published, a single metric, or an institution's ranking. RRA recognises the full range of research outputs and activities, the diversity of roles and careers in research, and the values of integrity, rigour, openness and inclusion.

Q2. Why is the University doing this, and why now?

Two things have come together. First, thinking across the sector has shifted from a narrow focus on publication metrics towards a broader, fairer framework that better reflects how research actually creates value. Second, we want a research culture that recognises and rewards the full range of contributions, including Open Research. The University adopted a Statement on the [Responsible Use of Metrics](#) in 2018; in 2023 we signed the international Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment and joined [CoARA](#). This programme delivers on that commitment.

Q3. What is CoARA, and what did we sign up to?

CoARA is the [Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment](#) an international coalition of organisations reforming how research is assessed. By signing its Agreement in 2023 we subscribed to four core commitments and six supporting commitments. The core commitments are a) recognise the diversity of contributions and careers, b) base assessment primarily on qualitative peer review supported by responsible metrics, c) abandon inappropriate uses of journal- and publication-based metrics (notably the Journal Impact Factor and h-index), and d) avoid using rankings of research organisations. Our [CoARA Action Plan 2026–2029](#) sets out how we deliver them.

Q4. How do DORA and the Leiden Manifesto fit in?

They are the foundations our principles build on. [DORA](#) (the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment) focuses on not misusing journal-based metrics, the [Leiden Manifesto](#) sets out principles for the responsible use of research metrics. Our approach is aligned with both.

Q5. Is this just about banning the Journal Impact Factor and the h-index?

Journal-level indicators such as the JIF describe a journal, not the individual articles within it. Because citations within any journal are very unevenly distributed, most articles in a journal receive fewer citations than the journal's headline figure so the figure tells an assessor very little about the specific piece of work in front of them. The h-index has a separate problem: it accumulates with time and volume, so it systematically reads a longer, uninterrupted, full-time career as a stronger one. Both indicators also depend on citation databases whose coverage is uneven across disciplines and languages. So, these metrics are considered to be weak proxies for the quality of an individual output, or the work of a researcher and evidence suggests that they can entrench bias.

Q6. Does this mean we are lowering the bar on research excellence?

No, if anything, the opposite. Reducing quality to a journal title or a citation count is a shortcut, and often a misleading one. Expert judgement of the actual work is a more demanding standard, not a weaker one. The aim is more rigorous and fairer assessment that better identifies and rewards genuine quality and impact fully consistent with our ambitions for research excellence.

Open Research and the range of contributions

Q7. How does this connect to Open Research?

Closely. Recognising and rewarding Open Research practice was one of the original drivers for this work. RRA explicitly values open practices and outputs open data, software and code, preprints, registered reports where they contribute to the integrity, verifiability and re-usability of research, or demonstrate quality, reach or impact. See [Open Research at Reading](#).

Q8. What is CRedit, and do I have to use it?

CRedit (the [Contributor Roles Taxonomy](#)) is a simple, standard way to describe who did what on a piece of work conceptualisation, methodology, writing, and so on. It is a helpful option for making your specific contribution clear, particularly on collaborative outputs. It is encouraged where useful but is not a blanket requirement.

REF, funders and rankings

Q9. Doesn't the REF use metrics? How does this square with [REF 2029](#)?

The [REF](#) assesses outputs on their own merit through expert peer review and does not use journal-based metrics such as the Journal Impact Factor to judge quality which is consistent with our approach. Where metrics such as citation counts are used, they are used within a published framework, and do not replace expert review, in line with RRA aims.

Q10. What about funders who use metrics or set their own criteria?

These principles do not override funder requirements; they ask that, internally, we assess against criteria that are relevant and appropriate to the purpose, and that any indicators are used responsibly.

How we are delivering, governing and tracking this

Q11. Who is leading this work?

The work is sponsored at University Committee level (through the University Committee for Research and Innovation, UCRI), coordinated by the Research Assessment Implementation Group led by an Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor, who are responsible for planning and engaging others in helping the University to deliver this work. Day-to-day

operational support sits with the Research, Engagement and Innovation Office (REIO). The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation) owns the principles.

Q12. What is the timeline?

Broadly, 2026 to 2029 in line with the COARA action plan delivery timeframe, but the implementation group will provide regular updates on work activity and how colleagues can engage and get involved as the work progresses.

Q13. How can I get involved or give feedback?

We will be publishing opportunities for engagement and for providing the implementation group with feedback in relation to the various workstreams, so look out for these.

Q14. Who do I contact?

For further information, please contact the Research, Engagement and Innovation Office (REIO), [Adrian Bell \(Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research, Prosperity and Resilience\)](#), or [Bidur Pokhrel \(Responsible Research Assessment Project Officer\)](#).