



ADVANCING A SHARED DIRECTION FOR RESEARCH ASSESSMENT



REPORT ON THE JOINT WORKSHOP BY THE NATIONAL RESEARCH INTEGRITY FORUM AND THE NATIONAL OPEN RESEARCH FORUM

THE ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY, DAWSON STREET, DUBLIN 2

1ST NOVEMBER 2023

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PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND ● ● ● +

This workshop, ‘Advancing a Shared Direction for Research Assessment’, funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), was jointly organised by the National Research Integrity Forum (NRIF) and the National Open Research Forum (NORF) to progress the national conversation on the reform of research assessment. This follows on from a very

successful workshop in 2019 on “[Responsible Research in an Open Research Environment](#)” organised by the NRIF and NORF. The European Research Area (ERA) Policy Agenda sets out ERA actions¹ for the period 2022-2024 to which member states in the ERA may volunteer to contribute. Research assessment reform, (Action 3), is one of the actions Ireland



¹ Priority actions are defined in the Council Recommendation on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe (Pact for R&I).

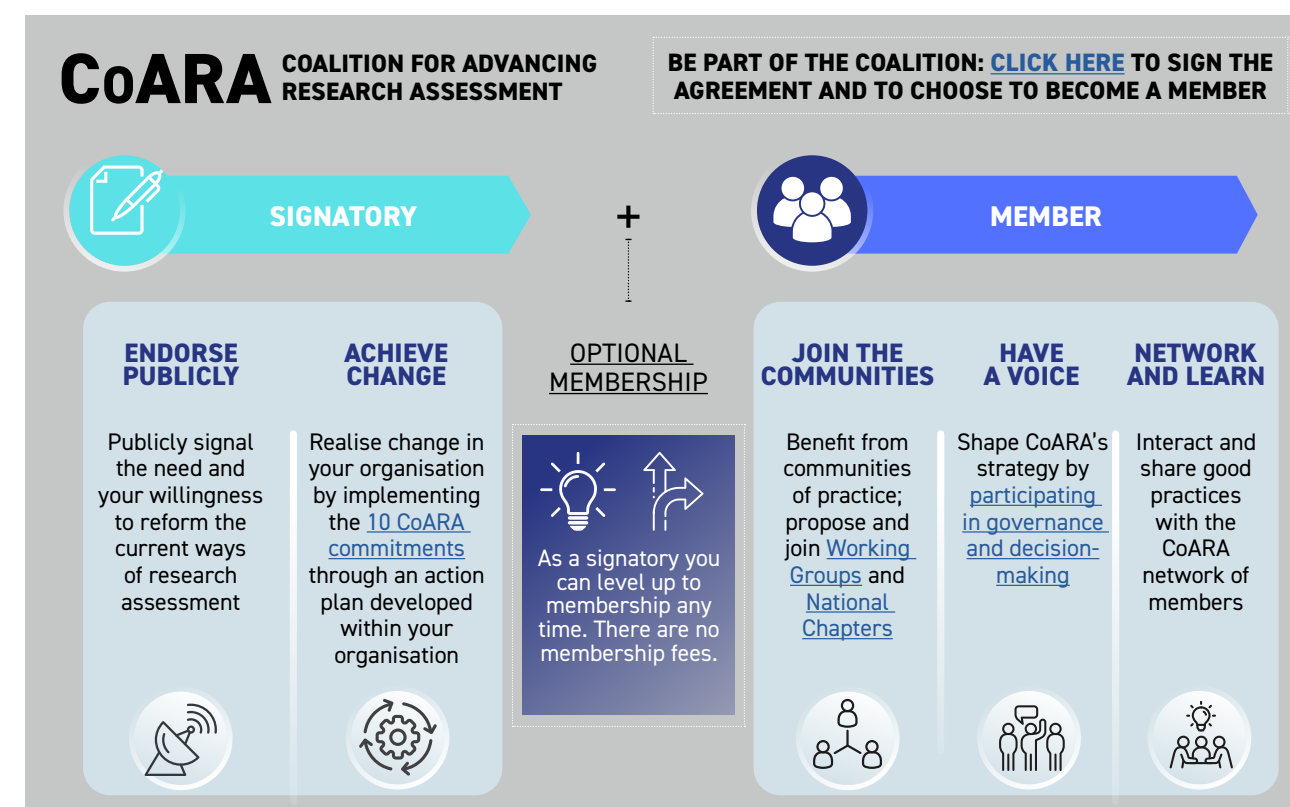
has committed to implementing at a national level. More than 350 organisations from over 40 countries were involved in the process of drafting an [Agreement on reforming research assessment](#), a process initiated in January 2022.

Many signatories of the Agreement have come together to form the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA). CoARA is a global Coalition of research funding organisations, research performing organisations, national/regional assessment authorities and agencies, and other relevant organisations who are signatories of the Agreement and have committed to work together to implement systemic reform and improve research assessment practices.

The coalition is supported by National Chapters, which are groups of stakeholders with an interest in enabling research assessment reform in a national context and have been approved by CoARA. At present there are [thirteen Irish institutions](#)² signed up to CoARA and also to the recently approved National Chapter.

Attendees of the event, including representatives of Ireland’s National Chapter of CoARA, were invited to share and discuss current and planned future work on research assessment reform at their respective institutions, organisations and government departments and funding agencies.

Members of the NRIF steering group and NORF were invited to attend along with representatives of the HEA, Higher Education Institutions, Vice Presidents for Research, Directors of Research, Research Officers, Librarians, and Data Stewards. Other attendees included, senior policy representatives from the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), other government departments including the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, national funding bodies, and SFI centres. Early Career Researchers (ECRs) including Yensi Flores Buesco, the ECR representative on the CoARA Steering Board, were also in attendance and participated in panels.



² At the time of writing the following signatories had committed to CoARA: Dublin City University, Mary Immaculate College, Health Research Board, Irish Research Council, University College Cork, University College Dublin, University of Galway, University of Limerick, Technological University of the Shannon, Trinity College Dublin, Science Foundation Ireland, South East Technological University, Technological University Dublin.



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BREAK OUT GROUPS



The event continued with attendees being broken into five groups to discuss and respond to the following four key questions:

- + At what stage is your organisation in reviewing processes or implementing changes related to research assessment?
- + Are there any examples of plans or progress you would like to share?
- + What barriers have you encountered and what strategies have you used to overcome them?
- + What next steps could be taken nationally to help coordinate and ensure progress on this agenda?

The discussions at each table established a general context for research assessment reform in higher education institutions, research performing organisations (RPOs) and research funding organisations (RFOs) in Ireland. It was broadly acknowledged that Ireland, like many other European jurisdictions, is at the beginning of a journey with regard to embedding research assessment reform into our system.

The need for systemic change and the significance of each step towards implementing lasting change as discussed earlier in the event were reinforced through the discussions at the breakout tables. It was agreed that recognising what Ireland does well, and what we can learn from the implementation of reform in other countries, will be essential to informing the strategic direction of future work in this area.

The evolving international conversations on how best to define and quantify quality will continue to inform the reform of research assessment and there was broad consensus on the importance of Ireland's continued engagement with and input to these discussions. In the same vein, training, knowledge sharing and awareness raising were all emphasised throughout the workshop as a means to keeping those involved in research and its assessment informed on new approaches and their implementation.

Ultimately, clear communication across and through the system on how best to implement change, what changes to implement, as well as when and where were key takeaways from the discussions.

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KEY THEMES EXPLORED



THEMES DISCUSSED AT THE BREAKOUT TABLES INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING:



THE RESPONSIBLE USE OF METRICS IN A CHANGING CONTEXT



THE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH CULTURE IN INSTIGATING AND SUPPORTING THE REFORM OF RESEARCH ASSESSMENT AT INSTITUTIONAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS



THE STEPS INSTITUTIONS ARE TAKING TO INTRODUCE CHANGES TO HOW RESEARCH IS ASSESSED INTERNALLY



THE ROLE OF AND SUPPORT FOR EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS NECESSARY TO MAKING LASTING CHANGE

METRICS

Training across the sector on the responsible use of metrics, including appropriate recognition of the diversity of non-traditional research outputs and outcomes, in assessing research was seen as a key element of the work already being undertaken in institutions, and as essential to positioning institutions and the wider sector on how best to adapt and change practices.

The need for careful consideration of how the sector assesses qualitative outputs and outcomes and uses such measurements was discussed as part of a whole of system approach that promotes research assessment as a holistic practice, and not as one which integrates qualitative metrics as a simple 'box ticking' exercise.

It was also recognized that there is a need to consider activities and processes beyond the more traditional research outputs/outcomes including public and policy-maker engagement, mentoring, EDI activities, leadership training, and diversity of career paths, always cognisant of 'measuring what matters'.

RESEARCH CULTURE

The conversation around metrics continued at each table as participants discussed movement away from the traditional view of research outputs and movement towards a shared understanding of research outcomes. Cultural change and the engagement with all relevant actors were identified as essential to progressing the systemic change necessary in institutions and across the broader sector.

While it was acknowledged that some institutions are further down the journey of introducing change than others, it was agreed that the sharing and dissemination of sectoral learnings will be of benefit to Ireland as a whole. This was seen as particularly fitting in relation to overcoming barriers to research assessment and the CoARA National Chapter will have a key role to play in ensuring effective sectoral learning. In this regard, work being done in the Technological University sector and the investment it is receiving to stimulate change is expected to provide insights into the impact of changes in research culture.

The breakout groups identified training needs, resources, the promotion of narrative CVs and development for those engaged in peer review (including those who evaluate narrative CVs in the context of recruitment, promotions, and funding programmes) as a means to overcoming barriers to introducing and integrating reform.

The role of early career researchers (ECRs) and their supervisors was identified as a pivotal driver of change. ECRs, in particular, have needs that, if met, will enhance their opportunities for participation in a changing global research environment.

The impact of supporting and preparing ECRs for that integration is perceived as having the potential to perpetuate change in the reform of

research assessment in Ireland. In this regard, ECRs are seen as key players driving change from the bottom up. Similarly, supervisors of research students and postdoctoral mentors are conduits of support for that change. The groups emphasized the training needs of supervisors and mentors.

APPROACH TO RESEARCH ASSESSMENT REFORM AND EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS

Having a joined-up, coordinated approach to research assessment reform was emphasised as essential to successful outcomes. For any reform that takes place, it was agreed that the bottom-up approach being driven by ECRs, supervisors and mentors requires a complementary top-down approach to ensure coherent whole sector development. The vulnerable position of ECRs as researchers embarking on their careers in an evolving context was noted as one to be taken into consideration when introducing and implementing change. Their vulnerability reflects the changing understanding of what we measure, who conducts assessments, the training they have received and what we value as a sector.

Research funders, senior management teams in institutions, government departments and agencies were noted as drivers of the top-down strategic development of the reform of research assessment. The establishment of intersectoral working groups to drive implementation and policies towards change were recommended as a means to assisting the reform of research assessment in Ireland.

response from all stakeholders if research assessment culture in Ireland is to be changed effectively.

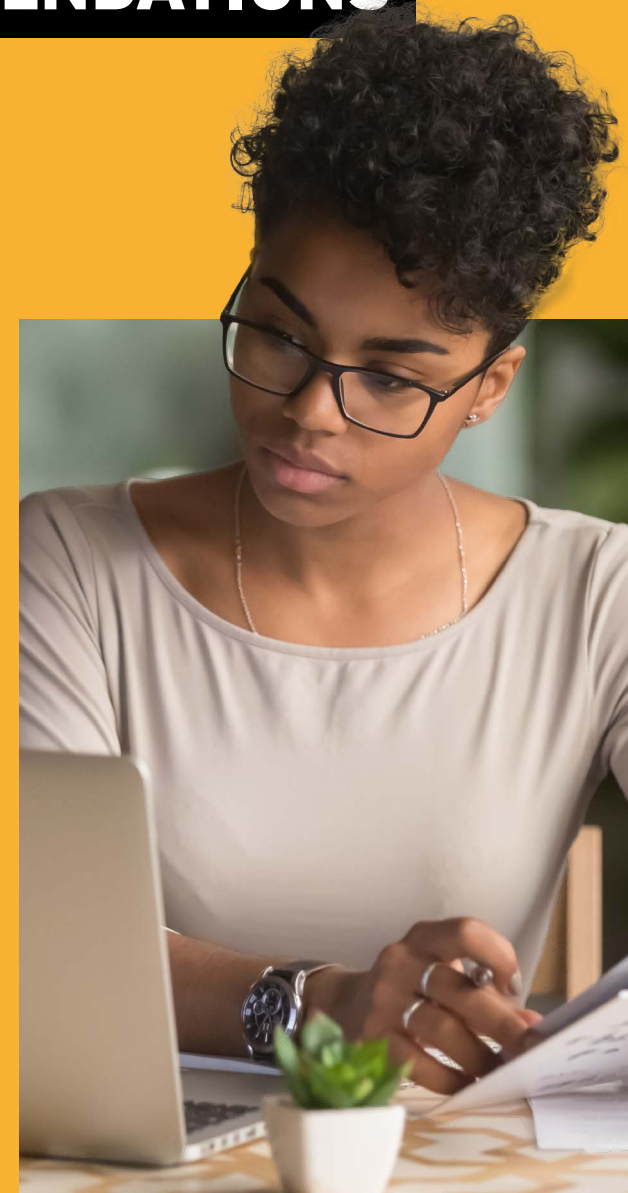
05 EVENT CLOSE

Professor Grace Mulcahy, University College Dublin, provided closing remarks for the day with an in-depth summary of the event and reinforcement of the need for a collective

06 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Key recommendations from the workshop:

- + Coordinated, in-depth consultation with a diverse range of stakeholders to determine how best to progress research assessment reform is required at a national and disciplinary level but also at career stage levels. Ensuring a coherent approach at the national level, linked to international developments in this space, will be essential. The CoARA National Chapter will have a key role to play in this regard.
- + Capturing best practice both nationally and internationally on an ongoing basis will be fundamental to informing how different stakeholders will make decisions on what changes need to be made. Mindful of the difficulties in delivering systemic culture change, and the associated resources required, an understanding of what success looks like and being realistic about the destination will be important.
- + Having a clear understanding of what we capture *versus* what we value when we come to assess research and researchers.
- + Recognition of the diversity in processes, outputs and outcomes will be essential.



07 ARTIST

Beth McComish is a multidisciplinary artist who created the illustrations featured in this report.

Beth captured the key points discussed during the workshop and provided visual designs of the themes and points of discussion throughout the day.





FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:
[HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.7486/DRI.BZ60SQ77T](https://doi.org/10.7486/DRI.BZ60SQ77T)

NORF NATIONAL
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HEA HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS

