



D3.1

EDUC STRATEGY FOR REFORMING RESEARCH ASSESSMENT

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Abstract	This strategy outlines shared priorities for reforming the Alliance environment while recognising diverse national systems, institutional contexts, and cultural legacies. Rather than prescribing uniform actions, the document provides guiding principles and common values, offering space for flexibility and collaboration. The EDUC Alliance seeks to strengthen research quality and competitiveness in Europe by co-creating responsible, inclusive, and sustainable evaluation cultures.



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Abbreviations

ANECA - National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (Spain)
 ANVUR – Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of the University and Research Systems.
 ARRA - Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment
 CDP – Career Development Plan
 CNCI - Category Normalised Citation Impact
 CoARA - Coalition on Advancing Research Assessment
 CSSE- Centre for Scientometric Support and Evaluation (Masaryk University)
 CRUE - Spanish Conference of Rectors
 CNU - National Council of Universities (France)
 CV – Curriculum Vitae
 CZARMA – Czech Association of Research Managers and Administrators
 DFG - the German Research Foundation
 DMP – Data Management Plan
 DORA - Declaration of Research Assessment
 EDUC – European Digital University
 FWCI - Field-weighted Citation Impact
 HCERES - High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (France)
 HR – Human Resources
 HRS4R – Human Resources Strategy for Researchers

IRDE – Internal Research and Doctoral Studies Evaluation (Masaryk University)

JIF – Journal Impact Factor

NOR-CAM – Norwegian Career Assessment Matrix

MUNI - Masaryk University

OTM-R – Open, Transparent, and Merit-based Recruitment (Italy)

OA – Open Access

PNU - Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University

RA – Research assessment

RAEG – Research Assessment Expert Group

RRA - responsible research assessment

UJI - Universitat Jaume I

UNICA - University of Cagliari

UNIVREN - University of Rennes

UP - University of Potsdam

UPECS - University of Pécs

UPN - Paris Nanterre University

USN - University of South-Eastern Norway

YERUN – Young European Research Universities Network

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1. Introduction

The research assessment reforming movement started, or rather obtained the principal conceptual background, in 2014, when the Declaration of Research Assessment (DORA) was issued. Following the ongoing research tackling the research communication and patterns in different disciplines, studies on national evaluation systems, community response to these systems and academic well-being, the reforming ideals aimed to reduce the unwanted effects of **metrics** in research evaluation. After DORA, many central or peripheral initiatives have been continuously issued; the most central have been Leiden Manifesto, The Metric Tide (and its recent update, Harnessing the Metric Tide), Hong Kong Principles, also Helsinki Initiative on Multilingualism, and most importantly, the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (ARRA, 2022), combining all previous concepts in one authoritative document. This recent initiative is the most influential, firstly because of the support of the European Commission as well as other respected academic bodies, and secondly due to the strong background in the Coalition on Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA).

All EDUC universities are by summer 2025 CoARA members and thus committed to reforming their internal processes towards higher responsibility and to reducing toxic features in their academic cultures. In EDUC, we believe that this reforming journey will most importantly improve our research quality and competitiveness in the European research area by focusing on what matters and enabling researchers to freely expand on their research topics. Their quality, not its proxies, should be rewarded.

By this document, we intend to help EDUC universities implement responsible research assessment (RRA) principles, predominantly those anchored in the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment. The EDUC Alliance offers a unique space for experimentation, peer support, and the co-creation of evaluation cultures that reflect the collective values and missions of its member institutions.

The strategy structure is as follows. In the introductory chapters, the strategy scope and structure are explained and justified. The chapter “Preliminary overview of main research assessment reform priorities across EDUC universities” contains the table depicting the core individual priorities of partner universities. Then, the chapter with joint strategic priorities and pending tasks, the most important part of this document, follows.

2. EDUC strategy for reforming research: why it matters?

The Research Assessment Report on Czechia, Hungary and Ukraine (EDUC-WIDE Deliverable 3.2) served for three EDUC universities (Masaryk University, University of Pécs, and Precarpathian National University) to map the current system and thoroughly think about and identify the most pressing issues in the research assessment processes. Problems identified in the report are reflected in the CoARA Action Plans and concurrently in this strategy. Other EDUC partners were not the subject of this study. Instead, they provided a short reflection on their current systems which served for the basic analysis provided in this Strategy (chapter Preliminary overview of main research assessment reform priorities across EDUC universities). During several meetings, we have realised that in terms of the culture of the research assessment, despite our diverse national and institutional contexts, from transitional systems in Ukraine to established evaluation frameworks in Norway, **we face similar issues**, but in a different way, in different contexts and to a different extent. To avoid questionable, inappropriate, or even toxic practices in the research assessment, we commonly share a commitment to implementing the principles of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA). This initiative, together with other reforming initiatives named above, tries to determine the most important principles for framing such practices. In the following text, we mention some of these practices.

Regarding the compliance with CoARA, different universities have different starting points. Three countries from the Central and Eastern European region (the Czech Republic, Hungary and Ukraine) involved in the EDUC-WIDE project are considered to have limited historical and cultural starting points. This heritage caused lagging somewhat behind the dynamics of Western and Nordic counterparts in the development of the evaluation cultures and involvement in reforming initiatives. The Research Assessment Report on Czechia, Hungary and Ukraine and multiple published research studies, show us that the tradition of relying on metrics in research evaluation is strong, especially in Central and Eastern European countries. In the Czech Republic, announcing the new national assessment system in 2017 meant the transition from a publication indicator to a system promoting peer review as a main method. Officially, the system changed, but based on many interactions in the scientific community, we know that publication performance expressed by the journal-level metrics is still the main proxy for seeing quality, which leads to underestimating the merit of other methods for the decisions. Here, we must ask about the effects of the reform, to what extent the change is declaratory or cultural. More research needs to be done on this topic globally, as we must conceptualise the values of reforming research assessment, which is essential for understanding the real effect of the reform. It is not the purpose of this strategy to discuss it more thoroughly, but the recent research suggests that using metrics in assessments and their overall setup has different cultural connotations in Eastern and Western Europe, namely the heritage of central planning and lack of trust for the former and New Public Management for the latter. These are obviously factors influencing the starting points for the reform and the readiness of EDUC institutions to align with CoARA and generate diversity. We can find traditions of metric-based evaluations in Western countries as well, but the regimes underwent a rapid change, foremost due to membership in CoARA. Spain, for example, has changed the former quantitative criteria for the 6-year evaluation and for accreditation in 2024.

The Strategy reveals several challenges, both for planning the action and the implementation itself. Such challenges are the **dependence on national assessment systems** (the level of

institutional freedom), **variability of assessment methods**, units of assessment and the scope of assessment.

Whereas Hungary, from the point of view of the reform journey, should rethink and rebuild the whole evaluation system, Norway will rather polish relatively minor shortcomings. In the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Ukraine, the reform goes hand in hand with the broader cultural shift and changing researchers' mindsets, which is not necessarily the case in France and Norway. France has already avoided using metrics in research evaluations, but the assessment, as well as in Italy, is driven by the national authorities. Also, when we speak about assessment reform, it means different objects of evaluation relevant for each EDUC university. These objects (institutional level, individuals, proposals, etc.) require different methods and tools. University Paris Nanterre (France), for example, does not use a system for evaluating individual researchers, at least not in the same way as, for example, Masaryk University in the Czech Republic. Other challenges lie in the core dilemmas linked to the validity of the reform itself, namely, the balance between the transition to peer-review-based systems and the requirement to keep the quantitative approaches for practical reasons.

Previous examples provided rationale for the strategy concept and showed us the diverse contexts in which each local community plays the evaluation game, in a different way in different locations, reflecting local research policy landscapes. In EDUC, we are aware of these challenges, as well as the diverse locally anchored understanding of terms and slogans. These abovementioned factors were considered in designing the EDUC strategy for the research assessment reform and the strategy tasks. We reflect the challenges and understanding issues, and explain our approach to the strategy priorities and their future implementation in the following chapters.

Clarifying Core Concepts in Research Assessment Reform

To enable implementation and ensure rigour, we deliver the definition of core concepts of research assessment how we use them for the purpose of this Strategy.

Responsible Research Assessment

The term responsibility recurs throughout reform documents, yet remains underdefined in many cases, or rather, the definition varies in diverse research cultures in relation to diverse understandings of terms such as quality and excellence. For this Strategy, we work with the concept of responsibility, where the Responsible Research Assessment is *“an umbrella term for approaches to assessment which incentivise, reflect and reward the plural characteristics of high-quality research, in support of diverse and inclusive research cultures”*.¹

A responsible approach to research assessment should be further understood in following dimensions:

- Epistemological responsibility – ensuring that evaluation processes support the production of valid, rigorous, and socially relevant knowledge.
- Institutional responsibility – clearly allocating roles and accountability in assessment systems (e.g., who sets criteria, who uses results, who we evaluate and why).

¹ Curry, S., de Rijcke, S., Hatch, A., Pillay, D. (Gansen) ., van der Weijden, I., & Wilsdon, J. (2020). The changing role of funders in responsible research assessment: progress, obstacles and the way ahead (RoRI Working Paper No.3). doi: 10.6084/m9.figshare.13227914.v2.

- Methodological responsibility (e.g. which methods are appropriate for the desired purpose and evaluation units, bridging the evaluation gap²).

In relation to this definition, another issue is the definition of *quality*. However, we assume that for this Strategy, it is not inevitably necessary to define what the quality notion is like in different disciplines or local contexts. The point is in the “*plural characteristics*”, which basically means that evaluation methods should not be simplistic or reductive and that we should align the criteria or indicators only with related concepts to avoid the evaluation gap.

Qualitative evaluation/peer review

For the purposes of this Strategy, considering the most common situations, the qualitative evaluation denotes an evaluative approach based on expert (peer) interpretation of others' work while using narrative, contextual, and qualitative evidence, as opposed to decisions made on solely quantitative scoring using metrics.

Variants may differ according to the practical feasibility in different systems and for different purposes, and usually include tools such as internal or external review; anonymous or open evaluation; narrative CVs and portfolios; institutional self-assessment reports; case studies of research impact; hybrid formats thereof.

Inappropriate Use of Metrics

We consider the inappropriate use to be:

- any application of quantitative indicators for a purpose for which they were not designed;
- using a sole metric for complex situations;
- using metrics as a sole method for decision-making without proper contextualisation.

An example of such inappropriate use is using Journal Impact Factor, Article Influence Score or similar journal-level metrics to decide on the quality of individual publications or researchers (in this matter, they do not accurately represent research quality or impact). On the contrary, it is not statistically wrong to use these metrics for representing quality or impact in larger datasets for monitoring purposes. Further example of unwanted practices is using h-index for ranking people or using normalised citation scores (Category Normalised Citation Impact – CNCI, Field-weighted Citation Impact – FWCI) for rewarding, promotion, etc. (one indicator should not be used to describe a complex problem, which the individual career is). On the contrary, normalised citation impact metrics work very well for comparing citation impact between two entities with larger datasets or exploring the entity's impact by profiles.

To distinguish potentially inappropriate solutions and to use metrics wisely, experts educated in bibliometrics and research evaluation are needed. The responsibility in research assessment may be obviously further seen from more perspectives than just metrics and their usage.

² „The evaluation gap is a phenomenon... that the criteria in assessments do not match the character or goals of the research under evaluation or the role that the researcher aims to play in society.“ Wouters, P. (2017). Bridging the evaluation gap. *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society*, 3, 108–118.
<https://doi.org/10.17351/ests2017.115>.

Career Development

From the perspective of research assessment, we distinguish between research evaluation and researcher evaluation. Even if common methods and tools may be similar, the tools acceptable for disciplines may not be appropriate for use at the individual level and vice versa. By career assessment, we understand the processes of evaluating individuals for the purposes of promotion (career development), reward (financial), or recruitment. Inappropriate research assessment practices have even greater destructive potential or higher negative impact when influencing individual careers or funding. In EDUC, we encounter diverse practices in individual evaluations based on local legislative or organisational context, and thus the feasibility of reforming efforts. These differences must be considered in defining joint priorities and implementation tasks.

3. Vision and the Strategy concept

Our vision is to promote a fair, transparent, and contextual approach to evaluating research and researchers. This approach should acknowledge a plurality of research contributions, value their importance to society, policy, education and innovation. We aim to align our institutional practices to existing and evolving global standards for responsible research assessment. Through collective action and mutual learning, we aim to contribute to the transformation of research culture in Europe and beyond.

By this strategy, we mainly aim to formulate and follow **crucial priorities** for the abovementioned collective action within the EDUC alliance. At the same time, trying to unify our institutional practices and approaches to the reform is almost impossible, given the fact that we operate in different cultural, political and legislative contexts. To avoid this dichotomy and possible misunderstandings, and secure realistic implementation of the project goals, we want to first carefully formulate the **strategy scope and concept**.

The strategy aims to provide common reform principles and ensure that the research assessment reform is driven responsibly by all partners. We have already mentioned that we operate in a political-historical context, a national legislation system, and specific starting positions of EDUC universities. Therefore, we cannot precisely coordinate our reform journeys or take the very same actions respectively. The inevitable **diversity** is actually a **strength**. To a great extent, we can't reach a consensus due to disparities in institutional capacity, regulatory constraints, and research traditions. On the other hand, we can still find priorities and values that are common for all EDUC universities as a desired target, or those which one partner could support another in. We can **show ways** of adapting and changing research assessment. In the strategy, **we must be general, but not generic**.

Disentangling all conceptual aspects of responsibility from a broader sense linked to diverse national contexts would go far beyond the scope of this Strategy. Therefore, we aim mainly to

- A) define priorities which deal with the most pressing issues which we committed to reform by signing ARRA;
- B) broaden the measures to contribute to desired diversity and inclusiveness in the assessment of research and individuals.

The **Strategy** is rather a guiding document helping EDUC universities implement RRA principles (predominantly COARA). Due to the rationale explained above, the priorities are not KPIs that must be strictly followed and fulfilled. Rather, the priorities are a set of values which represent a shared notion of what is foremost important to cover in terms of reforming research assessment. Priorities are to be interpreted and approached through **pending tasks**, which we see as possible ways to the realisation of the reform. These joint priorities are still valid as values which we consider joint regardless of the starting points and geographical location. Guidelines and trajectories can be followed by EDUC universities within their own reference systems. We also want to and can collaborate in their implementation.

The implementation of these priorities in the next phase of the project will be enabled thanks to the large extent of flexibility and freedom. Each university, nevertheless, is committed to achieving its individual goals through its CoARA Action Plans, which make a framework comparable to this strategy.

Preliminary overview of main research assessment reform priorities across EDUC universities

Priorities are not only joint for the EDUC alliance, but also institution-specific. As a context for the EDUC strategy, this chapter aims to bring together a preliminary structured summary of diverse priorities reflecting CoARA commitments in diverse EDUC national contexts. This section synthesises the institutional approaches to reforming research assessment across EDUC universities.

We used a written overview of starting points and target points provided by EDUC partner universities, for which they used their CoARA Action plans, or other strategic documents. However, these overviews differ in the level of detail and structure. To ensure comparability, we structured institutional practices in support of more responsible, transparent, and inclusive research assessment systems around ten CoARA commitments.

EDUC universities' abbreviations: Masaryk University (MUNI), University of Pécs (UPECS), University of Potsdam (UP), University of Cagliari (UNICA), Universitat Jaume I (UJI), University of South-Eastern Norway (USN), Paris Nanterre University (UPN), University of Rennes (UNIVREN) and Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University (PNU).

A comprehensive systematic analysis of national contexts, readiness for the reform, and strategic priorities will be developed as a separate document in the implementation phase of the EDUC-WIDE project.

CoARA commitment	MUNI	UPECS	USN	PNU	UJI	UNICA	UP	UPN	UNIVREN
C1: Diversity of contributions & careers	Completed IRDE recognises diverse disciplines; field-specific self-evaluations	Planned Recognised need to move beyond "one-size-fits-all"; HRS4R and CoARA reforms already underway	Completed NOR-CAM toolbox adapted; career diversity integrated into HR and HRS4R	In progress Pilots on societal impact & interdisciplinarity; narrative CV planned	In progress Current research scale partly aligned; narrative CV pilots planned 2025–26	In progress Recruitment aligned with OTM-R; workshops/seminars; training, IPR, ethics; full roll-out by 2027	In progress Recognises broader contributions via HRS4R and diversity audits	Completed HCERES evaluation includes a wide range: publications, funds, outreach, PhD, and teaching links	Completed HCERES evaluation includes a wide range: publications, funds, outreach, PhD, and teaching links
C2: Peer review as primary method	Completed IRDE fully peer-review-based, aligned with DORA/Leiden; minimal bibliometric support	In progress Institutional RA mixes peer review + bibliometrics; still indicator-driven	In progress New USN-CAM framework 2024–25, peer review central	In progress Introduction of qualitative peer review mechanisms and staff training on responsible evaluation	In progress Pilot procedures, narrative CV + qualitative peer review planned; full roll-out by 2028	In progress National RA via ANVUR mixes bibliometrics & peer review; UniCA aligning with qualitative principles	Completed DFG-led system ensures peer review is central	Completed HCERES qualitative peer review central; indicators used only as complements	Completed HCERES qualitative peer review central; indicators used only as complements
C3: Avoid inappropriate use of metrics	Completed Metrics only for monitoring; no JIF/h-index	Planned Heavy reliance on IF, citations, InCites metrics; predatory journal risks noted	Completed No JIF/h-index; guidance and principles for appropriate bibliometrics under development	Planned Alternatives to JIF/h-index by 2026	Planned Current system still bibliometric-heavy; explicit commitment to reduce inappropriate use and shift towards responsible indicators	In progress Mentorship and career development pilots; explicit recognition of need to move beyond JIF/h-index, but change is still at pilot stage, 2026	In progress Bibliometrics still influential in promotion and funding	Completed No metrics at UPN level; national level still mixed in some disciplines	In progress National level still mixed in some disciplines
C4: Avoid use of rankings	Completed Rankings excluded from evaluation/funding	Planned Scimago ranking used in practice; no evidence of abandoning rankings	Completed Rankings excluded from evaluation/funding	Planned Internal evaluation mechanisms designed to replace rankings	Completed Rankings excluded from evaluation/funding; focus is on internal quality scales	Completed Rankings excluded from evaluation/funding	Completed Rankings not decisive in RA	Completed Strong resistance to rankings; no university ranking in RA; UPN vocal against it	Completed Strong resistance to rankings; no university ranking in RA
C5: Commit resources to reform	In progress CSSE unit coordinates reform; resources dedicated but developing	In progress Gap analysis for HRS4R done; 2-year action plan ongoing; OS&RA actions in design	In progress Project resources allocated from research dept., HR, rector's staff, faculties	Planned Resource allocation plan and training programmes for professional and research-support staff	In progress Staff time from research & quality offices; IT tools and external reviewers foreseen; annual budget for peers planned	In progress Administrative support for DMPs, increased budget for OA publications, public engagement plan until 2026	In progress Reform linked to HRS4R	In progress Part of CoARA, DORA signatory; resources mobilised via VP Research & Research Commission, but no dedicated RRA unit	In progress Resources channelled mainly via national frameworks; institutional commitment exists but limited autonomy

CoARA commitment	MUNI	UPECS	USN	PNU	UJI	UNICA	UP	UPN	UNIVREN
C6: Review & develop criteria/tools	In progress Plans to analyse processes, align 2027 IRDE with CoARA; develop field-specific criteria	In progress Proposals for handling problematic journals; strategic process starting nationally	In progress Pilots for documenting Strategic Research Areas; new criteria and framework under development	In progress Mapping & piloting of new CV formats	In progress Pilots of new criteria and narrative CV formats in 2025–26	Completed Standard procedure for doctoral programmes and updated Code of Ethics already set for 2024	In progress Further development constrained by national law	In progress Criteria mainly shaped by HCERES nationally; UPN contributes, but autonomy limited	In progress Criteria shaped by HCERES; university seeks more dialogue for flexibility
C7: Raise awareness & training	In progress dInfographics, conferences, training	In progress Training, growing awareness of DORA, Leiden, CoARA principles	In progress Training, guidance, support	In progress Training, guidance, public communication	In progress Training through Doctoral School, consultation, public communication	In progress Training, seminars/workshops on ARRA principles by 2027	In progress Training, growing awareness of DORA	In progress Awareness and guidance growing at leadership and staff levels	In progress Training and awareness-raising activities occur via doctoral schools and national channels
C8: Exchange practices, mutual learning	Completed National working group via CZARMA; international networks; updated website for transparency	In progress Participation in Hungarian CoARA coordination via HUN-REN	Completed Active participation in CoARA, NOR-CAM national network, YERUN, EDUC	In progress Participation in EDUC; plans for conferences and workshops	Completed Active participation in Spanish CoARA Chapter, EDUC, Catalisi	In progress Open Science Committee appointed in 2024; workshops scheduled until 2027	Completed Participation in CoARA National Chapter, DFG, and HRS4R processes	Completed Active in French CoARA chapter, Université Paris Lumières alliance, EDUC	Completed Active in French CoARA Chapter and European networks
C9: Collaboration for reform beyond own institution	In progress CZARMA national group, sharing experiences, participation in international networks, but evolving	In progress Alignment with national reform bodies; open science statements and proposals issued	In progress Progress communication built into project dissemination plan; regular updates planned 2024–27	In progress Dissemination of the RA Action Plan; progress reporting through committees and stakeholder meetings	In progress Regular progress reports and dissemination planned, alignment with ANECA and CRUE; not fully institutionalised yet	In progress Website section on good practices planned for 2026	In progress	In progress Communication mostly through national HCERES/CoARA frameworks	In progress Communication depends on HCERES and CNU reports; limited institutional space
C10: Evaluate implementation & progress	In progress Planned IRDE summary report, public reporting, long-term analysis and monitoring 2027 cycle	Planned No systematic evaluation yet	In progress First evaluation after one year of full use in 2026; then every 3–5 years	Planned Monitoring & evaluation cycle not yet established	In progress Regular progress reports and dissemination planned, alignment with ANECA and CRUE; not fully institutionalised yet	In progress Draft OTM-R institutional policy and quality control system planned by 2025	Planned	Planned Implementation monitoring depends on HCERES 5-year cycle; no UPN-specific evaluation yet	Planned Monitoring depends on 5-year national HCERES cycle

Key actions planned or taken by EDUC universities to reform research assessment

Category	Universities	Key Features of Reform Stage	Illustrative Practices
Institutions with Mature Reform Frameworks	MUNI, USN, UJI, UPN, UNIVREN	Reforms already embedded in institutional policies; pilots running; strong alignment with national frameworks	MUNI: Internal Research and Doctoral Studies Evaluation (IRDE) is fully peer-review-based, has no reliance on JIF/h-index, and provides transparent infographics for communication. USN: USN-CAM competence-based model applied at all levels (individual → unit → institutional), integrated with HR processes, linked to Open Science policy. UJI: Dedicated CoARA-UJI committee, institutional diagnosis of RA, pilots for research groups and grants, balanced scorecards including PhD supervision & project leadership, active communication strategy.
Institutions at Early or Transitional Stages	PNU, UPECS, UP	CoARA principles acknowledged, initial steps, pilots in limited areas, broad consultations	PNU: Narrative CV and peer-review pilots; linking RA to societal impact, interdisciplinarity, and post-war recovery; training staff on responsible metrics and CoARA principles. UPECS: CoARA Action Plan, linked to HRS4R; active in Hungarian CoARA Chapter; reviewing internal funding/evaluation schemes; recommendations for transparency and recognition of diverse contributions.
Institutions Constrained by National Policy but Experimenting Locally	UNICA	National context restrictive, but strong local initiatives	UNICA: Updated Code of Ethics addressing unconscious bias; mandatory equity declarations for evaluators; mentorship programmes for early-career researchers; Open Science Committee for FAIR/data policies; increased OA funding; prohibition of rankings in internal RA.

4. EDUC strategy – joint priorities for the reform

The EDUC Alliance aims to strengthen cooperation through a shared plan for reform research assessment, for enhancement of training, and for implementing an academic career development system, in line with the principles of responsible research and open science. This chapter depicts priorities and values, which we identified as joint at multiple project meetings.

These joint priorities not only reflect issues that we have in common in terms of the alignment with CoARA but also define sectors where collaboration between EDUC universities could result in easier or more effective implementation of responsible research assessment principles, even if the overall trajectories may differ.

Joint priorities are seen as a set of shared ideals, not a “technical” checklist. They will be approached through the basket of pending tasks, seen as possible ways to the realisation of the reform, or as a system of guidelines, followed freely to a great extent. In the implementation phase of the project, each EDUC university will evaluate its realisation journey. Concurrently, those EDUC universities, which have already published their CoARA Action Plans, will follow them. **Thus, this strategy is an alternative Action Plan, naturally reflecting individual CoARA Action Plans of EDUC universities, sharing similar priorities, but promoting foremost those values that are common for all of us and where we can support each other through continuous cooperation.**

During the discussions at meetings, we aim to strengthen cooperation through a shared plan for reform research assessment (RA), for the enhancement of training, and for implementing an academic career development system, in line with the principles of responsible research and open science. We originally identified the following actions as joint priorities and values:

1. Sharing capacities in education and training within the EDUC alliance.
2. Connect to other relevant EDUC experts or working groups regarding ongoing trainings (promote Moodle), and career assessment.
3. Create a network of evaluators (reviewers) in the EDUC Alliance.
4. Create guidelines with examples of what we understand by the inappropriate use of bibliometrics.
5. Implement changes through CoARA national chapters, where relevant (pressure on national systems).
6. Develop a template for a career path.
7. Establish a PhD Alumni Association.

However, for the purpose of this strategy, we **reformulated** them and **structured** them around **three thematic pillars** – Education and exchanges for responsible research assessment, Transition from metrics to peer review, and Responsibility in career assessment. The **new structure of priorities** defines main trajectories within which we distinguish the pending tasks.

Pillar 1: Education and exchanges for responsible research assessment

This pillar aims to promote institutional change in research assessment through shared training initiatives, coordinated advocacy, collaboration, knowledge exchange and peer learning at the alliance level and beyond.

Priority 1: Sharing capacities in education and training within the EDUC alliance.

Description:

The objective is to reinforce joint training on CoARA-driven reformed research assessment (referred to as „(reformed) RA“). This priority strengthens the capacity of academic communities to engage in responsible assessment through training, mentoring, and the co-creation of context-sensitive evaluation criteria. At the same time, it saves the capacity of lecturers and trainers and secures a similar high quality of the content. It supports the reform by raising awareness.

The priority is relevant for the following CoARA commitments:

- Commitment 5: Commit resources to reforming research assessment as is needed to achieve the organisational changes committed to
- 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
- Commitment 8: Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition

Pending tasks:

- Map existing training offers across EDUC universities to identify strengths and gaps.
- Create shared EDUC-wide training modules, covering:
 - (reformed)RA for scientific projects and research outputs.
 - Transparent, merit-based recruitment and use of narrative CVs.
 - Organise joint training events and mentoring schemes across the alliance.
- Embed RRA training into doctoral/postdoctoral programmes and staff development tracks.

Priority 2: Connect experts in research assessment and other relevant topics (open science, HR, etc.) regarding ongoing training in and support of (reformed)RA.

Description:

Collaboration with other EDUC expert groups, the development of joint modules, and the promotion of a shared training infrastructure (e.g. via Moodle or a dedicated platform) are crucial to fostering knowledge exchange and peer learning, understanding of the reform commitments and sustainability of the reform. In this matter, RAEG should connect to other EDUC working groups, promote Moodle, and try to fill the missing gap either with topics or

the target audience, e.g. RRA topic. An information platform for promoting these trainings and lectures could be established. It supports the reform by effective exploitation of the expert capacity of people already working in research assessment. Through joint learning, experts will share experience and common values.

The priority is relevant for the following CoARA commitments:

- Commitment 5: Commit resources to reforming research assessment as is needed to achieve the organisational changes committed to
- 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
- Commitment 8: Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition

Pending tasks:

- Establish a shared database of EDUC experts in research assessment and related fields.
- Facilitate regular knowledge exchange with relevant EDUC expert groups (e.g. Open Science, Career development).
- Exchange of case studies and practices among EDUC partners via Moodle hub.
- Engagement with international communities.
 - Organise cross-consortium workshops with external experts (e.g. DORA, CoARA, ENRESSH).
 - Support the creation of a Central and Eastern European network for research evaluation and scientometrics (original idea of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań).

Priority 3: Contribution to cultivating the national systems

Description:

This priority supports structural change at the national and European level by contributing to reform efforts through CoARA national chapters and engaging in dialogue with policymakers, thus aligning institutional and national systems with shared RRA values. We especially aim to coordinate (reformed)RA efforts with national regulatory frameworks. To achieve this, EDUC universities that have active CoARA national chapters in their country and whose assessment is influenced by national assessment systems should try to implement changes through CoARA national chapters and actively contribute to the national cultivation process. By presenting EDUC-WIDE's Research Assessment Expert Group (RAEG) work, the alliance can play a strategic role in shaping research assessment landscapes at the national level. It supports the reform by pushing the national system to prioritise this issue and make this initiative legitimate and supported.

The priority is relevant for the following CoARA commitments:

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

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

Pending tasks:

- Foster dialogue between EDUC universities and national authorities through CoARA national chapters.
- Present joint recommendations to support systemic change in research assessment.
- Actively contribute to national policy-making in collaboration with CoARA chapters.
- Facilitate stakeholder dialogues to align institutional and national goals.

Pillar 2: Transition from metric-based to (predominantly) peer-review assessment

Recognising the diversity of research contributions and basing the assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation are the most important reform commitments. The extent to which metrics are used and the influence on the system they have, are very diverse across EDUC universities and actually play a great role in different communities' response to the reform. The biggest pro of peer review is that it allows for a wide range of outcomes. It is more inclusive than bibliometrics. Its biggest obstacle is the time-consuming nature, the lack of reviewers and also the subjectivity of the evaluation. Also, from a practical perspective, peer review evaluations are often reduced due to their feasibility in overburdened systems. In contrast, bibliometrics is objective and less time-consuming, but has its negatives if used inappropriately. Appropriateness of the usage of metrics is thus a crucial issue. Metrics are still alive, and we cannot (even if we do not want to) fully avoid them. Metrics are useful for different monitoring systems and are still vivid in evaluations in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Spain and Ukraine. We must, therefore, carefully interpret the responsible usage of metrics.

In RAEG, we are aware of the advantages and disadvantages of both main methods, and we primarily call for evaluation expertise to ensure the validity, reliability and credibility of the evaluation for decision-making and to comply with the desired values of responsibility. In RAEG, we agreed that when used for monitoring purposes at the institutional or national level, metrics can be considered appropriate. At other levels of evaluation, we recommend using peer review to the maximum extent possible. The minimum for the transition is to avoid using metrics straightforwardly when deciding about an individual's career and promotion.

Priority 4: Anchoring the responsible assessment practices in institutional cultures**Description:**

This priority promotes the ethical and informed use of both qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods. It facilitates best practices in RA and supports the development of institutional policies that clearly define appropriate uses of bibliometrics, in line with CoARA principles. We aim to promote the ethical use of metrics by developing shared positions on the values, limitations, and appropriate use of quantitative indicators to ensure consistent application across the alliance. To support this, we will revise and properly interpret CoARA recommendations to have a common understanding. We believe that this will help to overcome possible resistance to reform and embed new assessment practices sustainably.

It directly supports the reform by making the obligation to implement CoARA commitments part of the institutional policy system, thus open, transparent and legitimate.

The priority is relevant for all commitments, but mainly the core ones:

- Commitment 1: Recognise the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research
- Commitment 2: Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators
- 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
- Commitment 4: Avoid the use of rankings of research organisations in research assessment

Pending tasks:

- Develop institutional policies for responsible research evaluation.
- Create and publish CoARA Action Plans at each institution.
- Draft EDUC-wide guidelines on the responsible use of bibliometrics:
- Form a dedicated working group.
- Collect examples of good and poor practices.
- Disseminate guidelines and integrate them into internal regulations.
- Promote shared tools and platforms for continuous training in RRA (such as Moodle).

Priority 5: Enabling the peer-review assessments at EDUC universities

Description:

This priority focuses on strengthening peer-review-based research assessment, and ensuring homogeneity in (reformed) RA processes by training, guidelines and foremost creating a Network of Reviewers within EDUC. It directly supports the reform by supporting the main trajectory of the reform, i.e. moving towards research assessment criteria that focus primarily on quality.

The priority is relevant for the following CoARA commitments:

- Commitment 1: Recognise the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research
- Commitment 2: Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators

Pending tasks:

- Establish a shared EDUC-wide register of trained reviewers, based on common RRA principles.
- Provide coordinated reviewer training, aligned with agreed guidelines (e.g. narrative CVs, DORA, CoARA, SCOPE framework, OTM-R principles).
- Design and pilot new mechanisms replacing generic or primarily quantitative approaches with primarily expert, qualitative, or contextualised judgement (peer review) in selected areas (e.g. career assessment, research evaluation, evaluation of proposals, etc.). These areas may differ between EDUC partners due to different local contexts.

Pillar 3: Career Assessment

The research assessment reform does not only operate at the level of national systems or assessment of research at institutions (e.g. for excellence initiatives). Even more important is the reform when a certain evaluation method influences careers, promotion, rewards and other features at the level of individuals. CoARA commitments are formulated intentionally commonly, without further specification of the level they refer to. This may cause a great diversity in the interpretation, especially concerning different national and institutional systems and contexts, where the assessment approaches need to be reformed. This diversity is present in the EDUC alliance as well. In RAEG, we believe that career assessment must not be avoided when implementing the assessment reform, even though the responsibility for that lies with faculties, institutes and departments, and so the communication of the reform principles must be grasped very thoroughly. To enable this, we aim to closely collaborate with HR departments, e.g. through the implementation of HRS4R projects.

Priority 6: A template for a career path

Description:

This priority aims to support researchers' career development through fair and forward-looking assessment, which values potential, growth, and diverse forms of achievement beyond high-impact publications. The objective is to achieve **transparent, inclusive, objective, merit-based, and sustainable academic career paths**. Among the main aims, RAEG considers it important to align research assessment with the recognition of diverse career paths, fostering mobility, and covering the level of postdocs, which is not anchored at any (discussing) institutions, and unlike other groups, they do not have given development or career growth plans.

It directly supports the reform by:

- **A template for career path** illustrates the researchers' career path possibilities, and within this plan, appropriate assessment methods for each stage could be defined.

The priority is relevant for the following CoARA commitments:

- Commitment 1: Recognise the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research
- Commitment 6: Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes

Pending tasks:

- Develop a template for a personalised Career Development Plan (CDP) that includes indicators beyond publications (e.g. teaching, open science, societal impact).
- Pilot the CDP template at selected institutions and gather feedback.
- Create a template for embedding narrative CVs and diverse indicators into promotion and hiring processes.

Priority 7: Establishing a PhD Alumni Association

Description:

This priority enables inclusive participation of former PhD students in shaping assessment policies, engaging researchers, students, and stakeholders to build trust, adaptability, and relevance to academic communities. A PhD Alumni Association will provide a platform for networking, mentoring, and co-creation of good practices, while also serving as a feedback mechanism for institutional policy. It directly supports the reform by enabling the alumni tracking, which is an important research culture and impact indicator (evaluation of career and academic paths of graduates as a qualitative indicator of excellence). It also has an impact on the transfer of good practice, providing current PhD students with valuable information.

The priority is relevant for the following CoARA commitments:

- Commitment 1: Recognise the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research
- Commitment 2: Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators
- Commitment 8: Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition

Pending tasks:

- Map PhD alumni across the EDUC alliance to identify career trajectories and collaboration potential.
- Utilise a recent digital platform for alumni networking and knowledge exchange (OpenUP).
- Organise annual events and mentoring initiatives involving alumni.
- Establish ongoing consultations and feedback mechanisms (e.g. surveys, focus groups) to ensure the RRA process reflects community values, and use this input to inform policy adjustments, training content, and institutional practices.

5. Dissemination

The dissemination of the EDUC Strategy for Responsible Research Assessment (RRA) is a key component of ensuring its adoption, visibility, and long-term impact both within the Alliance and beyond.

Objectives of Dissemination

- Promote awareness of the shared vision and principles guiding RRA reform across EDUC institutions.
- Engage key internal and external stakeholders to build ownership and commitment.
- Foster dialogue and mutual learning between EDUC partners and external research organisations.

Target Audiences

- University leadership and management teams
- Research and evaluation committees
- Early-career researchers and doctoral candidates
- Human resources and career development services
- National policy-makers and CoARA national chapters

Channels and Formats for Dissemination

- Workshops and seminars
- Publications and practical guidelines
- EDUC Moodle modules
- Cross-institutional events
- Stakeholder meetings with national policymakers (organized by PNU, MUNI, UPECS).
- Short-term staff exchanges within EDUC alliance
- Expert groups

6. Strategy evaluation and monitoring scheme

To support mutual learning and adaptive implementation of the Strategy, the EDUC Alliance will adopt a formative, learning-oriented monitoring approach. Rather than enforcing compliance, this process aims to provide tools for self-reflection, mutual exchange, and continuous improvement aligned with CoARA principles.

Monitoring and evaluation

A specific monitoring plan is needed for the effective implementation of strategic goals. Key mechanisms:

- Institutional self-assessments, supported by a common EDUC template aligned with CoARA principles.
- Progress reports linked to project deliverables, outlining implementation milestones and adjustments.
- Stakeholder consultations and feedback loops, particularly with early-career researchers, research managers, and evaluators.

Signals of Success

- Number of training sessions held and level of participant engagement across EDUC.
- Use of EDUC Moodle modules on RRA topics (e.g. narrative CV, peer review, metrics).
- Adoption and integration of Career Development Plan (CDP) templates across partner institutions.
- Collection and analysis of researcher feedback (e.g., via surveys or focus groups) on the fairness, clarity, and inclusiveness of research assessment processes.
- Level of engagement of PhD students and postdocs in discussions on assessment reform.
- Engagement of mid- and late-career researchers (as potential evaluators) in awareness-raising events.
- Active participation in CoARA national chapters and working groups.