

YERUN'S REPORT AND ACTION PLAN ON COARA

1.Introduction

Since the early discussions on the reform of research assessment in Europe, beginning in 2021, YERUN has actively contributed to shaping the debate and advancing a broader vision of **responsible academic assessment**. As a member of the Coalition of the Willing from January 2022, YERUN contributed to the development of the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment through its participation in both the Core Group and the Implementation Group. On 10 November 2022, YERUN became one of the early signatories of the Agreement, reaffirming its commitment to the future Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA).

From the outset, YERUN has understood that **research assessment—and, more broadly, academic assessment**— plays a critical role in fostering a high-quality, diverse and internationally competitive research and innovation (R&I) ecosystem. For YERUN, research assessment cannot be considered in isolation from the wider academic environment in which research, education, innovation and societal engagement are recognised, rewarded, and supported. The reform of research assessment, and more broadly of academic assessment, is therefore not an isolated policy objective but a key enabler for strengthening research careers, Open Science, research excellence, institutional diversity and the attractiveness of academic careers across Europe.

Responsible assessment is fundamental to ensuring that researchers are recognised for the full diversity of their contributions and that universities are encouraged to pursue excellence through collaboration, openness, integrity, and societal impact. Throughout its policy work, YERUN has consistently advocated for expert-informed, context-sensitive and multidimensional assessment approaches that recognise the diversity of institutional missions and contributions, moving beyond simplistic or purely quantitative measures of research performance.

This commitment is closely connected to YERUN's broader strategic vision of strengthening the conditions for talent, excellent research and innovation across Europe, as initially reflected in the **YERUN Strategy 2021–2025 and reaffirmed in the YERUN Strategy 2026-2030**. It is equally embedded in YERUN's long-standing engagement in shaping the European Research Area, including its contributions to the ERA Policy Agendas 2022–2024 and 2025–2027, where research assessment has become a key structural policy area.

YERUN's added value lies in facilitating collaboration, promoting mutual learning, supporting evidence-informed policy development, and amplifying the experiences and perspectives of its members. For this reason, during the first years of CoARA, YERUN prioritised facilitating the exchange of knowledge and good practices, promoting peer learning and mutual support, fostering collaboration across its membership, contributing to European policy discussions, and ensuring that the perspectives and experiences of young research universities were reflected in the evolving European policy landscape. These activities have laid the foundations for the present Action Plan.

Building on this experience, this Action Plan provides a structured framework to support YERUN members in advancing the principles of CoARA through collaboration, mutual learning and policy coordination. Rather than replacing existing institutional initiatives, it complements and strengthens them by facilitating the exchange of practices, promoting institutional learning and reinforcing shared commitments across the network. Fully aligned with YERUN's broader policy work on research assessment, academic assessment, research careers, Open Science and the European Research Area, the Action Plan aims to support coherent and responsible implementation of assessment reform while recognising the diversity of institutional contexts and missions across YERUN's membership. As a European university network, YERUN considers as a primary contribution to support and empower its member universities in widely implementing the research assessment reform, rather than developing institution-specific assessment frameworks.

2.YERUN's progress to date

YERUN has made significant progress in advancing the academic assessment reform by fostering collaboration and alignment with CoARA principles. These past and ongoing achievements are structured into three overarching areas of action:

2.1 Informing, connecting and engaging stakeholders and YERUN members

YERUN is dedicated to ensuring its members and the broader academic community are well-informed about the principles, commitments, and ongoing developments related to CoARA and the broader reform of academic assessment.

Key activities include:

- Disseminating information and raising awareness of developments related to research assessment reform, both within the YERUN network and externally.
- Providing regular updates and guidance to members on CoARA activities, initiatives and emerging developments.
- Acting as a bridge between CoARA and YERUN members, including institutions that are not yet members of the Coalition.
- Facilitating the exchange of knowledge, experiences and good practices among member universities.
- Encouraging and supporting YERUN members to actively participate in CoARA activities and wider discussions on research assessment reform.
- Disseminating the results of CoARA and YERUN initiatives on research assessment via social media, newsletters and internal communication channels.
- Contributing to European policy discussions and initiatives on research assessment reform, representing the perspectives of young research universities.
- Empowering YERUN members to actively engage in the governance and activities of CoARA, including representation on the Steering Board (with three YERUN member universities serving during this period) as well as active participation in Working Groups and Cascade Funding projects. This demonstrates YERUN's commitment not only to supporting the implementation of the reform, but also in shaping its strategic direction at the European level.

2.2 Supporting the advancement of research and academic assessment reform

YERUN has prioritised the importance of collective efforts in addressing shared challenges through the creation of YERUN working groups and its active involvement in the strategic and operational support to the Coalition's working groups (WGs). During these years, the following activities were developed:

1. **Developing the YERUN Working Group on CoARA and the reform of research assessment** as a platform for members to discuss policy and operational aspects of the reform, exchange knowledge and good practices, promote alignment of institutional approaches, and identify common challenges to implementation, feeding these into relevant European policy discussions, including the ERA Forum. The Working Group is now embedded within the YERUN Policy Platform and contributes to the ERA Forum through the Structural Policy on the Reform of Research Assessment.
2. **Facilitating institutional implementation of reforms:** YERUN has coordinated five pilots within the OPUS project (Horizon Europe, Open Universal Science), three of which were led by YERUN members (UNIRI, NOVA, UCY). The objective of the pilots was to integrate open science practices into evaluation frameworks. Promoting discussions and reflections on the responsible use of qualitative and quantitative indicators to foster evidence-based practices in member institutions.
3. **Ensuring leadership role within CoARA Boost project:** YERUN has coordinated, together with MCAA, the provision of operational and strategic support to CoARA Working Groups, as part of the CoARA Boost project. In addition to the direct support provided to the chairs of the working groups, this work has materialised in:
 - a. Co-leading the coordination and support provided to CoARA Boost Work Package leaders, facilitating collaboration and the effective implementation of project activities across the Coalition.
 - b. Co-leading the coordination, onboarding and monitoring of successive waves of CoARA Working Groups, contributing to their effective functioning, knowledge exchange and continuous improvement.
 - c. Supporting the dissemination and uptake of key CoARA outputs through YERUN's communication channels and networks, strengthening awareness and engagement with research assessment reform across the European research community.
4. **Embedding the principles of responsible research assessment in YERUN's own activities and initiatives.** Long before the establishment of CoARA, YERUN promoted qualitative, expert-based assessment approaches across its activities. Notably, the YERUN Mobility Awards (2017–2025) were evaluated through a robust peer-review process, with each proposal assessed independently by two experts against a qualitative evaluation matrix covering five assessment criteria, followed by a final evaluation by an expert panel. This approach reflected YERUN's long-standing commitment to recognising excellence through qualitative assessment rather than relying on quantitative indicators or institutional rankings.

Furthermore, YERUN and its members have participated as a member in CoARA WGs, ensuring the network's perspectives and expertise are integrated into CoARA's efforts.

3. Going forward

YERUN remains committed to promoting the reform of academic assessment in line with CoARA principles and European policy priorities. Building on the experience gained over the past years, YERUN will continue to contribute to research and academic assessment reform by acting as a facilitator, connector and advocate for its members. Recognising the need for change at both national and European level, YERUN will focus on creating the conditions for members to exchange experiences, learn from one another and contribute to European policy development that can ultimately help drive a meaningful assessment reform.

4. Future actions and strategic priorities

YERUN's action plan will follow the course of its current strategy (2026-2030). It will centre and strengthen its role as a facilitator, contributor and advocate in the field of academic assessment reform:

- **Strengthen coordination and exchange among members:** YERUN will continue to facilitate coordination among its members on the reform of research assessment through the YERUN Policy Platform, promoting the exchange of experiences, good practices and institutional approaches. Where relevant, YERUN will support joint reflections and encourage collaboration among members on issues related to the implementation of research assessment reform (e.g. through dedicated webinars or workshops).
- **Promote institutional learning and mutual exchange:** YERUN will continue to support peer learning by providing opportunities for members to share experiences, lessons learnt and practical approaches to implementing research assessment reform. Where appropriate, the network will promote and disseminate tools, methodologies and institutional practices developed by its members or through relevant European initiatives, fostering mutual learning across the network.
- **Contribute to European policy discussions:** Research assessment reform will remain part of YERUN's broader policy work on research careers, Open Science and the European Research Area. Where relevant and aligned with the network's strategic priorities, YERUN will continue to contribute to European policy discussions and promote the perspectives and experiences of young research universities.
- **Monitor emerging developments and opportunities:** YERUN will continue to monitor relevant European developments related to research assessment reform and facilitate the exchange of information among its members. Where opportunities arise, the network will encourage members' participation in relevant European initiatives and promote the visibility of successful institutional practices and experiences.
- **Promote responsible use of indicators across its policy work and network activities:** Consistent with its long-standing practice, the network advocates for expert-led, context-sensitive and qualitative approaches to assessment, recognising the diversity of institutional

missions and contributions. In line with these principles, YERUN deliberately avoids using institutional rankings⁽¹⁾ as proxies for research performance or excellence, instead promoting holistic and qualitative assessment of the strengths, achievements and impact of its member universities.

Through these activities, YERUN contributes to the implementation of the relevant CoARA commitments while respecting the distinct role of a European university network within the research ecosystem.

YERUN role	Contribution to CoARA commitments	Examples
Facilitator	Commitments 7 & 8	YERUN Policy Platform, peer learning through internal groups
Knowledge broker	Commitments 7-8 & 10	Dissemination, OPUS, publications
Advocate	Commitments 1-4	ERA Forum and ERA Policy Agenda, policy papers, consultations
Community builder	Commitments 5, 8 & 9	Support and participation in CoaRA Working Groups, CoARA Boost co-leadership
Responsible actor	Commitments 2-4	YERUN Mobility Awards, qualitative assessment, commitment to a responsible use of quantitative assessment (e.g. endorsement to More than our Rank initiative).

(1) YERUN [officially endorsed More than our Rank](#), INORMS initiative, in November 2024.

Relevant YERUN publications

This report and Action Plan builds upon a long-standing body of YERUN policy work, including:

- [Reforming research assessment in Europe](#) (Nov 2021)
- [Rethinking Academic Careers](#) (June 2022)
- [Toward a reform of research assessment](#) (Sept 2022)
- [YERUN position on the agreement of research assessment and the CoARA initiative](#) (Nov 2022)
- [Contributions to ERA Policy Agenda and ERA Act consultations](#) (Oct 2024)
- [Endorsement More than Our Rank](#) (November 2024)
- [Response to the Call for Evidence Launched by the European Commission](#) (September 2025)
- [YERUN Position Accompanying the Input to the ERA Act Public Stakeholder Consultation Questionnaire](#) (January 2026)

- YERUN Members -



YERUN, Young European Research Universities Network, September 2026

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