

YERUN POSITION ON THE AGREEMENT OF RESEARCH ASSESSMENT AND THE COARA INITIATIVE

November 2022



Today, 10th of November 2022, following the decision of its Executive Board and the approval of its member institutions, YERUN becomes an official signatory of the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment and officially expresses its willingness to join the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA).

YERUN has been strongly involved in the process leading to the reform of research assessment since the very beginning of the initiative: it was early 2021 when the European Commission, under the leadership of Kostas Glinos (former Head of Unit on Open Science in DG RTD), started a series of consultations on this topic involving several stakeholders. Those intense exchanges between the Commission, research funders and research performing organisations led to the EC Scoping Report published in November 2021. This was the first official document laying the basis for all the work that came after on this relevant topic.

Our network's involvement continued during 2022, through the so-called Core Group, namely the group of stakeholders supporting the drafting team (composed by the EUA, Science Europe and Karen Stroobants) in the creation of the Agreement on Research Assessment. This work was concluded on 20 July 2022, when the final agreement was published.

YERUN welcomes the high involvement of many of its member universities in the initiative so far, some of which have already signed the agreement and joined the CoARA initiative themselves. More widely, YERUN praises the whole research community which, since 28 September (date in which the agreement and CoARA were officially opened for signatures), is showing support by joining the initiative.

The involvement of YERUN in CoARA will be a natural continuation of our network's commitment towards advancing academic careers, in line with our strategy "Enabling Talent to Grow" and the specific strategic priority area on Talent Development.

This engagement has been carefully assessed by our members, who have reflected on the initiative on numerous occasions. A dedicated YERUN ad hoc group has been involved in the preparations of the agreement and has provided key indications and recommendations for the future of the initiative. Part of that work has also led to the publication of a YERUN paper on "Rethinking Academic Careers", which was launched in an online event in July 2022. Advancing academic careers and reforming the assessment mechanisms, with the objective to recognise the diversity of the contributions that universities, their researchers, students and staff make to our society, will remain a key driver for the networks activities in the years to come.

In light of its strong commitment, YERUN values its future involvement in CoARA and will contribute at the best of its possibilities for the initiative to be useful, relevant and a real enabler of change.

Almost two years since the beginning of the initiative that is set to revolutionise the way in which research is assessed in Europe, we are now in a decisive moment for the governance of the initiative, with clear implications for its future. Therefore, YERUN believes that the moment is right to reflect on the shape that the initiative is taking, to ensure that its future structure will not depart from its original objectives.

Considering the above, YERUN would like the below points to be considered within the implementation of the initiative and more specifically towards the 1st Constitutive Assembly of CoARA:

- **Ensuring ownership of the initiative by those that are making change happen:** From the very beginning, a major point of strength of the initiative has been its strong bottom-up approach: the agreement is, indeed, the concrete result of a fruitful collaboration between different stakeholders of the research sector. Therefore, CoARA must acknowledge that its foundation pillars are the organisations and their researchers that are actively making the change. Without them being active partners and wishing to engage actively in the activities of CoARA, the initiative will fail to continue being recognised as bottom-up. As open science itself, it should be an instrument of giving back research to the researchers.
- **An open and flexible governance model:** A large group of organisations will need a Steering Board that is open to listen to the diversity of needs from different players and that ensures that resources and support are provided for those enabling change. It will also require an open mindset to be able to adopt working mechanisms that are effective and efficient, avoid excessive administration, and maximise interactions and dialogue. This will inspire organisations to reflect on their core values for assessment, take ideas, adopt them and implement them back at their institutions, and come back with challenges and lessons learnt from the implementation phases.
- **A new approach to change is needed:** CoARA should not aim to become a creator of recommendations and guidelines, as those might focus on too general aspects without giving a sense of specific implementation. Much is being developed already, which should be acknowledged and made available. What we are lacking is actual dialogue to make actions context-specific to the institutions, their national and local settings, the disciplines or the outputs involved, as well as trust in the research community involved in the change. This is where CoARA could bring real added value in proposing a new approach.

- **Reaching critical mass is the key to becoming a global actor.** CoARA will not become globally recognised merely by being present at international fora and events, but when a critical mass from the organisations involved in it will make real change happen. Only then, concrete examples and the implementation of new mechanisms of assessment will serve as evidence to influence the direction of research and academic assessment. This requires a concrete, sound and perpetual commitment and support (both organisational and financial) from the EC and the national authorities, with a focus on addressing implementation challenges with an open mind and a view to sustainable change.

YERUN looks forward to remaining an active promoter of change through CoARA as a community-led and community-owned initiative, whose sense of belonging will not be lost in the meanders of complicated governance structures.

YERUN also calls all signatories to demonstrate their dedication to the initiative with a spirit of collaboration, of mutual learning and sharing and with a critical mindset to question how we are promoting our research collaborations and how we can ultimately make academia and the research process better, more accountable, responsible and socially relevant.

- About YERUN -

The Young European Research University Network (YERUN) is an umbrella organisation of young and research-focused universities in Europe, that strengthens and facilitates cooperation in the areas of scientific research, academic education and services which benefit society. The network's activities revolve around three main lines of action: policy advocacy, members' collaboration and communication. Through these activities, YERUN contributes to place young research universities on the map of Europe.

- YERUN Members -



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