

Introduction

The CoARA WG SAGA workshop *Reforming research assessment in our institutions: struggles and dreams* (Barcelona, October 2025) brought together around 30 research managers, administrators, and institutional leaders from biomedical research organisations actively involved in implementing research assessment reform. Through a visioning exercise and participatory world café discussions, participants shared practical experiences, identified common barriers, and discussed strategies that support institutional change. Here, we synthesize the key lessons emerging from those implementation experiences. **The full workshop report will be published in October 2026.**

Overarching reflections

- Research assessment reform is a **slow, cumulative** and **participatory** process.
- **Communication** and visible progress are essential to sustain engagement.
- What we evaluate **shapes** research **practices, cultures** and **values**.
- Strategic **leadership** and holistic, transparent and context-aware evaluation drive reform.

A shared vision for research assessment from its implementers

Research & Society

- Assessment is aligned with institutional values.
- Quality is valued over quantity, reducing pressure from publication-based systems.
- Broader recognition of contributions beyond research outputs.
- More inclusive, collaborative and multidisciplinary research cultures.
- Stronger societal impact and trust in science.

Institutions in practice

- Transparent, holistic and context-aware systems.
- Qualitative assessment routinely combined with responsible quantitative indicators.
- Assessment embedded in institutional culture and across policies and incentives.
- Alignment across institutions, funders and evaluation bodies.
- Sustainable infrastructure and leadership support.

Challenges and Enablers of reform: Experiences from practice

Designing and piloting the reform

- ✓ Build **communities** and **peer exchange**
- ✓ Secure **leadership** and **research manager** support
- ✓ Engage stakeholders through **existing structures**
- ✓ Create inclusive and diverse **working groups**
- ✓ Embed discussions in **governance** and decision-making structures
- ✓ **Pilot, learn and adapt**

Researchers' Engagement

- ⊗ Resistance to change
- ⊗ Uncertainty about new assessment approaches
- ⊗ Concerns about fairness and transparency
- ⊗ Increased workload and use of new formats
- ✓ Early involvement and **co-creation** approaches
- ✓ **Tailored communication** to diverse communities
- ✓ **Training** on new assessment models
- ✓ Mentoring and support during **transition period**

Institutional and Cultural Alignment

- ⊗ Fragmented policies and practices
- ⊗ Misalignment between rhetoric and action
- ⊗ Limited expertise and funding
- ⊗ Conflicting external requirements
- ✓ Visible **leadership commitment**
- ✓ **Strategic integration** of reform goals
- ✓ Investment in **training** and **infrastructure**
- ✓ **Collaboration** across units and institutions

Evaluation Dimensions and Processes

- ⊗ Assessing qualitative contributions fairly
- ⊗ Lack of common definitions and criteria
- ⊗ Evaluating multidisciplinary
- ⊗ Balancing research and other contributions
- ✓ **Broader use** of qualitative assessment
- ✓ Defining **shared criteria** across institutions
- ✓ **Multi-stage** and **expert-informed** reviews
- ✓ Researcher **self-assessment** and **portfolio** approaches

Engagement with External Stakeholders

- ⊗ Reliance on traditional evaluation criteria
- ⊗ Limited availability of expert reviewers
- ⊗ Assessing interdisciplinarity and translational research
- ⊗ Misaligned external (e.g., funders') requirements
- ✓ **Training and briefing** expert evaluators
- ✓ **In-person** dialogue and panel discussions
- ✓ Collaboration with **funders**
- ✓ **Communities of practice** and shared learning

Contact information

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