



RESPONSIBLE RESEARCH ASSESSMENT

CALL TO ACTION

The Global Research Council (GRC) calls on its participant organisations to **embed existing principles** (see below) and **take concrete actions** to incentivise and fulfil responsible research assessment (RRA) ambitions. It calls on its participant organisations to support the adoption of RRA globally by *developing a collective understanding of RRA, learning through collaboration, and sharing information and best practice.*

The GRC therefore invites its participant organisations to **support and join a Working Group** to advocate for the importance of RRA, and to provide guidance and support to participant organisations on embedding RRA in their practices, as well as in organisations they fund.

Background: A crowded policy landscape

In November 2020 the GRC convened (with partner organisations) a conference on RRA. The conference brought together global participants from funding agencies, research organisations, publishers, learned societies and others to share their respective practices and approaches to RRA, as well as suggestions of how funders can improve assessment approaches. This call to action reflects the main conclusion of the conference of the need for greater collective effort to enable research culture change at a global scale through the adoption of RRA. The following documents form the foundation of this Call to Action and provide information on the concept of RRA:

1. Research on Research Institute working paper¹ which includes analysis of a GRC survey on RRA and an introduction to existing RRA principles;
2. GRC RRA Conference Summary Report.²

The concept of RRA builds on an extensive set of initiatives and principles/frameworks which provide guidelines on the methodologies, systems and cultures related to research and researcher assessments. These include: the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)³; The Leiden Manifesto⁴; The Metric Tide⁵; Science Europe's Position Statement on Research Assessment Processes⁶; The Hong Kong Principles for assessing researchers⁷; International Network of Research Management Societies – SCOPE model⁸; Science in Translation- principles for hiring, promotion, and tenure⁹. As described by the frameworks, RRA is multifaceted, with a variety of important elements and stakeholders.

Across the GRC there is much interest in, appetite for and engagement with the topic of RRA. With many existing principles to build on there is no need to further crowd the policy landscape with additional statements. It is time to pivot to **collective action** informed by truly global perspectives.

Collective action will need to factor in the diverse approaches to, and engagement with, RRA as demonstrated by the GRC thus far.

Why should GRC participants embed the principles of RRA?

RRA catalyses high-quality research and innovation and can convene a research culture which allows our global research ecosystem to thrive.

Funders have the potential to catalyse positive culture change through careful design and implementation of research assessments. GRC participant organisations are often a central lever to enable this change. They can enable and direct systemic change and support bottom-up initiatives across other stakeholder groups e.g. research organisations, researchers, league table providers, publishers and academic societies, collaborating within their local context and globally. However, systemic culture change is also a key factor in achieving RRA as the two are interconnected. There are sometimes limits on the influence which funders have, for example, they may be restricted by external factors such as political frameworks. For RRA to be realised, funders should work with the rest of the research ecosystem who all need to accept their responsibility and take action to enable change.

A global approach to RRA

The most pressing societal and economic challenges we face today are global in nature and research and innovation have a critical role to play in providing the solutions that society needs to overcome these global challenges.

Many of the barriers that stakeholders in the research ecosystem need to overcome to work towards RRA require global action. These include: the absence of clear definitions of research excellence and research quality, league tables, blame-shifting, lack of diversity, perverse incentives, resistance to change, narrow criteria, and biased processes. A global initiative across GRC participant organisations has the potential to foster debates on these issues which are not limited in geographical scope.

As discussed during the GRC RRA conference, there must be more of a focus on measuring what matters to the research community at a global level, based on shared values underpinning research activity. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the international research community has worked collectively, establishing and strengthening collaborations, sharing data, code, methods and knowledge (including via pre-print publications). Funders swiftly developed funding calls and assessment mechanisms to enable the community to respond effectively to the pandemic. However, many funders across the globe do not systematically deliver assessments which take into account the activities described above, such as open research data and data curation.¹⁰ A focus on research activities which have been paramount throughout the pandemic provides renewed impetus to consider the importance of RRA.

Understanding research excellence through what is valued in assessments. What is valued and how it is measured will drive research quality and culture across disciplines and at national and international levels. At a time of increasing international cooperation, funders must work with international partners (including those performing research) to ensure that research is conducted in accordance with the highest possible international standards. To achieve this, it is vital to develop an understanding of the activities which are valued by funders, especially where and why they differ/overlap. This will enable global approaches to RRA.

Vision of RRA. A thriving global research system demands an international articulation of funders' vision of RRA. This must bring in perspectives from those who have had limited global engagement on RRA (most of the existing initiatives have emerged from Europe and North America^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}) and should reflect the ambition of countries with a developing research base. The GRC has the convening power to set out the global ambition whilst providing a platform to discuss and align the goal of RRA with regional and local considerations and context.

Shared visions and ideals are a prerequisite to collective action. However, GRC participants must **not delay making changes** and they should embed existing RRA principles in their practices as soon as possible. Individual actions will depend on current progress towards or engagement with RRA.

Role of the GRC – a Working Group

Conference participants requested that the GRC:

- Advocate the importance of RRA in improving the quality of assessments and the benefits of RRA in developing a positive research culture.
- Act as a forum for funders to share global practice and data, especially where RRA approaches to assessment have been evaluated and lessons can be learnt.
- Coordinate experimentation of new RRA approaches across funders globally to develop our understanding of what works in what context.
- Extend the knowledge base where gaps and barriers in funders achieving RRA persist or emerge
- Provide self-assessment tools and a roadmap for funders to inform their approach towards achieving RRA.

Individual funders will need to recognise the scale of the challenge of agreeing and implementing moves towards RRA and commit to the work that this will require. A GRC working group is proposed to drive forward the RRA agenda and provide solutions to challenges which persist. Active participants are sought from across all regions to join forces, to collaborate, and to guide GRC funders to fulfil RRA ambitions within their own organisations and wider ecosystems.

¹https://rori.figshare.com/articles/report/The_changing_role_of_funders_in_responsible_research_assessment_progress_obstacles_and_the_way_ahead/13227914

² To be published on 24 May 2021. Document will be available to download from <https://www.globalresearchcouncil.org/news/responsible-research-assessment/>

³ <https://sfedora.org/>

⁴ <http://www.leidenmanifesto.org/>

⁵ <https://re.ukri.org/sector-guidance/publications/metric-tide/>

⁶ <https://www.scienceurope.org/our-resources/position-statement-research-assessment-processes/?fromnext=10343>

⁷ <https://www.wcrif.org/guidance/hong-kong-principles>

⁸ <https://inorms.net/activities/research-evaluation-working-group/>

⁹ <https://scienceintransition.nl/en/nieuws/these-are-the-six-principles-for-assessing-scientists>

¹⁰ https://rori.figshare.com/articles/report/The_changing_role_of_funders_in_responsible_research_assessment_progress_obstacles_and_the_way_ahead/13227914 (page 33, Figure 3)