ABOARD

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i n   I R e l a n D

ABOARD Self-Assessment Survey

Summary Report for Irish Research Funding Organizations

Executive Summary

The overall objective of ABOARD is the production of a roadmap for system-level incentivisation of Open Research and Responsible Research Assessment practices in Ireland, aiming for effective and coherent alignment of incentivization practices that researchers encounter in all their fields of activity which - crucially - includes their engagement with external funders.

A recently published ABOARD report on the results of a self-assessment survey of Irish researchers regarding their openness to and appetite for change in relation to Open Research and Responsible Research Assessment practices showed high awareness and support levels for these principles. This report complements those findings by summarizing the next step within the stakeholder engagement process of the ABOARD project: a self-assessment of Irish research funding organizations (RFO). The report is based on a self assessment questionnaire completed by 9 funding organizations in Ireland.

The findings indicate that there is very high awareness of Open research and responsible research assessment practices among Irish funding organizations. Funders are acutely aware of their critical role in driving the adoption of these concepts, and they see a dual responsibility:

to lead by example through the use of responsible research assessment principles in their own decision making processes and to provide guidelines, resources and infrastructure that encourage and enable researchers to engage in Open Research practices.

Irish RFOs view their funding strategies as highly aligned with Open Research and responsible assessment principles, while still showing an appetite for additional implementation activity in the medium term. There is universal agreement that alignment of this activity is essential, not only with that of other funding organizations but also with research performing organizations and policy makers. Funders would highly welcome a unified approach, such as national guidelines and infrastructure to enable open research practices as well as common solutions to tensions arising from transitional Open Access agreements. Other priorities are the development of effective strategies for a stronger incentivization of public engagement and evidence-based policy making.

The self assessment exercises formed the initial step in ABOARD's stakeholder engagement process. Combined with ongoing dialogue with stakeholders and a series of collective intelligence workshops, the outcomes will feed into government recommendations and a position paper. These will ultimately inform national policy in relation to the incentivization of Open Research practices.

ABOARD
RoAdmap to
EmBedding Open
ReseArch Practices
in IRelanD

1. Introduction

The ABOARD project is funded by the National Open Research Forum (NORF). It is co-led by University College Cork (UCC) and Trinity College Dublin (TCD). ABOARD brings together a consortium of research performing organisations, funders and researchers in Ireland and also undertakes dialogue with key policymakers.

The project's objective is the production of a roadmap to develop both system-level incentivisation of Open Research and responsible research assessment practices in Ireland; this will mean that the incentives that researchers encounter in all their major fields of activity (including recruitment, promotion, institutional research initiatives and engagement with funders) are aligned effectively.

ABOARD's work package #3 had the objective of assessing the current state of Open Research incentives and responsible research assessment practices in the Irish research ecosystem and the openness to and appetite for change in relation to these. The ABOARD project team has recently published the outcome of a Self Assessment survey among researchers in Ireland. In parallel, the team surveyed Irish RFOs as another key stakeholder group, and this report summarizes the findings. The survey ran from November 2024 to January 2025. It obtained ethical approval from the Social Research Ethics Committee in UCC and was disseminated to Irish funding institutions via targeted emails through the ABOARD project partners.

2. Participating Institutions

The survey received responses from 9 funding institutions in Ireland:
- Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
- Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- Health Research Board (HRB)
- Health Research Charities Ireland
- Marine Institute
- Research Ireland
- Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI)
- Teagasc

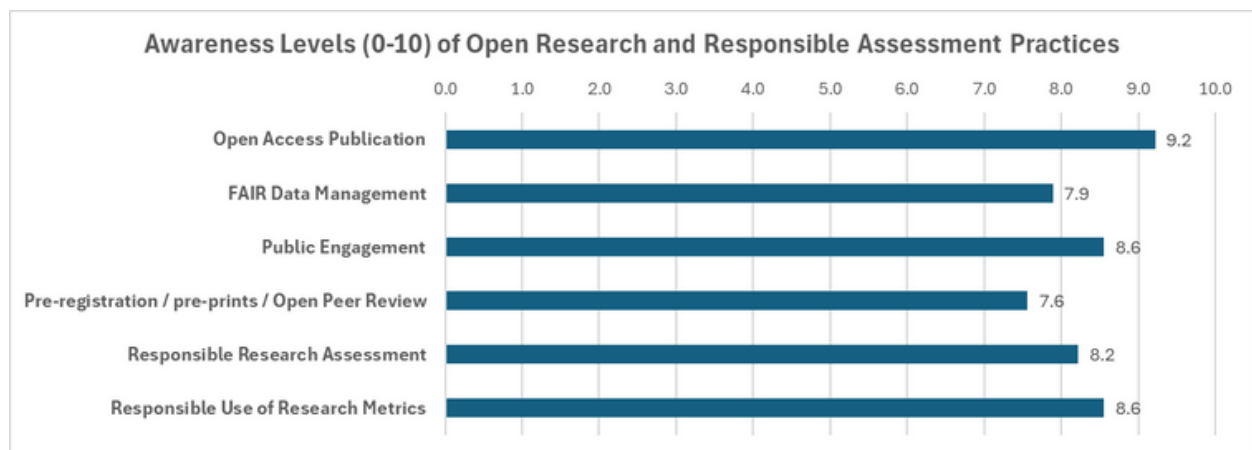## 3. Awareness Levels of Funding Institutions

Fig. 1: RFOs' Awareness Levels of Open Research Practices, Responsible Research Assessment and the Responsible Use of Research Metrics

Open Research principles and practices

Open Access (OA) Publication, Open peer review, pre-prints and pre-registrations as well as FAIR Data Management and Public Engagement are commonly understood as Open Research practices. Engagement in these practices is closely linked to their incentivisation. Responsible Research Assessment (RRA) means recognising, in research assessment, a broad range of research practices, activities and outputs and basing assessment principally on qualitative evaluation and avoiding the inappropriate use of metrics.

Key Findings

Awareness levels of these concepts and practices are very high among funding organizations, highest for Open Access Publication (mean: 9.2), followed by Public Engagement, the Responsible Use of Research Metrics (both 8.6) and Responsible Research Assessment (8.2). Awareness levels for FAIR data management, pre-registration, pre-prints and open peer review are only slightly lower at 7.9 and 7.6 respectively. Individual awareness levels ranged from a neutral 5 for RRA and RURM as the lowest value to the maximum awareness level of 10 across all practices and concepts.

4. Institutional Alignment and Implementation levels

a) Currently, how well aligned would you rate the funding strategy of your organization with the incentivization of the following concepts:

Alignment of funding strategy with the incentivization of ...

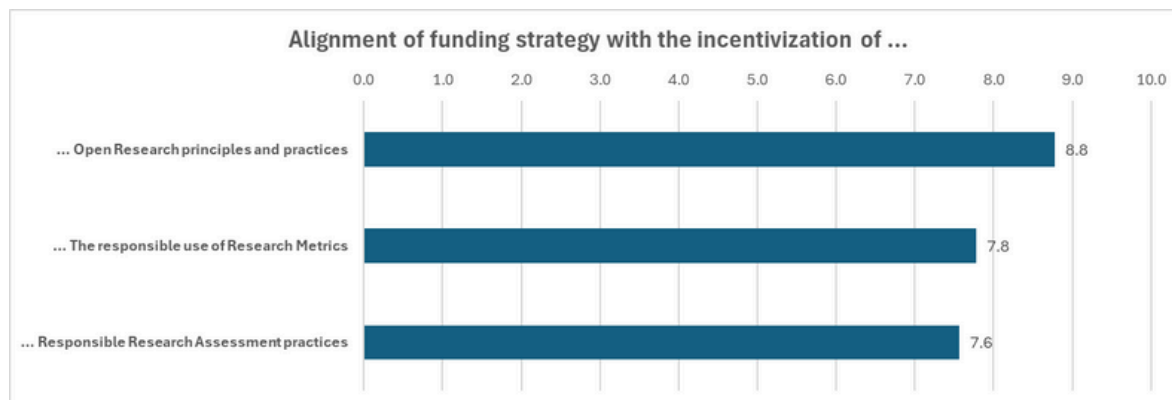| Concept	Value
... Open Research principles and practices	8.8
... The responsible use of Research Metrics	7.8
... Responsible Research Assessment practices	7.6

Fig 2: Funding institutions' views on current alignment between funding strategy and incentivization of OR and RRA concepts

b) Over the next 3 - 5 years, how much (additional) implementation activity would you like to see in your organization related to the incentivization of...:
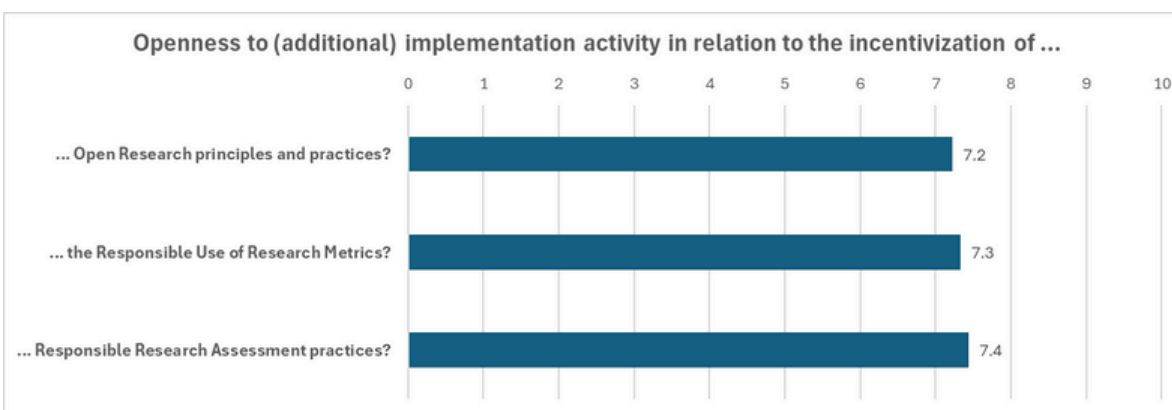
Openness to (additional) implementation activity in relation to the incentivization of ...

Concept	Value
... Open Research principles and practices?	7.2
... the Responsible Use of Research Metrics?	7.3
... Responsible Research Assessment practices?	7.4

Fig 3: Funding institutions' views on additional activity over next 3-5 years

Key Findings:

RFOs view their funding strategies as highly aligned with Open Research principles (on a scale from 0-10, agreement lies at a mean of 8.8). Alignment with the Responsible Use of Research Metrics and with Responsible Research Assessment practices is slightly lower but still viewed as strong (mean values of 7.8 and 7.6 respectively).

Comments provided by funding organizations indicate that the alignment is strongest in the area of Open Access publication, where formal expectations are for example set out in policies and guidelines for applicants.

Even though funding institutions already view their strategies as strongly aligned with Open Research and Responsible Research assessment practices, there is still significant appetite for additional implementation activity within their organizations over the next 3-5 years. On a scale from 0-10, additional activity would be welcome at mean values of 7.4 for Responsible Research Assessment practices, 7.3 for the Responsible Use of Research Metrics and 7.2 for Open Research principles (not surprisingly in reverse order to perceived current alignment with these practices as per 4a).

4c) Comments (free-text) on the alignment of institutional funding and incentivization strategy with Open Research practices and Responsible Research Assessment:

The following themes emerged from RFOs' comments in relation to institutional alignment with and implementation levels of incentivization of Open Research and Responsible Research Assessment practices:

- There is **tension** between researchers' desire to secure funding for **fee-based publishing models** and the broader objective to shift away from these.

- Funding organizations are aware of their **role in driving Open Research practices**, but have **limited capacity to monitor and enforce** open research policies, and this may hinder full implementation.

- Some Irish funding organizations mandate open access for all research outputs and are transitioning to immediate open access on dedicated platforms which are also available to support open data, open peer review, and transparent reporting practices.

- In addition to Open Access publication, there is a strong focus on **research data management, including planning, budgeting, stewardship,** and recognition for data sharing.

- There is a **strong focus on societal impact of research and public engagement** to achieve same. In healthcare and social care research, public and patient involvement (PPI) is a priority in funding policy to **ensure research reflects real-world needs** and achieves impact.

- Some funding organizations engage in **collaboration with national and international bodies that support the advancement of open and responsible research practices**, such as the Coalition on Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA), emphasizing qualitative evaluation, recognition of diverse outputs, and consideration of non-linear career paths.

- **Traditional metrics like h-index and journal impact factor are avoided** in favour of fairer, more inclusive assessment methods.

- Internal initiatives are underway within some funding organizations to support ongoing reforms and **promote integrity, reproducibility, and fairness** in research.

Selected quotes:

[...]We expect that outputs and findings should be widely disseminated and made publicly available. [...]

Researchers are seeking for gold open access fees to be funded by research funding organisations, but we are meant to be moving away from these fee based models. There are tensions here.

Although we have policies in relation to open research and data, our capacity to monitor and enforce it is limited, hence our effectiveness may not align fully with our ambition.

5) Importance of alignment with other stakeholder groups:

*"On a scale from 0-10, to what degree do you think it is important that the **research incentives/rewards and research assessment approaches taken by others** (i.e. other research funding organizations, research performers and national research policymakers) **align with your organization's approach** in these areas?"*
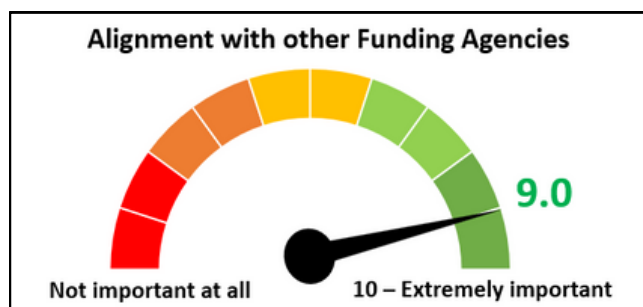

Fig 4: Funders' view on alignment with other Funding Agencies
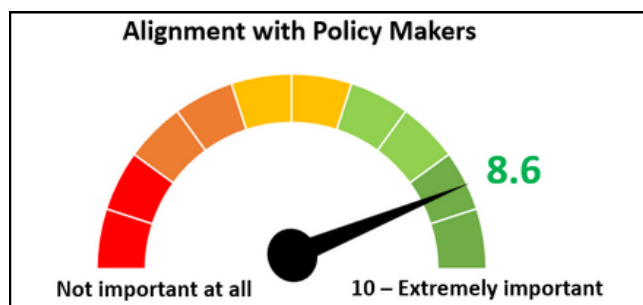

Fig 5: Funders' view on alignment with RPOs

Fig 6: Funders' view on alignment with other Policy Makers

Key Findings:

RFOs in Ireland view sectoral alignment of research incentives and rewards as well as research assessment approaches by other stakeholders in the research system as extremely important. When asked how they rate the importance of alignment with the approach of other stakeholder groups, they rated the importance of alignment with other funding bodies the highest (at a mean value of 9). The alignment with Research Performing Organizations was rated similarly important (only marginally lower at a mean value of 8.9). The importance of alignment with policy makers was rated only slightly lower (mean 8.6).

Themes emerging from comments:

Funding organizations are aware of their key role in research assessment and incentivization, and there is willingness to **lead by example through innovation of own practices and the promotion of supportive policies, infrastructure, and governance**.

RFOs would highly welcome a unified national approach, particularly **national research data infrastructure** and a **common open access policy and funding approach**. The incentivization of **evidence-based policymaking** as well as **public engagement,** for example in the form of Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) in health and social care research, should also be key focus areas for alignment.

Collaborative Engagement at EU and at national level is important, for example through leveraging the CoARA National Chapter.

6. Conclusions and Next Steps

The survey findings indicate that there is very high awareness of Open research and responsible research assessment practices among Irish funding organizations. Funders are aware of their critical role in driving the incentivization of these concepts and have adopted many principles into their own assessment and decision-making processes.   As a result, most funders view their funding strategies as highly aligned with Open Research and responsible assessment principles, while still showing an appetite for additional implementation activity in the medium term. There is universal support for concerted activities between all funding organizations in close alignment with those of other stakeholder groups. Funders would welcome national guidelines and infrastructure to enable open research practices and common solutions to the current transitional Open Access agreements. Other priorities are the creation of incentivization strategies that enhance both public engagement and evidence-based policy making.

Next Steps
The results of the self assessment exercises with both researchers and funding organizations formed the basis for a series of collective intelligence workshops with different stakeholder groups (work package #4), which took place between March and May 2025.

The insights from both work packages will be used to form Declarative Statements, recommendations and a position paper in relation to the incentivization of Open Research practices, the responsible use of research metrics and responsible research assessment practices. These will be debated at a capstone event which is expected to be held in early 2026 where policy recommendations and the final position paper will be presented which will ultimately inform national policy in relation to the incentivization of Open Research practices.

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