

# CoARA Action Plan 2024 - 2029

## A Shared Approach to Reforming Research Assessment at Goldsmiths

### Five-year CoARA Action Plan

## Background

### Responsible research assessment

Launched in 2023 the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) was born from a growing dissatisfaction with current research assessment practices where the dominant practice for research assessment is to look at how many publications researchers produce and where they are published. CoARA is a European initiative with an international span and aims to establish a common direction for research assessment reform. The coalition sits within a building number of initiatives - such as the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA, 2013), the Leiden Manifesto (2015) and the Metric Tide Reports (2016/22) - that have been working to challenge the use of traditional metrics, promote sustainable research quality, and strengthen research cultures.

There is an increasing awareness that traditional publication metrics are not fit for purpose, inequitable, and under representative of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences in particular. Research is much more diverse than this, it is about engaging society, collaborating and producing research outputs in a variety of formats to suit reach wider audiences. The vision of CoARA is that the assessment of research, researchers and research organisations recognises this diversity of output, practice and activity produced from quality research. It identifies that this requires basing assessment primarily on qualitative judgement, for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators.

In September 2023 Goldsmiths joined the growing number of research organisations around the world who have signed up to the commitments of CoARA, working together to progress real and lasting change in research assessment practices.

## The CoARA commitments

By joining CoARA, Goldsmiths committed to actively reviewing and reforming research assessment practices in order to recognise the diverse outputs, practices and activities that maximise the quality and impact of research.

To this end, Goldsmiths has committed to ensuring all activities relating to research assessment are grounded in the principles as set out in the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (ARRA).

The ARRA commitments are to:

1. Recognise the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research.
2. Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators.
3. Abandon inappropriate uses in research assessment of journal- and publication-based metrics, in particular inappropriate uses of Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and h-index.
4. Avoid the use of rankings of research organisations in research assessment.

These core commitments are supported by six practical commitments to enable the move towards new research assessment criteria, tools and processes, and to facilitate mutual learning, communicate progress and ensure that new approaches are evidence informed:

5. Commit resources to reforming research assessment as is needed to achieve the organisational changes committed to.
6. Review and develop research assessment criteria, tools and processes.
7. Raise awareness of research assessment reform and provide transparent communication, guidance, and training on assessment criteria and processes as well as their use.
8. Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition.
9. Communicate progress made on adherence to the principles and implementation of the Commitments.

10. Evaluate practices, criteria and tools based on solid evidence and the state-of-the-art in research on research and make data openly available for evidence gathering and research.

## **What it means to be a signatory**

Signatories agree on the need to reform research assessment practices, and that they will work together to enable systemic reform on the basis of common principles within an agreed timeframe, and to facilitate exchanges of information and mutual learning between all those willing to improve research assessment practices.

Signatories also agree to:

- develop and publish an action plan for the implementation of the commitments within 12 months of signing up to CoARA.
- regularly demonstrate progress towards reviewing, developing and evaluating criteria, tools and processes that fulfil the core Commitments. It is expected that within five years of signing the Agreement signatories will have worked through at least one cycle of review and development of their assessment criteria, tools and processes.

As signatories we have committed to working actively to embed the commitments within our institutional policies and processes, to advocate for responsible research assessment and to share best practice with others. Goldsmiths are also members of the national chapter, which aims to provide a forum for UK organisations involved in research to put the CoARA principles into practice. It has two primary objectives:

1. Facilitating meaningful change by supporting member and signatory organisations to reflect on ambitions for reform of research assessment and put principles into practice, e.g. through the development and implementation of action plans.
2. Promoting systemic reform by engaging with those outside of the Coalition and supporting potential UK CoARA members and signatories to understand the implications of signing and/or joining CoARA.

## **A shared vision for research assessment**

### **CoARA in the context of Goldsmiths**

Goldsmiths has a distinctive research portfolio, stretching across a range of Arts, Humanities and Social Science subjects, and as such any focus on research

assessment must acknowledge, and actively work with, the specific challenges that come with research assessment in this area. For Goldsmiths to be successful in embedding responsible approaches to research assessment as part of its wider move towards an excellent research culture we must consider the CoARA commitments through the lens of AHSS disciplinary practices and employ this understanding to support researchers and organisations within this space.

## **Goldsmiths research strategy and CoARA**

The (draft) Goldsmiths Research Strategy highlights the College's research culture should "ensure openness, innovation, experimentation and high-quality performance." The ambition of the strategy highlights the importance of ensuring academic staff (as individuals and research teams) are able to flourish, thrive and deliver on their goals; addressing systemic inequalities to ensure that academic staff can produce the best research and achieve their best; and grow and develop a vibrant, cross-disciplinary, open and outward-facing research environment and culture.

**We recognise that the success of CoARA at Goldsmiths will be contingent on fully embedding the action plan across all areas of research activity (from research grant capture, to research practice, outputs and impact), and therefore must not sit separately to the strategic aims of the College but act as one of the routes to their delivery.**

The strategy also highlights the importance of assessment to monitor and understand progress as part of its delivery of its ambitious goals: "strategic investment and planning, shaped by clear performance indicators, targets and management, will ensure that we are able to progress with, and get external recognition for, what we do best." The COARA action plan acknowledges the need for clear and robust assessment of research performance as part of the College's progress towards its strategic aims, but also acts as a check to ensure that all measurement and assessment are undertaken in an appropriate and consistent manner.

## **Recognising barriers**

It is crucial to acknowledge that the sector, and the college, are experiencing unprecedented challenges which will inevitably have an impact on the delivery of the action plan. To achieve long-term, sustained change we will take a practical and phased approach, ensuring that existing activities and resource are exploited to ensure a high level of integration and a low level of duplication.

A core focus for the initial phase of the plan will include an awareness and communications workstream, with the intention to build buy-in and capacity for the future

phases. This is seen as critical to the success of the action plan and will be evaluated as part of the ongoing work.

## **A five-year action plan 2024 – 2029**

### **Approach based on shared responsibility**

Taking into account Goldsmiths' strategic focus, as well as restrictions with respect to time and resources, the 5-year plan offers a proportionate and phased approach to embedding CoARA principles throughout college processes.

The Goldsmiths approach to building progress in responsible research assessment will be based within a shared responsibility model: recognised at every level, from the strategic language and approach of the College through to conducting the operational processes of research.

This shared responsibility model will be delivered through three core principles of Inclusivity, Transparency and Trust:

- Inclusive approach to defining high quality research, with special focus on leading practice research assessment methods
- Transparency in the review and design of new approaches, utilising the breadth of expertise at the College
- Building a trusted and valued suite of approaches to responsible research assessment which are clearly defined within all related Goldsmiths policies and processes

Core to the success of this shared responsibility approach is a commitment from the whole college community to uphold the principles of responsible research assessment across all aspects of research activity.

### **Phase 1: September 24 – August 25 – Engage and expand**

This phase will focus on building understanding, establishing clear areas of focus, and thinking about resourcing and governance. We will build on the existing activity, engage SMT, and build awareness among staff.

Actions		Timeframe
<b>Development of action plan and resourcing</b>		
1.1	Complete internal initiative gap analysis, with prioritisation of activities for the next phase.	
1.2	Develop detailed focus points and action points for phase two and three.	
1.3	Consider evidence and evaluation needs for later phases, including the development and collection of baseline data.	
1.4	Ensure clear governance in place for the delivery of the action plan, including representation from core teams and academic leadership.	
1.5	Focus on REF assessment best practice as a priority, working with the REF delivery team to ensure principles of responsible research assessment are built into all aspects of the process and code of practice.	
<b>Awareness and capacity building</b>		
1.6	Engage with teams to deliver internal communications focused on awareness building around responsible research assessment and CoARA, promoting transparency and collective responsibility for success.	
1.7	Work directly with SMT and GLG to build senior staff awareness of responsible research assessment, their role in systematic reform and to secure a clear SMT pledge to actively engage with and uphold commitments, promoting transparency and collective responsibility for success.	
1.8	Engagement with national and international working groups as appropriate, sharing progress and good practice.	

## Phase 2: September 25 – August 28 – Innovate and grow

Initial work in phase 1 will ensure that this phase can focus on developing new initiatives as well as building on what we have already achieved. It is a time of expansion and growth aimed at forming clear and effective approaches.

The detailed action plan will be developed as part of phase one, but we would expect to have defined outcomes such as:

- An embedded approach to the assessment of college KPIs and other measures.

- An integrated approach to responsible research assessment as part of wider work to develop our research culture.
- Newly defined approaches to the responsible assessment of practice-based research in collaboration with other HEIs, engaging with the sector.
- Progress in evaluation techniques and tools as part of research culture development.

### **Phase 3: September 28 – August 29 – Evaluate and advance**

As part of the commitments, we need to demonstrate an evaluation phase will be undertaken, to understand our own progress and where we might want to focus on next. This is a critical phase of the action plan and can only be achieved if evaluation development has been built into the previous stages of the process.

We expect to be able to:

- Demonstrate the impact of actions and initiatives, with clear evidence of change and impact.
- Reflect on and demonstrate how responsible research assessment with a focus on AHSS has developed, internally and within the sector.
- Understand areas of low uptake or understanding, including the effectiveness of the shared responsibility approach at all levels of the organisation.
- Challenge embedded bad practice and reflect on successful strategies for change
- Build clear priorities for the next 5-year period, with a developed action plan.

### **Acknowledgements**

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