

The Glasgow School of Art

Code of Practice for REF 2029

Part 1: Introduction

This Code of Practice (CoP) sets out how the Glasgow School of Art (GSA) will make key decisions pertaining to the volume measure and selection of outputs for our participation in REF 2029.

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the UK's system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions (HEIs). The REF is undertaken periodically on behalf of the four UK higher education funding bodies with the aim of maintaining and developing a high-quality, dynamic and responsive research base throughout UK higher education (HE). The next REF will be completed in 2029 and the deadline for institutions to make their submission is Autumn 2028. The outcomes of REF 2029 will provide important insights into HE research, determine the allocation of block-grants, provide accountability for public investment and influence how HEIs are perceived by peers, collaborators, students and other stakeholders.

Publication of an approved CoP is a condition of participation in REF. The CoP explains how GSA will identify staff who have Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR) or who are Independent Researchers (IR) and how examples of staff members' research will be selected for inclusion in our REF 2029 submission.

1.1 Robustness, Transparency, Equity and Inclusion

1.1.1 Robustness

GSA is committed to ensuring that all procedures influencing REF decision-making are rigorous and fair and that all participating staff are treated equally. The purpose of this CoP is to provide clear information to staff about procedures that will be followed and criteria that will be applied consistently when developing GSA's REF submission. Anyone who believes that procedures defined in this document have not been followed correctly has the right to appeal resulting decisions which affect them (see 2.3).

Sections 2 and 3 explain how our approach to identifying staff with SRR or who are IR will reliably reflect the responsibilities of staff, including procedures to verify eligibility.

Section 5 sets out how GSA researchers' outputs will be selected for inclusion in the Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding (CKU) section of REF 2029. Our process will robustly assess quality using methods that are objective and fair. All those involved in peer review receive relevant training, while the selection process is modelled on good practice as outlined by REF guidance.

1.1.2 Transparency

This CoP is published on the GSA website and on the staff intranet to ensure that staff are fully informed about how decisions relating to REF 2029 which affect them are being made. Staff email bulletins will periodically include information about how to access the CoP.

Staff will be able to attend the CoP launch presentation at the Glasgow campus in person or online, and a recording of the event will be made available on the staff intranet. The event will include opportunities to ask questions, and queries may also be sent by email to the REF operations team at research@gsa.ac.uk. If staff based at GSA's Forres campus require an in-person CoP information session, this will be arranged.

An FAQ page will be compiled on the staff intranet, and additional guidance and updates will be provided to keep staff informed of progress towards the REF submission, and any anticipated implications for their work and plans.

The CoP has been formatted to ensure it is accessible to assistive technologies such as screen readers, but any member of staff may request alternative versions if required from research@gsa.ac.uk.

Academic staff who are absent when the CoP is published, such as those on secondment or parental leave, will be identified by HR REF Leads and a copy will be emailed to them directly, or a printed copy will be posted to them if more appropriate.

The CoP was approved by Research Committee on 5th November 2025 and by Academic Council on 26th November 2025. Minor revisions were made in response to the publication of revised REF Guidance in December 2025, and approved by Research Committee on 4th February 2026. During its development, the CoP was presented to and discussed with the Research Committees in each of GSA's academic Schools, the Research Leads Group, the Senior Leadership Group and Trade Union Forum. Further amendments were made in response to feedback and requests for additional information received from the Scottish Funding Council in May 2026.

1.1.3 Equity and Inclusion

GSA's CoP has been designed to promote equality and ensure that the contributions of all staff with a responsibility to undertake research are considered equally, irrespective of their role, career stage, personal or professional identity or where they work within GSA. The CoP builds on established institutional processes for defining research responsibility which are consistently and regularly applied to all academic staff and objectively reviewed in the same way, by a cross-institutional peer review panel. The resulting proportion of time available for research is the same for the majority of research-active academic staff whose main role is teaching (20%), regardless of seniority – ensuring equal opportunities for all research-active staff to contribute to REF. Section 5 describes how our REF submission will combine quality with a representative range of research disciplines, topics, themes and types of output.

Equity and inclusion are promoted by ensuring that staff who require adjustments or additional support to enable their participation in any aspect of the REF-related procedures described in this CoP due to special characteristics may request it via the HR Service Desk and reasonable adjustments will be made. Beyond the immediate scope of the CoP, GSA continues to provide

support and resources to encourage a more diverse and inclusive research community, including through access to guidance, training, research mentoring and research leave.

GSA's Equality and Diversity team have been consulted during the development of our approach to REF 2029 and will perform an ongoing advisory role during the implementation of the CoP. See also 6.2.

1.2 Contextualisation within Institutional Policies

GSA's current Strategic Plan presents our ambition to achieve impact through creative research, innovation and partnership, including by creating a supportive environment and culture in which our researchers can thrive. Our institutional lead indicators of success include a percentage increase in 3* and 4* Outputs and Impact Case Studies in REF 2029, building upon the positive outcomes of our REF 2021 submission. The Strategic Plan, which was developed with input from more than 400 staff, students and stakeholders, places people at its core.

The Research Strategy (2022-27) sets out the work being undertaken to achieve those ambitions. Our strategy focuses on three themes – Research Excellence, Research Impact and Research Leadership – each responding to lessons we learned during the REF 2021 period and our priorities for REF 2029. Those include: defining and developing research careers, building a strong and inclusive researcher community and training and development for researchers at every career stage. The REF workstreams in our research strategy implementation plan include the development of fair, transparent and inclusive procedures for this CoP, to support excellence. Our four academic Schools (plus research groups not aligned to Schools) are contributing to institutional goals through their own research strategies; each aligned with their distinctive disciplines and areas of expertise.

GSA's approach to REF is informed by our organisational values, which include a sustainable and equitable approach to work, a focus on deep specialism and interdisciplinary practice and a culture that enables and empowers. It is influenced by our People Strategy (2023-27), which ensures our workforce has the skills, diversity, inclusivity and agility to work together to deliver our strategies, including in research. That strategy's commitment to ethical leadership, nurturing talent and capability, and a rewarding and positive experience for employees (free from discrimination, harassment or inappropriate behaviour) is reflected in our ambitions for research, while our experience of REF will feed into the co-development of an evidence-based Career Framework that celebrates and recognises the contributions of staff to GSA's collective success, supports diversity and nurtures and develops talent.

All of GSA's policies and strategies, including those relating to REF, are underpinned by our responsibilities as a publicly supported body to uphold the Public Sector Equality Duty of the Equality Act (2010) and Equality Act (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations (2012): we are committed to mainstreaming the consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion in everything that we do. Regular reports on our performance and progress are published on the GSA website.

1.2.1 Support for Fixed Term and Part-Time Staff

Institutionally, GSA is committed to equitably supporting varied and flexible work patterns. We have publicly confirmed our support for the Scottish Government's Fair Work First initiative and produced a Fair Work Statement with our Trade Union Forum, which includes actions to limit use of zero-hour contracts, avoid 'hire and rehire' practices and promote family friendly working arrangements – contributing to relatively low levels of academic staff with fixed-term contracts (4%). The Flexible Working Policy gives all staff a mechanism to request changes to working patterns and achieve balance between work and other priorities. The Redeployment Policy seeks to reduce employment insecurity, including for those in a fixed-term role of more than two years, while our Retirement Policy allows for a reduction in hours as part of a phased retirement. A high proportion of our academic staff are part-time, with some choosing to be in order to sustain parallel careers as creative practitioners or in other roles alongside their academic work.

GSA recognises the vital role our part-time and fixed term colleagues play in our research environment. Our provisional analysis indicates that similar numbers of full-time and part-time employees are likely to contribute to the REF volume measure, following implementation of this CoP. Our ARP process was introduced following REF 2014 partly to safeguard research time for part-time staff, and as explained in Appendix 6.2, academic staff with contracts of 0.2FTE or higher are eligible to participate, including those on fixed-term contracts. ARPs are reviewed in a manner that ensures expectations for research productivity are proportionate to the staff member's contractual hours. By using this established process to determine SRR for REF 2029 (see Part 2 below), we will make sure that PT staff contribute to the volume measure based on their confirmed institutional status as researchers rather than on other considerations, such as the volume or nature of the work they have produced.

Outputs by all eligible staff will be considered for submission to REF 2029, irrespective of their FTE (see Part 5 below). Any staff member whose research time is confirmed through the ARP process, whether full time or part time, is eligible to apply for internal Research Development Funding, research mentoring, and Research Leave. Such schemes make provision for those who do not work full-time – for example, costs such as childcare expenses are covered for staff with caring responsibilities who attend conferences on days when they do not usually work. Our research training and development activities are scheduled so that as many people as possible can take part, and recorded for those who can't attend. The Research Leadership Group, which will play a key role in confirming the content of our REF 2029 submission (see 2.2), includes part-time staff who fully understand the challenges of undertaking research while on a fractional contract.

1.3 Update on Actions Since REF 2021

Since REF 2021, GSA has implemented a range of measures to enhance our research environment and support the professional development of researchers.

Led by the HR department, work is underway on the development of the new career framework; one aspect of this will be a more structured approach to career progression for researchers, while also providing greater clarity on roles ahead of the research assessment exercise that follows REF 2029.

A model of distributed research leadership has been embedded at GSA through the formal implementation of Research Lead roles to support research development in each of our Schools. Research Leads are members of the Research Leadership Group (RLG), which was developed from the REF 2021 planning group to build on the insights gained and priority actions identified when preparing the last REF submission and to formally embed a collegiate, cross-institutional approach to developing researchers and research quality on an ongoing basis, including local implementation of GSA's research strategy. The RLG is formally constituted as a sub-committee of GSA Research Committee (its remit is available from <https://gsadocuments.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Remit-and-Membership-Research-Leadership-Group-2025-26.pdf>). Research Leads are members of the Research Committee and chair School-level research committees, which report to the Research Committee.

We established our timetable to become a formal signatory of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers in 2026, having previously aligned ourselves with its principles. We created GSA's first dedicated Researcher Developer role, to oversee the delivery of a comprehensive and structured programme of training and professional opportunities and resources for research staff and postgraduate research students. The Researcher Developer also represents research on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and will feed into the development of GSA's new National Equality Outcome Action Plan.

We have introduced ongoing enhancements to our research mentoring scheme, which prioritises support for less experienced researchers, partly in response to our REF 2021 equalities impact assessment, which indicated a modest, proportionate reduction in ECR representation compared to REF 2014.

The Research Leave scheme was also revised to provide guaranteed opportunities for early career researchers.

We have developed new guidance and resources for the presentation and dissemination of creative practice research and are supporting colleagues to develop the skills to articulate their research effectively. GSA aims to become the leading HEI in Scotland for creative practice research, as stated in our research strategy.

We are providing an ongoing programme of training and support in research impact and are developing better infrastructure for managing evidence of impact.

Our new GSA Peer Review College was established, providing newer members with opportunities to gain skills and insight, to support the quality of research and provide reassurance about the rigour and transparency of review processes, including those which could influence REF decision making.

Part 2: Identifying Staff Contracts with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR)

The scale of GSA's REF 2029 submission is determined by statistical information on researchers that we submit annually to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). In contrast to previous research assessment exercises, information on individual staff will not be submitted directly to REF 2029.

The information we provide to HESA must identify those in teaching and research roles who have significant responsibility for research (SRR) and those in research only roles who are independent researchers (IR). Taken together, the FTE of both groups determines GSA's 'REF Volume Measure'.

The HE 2000 contracts on which all GSA academic staff are employed allow for a potential balance of teaching, research, scholarly activity and other duties, but do not specify the composition of that balance for individual roles. Role descriptors can also be unreliable indicators of the full range of an employee's current responsibilities, particularly for those who have taken on additional responsibilities since their appointment. As a result, our HESA data has in previous years defined most academic staff as 'teaching and research' by default without reliably identifying all contracts with SRR or those which relate to research-only, independent researchers. Therefore, for GSA's submission to REF 2029, this CoP defines a process and procedures for identifying SRR and IR.

2.1 Policies and Procedures

2.1.1 Criteria for SRR

SRR describes those for whom:

- Explicit time and resources are made available for research
- To engage actively in independent research (as defined by REF)
- And that is an expectation of their job role

REF 2029 enables HEIs to rely to a greater extent on existing institutional governance and processes to make key decisions for the exercise. For staff at GSA whose main responsibility is teaching, Annual Research Plans (ARPs) are the institutional process that determines for whom explicit time and resources are made available to engage in independent research as an expectation of job role.

ARPs were introduced following REF 2014 to ensure that all academic staff have an equal opportunity to demonstrate their potential to undertake high-quality research, irrespective of where they work at GSA or whether they are employed full time or part time. Teaching staff who meet the ARP criteria, and are employed at least 0.2FTE, are allocated 20% of their contracted hours for research through activity planning processes.

For REF 2029, eligible academic teaching and research staff who have research time confirmed through the ARP process for AY 2026-27 (or had 'normative' research time for AY 2025-26) will be identified as SRR and this will be reported to HESA. The use of ARPs will reduce burden and minimise the need for staff to engage in additional, complex REF administration procedures.

'Teaching and research' staff at GSA are those whose activity plans include at least 20% of their time for research and more than 6 hours teaching per week on average (pro-rata)¹.

¹ There may be some instances in which a member of staff whose primary responsibility is neither teaching nor research nonetheless has 20% research time via the ARP process and undertakes some teaching; such staff will be classified as consistent with HESA guidelines.

If applicable, those with ‘emergent’ research status (during AY 2025-26) confirmed through the ARP process will be reported to HESA as ‘teaching and research’ staff without SRR, as the requirement for actively engaging in independent research (which meets the REF definition) would not have been met.

Those who were confirmed not to have research time after completing the ARP process, or who opted not to participate in it, will not have SRR and will be reported to HESA as undertaking teaching only roles.

2.1.2 Decision-Making and Communication

Guidance on the ARP procedure and timetable is updated annually and communicated via the ARP launch annual training event, staff email bulletins and Research Committees. Since 2015, ARPs have been the approved institutional process for confirming research responsibility within an academic role, and full information and guidance are available for employees on the Research section of the Staff Intranet. For the benefit of the bodies responsible for REF and other external parties, Appendix 6.2 provides information about ARP eligibility, management, review processes and appeals.

The ARP process is criteria-based and peer reviewed, ensuring a consistent, transparent, and equitable approach. Each ARP is reviewed by two members of GSA’s experienced peer review college and moderated via a chaired panel.

Research time confirmed through the ARP process for AY 2026-27² will directly result in SRR status for ‘teaching and research’ staff. No further evaluative decision making will be undertaken in addition to the ARP process to identify SRR for REF 2029, but eligibility checks will be carried out as follows.

Following completion of the annual ARP process, the employment information provided by those confirmed to have research time will be cross-checked against HR system information to identify which staff should be reported to HESA as SRR. This will be undertaken by the REF operations team and HR REF Leads (see 2.2). Any sensitive or personal information will be managed confidentially, in accordance with GSA data protection policies. If any staff do not meet eligible employment relationship conditions (minimum 0.2FTE for at least 12 months continuously during the eligible period for REF 2029), their details will be excluded. If any staff have multiple roles with separate contracts, those which relate to SRR will be confirmed. Staff whose main responsibilities are neither teaching nor research (for example, some of those in more senior managerial roles) will not be reported as SRR to HESA. Staff identified as ‘research only’ will be processed according to the procedure to identify IR (see 3). Staff who are not employed on academic contracts will not be included in the process to identify SRR. Heads of School or equivalent senior managers may be consulted if there is any uncertainty about the nature of a staff member’s employment (e.g. FTE in a particular role or degree of involvement in teaching). All decisions and evidence consulted will be documented.

The Head of Research and the Research Leadership Group will provide oversight and approve the list of staff with SRR before it is finalised for submission to HESA, which will be completed by the HR REF leads and members of the REF operations team.

² Or ‘Normative’ research time confirmed through the ARP process for AY 2025-26.

Staff will receive confirmation of their SRR status by email, to include an explanation of their resulting designation in the HESA Staff Record. Further information will also be provided on the REF section of the staff intranet to explain how this relates to the potential inclusion of their research in REF 2029. Staff may consult the REF operations team if they have any questions.

2.2 Staff, Committees and Training

Details of those with primary responsibility for managing and coordinating all aspects of REF 2029 processes and procedures at GSA are presented below. Note that as a small, specialist institution, we have a relatively limited pool of staff with the capacity and experience to perform key advisory and decision-making functions and are therefore reliant on some of the same individuals performing multiple roles.

Individual/Group	Role and Membership	Nature of Role
Director and Principal	Ultimate responsibility for REF 2029 submission.	Decision making
Deputy Director, Research & Innovation	Oversight of delivery of REF 2029 plans and procedures and preparation of institutional submission. Role in stage 2 appeals in absence of Head of Research.	Decision making
Head of Research	Management of REF 2029 submission. Chair of Mock REF review panels. Chair of output selection panels. Chair of Research Leadership Group, with responsibility for signing off SRR and IR outcomes. Leads on development of REF submission. Final selection and approval of Impact Case Studies. Stage 2 appeals process.	Decision making
Research Leadership Group	Membership: Research Leads from School of Fine Art, School of Design, Mackintosh School of Architecture, School of Innovation and Technology, equivalent representatives of (non-School) interdisciplinary research group/research labs, Head of Postgraduate Research, Head of Research Support Services, Head of Research. (The Research Leadership Group reports to GSA's Research Committee (see 1.3); its remit is available here: https://gsadocuments.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Remit-and-Membership-Research-Leadership-Group-2025-26.pdf). Selection of Outputs for Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding section. Development and selection of Impact Case Studies. Support for creative practice research.	Decision making

	Support development of Strategy, People and Research Environment narratives. Approve process of identification of staff with SRR or who are IR.	
Mock REF Review Panel	Membership: invited members of GSA Peer Review College (details are published on the GSA Staff Intranet), including representation from all Schools and main research disciplines; members of Research Leadership Group also participate. Responsibility for reviewing nominated eligible Outputs, following institutional procedure which is based on REF guidance (particularly Panel Criteria and Working Methods). Must first have completed relevant training.	Advisory
'REF operations team'	Membership: members of Research Department professional support team, including Head of Research Support Services, Research Information Manager, Research Information Coordinator, KE and Impact Officer, Researcher Developer, Research and Innovation Funding Officer and administration team. Supporting all aspects of REF 2029 planning, development and submission including: coordination of procedures to identify SRR and IR staff; support of Mock REF and output selection panels; development of Impact Case Studies; training, guidance and communications; data management, analysis and reporting; eligibility checking; participating in appeals process; supporting development of REF submission; REF submission portal management. Reports to Head of Research and Deputy Director, Research & Innovation	Advisory Some decision-making responsibility for HRSS in stage 1 appeals
HR REF Leads	Members of HR team identified to support REF 2029 submission, including: working with REF operations team to verify SRR and IR eligibility and substantive links; HESA Staff returns; liaison with staff reps; support for relevant training; role in receiving and coordinating appeals requests requests for reasonable adjustments.	Advisory
Members of Equality and Diversity team	EDI guidance and support	Advisory
Senior Leadership Group (SLG) Research Committee Academic Council	Approval of REF 2029-related policies and major procedures	Decision making

2.2.1 Roles and Responsibilities – Identification of Staff with SRR

The ARP process is managed separately from implementation of the Code of Practice. Those involved in ARP assessment are members of the GSA Peer Review college, including Research Leads, and their details are provided on the Staff Intranet. The Head of Research chairs moderation panels.

The REF operations team and HR REF Leads will undertake REF eligibility checks of those nominally identified as SRR through ARPs and prepare their data for HESA. The Research Leadership Group, chaired by the Head of Research, will check and approve the final dataset.

The REF operations team will notify staff of outcomes.

The REF operations team and HR REF Leads will manage appeal requests (see 2.3). The Head of Research Support Services will process and respond to stage 1 Appeals. The Head of Research will process and respond to stage 2 Appeals.

2.2.2 Training

A series of in-person and online REF briefing sessions will be provided for staff following approval of this Code of Practice, including information on the Volume Measure and SRR. This information will also be published on the staff intranet.

Members of the REF operations team and HR REF leads will complete HESA online training on collating and submitting data for REF 2029.

Any member of staff involved in REF-related review of staff eligibility or output assessment must have first completed training in unconscious bias. Those already involved in relevant procedures have completed REF-specific unconscious bias training provided by AdvanceHE.

A training and guidance session is provided annually for all staff due to complete an ARP, which from academic year 2025-26 includes information on the link between ARPs and this REF CoP. Each year, the session is recorded and made available on the Staff Intranet.

All GSA staff must complete mandatory training modules (repeated at regular intervals) in subjects including: Equality and Diversity in the Workplace, Safeguarding, Complaints Handling and Data Protection. Staff are also strongly encouraged to complete a range of other online training modules in topics including: Unconscious Bias, Disability Awareness, Dignity and Respect at Work, Gender-based Violence, Inclusive Leadership, How Micro-Behaviours Affect the Workplace, Race in the Workplace, Menopause at Work, Neurodiversity at Work, Supporting Transgender Staff and Students and Mental Health First Aid.

2.3 Appeals

An established appeals process is provided for those who wish to raise issues about outcomes of the ARP process, including those who suspect discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics. This is defined in the ARP guidance and on the staff intranet and is distinct from REF procedures and the REF appeals process. It is a two-stage process consisting of an informal stage and (if required) a formal ARP appeals panel.

A staff member may separately appeal an SRR decision (or IR decision) if they suspect that:

- the process defined in the Code of Practice has not been followed correctly;
- they have been subject to unlawful discrimination on the basis of age, disability, gender identity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation, or because the individual concerned is pregnant or has recently given birth;
- decisions have been made based on incorrect data (for example, relating to indicators or research independence or average teaching hours).

An appeals form (see 6) should be completed and submitted to the HR REF Leads via the HR Service Desk system. The appeals process consists of an informal and a formal stage.

Informal Stage (stage 1)

Appeals should be made within 28 days of receiving email notification of SRR or IR status. The HR REF leads will coordinate a meeting between the member of staff and the Head of Research Support Services to review the appeal, within 21 days. A colleague or trade union representative may accompany the member of staff. A written summary of the discussion will be provided by email within 7 days of the meeting. The member of staff may then either withdraw the appeal (if it is agreed it should not be upheld) or progress to stage 2.

Formal Stage (stage 2)

The member of staff should inform HR via the HR service desk if they wish to escalate their appeal to stage 2, within 14 days of receiving the outcome of stage 1. An Appeals Panel will then be convened comprising the Head of Research and an experienced senior academic who has not previously been involved in the decision making or appeals processes. A colleague or trade union representative may accompany the member of staff. Evidence will be sought from those responsible for the relevant stage of decision making, and others as applicable. Following discussion and review, the Appeals Panel may conclude that:

- The appeal is not upheld
- The appeal is partially upheld but that the decision on SRR or IR designation is correct
- The appeal is upheld or partially upheld and the process to identify SRR or IR status should be undertaken again, potentially based on revised evidence or by different individuals.

Stage 2 Appeals Panel decisions, or the outcomes of a second review of SRR or IR status, will be final. The Panel chair will write to the member of staff (by email) to confirm the outcome and any required actions.

Note that the outcome of an appeal will apply only to the member of staff's SRR or IR designation in the HESA Staff Record, and will not alter their ARP status, which is subject to separate processes. Any decision relating to the selection of a researcher's outputs based on quality is not subject to appeal.

2.4 Equality Impact Assessment

The equalities impact assessment completed following REF 2021 influenced GSA's approach to developing our research environment and community as an aspect of our longer-term preparations for REF 2029. A further equalities impact review undertaken during the development of this CoP has provided additional insight and helped to shape our approach to developing an inclusive submission. For instance, the proportion of female researchers included in submissions increased significantly between REF 2014 and REF 2021 (rising to 54%), better reflecting the academic staff profile, in which there is a slight majority of female academic staff overall and a high proportion of women in leadership positions, including for research. We aim to maintain that positive trend by ensuring that women are well represented among those involved in REF review and decision-making. An issue flagged for attention following analysis of our REF 2021 submission was that the average age of those submitted to REF was older than in REF 2014, and the proportion of those aged 35 or younger (8%) was lower than in the academic population as a whole (now around 15%). Since then, we have introduced measures to support ECRs, such as preferential access to research mentoring, ring-fenced research leave, and enhanced capture of ECR status in ARPs, with proportionate review (see also 1.3 and 6.2). We have also updated policies to ensure that ECRs are represented on research committees at all levels, and are involved in peer review. Our CoP has been designed to accurately reflect the composition of our research community based on established institutional processes, and we anticipate improving levels of inclusion of younger staff by the close of the current REF cycle.

There are some limitations to the available data on those with a declared disability within the (provisional) anticipated REF 2029 cohort, as more than half of that population has disclosed no information about the protected characteristic. Overall, around 6% of those in our provisional dataset have a declared disability, compared with only 3% in REF 2021, and <5% in the current academic population as a whole, indicating either a higher rate of disclosure or inclusion (or both). All GSA REF guidance materials, including this CoP, are produced in formats accessible to assistive technologies, such as screen readers. GSA provides access to a range of assistive software tools and hardware such as hard-of-hearing systems. Staff requiring alternative formats may request them from research@gsa.ac.uk. Staff who require assistance with any other aspect of the REF-related procedures described in this CoP due to special characteristics may request it via the HR Service Desk and reasonable adjustments will be made.

In other respects, there are some limitations to the available institutional data and information about protected characteristics among our research community, given cohort size, confidentiality considerations and levels of disclosure by staff. Therefore, the REF operations team will undertake an interim equality impact assessment exercise once initial HESA volume data for REF 2029 are available, to assess whether GSA's REF-related equality and diversity objectives are on track, and identify potential mitigating actions if any issues are identified. As advised by GSA's Equality and Diversity team, this exercise will include an anonymous survey of academic staff which includes optional equality monitoring questions, to reduce the risk of disclosure of sensitive information about individuals in a relatively small cohort.

Note that staff can update their own personal and sensitive information via their self-service profile on the HR system. Staff identified as SRR or IR will be invited to do so, in order to provide better aggregate, anonymised data for analysis and equality impact assessment– this will be

voluntary, but information will be provided on how the data will be used, why it is important and how we will safeguard confidentiality, in order to encourage engagement.

The institutional ARP process is the main indicator of SRR. It was introduced partly as a response to the equality impact assessment undertaken following REF 2014, which indicated there had been unequal access to research time, with part-time staff more likely to have been disadvantaged. Since then, all academic staff who are employed on at least a 0.2FTE basis are entitled to complete ARPs; the scope of a researcher's plan is expected to be proportionate to their FTE.

Research plans should be submitted annually, but a clearly defined mitigating circumstances process is in place for those whose situation has delayed or prevented completion of an ARP, or affected their research. Mitigating circumstances are managed by the HR department, and confidentiality is maintained as appropriate.

For any member of staff who has not completed the ARP process in a given year due to a planned absence or mitigating circumstances (for example, parental leave, long-term ill health or caring responsibilities), SRR reporting to HESA will be based on participation in the ARP process during the previous three-year period. See also 6.2.

The composition of both REF and ARP advisory and decision-making review panels is balanced, reflects diversity and is as representative of staff as possible given required skills and expertise.

Anybody involved in REF-related review must first have completed unconscious bias training for peer reviewers. In addition, all staff must complete Equality and Diversity in the Workplace training every three years and are encouraged to complete more general training including on unconscious bias, neurodiversity, supporting transgender staff and students and mental health first aid (see also 2.2). In addition, staff have access to external resources provided by AdvanceHE, Open University and other providers and relevant materials are promoted to peer reviewers.

Part 3: Determining Research Independence

3.1 Policies and Procedures

IR status applies to academic staff who are in research-only roles and describes researchers who undertake self-directed research (which meets the REF definition) rather than primarily being directed to carry out others' research programmes. Staff who are 'research only' are primarily employed to carry out research and must undertake no more than 6 hours per week of teaching, on average (for a full-time employee, pro-rata for part-time staff). Staff confirmed as IR are reported as such to HESA and contribute to the Volume Measure.

3.1.1 Criteria and Evidence

At GSA, contracts cannot reliably be used to identify research-only staff, as they are the same as those issued to other academic roles; in addition, job titles and role descriptors do not always reflect the full range of current duties, including teaching. Therefore, ARPs will be used

as the primary, initial source of evidence to identify those in research only roles and determine which of them are IR.

Following completion of the annual ARP process, the REF operations team, with the support of HR REF Leads, will collate average teaching hours for each member of staff, with reference to activity planners and TAS surveys (where available) and in consultation with managers if required. This will filter out staff who should instead be considered under the process for identifying SRR (see 2).

The REF operations team will then review the content of each research-only member of staff's ARP for evidence that at least two indicators of research independence have been met. Multiple ARPs submitted during the REF 2029 eligibility period (AY 2021-22 to AY 2026-27) may be consulted. Indicators of RI include:

- acting as lead applicant/investigator on externally funded research project or KE project underpinned by the staff member's independent research
- being named as co-applicant/investigator on externally funded research project
- leading substantial/specialised work package of a research project and having significant input in the design, conduct and interpretation of the research
- holding³ an independently won, competitively awarded research fellowship⁴ requiring research independence
- supervising a PhD to completion.

Details will be verified with reference to institutional and external data and systems, including GSA's grant funded project database, project award documents and contracts, PGR student records systems, the institutional research repository (RADAR) and funders' published records. Where indicators relate to activity undertaken before a member of staff joined GSA, as consistent with their GSA role, former employers may be contacted if appropriate.

3.1.2 Decision-Making and Communication

The outcomes of this process and evidence consulted shall be documented and presented to the Head of Research and the Research Leads group for review and approval. If at this stage there are any members of staff whose IR status remains uncertain, this panel may come to a majority judgement to confirm the designation or require that further evidence is provided. Once confirmed, the HR REF leads and members of the REF operations team will prepare details of staff who are IR for submission to HESA.

IR status is considered to endure, so the process to confirm it needs to be completed only once per REF cycle for each research-only member of staff, unless they move into another role or their employment circumstances change significantly.

Research Assistants, Research Associates or equivalent are assumed in most cases not to be IR. Those employed in such roles below GSA's Grade 7 are not required to complete ARPs and

³ Or having held such a Fellowship, if the nature of the role has been maintained following its completion.

⁴ Consistent with the REF 2029 list of fellowships requiring research independence, such as AHRC Leadership Fellowships, British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowships or Royal Society of Edinburgh Arts & Humanities Awards – see <https://2029.ref.ac.uk/publication/research-fellowships/>

will not routinely be subject to the process to identify IR. If such staff voluntarily complete ARPs, they will be assessed for IR as described above.

Staff shall receive confirmation of their IR status by email, to include an explanation of the rationale for the outcome and their resulting designation in the HESA Staff Record. Further information will also be provided on the REF section of the staff intranet to explain how this relates to the potential inclusion of their work in REF 2029. Staff may consult the REF operations team informally to seek clarification if they have any questions, and may appeal the outcome if they believe the CoP process has not been followed correctly, they have been subject to unlawful discrimination or that decisions have been made based on incorrect data (see 2.3, 3.3).

3.2 Staff, Committees and Training

3.2.1 Roles and Responsibilities

See 2.2. for an overview of all REF-related roles and responsibilities.

The REF operations team will assess ARPs for evidence of indicators of IR, verify details with reference to supporting data sources and prepare reports.

The REF operations team, in liaison with HR REF Leads, will undertake REF eligibility checks of those nominally identified as IR through ARPs, verify allocated teaching hours with reference to relevant data and in consultation with line managers and Heads of School/area, and prepare their data for HESA.

Research Leadership Group, chaired by the Head of Research, will check and approve the final dataset.

REF operations team will notify staff of outcomes.

The REF operations team and HR REF Leads will manage appeal requests (see 2.3). The Head of Research Support Services will process stage 1 Appeals. The Head of Research will process stage 2 Appeals.

3.2.2 Training

For training, see 2.2.2.

3.3 Appeals

Appeals relating to decisions on the research independence of research-only staff will follow the same process as for appeals relating to SRR status (see 2.3).

3.4 Equality Impact Assessment

Please refer to 2.4 for information about the rationale for the ARP process (on which IR assessment will be based), details of its mitigating circumstances process and composition of ARP and REF review panels, and how they support equality and fairness in decision making.

For any member of staff who has not completed the ARP process in a given year due to a planned absence or mitigating circumstances (for example, parental leave, long-term ill health or caring responsibilities), IR assessment and reporting to HESA will be based on participation in the ARP process during previous years within the REF period.

Note that equalities data on the provisional IR cohort cannot be disaggregated from that for provisional SRR staff in the pilot year of HESA REF volume data, due to the limited size of the IR cohort.

All GSA REF guidance materials, including this CoP, are produced in formats accessible to assistive technologies, such as screen readers. GSA provides access to a range of assistive software tools and hardware such as hard of hearing systems. Staff requiring alternative formats may request them from research@gsa.ac.uk. Staff who require assistance with any other aspect of the REF-related procedures described in this CoP due to special characteristics may request it via the HR Service Desk and reasonable adjustments will be made. See also 6.2.

Part 4: Allocating Contracts to REF Units of Assessment (UoAs)

As GSA is small, specialist, creative arts institution, all eligible staff at GSA will be submitted to a single REF unit of assessment, UoA 32 – Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory, in Main Panel D – Arts and Humanities. There is therefore no need for a process to manage allocation of contracts to UoAs.

Part 5: Selecting Outputs

5.1 Policies and Procedures

All Outputs considered for potential selection for REF 2029 will be reviewed and assessed by GSA's Mock REF peer review panel, which consists of academic members of GSA's Research Leadership Group (RLG) and a wider group of GSA's experienced peer reviewers. The Mock REF Panel's role is advisory. Outputs are identified for review from those presented by staff in their ARPs as the best examples of their research, and from wider review of the GSA Research Repository (RADAR) and consultation with staff members.

Each output is assessed and scored against each of the REF quality criteria by two peer reviewers (selected to ensure there is expertise in the relevant discipline), and the scores are then considered (and if necessary calibrated) by a moderation panel chaired by the Head of Research. The Mock REF Panel will continue to review completed outputs from across GSA periodically until the REF 2029 submission point in 2028. This will result in a list of all eligible outputs ranked by quality.

The Head of Research and Research Leads are responsible for the selection of outputs for submission to REF 2029. The selection will be based primarily on quality, balanced against our

objective to present a representative range of research, which reflects the disciplines and methodologies of GSA's researchers. Outputs that do not meet the REF definition of research will not be selected.

Outputs nominated for review will be subject to eligibility checks. Prior to Mock REF peer review it will be necessary to confirm that outputs were first made publicly available between 1st January 2021 and 31st December 2028 (the REF Publication Period).

Prior to selection, we will confirm that there is a substantive link between researcher, research output and GSA (see section 5.1.1 below) and that the output meets Open Access requirements (where applicable).

Open Access requirements apply to journal articles and conference contributions that have an ISSN and were published between 1st January 2021 and 31st December 2028. Articles published from 1st January 2026 are subject to different Open Access criteria (e.g. duration of embargo periods, license format) than those published between 2021 and 2025, and researchers should consult the Open Access information on the Staff Intranet for detailed guidance or contact the research repository team on radar@gsa.ac.uk for advice. The core requirement is that Open Access outputs should be published and/or deposited (as relevant) in a way that is discoverable and free to read, download and search within by anyone with an internet connection, within defined time periods. In most instances, researchers should ensure that Open Access examples of their Outputs are made available as soon after the date of acceptance as possible.

Outputs that do not meet Open Access requirements may be reviewed by the Mock REF Panel and considered for selection, as exceptions to criteria may apply and there is some tolerance for inclusion of non-compliant items, although this is limited. The Open Access status will, however, be recorded and taken into account during the selection process, and non-compliant Outputs are significantly less likely to be included in the REF submission.

5.1.1 Identifying Substantive Link to Outputs

For outputs to be eligible for REF 2029, GSA must be able to demonstrate a *substantive link* between the researcher, the research (in output form) and the institution. One required indicator of a substantive link is that there is an eligible employment relationship between the researcher and GSA. An eligible employment relationship is defined as a minimum of 0.2FTE for at least 12 months of continuous employment⁵ (which may consist of an unbroken sequence of shorter contracts). The role(s) should also include an expectation of research activity (as defined by REF). The eligible employment must have occurred:

- at the point at which the output was first made publicly available (which can occur at any point during the eligible employment); and/or
- when the research resulting in the output was carried out.

If the substantive link applies to the period during which the research was carried out, but not to the point at which the output was first made publicly available, then:

⁵ As defined by Section 210 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (ERA 1996)

- the research should normally have been carried out between January 2021 and December 2028 and no more than two years prior to the output first being made publicly available
- for long-form and extended process outputs⁶, the research must have been carried out no more than five years prior to the output first being made publicly available
- the research may have been carried out prior to January 2021 if the output was first made publicly available during the REF Publication Period and within the time-limited periods indicated above.

The duration of a researcher's eligible employment in relation to the development and dissemination of their research will be checked with reference to the HR system.

Research activity is confirmed as an expectation of role on the basis of allocated research time resulting from ARPs. This will include staff identified as SRR or IR, and some whose main responsibility is neither teaching nor research, but who have been allocated research time through the ARPs process. Staff confirmed to be IR (see 3) will be considered to have held that status for the duration of employment in that role, and to have met the expectation of research activity for any research developed and disseminated during that time.

The substantive link will be checked and confirmed before an output is considered for submission to REF 2029. (Results of checks will be recorded and stored securely and confidentially until all REF 2029 procedures have been completed.)

Outputs that were produced and made public by individuals while employed in a non-eligible category for REF may be considered for selection if that individual moves to a REF eligible role, providing:

- all applicable contracts at GSA meet the definition of continuous employment; and
- other eligibility criteria are met.

Otherwise, eligible employment relationships that occur after an output is first made public cannot constitute a substantive link. The only exception to this rule applies to long-form and/or extended process outputs – such outputs will be eligible for submission to REF 2029 if:

- they were first made publicly available during the REF Publication Period and
- the staff member's eligible employment relationship at GSA commenced within 5 years of the outputs first being made publicly available.

Outputs solely authored by (or where the only substantive link is through) the following groups will not be eligible for submission to REF 2029:

- postgraduate research students
- visiting or honorary staff
- staff in teaching-only roles
- staff in support-only or technician roles (including those with 'academic' contracts).

Exceptionally, permission to include outputs solely authored by staff on teaching-only, honorary emeritus or other non-research contracts (who were employed in that capacity when

⁶ Long-form outputs are of extended scale or scope; extended process outputs are the culmination of a substantial, discrete research endeavour involving intense activity sustained over five years or longer. The REF 2029 Main Panels will publish further guidance on these output types.

the research was carried out and/or first made publicly available and who remain on such contracts) may be sought if:

- the individual received an internal GSA Research Development Fund grant or Research Leave or was supported by an externally funded research grant obtained and managed by GSA (including as a member of a consortium) to produce the output or undertake the research leading to the output.

At GSA, such staff would include those who were not given responsibility to undertake research through the ARP process at the time when the research was undertaken or disseminated, or who opted not to participate in the ARP process. Note that submission of such outputs would need to be justified and will only be permissible with the advance approval of the bodies responsible for REF.

5.1.2 Selecting Outputs by Former Staff

No outputs first made publicly available after their author or creator has been made compulsorily redundant will be included in GSA's REF 2029 submission.

Outputs by other former members of staff may be considered for inclusion in GSA's REF submission if:

- the outputs meet REF 2029 eligibility criteria and
- a substantive link as defined in 5.1.1 can be demonstrated for the period during which the former member of staff was employed by GSA.

Note that for former members of staff who were in research-only roles and who left GSA before it was mandatory for those in such roles to complete Annual Research Plans, the substantive link will be assessed with reference to contractual FTE/duration and the indicators of IR in 3.1.

The above criteria will apply to:

- Former colleagues who chose to take voluntary redundancy/severance;
- Those who have retired;
- Those who have left GSA to work for another employer;
- Former colleagues who were employed on fixed-term contracts, if other eligibility criteria are met.

In addition:

- Outputs that were made public before the author or creator was made compulsorily redundant may be considered for submission to REF 2029 if the other criteria above are met and the output was first made public before any redundancy process commenced.
- Outputs jointly co-authored or co-created by current eligible staff with former eligible staff may be included and attributed to the current eligible staff providing a substantive link can be demonstrated.

5.1.3 Assigning Outputs to REF Units of Assessment (UoAs)

All Outputs selected for submission to REF2029 will be assigned to UoA 32 – Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory. Outputs with an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary dimension may be submitted with a request to the sub-panel to consider cross-referring the output to another UoA's sub-panel for advice. It is anticipated that UoA descriptors for REF 2029 will be

sufficiently broad to allow interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary outputs to be meaningfully aligned to the appropriate disciplinary areas, and therefore cross-referral requests will be made prudently.

5.1.4 Procedure for Supporting Diversity of Outputs

No output type will be prioritised for selection or valued more highly than other eligible output types by virtue of its format: all outputs will be identified for potential selection based on assessment of the quality of the research only.

In addition to supporting the development of what might be described as conventional output types (books, book chapters, journal articles etc.), GSA has a strategic research objective to become the leading institution in Scotland for creative practice research, and we are actively working to build our capacity to present practice research effectively. GSA has developed a Creative Practice Template and related guidance and training/mentoring to support the presentation and articulation of creative practice research for REF, building on the success of our 2021 submission. Approximately 25% of our outputs and one of our four Impact Case Studies submitted to REF 2021 were rooted in creative practice research, and we aim to build on those achievements for REF 2029.

5.1.5 Procedures for Ensuring Submissions are Representative of Research Undertaken During the REF Period

We are committed to selecting examples of our best research from across our institution for submission to REF 2029.

The majority of outputs reviewed through Mock REF and considered for submission to REF 2029 will be nominated by members of staff in their ARPs, ensuring that research by all eligible staff will be assessed, and high-quality work identified wherever it originates within GSA.

Each School's research strategy includes targets for the completion of high-quality research, to increase the likelihood that our top-ranked outputs will be drawn from across the institution; our research centres and interdisciplinary staff not based in Schools have similar targets.

Membership of the Mock REF Panel reflects the composition of GSA's Schools and disciplines, to ensure that assessment is fair and accurate. Research Leads from each of GSA's Schools and our Interdisciplinary research grouping will be involved in the selection of outputs.

Consideration of representativeness is necessary because there is *no* requirement in REF 2029 for every member of staff with SRR or IR to contribute a minimum of one output to our submission. In nearly all cases, the maximum number of outputs that can be attributed to a single substantive link (an eligible employment relationship between GSA and an output author) is five (in rare and specific circumstances it may be possible to exceed this, but GSA will endeavour not to).

If the final ranking of outputs by quality assessment alone disproportionately favours any disciplinary areas of GSA over others, the Research Leadership Group will use its judgement to ensure the final selection achieves an appropriate balance between quality and representativeness. We commit to ensuring that our REF 2029 submission is representative of

our institutional disciplines, subject structures and research themes. A ‘statement of representation’ will be included in our REF submission, providing an account of how we have achieved this commitment

5.1.6 Responsible Research Assessment

Every output considered for submission to REF 2029 will be reviewed directly, as described above. GSA does not consider research metrics, journal impact factors, funder details or other proxies when assessing research quality.

5.1.7 Review of Outputs in Languages Other than English

Staff may nominate research outputs in languages other than English for review, and GSA has a responsibility to ensure that such work is not treated less favourably during the output selection process. Any such outputs to be assessed through Mock REF will be processed as follows:

- if any existing members of the Mock REF Panel are fluent in the language, the output will be assigned to them to review in the original language;
- if no member of the Mock REF Panel is fluent in the language, we will seek to identify another member of GSA staff who is both fluent in the language and has the necessary research expertise to review the output in the original language (after undertaking necessary peer review and unconscious bias training);
- if no GSA member of staff has the required expertise and language skills to review the output, an external expert will be sub-contracted either to review the output (after receiving necessary training) and/or translate it into English for review by the GSA Mock REF Panel; we will seek to identify external reviewers and/or translators working within the UK or international HE sector as our preference.

Outputs in British Sign Language (BSL) will always be reviewed in their original form, although additional contextual information may be requested to assist peer reviewers.

Outputs in Scottish Gaelic or Scots will be reviewed in the original language whenever possible⁷. For outputs in Welsh, Ulster Scots, Irish or Irish Sign Language produced in collaboration with jurisdictions in which they have protected status, collaborating institutions in those jurisdictions will be approached for advice and guidance on review and/or translation, if no in-house capacity for review can be identified.

Once reviewed, outputs in any language will be considered for selection on the same basis as any other output.

Note that an English language abstract will be provided for any non-English-language outputs that GSA submits to REF 2029.

⁷ in recognition of the equal respect afforded to these languages under the Scottish Languages Act 2025 and Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2025

5.2 Staff, Committees and Training

5.2.1 Roles and Responsibilities

See 2.2. for an overview of all REF-related roles and responsibilities.

The REF operations team will prepare data to support output review and selection and ensure robust, transparent data management is maintained. They will also be responsible for verifying and recording the eligibility of outputs, including substantive links (in liaison with HR REF Leads), Open Access and dates of publication/outputs first being made public.

The Mock REF Panel will review nominated outputs.

The Research Leadership Group will select outputs for submission.

On an ongoing basis, the REF operations team will notify staff of the scores their outputs have achieved through the Mock REF process and, at the end of the Mock REF exercise, if their outputs have been selected for GSA's submission to REF 2029.

5.2.2 Training

For Training, see 2.2.2.

In addition, those involved in Mock REF Panel peer review and output selection by the Research Leadership Group will receive in-house training on robust, fair and objective output review methods, modelled on the REF criteria and informed by the REF guidance (particularly Panel Criteria and Working Methods) and the extensive peer review expertise of members of the Mock REF Panel.

5.3 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

Please see 2.4 for information about how the composition of review panels and the training undertaken by and available to panelists support fairness in decision-making and equality, diversity and inclusion.

All GSA REF guidance materials, including this CoP, are produced in formats accessible to assistive technologies, such as screen readers. GSA provides access to a range of assistive software tools and hardware such as hard of hearing systems. Staff requiring alternative formats may request them from research@gsa.ac.uk. Staff who require assistance with any other aspect of the REF-related procedures described in this CoP due to special characteristics may request it via the HR Service Desk and reasonable adjustments will be made. See also 6.2.

Part 6: Appendices

Further details of material referenced in this CoP are provided below:

- 6.1 Appeals Form
- 6.2 Annual Research Plans
- 6.3 Equalities Impact Assessment

6.1 REF 2029 Appeals Form

Please refer to section 2.3 of the GSA REF 2029 Code of Practice for Details of the Appeals Process. You should submit the Request for Appeal within 28 days of receiving notification of SRR or IR status. To request an appeal, complete this form and submit it to HR using the Service Desk system on the Staff Intranet: <https://gsaservicedesk.sysaidit.com/servicePortal>. The HR REF Leads will advise you of next steps for either stage 1 or stage 2 of the appeals process.

1) Name and job title:

2) School and Department:

3) Grounds for appeal (mark those that apply with an 'X'):

I believe the process defined in the Code of Practice has not been followed correctly	
I believe decisions have been made based on incorrect data or information	
I believe I have been subject to unlawful discrimination on the basis of age, disability, gender identity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation, or because I am pregnant or have recently given birth.	

(Note that decisions relating to the review and selection of outputs for submission to REF are not subject to appeal.)

4) Case for appeal: Please describe why you believe the above grounds for appeal apply
(up to 300 words)

5) I confirm that, to the best of my knowledge, the information I have provided is accurate and up to date.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

For Office Use

Received (date) _____ By (initials) _____

Follow up action and date confirmed (provide details):

6.2 Annual Research Plans

GSA's Annual Research Plan (ARP) procedures were introduced as an element of activity planning following a review of our REF 2014 submission and outcomes, in response to a number of issues. First, that GSA's academic staff contracts, role descriptors and historical working practices were not always a reliable indicator of which members of staff were in practice expected (or seeking to) be actively involved in research. Secondly, that the equalities impact assessment of REF 2014 indicated inconsistent and potentially unequal opportunities to participate in research in different parts of the institution, with part-time and female members of staff among those at higher risk of being unable to protect time to undertake their research. Thirdly, that there was a need for a more systematic and structured approach to managing involvement in research — balancing equality of opportunity, staff development, quality standards, activity planning and investment considerations. This was also understood as a necessary aspect of involvement in future REF exercises. Fourth, that there were insufficient opportunities for staff to receive regular feedback on their research plans and activities, to guide their development and the potential impact of their work, exacerbated by a high proportion of 'lone researchers' who did not work as part of a research group or unit, in some cases with managers who were not themselves trained or active researchers or reviewers of research. This could also result in staff working on activities and projects that did not meet the REF definition of research.

Since then, ARPs have been an annual exercise in which academic staff submit a structured overview of their recent, current and planned research projects, outputs and other activities for centralised peer review by a cross-institutional panel of experienced academic colleagues. Peer reviewers provide feedback and guidance, as well as an evidenced justification for the allocation of time in which to undertake research as an element of activity planning and workload modelling, and thus as an expectation of role.

Full guidance on ARP procedures is provided on the GSA Staff Intranet. Briefing and guidance events take place annually and are recorded for those unable to attend.

Eligibility

Any member of staff employed on an academic contract of at least 0.2 FTE may submit an ARP. For those whose main responsibility is teaching or other duties such as senior management, submitting an ARP is optional but is a prerequisite for being allocated time in which to undertake research as an element of activity planning. ARPs used to be optional for GSA's relatively small cohort of research-only staff (those seeking feedback and guidance on their plans), but are now mandatory for those employed at GSA's Grade 7 or above, in part to support more accurate HESA reporting. They are optional for research assistants.

Review Procedures

Reviews are undertaken by members of GSA's Peer Review College, all of whom are experienced research reviewers, to ensure the process is consistent and equitable for all staff. Each ARP is reviewed by two reviewers, against defined criteria (aligned with REF standards). One reviewer is appointed to collate and summarise feedback, which is then moderated via panel (chaired by the Head of Research) to ensure it is issued to colleagues promptly and

reliably and that outcomes are reached consistently for all staff. Conflicts of interest (such as line management relationships) are avoided when ARPs are allocated to reviewers. Review panels are diverse in terms of age, gender, career stage and discipline and all reviewers receive peer review training, including in unconscious bias. Each School's Research Lead (and equivalent for research groups not within Schools) is involved in peer review and moderation panels. Those involved in ARP peer review each year are listed on the Staff Intranet.

ARPs are reviewed holistically, focusing on assessment of the staff member's research as appropriate to their career stage. Peer reviewers consider the individual's track record and trajectory, the quality of their recent and planned outputs, the extent to which activities constitute research, contributions to the research environment and culture and the quality, focus and feasibility of plans. For earlier career researchers, there is a greater emphasis on focus, profile, potential and plans than on high-quality achievements.

Outcomes

The outcomes of peer review include feedback and (for staff who are not on research-only contracts) confirmation of research time allocations within activity plans. For staff whose primary responsibility is teaching, possible outcomes are to be allocated research time (previously referred to as 'normative time') or no research time. Research time equates to 20% of contracted hours for applicable staff at all levels. (This can be expanded through externally funded research of sufficient scale.) ARPs are completed in Spring and apply to the following academic year.

Before the current REF period, ARPs also included a possible outcome of 'enhanced research time' (40%) for those undertaking particularly high-quality or large-scale research, but this was later phased out due to concerns about equity and resource allocation. Later, an alternative outcome designation of 'emergent' research time was introduced for a number of years to provide an opportunity for GSA staff who had not completed a research degree or received formal research training (including those who had entered the profession as creative practitioners or through alternative career paths) to develop a track record in research. Once sufficient time had been provided for members of that cohort to become established as researchers, emergent time was phased out in 2025. From 2026, additional measures for prioritising targeted support for ECRs have been introduced.

GSA is currently developing an academic career framework, which will define more structured role designations and responsibilities and career pathways. Once implemented, we anticipate that ARPs will move to longer review cycles and a less direct influence on research time allocations within activity planning.

Mitigating Circumstances

A mitigating circumstances process is available so that disruptive, sudden, or unexpected events can be taken into account if they have impaired a member of staff's ability to undertake research or participate in the ARP process within the normal timeframe. This ensures that a member of staff's research designation and time allocation would not be adversely affected if, for example, ill health or caring responsibilities had affected their research or participation in ARPs. Mitigating Circumstances requests (which may contain sensitive and confidential

information) are submitted to the HR department. For those who cannot complete an ARP on time, deadline extensions can be granted.

Appeals

An appeals process is available for staff if they believe that they were not treated fairly and in accordance with the procedure set out in the ARP Guidance — typically if either procedural error or unlawful discrimination is suspected. The appeals process consists of an informal stage and a formal stage. The informal stage involves an advisory meeting with the Head of Research to review the appeal. If the appeal is not upheld, the member of staff may then either withdraw the appeal or request a formal appeal. The Deputy Director and Vice Principal (Research & Innovation) reviews formal appeal requests and, when the criteria for appeal are met, appoints an appeals panel comprising a senior research academic and HR representative. The panel's responsibilities include assessing evidence from those involved in decision making, ascertaining whether due process was followed and meeting with the member of staff to discuss the substance of the appeal. At each stage, a work colleague or trade union representative can accompany the member of staff. If the appeal is upheld, then the ARP outcome will be re-assessed by the appeals panel. There is also a separate appeals process that applies to the outcomes of mitigating circumstances requests, in which review is undertaken by a member of the HR team who has not previously assessed the request.



6.2 Equality Impact Assessment Form (EIA): REF 2029 Code of Practice

As a public sector organisation, GSA has a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 to assess the impact all of its new or revised policies, practices, procedures or projects may have on protected groups (as defined by the Act).

The purpose of this assessment is to use relevant evidence and critical thinking to identify any impact (positive, negative or neutral) the policy, practice, procedure or project that is being assessed may have on the people it affects or is intended for.

The EIA is a tool which helps mainstream equality into everything GSA does. It requires us to consider how we can mitigate or eliminate negative impact and, in turn, advance positive outcomes. Therefore, it must be undertaken during the development / review of the policy, practice, procedure or project it refers to and not after it has been finalised. Ideally, EIAs should be a team effort of relevant parties to ensure a variety of perspectives have been consulted. All finalised EIAs must be signed off by an executive lead and either the Head of Student

Support and Development or GSA's Equality Officer, however, support from the Equality Officer is available at any stage of completion.

Further guidance on how to complete an EIA can be found on GSA's website and the Equality and Diversity section on the staff intranet. If you have any additional questions, please contact equality@gsa.ac.uk.

Name of Equality Impact Assessment (E.g. Area of decision making/title of policy, procedure, programme or relevant practice)	REF 2029 Code of Practice (policy, procedure)
New or reviewed	New
Owner/Review Lead and role	Colin Kirkpatrick, Head of Research Support Services
Department or School	Research Department
Date of assessment	October 2025

6.2.1 Purpose of policy/practice/procedure/project being assessed – brief description

The Code of Practice (CoP) sets out how the Glasgow School of Art (GSA) will make certain key decisions relating to our participation in REF 2029, specifically:

- How staff will be identified as having Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR)
- How staff who are in 'research only' roles will be identified as 'Independent Researchers' (IR)
- How research outputs will be selected for submission to REF 2029.

Development and approval of a CoP is a requirement for participation in REF 2029. The CoP must be publicly available, and promoted to staff so that they understand how REF procedures may relate to them and be confident that procedures will be conducted consistently, fairly and transparently.

6.2.2 Evidence used when undertaking this assessment – this can comprise of internal and external reports, survey data, etc.

An equalities impact assessment is undertaken after each REF exercise, and we referred to those undertaken after REF2014 and REF2021, in comparison with Annual Research Plan data and all staff information provided in GSA equality monitoring reports. Note that at the time of writing any analysis of equalities data in relation to (estimated) SRR and IR cohorts is provisional, as the CoP has not yet been implemented and the actual cohorts have not yet been identified. We will undertake further equalities analysis after the first year of CoP implementation, in order to assess equalities implications in practice, and the findings will be factored into the final REF preparations and relevant research procedures.

6.2.3 Type of protected characteristic or wider equality area

Protected characteristic	Positive impact	Negative impact	Neutral impact
Age	All those involved in review which influences REF decisions must first complete tailored unconscious bias training for Mock REF peer reviewers. Consideration is given to how diverse and representative Mock REF Panels are. Review procedures are objective, transparent and rigorous.	EIA of REF 2021 indicated older average age of those submitted compared to REF 2014. Research Department initiatives have sought to redress this, e.g. preferential access to research mentoring and research leave for (predominantly younger) ECRs, improved researcher development training provision (note, such initiatives are not part of the CoP policy, but may	

	CoP includes appeals process in which potential discrimination due to protected characteristics is a valid criterion for appeal. Research Department initiatives provide additional support for early career researchers, such as priority access to research mentoring and ringfenced research leave (note ECRs are more likely to be in younger age bands, but not in all cases; these initiatives are not part of the CoP policy but may influence decisions it supports). REF 2021 indicated no disadvantages to older staff.	influence decisions it supports). Provisional data, however, indicates that a majority of those in the estimated SRR & IR cohort are (still) 45 or older, and that there has been no proportionate increase in those in younger age bands, although this effect may reduce following CoP implementation. We will seek to expand initiatives to support earlier career researchers with the intention of ensuring that the impacts of measures we have introduced can have a demonstrable impact prior to the REF submission. Criteria for IR for those in research-only roles more likely to be met by more experienced staff, but this is consistent with REF expectations (e.g. expectation that research assistants would normally not have IR unless otherwise demonstrated) and is not considered problematic or discriminatory, although it will be monitored. Research assistants	
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		who wish to participate in identification process are not excluded, and we will provide support to those seeking to become independent. (Numbers of research assistants at GSA are low.)	
Disability	All those involved in review which influences REF decisions must first complete tailored unconscious bias training for Mock REF peer reviewers. Consideration is given to how diverse and representative Mock REF Panels are. Review procedures are objective, transparent and rigorous. CoP includes appeals process in which potential discrimination due to protected characteristics is a valid criterion for appeal. CoP documentation, training and guidance will be accessible for those who use assistive technologies, and makes provision for requests for other	There are some limitations to the available data on those with a declared disability within the anticipated REF cohort, as more than half of the estimated, provisional cohort has not disclosed information about this protected characteristic. Overall, around 6% of those in our provisional data set have a declared disability, compared with only 3% in REF 2021, indicating either a higher rate of disclosure or inclusion (or both); this is also marginally higher than the proportion of all <i>academic</i> staff currently known to have a disability (<5%, based on HESA data), which is potentially encouraging. However, this is significantly lower than the 25% of <i>all</i> staff who declared a	

	reasonable adjustments. We estimate that around twice as many people with a declared disability are likely to contribute to the REF 2029 volume measure compared to REF 2021, indicating a potentially more inclusive research community.	disability in 2025 (up from 10% the previous year).	
Gender reassignment (covers Trans identities)	All those involved in review which influences REF decisions must first complete tailored unconscious bias training for Mock REF peer reviewers. Consideration is given to how diverse and representative Mock REF Panels are. Review procedures are objective, transparent and rigorous. CoP includes appeals process in which potential discrimination due to protected characteristics is a valid criterion for appeal. The CoP makes provision for those who have been unable to participate in most recent ARP	To date we have limited data on some protected characteristics including gender reassignment and Trans identities, within the anticipated REF cohort.	

	process due to longer term absence.		
Marriage and civil partnership	All those involved in review which influences REF decisions must first complete tailored unconscious bias training for Mock REF peer reviewers. Consideration is given to how diverse and representative Mock REF Panels are. Review procedures are objective, transparent and rigorous.		
Pregnancy and maternity	CoP includes appeals process in which potential discrimination due to protected characteristics is a valid criterion for appeal. All those involved in review which influences REF decisions must first complete tailored unconscious bias training for Mock REF peer reviewers. Consideration is given to how diverse and representative Mock		

	REF Panels are. Review procedures are objective, transparent and rigorous. The CoP makes provision for those who have been unable to participate in most recent ARP process due to prolonged absence, including relating to parental leave, pregnancy, giving birth and caring responsibilities.		
Race	All those involved in review which influences REF decisions must first complete tailored unconscious bias training for Mock REF peer reviewers. Consideration is given to how diverse and representative Mock REF Panels are. Review procedures are objective, transparent and rigorous. CoP includes appeals process in which potential discrimination due to protected characteristics is a valid criterion for appeal.	To date we have limited data on some protected characteristics within academic staff as a subset of all staff, and further analysis would be helpful to influence the emphasis of support provided to support participation in research.	

	Provisional data indicates that the proportion of people contributing to the REF volume measure who have disclosed that they identify as belonging to a minority ethnic group has increased by 4 percentage points compared to REF 2021, and that this is higher than the proportion of all GSA staff, indicating a potentially more inclusive research community.		
Religion and belief	All those involved in review which influences REF decisions must first complete tailored unconscious bias training for Mock REF peer reviewers. Consideration is given to how diverse and representative Mock REF Panels are. Review procedures are objective, transparent and rigorous. CoP includes appeals process in which potential discrimination due to protected characteristics is a valid criterion for appeal.	To date we have limited data on some protected characteristics including religion and belief within the anticipated REF cohort.	No positive or negative impacts are anticipated. The CoP will be in place over several years and will not be affected by religious holidays. There are no anticipated reasons why religious beliefs would be disadvantageous (or unfairly advantageous) in terms of REF participation.

Sex	All those involved in review which influences REF decisions must first complete tailored unconscious bias training for Mock REF peer reviewers. Consideration is given to how diverse and representative Mock REF Panels are. Review procedures are objective, transparent and rigorous. CoP includes appeals process in which potential discrimination due to protected characteristics is a valid criterion for appeal. Female researchers are well-represented in REF review and decision-making roles. Between REF 2014 and REF 2021, the proportion of female researchers included increased significantly; initial predictions are that this balance will remain at a similar level for the REF 2029 volume measure, and at a higher proportion than all GSA staff.	Although female researchers were well represented in REF 2021 (disproportionately included relative to all GSA academic staff), research outputs by men were (slightly) disproportionately included, although no evidence of bias in review was identified.	
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Sexual orientation	All those involved in review which influences REF decisions must first complete tailored unconscious bias training for Mock REF peer reviewers. Consideration is given to how diverse and representative Mock REF Panels are. Review procedures are objective, transparent and rigorous. CoP includes appeals process in which potential discrimination due to protected characteristics is a valid criterion for appeal. Provisional estimates indicate a higher proportion of people not identifying as heterosexual are likely to contribute to the REF 2029 volume measure compared to REF 2021, indicating a potentially more inclusive researcher community and/or one in which people are more confident to declare their sexual orientation, although these projections are very tentative and	To date we have limited data on some protected characteristics including in terms of how analysis of this indicator is presented in data for all staff compared to available data for an estimated REF cohort, so further analysis will be necessary.	
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	based on low numbers, and the majority still choose not to disclose.		
Impact on other groups (e.g. Care Experienced; Carers; Military Veterans; Low Socioeconomic Status (SES); Asylum Seekers; British Sign Language Users, etc)	All those involved in review which influences REF decisions must first complete tailored unconscious bias training for Mock REF peer reviewers. Consideration is given to how diverse and representative Mock REF Panels are. Review procedures are objective, transparent and rigorous. CoP includes appeals process in which potential discrimination due to protected characteristics is a valid criterion for appeal. The impact on BSL users should be positive; the CoP reflects the REF regulation that BSL research outputs should be reviewed in the original language (see also protected languages).	To date we have limited data on the extent to which the anticipated REF cohort or review panels reflect other groups which should be included when considering the equality implications of this policy.	

	The CoP makes provision for those who have been unable to participate in most recent ARP process due to absence, including those with caring responsibilities.		
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6.2.4 How has the identified negative impact been mitigated? – please provide details of undertaken actions broken down by protected characteristic

Potential for disproportionate representation of older academic staff, based on REF 2021 trend: Research Department initiatives implemented, as Research Strategy priorities, to enhance access to research mentoring, research leave and researcher development training to (predominantly younger) Early Career Researchers. These are not elements of the REF 2029 CoP, but are anticipated to influence outcomes. We will monitor effectiveness once CoP implementation begins and datasets are available.

Limitations to some equalities data for (anticipated) REF Cohort: Following implementation, those identified as SRR and IR will be encouraged to update sensitive information on iTrent profiles to support better anonymised, aggregate equalities data for REF cohort – but this will be voluntary, not mandatory. Equalities data analysis will be undertaken once first CoP HESA Staff dataset is available, and additional potential mitigations will be identified as appropriate, and reported to Research Committee.

6.2.5 Any outstanding mitigation (where applicable) – please provide a concise action plan with action owner and a timescale for competition

Action	Equality Impact	Person Responsible	Time frame
Ongoing equalities data monitoring to be undertaken following implementation of CoP and prior to REF submission.	Will provide better understanding of equalities implications of CoP and opportunity for further enhancements, relating to a range of protected characteristics, prior to REF submission. Will also inform EIA of REF 2029, feeding into subsequent strategic priorities for Research.	Head of Research Support Services, with Research Department professional support team, liaising with HR and Equality and Diversity team.	First REF 2029 HESA dataset should be available October/November 2026 – analysis to be undertaken prior to second Research Committee of AY 2026-27.
Continued expansion of measures to support earlier career researchers.	To ensure that GSA's research environment is creating opportunities to support the career development of less experienced researchers, as consistent with institutional staff profile and recruitment patterns.	Head of Research Support Services, with Research Department professional support team, liaising with HR and Equality and Diversity team.	Throughout period to REF submission, and continuing thereafter.

6.2.6 How does the outcome of this assessment and the actions undertaken support GSA's 2021 – 2025 Equality Outcomes?

Participation in REF 2029 applies to academic staff only. To the extent to which GSA's Equality Outcomes relate to students and the student experience, the outcomes of this assessment will have minimal impact.

In other respects, the approach to the REF 2029 CoP seeks to reflect GSA's commitments to mainstreaming equality and meeting the public sector equalities duties.

The CoP is intended to contribute to an environment in which people with protected characteristics feel safe, supported and confident that their needs are being met. REF 2029 places a strong emphasis on equality, diversity and inclusiveness, the wellbeing of researchers and robust, transparent and fair procedures. We believe our CoP meets those expectations, underpinned by wider strategies, policies and initiatives for research.

6.2.7 How does the outcome of this assessment and the actions undertaken support the three main duties the Glasgow School of Art has under Public Sector Equality Duty (underpinned by the Equality Act 2010) to:

- **Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation**
- **Advance equality of opportunity**
- **Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not?**

The CoP seeks to support all three main duties through:

- targeted training to ensure that procedures influencing decision making are free from bias
- defining a clear policy and robust, transparent procedures that apply (and are implemented) equally in relation to all academic staff
- ensuring that advisory and decision-making panels are as diverse and representative as possible of a range of characteristics
- incorporating appeals processes in which discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics provides legitimate grounds for appeal
- ongoing EDI monitoring to inform implementation of the CoP and influence the REF 2029 submission.

6.2.8 Where/when will action progress and outcome be reported and reviewed?

Research Committee, ongoing until completion of REF 2029 and receipt of results in 2029. Regular reports on REF from Research Committee will be submitted to Academic Council and Senior Leadership Group.

6.2.9 Next review date – please consider any outstanding actions outlined above; the review period must be in line with the policy/service review and/or at intervals of no more than three years

Prior to implementation of CoP following approval by REF bodies (anticipated from summer 2026)

Research Committee, Semester 2, AY 2026-27 (updated equalities data analysis)

6.2.10 Approval

Signed off by Owner/Review Lead (name and role)	Colin Kirkpatrick, 28.10.25
Signed off by Executive Lead (name and role)	(date) Prof. Irene McAra McWilliam, 18/11/2025
Signed off by Equality Lead	Ceit Mackintosh, Equality Officer, 10/11/2025
Signed off by Research Committee	(date) 05/11/25

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