



Department for  
Science, Innovation  
& Technology

# Government response to the Independent Review of Research Bureaucracy

February 2024



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# Ministerial Foreword

When I was appointed Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology a little over one year ago, I made it my mission to listen to and champion the UK's amazing community of scientists, innovators and entrepreneurs. That is because our mission to become a science and tech superpower by the end of the decade is not just empty words. We are laser focussed on making it a reality and we simply cannot succeed without the efforts of all our brilliant scientists. I see it as the government's job to remove barriers to scientific success, innovation and growth.

What the community has told me again and again is that research has become bogged down in a huge growth of unnecessary bureaucracy. From complex applications forms with short deadlines to endless reporting, research has become gripped by an audit culture which is holding people back from doing their best work.

Unnecessary bureaucracy is a problem that has multiplied over many decades, sapping more and more valuable time and resources away from core research tasks. Scientists and researchers report that applying for and reporting on research grants have grown more cumbersome and more complex, with much information collected without ever being referred to again. Whole industries have sprung up to help researchers and institutions navigate complicated funding requirements, assessment exercises and evaluations.

It is also clear to me that, when applied carefully, some bureaucracy is positive – one of my mantras is regulate to innovate. The right regulation can provide necessary guardrails that keep research subjects and the wider community safe and provide greater certainty. Reporting can help marshal a crucial evidence base for the research funders, investors and taxpayers that pay for research. Rules and guidelines can provide a framework to help innovative work to succeed – or to fail quickly enough that we might turn our attention to more profitable things.

But if we keep tying the hands of our brilliant scientists and world-leading institutions with layer upon layer of endless bureaucracy, we simply will not fulfil our potential as a nation. Just as in healthcare where we want brilliant doctors to spend time with patients not filling in forms, and in education where we want inspiring teachers to focus their efforts on the pupils, not the burdensome processes we want our world-leading scientists to be able to spend longer developing their ideas, experimenting and collaborating, not form filling and reporting. Time is being wasted. Important, game-changing work could be left undone. Opportunities will be lost.

On the other hand, if we get it right, we can be proud of building the world's most agile, streamlined and fast-moving research system. A system where people and institutions are trusted to act wisely, and where researchers and their teams are free to focus on what really matters. Put simply, we can become the most exciting place in the world to do research and innovation.

Eliminating unnecessary bureaucracy is therefore mission-critical for my department, for the government, and for the future prosperity of the UK. It is why the Review undertaken by

Professor Adam Tickell is so important, and I am grateful to Professor Tickell and all those who contributed to the Review for producing a comprehensive and thoughtful report.

As part of this response, I am pleased to set out rapid action to alleviate some of the most pressing problems in the publicly funded research system. But I also recognise that we need a longer-term shift across the sector – with reform needed within all institutions. I am encouraged that funders, institutions and individuals across the research system are already making changes which respond to the review's call for change.

However, this is not an agenda which will be resolved overnight. Reducing unnecessary bureaucracy is a task that requires constant vigilance and ongoing effort. We have a plan. We need to draw a line in the sand – from here on, our shared aim must be to reduce bureaucracy, not introduce it, and I ask everyone across the research sector to do their part.

The Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP

Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology

## Overview

Unwarranted levels of bureaucracy have built up in every part of the UK research system, impeding the efficiency and productivity of our researchers and diverting resources to burdensome activity. The Independent Review of Research Bureaucracy has provided a clear roadmap to minimise this burden, so that our world class researchers can focus their time on groundbreaking research that supports economic growth and a better quality of life for UK citizens.

The Review provided a clear diagnosis alongside a set of sensible and practical recommendations. This Government Response responds to all the recommendations and provides a comprehensive plan for how the sector will work together to unleash the full potential of the research system. Below we provide an overview of the actions covered in this government response. These actions are already reshaping the research system, making it leaner, more user-friendly and more productive.

### Systems are being streamlined and simplified:

- The UK's two largest public funders of research are transforming the way they fund research. UK Research and Innovation is developing the new Funding Service under its Simpler, Better Funding programme and the National Institute for Health and Care Research will be launching a new simplified single awards management system;
- A more streamlined, joined up UK ethical and regulatory approval service for health and social care research will reduce duplication and speed up decision-making;
- Funders are removing the requirement for letters of support in applications wherever possible, freeing up time for researchers;
- Funders are building in greater flexibility in the way research grants are managed to improve the experience for researchers and save them time to focus on making the discoveries that shape the future.

### Funders are developing better ways of collecting, processing and analysing data:

- UKRI will be asked to immediately start working on the future of data collection on the impacts of research. We are asking them to be ambitious and consider all alternative options, including no longer using Researchfish, from 2025 onwards;
- Funders will work together to improve data flows between different digital platforms, make more effective use of that data, and test the potential of new tools including AI.

### Funders will work together to harmonise and co-ordinate processes:

- Funders are working together to align and coordinate funding assurance where possible, reducing the reporting burden on research organisations and researchers;

- Funders will seek to standardise and harmonise their application processes, making the systems easier to use for researchers.

### Funders are exploring innovative new approaches to reducing bureaucracy:

- Funders are undertaking trials of novel assessment approaches which have the potential to reduce the burden on researchers;
- UKRI has undertaken an end-to-end review to understand what works and what could be improved in peer review, with a response to follow this year;
- UKRI will use the new narrative CV, the Resumé for Research and Innovation, in all its funding opportunities that require academic track record information;
- Government will launch a new metascience team aimed at identifying new, innovative and more effective ways of extracting maximum impact from the research system.

### More trust is being built into the system to reduce the need for onerous verification:

- UKRI and NIHR will explore the potential for self-certification of assurance requirements by institutions, allowing for greater flexibility where institutions have earned trust;
- The Russell Group will continue to develop the use of trusted funder policies, meaning more projects will be able to get up and running before their formal starting period.

### Funders are improving the way they communicate about bureaucracy:

- Funders will redouble their efforts to ensure timely and effective consultation with research organisations, including on new strategies and policies;
- New communication channels will support more open, accessible and targeted communications, to reach the right people at the right time.

### The research sector is getting its own house in order:

- Universities UK has committed to working with other representative organisations, to address the Review's findings on institutional bureaucracy;
- Universities UK has established a working group to identify opportunities to share learning on reducing bureaucracy, including how processes can be streamlined or standardised.

### A new strategic approach to monitor, challenge and remove bureaucratic burdens:

- From today UKRI will have a new mandate to have due regard for reducing bureaucracy in all new initiatives and programmes it funds;
- The government will establish a new task-and-finish "red team" which will have a remit to identify areas of creeping, unnecessary bureaucracy across the wider public research system. This will make recommendations to funders and ministers for their rapid removal and will consider whether UKRI are meeting the expectations of the mandate.

Together these measures should lead to a reduction in bureaucracy in new and existing schemes and programmes;

- The government has set up a steering group, with funders and research sector representatives, to sustain progress against the commitments;
- UKRI will publish an independent study in early 2024 on understanding the benefits and burdens of funding processes. The study will estimate the costs and identify the benefits that are derived from such processes. If, as anticipated, the total cost has increased, UKRI will take action to reduce this, demonstrating progress on a three yearly basis;
- The government is working with funders and others to develop an effective monitoring framework for measuring success and holding the sector to account on this agenda.

Cumulatively, the actions described above will transform the system for researchers, research organisations and funders. For researchers and research institutions the changes will accelerate research decisions and unlock time and cost savings whilst improving user experience. For funders there will be improved efficiencies through reduced duplication of effort. Overall, it will make research a more attractive career proposition, helping attract and retain the talent required to cement the UK's status as a Science and Technology superpower.



# Introduction

The UK Government's focus on unleashing long-term economic growth is supported by the commitment to increasing publicly funded Research and Development (R&D) spending. The Government recommitted at the 2022 Autumn Statement to increasing public expenditure on R&D to £20 billion per annum by 2024/2025. This represents the largest ever increase in public R&D spending over a Spending Review period. To unlock the opportunities offered by this investment, the Government wants to see reductions in unnecessary research bureaucracy as part of wider work across the sector to improve the impact and culture of research.

This document sets out the Government response to the Independent Review of Research Bureaucracy, led by Professor Adam Tickell. It should be read in conjunction with the Review's final report.

The Government asked Professor Tickell to meet the following headline objective, as set out in the terms of reference for the Review:

*"The overarching goal of this Review is to advise on a substantial reduction in unnecessary research bureaucracy in government and the wider sector, supporting our researchers to focus on research and related activities which contribute to a healthy research base. Our ambition is to reduce research bureaucracy so that only essential elements remain, resulting in a major improvement in the quality of the working lives of individuals and teams conducting research."*

The findings and recommendations of the Review are sector wide. The Government response includes commitments covering government departments and funders and has been developed in consultation with the Devolved Administrations. This response recognises the responsibilities for research across all parts of the UK. There is particular emphasis on the role and leadership of the two main UK government research funding bodies: UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) who distribute around three quarters of public R&D funding, as well as commitments from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to collaborate to reduce burdens.

It also includes examples of actions from a wider set of stakeholders across the research system. The development of this response has relied on contributions from the National Academies, the medical research charities, regulators, Universities UK (UUK), the Russell Group, and other representative groups of research institutions and research managers.

The headline response to the Review's recommendations is a positive one. This response sets out the actions that the government, funders and the sector will take against each recommendation to unleash the research sector from unnecessary bureaucracy.

Those who contributed to this response recognise the Review's findings and share a commitment to address them. This will require sustained, coordinated action to improve and simplify systems and processes. It will also need collective effort to consider the implications through the funding chain - from government departments to research organisations and their research teams. This response reflects actions already taken since the Review was published, those planned, and ambitions for the longer term. There will be significant improvements

delivered through UKRI's Simpler and Better Funding programme and NIHR's transformation programmes. Throughout this response these programmes are recognised as vehicles through which these funders will address issues identified by the Review. The Review found unnecessary bureaucracy has increased over many years and takes different forms, so efforts to reduce it will take time. This response therefore marks the first step in what will need to be a process of continuous improvement, while recognising changes must not destabilise the system. The Government agrees that the Review's seven principles of harmonisation, simplification, proportionality, flexibility, transparency, fairness and sustainability should guide the approach taken.

### **Simpler and Better Funding**

The goal of UKRI's Simpler and Better Funding programme is to create a single, consistent user-centred service ('The Funding Service') that reduces the burden of finding, applying for and managing research funding. The Funding Service will be designed to give UKRI the required evidence to support funding the best ideas. It will also be designed to respond and adapt easily to change. The Funding Service is being developed in a user-centred, iterative way. From 2024, Research Council opportunities will be delivered and managed end-to-end in the Funding Service. The Simpler and Better Funding programme will run to March 2025, continuing to iterate and develop the platform and making processes more efficient. It will also bring Research England onto the new Funding Service and align with the Innovation Funding Service.

### **NIHR Transformation Programmes**

The NIHR is investing in transformation programmes to make it easier for researchers and other stakeholders to engage and interact with the NIHR, building on earlier initiatives to reduce bureaucracy. The NIHR will be launching in the second half of 2024 a new single awards management system and optimising its processes through the lens of simplification and proportionality. It also has an ambitious Digital Programme with a mission to enable research to be faster, simpler, more accessible and more engaging for users (public, researchers, and NIHR colleagues/partners).

The Review acknowledges that changes need to be achieved in a way that enables the sector to continue to meet important requirements. This includes safeguarding the use of public funds, demonstrating the impact and the value for public money spent on research, and providing evidence to support efficient and effective future investment. Other important areas include safeguarding national security, fulfilling OECD requirements on Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding, supporting safeguarding and promoting a diverse and inclusive research system.

This response and actions do not stand alone. It supports the Science and Technology Framework, which highlights the need for reduced bureaucracy in funding identified in the "Investment in Research and Development" strand. There are clear links and synergies to other reforms - from the implementation of the R&D People & Culture Strategy to the Review of

the Research, Development and Innovation Organisational Landscape. There are also parallels with the new Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) which aims to deliver funding for pioneering research flexibly and at speed, minimising hurdles across a typical project lifecycle. In the field of health research, the Review of Commercial Clinical Trials in the UK aims to improve the bureaucracy of approval processes. Working together on implementation of all of these reforms, and other complementary policies will be vital to avoid duplication and maximise the benefits for our research system.

The actions from this response must be sustained to successfully untie the sector from unwarranted bureaucracy. This will be achieved by coordination and leadership across the sector. The Bureaucracy Review Reform and Implementation Network<sup>1</sup>, has been established to provide strategic oversight of the implementation of all the Review's recommendations. Membership of this group has been expanded to ensure the voice of research organisations is included.

In addition, existing governance structures on research and innovation in government, and elsewhere, should consider the bureaucratic impacts of their work, and strive for alignment and simplification, sharing best practice. The Government will work with the Bureaucracy Review Reform and Implementation Network to identify and challenge potential new bureaucratic burdens, whatever the source. This will include working with the sector to identify emerging issues and ways to streamline approaches where new measures are unavoidable.

To enable this, UKRI will have a new mandate to have due regard for reducing bureaucracy in all new initiatives and programmes it funds. We will establish a new task-and-finish “red team” which will have a remit to identify areas of creeping, unnecessary bureaucracy across the wider public research system. This will make recommendations to funders and ministers for their rapid removal and will consider whether UKRI are meeting the expectations of the mandate. In addition, the Government is commencing discussions with the research sector on a new agreement between funders and research organisations that would commit them to eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy from the research system.

Progress on delivery of this response will focus on monitoring the actions below and gauging the views of researchers and research teams. Measuring bureaucracy at a system level is complex and should not itself be the cause of additional burdens. The Government is committed to working with the sector to identify proportionate ways of measuring impact.

The following sections cover the Government's response to the six themes in the Review's final report. For each theme, the response sets out the Government's key commitments and the difference this will make to the sector. For each recommendation there are specific actions that government, funders and others are undertaking with a longer-term goal of where we want to reach.

In February 2023, the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) was split into the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, and the Department for Business and Trade. The creation of DSIT provides a new single point of leadership, coordination and evidence for Science,

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<sup>1</sup> Bureaucracy Review Reform and Implementation Network was formerly called the Funders Group. The name was changed to reflect wider membership beyond research funders.

Innovation and Technology policy. Any references in the Review's recommendations to BEIS should be read as referring to DSIT.

## Assurance

Assurance refers to information that research organisations are required to provide to funders and regulators. This information is used to demonstrate: that research is carried out in accordance with funding terms and conditions and any relevant statutory regulation; that it meets the highest ethical standards; that it meets appropriate security standards; that it is supported and governed by appropriate policies controls and infrastructure; and that it represents a good use of public money. Assurance spans the entire research lifecycle from funding applications to post project reporting. v

The Government recognises that the approach to assurance has impacts throughout the research system. The priority must be to reduce the number, complexity and duplication of assurance requirements while ensuring legal, value for money and critical safeguards, including those around national security and vulnerable individuals and populations, are not compromised.

**The Government will build on ongoing work to harmonise and simplify assurance requirements, ensuring these are proportionate and transparent, while satisfying mandatory requirements.**

## Key commitments

- All major UK government funding departments will work together to align and coordinate funding assurance where this makes sense, including through piloting joint approaches to assurance;
- UKRI and NIHR will work to align assurance approaches with funders beyond government, building on existing collaborations;
- The Association of Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA) through their Special Interests Groups, is developing shared resources on assurance and engaging their members to follow up the Review's recommendations;
- UKRI and NIHR will undertake the first steps to test the potential of self-certification of assurance requirements by institutions;
- Government spending controls thresholds which impact Public Sector Research Establishments (PSREs) and research institutes are being raised and will be reviewed annually;
- NIHR and UKRI will share a set of commercialisation principles, including good practice of research commercialisation and how to reduce the burden on institutions of data collection activities;
- UKRI Funding Assurance will set out proposals for changes to testing which take account of the relevant risk profile of research organisations;

- Innovate UK are reviewing their monitoring framework to support project assurance and delivery by Higher Education Institutions;
- The Government will work with the Devolved Administrations and other major funders of R&D to share best practice and develop a more harmonised approach to assurance where appropriate.

### What will be different as a result?

Who benefits	How
For research teams, administrators and managers:	The changes will unlock time and cost savings. It will make it easier for teams to support and report on research programmes.
For institutions:	Greater alignment and simplification of funders' requirements will benefit the host institution.  The greater the number of funders that are willing to engage in the common approach, the greater the benefit for research institutions.
For funders and regulators:	There will be greater efficiencies, higher quality responses, reduced duplication of effort, and more effective management of risk, particularly for smaller funders.

### Response to the Review's recommendations on Assurance

**Recommendation 1: There should be coordination across UK Government departments that fund research to ensure there is greater alignment of assurance approaches including greater alignment and coordination across UKRI Councils.**

All major government funders have committed to working towards greater alignment and coordination on assurance of funding where this makes sense. This will take two forms – cross government coordination and practical trials.

UKRI has developed a vision to integrate, wherever possible, the Funding Assurance approaches across their funding streams. Pilots are planned for a single assurance process at universities to cover Innovate UK and Research Council funding in 2023-24.

UKRI and NIHR are progressing joint funding assurance assignments in 2023-24 and working together on domestic funding assurance processes and aligning due diligence for global health research. In 2022, the two funders conducted a joint audit of a higher education institution to learn from and help to align their approaches.

On practical next steps, we will now seek to pursue a combined assurance approach to the Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) which could meet the needs of all research funders

who pay on a full economic cost basis. This work will commence now, with potential pilots undertaken in 2024-25.

In addition, UKRI and NIHR will work towards joint assurance assignments wherever feasible, sharing information and thereby reducing the burden on research organisations. UKRI and NIHR will coordinate their planning and delivery of assurance assignments for FY24/25. This will provide a model for joint working that could be extended to include other organisations thereafter. Any model will however need to accommodate some tailored, additional requirements, for example covering ODA specific and security-related issues.

**Recommendation 2: Government Departments in consultation with the Devolved Governments should convene discussions with other major funders of R&D in the UK with the aim of reducing the assurance burden on the sector.**

A commitment to extend a more coordinated approach to assurance by government funders is the basis of this response. This includes Devolved Administrations and funding bodies who welcome discussion and collaboration on reducing assurance burdens in ways which take account of differences of approach across the UK. There is also broad support beyond government funders to align approaches.

A number of major UK funders, including NIHR, Wellcome, Cancer Research UK, the Royal Society, British Heart Foundation and the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC), are together assessing the potential for a single approach to collecting and assessing compliance with funder policies. The group is developing a platform to collect, access, store and share this information to reduce administrative burden on the host institution. AMRC is supporting this work as it will provide reassurance for smaller charities without the resources to manage assurance across multiple funders. The pilot of this project is due to be launched in Q1 of 24/25 with assessment of the pilot scheduled for Q3. There are further examples of a commitment to greater cross-funder alignment. The British Academy is minimising separate requests of audit material, instead relying on the standard audit of institutions by UKRI.

In Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council is developing a revised approach to assurance and accountability. They are keen to engage in discussion with other funders to explore scope for coordination, alignment and, where appropriate, sharing of assurance to minimise unnecessary burden and promote system efficiencies.

In the longer term, harmonised approaches across an increasing number of research funders should bring greater efficiencies across the system and support higher quality outputs. Harmonising grant funding terms to the full extent possible would also support this goal and help address several other recommendations in the Review.

**Recommendation 3: Funders and research organisations should develop collective approaches and resources to support institutions in managing their assurance processes. As an early step BEIS working with UKRI and Trusted Research leads across government should engage with the ARMA project to ensure that its recommendations and subsequent output design is fit for purpose in addressing the Trusted Research agenda. The ARMA study was published on 3 March 2023.**

There is general support for collective approaches and resources across the sector to help institutions manage research and innovation security risks and assurance. The collaboration that UKRI and NIHR started on financial and process audits in 2023 will be the first of many with the potential to bring other funders onboard once standards are established and documented.

Other joint initiatives include the formal agreements that MOD have with UKRI and PSREs. UKRI will work across the sector in response to the findings of an ARMA led project on due diligence and Trusted Research. [Complex Collaborations - Efficiency, Equity, Quality and Security in International Research](#) was published in March 2023. Discussions have been ongoing with Research England on next steps and resourcing. In early 2024 ARMA will be engaging with other organisations leading initiatives on security more broadly to consider a collaborative approach to investment in necessary resources to support the sector in tackling increasing risks in the international research arena. Separately, ARMA will hold a session in 2024, as part of their Good Practice Exchange series of events, with a focus on the assurance findings in the Review and their implications for Higher Education Institutions.

In the longer term, further work across the sector will develop and promote shared resources and standardised approaches as integral parts of research and innovation security risk management and assurance processes. This includes working closely with industry stakeholders on how best to support and share with them.

**Recommendation 4: In the longer term, funding bodies should explore the potential benefits of self-certification and/or earned autonomy as a means of streamlining assurance requirements for institutions with a strong track record of robust assurance.**

Major funders are committed to working with partners across the sector to identify and test opportunities to streamline assurance requirements. This includes the potential for self-certification (approaches which allow organisations to declare their compliance) and/or earned autonomy (approaches where organisations' assurance varies based on track record of compliance and risk).

In the first instance, NIHR and UKRI will work together to examine options for allowing institutions to self-certify compliance on certain aspects of funding terms and conditions. Institutions would declare (self-certify) their compliance on a stated time scale, likely to be three years for those that meet expectations. This process would initially only be piloted on institutions who could evidence earned autonomy. It would be centrally audited, and a data



repository would allow all funders access subject to securing relevant data sharing protocols. This would reduce bureaucracy by:

- Data being collected once but used many times. All funders would be able to make use of the same data sources;
- Reducing project level administration and the number of audit requirements;
- Funders will know that their policies are being implemented and have the data to quantify impacts.

The establishment and use of the data repository would represent a significant step in funders working together on assurance data and towards self-certification. Due regard will need to be given to compliance with data sharing protocols and legislation.

Establishing self-certification and/or earned autonomy across the sector will however be challenging where there are changes to funding terms and conditions as well as the evolution of new and contentious risks, or where there are specific security requirements. For example, on international funding and ODA funding which will require project level assurance in the majority of circumstances. FCDO is reviewing internal guidance to support proportionate approaches to assurance, including due diligence, to reflect different levels of funding and risk in research programmes.

The NHS Health Research Authority (HRA) has held a public consultation considering how they can further streamline ethics review as part of the Research Ethics Service. One element of the consultation considered a proposal for a service which approves programmes of research, with review of sub-studies being undertaken within the sponsoring organisation. Programmes of research would still gain ethical approval from a research ethics committee as part of the Research Ethics Service. Sub-studies would then gain subsequent approval from their institution, however still working within the agreed parameters set by the original Research Ethics Committee. Institutions would need to employ robust governance processes to be offered this type of ethics review. The public consultation for this change concluded on 23 September 2022 and the HRA is currently working with representatives from all parts of the UK to develop a pilot plan to test the feasibility of such a service by December 2024.

In the longer term, self-certification/earned autonomy may play a greater role in funding assurance as we pilot different models and shared resources. However, where the risk profile of a research organisation gives cause for concern, there will always be a retained ability to undertake in depth assessments when required.

**Recommendation 5: Central government should engage with sponsoring departments and public research organisations (PROs) to review the impact and effectiveness of public sector controls and procurement rules on PROs capacity to deliver their mission.**

Controls on expenditure are one method used by the government to safeguard public money and ensure that it is put to the best possible use in the most efficient way. The controls are held by HM Treasury, although some controls are delegated to the Cabinet Office.

HM Treasury and the Cabinet Office work with departments to ensure that controls are targeted where they most effectively fulfil the responsibility to Parliament on managing public money. HM Treasury has recently increased DSIT's delegated limits in accordance with this. Cabinet Office spend controls were updated to version 7 in February 2023. This version has reduced bureaucracy whilst focussing attention on the highest areas of spend for each control.

**Recommendation 6: UKRI should press forward with its implementation of the Research Commercialisation Monitoring Framework which will drive improvements in the quality of data through the linking of datasets.**

Commercialisation is defined as the process by which new or improved technologies, products, processes and services are brought to market. Data showing the impact of funder commercialisation policies are important for demonstrating their effectiveness, and the total value of UK research funding. There is a strong appetite for data which shows the outcomes, value-for-money and return-on-investment.

UKRI has developed its Research Commercialisation Monitoring Framework based on a theory of change and a logic model. It is now available across UKRI. Its implementation is linked closely with and is being embedded in cross-UKRI activity to better capture the outcomes and impact from UKRI investments in research commercialisation. NIHR is also committed to sharing information on research commercialisation, covering IP, commercialisation and impact and evidence from taxpayer returns. This will include consideration of data collection activities to reduce the reporting burden placed on institutions. This work will be shared with other funders in early 2024.

**Recommendation 7: The National Audit Office (NAO) and UKRI should review the level of transaction testing in UKRI institutional audits to establish whether this is still appropriate.**

UKRI Funding Assurance will set out proposals for changes to its transaction testing which take account of the relevant risk profile of research organisations. These will be discussed in the first instance with the NAO. This is with the aim of reducing the burden on low to medium risk organisations. Given the commitment by UKRI and NIHR to work toward joint assurance assignments, UKRI will keep NIHR up to date with progress so they can understand the implications for their approach to assurance.

**Recommendation 8: UKRI should review the variations in standards and methods used by Innovate UK Monitoring Officers with a view to developing new principles to increase consistency.**

Innovate UK are addressing the issue of consistency of approach. Monitoring Officers are now referred to as Monitoring Service Providers. Universities on Innovate UK grants are currently subject to the same level of scrutiny as industrial partners. Innovate UK are reviewing their monitoring framework and the potential separation of impact monitoring from financial

assurance, with a greater reliance on internal monitoring. Further work will review the future support role of Monitoring Service Providers, such as offering more technical or project support or majoring on financial assurance. Longer term, Innovate UK will also assess the need to recruit more Monitoring Service Providers to account for the increasing number of competitions and programmes and to provide greater support to institutions.

# Applying for Funding

Funding applications were cited in the Review as the major cause of unnecessary bureaucracy in the research system by individual researchers. Key points are the amount of effort required versus the chances of success, and digital platforms that are out of date. With most applications being unsuccessful there is a significant opportunity to reduce the amount of wasted effort so that application processes are proportionate to the chances of success.

**This work will capitalise on existing programmes and initiatives to trial new application processes. Actions will ensure processes promote fairness and do not compromise the rigour of assessment.**

## Key commitments

- Funders will streamline and experiment with new application processes, taking proportionate approaches to reduce administrative burdens;
- Funders will increase standardisation in their application processes and will work together to harmonise their approaches, as far as is practicable;
- Assessment processes will be reviewed and new methods trialled;
- Funders will ensure that innovation in application and assessment processes supports equality, diversity and inclusion;
- The requirement for letters of support will be removed, or if retained because it is a critical part of the assessment process, the information required will be significantly reduced.

## What will be different as a result?

Who benefits	How
For research teams, administrators and managers:	Accelerating research decisions and ultimately impact and making research a more attractive proposition.
For institutions:	Streamlined, proportionate approaches have the potential to reduce the administrative burden in institutions.
For funders and regulators:	Simpler, faster, proportionate application and assessment processes with implications for all those involved in the assessment process, including peer reviewers.

## Response to the Review's recommendations on Applying for Funding

**Recommendation 9: Funders should experiment with application processes to reduce burdens for applicants, (including greater use of two-stage application processes) where information required increases in line with likelihood of being funded.**

Experimentation and streamlining of application processes is already happening across the sector. New application platforms will help to mainstream further improvements for those applying for funding.

UKRI's Simpler and Better Funding Programme is designed to reduce the burden of finding, applying for and, managing research funding for the range of research organisations which UKRI supports. Applicants are asked to provide information that directly addresses the assessment criteria for an opportunity, and/or to meet statutory requirements, and risk management. Further information will be collected only from successful applicants. Research Councils are trialling 'two-step' application processes and Research Council opportunities will be offered on UKRI's new application platform, the Funding Service. Also, in UKRI, Innovate UK has developed grant products to simplify application criteria and speed up funding processing for feasibility studies. Innovate UK has also introduced two-stage processes to accelerate ideas through to transformation funding, for example the [Biomedical Catalyst programme](#).

NIHR already uses a two-stage application process across the majority of its research programmes. NIHR's standard application form will be further streamlined during 2024 as part of the development of the new single awards management system, so that applications only focus on the information that reviewers and funding committees need to make funding recommendations. They will also optimise the pre-population of information in applications, such as linking to Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID) to provide CV information of applicants.

Similar approaches will be followed by other government funders including FCDO which will pilot streamlined commissioning approaches, including the use of two-stage processes. MOD plan to implement a single science and technology portal to make it easier for external partners to access and apply to the right parts of the system.

Funders outside government are also experimenting with application processes. For example, the British Academy is using two-stage selection for the Academy's Mid-Career and Postdoctoral Fellowship schemes. The Royal Academy of Engineering will continue to consider the appropriateness of two-stage application processes across all their research funding schemes where not already used. AMRC are currently expanding their guidance and training to highlight the range of ways that application processes and grant funding can be managed. This builds on best practice to support alignment across the sector.

The Scottish Funding Council utilised a two-step application process in the development of new Alliances for Research Challenges. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales is currently working with key stakeholders to identify ways to minimise unnecessary bureaucracy within its own application and monitoring processes. In the longer term, the major funders will

support initiatives to reduce the length, complexity and inconsistency of application processes and share the lessons learned across the sector.

Government funders are already taking action to improve standardisation within their application processes and to harmonise approaches across funders where this makes sense. UKRI's new Funding Service is developing standardised content, including guidance, question sets and assessment criteria for Research Council opportunities. UKRI will use the new narrative CV, the Resumé for Research and Innovation, in all its funding opportunities that require academic track record information.

**Recommendation 10: Funders should work together to increase standardisation across their application processes in terms of the use of language and the questions they ask, where appropriate. UKRI should facilitate this across Research Councils in the first instance.**

As part of its action under the UK Innovation Strategy, UKRI has developed a commercialisation funding framework highlighting funding principles and best practices in awarding commercialisation funding. The framework also includes a common commercialisation question set which is being piloted by different Research Councils in commercialisation/translational research opportunities. UKRI will share with NIHR a set of commercialisation principles, including sharing good practice of research commercialisation.

By April 2024, UKRI will have developed standardised question sets for core funding opportunity types in the Funding Service. NIHR is developing standard operating procedures to improve consistency and standardisation across the funding process. NIHR will work with UKRI and other funders during 2024 to standardise language and question sets where appropriate, and share learning of good practice.

Working with UKRI and other partners, FCDO will assess the degree of standardisation that can be introduced across its portfolio of programmes. The MOD aims to simplify language in applications while balancing the need for bespoke technical details.

The Royal Academy of Engineering will, in 2024, be initiating a project to review what questions they ask across each of their programmes and why, to ensure consistency across the Academy in the way certain information is requested. In doing so, the Academy will make use of the question bank functionality within Flexigrant. In the longer term, wherever possible, the standardisation of application processes will be the norm. This will mean the broad adoption of consistent and clear terminology, reducing the overall burden of applications, making it easier to apply to a wider range of funding sources and supporting inter-disciplinary research.

**Recommendation 11: Funders should review what adaptations will be needed to assessment processes to take account of changes to application models. This should include considering innovative approaches from the use of peer reviewer triage to limit the number of applications requiring full peer review to experimenting with new models such as randomly allocated funding.**

Peer review is central to application assessment processes and relies on the research community to be panellists. There needs to be innovation and experimentation in assessment to make the most of the time people give to peer review.

UKRI has undertaken an end-to-end review to understand what works and what could be improved in peer review. This independent review, commissioned by UKRI, brought together the existing body of evidence about the impact of innovations to peer review. UKRI will be responding to the review and its recommendations in 2024.

The review provides a resource that can be used by all funders to reflect on the effectiveness of their peer review processes and identify potential areas for reform. UKRI is already piloting different approaches to peer review including through double-blind stages and partial randomisation. In 2022, Natural Environment Research Council piloted the use of partial randomisation in the Exploring the Frontiers funding call. The new Funding Service is based on user-centred design which will simplify and improve the peer review experience. In addition, Government will launch a new metascience team aimed at identifying new, innovative and more effective ways of extracting maximum impact from the research system.

NIHR has adopted a shorter, simplified external peer review form across most research programmes, which asks relevant and targeted open questions. Common principles on peer review will drive a proportionate approach focussing on the use of committee member expertise, reducing the number of external peer reviewers. Further NIHR initiatives will improve, simplify and standardise the peer reviewer identification processes. In 2024, NIHR will develop a 'commissioning' standard operating procedure covering best practice across peer review processes, which will be enacted through the new single awards management system. The new system will also centralise relevant contacts (including technical experts, public reviewers, and evidence users). This will also provide better coordination of peer review tasks and improve the visibility of peer review burden.

FCDO's work on streamlined approaches to the commissioning and managing of research projects will identify future actions on assessment approaches.

Examples from the wider sector include:

- The Academy of Medical Sciences removed written peer review requirements for Global Challenges Research Fund Networking Grants using an approach for awards below £25k which focussed on the collaborations proposed. This change has eliminated around 600 written review forms per annum.
- The British Academy has adopted the partial random allocation model as a trial for three years for its Small Research Grants scheme. It will monitor the impact on applicants, research offices, assessors and the wider academic community.

- The Royal Academy of Engineering make extensive use of peer reviewer triage – review committees only sending those applications considered competitive for funding for full peer review. By March 2025, the Academy will review adaptations to assessment processes across all their research funding schemes. When audited in 2020-21, over 80% of AMRC charities reported use of triage for applications in some form or other. This included assessment of eligibility and scientific or research quality. The AMRC is reviewing their principles and guidance around peer review to ensure it is flexible to allow charities to use innovative approaches in their processes, whilst remaining robust and maintaining AMRC’s standards.

In the longer term, no single approach on assessment processes will work for all given the diversity of funders. But the goal will be to improve, simplify and share so that good practice and the lessons learned extend across the sector.

**Recommendation 12: Funders should ensure that application processes support their commitments to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.**

This Government believes strongly in creating opportunities, knocking down barriers, and enabling a meritocratic and fair nation. This benefits the research base by ensuring that brilliant people can contribute and succeed, irrespective of their background. The Government believes that a commitment to fairness does not require the creation of unnecessary bureaucracy. As reflected in the Autumn Statement, the Government has expressed concerns about the excessive amount of time and resources being spent on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion across the public sector.

Research funders have legal duties under the Equality Act 2010 and public sector funders must also have due regard for the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Government does not require or advise funders to do any activities, or require such activities from others, beyond what is necessary to comply with their legal duties under the Act. This includes the excessive use of Equality Impact Assessments. Burdensome approaches should be avoided.

The Government expects public funders to ensure they have strong evidence for their Equality, Diversity and Inclusion requirements, which must be proportionate and well-targeted to discharging their legal duties. In doing so, funders need to ensure that they avoid creating unnecessary bureaucracy that exceeds these duties.

On 18 December 2023, the Government published [new guidance for public authorities](#) where it made clear that public authorities must not ‘gold-plate’ their compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty at the unjustified expense of the taxpayer and of private or voluntary sector contractors.

In UKRI’s Simpler and Better Funding programme, standardised requirements are being designed into the platform’s features. UKRI should minimise reporting burdens. The alignment of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion data collection across UKRI systems with the Funding Service is anticipated in Spring 2024.



Noting that funders currently collect diversity data on gender, the government position is that any such collection of gender data should not be conflated with the protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010 - which is sex.

We are undertaking an independent review into the collection of accurate data and statistics on biological sex. Terms of Reference for the review will be published shortly.

**Recommendation 13: Funders should remove the requirement for letters of support from applications in most circumstances.**

Some funders do not ask for letters of support, including FCDO. Those that do are currently reviewing their requirements. UKRI's new Funding Service will move away from the use of attachments, with the expectation that letters of support will not normally be required at the application stage by early 2024. Instead, it is expected that information on project partner contributions will be submitted in digital form when the service is fully operational. Any additional requirements for successful applicants prior to award will be considered as part of the future development of the Funding Service.

NIHR has been removing letters of support for the majority of research programmes during 2023 and this will continue into 2024. However, some exceptions will be retained where applicants need to upload supporting letters from industry partners, funding for interventions (for example, on public health research) or reporting previous research from non-NIHR funded studies where this has not been published.

As part of the Royal Academy of Engineering's review of questions asked there will be a review of letters of support requested and information requested in these in 2024. The desire will be to limit to essential content and with clear templates. Other funders will also reduce the use of letters of support or where letters are required, reducing the amount of information needed. We aim that, by 2024, either all requirements for letters of support will be removed, or where they are retained, the information required will be significantly reduced.

# Grant implementation and in-grant management

Grant management processes are the administrative obligations on, and actions by, institutions in taking successful proposals through the grant lifecycle. Effective grant management is important to ensure that the research project fulfils the requirements of the grant.

The Government agrees with the findings of the Review. The Review highlighted the flexibility needed to accommodate a range of potential issues once an award has been made, particularly as research can be novel and unpredictable. There are multiple issues. Time is a key factor – it can take too long between application submission and the start of the project, and in getting decisions once projects are up and running. For some grants and awards, in-project monitoring can be extensive. Contracts and collaboration agreements can be a major source of delays.

## Key commitments

- Funders will review their requirements, extend start dates or negotiate with successful applicants to support the preparatory phase of research projects;
- Government will work with stakeholders to encourage greater use of standard contracts and collaboration templates, ensuring these remain fit for purpose;
- Funders will build in greater flexibility and work more closely with grant holders to manage in-grant queries and no-cost extensions;
- Reform programmes are underway to streamline regulatory approvals and support collaboration in health-related research;
- A more streamlined, joined up UK ethical and regulatory approval service for health and social care research will reduce duplication and speed up decision-making;
- The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) will identify opportunities to streamline processes and remove duplication in research collaborations between NHS Trusts and universities.

## What will be different as a result?

Who benefits	How
For research teams, administrators and managers:	Processes will be more responsive and streamlined, freeing up research teams by reducing delays and administrative burdens.

For institutions:	Quicker decisions, more flexibility and standardisation will help in the planning, resourcing, contracting and delivery of research projects.
For funders and regulators:	Closer engagement and alignment across funders and regulators to share ways of working and best practice. This will ensure systems can adapt to new opportunities while the necessary safeguards, for example around national security and legal requirements, are protected.

## Response to the Review's recommendations on Grant Implementation and In-Grant Management

**Recommendation 14: Funders and recipients should ensure there is adequate time for the completion of all necessary tasks (including providing assurance information) between the issue of the award letter and the start of the project.**

The reasons for delays between the issue of award and the start of a project are complex. However, the Review concluded that funders could go further to support the preparatory phase of projects.

UKRI Simpler and Better Funding programme is reviewing the information and checks required before the start of a project, and the time allowed for this process. The six-month flexibility for responsive grant start dates, introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, has been made permanent. Innovate UK has simplified its 90-day mobilisation period and actively engages grant recipients in this set up phase.

NIHR negotiates proposed start dates with applicants or works closely with applicants where research is time limited or urgent and deadlines are fixed. The NIHR sets out a clear timeframe for each step towards the agreement of the contract and issues an initial 'letter of intent' to successful applicants which confirms the intention to award funding upon acceptance of the terms and conditions.

NIHR works with others to speed up the start of research projects ahead of final contract. For example, engaging with businesses to procure trial drugs. In some circumstances, NIHR will permit contractors to complete certain pre-contractual requirements in the early phase of the contract against plan with defined milestones and completion dates.

In the longer term, funders will continue to work with recipients to identify where more support and greater flexibility are needed for the preparatory phase of a research project.

**Recommendation 15: Universities and research organisations should, wherever possible, use standard templates for contracts and collaboration agreements, recognising that this would not just be faster, but would also facilitate third-party collaborations. This could build on existing work carried out by the Russell Group.**

Many Russell Group members have already committed to using Brunswick and/or Lambert templates. However, the Brunswick templates for research collaboration agreements between universities are more widely used than the Lambert toolkit which is primarily used for university to business collaborations. The Government believes there is considerable scope to go further. It will work with sector representatives and funders, for example with Innovate UK on the take up of these and the challenges of encouraging more widespread use.

There are complementary activities underway across the sector to support standardisation. This should take account of the recognition that arrangements covering the highest risk collaborations will require additional scrutiny compared to others.

NIHR standardises its research contract terms, where possible and proportionate to do so. A standard template collaboration agreement has been developed to bring together multiple research bodies to address key healthcare challenges, via its Translational Research Collaborations. As a next step, NIHR held a roundtable with representative contractors and wider stakeholders to examine how template contracts may be best developed and implemented, learning lessons from the Lambert Review.

Research in health and care sectors has for many years benefitted from standard templates for use between research sponsors and participating organisations. The first template in what is now the suite of UK National Health Service (NHS)/Northern Ireland Health and Social Care template agreements was published in 2003. Subsequent work, now overseen by a UK-wide group has focussed on creating additional templates to cater for more study types and scenarios. The same group also maintains existing templates in light of legislative and other developments. Work continues to identify gaps in the suite of agreements, through engagement with Higher Education and NHS communities.

Alongside this work the NHS Health Research Authority (HRA) have started conversations with NIHR and DHSC to explore the development of template collaboration agreements for use in commercial/NHS/Higher Education Institutions collaborations and between funding award/grant holders and their collaborators. This work will build on existing best-practice including the Brunswick and Lambert templates (adjusted to cater for the NHS element), with the intention of exploring if unmodified use in multiple scenarios is possible, including exploring this in relation to NIHR award holders and their collaborators.

Elsewhere in the sector there are examples of similar initiatives. For example, the Royal Academy of Engineering intends to bring its contractual template in line with other National Academies, aspiring to adopt a single shared template with variations only as necessary. And over the next year (2024-25), they will review how they can support extended use of standard agreements on each of their research funding schemes.

In Scotland, the Universities Scotland Research Commercialisation Directors' Group and Interface have worked on a common contract template to help businesses work with academia. They also collaborated on Innovation Voucher templates to ensure consistency across Scottish universities on IP arrangements.

Many institutions in Wales use standard templates for various contractual and collaboration agreements. Several institutions have also reviewed their internal processes to identify ways of managing contractual negotiations more effectively.

In the longer term, there will be further coordinated action across government, the sector and industry to identify and address barriers to more widespread use and to ensure standard contracts and collaboration agreements remain fit for purpose.

**Recommendation 16: Wherever possible, funders should build in flexibilities, including no-cost extensions within manageable parameters, to reduce delays in addressing project changes and the number of queries.**

In-grant changes will be addressed by UKRI's Simpler and Better Funding programme. UKRI are expanding research organisations' authority to make limited changes directly on the Funding Service. Research Council guidance has been revised giving more flexibility on when and how grant extensions should be managed. Also, in UKRI, within certain thresholds, Innovate UK offers flexibility to projects requiring a scope, financial or project duration change. The target is to halve the time for such in-grant approvals.

Currently, a degree of flexibility can be negotiated by FCDO teams at an individual contract level, within the constraints of central procurement guidance as set by the Cabinet Office.

Beyond government, other actions include the streamlined, fast-track processes put in place by the Academy of Medical Sciences after COVID-19 to consider changes to awards and no-cost extension requests. The British Academy has streamlined its approach offering flexibility on change requests and a light touch requirement for no-cost extensions where appropriate. The Royal Society has an active project focussed on reducing information requirements for project change requests, with a particular focus on no-cost extensions. This includes looking at how they can better engage with Research Offices at the point of need.

In the longer term, public funders will ensure their published service standards set target ranges for the response times to, and accuracy in, managing in-grant queries and no-cost extensions.

**Recommendation 17: Ethical and other regulatory approvals should be the responsibility of the lead partner on a multi-institution research project and counterparties (including the NHS) should not require additional duplicative approvals.**

This recommendation and the Government response relate to ethical and other regulatory approvals in health research only. The NHS Health Research Authority (HRA) is working on a

streamlined process that makes it easy for health and care researchers to understand necessary approval requirements.

The HRA, Health and Care Research Wales (HCRW), Health and Social Care Northern Ireland and NHS Research Scotland are working in collaboration to deliver a streamlined UK approval service for health and social care research across the UK. This will replace HRA and HCRW Approval and equivalent processes, and site permission and confirmation processes across the UK. HRA and HCRW Approval brings together research ethics reviews and governance and compliance reviews, meaning that researchers wanting to do research in England and Wales can submit one application for both, removing the need for additional duplicate approvals in organisations that host the research. The HRA advises Higher Education Institutions not to replicate ethics review as part of any institutional reviews.

Working with the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), HRA have also introduced combined review. This offers applicants and sponsors of Clinical Trials of Investigational Medicinal Products (CTIMPs) a single route and a joined-up review to obtain both Research Ethics Committee and MHRA approvals, leading to a single UK decision in a faster overall timeline than the previous separate process. This has halved the time it takes for studies to get approval and cuts the time from application to recruiting a first patient by 40 days. All CTIMPs are now reviewed in this way and this benefits both triallists and participants.

Through their 2022- 25 strategy, HRA will deliver changes that save money and time so that researchers can focus on doing good research. The new, simple to use, accessible system will guide researchers through the ideal path for a study, making it easier to do research that people can trust. The HRA will also make it easier for patients and the public to find out about that research. Together, this work will ensure that research findings improve care faster because the UK is the easiest place in the world to do research that people can trust.

**Recommendation 18: Universities and NHS Trusts should work to develop forms of collaboration that eliminate duplication of effort and improve support for researchers working across the interface.**

NIHR recognises the need to strengthen collaboration and streamline approaches between Higher Education Institutions, and health and care providers. To address this recommendation, the NIHR will identify opportunities through its transformation programmes to streamline processes as well as support and development needs.

This is likely to include identifying approaches to strengthen collaboration, minimise bureaucracy and create opportunities for innovation and shared learning.

## Digital Platforms

Digital platforms are critical parts of the research system from the application stage through to outcome evaluation, and in supporting audit and data use. There are significant challenges and opportunities in working across different funders and different systems. Improved data interoperability, data flows and accessibility have the potential to save time and reduce costs.

The Review recognises the importance of digital platforms across the research lifecycle, and the impact they have on the experience and perception of research bureaucracy. There are opportunities to reduce the bureaucratic burden in the design and introduction of new digital programmes. However, there are also constraints given the number of different platforms already in use. As the report sets out, maximising the effectiveness of these systems will need to address the challenges of interoperability and future-proofing.

Jisc plays an important role in the digital transformation as the UK digital, data and technology agency focused on tertiary education, research and innovation. Jisc has contributed to this response and there are commitments that speak to their current and future work with funders. This response also recognises the much wider role Jisc plays within the sector including with research organisations and others across tertiary education.

As set out in the actions below, there are a range of initiatives underway to increase further cooperation on digital and data. This needs to go further.

### Key commitments

- Jisc will bring actors together from the higher education and research sector to strengthen the integration of digital infrastructure, data and information across the system;
- Jisc will support the development of advanced high-performance computing including exascale through long-term capacity planning for secure, stable networking, maximising capacity, ensuring the optimal, cost-effective and efficient use of these facilities;
- Jisc will pilot, within the JANET network, innovative networking for research teams across the sector, including through the provision of edge computing, offering secure multi-tenanted distributed digital research infrastructure which reduces costs and improves efficiencies;
- Jisc will support UKRI and research stakeholders with the development of “federated” approaches across the UK digital research infrastructure in support of its efficiency, sustainability and innovation;
- Jisc will broker agreements for licensing research software and hardware across the research lifecycle, meeting demand from research stakeholders for the negotiation, licensing and procurement of solutions that support research and innovation, driving standards and reducing duplication of effort across the research sector;

- Jisc will bring actors together from the higher education and research sector to develop a strategic approach to sustainable and ethical approaches to the collection and management of data about research management and administration, research culture and environment, supporting assessment and positive research cultures;
- UKRI, NIHR and Jisc will work together to improve data flows between different platforms, make more effective use of that data, and test the potential role of new software including AI;
- UKRI will be asked to immediately initiate the next phase of their thinking about the future of research and innovation outcomes collection. We are asking them to be ambitious and consider all alternative options for data collection, including no longer using Researchfish, from 2025 onwards;
- The role of persistent digital identifiers will be supported where sustainable approaches can be identified which improve the interconnectedness, reusability and accuracy of research-related data and reduce administrative burden for researchers and organisations;
- UKRI and NIHR will work with Jisc, other funders and research organisations to improve data consistency across the sector, including common taxonomies and standards to support greater interoperability;
- Funders will introduce core question sets across different funding opportunities, making applications, reviews and reporting more efficient and reducing administrative burdens;
- Stronger coordination across the sector will identify and help tackle issues on the use of digital platforms, and this will be based on the end user experience.

## What will be different as a result?

Who benefits	How
For research teams, administrators and managers:	Cost and time savings, and greater access to consistent digital infrastructure and software as well as data for analysis, comparison and collaboration.
For institutions:	Improved interoperability and data use will bring efficiencies and support collaboration.
For funders and regulators:	Greater efficiencies through greater system interoperability, more advanced digital research infrastructure, and data-sharing.



## Response to the Review's recommendations on Digital Platforms

**Recommendation 19: For the higher education sector, Jisc should lead on the creation of sector wide groups responsible for overseeing the development and further integration of the research information ecosystem, including research management data.**

As the UK's National Research and Education Network, Jisc has a significant and continuing track record in providing foundational technology and infrastructure, including network capacity, cyber security and access management as well as cloud services, data movement and facilitating open access to research, at scale.

Jisc is bringing actors together from the higher education and research sector to strengthen digital infrastructure, data and information across the research system. For example, Jisc is informing the consultation processes for long term capacity planning for secure, stable networking, maximising capacity to support the UK Government's review of UK compute needs over the next decade. This includes exascale computing, which will enable gigantic processing power and storage capacity, offering ultra-powerful supercomputing, with systems performing billions of computations per second, supporting developments in AI and quantum science, and the implementation of the UK Government's Science and Technology Framework.

Jisc is innovating in the development of its network infrastructure including edge compute securely from JANET, a high-speed, high capacity and secure network for the UK research and education community provided by Jisc, bringing computing close to the source of data to reduce latency and bandwidth use. Jisc is piloting secure multi-tenanted distributed digital research infrastructure for research teams to share, serving multiple customers and offering economies of scale, cost and resource and deduplicating infrastructure. Innovations in software defined networking will offer the basis to develop advanced services such as 5G connectivity and quantum.

The UKRI Digital Research Infrastructure Committee has engaged Jisc to understand the potential for "federated" approaches across the UK digital research infrastructure, which includes collaborative approaches to the deployment and use of compute, platforms and software, trusted research environments, access, security, service management, people and skills, cost management and future technology to support the continued efficiency, sustainability and innovation of the UK digital research infrastructure. A complex area with acknowledged multiple dependencies, and therefore in need of a community supported approach; this activity aims to offer a means to enable a collective understanding of the potential for a federation journey, principles for investment and the next steps to achieve it.

Part of Jisc's mission is to negotiate the best agreements for and with the research and education sectors, underpinned by intelligence and data driven insights. Jisc is a leader in licensing negotiation, intelligence and analytics, negotiating agreements with vendors for research software and hardware across the research lifecycle. They deliver significant value to the research sector, reducing and constraining costs and where Jisc can continue to excel. In recognition of growing demand, Jisc is investing in growing its licensing capabilities and capacity to build on and extend the existing value provided to research.

Jisc supports open access in higher education through the negotiation of a range of open access agreements. These agreements seek shared approaches, affordability and standards around related research information for open access and the UK's Open Access policy has been implemented for no increase in institutional expenditure.

As part of its Open Access Review UKRI worked with other funders including NIHR and FCDO to deliver aligned approaches, as well as recognising the role of Jisc and research and higher education organisations in achieving effective open access agreements including partnerships to implement improved research information standards.

Following their own open access policy review NIHR, working with Jisc, is expanding these activities to research organisations in the health and care system, including NHS Trusts. This will reduce the burden on health and care researchers by streamlining requirements and supporting them to access research and publish their work open access.

**Recommendation 20: For existing systems, approaches to improving the flow of data between different platforms should be explored using for example application programming interfaces point to point integration and machine learning.**

Improving data flows between different platforms can drive reductions in data gathering requirements and supports monitoring and evaluation. This applies to data flows from and between systems used locally by research organisation as well as funder systems that support their processes.

The UKRI Data Programme will make it easier for UKRI to utilise the data it holds effectively, enabled by underlying data integration and platform projects.

Improving data flows is a central theme of the NIHR digital strategy. This work has focused on: data standards that can be utilised by both the NIHR and other organisations; a single sign-on enabling users to access multiple systems; and the development of Application Programme Interfaces to enable interoperability across multiple NIHR platforms.

The Integrated Research Application System is the system for applying for approvals for health and care research. It currently provides digital flows of data about research studies to the NHS Health Research Authority (HRA), NIHR, and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency. Further development of system is planned, with further interoperability with organisations related to the regulation and delivery of research.

Jisc is supporting the use and development of ethical machine learning, and AI in tertiary education. It has recently merged with the Higher Education Statistic Agency (HESA), supporting the development of more sustainable, persistent and interoperable open data about research. In the longer term, Jisc aims to innovate and improve data flows and for this learning to be shared and co-developed between platforms. This will need to ensure the security of information, including meeting the requirements of UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), but should support making data about publicly supported research openly available and accessible wherever possible. Jisc notes the opportunity to develop strategic approaches to the development of new sustainable and ethical data about research management and

administration, research culture and environment, supporting assessment and positive research cultures. Jisc will become a provider of official statistics, following the merger with HESA and will support effective and efficient data development and coordination, reducing bureaucracy and identifying economies of scale, process and resources.

**Recommendation 21: The review strongly encourages the use of persistent digital identifiers to drive wider adoption.**

Persistent digital identifiers for individuals are already embedded within UKRI systems, and the use of persistent digital identifiers for organisations and outputs is in progress. Gateway to Research provides a persistent record for a UKRI grant, which is publicly accessible. The principle of introducing persistent digital identifiers for grants has been agreed and will form part of the development of The Funding Service.

NIHR's Digital Strategy covers data standards, identity management and interoperability across multiple platforms. NIHR has been using ORCID as its identifier for a number of years and requires NIHR funded researchers and applicants to obtain an ORCID ID. The single awards management system for the NIHR will streamline processes and reduce the amount of information requested. Where possible data will be increasingly collected only once and shared safely and securely with those who have need to use it.

HRA have been involved in the 'Common ID' project with NIHR to use the Integrated Research Application System ID as the common identifier across research ecosystem systems.

Jisc continues to lead the UK ORCID Consortium and is exploring the potential of the Research Activity Identifier, a new identifier for research projects and activities, to enhance system integration.

In the longer term, persistent identifiers will be widely deployed across the sector.

**Recommendation 22: Funders and platform providers should focus in the short to medium term on the creation of common data taxonomies and the standard questions they will ask. This would make it far easier to repurpose applications for other schemes and funders to share assurance data and to conduct 'big picture' analyses of research outcomes in the UK which are currently inhibited by the multitude of systems and interfaces.**

Across UKRI, the Funding Service is piloting standardised content for funding opportunities, including guidance, question sets and assessment criteria. Greater data consistency will form one part of UKRI's new Data Strategy and Data Excellence Framework.

NIHR will be introducing a single awards management system across the various areas of NIHR research investment, covering research programmes, research infrastructure, and personal awards and fellowships. The initial focus will be to consolidate internal taxonomies and data standards.

Both UKRI and NIHR will work with the public and other funders to improve data consistency across the sector. They will work with Jisc to support the development of common standards

which will lead to greater interoperability. This will also need to involve research organisations to encourage interoperable systems and facilitate data sharing which will build on Jisc's existing work.

In the longer term, where it will reduce administrative burdens, the potential for the greater use of common data taxonomies and question sets will be realised by more funders and across more disciplines.

**Recommendation 23: Funding bodies and owners of reporting platforms should review the structure and content of current online forms as a priority with the aim of removing sections that are unnecessary or unclear.**

Researchfish is currently used by many public and third sector organisations to collect data on the outputs, outcomes and impacts of research. Whilst use of a common system across funders aids standardisation and avoids duplication in collection, we recognise the current system can be burdensome for users and does not make the best use of recent technological advances.

More modern approaches should focus on harvesting data that has already been compiled for other purposes and collecting more data from research organisations rather than researchers.

We are therefore asking UKRI to immediately initiate the next phase of their thinking about the future of research and innovation outcomes collection, with a view to both improving data insights and reducing bureaucratic burden on researchers and the system.

We are asking them to be ambitious and consider all alternative options for data collection, including no longer using Researchfish, from 2025 onwards. They should engage the market, learn from international best practice, and engage with other research funders including NIHR, charities, and experts in research on research such as the Research and Innovation Caucus and the Metascience unit.

There are several additional activities that support or complement this recommendation. UKRI's Funding Service will use a more intuitive digital question and answer format, making it easier for applicants to explain their idea, and easier for assessors to review. Central to this format is the 'core question set', a set of questions generic enough to apply to all councils and nearly all funding opportunity types. In addition, Innovate UK are developing impact management forms within the Innovation Funding Service making use of data already in the system.

NIHR has worked closely with other funders to consolidate the reporting of research outputs, outcomes and impacts and improve interoperability between systems. A review of annual reporting requirements for the NIHR Infrastructure funding scheme portfolio was completed in February 2023. This included identifying an appropriate question set for each scheme. The design of a more efficient reporting process to reduce administrative burden for award holders is ongoing and due to be completed in 2024. The new process will be piloted on a small number of infrastructure schemes in the first instance before being rolled out in early 2025. The NHS Health Research Authority (HRA) are reviewing the Integrated Research Application

System question sets to ensure that data is collected from researchers once and re-used for multiple purposes.

In the longer term, the structure and content of online reporting forms will be regularly reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose and are not imposing unnecessary burdens.

**Recommendation 24: Where relevant, there should be more active, coordinated engagement by funders with the research platform providers that will help address issues and lead to better, harmonised approaches. End user representation should also be included.**

Working with others, DSIT will review whether this recommendation can be met through existing fora or whether new mechanisms may be needed. However, there are several coordination and end user engagement initiatives already in place.

In developing their new Funding Service, UKRI continues to engage end users, including applicants, assessors and research office administrators.

The NIHR is developing a single awards management system across its research programmes, which will involve extensive stakeholder engagement and user testing. NIHR is working closely with publication archives, suppliers of information databases and other funders on ways to gather information on research outputs and outcomes.

Jisc is working across the sector on the development of research infrastructure and systems through a range of initiatives and will have an important role to play in strengthening coordination and engagement.

In the longer term, better coordination across the sector will continue to identify and tackle issues on the use of digital platforms, primarily based on end user experience.

## Institutional bureaucracy

Institutional bureaucracy refers to systems, processes and approaches within research organisations as opposed to those imposed by funders, regulators and government departments.

The Government notes the Review's findings that institutional bureaucracy was one of the most frequently cited issues by individuals in the Review's call for evidence. Concerns about institutional processes structures and speed of decision making were often linked by some of the Review's contributors to risk aversion in research organisations. There are strong links between bureaucracy related to the requirements of government, funders and regulators and each research institution's own systems, processes and approaches. As the Review notes, if system level improvements to application assurance and grant management processes are not mirrored by new approaches within research organisations the benefits to researchers will not be fully realised.

The Government notes that reducing bureaucracy is a priority for academics and universities and for the sector's representative bodies, and welcomes the steps already being taken by organisations to review their internal processes in response to the Review, including the greater delegation of approvals. The Government also welcomes the work of representative bodies to bring organisations together to help facilitate the changes needed. The Government notes the Russell Group commitment to work with their members and UKRI to explore wider adoption of 'trusted funder' policies to help projects start on time. The Government is commencing discussions with the research sector on a new agreement between funders and research organisations that would commit them to eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy from the research system. The agreement would help clarify the roles of funders and research organisations as well as committing them to close co-operation and communication. Care will be taken to ensure any agreement is succinct and refrains from introducing additional unnecessary burdens on the sector.

### Key commitments

- The Government commits to working with sector representatives to help identify ways to share best practice amongst research organisations;
- The Government commits to ensuring sector representatives are represented in the Bureaucracy Review Reform and Implementation Network so that sector challenges are relayed to, and understood by, major funders and government departments.

## What will be different as a result?

Who benefits	How
For research teams, administrators and managers:	More effective collaboration with support functions and faster research-related administration freeing up time and capacity for research and wider academic responsibilities.
For institutions:	More effective collaboration between professional services departments supported by training and sector wide best practise and information sharing.
For funders and regulators:	Streamlined, faster interactions with research organisations.

## Response to the Review’s recommendations on Institutional bureaucracy

**Recommendation 25: wherever possible research organisations should examine the feasibility of delegating research related approvals to research managers and officers who are closer to research.**

The Government encourages individual research organisations to review their research-related approvals. Several Russell Group members have either already moved in the direction of more delegated approvals or are looking at what more could be done. Empowering junior staff with a more immediate and detailed understanding of processes will require support and training. There may be a role for representative bodies to support the review process by sharing best practise and knowledge across institutions and across disciplines. In the longer term, complex approval hierarchies should be removed as part of a shift to support and delegate to those closest to the issues.

**Recommendation 26: Universities UK should bring research organisations together to find new platforms and methods for working together on research management issues such as increasing risk appetite streamlining burdens including through greater standardisation.**

UUK has committed to working with other representative organisations, including university bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, to address the findings in the Review on institutional bureaucracy. UUK has established a working group to identify opportunities to share learning on reducing bureaucracy, including how processes can be streamlined or standardised. Jisc is investing in growing its licensing capabilities and capacity, and data collection, management and publishing to build on and extend the existing value provided to research for reducing institutional bureaucracy.

Some initial engagement has already taken place, including through discussions with universities on effectiveness and efficiency in university research. There are already several areas where UUK is supporting common approaches which reduce bureaucracy across the sector. These have included:

- providing a key role in shared approaches to open access, agreements, negotiations and systems, working closely with Jisc. This is helping to bring alignment across the sector and with funders to reduce burdens, increase efficiency and streamline monitoring;
- working with National Protective Security Authority and UKRI to align guidance on managing risks in international research;
- working with UKRI and Wellcome to commission a concordats and agreements review, which explored potential alignments to increase influence and capacity, help reduce workload and coordinate reporting. This work included a co-designed blueprint of actions that the initiative owners can take forward with the community. Developing new annual reporting templates for the Research Integrity Concordat and Researcher Development Concordat. This will help to standardise the information institutions provide, streamline the reporting process, and avoid duplication, for example by aligning with the HR Excellence in Research Award. The report was published in May 2023.
- chairing of the Alternative Uses Group for the Resumé for Research and Innovation narrative CV, developed in partnership with UKRI. The group worked to promote the wider adoption and use of narrative CVs, for example in hiring and promotion. A Resume Resources Library has been created to support adoption. Over time this will ensure people applying to, or reviewing for, any organisation will be familiar with the use of these CVs.

There are also other examples of proactive sector initiatives such as the Higher Education Export Control Association, which convene universities to share best practice on managing research risks.

In the longer term, coordination and information sharing on research management issues will be firmly established in the sector.

**Recommendation 27: if they do not already have them universities should establish trusted funder policies to enable projects to proceed at risk depending on the source and size of the grant.**

Some Russell Group members already have trusted funder policies while others are considering them. However, in some cases there may be practical and legislative barriers preventing wider adoption and implementation. For example, funder policies themselves can prevent projects starting until the relevant collaboration agreement is signed by all parties. There are also a range of legislative obstacles to pursuing this approach with certain kinds of projects. The Russell Group will continue to work with UKRI to consider ways to overcome these barriers and encourage wider adoption of trusted funder policies. In the longer term, trusted funder policies will be adopted more widely with benefits for the start-up times for new projects.



# Communications

Communications play a critical role in the successful functioning of our research system across the research life cycle. Content, clarity, timing, frequency, and targeting are all important considerations in getting this right. The impact of poor communication doesn't just bring inefficiencies and ambiguity, it also undermines the fairness of the system.

The government agrees with the Review that this is an important area to help the development and navigation of the complexities of the research system, from new funding models, regulations and assurance requirements. Being clear on why information is required will help to build understanding and support 'buy-in'.

## Key commitments

- All government funders will ensure more timely and effective consultation with research organisations, including on new strategies and policies;
- All government funders will test, share and implement improved communications channels and capabilities;
- New communication channels will support more open, accessible and targeted communications, to reach the right people at the right time;
- The government encourages universities and other research organisations to consider their internal communications alongside reviewing their internal bureaucracy;
- Government funders will ensure applicants are not disadvantaged by the duration or closing date of funding opportunities.

## What will be different as a result?

Who benefits	How
For research teams, administrators and managers:	Quicker, more direct and open communications channels supporting research design, delivery and outputs.
For funders, regulators and institutions:	More effective and mutually supporting relationships between funders and those in receipt of funding. Building a stronger culture of sharing, consultation, feedback and experimentation.

## Response to the Review's recommendations on Communications

**Recommendation 28: Government funders and regulators should undertake wide ranging consultation with research organisations prior to the introduction of new regulatory or other requirements.**

Funders across the UK are committed to improving engagement with stakeholders when developing new policy and practice. There are lots of examples of good practice that forms a platform for further actions.

UKRI has introduced an Engagement Hub to inform their strategy development and to hear the priorities of their stakeholders. The Funding Service development is based on user centred design principles and users are encouraged to provide feedback on their experience of the beta platform to aid continuous improvement. Innovate UK routinely gathers feedback from applicants and a major simplification to funding assurance process will be made as a result. UKRI also convenes a Research Organisation Consultation Group, who provide advice and allow for two-way dialogue with research managers on UKRI policies, processes and administrative arrangements.

NIHR is improving its engagement with stakeholders. For example, through engagement with research organisations during the development of their open access policy to ensure it accommodates the different needs of Higher Education Institutions and NHS Trusts.

The NHS Health Research Authority (HRA) have prioritised user engagement in their strategy over the next three years. HRA will create more opportunities for people with lived experiences to be involved in their internal decision making and include a more diverse group of people in their regulatory decision-making committees.

The HRA has been working with researchers at all levels, including those who don't yet need to apply for approvals but may wish to in the future, to inform the development of the new Integrated Research Application System and its website. The new website aims to make research and applying for research easy to understand, reduce jargon and provide all the support, information and guidance in one place. As part of the development HRA have worked with users (researchers, sponsors, commercial and non-commercial sectors) to ensure the website is tested and developed with user needs at the centre – making content easy to digest and understand.

The new Clinical Trial legislation was influenced by a public consultation receiving 2000+ responses, and these were from a wide mix of groups including pharmaceutical companies, CROs, patients/public and charities. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) are currently working closely with key stakeholders to further develop policy approaches for clinical trial application assessment, which would enable faster initiation of trials that are considered lower risk. The MHRA and HRA will carry out extensive stakeholder engagement in finalising the legislation and developing guidance. Timelines for the new legislation are subject to confirmation later in 2024.

The Scottish Funding Council engaged extensively as part of their review of Tertiary Education and Research. In addition, the Scottish Funding Council have worked closely with the sector through consultations on their Research Excellence Grant and Research Postgraduate Grant

as well as a consultation on their Knowledge Exchange and Innovation Strategy. The Scottish Funding Council worked with the sector on development of its new approach to research assurance and accountability, currently under consultation. In Northern Ireland, there is regular engagement between Department for the Economy officials and research managers and academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions. For example, the Department is consulting research organisations on the data management requirements for the US-Ireland programme. In Wales, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales consults widely with stakeholders prior to the development of new policies or procedures. From April 2024, the Council will be replaced by the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research which will undertake all duties currently held by the Council.

In the longer term, there will be stronger, more dynamic partnerships between funders, regulators and research organisations. This will be built on open engagement and an expectation, wherever possible, of co-design of new or amended funding initiatives or requirements.

**Recommendation 29: Government and funders should proactively communicate on new and emerging regulatory issues. The RCAT model is good practice in this regard.**

Major funders across government are committed to testing and replicating improved models for sector engagement. UKRI's Enterprise Relationship Management system is live and being rolled out across Councils. It has gone live in three research councils and will be introduced in the remaining ones through the rest of this financial year and into next. This will support better coordination of external communication by UKRI working with their established external affairs and communications teams and engagement networks.

The NIHR is establishing an External Affairs Unit to coordinate how it engages and communicates with its partner organisations. This team will ensure that relevant organisations are kept informed with important messages and regulatory changes via targeted communications. The NIHR's Digital Strategy includes a proposal to explore developing a Target Customer Experience that will incorporate a personalised notification service as part of a researcher's NIHR account. Such a service would enable researchers to receive push-notifications in their preferred format on a range of content including important regulatory changes that influence their research. The MOD deploy a range of different approaches depending on the target audiences, from a small subset of researchers and suppliers on sensitive research programmes to broader external engagement through their Collaboration and Engagement Strategy.

The NHS Health Research Authority has a popular operational change bulletin (HRA Now) so that requirements for research approvals and rationale can always be communicated to researchers and institutions, which sign up to the bulletin, in a timely way.

In the longer term, there will be regular sharing of best practice across all major funders and regulators, including feedback from the wider sector.

**Recommendation 30: Funders should ensure important messages about research are sent to research office contacts as well as Vice Chancellor/Pro Vice Chancellor Research.**

Actions that will support this recommendation include UKRI's new Enterprise Relationship Management system, which will support the sharing of messages with the right contacts at the right time. UKRI regularly communicates and engages on topics of interest for example the new Funding Service with stakeholders such as Research offices via events, webinars and newsletters directly or via networks such as the Research Organisation Consultation Group, and ARMA. NIHR will support this action through the development of the External Affairs Unit and digital transformation as described under recommendation 29.

In the longer term, there will be new ways of working and new mechanisms to support open, accessible and targeted communications.

**Recommendation 31: The transparency principle applies as strongly to internal university bureaucracy as it does to requirements imposed by funders regulators and Government departments. The justification for internal bureaucracy should always be clear to researchers.**

The government looks to universities and other research organisations to combine actions to reduce their internal bureaucracy with improvements in the transparency of internal communications associated with research. This will support the goal of improving communications through the system, from government departments to research teams and individual researchers.

In the longer term, there will be a sustained focus on improving the transparency and effectiveness of internal communications on research, supported by the sharing of best practice within and across institutions.

**Recommendation 32: In the interests of fairness and quality, funding bodies should make every effort to ensure that enough time is left between the announcement of calls and application deadlines. They should also avoid setting deadlines that are liable to disadvantage certain applicants (e.g. during or immediately after school holidays).**

UKRI aims to deliver the ambitions of the UK Government, securing benefits from research and innovation for all citizens, and therefore UKRI needs to consider all parts of the UK when setting deadlines for funding opportunities. UKRI will take a balanced approach of recognising business needs and the wide variation of school holidays across the UK.

New quality control processes will highlight where funding call duration or closing dates may need to be adjusted. One example of the type of action being taken is Innovate UK's greater use of repeating competitions such as Smart Grants and always-open competitions such as Innovation Loans, which mean that opportunities to apply are regularly available.

NIHR commissioned calls are highlighted prior to applications opening. NIHR funding calls are open for at least eight weeks for commissioned calls and on a rolling basis for researcher-led funding calls. NIHR will continue to make every effort to open urgent or time-dependent funding calls as quickly as possible and to provide as much time for applicants to apply as is feasible within the timescales.

In the longer term, to support fairness, all public funders of research will ensure that, wherever possible, applicants will not be disadvantaged by the duration or closing date of opportunities.

## The way forward

As the Review sets out there must continue to be shared ownership of the problems and actions to address unnecessary research bureaucracy now and in keeping it at bay in the future. The Review's seven principles should be used to guide this collective effort.

Keeping bureaucracy at bay requires vigilance and constant, repeated action. Well-meaning initiatives can result in unnecessary bureaucracy being introduced, and the cumulative effects can be enormous. To help address this, from today UKRI will have a new mandate to have due regard for reducing bureaucracy in all new initiatives and programmes it funds.

We will establish a new task-and-finish "red team" which will have a remit to identify areas of creeping, unnecessary bureaucracy across the wider public research system. This will make recommendations to funders and ministers for their rapid removal and will consider whether UKRI are meeting the expectations of the mandate. Together these measures should lead to a reduction in bureaucracy in new and existing schemes and programmes.

While the Review did not comment on individual initiatives, we are mindful that a prominent source of research bureaucracy is the Research Excellence Framework (REF), and this requires special attention in our response. The cost of the REF to universities has increased significantly over time – from £246m in 2014 to £471m in 2021. The cost is approximately 3-4% of the funding dependent on the exercise, while grant funding through peer reviewed calls for proposals costs approximately 9-12% of the sums awarded. Government is committed to reversing the trend of increasing costs and expects the next REF exercise to be significantly and measurably less bureaucratic than REF2021. We remain committed to the REF assessing research excellence that our universities already produce and will work with the four UK research funding bodies to achieve this.

## Key commitments

- Government will continue the Review's Funders Group, now renamed as the Bureaucracy Review Reform and Implementation Network, as a forum for sustaining progress against the commitments in this response;
- The Bureaucracy Review Reform and Implementation Network will focus on making a difference through projects that support collaboration and harmonisation of policies, systems and processes between funders;
- Government will work with the Bureaucracy Review Reform and Implementation Network to identify and challenge potential new bureaucratic burdens. Sector engagement will be essential;
- Government will work with funders and others to develop the framework for measuring progress on tackling unnecessary research bureaucracy.

## Governance and coordination

To succeed in untying the research sector from unnecessary bureaucracy there will need to be greater coordination and leadership in different parts of the sector. The Government will continue the work of the Funders Group through the Bureaucracy Review Reform and Implementation Network, working with funding departments and organisations from inside and outside government and involving the Devolved Administrations. This will provide strategic oversight of the implementation of all the Review's recommendations. Government will work with the Network to identify and challenge potential new bureaucratic burdens, whatever the source. This will include working with the sector to identify emerging issues and ways to streamline approaches where new measures are unavoidable.

This group does not cut across the work of existing groups, who are pressing ahead with projects and programmes that are aligned with the Review's aims. It will be important that existing governance structures on research and innovation in government, and elsewhere, consider the bureaucratic impacts of their work, and strive for alignment and simplification. Oversight and governance should be light-touch and focus on the sharing and promotion of best practice, and lessons learned.

## Measuring success

The Review recommends that mechanisms should be established to monitor the implementation of the recommendations and ensure unnecessary bureaucracy is kept in check in the future.

The cross-government Open Innovation Team have been commissioned to consider options for evaluating the impact of the response on reducing unnecessary bureaucracy in the research system. Their recommendations will inform ongoing plans to monitor progress reducing bureaucracy.

An important part of monitoring and evaluation plans will be drawing on ongoing evaluations of specific initiatives. This response sets out a wide variety of work that is underway or planned which aims to reduce bureaucratic burden across the six themes in the Review. Many new approaches involve reviews or pilots so where possible the findings from these will be evaluated. Sharing the findings between funders will be important to maximise the benefits of these evaluations.

The Government's UK-wide survey of the Research and Innovation Workforce will also provide important data over time. The first wave of this survey took place in 2022, achieving a total sample of 7,519 respondents from a range of backgrounds, including different sectors and occupations within research and innovation. It asked the workforce questions around administrative tasks and processes. The majority of respondents agreed that administrative tasks and processes took up too much time at their organisation. The results from this survey provide a further baseline against which the Government can monitor perceptions on administrative burdens across the sector and in varying groups.<sup>2</sup> This survey will run every two

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<sup>2</sup> Research and Innovation (R&I) Workforce Survey Report, 2022 available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-and-innovation-ri-workforce-survey-report-2022>

years and in the next iteration, due in 2024, we will explore researchers views on the scale and impact of research bureaucracy.

The absence of an agreed or measurable definition of ‘unnecessary’ bureaucracy presents challenges for monitoring and evaluating impact. Also acknowledged in the Review is the issue that different types of organisations in the UK research system have varying experiences and perceptions of bureaucracy. The issues around measurement will need to be considered when assessing how the level of bureaucracy in research will be monitored.

In some areas new data and evidence will be required. The last evaluation of the total cost of peer review was undertaken by Research Councils UK in 2006 – it found that the total cost incurred across the system was £196 million, including direct and indirect costs. This was roughly 6% of the research councils’ expenditure on research at the time. This percentage is likely to have increased over time as new requirements have been introduced into the system. UKRI will publish an independent study in early 2024 on understanding the benefits and burdens of funding processes. The study will estimate the costs and identify the benefits that are derived from such processes from idea, to award, using a sample of UKRI grant schemes. It will also highlight opportunities for improvement. If, as anticipated, the total cost has increased, UKRI will take action to reduce this, demonstrating progress on a three yearly basis. Our expectation is that this total cost reduces meaningfully over time, and this may serve as a key metric for success – including for UKRI itself.



# Annexes

## Annex A: List of the Review's recommendations

### ASSURANCE

Recommendation 1: There should be coordination across Government departments that fund research to ensure there is greater alignment of assurance approaches, including greater alignment and coordination across UKRI Councils.

Recommendation 2: Government Departments, in consultation with the Devolved Governments, should convene discussions with other major funders of R&D in the UK with the aim of reducing the assurance burden on the sector.

Recommendation 3: Funders and research organisations should develop collective approaches and resources to support institutions in managing their assurance processes. As an early step, BEIS working with UKRI and Trusted Research leads across government should engage with the ARMA project to ensure that its recommendations and subsequent output design is fit for purpose in addressing the Trusted Research agenda. The ARMA study is due to be published in Autumn 2022.

Recommendation 4: In the longer term, funding bodies should explore the potential benefits of self-certification and/or earned autonomy as a means of streamlining assurance requirements for institutions with a strong track record of robust assurance.

Recommendation 5: Central government should engage with sponsoring departments and public research organisations (PROs) to examine the impact and effectiveness of public sector controls and procurement rules on PROs capacity to deliver their mission.

Recommendation 6: UKRI should press forward with its implementation of the Research Commercialisation Monitoring Framework which will drive improvements in the quality of data through the linking of datasets.

Recommendation 7: The National Audit Office (NAO) and UKRI should review the level of transaction testing in UKRI institutional audits to establish whether this is still appropriate.

Recommendation 8: UKRI should review the variations in standards and methods used by Innovate UK Monitoring Officers with a view to developing new principles to increase consistency.

## APPLYING FOR FUNDING

Recommendation 9: Funders should experiment with application processes to reduce burdens for applicants, (including greater use of two-stage application processes) where information required increases in line with likelihood of being funded.

Recommendation 10: Funders should work together to increase standardisation across their application processes in terms of the use of language and the questions they ask where appropriate. UKRI should facilitate this across Research Councils in the first instance.

Recommendation 11: Funders should review what adaptations will be needed to assessment processes to take account of changes to application models. This should include considering innovative approaches from the use of peer reviewer triage to limit the number of applications requiring full peer review to experimenting with new models such as randomly allocated funding.

Recommendation 12: Funders should ensure that application processes support their commitments to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Recommendation 13: Funders should remove the requirement for letters of support from applications in most circumstances.

## GRANT IMPLEMENTATION AND IN-GRANT MANAGEMENT

Recommendation 14: Funders and recipients should ensure there is adequate time for the completion of all necessary tasks (including providing assurance information) between the issue of the award letter and the start of the project.

Recommendation 15: Universities and research organisations should, wherever possible, use standard templates for contracts and collaboration agreements, recognising that this would not just be faster, but would also facilitate third-party collaborations. This could build on existing work carried out by the Russell Group.

Recommendation 16: Wherever possible, funders should build in flexibilities, including no-cost extensions within manageable parameters, to reduce delays in addressing project changes and the number of queries.

Recommendation 17: Ethical and other regulatory approvals should be the responsibility of the lead partner on a multi-institution research project and counterparties (including the NHS) should not require additional duplicative approvals.

Recommendation 18: Universities and NHS Trusts should work to develop forms of collaboration that eliminate duplication of effort and improve support for researchers working across the interface.

## DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Recommendation 19: For the higher education sector, Jisc should lead on the creation of sector-wide groups responsible for overseeing the development and further integration of the research information ecosystem, including research management data.

Recommendation 20: For existing systems, approaches to improving the flow of data between different platforms should be explored, using for example application programming interfaces, point to point integration, and machine learning.

Recommendation 21: The review strongly encourages the use of persistent digital identifiers to drive wider adoption.

Recommendation 22: Funders and platform providers should focus in the short to medium term on the creation of common data taxonomies, and the standard questions they will ask. This would make it far easier to repurpose applications for other schemes and funders, to share assurance data, and to conduct 'big picture' analyses of research outcomes in the UK, which are currently inhibited by the multitude of systems and interfaces.

Recommendation 23: Funding bodies and owners of reporting platforms should review the structure and content of current online forms as a priority, with the aim of removing sections that are unnecessary or unclear.

Recommendation 24: Where relevant, there should be more active, coordinated engagement by funders with the research platform providers that will help address issues and lead to better, harmonised approaches. End-user representation should also be included.

## INSTITUTIONAL BUREAUCRACY

Recommendation 25: Wherever possible, research organisations should examine the feasibility of delegating research-related approvals to research managers and officers who are closer to research.

Recommendation 26: Universities UK should bring research organisations together to find new platforms and methods for working together on research management issues such as increasing risk appetite, streamlining burdens including through greater standardisation.

Recommendation 27: If they do not already have them, universities should establish 'Trusted Funder' policies to enable projects to proceed at risk depending on the source and size of the grant.

## COMMUNICATIONS

Recommendation 28: Government, funders and regulators should undertake wide ranging consultation with research organisations prior to the introduction of new regulatory or other requirements.

Recommendation 29: Government and funders should proactively communicate on new and emerging regulatory issues. The RCAT model is good practice in this regard.

Recommendation 30: Funders should ensure important messages about research are sent to research office contacts as well as Vice Chancellor/Pro-Vice Chancellor Research.

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