



Reducing Bureaucracy: Further information pack

Making life simpler and better

Our ongoing 'Reforming our Business' programme is streamlining, simplifying and improving how we work so we can:

1. Create even better processes and systems to manage growing investment in R&D
2. Develop the flexibility and agility that helps us to invest in the best ideas and people
3. Bring in a diverse range of researchers and innovators from all parts of our communities and debias our processes and systems
4. Make it easier and simpler for researchers and innovators to interact with us
5. Free up time:
 - for researchers and innovators to focus on their vital work
 - to connect with and understand our communities at a deeper level

We will ensure that we:

- create true systemic reductions in bureaucracy rather than simply moving the burden to another part of the system
- enhance confidence in UKRI's ability to invest in quality ideas, researchers and innovators
- introduce changes in a co-ordinated, clear and well-managed way
- free our staff from burdensome processes to allow them to engage more broadly and deeply with our many stakeholders

Whilst our previous Transformation programme (initiated in June 2018) created the infrastructure to allow us to manage current levels of business in a co-ordinated way, 'Reforming our Business' (initiated in September 2019) is preparing us for growth. Further information on 'Reforming our Business' will be included in the UKRI Corporate Plan due for publication this autumn.

'Reforming our Business' is aligning its work with the ambitions set out in the government's R&D Roadmap and its recent announcement on Reducing Bureaucracy.

To identify further areas for improvement, we are initiating a review of processes and systems. Our initial focus will be on the 13 priority areas explained in further detail below – they cover the selection process, assurance and capturing outcomes and other systems and activities. This is not an exhaustive list and we will continue to adapt and add to our priorities based on collaboration with colleagues and our communities and the pilot evidence of what works.

The review which UKRI is undertaking is part of a wider package of measures outlined in the government policy document 'Reducing bureaucratic burden in research, innovation and higher education' published jointly by Department for Education (DfE), Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC).

UKRI initial priorities explained

Application and assessment process

Reviewing, with a view to simplifying, the criteria for organisations to be eligible to apply to UKRI for funding

- *Our focus is on identifying the best ideas and people to fund. Our eligibility criteria are currently onerous and unclear, particularly to organisations unfamiliar with the UK research and innovation system, such as partner organisations on our awards. These requirements do not necessarily add significantly to our assurance of the quality of ideas and people.*
- *We will review and streamline these qualification criteria and use this as an opportunity to bring in a diverse range of researchers and innovators from all parts of our communities.*

Streamlining the 200+ research and innovation grant schemes run by UKRI e.g. moving to single institutional Impact Acceleration Accounts for all future funding rounds and maximising the standardisation of Terms and Conditions.

- *When research councils came together into one organisation, it became apparent that many of the funding types across UKRI were very similar. This is frustrating for external applicants because they have to learn and adapt to funding types that are serving the same purpose and yet are subtly different for reasons of historical accident rather than necessity. It is recognised that this situation also harms our ability to effectively support interdisciplinary research.*
- *Our aim is to establish a core set of funding types (with associated terms and conditions) that can be used by councils/UKRI consistently for most situations; whilst still allowing variations on funding types where they are necessary. We are focused on harmonisation, not homogenisation.*
- *Having fewer funding types will make it easier for researchers and innovators to understand what is expected of them and to work across different councils. It will also assist support staff across applicant organisations. Within UKRI, it will reduce the administration required to keep documentation updated; and increase clarity in how we work.*
- *Impact Acceleration Accounts (IAAs) are strategic awards provided to institutions to support knowledge exchange (KE) and impact. Each HEI currently must have a separate Impact Acceleration Account with each council they work with. Moving to a single Impact Acceleration Account will instantly reduce the administration burden for HEI/IROs working with multiple councils. A single Impact Acceleration Account would mean one set of requirements for the HEI/IRO and a single payment, which would take less time/effort for UKRI to administer.*

Changing to a streamlined, two-stage application process for standard grant rounds. Applicants will only provide the information necessary to make a funding decision up front, with information necessary to make an award only required for successful proposals.

- *The potential benefit of a two-stage application process has been discussed for some time. We currently expect researchers/innovators to supply a lot of detailed information necessary to make an award, but not a funding decision, upfront when they don't even know if their idea is of interest and in the running for funding. With a relatively low success rate, this means we are asking researchers/innovators to spend a lot of time form filling, most of which turns out to be wasted effort.*
- *'Standard grant rounds' refer to a range of grant types used by most, but not all, councils in UKRI that are open to a variety of applications not specific to any particular challenge or brief. In some councils, these are referred to as 'responsive mode'. We will work with each part of UKRI to confirm exactly what this does and does not cover.*
- *We will work closely with HEIs, research organisations, businesses and other stakeholders in our investments to ensure their own applicant information needs are also being met so that we are creating system-wide reductions in form filling.*

- *We are currently running two Reforming our Business pilots, with NERC and EPSRC funding opportunities, to assess different approaches to a simplified application process. These funding opportunities have recently closed and we are now compiling the evidence from these pilots. A third pilot with BBSRC for a simplified application process is still open to applications.*
- *Running these pilots, we have already noted tensions between streamlined processes and surges in applications, for example, and are exploring ways to mitigate these issues. There are many approaches we can take in response to these issues and we will be working closely with colleagues and our research communities to develop these.*

Replacing multiple, varied approaches to providing CV and track record information with a single format based on the Royal Society's *Résumé* for Researchers

- *We are looking to introduce an inclusive single 'narrative CV' format across UKRI, based on the Royal Society's 'Resume for Researchers', that enables us to capture a more holistic view of the breadth of critical contributions made by researchers and innovators to the research and innovation system as a whole. These span not only the direct outputs of their research such as publications, but also the outcomes of their work to develop and support individuals and teams, to create networks in and collaborate with the wider research and innovation community, and how they engage with the users of their research and wider society.*
- *Where there is a need to capture information that is specific to a particular funding opportunity, we will ensure our processes are flexible enough to allow this.*

Implementing a brand new, fully digital, user-designed, applicant-focused and streamlined grants application system, for which the first pilot ran in August 2020

- *The Funding System has been developed in close collaboration with users and is based on extensive research and testing over the last 12 months*
- *The first Funding Service pilot was for the AHRC New Generation Thinkers opportunity, which opened to applications via the new Service on 20 August. This pilot is testing the core functionality of setting up an account and completing an application form.*
- *Future pilots will test additional functionality, such as the features necessary for Research Offices to oversee and manage applications. We will continue to learn from these pilots to iterate and continually improve the Service.*

Ensuring there is a single information document for a funding call rather than multiple documents to consult

- *At present, we provide guidance to applicants via our JeS system generalised help text, a guidance handbook as well as the call document for the specific funding opportunity. In the short term, this will be consolidated into a single information document. Longer term, the Funding Service will provide all relevant guidance information directly on the digital application form, directly above the field that needs to be completed. This is in line with GDS (Government Digital Service) best practice.*

Assurance and capturing outcomes

Harmonising reporting requirements across UKRI and where possible with other funders

- *Researchers and innovators may receive funding from different funding streams and different funding bodies, each with their own reporting requirements; as well as having to comply with the internal reporting requirements of their own institutions.*
- *Across the research and innovation system, we need to progress towards a more consistent approach to data and have a core set of reporting requirements common to funding organisations and within institutions. This will save significant time for frontline researchers and innovators and ensure we, and other funders, recognise the interconnectedness of all aspects of the R&D system.*

- *In the short term, we need to ensure that we are not creating new systems if there are suitable alternatives already in place. As we seek to increase our effectiveness in measuring activity and impact, we need to add to or complement existing reporting frameworks rather than replicate them.*

Reducing the number of questions for mandatory reporting for the Researchfish 2020 Submission Period and actively reviewing our approach to outcomes monitoring with a view to ensuring it is fit for purpose and minimally demanding on our awardees e.g. via use of ORCID/integration with other datasets

- *In the short term, our focus is on simplifying how Researchfish is used and seeing whether there are opportunities to integrate data from other sources so that researchers do not have to enter the same data multiple times.*
- *Longer term, we would look to integrate and streamline reporting across the research and innovation system and identify opportunities to make better use of data internal and external to UKRI. This is a key ambition of our work in this area.*

Identify opportunities to enhance our risk-based Funding Assurance approach to better align to the organisation and project type, to reduce the burden of independent audits and where possible assure the organisation's funding, rather than individual projects.

- *We must be confident that our risk approach and subsequent funding assurance requirements reflect our ambitions to invest in excellence wherever it is found without compromising the responsibilities we have as an investor of public money – we will review our current approaches to ensure they remain appropriate to enable an outstanding research and innovation system.*

Reviewing end of award reporting, for example, the use of and process for Final Expenditure Statements

- *The level of reporting required at the end of projects varies according to council. Some councils already have a streamlined approach to end of award reports.*
- *However, all awards must submit a FES, or equivalent, to conclude their grant.*
- *The review will look at how FES are administered as part of the overall project audit to see if there are any opportunities for streamlining and improving processes to reduce bureaucracy.*

Broader systems and activities

Working with external advisers to provide additional, independent challenge and to calculate the total costs of bureaucracy

- *We need a benchmark of our current costs so that we can track the cost implications of any changes across the research and innovation system and within UKRI.*
- *We recognise that efficiencies and financial savings are only worth having once the effectiveness of what we do is assured.*

Stopping multiple asks for data or information that already exists elsewhere e.g. in ORCID, CrossRef, DataCite and Companies House

- *It is frustrating for applicants if they have to keep entering the same information multiple times. Through its Storage, Reporting and Analytics project, we are currently reviewing and improving how it manages data now and in the future. As part of this, the UKRI Funding Service is building functionality into its online platform that will allow access to external datasets that reduces data entry and improves consistency of data. Our work on data will be GDPR compliant.*
- *We are also reviewing our organisational data needs and usage to ensure that we only ask for information with a clear business requirement and make better use of the data we hold. This includes implementing new data techniques and analysis.*

Reviewing the approach to and use of TRAC (Transparent Approach to Costings), with a focus on its research elements, to identify and implement improvements to ensure we accurately capture the true costs of research and innovation and act in a sustainable and informed manner. UKRI will work closely with the Office for Students and funding bodies in the devolved administrations on this to ensure coherence with evidence gathering for the review of TRAC(T), while allowing the two reviews to progress in tandem.

- *The research elements of TRAC (Transparent Approach to Costing) provide the framework for the Full Economic Costing (FEC) of research. RCUK adopted FEC in 2005 to provide a consistent way for accurately calculating the cost of research. It is very important to the way UKRI operates and assesses research costs. Since it is 15 years since its adoption, it is appropriate that we remain confident in our current approach. This review aligns closely with our ambitions around sustainability.*

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Embedding good practice in equality, diversity and inclusion as we undertake this work will be critical to supporting our commitments to address inequalities, challenges and issues, and drive transparency and accountability.

To help us better understand these issues, a focus will be on data collection and ensuring we use this information to understand and address inequalities in a targeted way.

Wherever possible we will use existing data sources and, should we need to collect additional data, we will do so with clear consideration of the impact these requests place on those submitting information.

Q&As about the Review

When will the review begin and who will be involved in the review programme?

How can we input?

We will be starting our review as soon as possible. We will work with all our key stakeholders to ensure we understand how processes currently operate across the research and innovation system, listen to concerns about the consequences of any proposed changes and capture further suggestions from experts across the system.

When will the review be completed and how can we see the impact of changes made?

This process of review will begin as soon as possible. We will share more information on timings and outcomes as it becomes available.

How will you calculate the impact of current bureaucracy on the research and innovation sector?

Our review will link closely with the BEIS-led review of bureaucracy in the sector to ensure that we are aligned, and we will work with external advisors to provide additional, independent challenge to current ways of working.

How will UKRI ensure that the review is carried out in a fair and robust way?

We will be engaging across the sector to develop and deliver this review, whilst continuing to work closely with the wider BEIS-led review of bureaucracy within the research and innovation sector.

How will Research Institutes be affected by this review?

It is vital that the specialist expertise and contributions made by Research Institutes is not compromised. We will therefore be undertaking, in the longer term, a first principles review of UKRI Research Institutes to ensure that these institutions continue to fulfil a unique and valuable role within the research and innovation landscape as UKRI expands its ambitions.