



Research  
England

# Circular letter

## Reporting significant events

To	Heads of English higher education providers
Reference	RE-CL-2024-09
Publication date	31 October 2024
Enquiries to	<a href="#">Research England Engagement Lead</a>

Dear Vice-Chancellor or Principal,

1. I am writing to draw your attention to Research England's requirement for higher education providers (HEPs) in receipt of our funding to notify us about specific significant events, as detailed in our [Terms and Conditions](#) of funding. This clarification is being provided in the context of our wider activity in relation to the financial sustainability of research and knowledge exchange.
2. We are developing further guidance for HEPs, to support decisions on reporting significant events to us. This letter is for providers to note, in advance of that further guidance.

### Background

3. Recent evidence and analysis<sup>1</sup> has highlighted the financial pressures HEPs are facing across the range of their teaching and research activities, with clear implications for the continuation of these activities where pressure is sustained.
4. Working closely with colleagues in UKRI and other key partners, Research England is undertaking a programme of work to develop our understanding of the scale of the financial challenge facing the higher education sector and the consequent financial and administrative decisions being taken to adapt to such circumstances across all types of providers we fund. Through this work, we are keen to build insight into the implications such decisions may have for research and innovation capabilities, infrastructure, assets and talent in England.

<sup>1</sup> [Research financial sustainability data – UKRI](#); Office for Students (2024) Financial sustainability of higher education providers in England: 2024, available at <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/>; PwC (2024) UK Higher Education Financial Sustainability Report, available at <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/>.

5. Our approach to building this insight will both draw on our existing activities, for example in gathering structured information from a sample of providers through our engagement function and will seek additional evidence where we do not already have it.

## Significant events

6. Our [Terms and Conditions](#) set out the requirement for HEPs to report to us decisions and actions that may affect the funding provided by Research England. This reporting of significant events extends to information about major changes in research and knowledge exchange strategies<sup>2</sup>.
7. In the context of our programme of work on financial sustainability, and in view of our responsibilities in managing public money, we need to ensure Research England has the information required to effectively perform our role. We are therefore developing further guidance for providers on what would constitute a significant event, and the process in place for reporting these, to enable and support providers to meet this requirement.
8. The further guidance on reporting significant events will be provided to HEPs in December this year. It will provide information in relation to reporting events arising in future, as well as in relation to current or past events where the provider considers that the impact is material and ongoing. The guidance will also set out the mechanism for reporting this information to Research England.
9. We will use the information reported to us in accordance with the following purposes:
  - a. Within the context of the accountability framework in place for the funding we provide, as a source of assurance to ensure our confidence in meeting our responsibilities in managing public money through the bodies we fund.
  - b. To support delivery of our mission to create and sustain the conditions for a healthy, dynamic, diverse and inclusive research and knowledge exchange system in the higher education sector.
10. As set out in our Terms and Conditions, we will respect commercial confidentiality in relation to any information we receive within the bounds of our legal obligations. The forthcoming guidance for HEPs on reporting significant events will provide further detail on our overall use of the information and our management of confidential information, including the circumstances in which information may be shared within UKRI.
11. We are aware of the many pressures providers are facing in the present climate and are actively exploring ways we can minimise additional burden for providers in this process. Across the range of our activity in relation to financial sustainability, we are working closely with other bodies, including the Office for Students, to identify ways to minimise duplication and draw on existing sources of data, where possible.
12. If you have any queries or comments about this letter please contact your [Research England Engagement Lead](#) to discuss.

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<sup>2</sup> Research England [Terms and Conditions](#), paragraphs 23 and 52.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jessica Corner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jessica" written in a larger, more prominent script than the surname "Corner".

Professor Dame Jessica Corner FMedSci, MAE, RN

Executive Chair

Research England