

## Circular letter

### Invitation to participate in the Transparency Programme Pilot Exercise

To: Heads of English higher education providers (HEPs)

Reference: RE-CL-2025-04

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Enquiries to: [researchpolicy@re.ukri.org](mailto:researchpolicy@re.ukri.org)

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Dear Vice-Chancellor or Principal,

1. I am writing to invite your institution to participate in the pilot for Transparency of Strategic Institutional Research Funding Annual Reporting as part of our wider Transparency Programme.
2. The Transparency Programme aims to gather evidence from English Higher Education Providers (HEPs) to highlight the importance of Research England's (RE) strategic institutional research funding (SIRF) as a flexible, fundamental, and underpinning element of the wider research ecosystem, in line with our [SIRF principles](#).
3. The Programme contributes to UKRI's response to the 2021 Nurse Review of Research Landscape.
4. An overview of the Programme work, including the full rationale behind it, is available on our website: [Research England funding, assessment and award management – UKRI](#)

#### The Pilot Exercise

5. The Transparency Programme pilot exercise will contribute to evidence Research England are preparing within the wider [review of SIRF](#).
6. The pilot is designed with the intention of becoming an annual process through which HEPs inform Research England of the broad, strategic uses of their annual SIRF allocations, to strengthen our evidence base.

7. This pilot exercise asks HEPs to report information on the use of your institutions' SIRF allocation over academic year (AY) 2025-26, commencing August 2025.
8. Our ambition is that the pilot will enable us to refine the process as currently designed ahead of a full roll out, and to enable HEPs to become familiar with the process. Together, this will ensure we deliver a new evidence-gathering process that meets our strategic aims around improving our methodologies related to data and evidence.
9. The pilot has been informed by community testing with HEPs and we would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude for the invaluable insights we received.
10. The pilot presents another opportunity for your institution and for all English HEPs to inform and co-shape the new process, as well as to trial the new tools.
11. Once the process is piloted and improved, we plan to roll it out on an annual basis to obtain better data and insights about SIRF as well as to gather compelling stories about how it is used on the ground.

### Taking Part in the Transparency Pilot

12. We strongly encourage all HEPs to participate in the pilot to enable us to achieve the aims set out above, to ensure that we receive feedback on the pilot from a diverse range of HEPs, and to allow HEPs time to familiarise themselves with the process ahead of a full roll out.
13. Submissions to the pilot exercise should be made through an interactive form accessible via the Research England Data Portal. Please log in to the Data Portal to access it: <https://www.ukri.org/councils/research-england/research-england-data-portal/>
14. A PDF version of the template to be completed is also available for information at Annex A, to aid your institution in collating information for the pilot return.
15. A guidance document to accompany the template is available at Annex B.
16. Your institution has been assigned to one of two pilot sub-groups (sub-group A or sub-group B) established for this exercise. Each group is testing a different methodology for calculating and categorising aggregated SIRF uses. You can check which group your HEP has been placed in by logging into the interactive form, accessible via the Research England Data Portal, and reviewing question 11. The guidance document provides further information on this aspect of the

pilot, and we encourage HEPs to familiarise themselves with the methodology relevant to their assigned sub-group.

17. The deadline for submission of completed templates is noon, Monday 1<sup>st</sup> June 2026. The deadline for submission falls before the end of the academic year to allow us time to analyse returns and refine the process for a full roll out of the programme from AY 2026-27. Please therefore include forecasted spend for June and July 2026 in your return. We hope this deadline provides sufficient time to collate the necessary information.
18. The link to the online questionnaire has been included in this circular letter addressed to you as the primary contact that Research England has on record. However, you may need to consult other colleagues within your institution involved with the Data Portal and with the management of your institution's SIRF allocation.
19. Please ensure that your HEP's response is co-ordinated so that only one response from each HEP is submitted. Please also ensure your submission is reflective of the whole institution (and not one School, Faculty, Department or individual staff member).
20. We will be convening information webinars for HEPs to support this pilot activity. These accessible online events will offer guidance on completing the process, a walk-through of the pilot template, and provide an opportunity for HEPs to ask questions. Pre-registration is required to attend, and a selection of dates is available:
  - 7<sup>th</sup> October 2025
  - 5<sup>th</sup> November 2025
  - 15<sup>th</sup> January 2026
21. While we strongly encourage all HEPs to participate in the pilot, we acknowledge the burden of doing so, particularly due to timing and staffing constraints. If your institution is unable to participate in the pilot, please contact us at [researchpolicy@re.ukri.org](mailto:researchpolicy@re.ukri.org) by Friday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2025.

### Taking part in the Real-time Review

22. During the pilot year, we will be undertaking a real-time review of the exercise to inform the subsequent full roll out of the process. This review will be run in parallel to the pilot exercise and participation by HEPs is voluntary.
23. The review will comprise an online survey open to all HEPs towards the end of the pilot, and we will communicate further details on this in due course. We will

also be undertaking more in-depth conversations with a small number of HEPs taking part in the pilot, focusing on your approaches, challenges and good practice in embarking on the pilot evidence gathering process. We anticipate these conversations taking place over winter 2025/26 and summer 2026.

24. If your institution is interested in volunteering to take part in the in-depth conversations element of the real-time review, please complete the Expression of Interest form accessible via the Research England Data portal <https://www.ukri.org/councils/research-england/research-england-data-portal/> by Friday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2025. We will be in touch with HEPs with further information once the expression of interest deadline has passed.

#### Further information including Equality, Diversity and Inclusion considerations

25. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken to inform the pilot exercise, please see the EIA on our website: <https://www.ukri.org/publications/transparency-programme-equality-impact-assessment/>
26. If you have any questions in relation to this letter or the Transparency Programme pilot exercise, please get in touch with the Research Funding Team at Research England via [researchpolicy@re.ukri.org](mailto:researchpolicy@re.ukri.org).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dame Jessica Corner DBE, FMedSci, MAE, FKC, RN

Executive Chair

Research England



## Annexes (provided as standalone files)

- A. Transparency Programme Pilot Exercise Submission Template for HEPs – non-editable PDF version.
- B. Transparency Programme Pilot Exercise Guidance for HEPs – PDF version.