Section A – Deadlines and challenges in data provision

Q A1 – Would it be possible to extend the deadline for responding to the survey?

Following feedback, we have reviewed the timeframes for the survey submission and have extended the submission deadline to 18th July 2024. We understand there are significant challenges across the sector at present and many HEPs are struggling to be able to provide the information within the original timeframes.

The responses to this survey are intended to provide crucial evidence to inform future Spending Reviews and to make the case for continued and increased research infrastructure funding through RCIF. To support our planning for these activities, submission as early as possible would be gratefully received. If you can complete the survey by the original deadline (11th May 2024) we would encourage you to do so.

We appreciate the amount of work required to complete this survey so if there continue to be challenges around the later deadline, but you would like to be able to contribute to this exercise, please do contact Research England to discuss what might be feasible.

Q A2– What should HEPs do where they have challenges in providing the information because, for example, it is not available or has not been documented?

We are happy for HEPs to use a methodology that is most suitable and practical for them to provide a sensible estimate. We appreciate that data collection of this kind can be onerous and do not want it to be overly burdensome for HEPs beyond a reasonable expectation. We are happy to be provided with approximations to give us high level figures that we can work from.

Although this may provide a less robust data set, we will endeavour to use the information provided to develop a high-level understanding of the broad condition of research infrastructure. For any future evidence collection, we will look at how we might incorporate such a request into existing data collections, such as HESA EMR and TRAC, in a rigorous and robust manner.

Q A3 – What should we do if we have challenges in providing answers to the mandatory or core questions?

Where HEPs have challenges in providing some of the mandatory information, we would appreciate understanding the specific challenges that are present in providing the information that is being requested. This would allow RE to see what can be done to tackle the challenges, to mitigate the levels of burden and to get suitably informative and reliable data. This information could be provided in the free-text boxes at the end of each section, where appropriate, or through getting in touch directly via the researchpolicy@re.ukri.org email.

Q A4 – If we cannot provide all the core data, do you still want us to complete the survey?

Yes, we would still value submissions from HEPs if they cannot provide all the core data. If certain information cannot be provided, please provide additional context and information within the relevant free-text box for that section to notify Research England of what data has not been provided and the rationale for this.

Q A5 – How should a HEP provideinformation if it does not differentiate research and teaching and learning spend internally?

Ideally, we would like to have the spending split to differentiate what relates to research versus teaching/learning. However, we appreciate that some HEPs may not have this level of granularity available to them and that different HEPs will record the data in different ways depending on how they function. Moreover, for some HEPs we are aware that the lines between research and teaching space can be particularly challenging to differentiate. We also acknowledge that some spaces and the costs associated with them will be of dual benefit (i.e. used for both teaching and research purposes) and should be recorded as such.

In certain cases, we would accept figures being provided for the HEP's complete spend which would include costs that relate to teaching/learning, but we would require some additional context to be provided in the free-text submission at the end of each section to outline this, and what the figures entail.

Q A6 – If a HEP does not record the data, or an element of it, required to comprehensively answer a compulsory question, are we obliged to undertake the data collection and analysis needed?

If there are challenges with collating these data streams, we are happy for HEPs to use a methodology that is most suitable and practical for them to provide a sensible estimate. We do not want this process to be onerous and overly burdensome for HEPs. We are happy to be provided with approximations for this to give us high level figures that we can work from, rather than having all the minute details accounted for.

For the compulsory core questions, we would hope that HEPs would consider the value in gathering this information to better understand their own estates, its usage, and the associated needs going forwards through the data collection and analysis. Although it is not mandatory to undertake such a data collection, we would appreciate all HEPs providing answers to the compulsory questions before the deadline to the best of their ability.

This is also the case for the optional questions: information for these optional questions should be provided if it is readily available or if it is of significant importance to the HEP.

Section B – Survey data

Q B1 – Should HEPs use the most up to date EMR data they have available (31/07/2023)?

This is dependent on which survey question it relates to. For section 2 (non-residential estates data) we would expect this to refer to the latest EMR data, where appropriate. Other sections refer to historic funding over longer periods (recent infrastructure funding) and future funding requirements which are not directly related to the latest EMR data return but may help inform some of the responses.

Q B2 – How should HEPs apportion research-related space based on its research intensity?

The entirety of the space that is related to research should be included in the calculation, so anything that is used for research purposes greater than 25% of the time.

Q B3 – Should HEPs include 100% of a building's space in its calculations if it is used for mixed purposes?

Yes, if any space is used for research greater than 25% of the time, then please fully include that space in the calculation at 100%. For example, with a mixed-use building that is 100 sqm and was used for 30% for research, you should include 100 sqm in the calculation rather than the pro-rated figure of 30 sqm.

Q B4 – Should space relating to academic offices be included?

Academic offices for academics that undertake research should be included in the calculation as these are essential for these activities to take place.

Q B5 – Should research support activity be included as research (i.e. professional services team supporting research)?

Yes, research support activity such as professional services supporting research should be included in the calculation as these are essential for these activities to take place. This is the same as outlined for academic offices for academics that undertake research.

Q B6 – How should HEPs assess levels of occupancy in their research estate (Q2.4 in the survey)?

We would like the level of occupancy to be calculated as an average over a suitable and representative period of time that can be readily extrapolated for a whole year. HEPs should use the methodology outlined below, based upon the EMR guidance.

A full headcount method will be the most accurate (i.e. counting all people in a room). If it is not possible to use this method, then the next most accurate method is to carry out a headcount up to a specified level (for example, 40 people) and estimate numbers beyond this point. A third method is to assess if the room is full/empty in proportionate terms (e.g. 25% full, 25-50% full etc.). HEPs should choose an approach that suits their needs. If the above is not possible, we are happy for HEPs to use a methodology that is most suitable and practical for them to provide a sensible estimate to give us high level figures that we can work from, rather than having all the minute details accounted for.

Q B7 – How can the descriptors for current levels of occupancy for the HEP's research estate be described?

The descriptors can be defined as follows:

- Excellent – 75-100% occupancy levels
- Above average – 50-75% occupancy levels
- Below average – 25-50% occupancy levels
- Extremely poor/no occupation – 0-25% occupancy levels.

These descriptors have been updated in the survey directly.

Q B8 – How do you define occupation for physical estate and for digital infrastructure please?

Occupancy should be based on how much the physical estate/infrastructure/asset is used and calculated based on the average over a suitable and representative period of time that can be extrapolated for a whole year. For buildings, this should be focusing on the amount of time that the space is occupied and used during its available working time.For digital infrastructure assets, this should be based on usage of available time.

Q B9 – Please can you whether HEPs should provide information on a space or building level?

We would like HEPs to include information at a building level, rather than on an individual space level.

Q B10 – Should HEPs determine space figures using gross or net internal area values?

For questions relating to space, please use gross internal area on a building level.

Q B11 – Regarding the 25% minimum research threshold, do you have a model calculation that we can follow?

We do not have a model calculation for HEPs to follow for the 25% minimum research threshold and HEPs should choose an approach that suits their specific requirements so long as it is done consistently at a building level.

Q B12 – How should HEPs determine the value of their research estate?

We recommend that HEPs use the insurance replacement value (IAV) to inform this. This is defined in the EMR as “the current cost of re-building the property to a standard similar to that of the existing, subject to appropriate allowances being made for any extra work which may be required because of physical conditions or statutory provisions, such as changes in building regulations. It does not record the value for which the property is insured.”

Q B13 – Are you asking for all capital spend from the HE or only where external funding has been applied (i.e. RCIF)?

We would like HEPs to include all capital spend that relates to research infrastructure when determining the overall annual figures. This will likely include funds from different sources, some of which may be listed in Q3.5 and Q3.6.

Q B14 – Should spend on running costs be included in Section 3 of the survey?

For questions regarding spend (Q3.1 - 3.4), we are interested in capital spend on infrastructure rather than revenue costs (such as running costs). However, we are aware that running costs have increased significantly for many providers in recent times and could impact the HEP's ability to invest in capital infrastructure. There are opportunities in other questions within this section to highlight this, including the free-text box at the end of section 3 where specific examples and challenges can be outlined.

Q B15 – Should digital network as capital equipment be included in the calculations and how should this be incorporated into the calculations?

So long as your digital network is sufficiently used for research purposes (i.e. above the 25% threshold) then please do include this within the calculations. An apportionment based on research activity across the HEP is suitable and sensible. For example, if 40% of all activity of related to research, please include an apportionment of 40%.

We expect many HEPs to have digital infrastructure as an essential and enabling part of their capital equipment so it would be sensible for those that it is vital for their research to include it, and so that we can get as full a picture as possible.

Q B16 – What is the lower value limit for equipment to be listed as ‘capital’?

The lower limit, for UKRI’s and Research England’s purposes here, is anything over £10,000.

Section C – Survey design and implementation

Q C1 – How were HEPs involved in the design of the survey?

The RE infrastructure team engaged with selected HEPs during the development of the survey, seeking input from a range of HEPs across the spectrum of the higher education landscape in England (including smaller specialist institutions) to test the ask of the survey and ability of different types of HEPs to provide responses. The team also considered extensive feedback from our institutional engagement team at RE.

Q C2 – Can the COTE survey be aligned with existing data submissions, such as TRAC or HESA EMR?

We are looking at how we can align with existing data submissions for potential future iterations. At present we are unable to align to the HESA or TRAC timelines due to our timeframes for gathering evidence for upcoming Spending Reviews.

Q C3 – Do you anticipate that you will repeat the survey in the future?

At present we are only running the survey once however there is a possibility that we would look at repeating the survey in the future to understand the changing research infrastructure landscape over time. As an alternative, we are looking at how we can engage with existing data collections (HESA, Data Futures) to embed some of the information that relates to research infrastructure and streamline existing processes.

Research England is considering evidence needs for research funding through other workstreams including the SIRF (Strategic Institutional Research Funding) Review.

Q C4 – Can you please provide offline versions of the survey questions to share to our staff internally?

Offline versions of documents are available in the related links section at the bottom of the survey home page.

Version History

V1.0 - uploaded 24th April 2024