

# Circular letter

## Guidance on reporting significant events

**To:** Heads of English higher education providers

**Reference:** RE-CL-2025-01

**Publication date:** 20 March 2025

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

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Dear Vice-Chancellor or Principal,

1. I am writing further to my letter of October 2024 about reporting significant events to Research England, with guidance on this matter for higher education providers (HEPs) in receipt of our funding.
2. It is important that this guidance is understood in the wider context of our funding assurance approach, which I have summarised in brief in this letter.

### A proportionate approach to assurance

3. As you will know, Research England works in partnership with HEPs, research organisations, businesses, charities, government, and the public to create the best possible environment for research and innovation to flourish. Our role within UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is to provide funding and long-term strategic direction to English HEPs for research and knowledge exchange.
4. Our funding decisions both at provider and project levels recognise the extraordinary contribution to research and innovation by the higher education sector across the whole of England, wherever excellence and high performance is found.

5. Engagement with the sector is a key priority for Research England because it positions us to have a nuanced understanding of issues across the higher education sector, to extract insights, to identify risks and opportunities, and to respond swiftly to the changing policy landscape. Accordingly, engagement also plays a role in assuring the funding we provide, where our aim is to encourage early discussion of any emerging issues rather than requiring this through formal routes, thereby building relationships on trust rather than on compliance. We know that the informal nature of our engagement, built around trust-based conversations, is highly valued in the sector.
6. This approach also reflects the fact that providers are accountable to the Office for Students (OfS) for their compliance with management, governance, financial sustainability, teaching quality, student outcomes, and access and participation regulatory requirements. It also reflects the fact that the activities funded by Research England are typically substantially invested in by providers, to undertake as much activity in this space as they can afford. As evidence including data from TRAC indicate, there is a clear drive within providers to prioritise investment in research.
7. For these reasons, we do not consider it proportionate to create an intricate structure of oversight to ensure that funds intended for research (which are otherwise unhypothecated) are spent on research. We do, however, need to ensure that where providers may struggle to continue to prioritise research, there is a clear expectation that quality-related research funds are spent on research or on the maintenance of capability which underpins it.
8. The significant event guidance and the process we have developed for providers sets out the circumstances in which we expect to receive formal notification from providers in relation to these matters, as well as administrative changes or potential changes relevant to governance matters.
9. More widely, and as indicated in the guidance, I encourage you to initiate conversations with your assigned Research England Engagement Lead to discuss any emerging issues or concerns about financial challenges and their impacts on research activity, so we can engage with you in early conversations about potential implications in relation to Research England funding.
10. If you have any queries or comments about this letter or the guidance on reporting significant events, please contact [significantevents@re.ukri.org](mailto:significantevents@re.ukri.org).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jessica Corner', is displayed within a light blue rectangular box.

Professor Dame Jessica Corner FMedSci, MAE, RN  
Executive Chair  
Research England