



Department
for Education



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

Higher Education and Research Bill:

Joint working between OfS and UKRI

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Joint working between OfS and UKRI

Introduction

Universities are central to the Government's objectives of social mobility, a more highly-skilled population, economic growth and cultural prosperity. The Government recognises that teaching and research work together, particularly in knowledge exchange between universities and the wider society and economy, to support these objectives. In universities with a research mission, teaching and research are closely linked. Many staff do both and the same premises and facilities are used for both. Universities in all parts of the country address global, national and local issues which depend upon the interplay between teaching and research.

As the Government encourages greater diversity in our higher education (HE) system, the funding and regulatory environment must change to recognise the more diverse nature of our system. Many of our new HE providers have no research mission and the OfS will be responsible for all providers of higher education in England. With regard to research, as Sir Paul Nurse recognised, greater co-ordination is required across the Government's research funding bodies and UKRI will fulfil that role.

The Government views joint working between the Office for Students (OfS) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) as vital to ensuring a coordinated and strategic approach to the funding and regulation of the higher education system in England. The two organisations will work actively together across their respective remits, both to support Government policy and to provide an interface for providers and students. Both organisations will also work with partners in the devolved nations in order to achieve their objectives. This factsheet sets out a range of specific provisions in the Higher Education and Research Bill to ensure this happens.

The clause entitled “Cooperation and information sharing between the OfS and UKRI” contains the following provisions

This clause in Part 4 of the Bill provides safeguards to ensure joint working, cooperation and the sharing of information between the OfS and UKRI. These provisions will enable a number of OfS and UKRI functions, including: integrated understanding of the stability, sustainability, efficiency and effectiveness of HE providers and the research base.

(1) The OfS and UKRI may cooperate with one another in exercising any of their functions.

(2) The OfS and UKRI must, if required to do so by the Secretary of State, cooperate with one another in exercising any of their functions.

(3) The OfS may provide information to UKRI if the disclosure is made for the purposes of the exercise of any function of UKRI.

(4) UKRI may provide information to the OfS if the disclosure is made for the purposes of the exercise of any function of the OfS.

As these two new organisations are created, the Government will work with them to develop appropriate governance arrangements that embed joint working principles and practices. Each organisation will have a framework document with its partner department, and these will be developed to ensure a consistent approach to joint working. The two organisations will also have a memorandum of understanding between them, which sets out the details of how they will work together, including formal structures for regular engagement and information sharing agreements. This will build on existing relationships between HEFCE and RCUK / the Research Councils, who currently cooperate and work jointly at all levels on many of the policy issues listed below, and whose joint investments are underpinned by their own agreements.

The areas where the Government expects OfS and UKRI to work together include:

Skills, capability and progression

The Government recognises that both bodies will play an important role in ensuring the higher education system is delivering the people with the skills required in the labour market and research base to support the growth of the UK economy and its public services, working with partners in the Devolved Administrations. In delivering on behalf of employers, OfS will need to have a good understanding of the technical and academic skills needs of the economy and the health of provision to meet these, both now and into the future. It will need to ensure it is using its regulatory and funding levers where necessary to ensure those needs are met by HE providers. Similarly, UKRI will have overall responsibility for the health and vitality of the research base and ensuring we remain world leading in developing new knowledge and applying it to real world problems. The bodies will work together to share this understanding and ensure that the skills pipeline is servicing all of these needs.

With regard to postgraduate students, the reforms provide clarity on the areas in which each organisation will lead, whilst enabling collaborative working to ensure coherent oversight. OfS will be responsible for protecting the interests of all students (post graduate taught and post graduate research students) and the quality of all regulated provision, working with the designated quality body. OfS will be responsible for the funding of taught postgraduate education, including the teaching grant currently allocated for this purpose through HEFCE. It will be the regulator for all degree awarding powers (DAPs), but in respect of research DAPs, must consult with UKRI. Furthermore the OfS will have a key role in looking at ways to improve access and participation at postgraduate levels.

UKRI will be responsible for all research funding, which will include the funds that Research Councils currently distribute for doctoral studies. UKRI will also be responsible for all research funding currently distributed by HEFCE, including quality-related research funding, which has an element to support the provision for doctoral students in England. UKRI, through its councils, will also be responsible for the health of the research base. The two organisations will work together and with other bodies to understand the pipeline and take oversight of the health of disciplines through all levels of education.

Knowledge Exchange

The Government understands the important role of knowledge exchange in supporting local and national prosperity. This is a core mission of all our universities, working through both research and teaching, in partnership with business, Government and third sector bodies. With regard to our reforms, UKRI will take the lead on knowledge exchange, bringing together the activities that are undertaken across all of the Research Councils, Innovate UK and research funding to universities currently distributed via HEFCE, including the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF). Under the current arrangements, there is a teaching component of HEIF, funded through the teaching grant, and this will continue over this Spending Review period. UKRI will engage with the OfS to ensure joint discussion of strategic objectives and the criteria for HEIF funding that reflect these teaching elements of knowledge exchange. UKRI and OfS will be required to ensure they act efficiently and effectively so, in this case for example, Government will expect streamlined arrangements such as single allocations and payments for HEIF and continuing flexibility for institutions to use HEIF funding to meet the specific needs of their mission, partners and the places in which they are located.

Infrastructure Funding

The Government currently provides capital funding to higher education providers for a range of activities. Looking ahead, both the OfS and UKRI will be responsible for ensuring that the capital allocated to them is invested where it can have the greatest benefit. Where the investment in institutions can benefit both research and teaching and it would be more effective and efficient for the two bodies to work together, they will do so, for example on the important ongoing provision of shared IT services by JISC. These services include the JANET network, which is not only a world-leading research network for our universities, but also serves learning and teaching in higher education, as well as being extensively used by the Further Education sector and by schools.

Financial sustainability and efficiency of the HE system and providers

The White Paper made clear that the OfS will have a duty to monitor the financial sustainability, efficiency and governance of the higher education sector and individual providers. The OfS will deliver this through its checks on governance and financial

sustainability as part of operating the regulatory framework. The OfS will be able to provide real-time analysis and information. This role will sit with OfS rather than UKRI as OfS will have oversight of all HE providers, including those that focus only on teaching. The Bill also contains provisions for the OfS to conduct efficiency studies of providers.

It is a condition of registration that providers will give the OfS the information it requires for the performance of its functions. Following the principles of gathering information only once, the clause entitled “Cooperation and information sharing between the OfS and UKRI” enables the OfS to share such information with UKRI, ensuring that UKRI has an accurate picture of institutional financial health so its funding decisions safeguard research sustainability. The two organisations will work together to analyse this information in order to shape policy advice to Government, and to challenge individual providers where necessary. Information sharing will also be required to provide regular assurance to satisfy the bodies’ respective accountability responsibilities.

Accountability and assurance

As these two new non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) are created, the Government will work with them to develop appropriate governance arrangements that embed joint working principles and practices and a consistent approach to accounting for the public funds they distribute. Both bodies will be required to comply with all government guidance on governance and managing public money.

Evidence gathering and system intelligence

Data and evidence, including system intelligence, are needed to support all of the cross-cutting objectives identified in this factsheet. They are particularly crucial to identifying and managing risks to providers that threaten the interests of students, research investments, research capability and the standing of the English system. They are also crucial for evidence-based decisions on policy and investment, and to understand and demonstrate their impact and returns. It will therefore be imperative for OfS and UKRI to build system intelligence that will identify and mitigate systemic risks, and secure robust evidence to be deployed across both organisations. UKRI will retain the cross-UK reserved remits that are currently delivered through the Research Councils and Innovate UK.

TEF and REF

Our reforms balance the incentives on institutions and establish parity for academics who focus primarily on teaching, research or a combination of both. The new arrangements will recognise and reward those institutions who apply research findings and expertise for the benefit of teaching (in the REF), while encouraging teaching that is informed by the latest in scholarship, research and professional practice (in the TEF). Overall, this will enhance learning and teaching and the student experience. We have committed to UKRI

and OfS working together to support the interface between teaching and research, including by ensuring that TEF and REF are mutually reinforcing.



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