

Government recommends cutting unnecessary bureaucracy in research sector

Today (Thursday 28 July), the government has published the [final report of the Independent Review of Research Bureaucracy](#), launched in March 2021 to identify ways to substantially reduce unnecessary bureaucracy in all parts of the research system.

The review was launched in recognition of the impact unnecessary bureaucracy has on diverting and hampering the work of researchers and their teams, and on the overall productivity of research organisations.

This report therefore makes recommendations across the research system – spanning government, funders, and research organisations and their teams – to address unnecessary bureaucracy for the benefit of the research system and those working in it, with the aim of ensuring it is kept at bay in the future.

The final report builds upon the Review's [interim report](#), which identified the principles that have underpinned the approach and development of the final recommendations. It draws together the overall scope and context for the Review's work, and sets out findings and recommendations across 6 different aspects of the research sector:

1. Reducing the complexity of assurance requirements: simpler asks for information, with less duplication and relying more on what organisations already do.
2. Proportionate funding applications: ask for less information at the start of the process and only ask for more as the chances of success get higher.
3. More responsive grant management: there should be flexible project start dates and standard arrangements for contracts.
4. Better sharing of data: improving data flows between different digital systems to minimise information asks, whilst maintaining data protection.
5. Action by institutions to reduce bureaucracy: universities should work with each other and with organisations like Universities UK to minimise bureaucracy.
6. Communicate better: express clearly why information is being asked for, and avoid 'just in case' gold plating.

The Review was led by Professor Adam Tickell, Vice-Chancellor at the University of Birmingham, and its findings support the goals of the government's [Research and Development Roadmap](#), which includes a commitment to removing unwarranted bureaucracy in the UK's research system.

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said:

The work of our exceptional researchers will not reach its full potential while the research system is bound up by excessive red tape. The findings of Professor Tickell's thorough review shine a light on the huge opportunity for improvements in this field.

I am confident this report will act as the stimulus needed for institutions, funding bodies, regulators – and for government – to come together and make the progress required.

Author of the Bureaucracy Review, Professor Adam Tickell, said:

UK research is world-leading, however from the findings and recommendations in the Review it is clear there are huge opportunities to improve how our research system works. The Review has unearthed excessive bureaucracy across the system.

It will now take a collective effort involving individuals, institutions, funders, regulators and government to realise the potential benefits of change while ensuring the vital checks and balances in the system are not lost. I hope this report signposts the way forward and provides the impetus needed.

Unnecessary bureaucracy ultimately diminishes the returns of research funding, and this report sets out a clear plan to increase efficiency and enable the UK's world-class research base deliver their innovative work to the best of its potential.

Chief Executive of UK Research & Innovation, Ottoline Leyser, said:

We warmly welcome this thoughtful and excellent review. I would like to thank Professor Tickell and his team for their thorough work and carefully considered recommendations setting out how the research and innovation community can work together to eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy.

The review's recommendations, and the principles that underpin them, strongly align with ongoing work at UKRI, such as our Simple and Better Funding Programme. By working in partnership across the UK research and innovation system we can catalyse transformational change, maximising the value from record-breaking levels of public investment in R&D.

The recommended changes will allow essential research – from healthcare development to studies in environmental science – to be delivered unhindered by excessive red tape, supporting the UK's ambition to maintain its

competitiveness, and secure its position as a science superpower.

Chief Scientific Advisor, Professor Lucy Chappell, said:

For many years, clinical research has been vital in helping us improve the health of patients and the public. In the COVID pandemic, we found new ways of doing leading-edge research from rapidly creating vaccines to identifying life-saving treatments such as dexamethasone. This research has saved thousands of lives.

It's crucial that we continue to build on the successes of our research ecosystem within the NHS and more widely. The Tickell Review will help us do that, with its proposals to improve the efficiency of research.

We will continue to work collaboratively across government and with key stakeholders to address any unnecessary bureaucracy relating to our research so that we can continue to deliver world-class care.

Interim Chief Executive of Universities UK, Chris Hale said:

UK universities produce world-leading research. This research is best supported by a dynamic and flexible system without unnecessary bureaucracy. The outcomes of this review show that there are ways the research system, and universities operating within it, can develop more efficient and effective processes.

We look forward to supporting the implementation of the findings to create a more sustainable and harmonised system that maximises universities' research capacity.