

Institutional survey guidance and FAQs

This document is intended to assist you in preparing and submitting your institution's response to the Research Professional Futures **institutional survey**. There are also contextual guidance notes within the survey itself, presented with the relevant question, which should be read alongside these notes. The **institutional survey** complements a separate **individual survey** which is designed to capture information about the perceptions and experiences of individual Research Professionals in Higher Education Institutions in the UK. The survey will be open to responses until **Friday 25 September**. If you have any questions about responding to this survey, which are not answered by this document, please email angharad.roberts@research-consulting.com for further assistance.

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1. About the project

The Research Professional Futures (RPF) project aims to reshape how research is delivered in the UK. It seeks to achieve this by focusing on Research Professionals (RPs) who are a diverse group of specialists whose skills are essential for delivering research. This project looks at specialist professional staff beyond academic and technical roles.

They operate in various areas, including research development, governance and systems, public engagement, knowledge exchange, commercialisation, and library services and include staff from central teams, faculties, and those embedded within research groups, as well as third space professionals and individuals with lived research experience from within or outside the sector.

The RPF project will continue to refine this working definition of Research Professionals and the emerging typology of 11 categories of Research Professional activity is shown below.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Research funding and research business development | 7. Research compliance, governance and regulatory requirements |
| 2. Research environment, culture and researcher development | 8. Managing research portfolios: applications, awards, projects and income |
| 3. Research systems, infrastructure, and management | 9. Research project, programme and centre management |
| 4. Library, collection and research information services | 10. Clinical and NHS-linked research management |
| 5. Research strategy, policy and planning | 11. Research communications and marketing |
| 6. Knowledge exchange, impact and commercialisation | |

The project will also co-create with the sector a strategic blueprint for both RPs and institutions to realise the full potential of this workforce, improve efficiency, and foster a more collaborative research culture.

The Research Professional Futures project is funded by Research England and will run for a period of 4 years until December 2029.

2. Why should my institution participate?

This is an important, sector-wider initiative funded by Research England. The heart of the institutional survey is the collection of quantitative data about RP roles and functions, contributing to sector-level understanding of the scale and scope of RP activity. By building, for the first time, a comprehensive picture of the Research Professional workforce across UK higher education, the survey will provide an evidence base to improve the effectiveness of future planning, helping institutions better understand and articulate the people, capabilities, structures and support ecosystems that enable an excellent research environment. The process of gathering the data to respond to this survey may assist in

your institution's preparations for the Strategy, People and Research Environment element of REF 2029, which recognises the significance of central and unit level roles which enable or support research, engagement and impact.

Additionally, we will provide early sight of findings from this survey to the institutions which have participated, including some broad summary conclusions regarding points of similarity and difference between your institution's responses and those from the wider set of participating institutions. This will focus on narrative descriptions of the aggregated data, will reflect the nuance and caveats relating to different approaches to answering the survey questions and will provide insights, rather than benchmarking.

3. About the survey

Before you start this survey you may find it helpful to:

- note that we only expect one response from each participating institution. This may involve co-ordinating input into responses within your institution, if multiple teams are involved in relevant activities;
- use the Word version of the survey (attached to the email providing this survey link; a PDF version is also available through this link) to prepare your responses before submission;
- this guidance document includes more details about the typology of Research Professional roles, as well as Frequently Asked Questions, to assist you in preparing your responses;
- note that there is an option in this survey software to 'Save and continue later' from page 2 onwards;
- allow sufficient time to gather information, as the survey requires facts and figures about your institution.

4. General guidance

*These FAQs were updated following the webinars to include a small number of additional questions. Additional or updated questions are indicated with an asterisk * after the question.*

4.1 Who should complete the survey?

We are expecting one response per institution, for example from a Director or a senior team member in research services. Given the range of topics covered in the survey, it is likely that one person will need to co-ordinate input into different sections of the survey from a number of different colleagues or teams in the institution. We have supplied a Word version of the survey in order to make it easier to approach individual internal contacts about specific questions.

4.2 For what timeframe are data requested?

The survey asks about the FTE of research-active academic staff (Teaching and Research or Research-only) (as of 31 July 2026) and approximate research income (in thousands, £000s) for the 2025-6 financial year. It also asks about headcount of Research Professional staff as of 31 July 2026.

4.3 How can I tell you more about my institutional context in relation to specific questions?

Throughout the survey there is space for additional "Comments" beneath questions. Please use these to provide context and more information about your institution in relation to the specific questions.

4.4 What is the desired length of comments?

Comments will be used to contextualise survey responses. They do not need to be lengthy, but should aim to capture key points of context that we need to be aware of. Comments do not have a word / character limit.

4.5 What should I do if I can't answer a question?

If you are unable to answer a question, please leave this blank and note the reasons for this in the comments field, where available. There is also a question at the end of the survey which provides the opportunity to record any specific limitations to your ability to respond to the questions not captured elsewhere.

4.6 We would like to participate but the target date of 25 September is challenging, can you help?*

Yes, please get in touch and we can arrange an extension to 16th October.

4.7 Will you normalise the data e.g. for larger universities or smaller universities based on e.g. FTE of research active staff or research income?

Yes, we will contextualise and normalise the survey results by institution size as indicated by FTE of research active staff or research income.

5. Staffing

5.1 Who do we include in the headcount for Research Professional areas of activity?

In this survey, the term "Research Professionals" is used to mean "the specialist staff who play a vital role in delivering high-quality, ethical and impactful research – from research development and strategy to public engagement, knowledge exchange and research culture". It excludes technical, academic or research-only staff. If people have a mixture of technical, academic or research responsibilities and Research Professional responsibilities, please only include those for whom Research Professional responsibilities represent their primary role.

5.2 What if we can't provide accurate headcount?

If you are unable to provide full details for this question (e.g. because you are not able to gather data for headcount), it is acceptable to provide an estimate, but please note this in the comments field.

5.3 What if staff have hybrid roles or are responsible for multiple areas of Research Professional activity?

Wherever possible, please try to map headcount to a primary area of responsibility. This may be possible based on functional unit or based on organograms. In exceptional cases, where there are staff with responsibilities across multiple different areas of activity (and no obvious primary area of activity), please include them in the "Multiple areas of activity" row in each question. Please explain more about these roles and the areas of activity they cover in the free-text question for comments to aid interpretation of your response.

5.4 If we map data based on other typologies of roles into the RPF typology, and the typologies don't align exactly, how should we describe this?*

It would be helpful to know which other typology the data have been drawn from and where the typologies align or where there are gaps. This may also help to inform future versions of the RPF typology.

5.5 Where should we report Research Professional staff working within different levels of the institution?

This section asks about numbers of Research Professional roles at each of the following levels of your institution:

- Central institutional Research Professional roles, undertaken within **central functions and services**
- **Cross-cutting Research Professional roles serving multiple local units**, such as roles within Faculties or interdisciplinary research structures
- Up to three examples of **local, discipline-focused units**, such as departments or institutes.

It would be helpful to have as complete a set of responses across these three institutional levels as possible. However, we recognise that this might be challenging - if it is only possible to provide figures for central institutional roles, if estimates are used or if only limited data is available at cross-cutting or department level, please continue and complete the survey and note the limitations in the comment box after the relevant question. There is also a question towards the end of this survey where you can add comments about any limitations to your responses not captured elsewhere.

The table below indicates the information requested for each organisational level.

Organisational level	Data requested
Central institutional functions and services	Headcount in central institutional Research Professional roles, by area of Research Professional activity; with name(s) of central unit(s) in which these roles are located; any comments which may aid interpretation of your response.
Cross-cutting structures supporting multiple academic units, such as faculties or interdisciplinary structures, inclusive of diverse institutional structures), which are not central university functions and services.	Headcount in cross-cutting Research Professional roles, by area of Research Professional activity; with name(s) of cross-cutting unit(s) in which these roles are located; any comments which may aid interpretation of your response.
Up to three examples of local, discipline-focused units, such as departments or institutes	Name of the example unit; contextual data to indicate scale – FTE of research active (T&R and R-only staff), research income (£000s); information about disciplinary focus of the unit; headcount of Research Professional roles, by area of Research Professional activity; any comments which may aid interpretation of your response (e.g. reasons for using this unit as an example).

5.6 How can responses include staff who are centrally managed but locally deployed?*

We advise recording these in the central institutional part of the survey, and adding a note in the free-text question to explain that these are centrally managed but locally deployed.

5.7 How do we decide which staff to include in the questions about the central institutional level, cross-cutting structures or local units?*

It can be helpful to consider where people are managed and employed. For example, some staff may have centrally-managed but locally deployed roles, which we would suggest recording at central level. Others may be employed

and managed at Faculty level but provide services to local units, in which case they can be recorded in the cross-cutting structure. Alternatively, if staff are based just in a local unit, they could be included as part of the example of a local unit. If there are no relevant staff within a particular level (central, cross-cutting or local) you can leave the relevant questions blank, but please use the free text boxes to explain why they are blank.

Please use the comments boxes and free-text questions in the staffing questions to explain the approach taken to recording these staff, including any areas of uncertainty. The intention is to only capture information about roles once, so please avoid duplicate counting of staff with responsibilities at different levels of the institution.

5.8 Across the different institutional levels and the different example local units there will be variations in approaches to gathering the data. How should we reflect this in the survey responses?*

The aim is for the survey to reflect the reality of the landscape of Research Professional roles in your institution. We recognise that different methodologies may be used in responding to the different questions and particularly between different local units: please use the comments box to help us to understand the specific approach which has been taken in responding to each of the staffing questions. This may include indicating where responses have been estimated, or if only a subset of potentially relevant roles are included or where distinctions between roles in different areas of the typology are blurred.

5.9 If enterprise or commercialisation support for the institution is delivered through a limited company wholly owned by the institution, do we include this Research Professional activity?*

If the separate limited company is wholly owned by the institution and is focused on core enterprise activities (such as commercialisation, intellectual property, technology transfer, spin-outs etc) in direct service of the University's research this would be fully in scope. The activity itself would probably mostly be included in the typology area for Knowledge exchange, impact and commercialisation. It would be helpful to note that the relevant figures include the separate limited company's team in the free-text comments.

5.10 Are technical staff included in the survey?

No, the survey looks at specialist professional staff beyond academic and technical roles.

5.11 How should we select which three local units (departments, institutes etc) to use as examples?*

Please include examples from different disciplinary areas. It is up to you which local units you choose to include as examples and factors to consider may include:

- willingness of a department to participate and help to provide data;
- how accessible or robust the data are;
- the extent to which a department is typical for a particular disciplinary group (e.g. typical within your institution for social sciences or for health and medicine); or
- the extent to which it reflects differences between higher or lower density of research professional roles across different disciplinary groups.

There is a question which asks about your reasons for selecting that each specific local unit as an example – please use this to explain the approach that you have taken to selecting that unit.

5.12 Do we have to provide three examples of local units?

No. If it is not possible to provide three examples of local units, you can provide one or two examples instead. Please add a note in the comment box for the last local unit you describe to explain why you have not provided another example local unit.

6. Environment, culture and Research Professionals

6.1 What is meant by an initiative or programme to support Research Professionals?*

This can include any programme or initiative which is intended to offer support to Research Professionals. It may have a broader overall scope, but fundamentally it is particularly applicable to Research Professionals, even if there may also be broader relevance to professional services or researchers in general. This can also include regional or national initiatives, particularly where your institution has a specific role in supporting or providing this. The next question asks about any particular issues affecting Research Professionals which the initiative was intended to address, which may also help to clarify whether an initiative was particularly applicable to Research Professionals.

7. Challenges and opportunities

7.1 How should I respond to the questions about challenges and opportunities?

To the extent that it is possible, it would be helpful to have responses to these questions which reflect an institutional perspective on challenges and opportunities.

8. Participation agreement

8.1 What is the purpose of the participation agreement at the end of the survey?

This section sets out in more detail how the information provided by you on behalf of your institution will be stored and used. This also provides an opportunity to download a PDF copy of your completed survey response, for your own records. Please click "Submit" on the final page of the survey in order to complete and submit your survey response.

Appendix A: Research Professional typology areas

The table below provides a more detailed description of the areas covered by the Research Professional typology. Examples of roles within each area of this typology are also included at the end of this document.

Proposed Area	Description
1. Research Funding and Research Business Development	Supporting the identification, development and acquisition of research funding. Roles work with researchers to shape competitive proposals, manage internal and external funding schemes, and build strategic relationships with funders, contributing to sustainable and strategically aligned research portfolios.
2. Research environment, culture and researcher development	Creating the conditions in which all those who contribute to research can thrive. Roles include doctoral administration, researcher development across career stages, and initiatives that promote connected, supportive, inclusive and responsible research cultures aligned with institutional priorities.
3. Research systems, infrastructure, and management	Being responsible for the systems and infrastructure that underpin research activity. Roles manage research information systems, repositories and data, ensuring research is discoverable, compliant and reusable, and supporting reporting, decision making and open research practices.
4. Library, collection and research information services	Supporting scholarly communications (including university presses), research data management, open access and open research (including open science practices), managing research collections, including collections in archives, galleries and museums, and providing expert information support that enables responsible research outputs.
5. Research strategy, policy and planning	Shaping and implementing institutional research strategy and policy, interpreting external policy environments, co-ordinating major returns such as REF, KEF and HESA, and supporting research intelligence, research evaluation, meta-science, evidence based planning and long-term strategic positioning.
6. Knowledge exchange, impact and commercialisation	Supporting the exchange of knowledge between research and wider society. Roles enable impact, public and civic engagement, partnerships, consultancy, enterprise and commercialisation, including IP, licensing and spin-outs, working across academic, public and private contexts.
7. Research compliance, governance and regulatory requirements	Ensuring research is conducted ethically, legally and responsibly. Roles support research ethics, governance, integrity, compliance and trusted research, embedding accountability and good research practice within institutions.
8. Managing research portfolios: applications, awards, projects and income	Managing research activity across the award lifecycle. Roles support pre-award and post-award processes, contracts, finance, costing and reporting, ensuring research funding is managed compliantly and efficiently.

9. Research project, programme and centre management	Leading the operational delivery of research investments including research projects, programmes, centres, doctoral training centres and institutes. These roles provide expertise in coordination, governance and risk management for complex initiatives, ensuring alignment with strategic priorities.
10. Clinical and NHS-linked research management	Working in clinical and NHS-linked contexts supporting clinical trials, governance and regulatory compliance, joint research office functions and partnerships, reflecting the specific requirements of clinical research environments.
11. Research communications and marketing	Communicating research activity, outcomes and value, translating research into accessible narratives for diverse audiences, supporting visibility, engagement and impact across institutional and external contexts.

Institutional survey guidance and FAQs

Appendix A: Research Professional typology areas

1 Research Funding and Research Business Development - Supporting the development of proposals to funders / sponsors - Management of strategic, internal or devolved funding against strategic or operational priorities (e.g. HEIF, QR) - Research Business Development - Research Funding - Funder Relations - Proposal development - Management of internal funding and programmes	3 Research Systems, Infrastructure and Management - Research Systems Management - Research Information - Institutional repository management - Research Data Management	6 Research Strategy, Policy and Planning - Research Policy - Research Strategy - REF Strategy, management and administration - Other institutional or sector returns - Management of internal funding and programmes - KEF, HEBCI, HESA - Management of strategic, internal or devolved funding against strategic or operational priorities (e.g. HEIF, QR)	8 Managing Research Portfolios: Applications, Awards, Projects & Income - Pre-award - Post-award - Research contracts management - Research finance management - Costing and pricing - Research portfolio reporting and management	10 Clinical and NHS-linked research management - Clinical Trial Management - Governance and regulatory compliance - Administration - Development and partnerships - Joint Research Office functions
2 Research Environment, Culture and Researcher Development - Management of strategic, internal or devolved funding against strategic or operational priorities (e.g. HEIF, QR) - Doctoral (PGR) administration - Researcher development - PGR / Doctoral - Researcher development - Early Career Researchers - Researcher development - other staff - Research Culture - Management of internal funding and programmes	4 Library, Collection and Research Information Services - Open Access - Open Research - Research Librarian	7 Research Compliance, Governance and Regulatory Requirements - Research Ethics - Research Governance - Research Integrity - Compliance - Trusted Research	9 Research Project, Programme and Centre Management - Management of strategic, internal or devolved funding against strategic or operational priorities (e.g. HEIF, QR) - Management of a centre for doctoral training or equivalent - Management of a centre, institute or group - Providing project management support across a range of projects and initiatives - Project management of a specific research or KE project or programme - Management of internal funding and programmes - Project or programme management - Project management - multiple projects	11 Research Communications & Marketing Communications and marketing
5 Knowledge exchange, impact and commercialisation - Impact development and management - Engagement (including public, policy and civic engagement) - IP commercialisation (including licensing, spinouts, technology transfer) - Knowledge exchange (including business partnerships, consultancy, CPD courses)	* tables highlight role / function sub-categories			

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