**Condition of the Estate (COTE) Survey**

*Background and aims of the survey*

Infrastructure, whether it be physical buildings, capital equipment or data-centred, is an enabling and underpinning part of the higher education environment and it is critical to maintaining and growing an internationally excellent and healthy research ecosystem. Recently documented challenges, including the reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) crisis within schools and the continued focus on financial sustainability within higher education, have highlighted the importance of investment into infrastructure. Infrastructure will also play a key role in higher education providers (HEPs) meeting ambitious net zero targets and help to drive agendas towards greater accessibility and equitability within research.

Infrastructure funding from Research England is provided through the following mechanisms:

* Research Capital Investment Fund ([RCIF](https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/browse-our-areas-of-investment-and-support/research-capital-investment-fund/)) - underpinning formula-based capital funding that supports the long-term sustainability of research and infrastructure.
* UK Research Partnership Investment Fund ([UKRPIF](https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/browse-our-areas-of-investment-and-support/uk-research-partnership-investment-fund/)) - supporting investment in world-leading higher education facilities and infrastructure across the UK.
* World Class Labs ([WCL](https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/browse-our-areas-of-investment-and-support/ukri-world-class-laboratories-fund/)) - helping research institutes and universities to maintain and improve facilities.
* Other opportunities, such as the Expanding Excellence in England (E3) can provide infrastructure funding for successful bids.

This compliments wider UKRI [funding for infrastructure](https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/creating-world-class-research-and-innovation-infrastructure/), such as through the [UKRI Infrastructure Fund](https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/creating-world-class-research-and-innovation-infrastructure/funded-infrastructure-projects/) and research council equipment calls, as well as [UKRI’s own infrastructure](https://www.discover.ukri.org/ukri-infrastructure/index.html).

At Research England, we are undertaking a piece of work to better understand the Condition of the Estate (COTE). The COTE project will develop an improved understanding of the current state of research infrastructure looking at both buildings and equipment, within the English higher education sector. The work is a key objective of Research England’s most recent [Strategic Delivery Plan](https://www.ukri.org/publications/research-england-strategic-delivery-plan/research-england-strategic-delivery-plan-sdp-2022-to-2025/), which commits to “...better understand the current condition and future needs of research infrastructure across English universities, developing methods of data collection across the sector.”

The objectives of the COTE work are twofold. Firstly, to garner greater understanding of the current physical condition of HEPs’ research infrastructure, its useability, safety, environmental sustainability, and effectiveness in enabling research to take place, and how this has changed over time. Secondly, to identify how much is spent on research infrastructure within HEPs, how needs are prioritised, what the needs specifically are, and the sources of funding to facilitate this.

The primary reason for this survey is to gather valuable evidence about the research infrastructure landscape in English HEP. This evidence is essential to make a strong and compelling case for increased infrastructure funding to HM Government. The information that we are provided by HEPs will be used to develop our case for this in future spending reviews. It will highlight the importance of investment into research infrastructure as a fundamental and underpinning element of the wider research ecosystem, which consequently enables the exciting and excellent research across the breadth of HEPs to take place.

*Available data*

HEPs provide a wealth of estates data to the Estates Management Record (EMR), a subset of the HESA return, which aims to provide the sector with standardised, useful estates-related data streams. Although the return of most of these data are now optional for HEPs, in practice the majority of HEPs provide data in each year of collection and there are several mandatory data items for England-based HEPs. Additional data is required to supplement available EMR data to garner deeper understanding of HEP research estates.

Analysis of the EMR by Research England has highlighted gaps in the data which would be valuable to contextualise the condition of research estates within HEPs. This is the primary focus of the survey that has been created. Following capturing of this additional data to supplement existing data streams that are available with the aim to provide a holistic overview of the current condition of research estates in English HEPs and their future needs. To supplement this, Research England will undertake interviews with selected HEPs to develop case studies that will further develop the case in Spending Reviews for increased levels of infrastructure funding.

*Instructions and survey structure*

The link to the survey has been sent as a single email to the primary research contact that Research England has on record and the lead estates contact (where available) for each HEP. However, you may need to consult other people within your institution involved with the management and strategic development of the university’s research estate. **Please ensure that your HEP’s response is co-ordinated so that only one response from each HEP is submitted.**

The survey has been split into a background section and 3 distinct infrastructure-focused sections to understand various aspects of the condition of the research estate. Within each section, there is a set of core questions that we require responses to (between 4 and 6) and a separate set of additional questions for which responses are not compulsory but are encouraged. This is to manage the burden that we acknowledge the survey will put on HEPs whilst maintaining that Research England can gather vital information to make the survey a success.

There are 15 core questions across the 3 sections, and a further 17 additional questions that are not compulsory. The core questions will enable Research England to build a baseline level of understanding of the research infrastructure landscape and provide valuable evidence to be used to make the case to HM Government for increased funding for research infrastructure. The additional questions will help to add colour and context to these core questions, potentially allowing for the development of targeted case studies focussing on specific aspects of research infrastructure. As such, Research England encourages HEPs to engage with these questions as best as HEPs can depending on their resource to do so.

The survey has been designed to minimise the administrative and bureaucratic burden upon HEPs where possible. Research England appreciates and understands the challenges that all HEPs are facing currently in relation to this, alongside financial sustainability challenges and constraints that are present across the sector.

To manage this within the survey, Research England is primarily seeking quantitative data that will support existing data sets through the core questions. Research England hopes that this will limit the amount of time that is needed on the compulsory sections of the survey. Additionally, figures provided do not need to be exact for these sections. Estimates or approximations are entirely suitable and better than not providing any data. It is much more important for Research England to develop an understanding of the entire research infrastructure landscape through approximate figures rather than specific numbers of each HEP.

There is opportunity available to provide qualitative information for each section through the additional questions. Several of the questions in the additional questions sections are multiple choice to limit burden where possible, whilst others ask for more qualitative information. These optional questions will help to add context to the quantitative information that HEPs are able to provide. We would be grateful for any explanatory and contextualising information relating to any of the questions posed, as this.

*Supporting information*

**The survey is open from 7th March 2024 and closes on 14th May 2024.** We hope this provides HEPs sufficient time to collate the necessary information for the survey. The survey also allows for responders to save their progress and return to it at a later point.

Research England will be hosting two webinar sessions to present the background and the aims of COTE survey and allow for HEPs to ask any relevant questions they may have. A FAQ document will be produced to support this following the webinars.

If you require further clarification, identify issues with the contents of the survey or have any queries about the work more broadly, questions can also be asked of the Research Infrastructure team at Research England via [researchpolicy@re.ukri.org](mailto:researchpolicy@re.ukri.org).

*Privacy notice*

Research England is a council of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). All personal data provided to UKRI in connection to the COTE survey will be processed in accordance with current UK data protection legislation. Further information on how we use personal data, and how you can exercise your rights as a data subject, can be found in the UK Research and Innovation Privacy Notice (<https://www.ukri.org/privacy-notice/>).

UKRI complies with current data protection law in the UK, and we process and handle personal information in accordance with this. The personal information that you provide for the survey will only be used for the processing of your response to the survey questions. Your data will only be viewed by UKRI staff and external colleagues employed to support this piece of work to help meet the objectives of the COTE work. Your information will not be used/shared for any other purpose without your specific consent. UKRI reserves the right to publish and share anonymised aggregated information with stakeholders.