

BRC announcements of NIHR funded or supported research

Policy document

Directors and Managers at NIHR Biomedical Research Centres (BRCs) are required to ensure that all press releases relating to NIHR funding and support (for example, announcing research findings) are notified to the NIHR Central Commissioning Facility (CCF) in advance.

BRCs are also required to notify CCF of any plans to release, or otherwise make available to third parties, any information relating to their research. This relates in particular to media announcements (which may originate through media requests, invitations for interviews, or site visits) and oral presentations to meetings where the results are likely to be reported by the media.

The purpose of these requirements is to ensure that the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) is aware in due time of any planned media activity, in particular on topics that may be sensitive, high profile or both. These requirements also allow CCF to prepare NIHR comms activities to amplify BRC announcements through NIHR channels.

These requirements are part of the contract between each BRC's host NHS Trust and DHSC (clauses 8.1, 8.2 and 8.3). These requirements extend to host Trusts, partner Universities and other formal partners named within the infrastructure bid.

Department of Health and Social Care notification requirements

CCF actively monitors and manages BRCs on their adherence to these requirements on behalf of DHSC.

BRCs notify CCF of press releases via their Communications Leads, who inform the CCF Communications Team by email on ccfcomms@nihr.ac.uk or phone on 020 8843 8072. Comms Leads should notify CCF in advance of the planned publication date. The Comms Leads should also provide a draft press release and copy of the research paper (if applicable) as soon as possible.

In addition, CCF should be notified about any other media activity (for example, filming, interviews, exclusives).

BRCs have a responsibility to ensure that researchers at their organisation and press officers at the BRC's academic and NHS Trust partners are aware of this requirement. Institution-level processes should be in place for researchers and press officers to inform BRC Comms Leads of any press releases or other media activity, including press releases produced by other parties (for example, publisher, funder or partner).

It may not always be possible for BRCs to provide full drafts of press releases ahead of issue. BRCs are instead expected to notify CCF of the 'intention to issue' a press release in advance of its publication.

Failure to meet the requirements

BRCs are deemed to have not complied with notification requirements when research funded or supported by a BRC is announced or otherwise reported in the media and CCF had not been notified in advance.

There may be mitigating circumstances limiting the opportunity for notification ahead of publication; for example, if a journal decides on a publication date for a paper at short notice.

If DHSC or CCF encounters a BRC news story or media activity that had not been notified, the CCF comms team will first clarify the facts with the BRC Comms Lead. If no mitigating circumstances are identified, DHSC will respond in the first instance by writing to the BRC Director. The Director will be encouraged to work with their staff and partners to improve institution-level processes to better enable timely notification, with support offered by CCF.

If there is a second instance, DHSC will write to the Trust Chief Executive, as the contract holder for the BRC, and the BRC Director. The Trust Chief Executive will likewise be invited to review institution-level processes and offered support.

If a third instance is reported, DHSC will write to the Trust Chief Executive and the BRC Director outlining that they have now breached their contract. The letter will state that DHSC will enforce the terms of the contract, as specified in clause 8.3, until the BRC provides evidence to CCF that they have an improvement plan, in particular of their process for notification and its successful application.

This enforcement of notification requirements will cover the whole duration of the BRC contract.

Implementation

This policy will come into force on 1 May 2018.