

[REDACTED]

21 September 2022

Dear [REDACTED],

Freedom of Information request: FOI2022/00244

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on the 22 July, and clarification received on the 9 August, in which you requested the following:

Your request:

You have previously supplied data on committee membership and participation from the AHRC, ESRC, EPSRC and NERC each of which has a 'Peer Review College', and from the BBSRC whose equivalent is a 'Pool of Experts'. Here, I refer to them generically as 'expertise pools'. You have also supplied data from the MRC, although I could not find any reference to an associated equivalent expertise pool. It is possible that they may recruit into their committees directly with an annual call. It is also possible that they hold information about potential committee members based on applications or expressions of interest - it would be useful if you could please clarify.

With this in mind, I would be grateful if UKRI could please supply the following data about these expertise pools, including any informal data held that are routinely used to populate the committees mentioned in FOI2020/00242 and FOI2021/00376:

For the Councils AHRC, BBSRC, EPSRC, ESRC, MRC & NERC:

- 1. The number of individuals in any 'expertise pools' from which committee members are drawn, broken down by research council, ethnicity and year. This data to be presented in both formats used in previous FOI requests, namely aggregated ethnicity data by year (as per FOI2020/00242) and broader ethnicity categories, aggregated by year (as per FOI2021/00376).*
- 2. If a council does not draw membership from an 'expertise pool', details of how members are recruited into their panels and any relevant ethnicity data held on their recruitment, broken down by research council, ethnicity and year.*
- 3. For those councils who draw committee membership from 'expertise pools', the number of invitations issued to reach the panel membership numbers from the previous requests, broken down by research council, ethnicity and year. Presented in the same formats as Q1.*

If it's possible to disaggregate data by year and ethnicity simultaneously, that would provide very useful information.

Our response:

I can confirm UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) does hold some information relevant to your request. Please see the information below.

For reference, copies of our previous responses to [FOI2022/00242](#)¹ and [FOI2021/00376](#)² are available on the UKRI Disclosure Log.

This response consists of information from AHRC, BBSRC, ESRC, EPSRC, MRC and NERC. Information on recruitment to decision making committees and use of peer review colleges or expert pools is provided below, and corresponding data for the period you have identified, 2015/16 to 2019/20 is provided in Annex A. The presentation of the data takes account of exemptions under the FOIA that are considered to apply, our response below also describes where information is held but to identify and extract data in the form you have requested would exceed the appropriate limit of the FOIA.

The data provided in Annex A has been compiled on an annual basis and is a snapshot during a particular financial year. As college members can serve for several years, when data is aggregated across the five-year period, this results in some individuals being counted multiple times. This can have the misleading effect of the college appearing five times larger than it actually is.

In preparing this response we have considered the risks of identifying individuals from small numbers and in line with standard statistical reporting practice, data has been suppressed to mitigate against the disclosure of personal data. Under Section 40(2) of the FOIA, this data is exempt where it relates to fewer than five members. We consider that to disclose information relating to small numbers of individuals would contravene the first Data Protection Principle as defined under Section 86 of the Data Protection Act 2018 and Article 5 of UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) of lawfulness, fairness and transparency.

Section 40(2) is an absolute exemption and does not require a public interest test.

In order to reduce the impact of data suppression on the information you have requested, ethnicity data has been presented, in seven categories; Asian, Black, Mixed, Not disclosed, Other, Unknown, and White.

Data relating to ethnicity is self-reported, and over the time period you have identified has been collected in different ways across the councils. As data has not been recorded in a uniform manner, to provide a consistent response the following criteria has been used to define each category:

- Asian – any individual who has identified as being Asian or Chinese, or any subset of these categories
- Black – any individual who has identified as being Black, or any subset of this category
- Mixed – any individual who has identified as being of mixed heritage
- Not disclosed – any individual who has provided diversity monitoring information and opted not to disclose their ethnicity
- Other – any individual who has identified as an ethnicity that they felt did not fall within the categories available
- Unknown – if an individual has not provided diversity monitoring information, or ethnicity information is not held. No assumptions have been made about an individual's ethnicity
- White – any individual who has identified as being White or any subset of this category

In line with our previous response, FOI2020/00276, aggregated ethnicity data has been presented in four categories; Ethnic Minority, Not disclosed, Unknown and White. For the purposes of these data sets, Ethnic Minority is defined as being any individual who has identified as being Asian, Black, Chinese, Mixed or Other, or any subset of these categories.

Further information on the breakdown of the ethnicity categories used by UKRI can be found on page 5 of the [UKRI Detailed ethnicity analysis of funding applicants and awardees](#)³.

Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC)

AHRC operates a peer review college, and convenes non-standing panels, usually from the college membership. Panels meet on an ad-hoc basis according to the requirements of the scheme for which they provide final grades and ranks. More detail on AHRC panels was provided in our response FOI2021/00376.

¹ <https://ukri.disclosurelog.co.uk/case/909b0584-2b59-4f11-8156-256a85989883>

² <https://ukri.disclosurelog.co.uk/case/cb3e9c9e-46aa-44b2-afa6-438c5bf83700>

³ <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/UKRI-15122020-DetailedEthnicityAnalysisOfFundingApplicantsAndAwardees2014-15to2018-19.pdf>

The ethnicity breakdowns of the AHRC college can be found in Annex A, Tables 1 and 2.

Information about the AHRC peer review college recruitment can be found in the attached document “*AHRC Peer Review College - 2021 Recruitment Call*” and via this [blog post](#)⁴. AHRC also publishes EDI data for the current college [here](#)⁵.

Data on the number of invitations issued to achieve the panel membership numbers provided in our responses FOI2020/00242 and FOI2021/00376 can be found in Annex A, Tables 3 and 4. Data has been provided on the number of invitations issued (Inv), those marked as accepted (Acc) and a percentage acceptance rate (%).

Information on invitations to meetings, acceptances and attendance is sourced from our funding systems, and multiple statuses and different methods of recording have been used over time. Therefore, while we have provided the data that is held, we would not consider this to be a complete and accurate representation of the actual number of invitations issued which resulted in the panel meeting attendance data provided in our previous responses. This also accounts for the variation in total numbers, between the number of invitations accepted and the number of members that attended panel meetings stated in previous responses.

Biotechnology & Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)

BBSRC does not have a peer review college but uses a pool of experts to support peer review. BBSRC has five committees that oversee the peer review and assessment of grant applications. Research committees A-D have a core membership that is complemented by additional members drawn from the pool of experts. Committee E is a standing panel. Information on the formation of the BBSRC committees was provided in FOI2021/00376.

The ethnicity breakdowns of BBSRC’s pool of experts can be found in Annex A, Tables 5 and 6. As core committee members are also members of the pool of experts, their data is included.

Data on actual attendance at panel meetings can be extracted from our funding systems, however data on the number of invitations is not held in a consistent and reportable format, and to identify and extract the data you have requested would require records for each meeting to be reviewed manually. Therefore, we estimate that the cost of complying with this part of your request would exceed the appropriate statutory limit as specified within Section 12 of the FOIA which for UKRI is set at £450. This represents the estimated cost of 18 hours of staff resource on locating, retrieving and extracting the information.

This estimate is based on the number of meetings over the five-year period you have identified, and the number of attendees. 79 panel meetings were held involving over 1,500 panel members, it has been estimated that it would take an average of 4 hours per meeting to source the relevant information, which for 79 panel meetings would total 316 hours. It would also be necessary to manually cross reference data on the pool of experts to determine ethnicity. At an estimate of 2 minutes per individual, for a minimum of 1,500 individuals, this would take at least an additional 50 hours.

Consequently, UKRI is not obliged under Section 12 of the FOIA to process this section of your request further.

Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC)

ESRC operates a peer review college but does not recruit members to decision making panels from it or any existing expertise pools. Panels comprise both ad-hoc groups convened to assess proposals submitted in response to specific calls and standing Grant Assessment Panels (GAPs).

For ad-hoc groups members are individually invited based on their expertise, as outlined in the response to FOI2021/00376.

Members of ESRC’s GAPs are appointed through an open recruitment exercise. Ethnicity data is not held for the GAP recruitment exercises covering the years 2015/16 to 2019/20.

⁴ <https://www.ukri.org/blog/a-warm-welcome-to-our-new-peer-review-college-members/>

⁵ <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/arts.and.humanities.research.council/viz/AHRCPeerReviewCollegeEDI/EDI-CurrentPeerReviewCollegeMembers>

Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)

EPSRC operates a peer review college. EPSRC convene prioritisation panels, with changing membership for each panel, primarily drawn from the peer review college with selections made on expertise in a general field. Information on the selection of EPSRC panels was provided in our response FOI2021/00376.

The ethnicity breakdown of the EPSRC peer review colleges is provided in Annex A, Tables 7 and 8. Due to the larger numbers of members it has been possible to present this data disaggregated by both ethnicity categories and years, and this is shown in Table 9.

These breakdowns should be compared to the size of the active Engineering and Physical Sciences community using HESA data, rather than taken on its own. For further HESA analysis of the EPS academic populations please see pages 11 and 12 of EPSRC's recent [ethnicity analysis report](#)⁶. Further information on the EPSRC peer review college is available [here](#)⁷.

Information on the number of invitations issued to prospective panel members is not held. Invitations to panels are not managed or recorded within our funding systems.

Medical Research Council (MRC)

MRC does not operate a peer review college. MRC research boards and panels are comprised of a standing group of members which review and manage scientific activity within their specialist areas and are responsible for recommending the award of MRC research grants and fellowships.

MRC recruit board and panel members every year, more detail is available [here](#)⁸. Ethnicity data is not held for the recruitment exercises covering the years 2015/16 to 2019/20.

Natural Environment Research Council (NERC)

NERC operates a peer review college. NERC convenes non-standing panels drawing from the membership of the college and other UK and International experts as required. Information on NERC panels was included in our response FOI2021/00376.

The ethnicity breakdowns of the NERC peer review college can be found in Annex A, Tables 10 and 11. This data was extracted from our funding systems. NERC has set out its commitments to improving diversity in its funding activities in its diversity and inclusion action plan [NERC diversity and inclusion living action plan 2022-2025](#)⁹.

While data on panel attendance can be extracted from our funding systems, data on invitations is not held in an easily accessible format. Therefore, we estimate that the cost of complying with this part of your request would exceed the appropriate statutory limit as specified within Section 12 of the FOIA which for UKRI is set at £450. This represents the estimated cost of 18 hours of staff resource on locating, retrieving and extracting the information.

This estimate is based on the number of meetings over the five-year period you have identified. 209 panel meetings were held, involving over 2,900 panel members. It has been estimated that this would take approximately 20 minutes per panel meeting to source the relevant information, which for 209 panel meeting would exceed 69 hours.

It would also be necessary to manually cross reference data on the pool of experts to determine ethnicity. Based on an average panel size of 15 members, it is estimated that between 20 and 40 invites are issued to finalise a panel. Extracting data for around 2,000 individuals, at an estimate of 2 minutes per individual, would take an additional 66 hours.

Consequently, UKRI is not obliged under Section 12 of the FOIA to process this section of your request further.

⁶ <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/EPSRC-100322-DetailedEthnicityAnalysisReport.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.ukri.org/councils/epsrc/guidance-for-reviewers/peer-review-college/>

⁸ <https://www.ukri.org/about-us/mrc/board-and-panel-membership/mrc-board-and-panel-member-recruitment/>

⁹ <https://www.ukri.org/publications/nerc-diversity-and-inclusion-action-plan-2022-2025/nerc-diversity-and-inclusion-living-action-plan-2022-2025/>

Your rights:

If you have any queries regarding our response or you are unhappy with the outcome of your request and wish to seek an internal review of the decision, please contact:

Head of Information Governance

Email: foi@ukri.org or infogovernance@ukri.org

Please quote the reference number above in any future communications.

If you are still not content with the outcome of the internal review, you may apply to refer the matter to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the review procedure provided by UKRI. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: www.ico.org.uk.

If you wish to raise a complaint regarding the service you have received or the conduct of any UKRI staff in relation to your request, please see UKRI's complaints policy: <https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-and-standards/complaints-policy/>

Yours sincerely,


Information Governance
Information Rights Team
UK Research and Innovation
foi@ukri.org | dataprotection@ukri.org

Annex A

The number of members in each category have been rounded to the nearest value of five and their respective percentage proportions rounded to whole values. Due to this the proportions may not add up to 100%. As mentioned above, information relating to less than five individuals is withheld as personal information under section 40(2) of the FOIA. Where there are no members within a category, a count of zero has been included.

As members can move on and off a college during a year, this data has been taken from the first day of a particular financial year. College members can also serve for several years, therefore, if the same individual held college membership for more than one year, their data has been included for each year served.

Table 1: AHRC Peer Review College Aggregated Ethnicity Data, by Year

	2015/2016		2016/2017		2017/2018		2018/2019		2019/2020	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Ethnic Minority	30	4%	40	6%	60	6%	60	6%	60	6%
Not disclosed	95	13%	85	12%	115	10%	105	10%	95	10%
Unknown	< 5	< 1%	5	< 1%	5	< 1%	< 5	< 1%	5	< 1%
White	580	82%	600	82%	955	84%	885	84%	830	84%
Total	705	100%	730	100%	1135	100%	1050	100%	995	100%

Table 2: AHRC Peer Review College Ethnicity Data by Category, Aggregated by Year

	2015-2020	
	#	%
Asian	165	4%
Black	15	< 1%
Mixed	70	2%
Not disclosed	495	11%
Other	0	0%
Unknown	15	< 1%
White	3855	84%
Total	4620	100%

Note: The total number is not a representation of the actual number of individuals who have been a member of the college during this period.

Table 3: AHRC Panel Invitations Aggregated Ethnicity Data, by Year and Acceptance Rate

	2015/2016			2016/2017			2017/2018			2018/2019			2019/2020		
	Inv	Acc	%	Inv	Acc	%	Inv	Acc	%	Inv	Acc	%	Inv	Acc	%
Ethnic Minority	10	5	40%	35	20	60%	20	10	40%	35	20	55%	50	35	70%
Not disclosed	45	25	55%	40	25	70%	35	20	50%	35	25	65%	45	20	50%
Unknown	< 5	< 5	100%	35	25	70%	10	5	40%	30	20	65%	10	10	65%
White	275	160	55%	335	175	55%	295	145	50%	300	155	50%	365	165	45%
Total	330	190	55%	445	250	55%	360	175	50%	400	215	55%	470	230	50%

Note: To minimise the risks of identification the acceptance rate has been rounded to the nearest 5%, rather than the nearest whole value.

Table 4: AHRC Panel Invitations Ethnicity Data, Aggregated by Year and Acceptance Rate

	2015-20		
	Invited	Accepted	%
Asian	95	55	60%
Black	20	15	83%
Mixed	35	10	35%
Not disclosed	200	115	58%
Other	0	0	0%
Unknown	85	55	64%
White	1575	805	51%
Total	2005	1060	53%

Table 5: BBSRC Pool of Experts Aggregated Ethnicity Data, by Year

	2015/2016		2016/2017		2017/2018		2018/2019		2019/2020	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Ethnic Minority	15	5%	25	6%	25	7%	25	7%	35	9%
Not disclosed	130	38%	105	26%	75	22%	60	17%	40	11%
Unknown	< 5	< 1%	5	1%	5	1%	5	2%	5	1%
White	195	57%	265	67%	240	70%	255	74%	305	79%
Total	345	100%	395	100%	345	100%	345	100%	385	100%

Table 6: BBSRC Pool of Experts Ethnicity Data by Category, Aggregated by Year

	2015-2020	
	No.	%
Asian	90	5%
Black	0	0%
Mixed	15	1%
Not disclosed	410	23%
Other	15	1%
Unknown	20	1%
White	1260	70%
Total	1815	100%

Note: The total number is not a representation of the actual number of individuals who have been a member of the pool of experts during this period.

Table 7: EPSRC Peer Review College Aggregated Ethnicity Data, by Year

	2015/2016		2016/2017		2017/2018		2018/2019		2019/2020	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Ethnic Minority	440	10%	770	13%	810	14%	875	15%	925	16%
Not disclosed	320	8%	440	7%	410	7%	415	7%	425	7%
Unknown	45	1%	55	1%	50	1%	50	1%	50	1%
White	3495	81%	4745	79%	4345	78%	4445	77%	4530	76%
Total	4300	100%	6010	100%	5610	100%	5785	100%	5935	100%

Table 8: EPSRC Peer Review College Ethnicity Data by Category, Aggregated by Year

	2015-2020	
	#	%
Asian	3135	11%
Black	165	1%
Mixed	380	1%
Not disclosed	2010	7%
Other	140	1%
Unknown	245	1%
White	21560	78%
Total	27635	100%

Note: The total number is not a representation of the actual number of individuals who have been a member of the college during this period.

Table 9: EPSRC Peer Review College Disaggregated Ethnicity Data, by Year

	2015/2016		2016/2017		2017/2018		2018/2019		2019/2020	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Asian	355	8%	635	11%	665	12%	720	12%	765	13%
Black	25	1%	35	1%	35	1%	35	1%	35	1%
Mixed	45	1%	75	1%	80	1%	90	2%	95	2%
Not disclosed	320	8%	440	7%	410	7%	415	7%	425	7%
Other	20	< 1%	30	1%	30	1%	30	1%	30	1%
Unknown	45	1%	55	1%	50	1%	50	1%	50	1%
White	3495	81%	4745	79%	4345	78%	4445	77%	4530	76%
Total	4300	100%	6010	100%	5610	100%	5785	100%	5935	100%

Table 10: NERC Peer Review College Aggregated Ethnicity Data, by Year

	2015/2016		2016/2017		2017/2018		2018/2019		2019/2020	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Ethnic Minority	20	3%	20	3%	20	3%	25	4%	20	3%
Not disclosed	65	10%	65	10%	65	10%	60	9%	60	9%
Unknown	< 5	< 1%	< 5	< 1%	< 5	< 1%	< 5	< 1%	< 5	< 1%
White	580	87%	560	87%	590	87%	575	87%	575	87%
Total	670	100%	645	100%	680	100%	660	100%	660	100%

Table 11: NERC Peer Review College Ethnicity Data by Category, Aggregated by Year

	2015-2020	
	#	%
Asian	80	3%
Black	0	0%
Mixed	25	1%
Not disclosed	320	10%
Other	0	0%
Unknown	10	< 1%
White	2880	87%
Total	3320	100%

Note: The total number is not a representation of the actual number of individuals who have been a member of the college during this period.