



02 July 2026

Dear [REDACTED]

Freedom of Information request: FOI2026/00237

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on the 17 March in which you requested the following:

Your request:

I would like to request recorded information held by UK Research and Innovation relating to international research collaboration involving UK institutions.

Please provide the following, created between 1 January 2023 and the present:

1. Comparative summaries

Any internal summaries, briefing notes, or reports which compare collaboration with institutions in the United States and other regions.

2. Strategic direction

Any recorded information outlining strategies or priorities to diversify or expand international research partnerships.

3. High-level data or analysis

Any aggregated data, summaries, or reports showing trends in international collaboration by country or region. To assist with compliance, I am not requesting individual grant-level data, not requesting personal data, and content to receive published or internal summary-level material.

Our response

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

1. Comparative summaries

Any internal summaries, briefing notes, or reports which compare collaboration with institutions in the United States and other regions

The information you have requested is available on the following links:

- [UKRI in North America: Impact in a changing world](#)¹
- [Fund for International Collaboration \(FIC\): Final Evaluation 2025](#)²
- [Fund for International Collaboration \(FIC\): interim impact evaluation Jul 2023](#)³

You may also find the following Russell Group report helpful: [Special Research Relationship October 2025.pdf](#)⁴

¹ <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/UKRI-09062023-Digital-9266-North-America-Impact-Assessment-TC-V4.pdf>

² <https://www.ukri.org/publications/fund-for-international-collaboration-fic-final-evaluation-2025/>

³ <https://www.ukri.org/publications/fund-for-international-collaboration-fic-interim-impact-evaluation-jul-2023/>

⁴ https://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2025-10/Special_Research_Relationship_October%202025.pdf

As the information you have requested is published in the public domain, under Section 21 of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), we can confirm that the requested information is already reasonably accessible.

Section 21 is an absolute exemption which means that there is no requirement to conduct a public interest test.

2. Strategic direction

Any recorded information outlining strategies or priorities to diversify or expand international research partnerships.

Please see [UKRI International Strategic Framework](#)⁵ for information on UKRI's strategy and priorities regarding international research partnerships.

We have also provided further information in the Country Prioritisation Data Pack contained in "FOI2026_00237 Annex 1", which is attached.

Please note:

- With regards to slide 4, the timelines have been pushed back due to other Executive Committee priority discussions.
- With regards to slides 6 and 7, the research potential rank is a metric developed and used by UKRI as a comparative indicator to support analysis and identify areas that may merit further consideration within qualitative assessments. It is not and has never been seen as an academically rigorous measure.

Section 41 – Information Provided in Confidence

We have determined that some of the information within the Country Prioritisation Data Pack falls under Section 41 of the FOIA, information provided in confidence. To explain further, some information has been provided to UKRI in confidence by a third party, the Department for Business and Trade (DBT), to support collaborative work and international relations. If the information was released, we believe it would result in an actionable breach of confidentiality.

Section 41 is an absolute exemption and does not require a public interest test.

Section 40 - Personal Information

We have exempted some information, such as employee names, in the attached document under section 40(2) of the FOIA. Disclosing this information 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).

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

Section 43 - Commercial interests

We believe some of the information you have requested, such as publications data provided by a third party, falls under the scope of Section 43(2) of the FOIA. This exemption is used where disclosure would likely result in a person's (an individual, a company the public authority itself or any other legal entities) commercial interests being prejudiced.

This is a qualified exemption, and a test was carried out to determine whether the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs public interest in disclosure.

Public interest in favour of disclosure

- There is a public interest in the disclosure of this information to ensure transparency and openness of a public organisation.
- There is also a public interest in transparency in order to ensure the accountability of public organisations and how they spend public funding.

⁵ <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/UKRI-300922-InternationalStrategicFramework.pdf>

Public interest in favour of withholding the information

- Data sets contain information commercially sensitive to the supplier such as methodologies and business strategies, which if released may harm their ability to compete for future commercial opportunities.
- Data sets contain information that the supplier would not anticipate UKRI releasing into the public domain.
- Releasing information provided in confidence to UKRI is likely to damage the possibility of ongoing relationships with other organisations. Relationships may become untenable if third parties cannot be certain that their commercial information will remain confidential when held by UKRI.
- Breaching the commercial interest may also adversely affect future negotiation opportunities for UKRI. UKRI may be seen as a 'confidentiality' risk if it routinely releases information relating to business arrangements into the public domain, particularly where this is third party information.
- We also considered the impact on UKRI if commercially sensitive information of companies we engage and work closely with were disclosed. We believe it would damage the trust in UKRI and likely impact our ability to carry out our role and to manage our current and future investments.

Taking the above arguments into consideration, we reached the decision that the need for commercial confidentiality outweighs the public interest in disclosure; therefore, the information is exempt from disclosure.

Section 27 – International relations

We consider that some of the requested information, including material relating to the development and decision-making of strategies, falls within the scope of Section 27(1) of the FOIA. Section 27 applies to information whose disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice:

- relations between the United Kingdom and any other State
- relations between the United Kingdom and any international organisation or international court, or
- the interests of the United Kingdom abroad

We consider that disclosure in this case would be likely to prejudice the UK's ability to negotiate effectively in an international context. Release of this information could undermine trust and cooperation between the UK and its international partners, which is essential to maintaining effective working relationships.

Section 27 is a qualified exemption, and a test was carried out to determine whether the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs public interest in disclosure.

Public interest in favour of disclosure

- There is a public interest in the disclosure of this information to ensure transparency and openness of a public organisation.
- There is also a public interest in transparency in order to understand UKRI's role in the UK's international activities.

Public interest in favour of withholding the information

- Disclosure of sensitive or premature information could erode confidence among international partners, discouraging future collaboration. Loss of access to shared data, infrastructure, or funding may result if foreign institutions perceive UKRI as an unreliable or indiscreet partner.
- Research and innovation are closely linked to trade, investment, and industrial strategy. Damaging relationships could reduce investment in UK research and innovation, or limit participation in international consortia. Disclosure may also undermine negotiations for future bilateral or multilateral agreements in science and technology.

- A strong international reputation fosters academic mobility, attracting top researchers and students. If relationships are strained, visa cooperation, exchange programs, and joint degrees may be affected.
- Disclosure that harms long-term relationships may weaken the UK's voice in international forums, reducing its influence on critical global issues like climate change, AI governance, or pandemic preparedness.

After careful consideration, we have concluded that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure. For the reasons set out above, the requested information is withheld under Section 27(1) of the FOIA.

3. High-level data or analysis

Any aggregated data, summaries, or reports showing trends in international collaboration by country or region. To assist with compliance, I am not requesting individual grant-level data, not requesting personal data, and content to receive published or internal summary-level material.

We estimate that the cost of complying with 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.

To gather this information, we have determined that it would take approximately 37 hours to perform this work. Consequently, UKRI is not obliged under Section 12 of the FOIA to process this section of your request.

To advise and assist you, we have provided the data we do hold on the top 20 partner countries in the annex below this response: FOI2026_00237 Annex 2.

The source data for this dataset is available via [Gateway to Research](#)⁶; however, to support and assist with this response, we have provided the relevant information here.

Please note that this dataset presents the top 20 partner countries by both number of awards and total award value for Research Council international awards with start dates between 2023 and 2026. As 2026 is not yet a complete year, this data includes any awards that have commenced or are scheduled to commence during 2026.

For an award to be identified as international, one or more of the following criteria apply:

- An international organisation is involved as a Project Co-Lead
- An international organisation is involved as a Project Partner
- The award is funded through one of the following International Funds:
 - Newton Fund, Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF)
 - Fund for International Collaboration (FIC)
 - International Science Partnerships Fund (ISPF)
 - or other Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding streams

All funding figures represent the total award value and do not indicate the proportion allocated to individual partner countries.

Please also note the following caveats to the information that has been provided:

- The data includes funding from the Research Councils only (AHRC, BBSRC, EPSRC, ESRC, MRC, NERC, STFC) between 2023 and 2026.
- The data covers Research and Innovation grants and fellowships only.
- It excludes funding from Innovate UK and Research England, as the nature of their funding means data held on international activity is not directly comparable to the other research councils.
- UKRI funding data may contain temporary gaps, delays, or inconsistencies due to the ongoing transition to UKRI's new Funding Service. As systems, processes, and data migrations continue to be implemented and refined, some data may be incomplete or not directly comparable across reporting periods.

⁶ <https://gtr.ukri.org/>

Your rights

If you have any queries regarding our response, please do let us know. If you are dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you have the right to ask for an internal review, explaining which elements of this decision you disagree with and why. Internal review requests should be submitted within 40 working days of the date of our response and should be addressed to:

Head of Information Governance

Email: foi@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 procedure](#).⁷

Yours sincerely,


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

⁷ <https://www.ukri.org/who-we-are/contact-us/make-a-complaint/#skipnav-target>

Top 20 Partner Countries by Award Count and Funding Value in Research Council International Awards (2023–2026)

Top 20 Partner Countries by Award Count

Country	2023	2024	2025	2026 ¹	Total
United States	272	380	373	126	1151
Germany	148	157	163	77	545
France	76	89	98	35	298
Netherlands	47	81	89	30	247
Canada	60	75	87	24	246
Switzerland	55	79	79	28	241
Australia	58	55	71	19	203
Italy	38	71	52	22	183
Belgium	39	53	42	15	149
Ireland	41	49	38	12	140
Spain	38	40	40	18	136
Sweden	26	41	40	13	120
Denmark	28	45	33	14	120
Japan	37	31	32	11	111
Norway	25	30	36	12	103
South Africa	26	28	33	9	96
Brazil	23	21	37	9	90
India	25	36	20	7	88
China	25	28	22	9	84
Austria	23	16	26	7	72

¹ Not a complete year

Top 20 Partner Countries Awarded amounts¹ shown in £millions

Country	2023	2024	2025	2026 ²	Total
United States	398	714	652	143	1,907
Germany	184	318	255	112	869
Netherlands	115	202	220	47	584
France	126	179	194	30	528
Switzerland	79	208	169	63	520
Australia	86	69	138	38	331
Italy	48	138	104	39	328
Canada	54	142	95	33	324
Belgium	74	114	86	28	303
Sweden	31	121	98	20	271
Ireland	84	113	55	17	269
Denmark	49	125	66	19	260
Spain	67	79	84	11	242
South Africa	16	84	46	9	155
India	30	49	39	36	154
Singapore	8	90	48	4	151
Norway	27	46	62	12	148
Austria	28	32	76	7	142
Japan	30	49	34	7	120
China	34	46	22	6	108

¹ Funding amounts are total award value, not what was received by the respective country

² Not a complete year