



[REDACTED]

05 November 2021

Dear [REDACTED],

Freedom of Information request: FOI2021/00461

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on the 15 October in which you requested the following:

Your request:

*Please could you provide me with a list of rejected research applications for Myalgic encephalomyelitis and chronic fatigue syndrome from 1956 to the present date.
I would like to know;*

- *Who the application was made by*
- *Study details. Brief aim with a description*
- *Funding figure applied for*
- *Reason the application was rejected*

Our response:

I can confirm UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) hold the information relevant to your request. This comprises information on applications for myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) and chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) research submitted to the Medical Research Council (MRC) and which were unsuccessful dating back to 1996. Information on unsuccessful applications submitted prior to 1996 is not held in an easily accessible form.

Between 1996 and the date of your request (15th October 2021) the MRC received 91 applications for research into ME/CFS, 14 were successful and 77 were unsuccessful.

As research organisations submit research applications in confidence, we are exempting this information from our response under Section 41 of the FOIA, information provided in confidence.

To explain further, applicants submit their proposals in confidence with the understanding that details of their application, including their scores will remain confidential. If released, we believe it would result in an actionable breach of confidence.

As this exemption is absolute there is no requirement to conduct a public interest test.

Although we are exempting a list of unsuccessful research applications in full, we have provided a list showing the number of unsuccessful applications for each year, which also outlines the area of research. This can be found in Annex 1.

You also asked for information on the reasons why the proposals were unsuccessful. The MRC uses a robust, multi-stage scientific peer review process to inform its funding decisions. As part of this, proposals for research funding are considered and assessed for scientific quality by a number of senior academics, or "peers", from the UK and overseas, who work within relevant areas of research.

This external assessment, or "external peer review", provides the basis of "triage" for shortlisting, and eventually, funding decisions made by the relevant MRC Board and Panel experts, which is also comprised of recognised experts in their relevant field. Further information on the peer review process can be found at [here](#)¹.

All applications to the MRC are considered in open competition with other areas of research, which means there are competing demands on funding at any given time. None of the unsuccessful applications were considered to have met the high scientific standard required for funding within the available budgets.

To add some context, as a publicly funded organisation, the MRC aims to fund excellent research in the areas within its remit and there is a high level of competition for MRC funding, such that only applications of the highest scientific quality can be funded. Furthermore, due to budgetary constraints the MRC is often not able to fund all applications that are identified as internationally competitive, the highest rating that can be received. The current overall MRC success rate is 17%.

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: <http://www.ico.gov.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

¹ <https://mrc.ukri.org/funding/peer-review/>

Annex 1

Year	Research area
1996/97	<u>6 applications received, 0 successful, 6 unsuccessful</u>
1996/97	Pathophysiology (e.g., genetics, biomarkers, neurophysiology, neurology, immunology), 3 unsuccessful applications
1996/97	Epidemiology, 1 unsuccessful application
1996/97	Other (e.g., primary care, observational studies), 2 unsuccessful applications
1997/98	<u>2 applications received, 1 successful, 1 unsuccessful</u>
1997/98	Other (e.g., primary care, observational studies), 1 unsuccessful application
1998/99	<u>1 application received, 0 successful, 1 unsuccessful</u>
1998/99	Pathophysiology (e.g., genetics, biomarkers, neurophysiology, neurology, immunology), 1 unsuccessful application
1999/00	<u>1 application received, 0 successful, 1 unsuccessful</u>
1999/00	Pathophysiology (e.g., genetics, biomarkers, neurophysiology, neurology, immunology), 1 unsuccessful application
2000/01	<u>0 applications received</u>
2001/02	<u>0 applications received</u>
2002/03	<u>2 applications received, 2 successful, 0 unsuccessful</u>
2003/04	<u>2 applications received, 0 successful, 2 unsuccessful</u>
2003/04	Epidemiology, 1 unsuccessful application
2003/04	Intervention studies (psychological, physiological, management and treatment), 1 unsuccessful application
2004/05	<u>10 applications received, 0 successful, 10 unsuccessful</u>
2004/05	Pathophysiology (e.g., genetics, biomarkers, neurophysiology, neurology, immunology), 3 unsuccessful applications
2004/05	Epidemiology, 3 unsuccessful applications
2004/05	Intervention studies (psychological, physiological, management and treatment), 4 unsuccessful application

2005/06	<u>17 applications received, 2 successful, 15 unsuccessful</u>
2005/06	Pathophysiology (e.g., genetics, biomarkers, neurophysiology, neurology, immunology), 11 unsuccessful applications
2005/06	Epidemiology, 2 unsuccessful applications
2005/06	Intervention studies (psychological, physiological, management and treatment), 1 unsuccessful application
2005/06	Other (e.g., primary care, observational studies), 1 unsuccessful application
2006/07	<u>3 applications received, 0 successful, 3 unsuccessful</u>
2006/07	Pathophysiology (e.g., genetics, biomarkers, neurophysiology, neurology, immunology), 2 unsuccessful applications
2006/07	Epidemiology, 1 unsuccessful application
2007/08	<u>5 applications received, 1 successful, 4 unsuccessful</u>
2007/08	Pathophysiology (e.g., genetics, biomarkers, neurophysiology, neurology, immunology), 2 unsuccessful applications
2007/08	Epidemiology, 1 unsuccessful application
2007/08	Intervention studies (psychological, physiological, management and treatment), 1 unsuccessful application
2008/09	<u>4 applications received, 0 successful, 4 unsuccessful</u>
2008/09	Pathophysiology (e.g., genetics, biomarkers, neurophysiology, neurology, immunology), 1 unsuccessful application
2008/09	Epidemiology, 2 unsuccessful applications
2008/09	Other (e.g., primary care, observational studies), 1 unsuccessful application
2009/10	<u>1 application received, 0 successful, 1 unsuccessful</u>
2009/10	Epidemiology, 1 unsuccessful application
2010/11	<u>3 applications received, 0 successful, 3 unsuccessful</u>
2010/11	Pathophysiology (e.g., genetics, biomarkers, neurophysiology, neurology, immunology), 2 unsuccessful applications
2010/11	Epidemiology, 1 unsuccessful application
2011/12	<u>10 applications received, 5 successful, 5 unsuccessful</u>
2011/12	Pathophysiology (e.g., genetics, biomarkers, neurophysiology, neurology, immunology), 5 unsuccessful applications

2012/13	<u>2 applications received, 1 successful, 1 unsuccessful</u>
2012/13	Epidemiology, 1 unsuccessful application
2013/14	<u>4 applications received, 0 successful, 4 unsuccessful</u>
2013/14	Pathophysiology (e.g., genetics, biomarkers, neurophysiology, neurology, immunology), 4 unsuccessful applications
2014/15	<u>1 application received, 0 successful, 1 unsuccessful</u>
2014/15	Pathophysiology (e.g., genetics, biomarkers, neurophysiology, neurology, immunology), 1 unsuccessful application
2015/16	<u>3 applications received, 1 successful, 2 unsuccessful</u>
2015/16	Pathophysiology (e.g., genetics, biomarkers, neurophysiology, neurology, immunology), 2 unsuccessful applications
2016/17	<u>1 application received, 0 successful, 1 unsuccessful</u>
2016/17	Epidemiology, 1 unsuccessful application
2017/18	<u>3 applications received, 0 successful, 3 unsuccessful</u>
2017/18	Pathophysiology (e.g., genetics, biomarkers, neurophysiology, neurology, immunology), 2 unsuccessful applications
2017/18	Intervention studies (psychological, physiological, management and treatment), 1 unsuccessful application
2018/19	<u>1 application received, 0 successful, 1 unsuccessful</u>
2018/19	Intervention studies (psychological, physiological, management and treatment), 1 unsuccessful application
2019/20	<u>2 applications received, 0 successful, 2 unsuccessful</u>
2019/20	Pathophysiology (e.g., genetics, biomarkers, neurophysiology, neurology, immunology), 1 unsuccessful application
2019/20	Epidemiology, 1 unsuccessful application
2020/21	<u>4 applications received, 1 successful, 3 unsuccessful</u>
2020/21	Pathophysiology (e.g., genetics, biomarkers, neurophysiology, neurology, immunology), 2 unsuccessful applications
2020/21	Intervention studies (psychological, physiological, management and treatment), 1 unsuccessful application
2021/22 (to 15/10/21)	<u>3 applications received, 0 successful, 3 unsuccessful application</u>
2021/22 (to 15/10/21)	Pathophysiology (e.g. genetics, biomarkers, neurophysiology, neurology, immunology), 3 unsuccessful applications