



[REDACTED]

1 August 2024

Dear [REDACTED],

**Freedom of Information request: FOI2024/00203**

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on the 8 March in which you requested the following:

**Your request:**

*Please can I request copies of the question and summary documents from the UKRI Wednesday webinars that have taken place so far in 2024.*

**Our response:**

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

The UKRI Wednesday Webinar is an internal, organisational-wide gathering of UKRI employees. These all-staff webinars take place fortnightly, and enable UKRI's Chief Executive Officer, Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser and other senior colleagues, to provide updates on current priorities from across the organisation, and to listen and respond to questions staff may have.

We have interpreted your request to be for copies of the Question and Answer (Q&A) Summary documents that are produced following each webinar, and which record all questions raised relating to the respective webinar. Due to the significant number of questions, the summaries are also used to respond to questions that were not answered live during the session itself.

The Q&A element of the webinars provide an important forum in which staff can raise questions, comments and queries anonymously. Leadership greatly value receiving this reliable insight into the questions, concerns and reactions of staff and as a mechanism to receive real time feedback on a wide range of topics.

There were 5 webinars, and therefore 5 Q&A Summary documents within the scope of your request. These took place on 10 January, 24 January, 7 February, 21 February and 6 March 2024. Redacted copies of each are attached. The average attendance of these webinars was 1,546 employees. Given that UKRI has over 8,000 staff, the majority of whom are based in our institutes and national laboratories, this equates to around 17% of the employee base. Questions raised at the Wednesday Webinars contain the personal views and opinions of individual staff members and can be based on conjecture, misinformation, assumption or rumour. They are not representative of UKRI's stance and position.

Most of the questions asked were done so anonymously and therefore we hold no information as to who has asked the question(s) and where they are based within the organisation.

I would also apologise for the time that it has taken to respond to this request. Given the substantial volume of questions involved combined with the high likelihood that at least some would be subject to an exemption under the FOIA, it has taken UKRI a very significant amount of time to review and prepare the information for disclosure. This potentially exempt information was scattered throughout these documents, and so could not be straightforwardly isolated without a manual review of all the document contents.

Having done so, we consider some of the information contained within these documents, relating to a small group of topics, to fall under Section 36(2)(c) of the FOIA, where disclosure would otherwise prejudice, or would be likely otherwise to prejudice, the effective conduct of public affairs.

## **Section 36 – Prejudice to effective conduct of public affairs**

For Section 36(2)(c), the opinion of UKRI's Chief Executive Officer, as UKRI's Qualified Person, was sought on engaging this exemption and the level of prejudice. As this is a qualified exemption, we were then required to consider the public interest both in favour of, and against, releasing the information.

### **Outcome of consideration of Section 36 – Prejudice to the effective conduct of public affairs**

As UKRI's Qualified Person, Professor Leyser confirmed her opinion that Section 36(2)(c) of the FOIA would be engaged as disclosure would be likely otherwise to prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs.

This relates to questions and answers on new and ongoing processes that are still under internal development by UKRI. In the case of these webinars this covers discussions of corporate change projects that are still being implemented, as referenced in [UKRI's Corporate Plan 2022-2025](#)<sup>1</sup> and [2023-2024 update](#)<sup>2</sup>.

### **The Public Interest Test**

As Section 36 is a qualified exemption, a test was required to determine whether the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs public interest in disclosure. The public interest test was conducted by a senior manager, who was not directly involved in the discussions that were the subject of your request.

#### **Public interest in favour of disclosure**

- Disclosure of this information may increase transparency and public understanding about UKRI and the issues raised by its staff.

#### **Public interest in favour of withholding the information**

- It is in the public interest for UKRI to operate as effectively and efficiently as possible and ensure that public funds are used efficiently and responsibly, maximising the value generated for the public. Maintaining an open, free and frank dialogue between staff and senior leadership relating to ongoing projects enables and empowers UKRI to manage resources efficiently and adapt to changing circumstances, in turn enabling UKRI to fulfil its objectives and serve the public effectively over time.
- Employees, partners, and other stakeholders may be adversely affected by premature disclosure of information, which could lead to uncertainty, disruption, or negative impacts to ongoing programmes, diminishing UKRI's ability to deliver an effective public service.
- Sharing incomplete or preliminary information relating to ongoing and developing processes can lead to misunderstandings or misinformation, which may mislead stakeholders and the public, causing unnecessary concern or false expectations.
- When a system is being developed using an agile methodology (being used while it is being developed), it relies on openness between users of the system, both internal and external, and the design team. If feedback raised internally is made public, this may have the unintended effect of influencing the feedback and openness of external users, or impact the external user's confidence in the system, both of which are vital parts of this methodology.
- When discussing candid and difficult questions relating to an ongoing programme or project, staff may be less likely to raise or address them with the knowledge that their response is effectively a public statement.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/UKRI-190822-CorporatePlan2022to2025.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/UKRI-121023-CorporatePlan20232024Update.pdf>

This could reduce the openness and transparency between staff and senior leaders, hindering the effective operation of the organisation.

Overall, UKRI considers that on this occasion the public interest is best served by maintaining the Section 36 exemption, and therefore the relevant information has been withheld from disclosure.

We are also exempting names, positions and contact details, where they do not relate to the UKRI CEO or Chair, 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.

Please note, the attached Q&A documents are presented as held and their original formatting has not been altered. This means that there may be some minor formatting errors, including:

- The second half of the answer to Q66 in the 10 January document has been published against the wrong question. It is a duplicate of the answer to Q74.
- CF18OCT223 being hyperlinked to an unrelated document in the 10 January and 24 January documents.
- In the 7 February, 21 February and 6 March documents, the unredacted part of entry CF24JAN6 is not part of the original question. It was unintentionally moved from CF18OCT16 in error.
- The final two new questions (after Q101) in the 21 February document have not been numbered, and remain without numbers in the 6 March document.
- To avoid any confusion, we have redacted hyperlinks that lead to internal articles and documents that are inaccessible to external users.

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 within the next 40 working days:

Head of Information Governance

Email: [foi@ukri.org](mailto: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](http://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](#)<sup>3</sup>.

Yours sincerely,

  
Information Governance  
Information Rights Team  
UK Research and Innovation  
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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/who-we-are/contact-us/make-a-complaint/#skipnav-target>