



[REDACTED]

17 February 2022

Dear [REDACTED],

Freedom of Information request: FOI2022/00035

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on the 1 February in which you requested the following:

Your request:

For Innovate UK's Smart Grants Competition, please can you provide:

- 1. Blank copies of the marking/scoring criteria sheets used by assessors, including the most recently closed round and next closing round.*
- 2. Marking/scoring criteria guidance literature provided to the assessors, including the most recently closed round and next closing round.*

For clarity, a link for the recently closed round: <https://apply-for-innovation-funding.service.gov.uk/competition/1035/overview>

Next closing round: <https://apply-for-innovation-funding.service.gov.uk/competition/1087/overview>

A precedent has been set in providing this information through a previous FOI (Ref:2020/00057) as recorded on your website. In addition, we have previously received a copy specifically for the Smart Grants competition through an FOI request to Innovate UK.

I believe that it is in the public interest to share information on how decisions are made by a publicly funded non-departmental public body. Additionally, I believe Innovate UK should be able to publicly evidence that a due process was followed in making this decision and considering the impact on equality, diversity and inclusion for applicants applying for grant funding.

Our response

I can confirm UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) hold information relevant to your request.

The information in relation to part 1 of your request, the marking/scoring criteria sheets used by assessors for the recently closed round and next closing round for Innovate UK's SMART grants competition, and part 2 of your request for the guidance literature provided to assessors has been withheld under Section 43(2) commercial prejudice 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.

Section 43(2) is a qualified exemption, meaning that a test was carried out to determine whether the public interest in disclosure outweighs the requirement for commercial confidentiality.

Public interest in favour of disclosure

- There is a general 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.
- It would be in the public interest to view the guidance literature as public monies are used to fund this activity. As this is the case it is important that the guidance has a positive impact and is beneficial to all parties involved. Seeing copies of the guidance enables the public to independently assess that Innovate UK is consistent and compliant with their own assessor guidance and criteria.

Public interest in favour of withholding the information

- The assessor marking/scoring criteria relates directly to the guidance provided to applicants, therefore we would expect that if an applicant addresses the question as detailed in the guidance then they would be addressing the assessment marking/scoring criteria. As such, the assessor marking/scoring criteria and the assessor guidance literature is not publicly available or routinely provided to all applicants. Releasing this information could give an unfair advantage to any future applicants with access to these documents. To explain further, the marking/scoring criteria and guidance literature will be utilised for future competitions and we therefore believe that releasing the guidance would negatively affect the commercial interests of all applicants who do not have access to this information and give those applicants with access an unfair advantage in future competitions. In our view, we do not consider the release of such information would enable fair competition between the organisations that apply.
- As the scoring matrix and guidance is intended to be used in future competitions, the unfair advantage that would be likely to occur from disclosure in this way would in turn affect the integrity of Innovate UK competitions. This would impact on the commercial interests of Innovate UK and our reliance on running a fair and transparent competition process.
- If the process is undermined, it is likely to harm the trust in the Innovate UK application process. This would adversely affect the application processes for future calls and could damage the reputation and commercial interests of Innovate UK and future investments.
- We follow the government guidance on [managing public money](#)¹. Standards expected of all public services include integrity, reliability, spending money in the public interest and achieving value for money. Our current thorough process ensures that only the best projects receive public monies. Releasing this information could jeopardize the fair and transparent competition process and undermine our function to fund the best projects. In turn, undermining this process would go against our responsibilities to manage our use of public funds.

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.

As part of our duty to advise and assist under the FOIA we can confirm that the scoring/marking criteria matrix for the Innovation Funding Service has been previously provided in response to a Freedom of information request and is available in the public domain on [whatdotheyknow.com](#)². Although this scoring matrix is no longer in use by Innovate UK you may find it of interest. As explained above the current scoring matrix falls under the exemption at section 43(2) however, we are considering whether we may publish it in the future.

Further in relation to your statement that '*Innovate UK should be able to publicly evidence that a due process was followed in making this decision*', for the reasons explained above we are not able to disclose the scoring matrix and guidance document, however information on the entire application and assessment process is publicly available on the [competition website](#)³.

Regarding your statement about the *impact on equality, diversity and inclusion for applicants applying for grant funding*, Innovate UK is committed to assessing and evaluating equality, diversity and inclusion impacts and currently collects personal data from lead applicants, including age, gender, disability, and ethnicity. In the spring, Innovate UK will be updating the data we collect to include additional categories.

¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/742188/Managing_Public_Money_MPM_2018.pdf

² https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/innovateuk_assessor_mark_scheme#outgoing-854904

³ <https://apply-for-innovation-funding.service.gov.uk/competition/1087/overview>

Innovate UK will use the personal data collected to:

- identify any under-represented groups, investigate the reasons for this and take appropriate and effective steps to improve representation.
- publish aggregated and anonymised data as part of our commitment to transparency and supporting access and inclusion.

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,


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