



[REDACTED]

22 September 2021

Dear [REDACTED],

Freedom of Information request: FOI2021/00376

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on the 16 August in which you requested the following:

Your request:

The previous data [provided in FOI2020/00242] show the extent of under-representation of ethnic minority committee members in research councils. For committee members, participation appears to entirely absent in a large fraction of committee meetings. I would like to understand the factors that affect participation (see part 1 below).

It is also important to acknowledge that individual actions, policies and practices are likely to impact different ethnicities differently, as is the case of many other parts of society. It is therefore important to understand the numbers associated with particular ethnicities. This is why in the previous FOI I asked "If possible, please provide ethnicity data for each ethnic category (for example, Black, Asian or White colleagues)". I note that on that occasion it was not provided, and recognise that this was probably to protect the identities of individuals. In part 2 below, I would like to request data in a form that is specific to ethnic categories, and at the same time in a format that protects personal information and individuality. Aggregating data across time is an effective research strategy and should allow you to protect anonymity.

With this in mind, please could you provide the following data? I make the request in two parts below.

Part 1:

Any written guidance issued to UKRI staff about the process of selecting and inviting individuals in the FOI[2020/00242] to committee meetings.

The median number of invitations to committee meetings issued to individuals over the period in the last FOI. Note that this collapses across years and summarises data across individuals, so probably eliminates the risk of identifying particular individuals. Therefore, please use the following ethnic categories at minimum (Asian, Black, Mixed race, White and uncategorised). For comparability, please use data for the same individuals as those contributing in the previous data release.

Part 2:

Please look again at the data used to generate the previous FOI release, and this time provide data of the same type pertaining to specific ethnic categories (at minimum, Asian, Black, Mixed race, White and uncategorised). Please aggregate data across the five years in order to protect individual identities and confidentiality.

Our response:

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

We have included a copy of FOI2021/00242 for your reference, due to your request to use the same data for this response.

As was noted in FOI2021/00242, UKRI was formed in 2018 and brings together the seven Research Councils, Innovate UK and Research England. Prior to this, each Research Council acted as an independent body, therefore our ability to respond to requests of this kind is dependent on the nature of the record keeping within individual Research Councils.

The data that was provided in response to FOI2020/00242 consisted of information from AHRC, BBSRC, ESRC, EPSRC, MRC, NERC and the UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship Scheme. This data that was collated differed from Council to Council depending upon that individual Council's approach to compiling decision-making committees. The different approaches taken by each Council is outlined below.

Information relating to decision-making committees was also compiled on a per-meeting basis, which means that if the same member sat on more than one committee meeting per year their data was included for each meeting. For the purposes of this response, the data included covers five financial years, beginning 1 April 2015 and ending 31 March 2020 and for reference also includes the total of the number of panel meetings that took place during that period.

When responding to your request, consideration was given to protecting the personal information and confidentiality of individuals. Individuals in a small group are also considered to be identifiable. It is standard statistical reporting to suppress the disclosure of personal data in these situations.

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

Ethnicity is a protected characteristic and sensitive personal data. Information held on this is only available where an individual has opted to provide confidential diversity monitoring information. Due to the individual nature of each Research Council this information has not been recorded in a uniform manner from Council to Council, therefore for the purposes of providing a consistent response the following criteria was 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

Further information on the breakdown of the ethnicity categories can be found on page 5 of the [UKRI Detailed ethnicity analysis of funding applicants and awardees](https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/UKRI-15122020-DetailedEthnicityAnalysisOfFundingApplicantsAndAwardees2014-15to2018-19.pdf)¹.

In answering this request, some information has been withheld under section 40(2) where it relates to fewer than five members in a category as defined above, individual's personal details or contact information.

We consider that to disclose information relating to small numbers of individuals, individual's personal details or contact 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) of lawfulness, fairness and transparency.

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

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,

¹ <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/UKRI-15122020-DetailedEthnicityAnalysisOfFundingApplicantsAndAwardees2014-15to2018-19.pdf>

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 would be included.

Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC)

The AHRC convenes non-standing panels, usually from the membership of its Peer Review College. Panels meet ad-hoc according to the requirements of the scheme for which they provide final grades and ranks.

Panel sizes vary, depending upon the relative number of applications being discussed and are selected based upon experience and expertise, balancing the number of panellists who have previously sat on an AHRC panel against those who have not, ensuring there will only be one panel member from any one institution and ensuring a representative spread of panellists in any given year, considering protected characteristics (gender, ethnicity and disability) and geographical location across the UK. Further details can be found in the attached documents “[AHRC] Panel Building Training”, “[AHRC] Panel Building – An Introduction” and “[AHRC] Pre-Panel Process” as well as Section 6 of the [AHRC Peer Review College Handbook](#)². Please note that the document “[AHRC] Panel Building – An Introduction” is currently being edited and comments in bold are internal comments to be addressed in the update, not items that are included in the training session.

The median number of invitations to Peer Review Panel meetings that have been issued to individuals included in the AHRC data from FOI2020/00242 can be found below:

	Median Invites		
	Overall	On College	Off College
Asian	1	2	1
Black	1	0	1
Mixed	1	1.5	1
Not disclosed	1	2	1
Other	0	0	0
Unknown	1	3.5	1
White	1	1	1

For context this data has also been presented with a split of members of the AHRC Peer Review College (On College) and those who are not (Off College).

The data used for the AHRC Peer Review Panels in FOI2021/00242 has been aggregated across five years below:

	2015-2020	
	No.	%
Asian	50	5%
Black	5	1%
Mixed	10	1%
Not disclosed	125	13%
Other	0	0%
Unknown	45	5%
White	740	76%
Total	975	100%
# of Panel Meetings	150	

² <https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/guides/peer-review-handbook/>

Biotechnology & Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)

The BBSRC has five committees that oversee peer review processes and assessment of grant applications. Each Research Committee has a core membership that is complemented by additional members drawn from a pool of experts. This ensures the appropriate expertise is available to assess the applications received. Core and pool members bring important assessment skills and expertise to BBSRC and gain valuable insights into how grants are assessed.

Committee sizes vary, depending upon the number of applications being reviewed and are selected based upon expertise, balancing the number of members with no previous experience of attending meetings against those who have, under- and over-usage of pool members, trying to balance the gender and geographical location of members and aiming not to duplicate representation from a single research organisation with the same expertise. Further details can be found in the attached document "[BBSRC] Committee Building Overview".

Information is not held on the number of invitations to Research Committee meetings that have been issued to individuals included in the BBSRC data from FOI2020/00242. Processes around this are currently being reviewed as part of ongoing project work into the use of the pool of experts.

The data used for the BBSRC Research Committees in FOI2021/00242 has been aggregated across five years below:

	2015-2020	
	No.	%
Asian	60	4%
Black	0	0%
Mixed	10	1%
Not disclosed	90	6%
Other	55	4%
Unknown	35	2%
White	1275	84%
Total	1525	100%
# of Panel Meetings	79	

Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC)

The ESRC funding meetings comprise both ad-hoc groups convened to assess proposals submitted in response to specific calls and standing Grant Assessment Panels (GAPs) which assess proposals for three key responsive mode schemes: Research Grants, New Investigator Grants and the Secondary Data Analysis Initiative. Both meeting types are included in this data. Some individuals will have attended both meeting types in a given year.

Information on the GAPs can be found [here](https://esrc.ukri.org/about-us/governance-and-structure/esrc-council/responsive-mode-grant-assessment-process/)³ and criteria that are used to assess and appoint members is listed in the [GAP Academic Member specifications](https://esrc.ukri.org/files/about-us/governance-and-structure/gap-academic-member-specification-2021/)⁴. When it comes to the selection of ad-hoc assessment panels, there is no formal ESRC requirement for a specific balance of protected characteristics, but ESRC has a specific guidance document that is used to help staff ensure EDI principles are applied to the selection of committee and panel members within the constraints of ensuring that a panel has the necessary expertise. Please see attached document "[ESRC] EDI Guidelines for ESRC Panels".

Information is not held on the number of invitations to the ESRC Funding Decisions Meetings that have been issued to individuals included in the ESRC data from FOI2020/00242.

The data used for the ESRC Funding Decision Meetings in FOI2021/00242 has been aggregated across five years below:

³ <https://esrc.ukri.org/about-us/governance-and-structure/esrc-council/responsive-mode-grant-assessment-process/>

⁴ <https://esrc.ukri.org/files/about-us/governance-and-structure/gap-academic-member-specification-2021/>

	2015-2020	
	No.	%
Asian	125	4%
Black	60	2%
Mixed	45	2%
Not disclosed	235	8%
Other	0	0%
Unknown	330	12%
White	2040	72%
Total	2835	100%
# of Panel Meetings	163	

Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)

The EPSRC hold specially convened prioritisation panels with changing membership for each panel. The panels judge the relative quality of research proposals competing for funding and are responsible for placing the proposals before it in a funding priority order. From this list, the final decision is made on funding. Further information on the EPSRC's peer review panels can be found at <https://epsrc.ukri.org/funding/assessmentprocess/panels/>.

Panel members are usually chosen from the EPSRC Peer Review College and are selected for their expertise in a general field. Membership will come from universities, industry and other special interest organisations and is tailored to the types of applications at the meeting. The membership balance of the panel considers the experience that members have with the process, the proportion of industrialists on the panel in relation to the types of applications and must be of mixed gender. Further details can be found in the attached documents "[EPSRC] Prepare and Convene a Meeting" (page 3, Optimum environment for panel members; pages 5-7, Selecting Meeting Attendees; page 25, Annex 1 - Competencies used to identify Panel members and Chairs) and "[EPSRC] Interview Meeting Procedures" (page 6, Interview Panel Participants).

Information is not held on the number of invitations to the EPSRC Peer Review Panel meetings that have been issued to individuals included in the EPSRC data from FOI2020/00242.

The data used for the EPSRC Peer Review Panels in FOI2021/00242 has been aggregated across five years below:

	2015-2020	
	No.	%
Asian	355	7%
Black	30	1%
Mixed	55	1%
Not disclosed	400	8%
Other	20	< 1%
Unknown	430	9%
White	3510	73%
Total	4800	100%
# of Panel Meetings	604	

Medical Research Council (MRC)

The MRC research boards and panels are comprised of a standing group of members which hold their own research budgets and review and manage scientific activity within their specialist areas. They are responsible for recommending the award of MRC research grants and fellowships.

Each board or panel meets between one to three times per year and all members are invited to attend all meetings for their respective panel regardless of whether they have an application being considered. As a result of this approach the MRC holds no written guidance on the process of selection and inviting individuals to committee meetings. It is also important to note that not all meetings are attended by all members, but members sign an agreement that includes a commitment to attend and actively participate in meetings.

The data used for the MRC Research Boards and Panels in FOI2021/00242 has been aggregated across five years below:

	2015-2020	
	No.	%
Asian	65	6%
Black	5	1%
Mixed	20	2%
Not disclosed	75	8%
Other	5	1%
Unknown	0	0%
White	810	82%
Total	980	100%
# of Panel Meetings	132	

Natural Environment Research Council (NERC)

The NERC convenes non-standing panels from the membership of its Peer Review College and other UK and International experts as required. Panels meet ad hoc according to the requirements of the scheme for which they are assessing. Further information on the NERC's assessment process can be found at <https://nerc.ukri.org/funding/application/assessment/>⁵ and information on the Peer Review College found at <https://nerc.ukri.org/funding/application/peerreview/>⁶.

Panels vary in size depending upon the number of proposals being considered and the breadth of expertise required to cover them. Selection takes into account the science and institutions covered by proposals, the expertise of the members and demand from other meetings. A gender balance and spread of representation from different Research Organisations is also considered, with ideally no more than two people from the same organisation included on a panel and if possible including a member who is a Principle or Co-Investigator on a proposal being discussed at the meeting is also avoided. Further details can be found in the attached documents "[NERC] Guidance for setting up and running a panel meeting" and "[NERC] Panel Meeting Best Practice".

Information is not held on the number of invitations to Peer Review Panel meetings that have been issued to individuals included in the NERC data from FOI2020/00242. For panel meetings from February 2021 this data has begun to be collected in a format that can be interrogated going forward.

The data used for the NERC Peer Review Panels in FOI2021/00242 has been aggregated across five years below:

⁵ <https://nerc.ukri.org/funding/application/assessment/>

⁶ <https://nerc.ukri.org/funding/application/peerreview/>

	2015-2020	
	No.	%
Asian	95	3%
Black	10	< 1%
Mixed	30	1%
Not disclosed	255	9%
Other	0	0%
Unknown	400	14%
White	2140	73%
Total	2930	100%
# of Panel Meetings	209	

UK Research and Innovation Future Leaders Fellowship Scheme (Cross-Council)

The Future Leaders Fellowships (FLF) is a cross-UKRI scheme which began in 2018. Assessment takes place using a two-stage process. Proposals are first assessed via peer review, with subsequent Panel meetings held to shortlist then interview candidates. Further details about the review process can be found in the [UKRI FLF Assessment Process Overview](#)⁷ and [FLF guidance page](#)⁸.

The FLF works with the different councils to form assessment panels on an ad-hoc basis, asking councils to recommend panel members who meet the experience and expertise needs of the panel, who are then invited to attend. Invitations are issued to the majority of those recommended based upon the overall makeup of the panel. The FLF team ask councils to consider EDI and the diversity of their research and innovation communities, along with a broad range of other factors, including, but not limited to, the need to include business-based panel members and representation from a range of different organisations and geographical locations.

Guidance is given to councils as part of a panel member selection spreadsheet which is used to gather recommendations and is supported through weekly meetings with council based FLF leads where the requirements of panels are discussed. Please see the attached document "[\[FLF\] Instructions for Councils_Redacted](#)".

Information is not held on the number of invitations to the FLF Peer Review Panel meetings that have been issued to individuals included in the UKRI FLF data from FOI2020/00242.

The data used for the FLF Peer Review Panels in FOI2020/00242 cannot be aggregated across the five years as requested, due to the FLF scheme beginning in 2018, however below is the aggregated data covering financial years 2018/2019 and 2019/2020:

	2018-2020	
	No.	%
Asian	35	5%
Black	< 5	--
Mixed	10	1%
Not disclosed	40	5%
Other	< 5	--
Unknown	45	6%
White	650	83%
Total	780	100%
# of Panel Meetings	8	

⁷ <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/MRC-080321-OverviewOfTheAssessmentProcessForFLF.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.ukri.org/our-work/developing-people-and-skills/future-leaders-fellowships/future-leaders-fellowships-guidance/expert-review/>

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

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