UK Research and Innovation

[redacted]

6 October 2026

Dear [redacted]

Freedom of Information request: FOI2026/00605

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

Your request:

I would like to request the following information regarding UKRI's use of Distributed Peer Review (DPR).

1. Please provide a list of all UKRI funding opportunities that have used Distributed Peer Review.
2. For each competition, please provide the average score of funded applications, average number of applications assigned to each reviewer.
3. How are reviewers matched to applications?
4. Please provide reviewer training materials, scoring guidance, reviewer handbooks and assessment criteria used in DPR competitions.
5. Please provide any documents outlining planned future use or expansion of Distributed Peer Review across UKRI funding opportunities. Which competitions will be deploying this approach?

Our response

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

1. Please provide a list of all UKRI funding opportunities that have used Distributed Peer Review.
4. Please provide reviewer training materials, scoring guidance, reviewer handbooks and assessment criteria used in DPR competitions.

For questions 1 and 4, please see the list of current or completed UKRI Distributed Peer Review (DPR) opportunities and relevant guidance in the table below this response: **FOI2026/00605 Annex 1**.

2. For each competition, please provide the average score of funded applications, average number of applications assigned to each reviewer.

UKRI does not hold the requested information. The average score of funded applications and the average number of applications assigned to each reviewer are not routinely recorded, collated, or analysed for Distributed Peer Review (DPR) funding opportunities. Whilst UKRI may hold information relating to individual applications and reviewers, it does not hold the requested averages as recorded information.

To provide the requested information, UKRI would need to extract and analyse underlying data and calculate new aggregate figures. This would require the creation of new information rather than the disclosure of recorded information already held. Under the FOIA, public authorities are not required to create information in order to answer a request.

The UK Metascience Unit intends to evaluate UKRI's DPR trials in 2027 and plans to publish the findings. However, this future work does not constitute information held for the purposes of this request.

Individual research councils publish information on funding outcomes for completed opportunities. The relevant funding outcome publications are available at:

ESRC panel outcomes and membership – UKRI[1]
Committee and panel outcomes – BBSRC – UKRI[2]
Board and panel outcomes – STFC – UKRI[3]

Please note that research councils do not publish funding outcomes in a standardised format. In addition, scoring methodologies vary between funding opportunities and, in some cases, scores are converted to a standardised scale for reporting purposes.

Guidance on the expected number of applications assigned to reviewers for individual funding opportunities is contained within the DPR Rules and Guidelines documents, the link to these document are provided in Annex 1. However, UKRI does not hold information on the actual average number of applications assigned to each reviewer.

3. How are reviewers matched to applications?

Information on how reviewers are matched to applications in DPR funding opportunities are provided in Annex 1 and the links provided below. Algorithms are tailored to the nature of individual funding opportunities.

For an example of how the UK Metascience Unit matches reviewers to applications using bespoke algorithms, please see the open-source code available at:

CillianUKRI/DPR_MetaRoundTwo: The DPR allocation programme for the Metascience Grants Round Two opportunity[4]

Further information is available in UK Metascience Unit: A Year in Metascience.[5]

The methodology may vary depending on the design and requirements of individual funding opportunities.

5. Please provide any documents outlining planned future use or expansion of Distributed Peer Review across UKRI funding opportunities. Which competitions will be deploying this approach?

On 10 September 2026, UKRI published information regarding its intention to increase the use of Distributed Peer Review for suitable high-volume funding opportunities across UKRI. For more information, please see: UKRI modernises grant assessment for the age of AI – UKRI.[6]

This followed the Government's commitment in the Autumn Budget 2025 to "expand distributed peer review across each of UKRI's research councils". Please see: Budget 2025 (HTML) - GOV.UK.[7]

UKRI does not currently hold information identifying specific future funding opportunities that will deploy Distributed Peer Review.

[1] https://www.ukri.org/publications/esrc-funding-decisions/
[2] https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/what-we-have-funded/bbsrc/committee-and-panel-outcomes/
[3] https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/what-we-have-funded/stfc/board-and-panel-outcomes/
[4] https://github.com/CillianUKRI/DPR_MetaRoundTwo?tab=readme-ov-file
[5] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/685a83af72588f418862071d/a-year-in-metascience-2025.pdf
[6] https://www.ukri.org/news/ukri-modernises-grant-assessment-for-the-age-of-ai/
[7] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/budget-2025-document/budget-2025-html

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[8].

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]
Information Governance
Information Rights Team
UK Research and Innovation
foi@ukri.org | dataprotection@ukri.org

[8] https://www.ukri.org/who-we-are/contact-us/make-a-complaint/#skipnav-target

FOI2026/00605 Annex 1

Table 1: List of Current or Completed UKRI DPR Opportunities and Relevant Guidance

Council	Opportunity name and link to UKRI Funding Finder	Link to DPR Rules and Guidelines* (from the 'Additional Information' section of each opportunity)
AHRC	Large grants outline stage AHRC large grants: outline stage – UKRI[9]	Distributed Peer Review guidance for AHRC Large Grants (PDF, 236KB)[10]
BBSRC	**Pioneer Awards** BBSRC Pioneer Awards 2025 to 26: bioscience discovery research – UKRI[11]	DPR Rules and Guidelines (PDF, 204KB)[12]
EPSRC	Sustainable AI Transformative sustainable AI technologies – UKRI[13]	Distributed Peer Review Rules and Guidelines (PDF, 271KB)[14]
	Explainable AI Next generation artificial intelligence (AI): explainable AI – UKRI[15]	DPR Rules and Guidelines (PDF, 259KB)[16]
	Enabling AI adoption across science and engineering UKRI Enabling AI adoption across science and engineering – UKRI[17]	EPSRC-160926-DPR-Guidelines.pdf[18]
ESRC	**Metascience AI ECR Fellowships** UKRI Metascience AI early career fellowships – UKRI[19]	Distributed peer review rules and guidelines (PDF, 167KB)[20]
	Metascience grants round 2 Metascience research grants: round two – UKRI[21]	DPR Rules and guidelines (PDF, 175KB)[22]
	Connect awards ESRC Connect Awards (pilot) – UKRI[23]	DPR rules and guidelines (PDF, 228KB)[24]

[9] https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/ahrc-large-grants-outline-stage/
[10] https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/AHRC-110626-DistributedPeerReviewGuidance-AHRCLargeGrants.pdf
[11] https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/bbsrc-pioneer-awards-2025-to-26-bioscience-discovery-research/
[12] https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/BBSRC-180925-DPR-Guidanceforapplicants.pdf
[13] https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/transformative-sustainable-ai-technologies/
[14] https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/UKRI-180826-DPRGuidelines-TransformativeSustainableAITechnologies.pdf
[15] https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/next-generation-artificial-intelligence-ai-explainable-ai/
[16] https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/UKRI-050826-DPR-Guidelines-NextGenerationArtificialIntelligence-ExplainableAI.pdf
[17] https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/ukri-enabling-ai-adoption-across-science-and-engineering/
[18] https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/EPSRC-160926-DPR-Guidelines.pdf
[19] https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/ukri-metascience-ai-early-career-fellowships/
[20] https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/ESRC-120225-Funding-Opp-UKRIMetascienceAIEarlyCareerFellowships-DPRRulesAndGuidelines.pdf
[21] https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/metascience-research-grants-round-2/
[22] https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/ESRC-300126-DPR-Rules-and-Guidelines-_UKRI-Metascience-research-grants-round-2-1.pdf
[23] https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/esrc-connect-awards-pilot/
[24] https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/ESRC-240326-DPR-Rules-and-Guidelines-_Connect-Pilot.pdf

Council	Opportunity name and link to UKRI Funding Finder	Link to DPR Rules and Guidelines* (from the 'Additional Information' section of each opportunity)
NERC	RESET Novel ecosystems Resilient economy and security through ecosystem transitions grants – UKRI[25]	Distributed Peer Review rules and guidance (PFD, 263KB)[26]
	Exploring the Frontiers Exploring the frontiers of environmental research 2026 – UKRI[27]	Exploring the Frontiers 2026 – DPR Guidance (PDF, 186 KB)[28]
STFC	**Innovator Route** Isambard-AI and Dawn AIRR supercomputers: Innovator route – UKRI[29]	AIRR DPR rules and guidelines (PDF, 101KB)[30]
	AIRR compute opportunity: AI open access AIRR compute opportunity: AI open access – UKRI[31]	Applicant and reviewer guidance (PDF, 309KB)[32]

*Unless stated in the 'How we will assess your application section' or in the DPR Rules and Guidelines document for each opportunity linked above, any training materials, scoring guidance, handbooks, and assessment criteria are standard, with information available on the UKRI website, for example:
UKRI principles of peer review – UKRI[33]
UKRI funding assessment and decision-making policy – UKRI[34]
UKRI Funding Service terms of use – UKRI[35]

[25] https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/resilient-economy-and-security-through-ecosystem-transitions-grants/
[26] https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/NERC-050826-Distributed-Peer-Review-rules-and-guidance-NERC-Defra-RESET-Projects.pdf
[27] https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/exploring-the-frontiers-of-environmental-research-2026/
[28] https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/NERC-25082026-Exploring-the-Frontiers-2026-DPR-Guidance-RF.pdf
[29] https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/isambard-ai-and-dawn-airr-supercomputers-innovator-route/
[30] https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/UKRI-081225-AIRR-DPR-RulesGuidelines.pdf
[31] https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/airr-compute-opportunity-ai-open-access/
[32] https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/UKRI-080626-AIRR-DPR-RulesandGuidelines.pdf
[33] https://www.ukri.org/councils/stfc/guidance-for-reviewers/peer-reviews/ukri-principles-of-peer-review/
[34] https://www.ukri.org/publications/ukri-principles-of-assessment-and-decision-making/
[35] https://www.ukri.org/who-we-are/terms-of-use/ukri-funding-service-terms-of-use/