



[REDACTED]

15 July 2020

[REDACTED]

**Freedom of Information request: FOI2020/00140**

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on the 19 May 2020 in which you requested the following:

**Your request:**

*My enquiry concerns the vaccines manufacturing centre at Oxford VMIC.*

*I would be pleased to receive all documentation with respect to:-*

- a) the technical and economic specification which formed the basis of the tender and the bidding process.*
- b) the details of the bids received.*
- c) the details of the decision making process, the decision criteria, and the discussions which formed the basis of the final choice of location.*

**Our response**

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

- a) the technical and economic specification which formed the basis of the tender and the bidding process. &*
- b) the details of the bids received.*

Under Section 21, Information already reasonably accessible, of the FOIA the information on the requirements for the Establishing a UK Vaccines Development and Manufacturing Centre competition can be found on the below link. All applicants for the competition had to reach the eligibility requirements stated, if eligibility requirements aren't met an application is not assessed.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/establishing-a-uk-vaccines-development-and-manufacturing-centre>

Information on the winning bid can be found on the below Innovate UK's transparency data, the link for which is below:

Innovate UK funded projects since 2004: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/innovate-uk-funded-projects>

Articles relating to the winning bid can also be found on the below links:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/industrial-strategy-delivers-new-vaccines-manufacturing-centre-to-lead-the-fight-against-deadly-disease>

<https://www.ukri.org/news/uks-first-ever-vaccines-manufacturing-centre-aims-to-tackle-deadly-diseases/>

<https://innovateuk.blog.gov.uk/2018/12/03/dramatic-increase-in-the-uk-vaccine-capability/>

Section 21 is an absolute exemption which means that there is no requirement to conduct a public interest test.

In regard to releasing the full bid details including application forms for all bids including those that were unsuccessful these are exempt under Section 41, information provided in confidence and Section 43(2), prejudice to commercial interests, of the FOIA. Further details on these exemptions can be found at the end of this letter.

- c) *the details of the decision making process, the decision criteria, and the discussions which formed the basis of the final choice of location.*

Please see the details of the decision making for this competition in the below table. The decision criteria for the Establishing a UK Vaccines Development and Manufacturing Centre competition is being exempted under Section 43 of the FOIA, further details on this exemption can be found at the end of this letter.

In regard to the choice of location, each bid was considered on its own merits and the strength of the bid and not on the location of the centre. As that is the case, there are no discussions regarding the final choice of location.

| Date       | Overview                              | Details  |
|------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| 12/10/2017 | Launch of the competition             |  |
| 15/11/2017 | Deadline for submission               |  |
| 04/01/2018 | Interview panel                       | <p>Individual assessors privately scored the proposals in the following three categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The business case (scored out of 10)</li> <li>• The technical case (scored out of 10)</li> <li>• Funding &amp; added value (scored out of 5)</li> </ul> <p>Each assessor also privately made a YES/NO recommendation of whether the proposal should be funded.</p> <p>The bids were independently assessed and were deemed to have had particular strengths and merits but neither was deemed suitable for funding.</p> <p>Each consortia were invited to a round table discussion to discuss further evidence underpinning their proposal to fill the gap in UK vaccine manufacturing capacity and capability and meet the needs as outlined in the competition brief.</p> |
| 16/02/2018 | Interview of UKRI Panel with the bids | <p>Each consortium presented to the UKRI Panel the answers to a set of additional questions made available to the consortia one week in advance.</p> <p>The winning bid was based on Panel scoring and discussions following responses to these questions from the bids.</p>   |
| 01/03/2018 | ISCF Steering Board discussion        | ISCF Steering Board discussion on the outcome of the second interview and agreement that the winning bid should be granted funding on the condition that further questions around co-investment level, exploitation plan and governance are suitably resolved.   |
| 30/05/2018 | Approval of bid                       | Innovate UK CEO approves the funding of the VMIC bid following the receipt of the additional material  |
| 25/06/2018 | Ministerial approval                  |  |
| 01/12/2018 | Ministerial announcement              |  |

## **Exemptions**

### **Section 41, information provided in confidence**

We have determined that the information you have requested falls under Section 41 of the FOIA, information provided in confidence. To explain further, bid information including the details of any unsuccessful applicants and application forms for both successful and unsuccessful applicants were provided to Innovate UK with the

expectation of confidence. If the information was released, we believe it would result in an actionable breach of confidentiality.

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

### **Section 43(2), prejudice to commercial interests**

We believe the information you have requested also falls under the scope of Section 43(2) 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.

This is a qualified exemption, meaning that a test was carried out to determine whether the public interest 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.

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

- The bid details, including application forms and information on unsuccessful applications contain commercially sensitive information such as business plans, cost and schedule information, technical project plan and extensive description of the project which were disclosed to UKRI in confidence. The agreement we have with applicants is that we will not release any confidential information without their permission. Releasing the information requested could be taken advantage of by competitors in planning competing strategies for further business opportunities. Applicants complete the application form knowing that if they achieve success only a brief overview of their successful bid will be publicly available, everything else will remain confidential.
- Innovate UK's competition process is highly competitive and composing a successful bid requires expertise and skill in providing quality information as well as understanding the most advantageous content to present in order to succeed. The applicant must also have the ability to support and justify the strength of their application. The applicant must do this whilst adhering within the strictly enforced scope and eligibility requirements of a particular competition. This knowledge is proprietary to the applicant. In addition, there are companies and consultancy groups that specialise in selling a grant writing service based on their grant writing expertise and knowledge. This exemplifies the commercial advantage and value that such expertise and skills deliver. As such disclosing the information requested is likely to reduce commercial advantage and thereby harm commercial interests in a highly competitive field. We believe disclosing this information confers an advantage to competitors which would likely materially disadvantage and harm the interests of applicants particularly in their ability to compete for grants
- We also considered the impact on UKRI if commercially sensitive information of companies we and engage and work closely with were disclosed. We believe it would damage the trust in UKRI and likely impact our ability to carry out our role and manage our current and future investments.
- Releasing the decision criteria would affect the integrity of Innovate UK competitions due to the advantage having the decision criteria. If released it will also have an impact on the commercial interests of Innovate UK and our reliance on running a fair and transparent competition process. This process ensures that only the best projects receive any public monies. Releasing the assessor's decision criteria will impact Innovate UK's core activities in their ability to run a fair and transparent competition process.
- Releasing the documentation is not necessary to promote understanding of the criteria used to assess any applications to this competition. Innovate UK gives a comprehensive set of guidance to enable applicants to enter a fair and transparent competition., the link for which was provided in question a. Innovate UK's

Competitions team work hard to ensure that all competitions are fair and that the grant funding is awarded on the strength of the bid. As such for each competition a comprehensive set of guidance is released to assist in creating the strongest application possible. The assessment criteria always relate directly to the applicant guidance, as such if an applicant addresses the question as detailed in the guidance then they would be addressing the assessment criteria.

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](mailto:foi@ukri.org) or [infogovernance@ukri.org](mailto: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  
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