



15 June 2022

Dear [REDACTED]

Freedom of Information request: FOI2022/00177

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on the 18 May in which you requested the following:

Your request:

The OME and HBBE at Newcastle University

1. *Can you tell me what proportion of the £8 million awarded to the Newcastle University HBBE was spent on construction of the OME building?*
2. *Can you tell me what evaluation of the OME building and research has been carried out to date?*
3. *Can you tell me whether UKRI has carried out any value for money appraisal of the OME project?*
4. *Can you state what view has been taken by UKRI about the fact that the building, meant to prototype bio technology and biological materials, has been constructed out of concrete and metal and other non-biological/bio-based materials. Does this comply with the conditions of the grant?*
5. *On the OME HBBE web site it says "The exterior of the building has been designed so experimental material samples can be easily installed for testing and whole sections of the internal and external walls can be replaced with new forms of construction". Can you state what evidence you have that whole sections of the walls can be replaced as they are made of solid concrete?*
6. *Can you state what experimental biological materials have been installed and tested?*
7. *Having arranged several weeks in advance to visit the OME building. I was refused access at very late notice on the basis that everyone was too busy to show me round. I was only able to view the building from the outside. Can you state if you have made any stipulations that the OME should be accessible to researchers like myself to visit?*

Our response:

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

Funding for the Hub for Biotechnology in the Built Environment (HBBE) at Newcastle University was provided by the Expanding Excellence in England (E3) fund. More information about the E3 fund, which builds research capacity in small and excellent units, can be found [here](https://www.ukri.org/what-we-offer/browse-our-areas-of-investment-and-support/expanding-excellence-in-england-e3-fund/)¹.

1. *Can you tell me what proportion of the £8 million awarded to the Newcastle University HBBE was spent on construction of the OME building?*

Data for the amount spent on construction is not held by UKRI or Research England.

2. *Can you tell me what evaluation of the OME building and research has been carried out to date?*

¹ <https://www.ukri.org/what-we-offer/browse-our-areas-of-investment-and-support/expanding-excellence-in-england-e3-fund/>

No evaluation of the OME building and related research at Newcastle University has yet been carried out by Research England, post-award. The intention is to carry out an interim independent evaluation of the E3 programme later in 2022.

3. *Can you tell me whether UKRI has carried out any value for money appraisal of the OME project?*

An appraisal of the application to the E3 fund was carried out using the published criteria for the E3 bid assessments. Please see the [Full Bid Guidance](#)² and [E3: Guidance for Full Bid submissions document](#)³ for further details.

4. *Can you state what view has been taken by UKRI about the fact that the building, meant to prototype bio technology and biological materials, has been constructed out of concrete and metal and other non-biological/bio-based materials. Does this comply with the conditions of the grant?*

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) provides public access to information held by public authorities. As this question is asking for opinion and commentary it does not fall within scope of the FOIA. However, we are able to confirm that there is no condition of the E3 grant that applies to the construction materials used in capital expenditure.

5. *On the OME HBBE web site it says "The exterior of the building has been designed so experimental material samples can be easily installed for testing and whole sections of the internal and external walls can be replaced with new forms of construction". Can you state what evidence you have that whole sections of the walls can be replaced as they are made of solid concrete?*

This information is not held. We would recommend contacting the Higher Education Provider for information regarding the research building's infrastructure.

6. *Can you state what experimental biological materials have been installed and tested?*

This information is not held. We would recommend contacting the Higher Education Provider for information regarding installation and testing of biological materials.

7. *Having arranged several weeks in advance to visit the OME building. I was refused access at very late notice on the basis that everyone was too busy to show me round. I was only able to view the building from the outside. Can you state if you have made any stipulations that the OME should be accessible to researchers like myself to visit?*

Public access to the Higher Education Provider's research infrastructure is not a condition of the E3 grant.

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: 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: <https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-and-standards/complaints-policy/>

² <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20210802101948/https://re.ukri.org/sector-guidance/publications/full-bid-guidance-expanding-excellence-in-england-e3-fund/>

³ <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20210802102308mp/https://re.ukri.org/documents/2018/e3-full-bid-guidance-pdf/>

Yours sincerely,


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