



[REDACTED]

3 August 2021

Dear [REDACTED]

**Freedom of Information request: FOI2021/00328**

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on the 14 July in which you requested the following:

**Your request:**

*I am writing to request access to information about early career focused grants awarded by research councils from 2017 to as current as possible. I am hoping that you would be able to help me with producing a table with at the least awarding council name, early career focused programme/initiative name (i.e. New Investigator), and the grant reference number.*

*Ideally, it would also include decision and overall score range - similar to the form that some of the councils used to publish call data information on the web before organisational change and website redesign happened (please see the example attached).*

*Thank you!*

- *outline as clearly as possible the information you are looking for: list of the grant reference numbers for early career awards (i.e. New Investigator grant and others of this type where name of funding scheme is different and the purpose is to support early career researchers) by research council;*
- *provide dates: FY decision date 2017-2018 onwards*
- *list any people or organisations involved: AHRC, BBSRC, EPSRC, ESRC, MRC, NERC, STFC, Cross-Council Funds, UKRI*
- *state the format you would like information: electronic*
- *provide your full name and address, either postal or email, where you want to be contacted:* [REDACTED]

**Our response**

I can confirm UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) hold information relevant to your request. Please see the information attached as "*FOI2021/00328 ecr\_grants\_table\_with\_note*".

In relation to your request for "*early career focused grants awarded by research councils from 2017 to as current as possible*", the spreadsheet details the grant reference number, grant category, scheme, and call as well as the ECR programme, research council and financial year authorised.

However, please note that the grants included in the table are not likely to be comprehensive of all early career focused grants since there is no one consistent definition of early career researcher and UKRI data does not have a classification for career stage. Furthermore, it is likely some grants will not have been identified due to inconsistencies in naming. However, we believe it to be a fair approximation of the main programmes.

Following the formation of UKRI, a consistent methodology and approach is now applied to all requests for information on grant applications. We consider that maintaining the confidentiality of applications, in particular those that were unsuccessful, outweighs the public interest in favour of disclosure and that to release information regarding individual unsuccessful applications may negatively impact their commercial viability and future opportunities.

The information provided therefore refers to funded programmes only; information on unfunded grant applications and overall score range for each grant is being withheld under the exemptions at section 41 information provided in confidence and section 43(2) commercial prejudice.

In relation to section 41 information provided in confidence, UKRI's grant awards process provides that if an application is successful that some of the information will be published and made publicly available. It is therefore implied that all organisations can confidently apply to UKRI and information relating to their specific application will be kept confidential unless they are successful. 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.

We also consider that the information in relation to unfunded applications and overall score ranges falls under the exemption at 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**

- Applicants apply for funding knowing that if they achieve success only a brief overview of their successful bid will be publicly available, everything else will remain confidential, including their overall score.
- As such disclosing the information requested is likely to reduce the applicant's commercial advantage and thereby harm its commercial interests in a highly competitive field. We believe disclosing this information via FOI confers a disadvantage to applicants which would likely materially disadvantage and harm their interests, particularly in their ability to compete for grants.
- Releasing this information is likely to damage the possibility of ongoing relationships between UKRI and other organisations. Relationships may become untenable if third parties cannot be certain that their scores will remain confidential when held by UKRI.
- Breaching the commercial interest may also adversely affect future negotiation opportunities for UKRI. UKRI may be seen as a 'confidentiality' risk if it routinely releases information relating to grant applications into the public domain, particularly where this is third party information.

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.

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  
[foi@ukri.org](mailto:foi@ukri.org) | [dataprotection@ukri.org](mailto:dataprotection@ukri.org)