



[REDACTED]

12 October 2021

Dear [REDACTED],

Freedom of Information request: FOI2021/00427

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on the 15 September in which you requested the following:

Your request:

I am interested in finding out how peer-reviewer scores are reflected in the final rankings for all UKRI panels (or if final rankings are not available, just whether the grants were funded or not). I require only the overall review scores (1-6 in the case of BBSRC for example, 6 being the best) and their position in the final rankings, broken down by panel wherever possible (research committee A to E for BBSRC for example, or research board for MRC). For example, one small section of the dataset might appear as follows:

BBSRC, Research Committee A, 1st Jan 2020:

- 1. 5,6,6*
- 2. 5,5,5*
- 3. 4,4,4,6*
- 4. 3,5,6*
- 5. 1,5,5,5*
- 6. 2,5,6*

Data would be preferred in spreadsheet format, but plain text will be acceptable if absolutely necessary.

I would also appreciate copies of any guidance documents given to peer-review panels from each of the research councils within the last five years.

If the above is too onerous, I will be willing to limit my request to data and documents from EPSRC, BBSRC, MRC, STFC and NERC.

Our response

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

In relation to your request for peer review scores, UKRI's grant application, peer review and award management mechanisms are confidential. Peer reviewers must agree to abide by general requirements on confidentiality contained in the Joint Electronic Submissions (Je-S) peer review protocols (see Annex A) and by the confidentiality requirements of the [Use of Grant Proposal and Training Grant information addendum¹](#), which applies to confidentiality in the use of grant proposal information in all contexts not only peer review. We therefore consider that the information in relation to peer reviewer scores is exempt under Section 41 of the FOIA. To explain further, UKRI undertakes to keep confidential all information in relation to a grant proposal, including peer

¹ <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/UKRI-310321-Use-of-grant-proposal-and-training-grant-information-addendum-V2.pdf>

review information. If the peer reviewer scores for all UKRI panels were released, we believe it may be possible to match reviewer scores to individual grant proposals, which would be a breach of peer review confidentiality, resulting in an actionable breach of confidence. As this exemption is absolute there is no requirement to conduct a public interest test.

As part of our duty to advise and assist under the FOIA, although research councils do not publish individual peer reviewer scores, panel outcomes or funding decisions are published and the relevant links are provided below for the individual councils. Further, UKRI is committed to publishing information about the projects it funds [Projects we've funded – UKRI](#)².

In relation to your request for guidance documents given to peer review panels, this information is already available in the public domain. We therefore consider Section 21 of the FOIA - Information already reasonably accessible, would apply to the information and we have provided the relevant links below for each council. Section 21 is an absolute exemption which means that there is no requirement to conduct a public interest test.

Information on how decisions are made is available [here](#)³ where you can find links to published information on the councils' assessment and decision-making processes. You will also find information on assessment processes for Innovate UK and Research England.

1. Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC)

Panel Guidance:

Information on peer review processes for AHRC is available at the link below:

[Peer Review - Arts and Humanities Research Council \(ukri.org\)](#)⁴

Panel Outcomes:

Funding decisions made by AHRC's panels are published at the link below:

[Panel Outcomes - Arts and Humanities Research Council \(ukri.org\)](#)⁵

2. Biotechnology & Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)

Panel Guidance:

BBSRC guidance for peer review panels is available at the link below:

[Information for reviewers - BBSRC \(ukri.org\)](#)⁶

Panel Outcomes:

BBSRC follows UKRI policy to publicise funded grants [here](#)⁷.

Funding decisions made by the panels are available at this link [Recent grant awards - BBSRC \(ukri.org\)](#)⁸

² <https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/funded-projects/>

³ <https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/how-we-make-decisions/>

⁴ <https://ahrc.ukri.org/peerreview/>

⁵ <https://ahrc.ukri.org/funding/research/paneloutcomes/>

⁶ <https://bbsrc.ukri.org/funding/reviewers/>

⁷ <https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/funded-projects/>

⁸ <https://bbsrc.ukri.org/funding/post-application/awarded-grants/>

3. Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC)

Panel Guidance:

The guidance for peer reviewers can be found at the links below and in the handbook attached.

[Guidance for peer reviewers - Economic and Social Research Council \(ukri.org\)](#)⁹

[Peer Review FAQs \(ukri.org\)](#)¹⁰ (Please see page 7 for information on how the information is shared).

Also attached is the 'FOI2021-00427 Final GAP Member Handbook v4 (Sept 2021)' which summarises ESRC processes and regulations for members of the Grant Assessment Panels and includes information on the peer review process.

Panel Outcomes:

ESRC publishes the funding decisions made by the panels, to help applicants and research organisations understand the relative position of their application and the range of all outcomes.

[Funding decisions - Economic and Social Research Council \(ukri.org\)](#)¹¹

4. Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)

Panel Guidance:

Standard mode panel guidance and protocols are published at the links below:

[Panel member guidance - EPSRC website \(ukri.org\)](#)¹²

[Panel meeting protocols - EPSRC website \(ukri.org\)](#)¹³

Bespoke guidance is provided for managed calls (based on the aims and desired outcomes of the call articulated in the funding opportunity). Given the volume of managed call panels (over 300) in the last five years we consider that the cost of complying with your request would exceed the appropriate statutory limit as specified within Section 12 of the FOIA which for UKRI is set at £450. This represents the estimated cost of 18 hours of staff resource on locating, retrieving and extracting the information. As we do not have a central depository for the information, we consider that it would exceed 18 hours to locate, retrieve and extract the information. Consequently, UKRI is not obliged under Section 12 of the FOIA to process your request further. In order for UKRI to comply with this request, we would advise you to refine the parameters by narrowing the scope of your request, to either narrow the timeframe or specify a particular call.

We can however provide some examples of panel guidance documents for EPSRC open/or responsive mode funding opportunities as follows:

FOI2021/00427 2019.07_PG Outline Panel Guidance (Change from Internal to External panel)

FOI2021-00427 Programme Grant - Interview Panel Guidance

FOI2021-00427 Interview Panel guidance_TEMPLATE

FOI2021-00427 Panel Presentation template

FOI2021-00427 Panel member's guide to managing unconscious bias in peer review

⁹ <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-peer-reviewers/>

¹⁰ <https://esrc.ukri.org/files/funding/guidance-for-peer-reviewers/faqs-for-peer-review-college-members/>

¹¹ <https://esrc.ukri.org/about-us/performance-information/application-and-award-data/funding-decisions/>

¹² <https://epsrc.ukri.org/funding/assessmentprocess/panels/panelmemberguidance/>

¹³ <https://epsrc.ukri.org/funding/assessmentprocess/panels/protocols1/>

We are withholding the names of individuals in the document “*FOI2021-00427 Panel Presentation template*” under the exemption at section 40(2) personal data.

Section 40(2) exempts personal information from disclosure if that information relates to someone other than the applicant, and if disclosure of that information would, amongst other things, contravene one of the data protection principles in Article 5(1) of the UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR) and section 34(1) of the Data Protection Act 2018. In this case, we believe disclosure would contravene the first data protection principle, which provides that processing of personal data is lawful and fair.

We have considered the legitimate interests of all parties in disclosure of this information and have found that on balance there is not an overriding legitimate interest in disclosure that outweighs the reasonable expectations of privacy of the individuals concerned.

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

Panel Outcomes:

EPSRC publish panel membership and rank ordered lists on Grants on the Web (GoW) after each panel. Further information can be found here: [Grants on the Web \(ukri.org\)](https://www.ukri.org/grants-on-the-web/)¹⁴. More detailed information on funded proposals are also available through GoW.

5. Medical Research Council (MRC)

Panel Guidance:

MRC panel guidance provides an overview of the funding meetings and the scoring matrix that board/panel members use:

[Funding meetings - Funding - Medical Research Council \(ukri.org\)](https://www.ukri.org/funding-meetings/)¹⁵
[Board and Panel Scoring Matrix \(ukri.org\)](https://www.ukri.org/board-and-panel-scoring-matrix/)¹⁶

Panel outcomes:

MRC publishes the meeting outcomes and the panels overall score to the below webpage:

[Board & panel meeting outcomes - Research - Medical Research Council \(ukri.org\)](https://www.ukri.org/board-and-panel-meeting-outcomes/)¹⁷

6. Natural Environment Research Council

Panel Guidance:

Peer reviewer guidance is available at this webpage [Handbooks, guidance and forms – UKRI](https://www.ukri.org/handbooks-guidance-and-forms/)¹⁸

An example of panel guidance is published at this link [Responsive Mode Guidance NX00315 \(ukri.org\)](https://www.ukri.org/responsive-mode-guidance-nx00315/)¹⁹

The assessment process including reviewing level targets is available at the link below:

[What happens after you submit your proposal – NERC – UKRI](https://www.ukri.org/what-happens-after-you-submit-your-proposal-nerc/)²⁰

Panel Outcomes:

¹⁴ <https://gow.epsrc.ukri.org/>

¹⁵ <https://mrc.ukri.org/funding/peer-review/funding-meetings/>

¹⁶ <https://mrc.ukri.org/documents/pdf/scoring-matrix-for-board-and-panel-meetings/>

¹⁷ <https://mrc.ukri.org/research/funded-research/board-panel-meeting-outcomes/>

¹⁸ <https://www.ukri.org/councils/nerc/guidance-for-applicants/handbooks-guidance-and-forms/>

¹⁹ <https://nerc.ukri.org/funding/application/howtoapply/forms/standardandguidance/>

²⁰ <https://www.ukri.org/councils/nerc/guidance-for-applicants/what-happens-after-you-submit-your-proposal/>

A breakdown of panel outcomes by year is provided below:

[NERC - Panel outcomes \(ukri.org\)](#)²¹

7. Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC)

Panel Guidance:

STFC do not have standard responsive mode calls and therefore panel guidance will be developed for each call that STFC hosts. As the information is not stored centrally, locating and extracting the panel guidance for all calls that have taken place in the last five years is likely to exceed 18 hours and we consider that the cost of complying with this part of your request would exceed the appropriate statutory limit as specified within Section 12 of the FOIA. As stated above, UKRI is not obliged under Section 12 of the FOIA to process your request further. In order for UKRI to comply with this request, we would advise you to refine the parameters by narrowing the scope of your request, to either narrow the timeframe or specify a particular call.

STFC however publishes generic supporting guidance which is published on our website and covers areas such as conflicts of interest and objective decision making:

[Peer-review and assessment - Science and Technology Facilities Council \(ukri.org\)](#)²².

The presentation on objective decision making is personalised for each call and presented to the panel at the beginning of the peer review meeting.

A handbook for STFC panel and advisory board members provides further information on roles and expectations:

[STFC Panel Handbook \(ukri.org\)](#)²³

Panel outcomes:

For most calls STFC publish grant outcome ranking lists which can be found at:

[Grant ranking lists - Science and Technology Facilities Council \(ukri.org\)](#)²⁴.

There are a number of areas in which we are unable to provide a list due to the nature of our grants, for example our consolidated grants in astronomy, particle physics and nuclear physics are ranked by the constituent projects rather than by the grants themselves. For these, information on relative position will therefore be provided within the written feedback to the applicant/RO rather than published.

Membership of standing panels is also published at:

[Advisory Boards - Science and Technology Facilities Council \(ukri.org\)](#)²⁵.

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

²¹ <https://nerc.ukri.org/funding/application/outcomes/awards/>

²² <https://stfc.ukri.org/funding/research-grants/peer-review-and-assessment/>

²³ <https://stfc.ukri.org/files/handbook-for-members-of-stfcs-advisory-bodies/>

²⁴ <https://stfc.ukri.org/funding/research-grants/grant-ranking-lists/>

²⁵ <https://stfc.ukri.org/about-us/how-we-are-governed/advisory-boards/>

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,


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