

[REDACTED]

2 October 2023

Dear [REDACTED],

Freedom of Information request: FOI2023/00593

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on the 3 August in which you requested the following:

Your request:

I'm writing under the Freedom of Information Act.

Under the Act, please provide me with the following information.

- 1. Any UKRI-funded projects which are undertaken in collaboration with Chinese counterparts, with start dates between 1/8/2018 and 1/8/2023.*
- 2. For each of these projects please provide:*
- 3. The name of the project and the organisations involved.*
- 4. The nature/aim of the project.*
- 5. The amount of funding awarded.*
- 6. The period of time funding was awarded for.*

Our response

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

The information within the scope of your request relates to UKRI funded projects with organisations in China recorded as co-investigators, project partner or project collaborators, and which started after 01/08/2018. Having considered the relevant information, we are able to release the document '*FOI2023/00593 UKRI funded grants with organisations in China*'. Information is provided on the relevant UKRI grant award, and includes the information requested above, for the organisations involved their role in the project is also provided. Additional information, including individuals, research publications and other outputs and outcomes can be found by searching for the grant reference on the UKRI [Gateway to Research \(GtR\)](https://gtr.ukri.org/)¹ or our [transparency data](https://www.ukri.org/publications/innovate-uk-funded-projects-since-2004/)² page for funded projects.

The information provided with this response is in line with the publicly available information on each grant, information on projects involving a Chinese counterpart where information on the project partner has not been made publicly available on UKRI GtR, has been withheld.

UKRI funds research and innovation projects across the full breadth of scientific and technological disciplines with applications submitted by Research Organisations in confidence to our grant management system, with their evaluation based on their scientific merit and potential societal and economic impact and benefit to the UK and

¹ <https://gtr.ukri.org/>

² <https://www.ukri.org/publications/innovate-uk-funded-projects-since-2004/>

globally. Information on funded projects is published and publicly available on GtR. More information about how UKRI makes its funding decisions can be found [here](#)³.

In considering the relevant information it was determined that the following exemptions under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) would apply to the names of the Chinese organisations, where these had not previously been identified for public disclosure and are not currently available on UKRI GtR:

- Section 43(2) - Commercial interests.
- Section 38(1)(a) - Health and safety

These are qualified exemptions and we are required to consider the public interest both in favour of, and against, releasing the information.

Overall public interest in favour of disclosure

In considering the public interest, the following issues were considered in favour of disclosure for both exemptions:

- There is a general public interest in transparency and openness regarding UKRI's investments and approach to collaborations with Chinese partners.
- There is a public interest in understanding the breadth of funded projects with Chinese counterparts and how this demonstrates the range of UKRI's collaborative research and innovation relationship with China.
- Disclosure of information relating to UKRI's approach to research and innovation links internationally is of value and in the public interest to promote transparency and accountability in relation to UKRI's role and function.
- It is important to demonstrate that UKRI is engaging with issues on an international scale and promoting the UK's international links within research and innovation.

Section 43(2) commercial interest

Public interest in favour of withholding the information

- Section 43(2) applies to some information relating to collaborative partnerships where the academic or industrial partner may be engaging in research that may be prejudiced by premature disclosure and where the relationship may result in new or ongoing research on as yet undisclosed research subjects.
- Disclosure is likely to harm the continuation of partnerships or development of new partnerships which would impact negatively on UKRI's capacity to invest in leading edge research and innovation, particularly where project partners and collaborators details may remain commercially sensitive until confirmed via the Research Fish return, and published as output data
- There is a public interest in protecting commercially sensitive information from disclosure where release would damage an award holders' commercial interests. The commercial interests of award holders may be damaged by unwarranted disclosure of research plans by revealing the information to competitors.
- Disclosing commercially sensitive information may also adversely affect future opportunities for UKRI to attract future high-quality applications. UKRI may be seen as a 'confidentiality' risk if information relating to grant holder's collaborative partnerships is released into the public domain.
- Disclosure may result in individuals across the research and innovation communities linked to awards with identified Chinese connections being subject to greater scrutiny that would hinder the smooth progress of their research activities. From a research perspective this may impact the ability to secure future funding, recruit students and research staff. On a company level this may result in higher costs and loss of trade.

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

- Some of the research projects and organisations have contractual links with other institutions outside of the UK and China. This includes award holding institutions as well as research project partners. Disclosure may lead to unwarranted attention.
- Release would also prejudice UKRI's ability to form strategic alliances with UK institutions and grant partnerships, thereby damaging UKRI's commercial position as a research performer and research collaborator.

Section 38(1)(b) health & safety: endangerment to safety of individuals

Public interest in favour of withholding the information

- Disclosure of the information would make it available to individuals or organisations that may use this information with malicious intentions. This includes targeting organisations, individuals, or groups identifiable by the information by endangering their safety. This includes subjecting them to physical harm and harassment.
- UKRI has an obligation to protect information that may endanger the safety of organisations and individuals receiving funding. Disclosure is likely to draw attention that is unwarranted, stressful, and harmful to individuals and would be likely to endanger their safety.

Overall UKRI has concluded that at this time the balance of the public interest lies in favour of applying the above exemptions. Therefore, the relevant information has been withheld from disclosure.

As part of our duty to advise and inform, additional information on international engagement can be found [here](#)⁴, and information on UKRI funded business support for UK companies interested in accessing the Chinese market [here](#)⁵.

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 within the next 40 working days:

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 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 | dataprotection@ukri.org

⁴ <https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/international-funding/our-international-offices/ukri-china/#contents-list>

⁵ <https://china.uknica.co.uk/>