



[REDACTED]

7 August 2026

Dear [REDACTED]

Freedom of Information request: FOI2026/00488

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on the 7 June, and clarification received on the 11 June, in which you requested the following:

Your request:

The information I am requesting relates to how Innovate UK administers its grant assessment and complaints processes, and how it monitors whether its published policies are applied consistently in practice. This is information held by a public body in the exercise of its public functions. Its disclosure serves the genuine public interest in transparent and accountable administration of publicly funded grant programmes.

I request that UKRI provide the information set out below. Where data is held in a form that requires extraction, I confirm I am content to receive it in summary statistical form, provided the summaries are sufficiently detailed to answer each sub-question. Where information is not held in the form requested, please confirm this explicitly for each sub-question and describe what related information is held.

Note on scope: 'Grant application complaints' means formal complaints submitted by applicants relating to assessment, scoring, moderation, or feedback processes for Innovate UK competitive grant programmes, including but not limited to the Women in Innovation Awards. 'Competition cycle' means each distinct round of a competition in which applications were received, assessed, and outcomes notified. Where requests refer to the Women in Innovation Awards 2025/26 specifically, this means the most recently completed competition cycle in which outcomes were notified.

Request 1: Scores of 3–4 recommended for funding and awarded grants — Women in Innovation Awards 2025/26

For the Women in Innovation Awards 2025/26 competition specifically, please provide:

- a) The total number of applications in which any assessor awarded a score of 3 or 4 on any single assessed question and simultaneously stated in their written feedback that the application was recommended for funding;*
- b) Of those applications, the number that received a funded award as an outcome of the competition;*
- c) The total number of applications that received a funded award, expressed as a figure and as a percentage of total applications assessed; and*
- d) Whether any of the applications identified in (a) were subject to a moderation review as a result of the score of 3 or 4 — and if so, how many, and what the outcome of that review was.*

If this data is not held in a structured form at question level, please confirm this explicitly and describe what scoring data is held and in what form.

Request 2: Published or internal guidance on scores of 3–4 and funding recommendations

Please provide the following:

- a) Any published or internal guidance, policy document, scoring framework, assessor briefing, or written instruction that addresses the relationship between a score of 3 or 4 on the published scoring matrix and a funding recommendation — specifically, whether such guidance permits, requires, prohibits, or is silent on an assessor awarding a score in the 3–4 range and simultaneously recommending an application for funding;
- b) Whether assessors for the Women in Innovation Awards 2025/26 were provided with any explicit instruction — in training, briefing materials, or written guidance — on how to reconcile a low question-level score with an overall funding recommendation; and
- c) If no such guidance exists in relation to (a) or (b), please confirm this explicitly — and confirm whether the absence of such guidance reflects a deliberate policy choice or an identified gap in the assessment framework that has not yet been addressed.

Please provide copies of any documents responsive to (a) and (b), or confirm that no such documents are held.

Request 3: Complaint volumes — grant application assessments

For each of the last three competition cycles in which Women in Innovation Awards applications were assessed (including 2025/26), and for Innovate UK grant programmes overall over the same period, please provide:

- a) The total number of formal complaints received relating to grant application assessment, scoring, moderation, or feedback processes;
- b) The total number of those complaints upheld in full;
- c) The total number upheld in part;
- d) The total number not upheld; and
- e) Where available, the total number of discrete complaint points (individual complaint issues) raised across all complaints, and the number of those individual points that were upheld.

Please provide this data broken down by programme — including Women in Innovation specifically — and by competition cycle, where it is held in that form.

Request 4: Score variance and moderation data — Women in Innovation Awards 2025/26

For the Women in Innovation Awards 2025/26 competition specifically, please provide:

- a) The total number of applications assessed;
- b) The total number of applications in which a question-level score variance of 40% or more existed between any two assessors on the same question;
- c) Of those, the number flagged for moderation review under the outlier process or any other mechanism;
- d) The number that were not flagged for any further review; and
- e) The number of applications in which assessor feedback was identified, at any point in the assessment or moderation process, as referencing an incorrect question number.

If data at question level is not held in a structured form, please confirm this explicitly and describe what score variance data is held and in what form.

Request 5: Complaint uphold rate trends — three-year analysis

For each of the last three calendar or financial years (whichever basis UKRI uses for internal reporting), please provide:

- a) The total number of formal complaints received by Innovate UK relating to grant assessment processes;
- b) The uphold rate — as a percentage — for those complaints at Stage 1 and Stage 2 respectively;
- c) The total number of appeals received under UKRI's complaints procedure relating to grant assessment processes; and
- d) The uphold rate for those appeals.

If this data is already published in an annual report, transparency return, or other public document, please provide the relevant reference and page number.

Request 6: Policy monitoring — assessment and moderation framework

Please provide the following information relating to how UKRI monitors the effectiveness of its published assessment and moderation policies:

- a) A description of the process by which Innovate UK monitors whether its published assessment and moderation policies — including those relating to outlier thresholds, moderation triggers, and assessor feedback quality — are being applied consistently in practice;*
- b) The frequency with which that monitoring is conducted and by whom;*
- c) Whether any internal audit, review, or evaluation of the assessment or moderation framework has been conducted in the last three years — and if so, the date, scope, findings, and any actions taken as a result; and*
- d) Whether UKRI holds any data or evidence on the consistency of assessor scoring across competitions — for example, inter-rater reliability data, calibration exercise outcomes, or assessor standardisation review findings — and if so, what that data shows at a summary level.*

Request 7: Equality impact — Women in Innovation programme

In relation to UKRI's obligations under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, please provide:

- a) Whether an equality impact assessment has been conducted on the assessment and moderation framework used for the Women in Innovation Awards — and if so, when it was last conducted and what its findings were;*
- b) Whether UKRI holds data on complaint rates, complaint uphold rates, or appeal rates disaggregated by applicant protected characteristics — including gender — for the Women in Innovation programme or for Innovate UK grant programmes generally; and*
- c) What steps UKRI has taken to verify that the assessment and moderation framework for the Women in Innovation Awards advances, rather than replicates, the structural disadvantages the programme is designed to address.*

If any of the above information is not held, please confirm this explicitly for each sub-question.

Request 8: Assessor error and quality assurance data

Please provide the following information relating to assessor quality assurance:

- a) The number of instances in the last three competition cycles in which assessor feedback was identified as containing an error — including but not limited to feedback referencing an incorrect question — and the process by which such errors were identified and addressed;*
- b) Whether Innovate UK holds data on assessor calibration or standardisation outcomes — for example, the proportion of assessors whose scoring has been found to deviate significantly from agreed standards — and if so, what that data shows at a summary level; and*
- c) The process by which Innovate UK decides whether an assessor error is sufficiently material to warrant a review of the score awarded — and whether that process is documented in any published or internal policy.*

Please confirm whether any assessor errors identified in response to (a) resulted in a review of the score awarded and, if so, the outcome of that review.

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.

Please note, requests 3 and 5 are related to the [UKRI complaints process](https://www.ukri.org/who-we-are/contact-us/make-a-complaint/)¹. This process includes stage 1, a local resolution step via Innovate UK (IUK) Customer Support Services. Complaints at stage 1 are not documented in

¹ <https://www.ukri.org/who-we-are/contact-us/make-a-complaint/>

UKRI's complaint management system, therefore, information is not held in relation to this step. Complaints are logged in UKRI's complaint management system at stage 2, which is considered the "formal complaint" stage.

In addition, we have identified that some of the questions raised within your request would take a significant amount of staff resources to locate, retrieve and extract the relevant information.

When we estimate that the cost of complying with your request would exceed the appropriate statutory limit as specified within Section 12 of the FOIA, UKRI is not obliged to provide a response. This limit is set at £450 for UKRI, which represents the estimated cost of 18 hours of staff resource.

However, in order to provide as transparent a response as possible, where this is the case we have instead applied Section 12 to the relevant section or question of your request, rather than the full response. This is noted accordingly and includes an estimate relevant to the specific question.

Request 1: Scores of 3–4 recommended for funding and awarded grants — Women in Innovation Awards 2025/26

- a) There were 141 applications where at least one question scored 4 or below and was recommended for funding.
- b) Of those 141 applications, one was awarded funding.
- c) 61 applications were successful and awarded funding, which is a success rate of 4.6%.
- d) Of the 141 applications identified in a) none of these were subject to a moderation review. All moderation of scores was done as a total assessor score and count of recommendations. One or more individual scores would impact a total score but are not considered in isolation.

Request 2: Published or internal guidance on scores of 3–4 and funding recommendations

- a) Assessors were sign posted to the [Assessors Guidance document](#)², which applicants also had access to via the [Innovation Funding Service funding page for the competition](#)³. This contains the guidance and scoring used by Assessors when reviewing applications.
- b) Assessors were asked to attend an Assessor briefing session designed specifically for the competition and the slides from the briefing were shared with all assessors. A copy of these slides is attached "*Assessor Briefing Women in Innovation 2025_26*". The content of this assessor briefing session covers specific guidance on the eligibility, scope, and aims of the Women in Innovation Awards 2025/26 alongside an in-depth review of the new question set and scoring guidance that was piloted for this competition. It also includes the standard guidance for assessing IUK competitions, including assessor expectations and obligations.
- c) There is no specific guidance for reconciling low scores with a recommendation to fund. The briefing slides note that the Assessor Behavioural Analysis (ABA) report looks at applications that have scored low/high but were recommended/not recommended for funding, however this is based on overall application scores and not question-level scores.

To address whether the absence of this guidance reflects a deliberate policy choice or an identified gap in the assessment framework is outside of the scope of the FOIA, as you are seeking comment and opinion, rather than recorded information that is held.

² <https://apply-for-innovation-funding.service.gov.uk/competition/2337/download/26198>

³ <https://apply-for-innovation-funding.service.gov.uk/competition/2337/overview/3750b1cd-2080-4a1c-82c0-003fbaafdd2d#how-to-apply>

Request 3: Complaint volumes — grant application assessments

Please note that complaint data is not categorised by programme or competition within UKRI's complaint management system. Therefore, the data provided in section 3a) - e) below covers all IUK complaints received across all IUK competitions between 22/08/2022 and 10/06/2026.

However, the total number of formal complaints received has been recorded separately by competition and is provided in "FOI2026_00488 Annex 1".

a) 58 formal complaints were received relating to grant application assessment, scoring, moderation or the feedback process. See Annex 1 for a breakdown by competition.

b) 10 of those complaints were upheld in full.

c) 19 of those complaints were upheld in part.

d) 29 of those complaints were not upheld.

e) We consider that Section 12 of the FOIA would apply to this question. Individual complaint issues are held in complaint and complaint response documents and would require manual extraction from each individual case. We have estimated that it would take approximately 20 minutes per case, which for 58 cases would be 19 hours of staff resource.

However, UKRI does track root causes for complaints. The table below provides a breakdown of root causes, total number and total upheld for IUK records meeting the criteria of the request. Please note that each case can have multiple root causes, therefore the number of cases and root causes are not equal:

Root Causes	Total Number ¹	Total Upheld
Failure to follow the UKRI's agreed policies and/or procedures	19	5
Failure to follow the UKRI's legal obligations	1	1
Failure to follow UKRI's externally published policies and/or procedures	12	4
Issue related to data handling, sharing or storage	2	2
Neglect or unreasonable delay in answering a query / request for service	8	8
Peer Review, Funders Panel or Assessment Process (not the decision)	39	11
Unclear or lack of internal written procedure or guidance for staff	8	6
Unhelpful or insensitive conduct by a UKRI employee	8	5

¹ This number does not include root causes for 10 cases dating between April to December 2022 - these cases occurred prior to harmonisation of the UKRI and IUK complaint process and therefore were not recorded in UKRI's case management system

Request 4: Score variance and moderation data — Women in Innovation Awards 2025/26

a) 1,313 applications were assessed.

b) – e) We consider that Section 12 of the FOIA would apply to these question. The relevant information is not held in a way that enables us to answer your questions without conducting detailed additional analysis. In order to identify, extract and compile the relevant information, it would be necessary to manually review each question across all 1,313 assessed applications. We estimate that this process would take approximately five minutes per application, which amounts to 114 hours of staff resource.

Please note, in accordance with the IUK standard approach, moderation is undertaken at the overall application level and not the question-by-question level. This is because the latter is considered a normal variation in expert judgement, which is expected due to the independent nature of the assessment process.

As outlined above, Innovate UK does not review all score variations during moderation where applications are not flagged as outliers. Applications are only subject to further scrutiny where defined escalation criteria are met, such as being flagged through the outlier process.

Request 5: Complaint uphold rate trends — three-year analysis

Please note, the below data covers the period 01/04/2023 to 10/06/2026.

- a) 47 complaints reached stage 2 of the UKRI complaints process that were related to the search term “grant decision making” which includes complaints related to assessment, scoring, moderation and feedback processes.
- b) As noted above, this information is not held for stage 1. For stage 2, 19.5% were upheld (9 of 47 cases).
- c) One appeal was received relating to grant assessment processes.
- d) This appeal was part upheld, therefore the uphold rate is 0%.

Request 6: Policy monitoring — assessment and moderation framework

a) Details of IUK’s competition assessment process are published in our [General Guidance](#)⁴ along with details of how applications are assessed and the controls in place for quality monitoring and feedback. If a competition has different assessment requirements, then these are fully detailed in the individual competition brief, along with details of the assessor scoring guidance for transparency.

No further recorded information is held that describes the process by which IUK monitors its published assessment and moderation policies. To create information, such as a description of a process, in order to respond to a request is outside of the scope of the FOIA.

- b) Monitoring is conducted for every competition once all written assessments have been submitted. This is conducted by the IUK Assessor Engagement team, as part of the wider pre-award team.
- c) IUK’s assessment processes are audited by the [Government Internal Audit Agency](#)⁵. Should any concerns be raised about assessment or any other process, they are reviewed immediately and necessary changes made. No internal audit, review or evaluation of the assessment framework has been conducted in the last three years.
- d) Data is captured for all IUK competitions at an individual competition level and additional assessment level checks are run to ensure consistency with assessor behaviour and feedback comments provided. However, IUK have not conducted any analysis or compiled any data on the consistency of assessor scoring across different competitions. Therefore, this information is not held.

Request 7: Equality impact — Women in Innovation programme

- a) An Equality Impact Assessment for the overall competition was developed, but not specifically for the assessment and moderation framework. The assessment and moderation frameworks used for the Women in Innovation Awards are standard within IUK. Questions from IUK’s new standardised question bank were used for this competition, a recorded support session is available [here](#)⁶ for more information about the question set used.
- b) Protected characteristics are not recorded for a complainant when a complaint is logged, therefore this information is not held.
- c) The Women in Innovation Awards have gone through significant changes this year following feedback from our community engagement in 2024. This year, IUK introduced 10 key changes to the Women in Innovation Awards in response to feedback from the community. IUK made every effort to communicate these changes clearly and transparently throughout the campaign, to support applicants in making an informed decision before applying.

⁴ <https://www.ukri.org/councils/innovate-uk/guidance-for-applicants/general-guidance/what-happens-after-you-have-submitted-your-application/#contents-list>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/government-internal-audit-agency/about>

⁶ <https://vimeo.com/1140083756>

Part of these changes included piloting a new application question set for this competition; the aims of this were to improve clarity and consistency. This included using a different approach for feedback by removing the individual feedback for each scored question and releasing average scores for each question.

In April 2025, IUK published [Our 10 commitments to women innovators](https://iuk-business-connect.org.uk/news/our-10-commitments-to-women-innovators/)⁷ on Advancing women-led innovation: our pledge for progress. IUK then published [Progress on our commitments to women innovators](https://iuk-business-connect.org.uk/news/progress-on-our-commitments-to-women-innovators/)⁸ of which “Commitment 1: Refine the Innovate UK Women in Innovation Awards” may be of particular interest.

A full list of changes to the Women in Innovation competition can be viewed in [this blog](#)⁹ which was published when the competition opened. Further updates to the Women in Innovation Awards 2025/26 can be viewed in [this news story](#)¹⁰.

Following the pilot of the new Innovate UK Application Question set, a survey was sent out to all Women in Innovation 25/26 applicants and assessors to receive feedback and review as part of our continuous improvements process.

Request 8: Assessor error and quality assurance data

a-b) IUK conducts an Assessor Behavioural Analysis (ABA) report, which is programmed to check for assessor trends and anomalies within the assessor feedback based on a specific set of rules and scenarios. However, findings are not always classified as errors, and data is not held in a way that enables us to answer your question without conducting additional analysis and cross referencing. Subsequently, we consider that Section 12 of the FOIA would apply to these questions. We estimate that it would take approximately 15-20 hours per question to complete this analysis.

c) As described above, IUK conducts an ABA report which requires manual interrogation and consideration within the full context of the application to confirm whether findings identified are sufficiently material to warrant a review of the scores awarded. There is no internal process or policy for this activity.

Your rights

If you have any queries regarding our response please do let us know. If you are dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you have the right to ask for an internal review, explaining which elements of this decision you disagree with and why. Internal review requests should be submitted within 40 working days of the date of our response and should be addressed to:

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 procedure](#)¹¹.

Yours sincerely,

⁷ <https://iuk-business-connect.org.uk/news/our-10-commitments-to-women-innovators/>

⁸ <https://iuk-business-connect.org.uk/news/progress-on-our-commitments-to-women-innovators/>

⁹ <https://www.ukri.org/blog/insider-insights-whats-new-for-the-women-in-innovation-awards/>

¹⁰ <https://nolimits.ukri.org/content/women-in-innovation-awards-2025-26-update>

¹¹ <https://www.ukri.org/who-we-are/contact-us/make-a-complaint/#skipnav-target>


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