



[REDACTED]

23 December 2020

Dear [REDACTED]

**Freedom of Information request: FOI2020/00430**

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on the 5 December in which you requested the following:

**Your request:**

*I would like to make a freedom of information request in relation to the activities of the MRC Methodology Research Programme and Panel, which I believe has recently been re-named 'Better Methods, Better Research'. I have submitted research proposals to this panel on several occasions in the past and have been both successful and unsuccessful. I appreciate the work of the panel and the many difficult decisions they make each year.*

*For the last 5 years I would like the following information:*

- a) *For all research grant submissions to the Methodology Research Panel, the institution of the Principal Investigator (PI), the title of the researcher (e.g. Professor, Dr, Ms etc.) and whether the research submission was successful or unsuccessful.*
- b) *The number of Methodology Research Panel research grant submissions where the PI or Co-PI is a serving member of the panel and the success rate.*
- c) *The number of Methodology Research Panel research grant submissions from research institutions which have a serving member of the methodology research panel and the success rate.*

**Our response:**

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

- a) *For all research grant submissions to the Methodology Research Panel, the institution of the Principal Investigator (PI), the title of the researcher (e.g. Professor, Dr, Ms etc.) and whether the research submission was successful or unsuccessful.*

Information on the successful applications to the Methodology Research Panel between 2015/16 and 2019/20 can be found in the attached spreadsheet "[FOI2020\\_0430\\_Successful\\_Applications](#)".

The financial year in which the application was submitted is in column A, column B shows the unique application identifier, column C the institution of the PI, column D indicates that the submission was successful, and the title of the researcher is displayed in column E.

For unsuccessful applications, we have determined that the information you have requested falls under Section 41 of the FOIA, information provided in confidence. To explain further, research organisations submit research applications to the Medical Research Council (MRC) in confidence and information on these applications is kept confidential and not published unless they are successful. Therefore, if this 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 are, however, able to provide information on how many unsuccessful applications were made to the Methodology Research Panel each year, with a breakdown of the title of the researcher which can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1: Number of Unsuccessful Applications per year, by title of the researcher**

Financial Year	Title of Researcher			Total
	Dr	Professor	Other	
2015/16	26	37	0	63
2016/17	47	30	0	77
2017/18	29	28	2	59
2018/19	28	20	0	48
2019/20	33	24	0	57

In providing this information we also had to consider whether its release would make individuals identifiable. The approach taken is that if information relates to fewer than five members of an identifying category, or if disclosing information would allow a subset of fewer than five members to be identified as a consequence of its release, that it be exempted under section 40(2) of the FOIA.

Therefore, we are exempting details of the institution of the PI under section 40(2) of the FOIA. Disclosing this information would contravene the first Data Protection Principle as defined under Section 86 of the Data Protection Act 2018 and Article 5 of EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016.

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

- b) *The number of Methodology Research Panel research grant submissions where the PI or Co-PI is a serving member of the panel and the success rate.*

As above, consideration was given to whether releasing this information would make individuals of unsuccessful applications identifiable. As details of both the successful applications and members of the panel are available in the public domain, it was determined that releasing this information on a per year basis would result in subsets of fewer than five being identified.

Therefore, we are exempting the number of submissions where the PI or Co-PI is a serving member of the panel and the success rate on a per year basis under section 40(2) of the FOIA. Disclosing this information would contravene the first Data Protection Principle as defined under Section 86 of the Data Protection Act 2018 and Article 5 of EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016.

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

We can, however, release a broader overview of the number of grant submissions where the PI or Co-PI is a serving member of the panel and the success rate in order to partially satisfy your request whilst protecting the identity of these individuals. Table 2 shows the cumulative totals for 2015 to 2019.

**Table 2: Number of Applications and success rate where PI or Co-PI is a serving panel member**

Year	Total Number of Applications	Overall Success Rate	Number of Apps where PI or Co-PI is on panel	Success Rate where PI or Co-PI is on panel*
2015-2019	358	15.1%	30	33.3%

\* Panel members make up 7-8% of applications to the Panel

- c) *The number of Methodology Research Panel research grant submissions from research institutions which have a serving member of the methodology research panel and the success rate.*

**Table 3: Number of applications and success rate where the research institution has a serving panel member**

Year	Total Number of Applications	Overall Success Rate	Number of Apps from institutions with a serving member on panel	Success Rate of institutions with a serving member on panel
2015	77	18.2%	42	16.7%
2016	90	14.4%	53	17.0%

2017	70	15.7%	42	21.4%
2018	55	12.7%	30	20.0%
2019	66	13.6%	27	11.1%

In relation to both question b) and question c), the [MRC Peer Reviewers Handbook](#)<sup>1</sup> contains information which addresses conflict of interest under Section 2.1 integrity.

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)

<sup>1</sup> <https://mrc.ukri.org/documents/pdf/reviewers-handbook/>