



[REDACTED]

10 February 2022

Dear [REDACTED],

Freedom of Information request: FOI2022/00027

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on the 24 January in which you requested the following:

Your request:

I apologise for the delay in replying to your letter of the 12th of October 2021, but I hope it is still possible to address your responses. Specifically, I would like to modify my request in order to overcome your objection that “we believe it may be possible to match reviewer scores to individual grant proposals, which would be a breach of peer review confidentiality”.

In order to make it impossible to associate a review score with a particular grant, I would instead like to request that just the peer review scores are provided along with the overall panel score (as opposed to the ranking as before), with the provision that in cases where there is a single grant with a particular score, it be eliminated from the dataset. In this way, there is no way to determine which peer review scores are associated with which grants, which I hope will address your concerns without adversely affecting my request. If the returned data could mention where this is the case (a note saying “Results with a panel score of 6 are not available for confidentiality reasons” or similar, for example) I should be able to make any statistical corrections necessary.

Our response

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

As stated in our response to your previous request, FOI2021/00427, we consider this information is exempt under section 41(1) information provided in confidence. In relation to section 41 the guidance provided to applicants and peer reviewers clearly states that applications are submitted to UKRI in confidence and that the peer review process will be carried out with the same degree of confidence. Under these circumstances peer reviewers and applicants would expect the peer review scores and overall panel score to remain confidential.

To address your point on anonymisation, as the rankings, which are published against identifiable proposals, follow the panel scores, which themselves are reached following discussions around proposals and their reviews, it is not possible to release data on reviewer scores in a way that does not risk exposing the reviewer scores for individual identifiable proposals.

However most notably, breaching the duty of confidence already established with reviewers and applicants would result in an actionable breach of confidence and therefore Section 41(1) has been engaged. Releasing this information would be likely to negatively impact participation in the peer review process and limit UKRI's ability to conduct peer review effectively; UKRI may be viewed as a 'confidentiality' risk if it routinely released information that had previously been acknowledged as being provided in confidence.

As this exemption is absolute there is no requirement to conduct a public interest test.

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

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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