

[REDACTED]

10 July 2020

[REDACTED]

Freedom of Information request: FOI2020/00171

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on the 12 June in which you requested the following:

Your request:

I am interested in grant applications regarding studies including epidemiological, into possible detrimental health problems caused to patients by prescribed benzodiazepine drugs. (A)

The following are my 2 FOI requests to the MRC.

- 1. Could you provide a list of successful applications awarded by the MRC since 1970 to 2015 and full details of said grants as (A) above?*
- 2. Could you provide a list of unsuccessful applications to the MRC since 1970 to 2015 and the full reason for rejecting said grants as (A) above?*

Our response

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

- 1. Could you provide a list of successful applications awarded by the MRC since 1970 to 2015 and full details of said grants as (A) above?*

Information of successful applications awarded by the MRC can be found in the attached file, "FOI2020_00171 Benzodiazepine Research 1970 to 2020".

The information we have provided comprises information on applications for research into possible detrimental health problems caused to patients by prescribed benzodiazepine drugs submitted to the MRC. Please note that information on applications submitted prior to 1996 are not always held in an easily accessible form, however we have included a number of applications which were available on our systems.

- 2. Could you provide a list of unsuccessful applications to the MRC since 1970 to 2015 and the full reason for rejecting said grants as (A) above?*

As research organisations submit research applications in confidence, we are exempting this information from our response as this falls under Section 41 of the FOIA, Information Provided in Confidence.

To explain further, applicants submit their proposals in confidence with the understanding that details of their application, including their scores will remain confidential. If released we believe it would result in an actionable breach of confidence. As this exemption is absolute there is no requirement to conduct a public interest test.

Although we are exempting a list of research applications in full, we can confirm that between 1996 and the date of your request (12th June 2020) there were 16 unsuccessful applications to the MRC for research into adverse effects prescribed benzodiazepine drugs.

You also requested information regarding the reasons why proposals were unsuccessful. The MRC uses a robust, multi-stage scientific peer review process to inform its funding decisions. As part of this, proposals for research funding are considered and assessed for scientific quality by a number of senior academics or "peers", from the UK and overseas, who work within relevant areas of research. This external assessment or "external peer review" provides the basis of "triage" of shortlisting, and eventually, funding decision made by the relevant MRC Board and Panel experts, which is also comprised of recognized experts in their relevant field. Further information on the peer review process can be found at: <https://mrc.ukri.org/funding/peer-review/>.

All applications to the MRC are considered in open competition with other areas of research, which means there are competing demands on funding at any given time. None of the unsuccessful applications were considered to have met the high scientific standard required for funding within the available budgets. To add some context, as a publicly funded organisation, MRC aims to fund excellent research in the areas within its remit and there is a high level of competition for MRC funding, such that only applications of the highest scientific quality can be funded. Furthermore, due to budgetary constraints the MRC is often not able to fund all applications that are identified as internationally competitive, the highest rating that can be received.

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,


Information Governance
Information Rights Team
UK Research and Innovation
foi@ukri.org | dataprotection@ukri.org