Dear [Name],

Freedom of Information request: InnovateUK assessor policy - ref UKRI – 2018/0129 IUK

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request submitted on the 28th August 2018 in which you requested the following:

Your Request:

Further to a previous FOI on UK assessor mark scheme, I would please like to request additional information regarding current InnovateUK assessor process and policy.

Specifically would you please confirm the current policy on InnovateUK assessor involvement within applications where the assessor has a direct/indirect relationship with any potential competition applicant.

To clarify this question further, could I ask for you to confirm whether InnovateUK assessors are allowed:

- To make direct applications (whether as the lead, or as a team member of a possible grant applicant) to funding competitions where they are not involved within the assessment process e.g. Would an assessor who is currently assessing for Open Competition rounds be allowed to make an application as part of a team for an Agri-Tech Catalyst round?

- To provide direct or indirect advice to possible applicants regarding an InnovateUK funding application within competitions where they are not directly involved within that competitions assessment e.g. Would an assessor who is currently assessing for Open Competition rounds be allowed to give advice to friends, family or customers (if within the realms of paid consultancy) who are making an application for an Agri-Tech Catalyst round?

In relation to the above questions and in each instance would I please be able to ask:

- what are the monitoring procedures taken to ensure compliance with these policies?

- is there a time limit involved with any restrictions e.g. is there a cool off period for individuals who have previously been assessors before they are allowed to be directly/indirectly involved within an application?
In all cases it would much appreciated if you could, alongside your answers, direct me to the specific area of text where such policy is mentioned in any handbook or policy document (complete with issue date, and any possible plans for change/past changes to the document or policy within the next/last 12 months)

Our response:

I can confirm that UKRI does hold the information that you have requested. Our response is detailed below:

Please find below an extract from the assessor agreement which you may find useful:

Section 5 – Assessor’s obligations
For the duration of the agreement you should provide assessment services to Innovate UK under the following terms:

- Notify Innovate UK immediately if you feel you may have a conflict of interest with an assignment or an individual application. You are considered to have a conflict of interest if you:
  - have been directly involved in the writing of an application
  - work for or have an interest in a company or sub-contractor involved in an application
  - could in any way benefit (directly or indirectly) from either scoring the application well or scoring it poorly
  - feel in any way that you are not able to independently and objectively assess an application

In your request you seek to clarify the following questions:

- To make direct applications (whether as the lead, or as a team member of a possible grant applicant) to funding competitions where they are not involved within the assessment process e.g. would an assessor who is currently assessing for Open Competition rounds be allowed to make an application as part of a team for an Agri-Tech Catalyst round?

There is nothing preventing an assessor applying to or being part of an application in one competition and acting as an assessor in a different, unrelated competition.

- To provide direct or indirect advice to possible applicants regarding an Innovate UK funding application within competitions where they are not directly involved within that competitions assessment e.g. Would an assessor who is currently assessing for Open Competition rounds be allowed to give advice to friends, family or customers (if within the realms of paid consultancy) who are making an application for an Agri-Tech Catalyst round?"

Nothing prevents an assessor giving advice under these circumstances but it would subsequently impact them in being able to assess applications in a competition where they had knowingly given advice.
What are the monitoring procedures taken to ensure compliance with these policies?

Innovate UK assessors are paid for each Innovate UK assessor assignment they undertake. They sign contracts which clearly state the terms and conditions including confidentiality and conflicts of interest. We find that they take these rules very seriously as they understand that any breach or inappropriate behaviour of any sort means that not only will not be selected as assessors on future engagements but their academic or business reputation in their sector would also be affected. It would be impossible to police 100% compliance but we have found that assessors tend to be totally transparent on the work they undertake and are quick to inform us of any malpractice that they may uncover in an application that they assess. Any suspicion is investigated immediately. To confirm, there is a contractual obligation assessor sign up to before beginning reviewing any applications; any breach would result in an assessor’s dismissal and would risk the validity application they are related to.

Is there a time limit involved with any restrictions e.g. is there a cool off period for individuals who have previously been assessors before they are allowed to be directly/indirectly involved within an application?

We insist that there is total separation between the competition where an individual is acting as an assessor and the competition where they are acting as an advisor or an applicant. Typically we find that where assessors move into the field of advising on applications they withdraw from being an assessor across all Innovate UK competitions.

If you have any queries about this response please contact me, or if you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request and wish to request a review of our decision, please write to:

Complaints Officer  
UK Research and Innovation  
Polaris House  
North Star Avenue  
Swindon  
SN2 1FL  
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 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:

Information Commissioner  
Wycliffe House,  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
SK9 5AF  

Enquiry/Information Line: Between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday 0303 123 1113 or 01625 545745. Further information about the Office of the Information Commissioner can be found at http://www.ico.gov.uk/

Yours sincerely,

Information Manager  
UK Research and Innovation, Information Governance Team  
Email: foi@ukri.org