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DEMYSTIFYING ASSESSOR FEEDBACK

Innovate UK SMART grants edition

An Ultimate Guide To IUK Resubmissions 2025

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Chapter 1: Requesting a Detailed Assessment Breakdown from Innovate UK

Understanding the Importance of Comprehensive Feedback

Innovate UK provides applicants with individual assessor feedback, with a simple aggregated score for each question. However, this averaging of the scores often masks the perspectives of individual assessors, which can vary widely in the scores given. In requesting each individual's assessment feedback score, it will allow you to form a more strategic resubmission plan.

Why Request Individual Assessor Scores

Imagine receiving a score of 7/10 for an answer. While seemingly positive, this single number conceals a critical story. Three assessors might view your technical approach as revolutionary, scoring it 9/10, while another does not understand the approach and only awards 2/10. The feedback however doesn't always reflect the score given. Some assessors give ways to improve a narrative even when awarding strong scores - whilst others may give mediocre scores with little negative comments. The average score presented smooths out these crucial distinctions, potentially hiding actionable insights that could dramatically improve your proposal.

By understanding the variance between assessors, you can:

- Identify the strengths and weaknesses noted by each assessor.

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- Prioritize which feedback is most crucial or consistent.
- Formulate a stronger argument for any future submissions based on specific assessor comments.

Having these individual insights helps you decide which feedback to address and which criticisms may be less relevant or inconsistent.

Legal Frameworks: Your Tools for Accessing Detailed Feedback

In the United Kingdom, public award bodies including Innovate UK are subject to both the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). These frameworks are designed to promote transparency and protect your rights:

Freedom of Information (FOI) Act

- Under the FOI Act, anyone has the right to request information held by UK public bodies.
- If the information is not exempt (for example, if it doesn't compromise national security or breach confidential commercial data), the public body is generally required to provide it.
- There are limits upon the time it takes to gather information for the request (the data can be collected in under 18 hours). If the information requested takes longer than the appropriate limit (£450 / £25 / hr) a fee can be charged or the body can seek and aid clarification on the request to form it in a manner within the appropriate limit.

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

- GDPR grants you the right to access any of your personal data held by an organization.
- It also allows you to verify the accuracy of that data and request corrections if needed.

Together, these regulations mean that if Innovate UK holds details related to your application—such as individual assessor scores, feedback, or interview notes—you have a legitimate basis to request them. Under most circumstances, Innovate UK must either share this data or provide a valid reason for withholding it.

How to Submit Your Request

Requesting the individual scores is a relatively simple email to support@iuk.ukri.org and typically can be processed within a couple of days. Note under the legal frameworks this can take up to 4 weeks, however with an increasing number of applicants requesting this additional information; support is much more streamlined with these requests.

Technically, this request fails under the GDPR framework, however, internally Innovate UK see these as Freedom of Information requests.

The following should be sent from **the same email address** as the lead applicant on the IFS portal

Template email

Subject: Detailed Assessment Feedback Request – [Application Number]

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Dear Support,

I am writing to request the individual assessor score breakdown and comprehensive feedback for my recent Innovate UK application. This request is submitted under the Freedom of Information Act and GDPR regulations.

I kindly request from the Innovation Lead the following:

- Individual assessor scores
- Any additional comments from each assessor identifiable to my application

Application Details:

- Number: [Your Application Number]
- Title: [Application Title]
- Submitted to [Competition Title] with competition dates [Deadline Date]

I would appreciate a response at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Contact Information]

Chapter 2: Requesting an appeal

In short: there is no right of appeal against assessor feedback

As you review your Innovate UK feedback, you will likely find that assessors sometimes disagree with each other, appear not to have fully read your application, or draw inaccurate conclusions from limited information. In moments like these, it's natural to consider appealing. However, Innovate UK's official guidance states:

"There is no right of appeal against the feedback provided. Innovate UK will not enter any discussions or complaints regarding the scientific or technical decision made regarding your application."

Essentially, appeals will only be considered under two extreme circumstances:

- Clear, irrefutable evidence of discrimination
- A demonstrable procedural error so fundamental that it renders the entire assessment invalid

Innovate UK maintains steadfast confidence in its assessment process and its chosen experts. The burden of proof rests entirely on the applicant, and the threshold for overturning a decision is practically insurmountable.

While it may feel deeply unfair to have your innovative proposal misunderstood or a critical nuance overlooked, the underlying philosophy is clear: successful applications

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must overcome potential misunderstandings through exceptional clarity and compelling communication.

Instead of pursuing a fruitless appeal, both time consuming and lengthy delays, it's often more productive to direct your energy toward a stronger revision or resubmission. By addressing confusion head-on—whether through clearer explanations, better-structured data, or more compelling evidence— clearly communicating the proposal's strengths in a way that won't alienate assessors stands you a greater chance of winning in a future round.

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Chapter 3 Assessment is extremely subjective

When you look at each assessor's individual score, you may notice significant variations in how they interpret the same content. A piece of text that one assessor rates highly might receive a considerably lower score from another. To make the most of this information, focus on the reasons and themes driving their feedback, rather than trying to address every negative point in isolation.

Scoring Nuances and Subjectivity

Most scoring matrices have a limited number of categories, each linked to two possible numeric scores. For example, the difference between a score of 6 and a score of 10 might come down to subtle differences in how comprehensively you've explained a market scenario. These distinctions often rest on the assessor's subjective impressions-particularly for the high-scoring answers (gradings between 8-10 are fully a subjective manner). Factors like how prepared or engaged an assessor feels on a given day can also affect your score—sometimes as much as a five-point difference. Frustratingly there is little we can do to avoid this, it's simply part of the Innovate UK application process.

Example of scoring matrix

Question 2 Your idea and innovation

What is your idea and innovation, and why is it game changing?

Assessor guidance & scoring:

8 - 10 There is a compelling reason for the project and innovation including how it is game changing and of the highest technical merit. It credibly addresses the need and opportunity identified, including a full understanding of nearest state of the art, and how the innovation described builds on, or is materially different to, other alternative solutions that are already available. Challenges and opportunities relating to equality, diversity and inclusion have been considered and embedded in the proposal where applicable.

6 -7 There is a clear reason for the project, and the innovation described has merit and will address the need and opportunity identified. Nearest state-of-the-art is detailed, but it is not clear how the innovation described will improve on or is different to currently available offerings. Further development of the idea is required.

4 - 5 The reason for the project is good, but the innovation lacks merit or is not different to other alternative solutions. Nearest state-of-the-art has not been fully explored, and the opportunity identified has not been fully realised or understood.

2 – 3 The reason for the project is poorly defined, and the innovation described has little merit. It is unclear what need or opportunity the innovation intends to address. The nearest state-of-the-art has not been explored, and the innovation described does not improve on current offerings.

1 There is no clear reason for the project, and the innovation described is not gamechanging or disruptive. References to current state-of-the-art are not offered or are not relevant, and the idea described will not impact on current offerings.

Identifying Core Themes

Because each assessor brings different perspectives and biases, you'll likely see recurring themes in their comments. A common pitfall is to treat every negative remark

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at face value, trying to plug gaps by adding more data or clarifying existing points. However, the real issue might be that your application isn't structured in a way that naturally addresses these concerns from the outset. By looking for patterns, you can determine whether to revise entire sections of your application or alter how you present your idea—rather than just inserting new text in response to a single assessor's feedback.

Turning Insights into Action

If multiple assessors repeatedly raise concerns about market clarity, for instance, it's worth restructuring your "Market" question to thoroughly demonstrate market need, traction, and potential. This approach helps ensure that future assessors won't latch onto that same gap. In other words, by proactively "closing the loop" on common issues, you can significantly reduce the likelihood of receiving inconsistent scores next time around.

Chapter 4: Applications are Connected Narratives not Stand Alone Questions

Scoring patterns often reveal hidden connections throughout your application. A negative comment in one section can signal deeper issues that reverberate through the rest of your submission. Because many assessors score questions in sequence, an early weak spot can bias them against the application overall.

When preparing a resubmission, pay special attention to where a score drops and try to pinpoint the exact moment the assessor's perspective shifted. If there's a sudden dip for a specific question, focus on revising that response first. This often addresses the root cause of the assessor's doubts or criticisms, preventing them from carrying that bias through subsequent questions.

Using a Narrative Framework

One effective way to avoid these scoring dips is to approach your application as a cohesive story rather than a series of disjointed answers:

Create Logical Links: Show how each section naturally follows from the previous one. This helps you build momentum and prevents assessors from misunderstanding your project's progression or missing key details.

Highlight Recurring Themes: If you have a strong market proposition, keep emphasizing its relevance in later questions. Reinforcing core ideas in a story-like

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manner can reduce the risk of an assessor "getting lost" or latching onto a small misunderstanding.

Anticipate Objections: By structuring your narrative, you can strategically address potential doubts up front. This ensures that when an assessor encounters future sections, they already have the necessary context to understand your technology or market argument.

Ultimately, by weaving a compelling narrative that reinforces key points and proactively addresses potential objections, you minimise the risk of a single issue overshadowing your entire application.

Chapter 5: Innovation matters, but the right kind

Not every innovative idea is a perfect fit for Innovate UK's SMART funding competition, which doesn't mean it isn't groundbreaking, or that it lacks commercial potential. The SMART competition prioritizes highly radical innovations with worldwide market potential and inherent scalability, which may not align with every project's goals or industry context. However, not being the right fit for SMART doesn't mean your idea isn't innovative or commercially viable; it simply means you may want to explore other, more suitable funding opportunities.

To understand this better, it helps to look at the Innovation Matrix, which categorizes projects by the level of novelty in both their technology and their market.
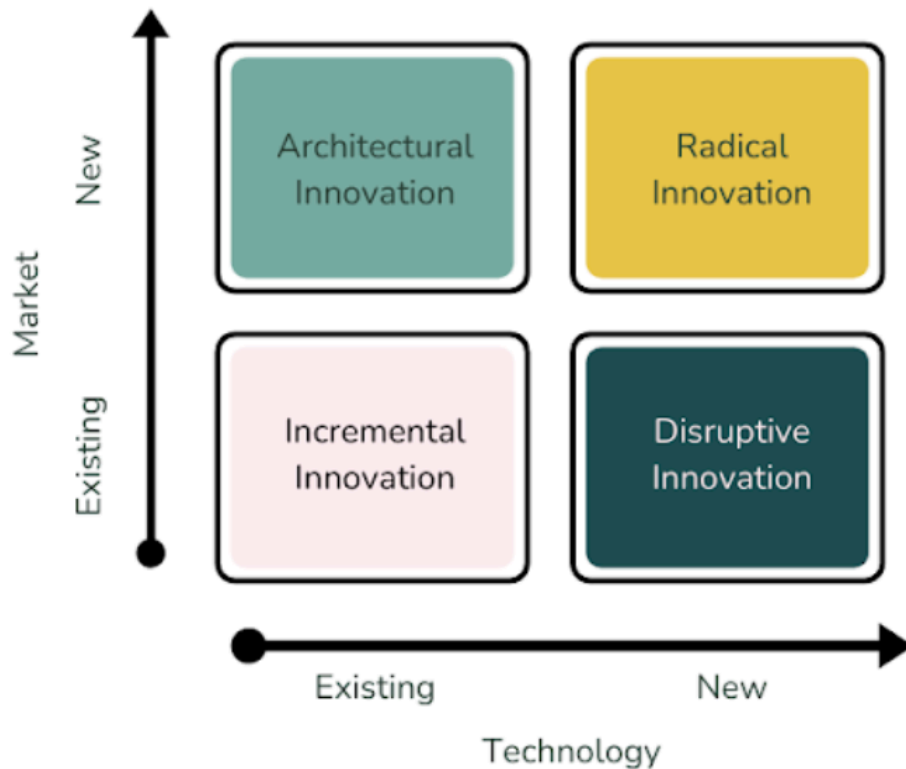
The Innovation Matrix: Four Key Categories

Incremental Innovation Existing technology, existing market

Improves upon established products, services, or processes. Will not meet SMART's emphasis on radical if it only introduces stepwise changes.

Architectural Innovation: Existing technology, new market. Expands a known solution into a novel market by combining existing technology in new and interesting ways. Can be significant within its niche, but may not fulfill SMART's criteria for technology that truly breaks the envelope.

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Disruptive Innovation: New technology in a less mainstream or emerging market. Can eventually reshape entire industries, May align well with SMART, especially if it demonstrates global market appeal and scalable growth potential.

Radical/Breakthrough Innovation. Entirely new technology targeting entirely new markets. Aims to redefine the status quo, creating industries or market segments where none previously existed. Strongly matches SMART's focus on "extremely disruptive innovation" with worldwide impact.

The Challenge of Cross-Sector Comparisons

When you submit to SMART, your proposal competes with projects from various industries—each with different norms and risk appetites. What seems highly disruptive innovation in one sector could be viewed as incremental in another. Assessors apply the same high-level criteria to each application, regardless of the field, which can put certain technologies at a disadvantage if they don't inherently scale or disrupt in the way that SMART aims to support.

Why the Right Funding Stream Matters

A "one-size-fits-all" approach to funding rarely serves every project well. SMART often favors radical innovations that have clear, global market potential. For instance, digital technologies may excel here because of their built-in scalability. However, if your solution is more incremental or adjacent, or if its market appeal is niche rather than global, you might find better support through other Innovate UK competitions or sector-specific programs.

By aligning your application with the most relevant funding stream from the start, you'll increase your chances of success. If you find that your project isn't a great fit for SMART's criteria, exploring alternative calls or even waiting for a more targeted competition might be the wiser strategy.

When considering a resubmission, thoroughly evaluate where your idea sits on the Innovation Matrix. If your project clearly fits the disruptive or radical category, then SMART may remain your best option. Otherwise, broaden your search for narrower, more specialized funding programs that value the specific type and scale of your innovation. In the long run this can save time, effort, and the frustration of competing in a round that isn't tailored to your project's strengths.

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Chapter 6: Know when to walk away

A common question is whether they should resubmit a proposal that didn't secure funding. The short answer depends on how close you were to the threshold of success:

- **Scores Above 70:**

  If your application scored above 70, there's likely potential for improvement. You may have been held back by one or two "outlier" assessors, bad luck in how your proposal was read, or relatively minor issues in structuring your responses. A thorough revision—especially if it clarifies the innovation level, market potential, and scalability—could significantly improve your chances on resubmission.

- **Scores Below 70:**

  If your score dipped below 70, the problems may be more fundamental. In many cases, the innovation may not be radical enough for SMART's criteria, or the market and scaling potential might not meet the competition's expectations. While it's not impossible to transform a sub-70 application into a winner, it often requires more substantial reworking—or perhaps even finding a funding stream better aligned with your project's scope.

Is Resubmission Worth the Effort?

Ultimately, this decision depends on your goals, resources, and how much work you're willing to invest. If your innovation is close to meeting SMART's criteria and you have a plan to address key weaknesses, a resubmission could be worthwhile. If, however, the

feedback suggests your proposal falls well outside SMART's requirements, it may be more productive to explore alternative funding routes.

The final consideration is that a project can only be re-submitted once, and this cross cuts all Innovate UK schemes. You may choose to hold on to a resubmission chance in case a better competition presents itself in the near future.

Remember, a well-structured application can sometimes boost scores by dozens of points, so the right adjustments can pay off significantly.

Chapter 7: Follow the Data and Leveraging Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests

Previously we used Freedom of Information request to obtain more detail on a specific application, here we leverage the framework to highlight trends in the wider landscape.

Though project-specific confidential details generally remain inaccessible, FOI requests can still yield aggregate information that proves highly valuable, including:

- Overall Application Volumes by sector
- Sector-Specific Funding Success percentages
- Broad Funding Allocation trends (e.g., types of projects and budgets typically approved vs that which isn't awarded funding)

Assessment Trend Analyses, helping you gauge how evaluators approach different types of proposals

Whilst information is published on winning applications in the funding logs, by default the expanded statistics you can request by FOI are not. With these extended statistics you can see trends in more thematic information—like the number of applications per industry, success rates, and funding distribution.

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Examples of FOI Data and Its Value

Industry Success Rates: Some sectors inherently have higher success rates in SMART competitions, which might guide you on whether to apply now or wait for a more tailored call.

Resubmission Odds: Historical data suggests that the success rate for resubmissions is similar to first-time submissions—roughly 5%—so there's no guaranteed advantage in trying again unless you've significantly improved your proposal.

Project Details: Innovate UK does publish public descriptions of funded projects, including size, start dates, and partners involved. FOI requests can supplement this info with additional insights, such as evaluation criteria or scoring breakdowns for entire competitions.

Published Requests

You can view past FOI requests at ukri.disclosurelog.co.uk/disclosures/. These logs offer a wealth of information about Innovate UK's funding decisions, trends, and overall landscape.

Examples of what can be obtained:

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Table 1: Number of applications and their corresponding success rates by industry area

Innovation Area	Total Submitted (6-18 Months)	Total Submitted (19-36 Months)	Successful (6-18 Months)	Successful (19-36 Months)	Success Rate (6-18 Months) (%)	Success Rate (19-36 Months) (%)
No Data Given	45	0	1	0	2.2	
Additive layer manufacturing (ALM)	3	0	0	0	0	
Advanced therapies	13	3	0	0	0	0
Aerospace	7	0	0	0	0	
Agricultural productivity	17	0	2	0	11.7	
Assembly / disassembly / joining	3	0	0	0	0	
Biosciences	35	8	1	0	2.8	0
Chemical / bio processes	6	0	0	0	0	
Composite materials	5	3	0	0	0	0
Connected and autonomous vehicles	3	2	0	0	0	0
Connected transport	9	1	0	0	0	0
Creative industries	39	3	1	0	2.5	0
Diagnostics, medical technology and devices	63	12	1	0	1.5	0
Digital health	127	14	4	0	3.1	0
Digital industries	316	7	10	0	3.1	0
Digital manufacturing	4	2	0	0	0	0
Digital technology	239	5	6	0	2.5	0
Electronic materials and manufacturing	2	1	0	0	0	0
Electronics manufacturing	7	1	0	0	0	0
Electronics, sensors and photonics	2	5	0	0	0	0
Emerging technology	43	6	3	1	6.9	16.6
Energy - other	28	5	1	0	3.5	0
Energy and automotive	5	1	0	0	0	0
Energy efficiency	19	4	1	0	5.2	0
Energy systems	18	2	2	0	11.1	0
Enhancing food quality	11	1	0	0	0	0

Innovation Area	Total Submitted (6-18 Months)	Total Submitted (19-36 Months)	Successful (6-18 Months)	Successful (19-36 Months)	Success Rate (6-18 Months) (%)	Success Rate (19-36 Months) (%)
Forming technologies	1	0	0	0	0	
Independent living and wellbeing	9	0	0	0	0	
Low carbon vehicles	6	1	0	0	0	0
Marine transport	2	3	0	0	0	0
Material recovery and treatment	12	4	1	1	8.3	25
Materials, process and manufacturing design technologies	21	2	1	0	4.7	0
Nanotechnology / nanomaterials	3	0	0	0	0	
Offshore wind	3	0	0	0	0	
Other transport	7	0	0	0	0	
Polymers and plastics	5	0	0	0	0	
Precision medicine	8	1	0	0	0	0
Preclinical technologies and drug target discovery	14	0	1	0	7.1	
Rail transport	2	2	1	0	50	0
Resource efficiency	10	0	2	0	20	
Robotics and autonomous systems	11	1	0	0	0	0
Satellite applications	3	0	0	0	0	
Sensor and instrument design or manufacture	3	0	0	0	0	
Smart infrastructure	19	3	2	1	10.5	33.3
Space technology	3	0	0	0	0	
Surface engineering	1	0	0	0	0	
Surface engineering, coatings and thin films	2	0	0	0	0	
Sustainable materials	10	2	1	0	10	0
Therapeutic and medicine development	9	2	1	0	11.1	0
Urban living	8	0	0	0	0	

Chapter 8: There's gold in the feedback.

Rejection always stings, and even though you didn't win the funding, there's immense value hidden within every piece of feedback you receive.

Think about it; at least three industry experts have just taken the time to offer their objective, impartial insights on your complete idea.

That's a rare opportunity.

View this feedback as a resource that you can use to improve the next application as a fresh perspective which can guide you to:

- Identify gaps or challenges you hadn't considered.
- Discover new avenues for research or refinement.
- Strengthen your concept and sharpen your strategy.

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Blending technical expertise with a touch of creative alchemy to craft compelling grant applications that stand out.

Grantwise don't just help you apply for funding—we help you win it.

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