

**From:** Freedom of Information

**Sent:** 12 May 2020 16:15

**To:**

**Subject:** Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/20/149)

Dear

**Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/20/149)**

Thank you for your clarified Freedom of Information (FOI) request dated 10 April 2020, reference K/20/149.

Your original request read:

“I am writing to you under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to request the following information from your database.

A key context is that I am seeking up-to-date information as regards to any indication of the extent to which students improperly submit for assessment essays produced for payment and to order by ‘essay mills’, a practice I have seen referred to as ‘contract cheating’ or ‘purchases essays”.

The information I ask for is as follows, broken down into data for each of the past five academic years.

Information on what is discussed or decided by the university over the last five academic years as regards any additional measures to prevent ‘contract cheating’ or plagiarism, including the dates of those discussions and decisions, software and detail of what forum (e.g. committee) was involved. e.g. concerning purchase of Turnitin’s “Authorship Investigate” software, or any other software, or blocking essay mill websites from IT equipment, being alert to advertising methods such as posters, flyers and social media, and take steps to minimise/counter them when detected.”

Your clarification email read:

“The past five academic years is the timeframe between 2014/15 to 2018/19.

The information I'm requesting for is mainly about 'contract cheating'. And yes, whether the university is using any other software or method to prevent or combat this behaviour of academic dishonesty. 'Additional' here means besides Turnitin, since almost every university uses it, I would like to know if the university might be taking additional, different measures.

I'm not asking for exact details of meetings, so just the minutes and the result of meetings. For example, if the university has launched any committee or discussion regarding this issue - contract cheating, and if the university did launch these, what decisions were made?

As one of your example given in the email - would discussions which took place earlier than the previous five academic years, but which relate to a decision taken within the previous five academic years fall with the scope of

your request? Yes, if the decision is made within the previous five academic years, it falls with the scope of my request because I am looking for decisions made within that period of time.”

The University of Leeds uses Turnitin software to monitor text matching against other sources. We do not use any other software at present. As such, we do not hold any information relevant to the software elements of your request.

We do not have any meetings or committees which specifically and exclusively consider contract cheating. As such, we do not hold any minutes or “results of meetings” relevant to your request. However, we take academic integrity very seriously at the University. We have an Academic Integrity Leadership Group and Network which regularly reviews our current regulations on academic malpractice, including considering matters such as contract cheating, in line with sector guidance and local experience. Decisions made by this group since 2014 include;

- enhancement of induction guidance for all students;
- contribution to a welcome information support package for international students;
- improvement to induction and academic support for incoming study abroad students;
- development of a compulsory academic integrity tutorial and test for all students, and;
- provision of teaching materials to support academics to communicate expectations.

Communication of clear statements about academic integrity expectations at the University is led by Academic Integrity Leads based in each School, who also lead on investigation of potential cases in accordance with University regulations. Information for students regarding cheating and plagiarism is available on the [Academic Life](#) pages of our website.

We hope this information is helpful. If you have any questions about this email, however, please do not hesitate to contact us on [foi@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:foi@leeds.ac.uk)

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request and wish to make a complaint or request a review of our decision, you can request an Internal Review. Requests for Internal Review should be made in writing using the following contact information:

Post: Mr D Wardle  
Deputy Secretary  
The University of Leeds  
Leeds  
LS2 9JT

Email: [foi@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:foi@leeds.ac.uk)

Requests for Internal Review should be submitted within 40 working days of receiving the University's response to your request. Further information about how the University manages Freedom of Information requests and about our complaints procedure is also available on our website ([www.leeds.ac.uk](http://www.leeds.ac.uk)).

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the review/complaints procedure provided by the University. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

Kind regards

**Chloe Wilkins**

Freedom of Information Officer

Secretariat

University of Leeds