

From: Freedom of Information

Sent: 26 October 2020 13:54

To:

Subject: Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/20/327)

Dear

Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/20/327)

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (FOI) request dated 15 October 2020, reference K/20/327.

You originally wrote to us on 24 August 2020. Your request read:

1. "The number of doctoral students who applied to your university between 2010 and 2020, and their socioeconomic, ethnic, gender, racial, and religious backgrounds.
2. The number of doctoral students who were admitted to your university between 2010 and 2020, and their socioeconomic, ethnic, gender, racial, and religious backgrounds.
3. Of the students admitted, how many students received research council scholarships, and their socioeconomic, ethnic, gender, racial, and religious backgrounds.
4. Of these students how many received University specific scholarships, and their socioeconomic, ethnic, gender, racial, and religious backgrounds.
5. The subjects of the PhD (including research titles)
6. The rate of rescindment amongst these students, and their race, ethnicity, age, sex, religious identity.
7. The rate of completion amongst these students, and their race, ethnicity, age, sex, religious identity.
8. How many students experiencing unforeseen circumstances and the broad nature of these circumstances, and their socioeconomic, ethnic, gender, racial, and religious backgrounds.
9. How many students were supported by the University specific scholarships during hardship, and their race, ethnicity, age, sex, religious identity.
10. How many students were supported by the any financial assistance funds during unforeseen circumstances, and their race, ethnicity, age, sex, religious identity."

We responded to you on 11 September 2020, requesting clarification on multiple elements of your request, and outlining several difficulties associated with your request (including the time it would take to respond, limitations in the information we hold, and the personal nature of the information being requested).

You provided some clarification on 15 October 2020. It is our understanding that your clarified request therefore seeks the following information:

1. “The number of doctoral students who applied to your university between 2010 and 2020, and their socioeconomic, ethnic, gender, racial, and religious backgrounds. [2010-2011 academic year onward].
 2. The number of doctoral students who were admitted to your university between 2010 and 2020, and their socioeconomic [background], gender, [ethnicity – standard UK govt. definitions], and [their religion]
 3. Of the students admitted, how many students received research council scholarships, and their socioeconomic, ethnic, gender, racial, and religious backgrounds [definitions as in question two above]
 4. Of these students how many received University specific scholarships, and their socioeconomic, ethnic, gender, racial, and religious backgrounds [definitions as in question two above]
 5. The subjects of the PhD (including research titles) [Broad PhD subject areas are OK]
 6. The rate of rescindment amongst these students, and their [ethnicity], age, sex, [religion].
 7. The rate of completion amongst these students, and their [ethnicity], age, sex, [religion].
 8. How many students [have submitted mitigating circumstances requests] and the broad nature of these circumstances, and their socioeconomic, ethnic, gender, racial, and religious backgrounds. [definitions as in question two above]
 9. How many students were supported by the University specific scholarships during hardship, and their race, ethnicity, age, sex, religious identity [definitions as in question two above]
 10. How many students were supported by the any financial assistance funds during unforeseen circumstances, and their race, ethnicity, age, sex, religious identity.” [definitions as in question two above]
- Where socioeconomic, ethnic data is not available, please provide data that is available.
 - If the request falls out of the 18hr limit- would it be possible to provide data for the years 2015-2020?”

The University of Leeds holds some information relevant to your request. However, we are refusing this request under section 14(1) of the FOI Act. Section 14(1) sets out that public authorities such as the University of Leeds do not have to comply with FOI requests where the request, or its impact on a public authority, cannot be justified.

In this case, the information you have requested is not held in a single collated format. Instead, information (where held) will be located across admissions, student finance, school and faculty records, and in individual student records. It would take a substantial amount of time and resource to locate and retrieve the information you have requested, and to cross-reference the files in order to provide the breakdowns you have requested. We receive approximately 5500 PhD applications each year, and as such estimate that over fifty thousand students will fall within the scope of your request.

We also note that it would be necessary to interrogate sensitive personal information about students (e.g. regarding their ethnicity and financial status), and as such further effort would be required in order to ensure exempt material could be redacted in advance of disclosure.

This would be unduly burdensome both in terms of the time and cost which would be required, and the logistics of making such arrangements.

This is exacerbated by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The vast majority of University of Leeds staff continue to work remotely, and we anticipate that these arrangements will persist into 2021. For information security purposes, not all information is available while working remotely. We have also had to be reactive to new requirements borne out of the pandemic which place additional strain on our capacity and impacts on our ability to deliver other business as usual priorities. It is therefore essential that we preserve resource as much as possible and prioritise tasks accordingly.

We are therefore refusing your request under section 14(1) due to the burden responding at this time would place upon us, which cannot be considered justifiable.

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

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

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).

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