

Update to K/20/367

The response to question eight of FOI request reference K/20/367 was updated further to an Internal Review. Please find the revised response below:

Before the academic year 2001/02, the University of Leeds issued “student status” certificate to all students who needed to demonstrate their student status. These were not specifically “council tax exemption letters” and did not refer explicitly to council tax. Instead they provide the registration status of the named student for the current year, plus basic course information and personal information. Since 2001/02, we have shared a secure data file with the councils local to the University of Leeds (Leeds, Wakefield, Bradford and Kirklees councils) which confirms the names and addresses of full-time registered students. This allows the council to cross-reference their own records of individuals who have notified the council that they are a student for council tax purposes. Students who do not reside in one of these council areas can still request a student status certificate in order to demonstrate their eligibility for council tax exemption.

We did not supply copies of any of these student status certificates in our original response because we interpreted your request to be for letters specific to council tax. No such letters exist. However, on review we consider that this part of your request could equally be interpreted as a request for copies of each student registration certificate issued to Clinical Psychology trainees in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020. The Deputy Secretary has therefore considered whether this information could be provided to you now. It is his conclusion that the student status certificates are exempt under section 40(2) of the FOI Act. By their nature, the certificates constitute the personal nature of the individual students. They contain information which is specifically used to identify the individual and to determine their student status. This is information which is not publicly known, and which students have no expectation that the University will disclose. Disclosure would therefore be unfair, would violate rights of students under the Data Protection Act 2018 and therefore the information is exempt under section 40(2).

The Deputy Secretary also considered whether it would be feasible to provide you with a sample or ‘dummy copy’ of a student registration certificate. However, we consider that to do so would provide individuals with the opportunity to produce illegitimate copies of certificates and would therefore risk council tax fraud and other types of dishonesty associated with falsely claiming to be a student. The Deputy Secretary therefore considers that samples or ‘dummy copies’ of the student registration certificate are exempt from disclosure under section 31(1)(a) of the FOI Act. As section 31 is a qualified exemption, he has also considered the public interest factors associated with this information. He has not found there to be any specific public interest in the disclosure of such a document; releasing it would not

provide any new insight or context into the way in which students can demonstrate their registration status. On the other hand, there is a very strong public interest in ensuring that individuals who are not entitled to claim student status are prevented from doing so. It is therefore the Deputy Secretary's conclusion that the public interest is in favour of maintaining the exemption.