

From: Freedom of Information

Sent: 20 November 2020 16:39

To:

Subject: Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/20/429)

Dear

Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/20/429)

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (FOI) request dated 23 October 2020, reference K/20/429

Your request read:

“- How many claims for tuition refunds have been submitted to the university for both strike disruption and COVID-related disruption, since the start of 2019?

- How many of these claims resulted in a refund being issued?

- What is the total amount of tuition fee refund paid out for each reason, and what is the largest single refund?

For each question, please give me figures for strike-related claims and for COVID-related claims separately.”

The University of Leeds holds some information relevant to your request. However, we consider that to respond to your request as it is currently framed would exceed the cost limit as set out in Section 12(1) of the FOI Act. Section 12(1) states that a public authority can refuse a request if complying with it would exceed the appropriate limit of £450. For the purposes of FOI, time spent on the permitted activities is calculated at the flat rate of £25 per person, per hour. The appropriate limit therefore represents the estimated cost of one person spending 18 hours to determine whether the information is held, and to locate, retrieve and extract the information.

We have outlined the reasons for invoking Section 12(1) below.

The information you have requested is not held centrally. There is no specific mechanism by which students can ‘submit a claim’ for a tuition fee refund. Instead, students may include a request for financial redress as part of a complaint or concern. It is our experience that students may express a request or desire for a tuition fee refund/reduction in a number of ways. Complaints or concerns raised by students can be made to the individual School (to an individual member of staff or the administration office), to members of the Senior Team (e.g. the Vice Chancellor’s Office), or to our Student Cases team. As your request is specific to requests for a reduction in, or refund of, tuition fees, it is also possible that some complaints/concerns will have been made to our Student Finance office. It is therefore possible that information relevant to your request may be held across a range of offices.

Some students may get in contact with us specifically to request a tuition fee reduction or refund, while others may refer to such a request only briefly or in a hypothetical manner (for example, seeking compensation “unless” particular action is taken). Some complaints may be very serious in nature, necessitating a referral to the Complaints Officer and management under our [Student Complaints Procedure](#). Other complaints or concerns are suitable for informal resolution, e.g. at the School level. Informal complaints or concerns are unlikely to generate a substantial amount of recorded information; they may in fact consist of a single email and its response. It would therefore be very difficult to identify and locate information relevant to your request which relates to informal or locally resolved matters. These locally resolved matters would not be recorded as formal complaints. As such there is no means by which we can establish which team(s) have received contacts of this nature. Each School, the offices of all members of the Senior Team, the Student Cases team, the Student Finance team and the Complaints Officer would all need to review all written correspondence and any casework folders which fall within the timeframe of your request (from September 2015).

It is difficult to estimate how long this would take to complete. There are no key words which we could use to search for information relevant to your request, as terms such as ‘compensation’, ‘tuition’, ‘refund’ and ‘complaint’ are likely to appear in correspondence which does not fall within the scope of your request. Furthermore, even at the School level, there is no single route via which students must direct their concerns. They may raise concerns with one of their tutors, with the Head of School (or their office), or with one of the administrative teams which supports the School.

There are 33 individual schools within the University. If it took each School an average of one hour to review records for each completed academic year (which we do not anticipate would be sufficient for all schools), a minimum of 165 hours would be required to locate information relevant to your request. Further time would then be required for similar searches to be conducted in other offices within the University, as outlined above.

We are therefore satisfied that section 12(1) applies in this case.

However, if you were to refine your request by limiting the scope to only complaints managed by our Student Cases Team (for which information is more readily accessible), we may be able to provide some information.

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