

From: Freedom of Information

Sent: 14 December 2020 15:52

To:

Subject: Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/20/475)

Dear

Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/20/475)

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (FOI) request dated 16 November 2020, reference K/20/475.

Your request read:

“a) Correspondence involving the university's Vice Chancellor (or equivalent) which:

- Was sent since the start of the academic year AND
- Mentions any of the words: death, suicide, mental health, counselling

Please provide full email chains/message exchanges of any correspondence, as understanding the full context is important.

b) Details (dates, times, attendees, agendas, and minutes) of meetings involving the Vice Chancellor covering any of the above topics, since the start of the academic year

I understand that an amount of this information may need to be redacted - if so, please provide justifications for each redaction. However I also believe there is a strong public interest in knowing how the university deals with student mental health and suicide at the highest levels.”

The University of Leeds holds 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.

As you might expect, the Vice-Chancellor receives and is copied into a great many items of correspondence which include the key words you have set out. Although the list of words you have provided are specific, in practice they appear in a very broad spectrum of subjects, from specific complaints made by or on behalf of students, as part of newsletters and organisational communications, in reference to organisational planning and in a variety of other communications. Similarly, a very wide range of meetings attended by the Vice-Chancellor include reference to the topics you have set out. It is also important to note that particularly throughout the coronavirus pandemic, the University in general has been keen to promote the wellbeing services offered to staff and students, and this has therefore increased the volume of material held which is relevant to your request.

We have identified over 150 items of correspondence and meeting materials which we consider to be relevant to your request. The work to collate this information took

approximately 20 hours. Further work would then be required to review each relevant document in turn with a view to redacting sensitive and confidential material. As your email specifically requests full email chains, some of the emails are very lengthy and will take a significant amount of time to review and redact. On the other hand, some are short newsletters or bulletins which are shared widely and would not require much effort to review and redact. Meeting papers are likely to take longer than emails to review, as they are typically more detailed and focussed and therefore more of the information within is likely to be sensitive. We estimate that it would take an average of ten minutes to review each relevant item and make the necessary redactions. Approximately 25 hours, further to the 20 already spent collating the information, would therefore be required to respond to your request. This does not include time spent reviewing attachments to emails, which would add significantly more time. This places an undue burden on the University, particularly during the additional strain placed on our services as a result of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. While we appreciate your concern for demonstrating how the University deals with the very serious issues of student mental health and suicide, we consider that the ends in this case do not justify the means. Only a small volume of the information captured by the request is likely to demonstrate our approach to student mental health and wellbeing, and as such the burden caused by the request cannot be said to be proportionate.

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