Dear

Freedom of Information request reference K/20/066

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (FOI) request dated 5 February 2020, reference K/20/066.

Your request read:

“I request that a copy of the following documents [or documents containing the following information] be provided to me:

The partnership between the University of Leeds and the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, Israel including research contracts, investment fundings, exchange programmes, residence abroad contracts, procurement.

The partnership between the University of Leeds and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, including research contracts, investment fundings, exchange programmes, residence abroad contracts, procurement.”

The University of Leeds holds this information.

We can confirm that the University of Leeds has Student Exchange Agreements with both the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. These agreements enable undergraduate student exchanges between Leeds and these institutions for either a full academic year or a semester. However, we are withholding copies of the agreements under section 43(2) of the Freedom of Information Act.

Section 43(2) sets out that information is can be withheld if disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person or organisation, unless there is an overwhelming public interest in disclosure.

We consider that to share the specific terms of these agreements would be likely to damage the commercial interests of the University of Leeds. We have set out our reasoning for this below.

Student Exchange Agreements can include clauses which permit either organisation to publicly share the details of the arrangement or copies of the agreement document. Whether or not the clause(s) is included will depend on the specifics of the agreement, the preferences of both organisations and other factors which are considered on a case-by-case basis. Neither of the agreements you have requested include clauses which permit the University of Leeds to release the document. While this alone does not preclude the University from releasing the information, we do consider that it speaks to the expectations of the organisations with whom the agreements were signed. We therefore consider that to disclose copies of the agreements would have a detrimental impact on the working relationships between the organisations, which would be likely, in turn, to dissuade either the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya or the Hebrew University of Jerusalem from engaging with the University of Leeds on similar arrangements in the future.
We also consider that disclosure would be likely to weaken our own opportunities to secure and/or maintain partnerships with other organisations. The University of Leeds competes with other UK universities to attract international exchange partners. We consider that to release the specific terms of these agreements would be likely to have a damaging impact on existing Student Exchange Agreements with other international organisations (if, for example, another organisation considered terms within these agreements to be more favourable than terms they have agreed with the University of Leeds). Conversely, the information could be used by other UK universities to their advantage. For instance, some universities may currently be using terms which are not considered as favourable as those used by the University of Leeds. In such cases, the universities could use Leeds clauses in order to make themselves more attractive as student exchange partners. This would disadvantage the University of Leeds in the pursuit of prospective partners going forward. This would, in turn, make the University of Leeds a less attractive option to potential students, which would have a clear commercial impact.

We are therefore satisfied that this appropriately demonstrates the prejudice which would be likely to occur as a result of the disclosure of this information. We have therefore gone on to consider whether the public interest is in favour of maintaining the exemption.

We consider that there is an inherent public interest within the FOI Act, which compels organisations to be as open and transparent as possible. The University of Leeds is committed to providing information under the FOI Act as far as is appropriate. We also appreciate that there is a public interest in the partnerships the University maintains with international organisations. However, we do not consider this to outweigh the significant public interest in protecting interests of the University’s current and future students. Providing a broad and varied programme of possible Student Exchanges provides all of our students (both directly and indirectly) with exposure to a range of cultures and languages, and develops skilled graduates prepared to contribute to society and the economy after graduation. We are therefore satisfied that the public interest is, in this case, in favour of maintaining the exemption.

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