Dear

Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/21/008)

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (FOI) request dated 7 January 2021, reference K/21/008.

Your request read:

“How many undergraduate students began the 2020-21 academic year? Of these, how many had left the university by the end of December 2020?

Please also provide equivalent data for the 2017-18, 2018-19, and 2019-20 academic years.

Please break down each year’s results by students’ year of study (eg. total number of first years starting the year, and the number who had left by December; total number of second years who started, and the number who had left by December and so on.)"

The University of Leeds holds this information.

The information we are able to disclose is set out in the attached spreadsheet.

However, we are withholding Winter 2020 non-continuation (students who have left) information under section 22 of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 22 sets out that information is exempt from disclosure if it is intended for future publication, either by the public authority themselves, or by another organisation.

The Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) is the Designated Data Body (DDB) for higher education in England as defined by the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA). This means that HESA is responsible for the publication of a range of information and statistics about university students, including non-continuation statistics. This information is published in January each year. Information in relation to the 2019/20 academic year will be published in January 2021. While this does not preclude individual providers from publishing information, to do so would result in unnecessary repeated effort on the part of the teams and staff members who compile our submissions to HESA. We also consider that an early release would undermine HESA in their DDB role.

Section 22 is a qualified exemption, which means that we are required to consider whether the public interest in the information outweighs the public interest in withholding it as this time. We have set out our considerations below.
We appreciate that there is an interest in student numbers, particularly given the ongoing covid-19 pandemic. However, we also consider that this information may be valuable to other provider organisations; allowing them to compare their own admissions and non-continuation statistics to ours, and in turn make some basic assumptions regarding our student-based income. This in turn may affect our own commercial sustainability in the higher education marketplace, since such information may be useful to competitor institutions and could inform their own policies regarding how to deal with changing student numbers. If potential students were attracted to other institutions as a result, then the university would suffer financially. This would not be in the public interest. We are therefore satisfied that the public interest is in favour of withholding the information under section 22.

Please also note that where the total number in a particular group is less than or equal to five, we are withholding the total figure under section 40(2) of the FOI Act.

Section 40(2) sets out that information is exempt from disclosure if it is the personal data of someone other than the person making the request, and disclosure would; contravene the data protection principles; contravene an objection to processing; or if the data is exempt from the right of subject access. We consider that the release of this information would be likely to lead to the identification of individuals, and would therefore reveal information regarding student status and educational history. This would be unfair and would therefore breach their data protection rights.

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