Dear

Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/20/528)

Thank you for your clarified Freedom of Information (FOI) request dated 13 January 2021, reference K/20/528.

Your original request read:

“The number of undergraduate students who permanently withdrew from your University in the first term (September to December — whichever dates you use for the first term/semester) over the past 5 years, so 2015-2020 (including this year).”

Your clarification read:

“It would be great if you have both - the number of first year undergrads who dropped out in their first semester of their first year AND all students withdrawing during the first term of the year, regardless of which year of study they were in.”

The University of Leeds holds this information.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Undergraduates withdrawing in first term (Sep-Dec) of their first year</strong></td>
<td>111</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>Withheld</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All Undergraduates withdrawing during the first term (Sep-Dec) of the year</strong></td>
<td>318</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>624</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>Withheld</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Please note that the academic regulations relating to re-sits changed after the 2016/17 academic year. From 2017/18, the opportunity for a second re-sit was removed, and as such students who were unsuccessful in their first (and now only) re-sit attempt are recorded as withdrawing in the Autumn (September to December) term, whereas in previous years they would have been able to attempt a second re-sit in Summer.

We are withholding the number of students who have withdrawn from study so far in 2020/21 under section 22 of the Freedom of Information Act.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 2020/21 academic year will be published in January 2022. 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. There is also a strong public interest in preserving the role of HESA as the DDB.

We are therefore satisfied that the public interest is in favour of withholding the information under section 22.

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.

Yours sincerely

Chloe Wilkins
Freedom of Information Officer
E: foi@leeds.ac.uk