From: Freedom of Information  
Sent: 23 March 2021 15:41  
To:  
Subject: Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/21/128)

Dear

Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/21/128)

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (FOI) request dated 10 March 2021, reference K/21/128.

Your request read:

“Q1) Please could you tell me if, as of 09/03/2021, your university is using learning analytics tools or learning analytics projects to, for example, monitor enrolled undergraduate or postgraduate student’s learning, university engagement or academic progress.

Examples of the names of such tools include, but are not limited to: Solutionpath Stream. Please bear in mind that the name of the analytic tools vary and I have only stated an example of one. Among the purported uses of such programmes is for universities to be able to monitor class attendance data, use of the library, the institution's ‘virtual learning environment’ and how regularly students are handing in assessments, enabling staff to spot patterns and anomalies that can then be investigated.

In relation to Q1, please can you answer 'Yes', 'No' or state if there are plans to adopt such monitoring tools by the end of the 2020/21 academic year or in the 2021/22 academic year. If the answer is 'Yes', please can you tell me the name of the learning analytic tool your university has adopted, on what date (in this format: DD/MM/YYYY) it was first rolled out at your institution on undergraduates/postgraduates (even if this was a 'pilot'), at what cost (£), and from whom (for example, but not limited to Jisc).

Q2) If the answer was ‘Yes’ to Q1, please can tell me the stated purpose of using said learning analytic tool or learning analytic programme/project. For example, is it to: track how often students log onto their virtual learning environment, click on any content, hand in any work, take out books from the library, access journals, view reading lists, print, scan or photocopy documents, log on to computers owned by the university and attend lectures, seminars and workshops?

Q3) If data collected from the analytic tool shows students are not engaging with their education, is it your university's policy to then contact the student directly or contact a student support advisor to suggest next steps?

Q4) Are all of the students being monitored aware of the university using such analytics tools to do so?”
The University of Leeds holds this information.

1. Please could you tell me if, as of 09/03/2021, your university is using learning analytics tools or learning analytics projects to, for example, monitor enrolled undergraduate or postgraduate student’s learning, university engagement or academic progress…. If the answer is ‘Yes’, please can you tell me the name of the learning analytic tool your university has adopted, on what date (in this format: DD/MM/YYYY) it was first rolled out at your institution on undergraduates/postgraduates (even if this was a 'pilot'), at what cost (£), and from whom (for example, but not limited to Jisc).

Yes. The University of Leeds is using a Learning Analytics system. It use is defined in the University’s Code of Practice for Learning Analytics which states:

“Learning Analytics is the measurement, collection, analysis, and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for the purposes of understanding and optimising learning and the environments in which it occurs.”

The University of Leeds uses BlackBoard Analytics4Learn, which has been in use since the first pilot which ran from 16 April 2018 to 18 May 2018.

We are also currently piloting Solutionpath’s StREAM system. A pilot of the StREAM system commenced for training purposes on 8 March 2021.

We are withholding cost information under section 43(2) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 43(2) sets out that information 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 reveal contract values would significantly disadvantage incumbent suppliers. By providing their competitors with the contract value, incumbent suppliers would be vulnerable to unfair ‘undercutting’ when the contracts are next put out to tender.

Section 43(2) is a qualified exemption, which means that in addition to demonstrating the prejudice which would or would be likely to occur as a result of disclosure (as we have done above), we are required to consider whether the public interest is in favour of disclosing the information or maintaining the exemption. In this case, we consider that the public interest is in favour of maintaining the exemption (i.e. withholding the information).

We recognise a general public interest in how the University of Leeds spends its money, particularly in relation to contracts with private sector organisations. However, we consider there to be a much stronger interest in preserving the University’s ability to secure value for money in future contract negotiations.

While ‘undercutting’ may result in lower prices for the University of Leeds in future tender situations, these prices would not necessarily represent better value for money. An artificially deflated price would unfairly distort the marketplace, and would
be likely to dissuade other organisation from working with the University in future, for fear of sensitive commercial information being released. This would limit the University’s ability to secure value for money, and would therefore not be in the public interest.

2. If the answer was 'Yes' to Q1, please can tell me the stated purpose of using said learning analytic tool or learning analytic programme/project.

The University of Leeds uses learning analytics to enhance taught student education and support student success for registered students. The University will use learning analytics to:

(i) support individual learners – through actional intelligence for students, teachers and professional staff;
(ii) help understand cohort behaviours and outcomes;
(iii) help understand and enhance the learning environment.

These purposes will be fulfilled through the collection and analysis of data that relates to how students are accessing a range of digital education resources and tools provided by the university including, but not limited to, virtual classrooms, library book and eResource, online quizzes, and audio and visual content.

3. If data collected from the analytic tool shows students are not engaging with their education, is it your university’s policy to then contact the student directly or contact a student support advisor to suggest next steps?

Yes. The university has an engagement monitoring process in place that allows student support staff and/or academic personal tutors to contact students if their engagement with the learning resources provided to them as part of the programme is lower than would be expected for that student on their specific course.

4. Are all of the students being monitored aware of the university using such analytics tools to do so?

Yes.

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
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

Secretariat
University of Leeds