From: Freedom of Information  
Sent: 12 March 2021 16:00  
To:  
Subject: Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/21/073)  

Dear

**Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/21/073)**

Thank you for your clarified Freedom of Information (FOI) request dated 19 February 2021, reference K/21/073.

Your original request read:

“I would like to know the number (as well as this figure as a percentage of the student population) of students who have left their studies prematurely this academic year. Can I also have this information broken down into year of study.

I would also like this information for the previous 5 years.

I would like to know whether the university had a plan in place for this year specifically to support students who felt the need to drop out.”

Your clarification email read:

“In regards to the first area of clarification, we are requesting the information for both undergraduate and postgraduate. To the second point, we would like to know what support was provided to students who were inclined to/at risk of withdrawing (dependent on your definition of “felt the need”) but ultimately remained at University”

The University of Leeds holds information relevant to your request.

Please find attached to this email a spreadsheet setting out the number and percentage of students who have withdrawn from their studies in the previous five academic years.

We are withholding the number of students who have withdrawn from study so far in 2020/21 under section 22 of the Freedom of Information Act.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 at 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.

In relation to support provided to students who are at risk of withdrawing from their studies, we can advise that in addition to the our Access and Participation Plan 2020/21 to 2024/25, the University has developed a strategy which includes the approaches to addressing non-continuation and supporting students. Recent changes have included:

- Review of progression between years;
- Institutional projects to enhance approach to Welcome, Induction and Transition and Personal Tutoring;
- Appointment of new staff roles to understand factors contributing to non-continuation to implement change at an institutional and local level;
- Additional support for students who may require resits

Students at risk of withdrawing are also supported via both our Academic Personal Tutoring system and our student support teams.

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