From: Freedom of Information
Sent: 20 August 2021 15:36
To: Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/21/314)

Subject: Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/21/314)

Dear

Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/21/314)

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (FOI) request dated 14 June 2021, reference K/21/314. Please accept our sincere apologies for the delay in responding to your request.

Your request read:

“The information we would like is as follows:
• How many students within your university were the subjects of disciplinary action in the academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21.
• How many of these actions were for activities that took place within student accommodation?

Please can you provide a breakdown of the above data by ethnicity? I understand that if there are less than 5 students within a certain category you may not be available to provide exact numbers, however I would be extremely grateful if you could please tell us if that is the case for any group.

For clarity, by disciplinary action we mean any informal action you have a record of as well as formal action including fines, written or oral warnings, removal from halls, withdrawal from program of study etc… If you could categorise the disciplinary action by type.”

The University of Leeds holds this information.

However, we consider that to respond to your request would exceed the cost limit as set out in Section 12(1) of the FOI Act. Section 12(1) states that a public authority can refuse a request if complying with it would exceed the appropriate limit of £450. For the purposes of FOI, time spent on the permitted activities is calculated at the flat rate of £25 per person, per hour. The appropriate limit therefore represents the estimated cost of one person spending 18 hours to determine whether the information is held, and to locate, retrieve and extract the information.

We have outlined the reasons for invoking Section 12(1) below.

The University of Leeds disciplinary process involves multiple teams, all with their own processes, procedures and records. The information you have requested is primarily held by the Student Cases Team, and the Residences Team.

It will take more than 18 hours to collate the information held by the Student Cases Team.

The information the Student Cases Team holds is contained within casework spreadsheets. There is one casework spreadsheet for each academic year. The
spreadsheets are used by members of the Student Cases Team to keep track of active casework, and are therefore dynamic documents. Their primary purpose is to assist staff members in the management of their workloads; not to provide a record of cases. As such, the way cases are recorded within the databases varies between team members, and depending on the nature of the case. The information which has been recorded in the databases year-to-year has also varied, as the team has grown and developed so has the way in which information is recorded.

Student ethnicity information is not specifically recorded within the spreadsheets. Where ethnicity is relevant to a case (for instance, in the case of a complaint), it may be recorded as part of case notes, but there is no separate column or category. The only means of establishing student ethnicity would therefore be to cross-reference the spreadsheets with student records, which are held by a separate team.

In order to obtain the information from student records, we would need to locate the Student Identification number (SID) for each disciplined student. There is no requirement for staff to record everything about a case within the database, nor to record information in a consistent way. As such, not all cases will include the SID of the disciplined student. Where this information is not recorded in the spreadsheet, it would need to be separately located. We have reviewed the 2019/20 spreadsheet, and of the 180 records which relate to disciplinary action of any kind, 93 records do not include the SID. We estimate that it would take around one minute per record to locate the SID. It would take a similar amount of time for the student records team to extract the ethnicity data for the student. It would therefore take approximately three hours to locate ethnicity data for information held by the Student Cases Team for 2019/20 only.

You have also asked us to “categorise the disciplinary action by type”. Based on the wording of your request, we understand this to be a request for the outcome of each case. Again, this is not always recorded in the spreadsheets. Of the 180 relevant cases located, 121 have no outcome recorded on the spreadsheet. It would take longer to locate outcome information than it would to locate SIDs. This is because outcomes can be appealed, and there is no specific way the outcome should be recorded in the case file. Furthermore, in some cases the matter is referred out of the Student Cases Team, and either into another process or to be handled by another team (e.g. to be handled by the student’s school directly). We therefore estimate that it would take an average of 10 minutes per case to locate the outcome, and check whether the outcome was overturned at appeal. This average takes into account straightforward cases which will be more easily located, and complex cases which have been referred out. We therefore calculate that it would take just over 20 hours to locate the outcomes information, in relation to information held within the Student Cases Team for 2019/20 only.

This clearly demonstrates that it would take far in excess of 18 hours to locate and extract the information you have requested. The time estimates above relate to only a small portion of the information you have requested. Further time would be required to locate and extract:

- Information held by the Residences team
- Records of informal discipline, which will likely be held at individual School level.
Information demonstrating whether the incident took place within student accommodation
  ▪ This information is not separately recorded and is likely to take a significant amount of time on its own. Even so, it is possible (perhaps even probable) that we simply cannot establish whether the incident took place within student accommodation in some cases.

As per our section 16 duty to advise and assist, please find below some suggestions for how your request could be refined in order to possibly reduce the total amount of time required:
  • You could limit your request to a single academic year, and;
  • Limit your request to disciplinary matters handled by either the Student Cases Team, or the Residences Team
  • You could remove the requirement to provide the outcome of cases
  • You could remove the requirement to specify incidents which took place within student accommodation.
  • You could limit your request to formal disciplinary matters only (i.e. excluding informal matters).

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