Dear Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/21/355)

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (FOI) request dated 16 July 2021, reference K/21/355.

Your request read:

“I am writing to you under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to request the following information:

1. How many Prevent referrals were made by the university in the academic years 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21? Please break this down into staff and students.

2. How many Channel support referrals (individuals who present with a ‘terrorism vulnerability’ and require Channel support) were made by the university in the same years, also broken down by staff and students?”

The University of Leeds neither confirms nor denies whether any information relevant to your request is held. We do so under section 24(2) of the FOI Act, which exempts public authorities from the duty to confirm or deny whether information is held in order to safeguard national security.

Section 26(1) of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (CTSA) imposes a duty on “specified authorities”, including universities and other Further Education (FE) institutions, to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. This is called the “Prevent duty”. The University of Leeds has a legal obligation to comply with the Prevent duty. A general overview of our approach to the Prevent duty can be found on the Secretariat pages of our website.

We consider that to confirm or deny whether any information is held which is relevant to your request would undermine the University’s ability to comply with its Prevent duty. Individuals inclined to incite, organise or carry out act of terror are likely to be motivated, innovative and persistent in pursuit of any information which has the potential to contribute to their aims. To provide information which sets out whether any referrals have been made, and the details thereof would be likely to reveal information which could be used to circumvent the University’s strategy for ensuring compliance with the Prevent duty. If, for example, agents acting (or intending to act) against the University were to be made aware of the number of referrals made and information regarding the individual to which the referral related, they would be able to establish whether their own efforts were being detected. This would enable them to adapt their approach, thus jeopardising the University’s ability to recognise students at risk and take appropriate action.
In order to rely on section 24(2), the University of Leeds must consider the public interest factors for and against neither confirming nor denying whether the information is held. The threat to the UK (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) from terrorism is “substantial”. This means that an attack is considered likely. We therefore consider there to be a very strong public interest in ensuring that the University does not disclose any information which could be used by those seeking to carry out an attack/attacks. While we recognise that the public is interested in the Prevent duty, and how it is being met by organisations, we do not consider this to outweigh the clear public interest in mitigating (or, at least, not increasing) the risk of an attack.

We also consider that the public interest in understanding the demographics of individuals who are referred through the Prevent Programme is met via information which is regularly published by the Home Office. On an annual basis, the Home Office publish a report titled “Individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent Programme”, which includes information on both the demographic of individuals supported through the Prevent Programme, and on the geographical region and concern type. The most recent report covers the 2019/20 tax year (April 2019 – March 2020).

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

Secretariat
University of Leeds