Dear

Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/21/384)

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (FOI) request dated 9 August 2021, reference K/21/384.

Your request read:

“1. Do you currently have CCTV cameras installed inside any prayer rooms at the university?
2. If yes, why?
3. If no, have you ever had CCTV cameras inside prayer rooms and decided to remove them?
4. If the answer to question 3 is yes, why?”

The University of Leeds holds information which shows whether CCTV cameras are installed at particular locations across the University. However, we are withholding this information under sections 31(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act.

Section 31(1)(a) sets out that information is exempt from disclosure if its release would or would be likely to prejudice the prevention or detection of crime.

We consider that releasing details of where CCTV cameras are or are not located would make the University more vulnerable to crime. Revealing which areas are under surveillance, and which are not, provides would-be criminals with valuable information which can be used to adapt their actions in order to avoid detection. This is true across the University for a range of types of criminality. For instance, details of the location of external CCTV cameras would be of value to those looking to gain unlawful entry to the University’s buildings by revealing which areas are monitored and which are not. Details of the locations of internal CCTV cameras would be of value to those looking to commit personal crimes such as harassment or assault. We recognise that in the vast majority of cases, CCTV cameras can be identified by sight. Providing would-be attackers with prior knowledge of where cameras are and are not located would theoretically allow them to carry out their actions without ever entering the field of vision of a camera. This would seriously undermine our ability to identify individuals and limit the value of the information we were able to pass to authorities such as the police.

Without such prior knowledge, the only means of establishing camera locations would be to physically visit the University, which would (in all likelihood) result in the individual(s) being filmed by the CCTV cameras, thus assisting us in identification and providing us with valuable information to be shared with the necessary authorities.
Providing this information in response to your request would make it more difficult for the University to resist similar requests for different locations in the future. Ultimately, this could result in the disclosure of all CCTV locations across the University estate, which would clearly be extremely beneficial to those with nefarious intentions, and correspondingly catastrophic for our security efforts.

As such, it is essential that we maintain a consistent approach to requests for information about the location of CCTV cameras, regardless of the specific location to which they relate.

This clearly demonstrates the prejudicial impact the release of this information would be likely to have. As section 31 of the FOI Act is a qualified exemption, we are also required to consider whether the public interest is in favour of withholding or releasing the information.

We recognise that there is a genuine public interest in understanding how the University of Leeds carries out surveillance of members of the University community. We also appreciate that there may be particular concern regarding the over- or under-surveillance of particular people or groups. For instance, if cameras are located in rooms designated for use by followers of one faith and not in rooms for followers of another faith, this could indicate a potential prejudice, and we accept that a response to your request may serve to partially address concerns of this nature. However, those who are on University premises are able to identify the location of CCTV cameras by sight, and can flag concerns regarding their location to the University directly. The release of the information you have requested would not provide users of the University space with any new information, thus limiting its value. We are not aware of any concerns of this nature, and as such there does not appear to be any current and pressing public interest in making the location of CCTV cameras publicly known.

Conversely, we consider that there is a very strong public interest in protecting members of the University community from harm and from criminal activity. There is also a strong public interest in protecting the University itself from criminal activity; financial or physical losses would negatively impact our ability to continue to provide a world-class teaching, research and learning environment, which would in turn impact on students’ studies. This would not be in the public interest.

We therefore consider that the public interest is strongly in favour of withholding the information.

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
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