From: Freedom of Information
Sent: 18 August 2021 15:57
To:
Subject: Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/21/202)

Dear

Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/21/202)

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (FOI) request dated 23 April 2021, reference K/21/202. Please accept our sincere apologies for the delay in providing a response to your request.

Your request read:

“I am submitting a Freedom of Information (FOI) request for data relating to cases of academic misconduct at the University of Leeds for the academic years from 2010/11 to 2020/21.

*Part A*

For each year I would like the following (assuming the university holds this data):

- A count of individual cases of academic misconduct.
- A count of individual cases of academic misconduct broken down by type (i.e. cheating on an exam, collusion, plagiarism etc.)
- A count of individual cases of academic misconduct that were identified as contract cheating/using essay writing services.
- A count of individual cases of academic misconduct broken down by the outcome/disciplinary measure/university response.
- A count of individual cases of academic misconduct split by whether the student was a home or international student.
- A count of individual cases of academic misconduct broken down by the department/faculty which the student was enrolled with.
- A count of individual cases of academic misconduct broken down by whether the student was studying an undergraduate degree, master's degree or Phd.
- A count of the number of individual cases of academic misconduct identified through the use of plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin.
- A count of the number of individual cases of academic misconduct identified through the use of proctoring software or remote invigilation.

If any of the information requested above is not held as structured data and therefore would require the investigation of individual cases causing the request to exceed the cost threshold for FOIs, then please exclude those individual requests moving from bottom to top until the overall request fits within the cost threshold.

If providing any of the information requested above would trigger an FOI exemption, please disregard that individual category and providing the remaining requested data.
If the university did not record data on academic misconduct prior to a particular date, please provide that date and the data for all cases that occurred after that date.

If the university does not collect or hold data on cases of academic misconduct could you please reply to let me know this is the case.

*Part B*
In the requests above I refer to cases of academic misconduct, by which I mean cases where the university concluded that academic misconduct did occur. However, if the university also collects data on suspected but inconclusive cases of academic misconduct, I would also like to replicate those individual requests but substituting “cases” for “suspected cases”. If responding to this second element of my FOI would cause it to exceed the cost threshold and therefore trigger an exemption, then please disregard Part B of the request.”

The University of Leeds holds some of 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 information we hold in relation to your request is primarily held in the Student Cases Team’s annual databases. The databases 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. There is no requirement for staff to record everything about a case within the database, nor to record information in a consistent way.

In order to establish the amount of time which would be required to answer your questions as they currently stand, we have performed a sampling exercise, using the 2019/20 Student Cases database. This database includes columns to record the following information which you have requested:

- Level of study (undergraduate, taught postgraduate or research postgraduate).
- Which subcategory of misconduct the case fell into
- The Faculty or Department the student belongs to
- The outcome of the case
There were 89 cases which, based on the report, were (or appear to be) about academic misconduct. Of these, 16 cases had information in all four of the above categories. The remaining 73 cases had information missing in some or all of the categories.

There are no columns to record whether the matter involved contract cheating, the fee status of the student, whether plagiarism detection software was used, or whether proctoring software was used. This information would therefore need to be separately located.

It would therefore be necessary to review the individual case files of all 89 cases, in order to establish the number of cases falling into each of the categories you have set out. We estimate that it would take an average of five minutes per case to review all material held, and make a note of the information you have requested. Some cases are extremely complicated and are likely to take far in excess of five minutes, while others may be more straightforward, generating fewer documents and therefore taking less time to review. Using an average of five minutes per case takes this into account.

To review all of the cases for 2019/20 would therefore take approximately seven and a half hours to locate the information you have requested for 2019/20 only. The information contained within the 2019/20 database is the most complete of the years you have requested. We therefore consider it to be very likely that earlier years will take longer than this, with the earliest years taking the longest to review.

We are therefore satisfied that it would take far in excess of 18 hours to locate and extract the information you have requested, thus engaging section 12(1) of the FOI Act.

You have asked that we disregard questions from the bottom up if the time/cost limit is exceeded. However, this would not reduce the amount of time required. The only way to locate any of the information you have requested would be to conduct a line-by-line review of our records of cases.

In order to reduce the total amount of time, you may wish to consider one or both of the following:

- Significantly reducing the timeframe of your request, ideally to a single academic year
- Removing the requirement to split cases according to fee status, whether the case involved contract cheating, and whether plagiarism or proctoring software was used. This information is only held within case folders, and as such any request which seeks any or all of these categories will require intensive manual review.

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