From: Freedom of Information  
Sent: 17 September 2021 15:38  
To:  
Subject: Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/21/413)

Dear

Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/21/413)

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (FOI) request dated 24 August 2021, reference K/21/413

Your request read:

“Please could you provide me with some information. Specifically:
- How much have you invested on improving the digital experience for students learning online since March 2020?
- What new digital services or online learning tools were introduced in that timeframe?
- How have you adapted the digital learning experience for students during the pandemic?
- How many complaints/positive comments have you received about online learning during the pandemic? How does this compare to in-person learning tuition?
- How many hours of online tuition took place during the pandemic?
- How much time was spent teaching lecturers to use digital platforms? How much did this cost?

The University of Leeds holds some information relevant to your request. 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.

You have asked “How many complaints/positive comments have you received about online learning during the pandemic? How does this compare to in-person learning tuition?” There is no single repository of all positive or negative comments made to or received by the University. The only means of collating this information would be to liaise with every single team, department, School and Faculty within the University. It is impossible for us to say how long this might take. There are 33 individual Schools within the University. Furthermore, even at the School level, there is no single route via which students must direct their concerns or praise. They may make comments directly with one of their tutors, with the Head of School (or their office), or with one of the administrative teams which supports the School. It is therefore clear that it would take far in excess of 18 hours to establish what recorded
information we hold, extract the relevant information where required and produce a response.

Formal complaints made by students via the Student Complaints Procedure are managed by the Student Cases Team. We have therefore considered whether it would be possible to focus our search on information which is held within the Student Cases Team. However, even this would take in excess of 18 hours. Student Complaints are normally categorised by the team, and one of the categories we use is ‘covid’ (i.e. the complaint is related in some way to the coronavirus pandemic). However, the application of complaint categories is not governed by any particular rule, and will depend on how the complaint handler interprets the complaint when it is first received. As such, there is no guarantee that all complaints about online learning would have been categorised as ‘covid’ complaints. Furthermore, it is likely that a significant number of the ‘covid’ complaints are unrelated to online learning. Finally, not all cases are categorised. The subject of the complaint may not be immediately apparent, or the complaint may have been resolved very quickly, before a category could be assigned. There is therefore no means by which the Student Cases Team could readily identify complaints which fall within the scope of your request.

It would therefore be necessary to manually review all complaints, in order to establish their relevance to your question. There are 290 complaints which we would need to review spanning the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years. We estimate that it would take an average of five minutes per case to review the information we hold and establish whether it is relevant. This takes into account the fact that some cases will be categorised more quickly, and some complex or long-running cases may take significantly longer. We therefore calculate that it would take approximately 24 hours to establish the number of formal complaints handled by the Student Cases Team which relate to online learning.

Even if we were to carry out this work, the results would only provide you with a small portion of what you have asked for. Additional time would be required to establish the number of complaints received about in-person teaching (we estimate that this would in fact take longer, as it is a broader category), to locate complaints or concerns which were handled outside of the Student Complaints Procedure, and to locate positive comments.

Finally, further time would be required to collate responses to your remaining questions.

We are therefore satisfied that section 12(1) applies in this case. As part of our section 16(1) duty to advise and assist, we are required to offer support and guidance to applicants whose requests are refused under section 12(1) to refine their requests and reduce the total amount of time which would be required. If you would like to submit a refined request, you may wish to consider the following:

- Removing the complaints/positive comments question entirely, or;
- Limiting the question to formal complaints handled by the Student Cases Team, within a specific academic year, or;
- Limiting the question to a specific School, and to comments made via a particular route (e.g. to the office of the Head of School)
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.

Sincerely

Chloe Wilkins  
Freedom of Information Officer  
University of Leeds