



Ms Isobel Urquhart

by email

Reference: FOI-2011-195

6 September 2011

Dear Ms Urquhart,

Your request was received on 8 August 2011 and I am dealing with it under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ('the Act').

You asked:

*"I believe that in the ballot on Grace 3 of June 15 2011 there were a) two ballot papers which were not counted as they were considered to be invalid and b) a further two ballot papers which were 'doubtful' and so the Presiding Officer had to decide how they should be counted.*

*As you are probably aware, the Freedom of Information 2000 is intended to 'permit people to apply for access to documents, or copies of documents as well as to the information itself.' (Paragraph 6 of the Explanatory Notes that go with the Act) and so I believe I am entitled to apply for copies of those ballot papers.*

*Therefore, please provide, in electronic format, to this address, copies of each of these four ballot papers, making clear which papers are in which category ((a) or (b)). I believe that each ballot paper has a serial number printed on it."*

While held by the University, this information is refused under section 36(2)(c) of the Act. In the reasonable opinion of the Vice-Chancellor (who is the University's 'qualified person' to make such decisions), its disclosure would be likely to prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs because its release would bring into question the very nature of a secret and confidential ballot overseen by senior Officers of the University in an impartial manner. No member of the Regent House voting in this election would reasonably have expected their completed ballot paper to be released into the public domain and, in this instance, published on an open access website. As this is a qualified exemption, the University has considered whether, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. The

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# UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Registry's Office

University recognises that the result of the ballot and the topic upon which it was called has led to a significant amount of interest from within the University community and, to some extent, beyond. It nevertheless suggests that the public interest would not be well served should the fundamental premise of such ballots be eroded. The University considers it a serious possibility that individuals could be less likely to vote in future secret ballots in the knowledge that their papers, completed or spoilt, could be released into the public domain. The University is aware of no precedent which would make it reasonable to release the papers themselves as it has already published the voting figures for the ballot.

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 this decision, you should write to Dr Kirsty Allen, Head of the Registry's Office, quoting the reference above, at The Old Schools, Cambridge, CB2 1TN. If you are not content with the outcome of your complaint, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by the University. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely,

James Knapton