



Ref: FOI/20211119/4

17 December 2021

Reply to request for information under the Freedom of Information Act	
Your ref	Email of 19 November 2021
Request	I would like to request the most current suggested reading lists and course syllabus and past exam papers for 2015-2021 for the following courses: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. MSc in Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology2. MSt in Islamic Studies and History3. MSc in History of Science, Medicine and Technology4. MSt in Philosophy of Physics5. MSt in Practical Ethics6. MSt in Traditional China7. BA in Classics (Literae Humaniores)8. BA in Philosophy, Politics and Economics9. BM BCh in Medicine10. MPhil International Relations

Dear Mr Mohammed,

I write in reply to your email requesting the information detailed above.

Reading lists

We hold the information but will not disclose it, as we consider it to be exempt from disclosure under section 43(2) of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Section 43(2) provides that information is exempt where its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person. In our view, disclosure of the information requested would be likely to prejudice the University's commercial interests, by revealing information that would be of value to other institutions offering similar courses. There is strong competition for students, both nationally and internationally. Oxford is one of the top-ranked universities for the subjects covered in your request. The reading lists indicate the particular approach taken by Oxford to the teaching of different topics or areas of study, and would be of interest and value to organisations seeking to emulate the University's success. To place this information into the public domain would allow any organisation to seek to replicate Oxford's approach and methods.

Section 43(2) is a qualified exemption that requires the University to weigh up the public interest in disclosing the information requested, which is presumed under FOIA, against the public interest in withholding it. The University recognises that there is a general interest in openness and transparency in the conduct of the University's affairs. However, we see little or no specific public interest in the information requested, as opposed to the private interest that others might seek to further through exploitation of the information for commercial purposes. There is a public interest in knowing that Oxford provides high-quality teaching and research but this interest is already met through the information that is publically available on the University's relative performance in this area e.g. [Times Higher Education](#).

Course syllabus

You can find this information on our website by visiting the following links:

- [MSc in Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology](#)
- [MSt in Islamic Studies and History](#)
- [MSc in History of Science, Medicine and Technology](#)
- [MSt in Philosophy of Physics](#)
- [MSt in Practical Ethics](#)
- [MSt in Traditional China](#)
- [BA in Classics \(Literae Humaniores\)](#)
- [BA in Philosophy, Politics and Economics](#)
- [BM BCh in Medicine - Pre-Clinical](#) and [BM BCh in Medicine - Clinical](#)
- [MPhil in International Relations](#)

Past exam papers

Please find attached the available past papers for MSc in Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology, MSt in Islamic Studies and History, MSc in History of Science, Medicine and Technology, BA in Classics (Literae Humaniores), BA in Philosophy, Politics and Economics.

There are no set papers for MSt in Philosophy of Physics, MSt in Traditional China, or MPhil in International Relations.

For MSt in Practical Ethics, assessment for each module is based on one 3,500 word essay per module.

As regards exam papers for Medicine, the University holds information that falls within the scope of your request. However, we will not disclose it, as we consider it to be exempt from disclosure under section 43(2) of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Section 43(2) provides that information is exempt where its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person. In our view, disclosure of the information requested would be likely to prejudice the University's commercial interests, by revealing information that would be of value to other institutions offering courses in Medicine. There is strong competition for students, both nationally and internationally. The answers in the examination papers would indicate the particular approach taken by Oxford to particular topics or issues, and would be of interest and value to rival organisations, who could use the information to improve their own courses. The University's approach would be of especial interest to rival organisations because Oxford has been ranked as the world's best institution for medical health teaching and research¹.

In addition, the nature of undergraduate medicine courses means that most higher education institutions use their own 'banks' of standard set examination questions, which can be reviewed and re-used as required – such resources could be easily replicated to mimic Oxford's rigorous academic assessment.

Section 43(2) is a qualified exemption that requires the University to weigh up the public interest in disclosing the information requested, which is presumed under FOIA, against the public interest in withholding it. The University recognises that there is some public interest in the disclosure of the information requested. Generally, there is an interest in openness and transparency in the conduct of the University's affairs. More specifically, there is an interest in information relating to the performance of the Medical Sciences Division as the world's leading destination for studying medicine. However, we consider that this interest can be met without impairing the University's ability to compete with other institutions. The topic list we have provided, as well as course information available on the University's [website](#) which covers content, structure, assessment methods and the

¹ https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2022/subject-ranking/clinical-health#!/page/0/length/25/subjects/3141/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/stats



resources available to students which, in our view, is more than sufficient to meet the public interest in disclosure. We therefore consider that the balance of public interests lies in favour of maintaining the exemption.

Please note that the attached information should not be copied, reproduced or used except in accordance with the law of copyright. In particular, any re-use for commercial purposes would require the permission of the University and/or any other copyright holders.

INTERNAL REVIEW

If you are dissatisfied with this reply, you may ask the University to review it by e-mailing foi@admin.ox.ac.uk. A request for internal review should be submitted no later than 40 working days from the date of this letter.

THE INFORMATION COMMISSIONER

If, after the internal review, you are still dissatisfied, you have the right under FOIA to apply to the Information Commissioner for a decision as to whether your request has been dealt with in accordance with the FOIA. You can do this online using the [Information Commissioner's complaints portal](#).

Yours sincerely

Information Compliance Team