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RECORDS MANAGEMENT SECTION

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Mahlea Babjak

Sent by email: request-685874-2e5d6c4d@whatdotheyknow.com

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Dear Mahlea Babjak

Freedom of information request

Thank you for your email of 19 August 2020 requesting information about Tier 4 students.

The University of Edinburgh is a global university, rooted in Scotland. We are globally recognised for our research, development and innovation and we have provided world-class teaching to our students for more than 425 years. We are the largest university in Scotland and in 2018/19 our annual revenue was £1.1 billion, of which £286 million was research income. We have over 43,000 students and almost 16,000 staff. We are a founding member of the UK's Russell Group of leading research universities and a member of the League of European Research Universities.

We operate on an international stage and this is reflected in all areas of University life; from our students and staff, to our collaborations that tackle problems transcending national boundaries, and the important intellectual and societal contributions we make. Our international applicants and students prize our international reputation, the programmes we offer, our expert lecturers and quality research. When surveyed for the annual International Student Barometer, we had more international students satisfied with their university experience than any other Scottish university.

The University of Edinburgh is a Highly Trusted sponsor for Visa Tiers 2, 4 and 5. Most international students are required to apply for a Tier 4 student visa to enter the UK. We are required to demonstrate that sponsored students are attending and engaging in their programme of study. Our processes have been tested and our Highly Trusted status reconfirmed in 2017. This recognises the rigour of our processes, our very low visa refusal rate and the high proportion of our international student achieving their academic goals.

We provide [guidance for Tier 4 students about their rights and responsibilities](#), and information about the University's responsibilities, on our website. The University's [Tier 4 Student Attendance and Engagement Policy](#), introduced in August 2015, outlines the University's processes. The *Policy* also supports the improvement of the overall student experience by identifying where students may be experiencing difficulties and ensuring timely intervention and appropriate support.

Tier 4 students

You asked for the number of Tier 4 students enrolled at the University in the 2019/20 academic year. A total of 9,186 Tier 4 students were enrolled in 2019/20. To be consistent with the Scottish Funding Council's approach, this figure includes all Tier 4 matriculated students with the exception of those who within five weeks of Semester 1 commencing either withdrew, interrupted or completed their studies.

You asked for the number of Tier 4 students who have contacted student funding services to report difficulties with paying their tuition fees on time. The University does not record these figures in a reportable form. In order to provide the number of Tier 4 students who have contacted student funding services, the University would have to review all emails to student funding services. Since March this year, it has received 3-5,000 helpdesk calls and emails each month. Students do not self-identify as Tier 4 or international students in all emails, so in these cases we would need to cross reference with the student record. Doing this work would cost more than £600, the limit over which the University is not required to respond to freedom of information requests.

You then requested information on the assistance that is in place for Tier 4 students who are unable to pay their tuition fees. The University's Finance Department can assist students in financial difficulty by working with them on an individual payment extension or payment plan. More information is available on the University's [collecting fees](#) webpages.

You also asked for the COVID-19 provisions in place for Tier 4 students regarding health and wellbeing, immigration advice and any other advice. The University's Student Immigration Service has provided [guidance for those affected by the COVID-19 outbreak](#). This includes a link to guidance on academic matters and the support available for students currently studying at the University of Edinburgh. For information on the wide range of personal and academic support available to students you can visit the University's [Accessing Support](#) webpages.

You asked whether the University is providing hardship funds for Tier 4 students. The University has provided hardship funds as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which all students were eligible to apply for. During the academic year 2019/20, 2,402 Tier 4 students applied for hardship funding. 1,865 Tier 4 students were granted funds with a value of £993,677. Additional funds, both from the University and the Government, continue to be available for Tier 4 students. The primary reasons why hardship fund applications from Tier 4 students have been rejected by the University are: a lack of information or supporting documentation to make a decision; and lack of hardship or access to a high volume of funds.

As part of hardship fund assessments, the University requires to see students' bank statements, which outline their access to funds. The issuing of both government and University funds are subject to an audit to ensure they are issued appropriately. The University's priority is to support those in hardship where there is limited access to funds or additional support. All students are assessed using the same framework regardless of their fee or visa status.

You then asked whether any Tier 4 students have been reported to the Home Office during the COVID-19 lockdown. The University has reported no Tier 4 student to the Home Office during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Finally, you asked for the number of Tier 4 students who have contacted the University's immigration support office requiring advice and/or reporting immigration difficulties from March 2020 until August 2020. In order to provide the number of Tier 4 students who have contacted the Student Immigration Service, the University would have to review around 15,000 emails, checking each one individually as email subject lines rarely reflect the nature of the email enquiry. Doing so would cost more than £600, the limit over which the University is not required to respond to freedom of information requests.

Technical exemption

Please note that as some of the information requested is available to you through the University website, it is technically exempt from the University's obligation to answer requests for information under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. The information is exempt under section 25 of this Act, because it is available to you by another route. This exemption is a technical matter only and does not affect your ability to obtain the information on-line.

If you do not have access to the Internet or would prefer to receive information in hard copy please let me know and I will arrange for printouts from the appropriate web pages to be sent to you.

Right to review

If you are dissatisfied with this response, you may ask the University to conduct a review of this decision by contacting the University's Records Management Section in writing (e.g. by letter or email) or in some other recorded form (e.g. audio or video tape). You should describe the original request, explain your grounds for dissatisfaction, and include an address for correspondence. You have 40 working days from receipt of this letter to submit a review request. The contact details for the Records Management Section are at the top of this letter. When the review process has been completed, if you are still dissatisfied, you may use the [Scottish Information Commissioner's guidance on making an appeal](#) to make an appeal to the Commissioner. If you do not have access to the Internet, please let me know and I will provide a copy of the relevant web pages.

Privacy notice for information request applicants

[The University of Edinburgh's request privacy notice](#), which describes how we use the information you have supplied about yourself and your request, is published on the University website.

Yours sincerely

Celia Jenkins
Project Officer

If you require this letter in an alternative format, such as large print or a coloured background, please contact the Records Management Section on 0131 651 4099 or email recordsmanagement@ed.ac.uk