

Our ref: FOI/2324/044

Name: Ibrahim Mahmood
By email to: request-1018551-915b4b5a@whatdotheyknow.com

31 August 2023

Freedom of Information Team

Legal & Governance
University of Liverpool
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Dear Ibrahim,

A response to your request for information received on 24 August is provided below. The questions asked are in *italics* followed by our responses in **bold**.

I would like to kindly ask how you select applicants for an interview using factors such as the UCAT, GCSEs and the personal statement.

When shortlisting we would first check that the academic criteria have been met. Applicants who fulfil this criterion (required A-level predictions/achieved grades and minimum GCSE requirement in place) would then progress to stage two of our shortlisting, where we would then look at their UCAT scores in conjunction with their non-academic questionnaire. We would then interview the top students from this group and an offer would then be dependent on the applicant's interview score. A score of Band 4 in the Situational Judgement would not be deemed a competitive enough score for the applicant to be considered for the BDS programme.

Secondly, what was the UCAT cut off score for applicants in 2021, 2022 and 2023.

	2022	2021
Lowest UCAT score for offer	2170	2220

We can confirm that the University holds this information; however, it is withheld because it falls under Section 43(2) (commercial interest) of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Section 43(2) FOIA provides that an authority is not obliged to respond to a request for information if "its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interest of any person, including the public authority holding it". Commercial interests may be prejudiced where a disclosure would be likely to:

- Damage its business reputation or the confidence that customers, suppliers, or investors may have in it
- Have a detrimental impact on its commercial revenue or threaten its ability to obtain supplies or secure finance
- Weaken its position in a competitive environment by revealing market sensitive information or information of potential usefulness to its competitors.

The University does not supply in-cycle admissions data until December after the academic year after an applicant applies in, and the academic year they would have started. Until this time, we believe is exempt from disclosure as the disclosure of this information would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of the University. Application and admissions data are commercially sensitive because they are key assets in developing and implementing the University's marketing, recruitment and offer making strategies. These directly affect the University's ability to recruit high-calibre students on whose fees and achievements the University's financial and reputational success depends. Disclosing this

type of information is likely to prejudice the University's ability to compete effectively and fairly in the highly competitive higher education market as it:

- a) Forms the basis of the way in which the University structures its business, which is one of the factors which distinguishes the University from its competitors.
- b) Discloses and gives unfair insight into the University's marketing, recruitment and offering strategies for the current recruitment cycle to competitor institutions.

As section 43(2) is a qualified exemption, the University has considered whether it would be in the public interest to provide the information, despite the exemption being applicable. When assessing whether it was in the public interest to disclose the information to you, we have considered the following factors:

Factors in Favour of Disclosure

- Disclosure would help public understanding of admissions policies and procedures.
- Disclosure would demonstrate the University of Liverpool's commitment to the principles of accountability and transparency.
- Disclosure would empower interested individuals to analyse and understand university recruitment plans, patterns, and trends.

Factors Against Disclosure

- The Information Tribunal has acknowledged that universities have commercial interests (EA/2009/0034), and that UK Universities operate in a global market. The University operates in a competitive environment where other institutions of higher education deliver comparable products (undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses).
- The admissions process for the current entry year is ongoing. Premature disclosure of the information would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of the University because we are still in the current admissions cycle.
- Universities are in competition to recruit high-calibre students from a limited pool of prospective UK and international applicants. Regulatory changes in recent years, such as the lifting of the cap on university places in England, have increased competition between institutions.
- If data were to be publicly available, the University would be placed at a significant commercial disadvantage. Our competitor institutions would be able to analyse our candidate selection and offer-making behaviour in granular detail. This would allow them to target our applicant demographics. It would be likely to cause the University genuine commercial prejudice if it were available to competitors within the sector.
- Releasing information for the current application process will also have a detrimental effect on applicants. Potential applicants could have an unfair advantage within the current cycle in understanding our candidate selection and offer-making processes. This would undermine confidence in our admissions processes and could be expected to have an impact on our ability to attract paying students.
- The University receives over 50% of its income from student fees and, there is a need for it to ensure that it still is competitive by protecting any information it considers to be sensitive which could affect student recruitment and affect its income.
- Our decision to withhold this information is consistent with the policy and procedure followed by UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) on this subject matter. UCAS does not publish information about individual institutions' year-on-year application positions until after a cycle is over so that the information cannot influence prospective applicants who are deciding whether to apply to an institution.

For the reasons outlined above, the University believes that the balance of interest currently lies in favour of withholding the information at this time. This acts as our Refusal Notice.

Also, please could you provide the average GCSE scores of applicants in 2022 and 2023 who were selected for an interview.

Information not held. We do not record GCSE scores against our admissions data.

If you are unhappy with the way we have handled your request, you have a right under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act to ask the University to review it. You must do so within 40 working days of the date of this response. Your request should include our reference number and explain the reason for requesting a review. Email foi@liverpool.ac.uk or write to the Freedom of Information Reviewer, Legal & Governance, University of Liverpool, Foundation Building, 765 Brownlow Hill, Liverpool L69 7ZX. We will respond to your request for an internal review within 20 working days of receipt.

Following an internal review, if you are still dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you have a right to appeal to the Information Commissioner. Information on how to do this is available at <http://ico.org.uk/complaints>. There is no charge for making an appeal.

Yours sincerely

Kirsty Rothwell

Kirsty Rothwell

Freedom of Information Officer / Data Protection Co-ordinator