



**Northumbria
University**
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29th January 2021

OUR REFERENCE: FOI/RFI-3088/Mckendry

Dear Mr Mckendry,

Your request for information received on 18th April 2021 has now been considered. The response to your request is as follows:

Please provide the total number of applicants and the number of offers made for the MA in Creative Writing for 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic year.

The requested information is held by Northumbria University, but we consider this information to be exempt from disclosure under section 43(2) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Section 43 Commercial Interests

(2) Information is exempt information if its disclosure under this Act would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person (including the public authority holding it).

The Section 43 (2) exemption applies because we consider that disclosure of this information would prejudice our own commercial interests because to release this data would prejudice the University's ability to successfully operate in an competitive student market in relation to student recruitment and admissions.

Section 43(2) is a qualified exemption, and we are required to conduct a public interest test when applying any qualified exemption. This means that after it has been determined that the exemption is engaged, the public interest in releasing the information must be considered. If the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in withholding it, then the exemption does not apply and must be released.

Public interest considerations favouring disclosure

- There is a recognised public interest in the number of applications and successful applicants to study at a University and the disclosure of such information supports the principle of transparency.

Public interest considerations favouring withholding the information

- Student recruitment is a commercial activity for any University.

- It is the current policy of the Government that the higher education market should be competitive in the interests of students and the wider public.
- Providing information in response to a Freedom of Information Act request is akin to publishing the information for the world to see, therefore any information released would be considered 'in the public domain' and accessible to other Universities.
- Information relating to recent recruitment and enrolment cycles is commercially sensitive because it demonstrates how successful the University's marketing, recruitment and offering strategies have been for a particular programme.
- Student numbers provide an indication of a University's teaching-based income for that programme and could be used as an indicator to other institutions as a possible area of expansion. By disclosing the number of successful application, it would be possible to derive an indication of the number of students on a programme.
- The Information Tribunal has acknowledged that universities have commercial interests (EA/2009/0034) and that UK Universities operate in a global market.
- As news headlines in recent years have attested, the Higher Education Sector is experiencing unprecedented pressure on securing income and anything that risks this would not be in the public interest. (<https://inews.co.uk/news/education/universitybankruptcy-reliant-on-loans/>)

If you are unhappy with our response or the way your request has been handled, you have the right to ask for an internal review. To request a review, please contact the Records and Information Manager, in writing at the above address or via email. The review would be undertaken by Jay Wilson, the University's Head of Legal.

Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

Should you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may then appeal to the Information Commissioner at:

Information Commissioner's Office Wycliffe House
Water Lane Wilmslow Cheshire
SK9 5AF
Telephone: 01625 545 700

Yours sincerely

Duncan James
Records & Information Manager