



5 March 2020

RECORDS MANAGEMENT SECTION

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Jenna Corderoy

Sent by email: request-619117-332fa1da@whatdotheyknow.com

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Dear Ms Corderoy

Your information request

Thank you for your email of 12 November 2019 requesting information relating to the government or embassy of China. I apologise for the lateness of this response.

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.

You asked for external and internal correspondence and communications received by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University which mentions or refers to the Chinese government or embassy for the period 1 January 2019 to 12 November 2019.

Please find enclosed the information that you requested. You will see that I have provided extracts in some cases: in these instances the other information in the documents was not related to your request.

Withheld information

I have withheld an attendee list for a conference dinner which mentions the Chinese embassy because the names of guests are their personal data. This would breach the data protection principles set out in data protection legislation. The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 does not require us to provide this sort of information as it is exempt under section 38(1)(b). The conference programme is included in the enclosed information.

I have withheld two project proposals sent to the University which mention the Chinese government. I have also withheld an internal email chain primarily about development of a commercial relationship, which mentions the Chinese government. Information

provided to the University while a project is being proposed or negotiated is provided with the expectation of confidentiality, and disclosure of discussions about the potential relationship would breach confidentiality commitments. Disclosure of this information would therefore be an actionable breach of confidence. The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 does not require us to provide this sort of information as it is exempt under section 36(2).

I have withheld an internal email chain relating to formulation of potential press communications, and an internal email chain primarily about development of a philanthropic relationship, which mention the Chinese government. The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA) does not require us to provide this information as it is protected under the following exemptions:

1. Disclosure would be likely to prejudice substantially the free and frank provision of advice, section 30(b)(i)
2. Disclosure would be likely to prejudice substantially the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation, section 30(b)(ii)
3. Disclosure would be likely to prejudice substantially the effective conduct of the University's legitimate business, section 30(c)

These exemptions are subject to the public interest test. There is clear public interest in the transparent operation of public authorities. However, there is also a strong public interest in allowing University staff members to share opinions and views with candour when considering potential relationships and in allowing the University a private space to discuss the public presentation of significant issues. Disclosure of this information would substantially inhibit such free and frank exchanges of views for the purposes of deliberation and would have a chilling effect on staff members' ability to raise or freely discuss concerns. This would limit future discussion or debate, adversely impacting the quality of the University's decision-making. Disclosing the details of the University's ongoing discussions or potential relationships before any relevant agreements have been signed would also be likely to substantially damage the effective conduct of the University's legitimate business. This is because disclosing details whilst active discussions are ongoing could damage these negotiations. There is a strong public interest in allowing the University to operate its business in a way to maximise the chances for success, in this case that means allowing us space to conduct discussions in private.

Therefore, in this case, the University considers that the public interest in withholding this information outweighs the public interest in releasing it.

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

Eleanor Rideout

Information Compliance Manager

Enclosure: Correspondence and communications received by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University which mentions or refers to the Chinese government or embassy, 1 January 2019 to 12 November 2019

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