Re: FOI Request 16/10

From: foi@sheffield.ac.uk <foi@sheffield.ac.uk>

To: ltheanine29 <ltheanine29@protonmail.com>

Date: Friday, November 13th, 2020 at 9:41 AM

Good morning,

Please see a response to your FOI request:

he general nature of many of our relationships with commercial funders is publicly available via our webpages. https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/business/partners-collaborators is one example. Many of our commercial partners are also open about their relationship with us. For example: https://www.rolls-royce.com/about/our-research/research-and-university.aspx

However, the University has determined that to provide more precise information regarding project titles and details relating to this research funding would damage its commercial interests and therefore Section 43(2) (Prejudice to commercial interests) is engaged.
The reasons for this exemption being engaged is as follows.
Research funding from industry and commerce forms a significant proportion of the University's research income. It is in the University's interest, and central to the successful provision of its core functions and activities of research, teaching and learning that it remains able to compete within a highly competitive commercial environment. The University must be allowed to operate in a manner that provides assurance to those organisations it has existing relationships with, and those that it might develop in the future, that it can operate without detriment to such relationships. Provision of the information requested would be likely to place the University in a position whereby it could not compete in a fair and equal way in this environment, thereby damaging its commercial interests.

Individual project titles are often sufficiently detailed as to reveal the precise nature of the research and its applicability to the sponsors of the research. This information is likely to be of use to the competitors of the University (and the research partners) in pursuance of their own commercial interests. In addition the amounts of income from the specific research sponsors are also deemed to be commercially sensitive. The commercial negotiations for research contracts will try to secure the most favourable conditions for the University and it is possible that a competitor of the University would be likely to gain a commercial advantage through suggesting that it would be capable of carrying out research within a similar area for a lower amount were this type of information divulged. The procurement of research funding takes place within a highly competitive environment, between a limited number of institutions and a limited number of research sponsors. Negotiations will have taken place within a confidential process, and there would have been an expectation that terms, conditions and further information such as details of the titles and those involved in the work would remain confidential unless it was agreed to release them publicly. Therefore were the University to divulge such information outside of agreed frameworks it would damage its reputation and the confidence that research sponsors have in the University. This in turn would damage the University's ability to operate fairly and equally within this competitive environment, and therefore prejudice its commercial interests.
The Section 43 exemption is subject to a Public Interest Test. The University acknowledges that the provision of information under the Freedom Of Information Act increases transparency and accountability but that must be set against the public interest in allowing the University to operate fairly and equally within the commercial environment that it operates within. The University determines that there is a greater public interest in allowing this to continue and that were this not to be the case its core functions of teaching and research would be likely to be negatively impacted. Therefore the balance of maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in making the information requested available. In coming to this conclusion the University notes decision notices from the Information Commissioner's Office relating to the University of Nottingham, 7 September 2009 (ref FS50125011) and the University of Reading, 5 March 2015 (ref FS 50547768), both of which relate to requests to disclose research funding from specific organisations.

Kind regards

Luke

On Fri, 16 Oct 2020 at 12:48, ltheanine29 <ltheanine29@protonmail.com> wrote:

> Good afternoon,
>
> I am writing to request information regarding your univerisity's funding from certain manufacturing companies, under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.
>
> Has the university received funding from any of the following companies since 2013: BAE Systems, Babcock International, Qinetiq, Rolls-Royce; Serco; Cobham and Raytheon UK, Airbus, DXC Technology, General

Dynamics UK, Leonardo MW UK, Lockheed Martin UK?

If so, please include the following details:

a. Total funding supplied by the company

b. The titles of the projects it is associated with

c. Descriptions of the projects it is associated with

Please provide the information in digital form.

If it is not possible to provide the information requested due to the information exceeding the cost of compliance limits identified in Section 12, please provide advice and assistance, under the Section 16 obligations of the Act, as to how I can refine my request.

If you can identify any ways that my request could be refined I would be grateful for any further advice and assistance.

If you have any queries please don't hesitate to contact me via email or phone and I will be very happy to clarify what I am asking for and discuss the request, my details are outlined below.

All the best,

Murray Jones