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07 July 2015

Dear ██████████

Freedom of Information Act 2000 – Information request (ref: FOI_15-114)

We have now considered your request of 26 June 2015 for “...a list of every database your authority holds alongside a description of what the database is.”

Unfortunately, on this occasion we have determined that the cost of finding and assembling the requested information will exceed the ‘appropriate limit’ as defined by section 12 of the Act and the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004/3244.

The ‘appropriate limit’ of £450, which equates to 18 hours’ work, relates to a request in its entirety. If the University cannot locate, retrieve and extract some or all of the requested information within the 18 hours we are not obliged to retrieve any of the requested information.

In explaining our response, we can start with the term “database’ which is quite elastic and can cover a vast range of collections of information and/or data. It can be classed by content; bibliographic, full-text, numeric, or images. It can include both digital and manual collections although generally it refers to digital collections. It can be classed by organizational approach such as relational databases or object-oriented databases.

Second, in a research oriented organization such as UEA, there are literally thousands of ‘databases’ that relate not only to the management and administration of the institution and its students, but virtually every research project will have at least one, if not several, databases, and students themselves create databases in course of undertaking their studies. There can be a variety of databases within one system, for example, underpinning our website, our student information system, or our financial systems.

To provide the information as requested would take days of effort and certainly more than 18 hours. For example, if we were to contact only administrative and academic staff, we would need to communicate with approximately 2500 separate individuals. If we assume that it would take each individual an average of 10 minutes to read and reply to a request for this information, the total time taken would be 416 hours or over 52 days.

Please also note, by way of advice and guidance, that even if the number and range of databases were small enough to be within the appropriate limit, we would not release the exact names of databases as this would pose a security risk by releasing information of value and use to potential hackers. We would therefore exempt this information pursuant to s.31(1) as information whose release would, or would be likely to, prejudice the prevention or detection of crime.

I am sorry we are not able to fulfil your request on this occasion. However, should you choose to submit a further request, we have looked at the type of information that could be provided which might satisfy at least some of your requirements, and would not be subject to any exemption under the Act.

If, for example, you went up a level of generality and requested information on systems (each of which would contain a variety of databases), as opposed to databases, this would be more manageable. .

As an illustration, we would be able to respond to a request for the name and description of major business-focussed functional systems administered centrally by our Information Services Directorate (i.e. eliminating, student, research and Faculty/School level databases). This would include systems such as our student records system, our financial/accounting system, our IT identity management system, our Library system and Estates management system. Some of them are listed on our website (see: <https://portal.uea.ac.uk/itservices/corporate-systems>).

You have the right of appeal against this response. If you wish to appeal, please set out in writing your reasons for appealing and send to the above address. You must appeal within 60 calendar days of the date of this letter. Any appeal received after that date will not be considered nor acknowledged. This policy has been reviewed and approved by the Information Commissioner's Office.

You also have a subsequent right of appeal to the Information Commissioner's Office. Further information is available on their website: https://ico.org.uk/Global/contact_us, or by telephone on 0303 123 1113.

Please quote our reference given at the head of this letter in all correspondence.

Yours sincerely

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