

[REDACTED]

21 November 2014

Dear [REDACTED]

Freedom of Information Act 2000 – Information request (ref: FOI_14-221)

We have now considered your request of 24 October 2014 for the following information:

'Please provide a copy of the Blueprint for the MBBS Final Clinical Examination (OSCE) June 2012'

We regret that on this occasion it is not possible to provide the requested information. In line with section 17 of the Act, this letter acts as a Refusal Notice. The Act contains a number of exemptions that allow public authorities to withhold certain information from release. We have applied the following exemption to your request.

Exemption	Reason
s.36(2)(c), Prejudice to the effective conduct of public affairs	Release of this information would, or would be likely to prejudice the University's ability to carry out its role

Section 36(2)(c) is cited on the basis that, in the reasonable opinion of the Vice-Chancellor (The University's 'qualified person' under the Act), release of the requested information would, or would be likely to, prejudice the conduct of public affairs. We believe that to release the OSCE blueprint would inhibit the University in the carrying out of its core public functions; namely, to examine students and to award qualifications as a result of those examinations.

The Norwich Medical School uses blueprints to ensure that all exam content reflects the balance of teaching across a variety of clinical and academic specialisms and that it is balanced year upon year within a five-year cycle. There are a limited number of questions and scenarios which can be used in the examinations, and each is tested rigorously by external examiners and a panel of clinical experts prior to its use. This is a careful, time-consuming and costly process to ensure that repetition within a five year sequence is avoided.

While we acknowledge the request refers to one particular year and one part of the examination process, we believe release would enable a re-sitting student or any other student coming to the exam for the first time to gain an unfair advantage in terms of prior knowledge of the exam themes or questions. We believe that release of this information under FOIA therefore runs the risk that we pass students who

“learn to the test”, rather than learning to become doctors with the ability to act competently in an unfamiliar setting/in dealing with an unfamiliar problem.

The application of the section 36(2)(c) exemption requires us to consider whether the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure of the requested information.

The University accepts that there is a general public interest in transparency with regard to the overall HE examination process, and that students should know how they are to be examined. However, the clinical setting requires doctors to respond to the unexpected and for this reason no past papers are available. In order to address students’ need to understand the examination process we do provide a limited number of example papers. Learning outcomes summaries for students in years 1-4 are also available to assist students after examinations. In addition, year 5 students approaching final examinations are provided with specific guidance and advice on what to expect.

Despite this provision for existing students we acknowledge that the general importance of the medical student examination process is such that additional appropriate guidance may be seen as being in the public interest. When considering our response we have taken into account the recent GMC review *‘How are students assessed at medical schools across the UK?’* noted in your request and published in September 2014. In light of this recent guidance, it is the intention of the School to review processes to establish if and how blueprints can in future be re-configured in order that they may be provided to students and other interested parties, without jeopardising the integrity and rigour of the examination process.

However the 2012 OSCE blueprint was not drafted with any knowledge of the GMC review (which was conducted in 2013/14). The review acknowledges that approaches to assessment blueprinting vary by institution and it is our understanding that UEA blueprints contain a level of detail that was never intended to be disclosed either to students or the general public under FOIA.

We do not believe the public interest would be best served by the release of information that would provide individuals with details of a specific examination that reveals the School’s approach to OSCE planning. The public interest lies in Universities being able to maintain the integrity of the examination process and assure themselves, and thus give confidence to the medical profession and to patients, that those who pass the MBBS are competent to practise as doctors.

You have the right of appeal against this decision. If you wish to appeal, please set out in writing your reasons for appealing and send to the above address.

You must appeal our decision 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

Ellen Paterson
Information Policy and Compliance Manager
University of East Anglia