

Request Reference: 3527

FOI Request dated 10/11/2025 –

- *Since 4 July 2024, how many employment visas has your institution sponsored?*
- *In the 2024/25, how many student visas has your institution sponsored? If you are able to break this information down between undergrad and postgrad we would be grateful.*

Response

1. Assuming this is referring to sponsorships since 4 July 2024 (rather than including those already sponsored at that point), we have sponsored 32 employment visas.
2. We regret that on this occasion it is not possible to provide the requested information.

In line with section 17 of the Act, this response 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(s) to your request -

Prejudice to commercial interests s.43(2) - Disclosure of information would, or would be likely, to prejudice the commercial interests of a person as defined by the Act.

To compete in the Higher Education market with leading UK and international universities, the University must ensure that information that would be strategically useful to its competitors is not placed in the public domain. Release of such information would potentially compromise the University's ability to attract high quality international students that allow it to be a progressive and sustainable institution.

The University's position would be severely compromised if it were to release information which would benefit its competitors.

Marketing encourages prospective students, staff and members of the public to engage with the products and services that the University offers to build relationships, develop the University's brand and convert prospective students into confirmed student population and therefore customers in relation to other aspects of University, it is undoubtedly a commercial activity for all universities.

The amounts the University invests into sponsorship of student visas and way in which the University directs its international student recruitment funds affects both our reputation and financial position. It therefore directly follows that information regarding our marketing spend can readily be seen as commercially sensitive.

The UK Higher Education sector is a highly competitive environment in which universities all seek to recruit the best students from a limited pool of prospective UK and international applicants, attract high quality staff, and success with obtaining research funding and accreditation. With regard to the requested

information, the University, in common with other universities, undertakes various advertising activities with the aim of promoting the institution to our target markets, at home and overseas. This is a vital marketing activity that directly affects our ability to compete within the sector.

Expenditure on international student visas (international student recruitment and admissions) is regarded as a key indicator of our marketing strategy. The manner in which we direct funding to create a comprehensive and engaging marketing strategy and organise our marketing activities provides us with a possible advantage compared to those competitors who undertake this activity less effectively.

There is a linkage between sponsorship of student visas and methodology and our ability to attract the desired number and quality of students. Awareness of an institution's course offering, academic reputation, and local setting is key to any prospective student's decision to attend. In a very crowded and competitive commercial environment, should the amount and nature of such expenditure be revealed, other institutions will be able to adjust their marketing to match or exceed our activity and thereby impair our ability to recruit quality students.

We believe it is likely that such prejudice to our interests would occur, given the consistent treatment of the information as commercially sensitive, by not only the University but other Higher Education institutions, and the degree to which the recruitment of the number and nature of applicants is now critical to any university's success.

Public interest test

The application of this exemption requires an examination of the public interest in disclosure as opposed to that in non-disclosure.

Factors in favour of disclosure:

- Enhancing the transparency and openness of the marketing / student recruitment advertising process
- Increasing public confidence in the integrity and probity of the marketing / student recruitment advertising process
- There is significant public interest in use of funds by universities to market themselves

Factors in favour of withholding:

- Protecting the ability of public authorities to compete on a level playing field
- Preventing a distortion of the market for admission to higher education by disadvantaging one institution

On balance, we therefore believe the public interest lies in withholding the requested information.