Email 1:
Sat 14/11/20 17:18

To whom this may be concern,

I write to request information regarding sponsorships and donations received by the university over the past five financial years (2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20). I am seeking information about research grants and donations received from the companies listed in Carbon Underground Top 200 (pdf attached).

For the companies listed, please list all projects, professorships and donations that the university has received funding for over the past five financial years, 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20.

Considering the broad nature of the information requested, I am happy for the university to provide as much information as the time limit allows, by starting with the first organisation and working downwards, until the appropriate limit is reached.

Please ensure that details show the company that provided the funding, the start and end date of the contract/project, the title of the sponsorship/donation and the total funding of each for the past five financial years.

Yours faithfully,

[Member of OCJC]

Email 2:
Mon 16/11/20 12:59

Dear [Member of OCJC],

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request.

Subject to any clarification required, the University will aim to reply to your request within the statutory deadline of 20 working days, starting from the day after receipt of your request. Please note that several University departments are under considerable strain because of pressures from the Covid-19 crisis. If your request involves one of these departments, we may find it difficult to respond by the statutory deadline. If we anticipate a delay, we will write to you nearer to the deadline to inform you of the position.

Yours sincerely,

[FOI Oxford]
Email 3:
Fri 18/12/20 12:00
Hello,

Thank you for your response on 16th November. I was wondering if there is any update or reason for delay for the FOI request as it has been over 20 working days now.

Kind regards,
[Member of OCJC]

Email 4:
Fri 18/12/20 14:56
Dear [Member of OCJC]

Our ref: FOI/20201114/1

With apologies for the delay in getting back to you, please find attached a partial response to your request of 14 November.

Your sincerely

Email 5:
06/01/21 14:13
Dear Information Compliance Team,

Thank you for your response, and I look forward to hearing back from you when the full response is available.

For the data already provided, please provide me with the exact amounts or close approximates for the funding received and information for the financial year 2015-16. I would also like to review the decision made in redacting the titles of the projects listed.

Your FOI response states that disclosure of project titles would ‘prejudice the University’s commercial interests, by making it more difficult to raise funds from research funders in the future’. This suggests that the commercial interests of the University are prioritised over its transparency and academic freedom. Your FOI response also states that disclosure ‘would not be in the public interest to impair the University’s ability to achieve the best use of public money, and to undermine its relationships with important funders’. I argue that it is of public interest on several grounds.
Firstly, it is within public interest to know the exact (or close approximate) amounts of funds given to the University by fossil fuel companies, as Cambridge has done. The IPCC dictates that a zero-carbon economy by 2050 is essential (Oxford University has committed to halving carbon emissions by 2030) and the Paris Agreement states that the majority of fossil fuel reserves must be left in the ground. As an institution that is partly supported by tax-payer money (and I hope that the University can 'achieve the best use of public money'), it is within the public interest to know how Oxford is aligning with the Paris agreement. Knowing how much money Oxford receives from these companies outweighs any benefit to the public interest in not disclosing this information.

Secondly, it is in the public interest to know the titles of the projects funded. One of the companies which provided funding to Oxford in the last five financial years was BP, which projects an increase in oil production of 7% by 2030, while Shell has made no commitments to any climate targets. Shell and Eni also both refuse to take blame for oil spills and human rights abuses in the Niger Delta while continuing to extract from those reserves. The public has the right to know how Oxford assists these companies in exploiting people and natural resources, which the project titles would reveal. It is inappropriate for this FOI response to redact the titles of research projects supported by fossil fuels companies.

Finally, Oxford is influential, and research and actions carried out are respected. Oxford voted to divest its endowment from fossil fuels in April 2020. This constituted a recognition that these companies have already contributed beyond redemption to the climate crisis, which has been causing destruction and suffering for decades now, particularly in the Global South. This industry has known about the consequences of its actions since the 1980s or even earlier. There is no time for more chances if we want a habitable world for all the people and species with whom we share our planet. It is therefore a moral obligation for Oxford to show how its research is funded. Maintaining the University’s relationships with these funders should not be a priority and should only be secondary to the University’s transparency and accountability.

Thank you for your time. I hope that the Information Compliance Team will review the decision in redacting the project titles and that I will hear back soon with the full response, including exact numbers and information for the financial year 2015-16.

Kind regards,
[Member of OCJC]

Email 6
07/01/21 14:11

Dear [Member of OCJC]

I write to acknowledge your request of 6 January for a review of the University’s response to your request for information under the Freedom of Information Act.
The University's aim is to respond to internal review requests within 20 working days. Our target therefore is to send you a substantive response by 3 February 2021.

Yours sincerely,

Information Compliance Team

Email 7:
Thu 04/02/21 14:15

Dear Information Compliance Team,

I am writing to ask if there is any update on the FOI review request, which I sent on 6th January as it has now been over 20 working days.

Thank you very much,
[Member of OCJC]

Email 8:
Fri 05/02/21 9:30

Dear [Member of OCJC]

We apologise for the delay in responding to your internal review request. We have needed to re-consult the funders on the disclosure of the additional information and are waiting to hear back from them, and we will give you an update as soon as we are able.

Best wishes

Email 9:
Wed 24/02/21 15:25

Dear Information Compliance Team,

I am writing to ask if there are any further updates on the disclosure of the information requested on 6th January. If not, I was wondering if you could let me know how much longer it will be before you hear from these funders.

Thank you very much,
[Member of OCJC]
Email 10:
Wed 10/03/21 19:33

Dear Information Compliance Team,

I am writing yet again to ask if there are any further updates on my FOI request sent to you on November 14. It has been well over 20 working days now since your last response, where you stated that you will give me an update as soon as you are able. Please could you update me before 17th March, after which I will take this complaint to the ICO.

As stated in my previous email to you, I would be grateful if you could provide me data specifically on:
1. the exact amounts or close approximates for the funding received;
2. information for the financial year 2015-16;
3. titles of the projects listed.

In your previous response, you stated that disclosure of project titles would ‘prejudice the University’s commercial interests, by making it more difficult to raise funds from research funders in the future’, suggesting that the commercial interests of the University are prioritised over transparency and academic freedom. Your FOI response also states that disclosure ‘would not be in the public interest to impair the University’s ability to achieve the best use of public money, and to undermine its relationships with important funders’. I see no reason why Cambridge is able to provide this information but Oxford cannot. As an institution that is partly supported by tax-payer money (and I hope that the University can ‘achieve the best use of public money’), it is within the public interest to know how Oxford is aligning with the Paris agreement. Knowing how much money Oxford receives from these companies outweighs any benefit to the public interest in not disclosing this information.

It is also in the public interest to know the titles of the projects funded. The public has the right to know how Oxford assists these fossil fuel companies in exploiting people and natural resources, which the project titles would reveal. It is inappropriate for this FOI response to redact the titles of research projects supported by fossil fuels companies. Oxford voted to divest its endowment from fossil fuels in April 2020. This constituted a recognition that these companies have already contributed beyond redemption to the climate crisis, which has been causing destruction and suffering for decades now, particularly in the Global South. This industry has known about the consequences of its actions since the 1980s or even earlier. There is no time for more chances if we want a habitable world for all the people and species with whom we share our planet. It is therefore a moral obligation for Oxford to show how its research is funded. Maintaining the University’s relationships with these funders should only be secondary to providing transparency and accountability.

I look forward to your reply soon.

Best wishes,

[Member of OCJC]
Email 11:
Thu 11/03/21 18:56

Dear [Member of OCJC]

I am sorry for the continued delay in responding to you on this, which has been caused by the need to consult the relevant funders and due to a large increase in the department’s work over the past 2 months.

We have re-consulted the funders and I write to provide an update to the data provided in our original response. Please find attached a copy of the data including the exact amounts of the funding and the names of the project descriptions. We are still awaiting a response from two remaining funders and we will provide another update as soon as we are able.

As explained in our original response, we have continued to redact any personal data contained in the project descriptions, applying the exemption in section 40(2) of the FOIA.

We hope to be able to give you a further update by 17 March.

Best wishes
[FOI Oxford]

Email 12:
Wed 17/03/21 19:51

Dear [FOI Oxford],

Thank you for your reply, I am writing to ask if there is any further update. I will contact ICO tomorrow evening at 6pm if I do not hear back from you before then.

Kind regards,
[Member of OCJC]

Email 13:
Fri 19/03/21 11:23

Dear [Member of OCJC]

I’m sorry we didn’t get back to you on Wednesday. Please find attached a further update (with the addition of funding from Mitsubishi) – we are still waiting on confirmation from one funder, but are trying an alternative contact and hope to be able to provide an update on this next week.

Best wishes
[FOI Oxford]
Dear [FOI Oxford],

Thank you for sending that information through. As a result of that I’ve decided to not go to the ICO. I look forward to receiving information regarding the final funder this week. Would you also be able to send through official confirmation that you have responded to my FOI by sending through an official response on a PDF?

I also have several questions about the information you sent through.
1. I’ve compared the information you sent through with information recently released by a researcher covering the years 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. This states that Mitsubishi Heavy Industries provided research grants in these years but does not disclose how much. I’m just wondering therefore why there is no data in the information you sent about research grants from Mitsubishi in these years?
2. The information you sent through states that Mitsubishi were the only relevant company that made a research grant in 2015-16. Can I just double check that this is accurate?
3. Why have the titles of projects by Shell Brazil still been redacted despite the latest FOI review?

I look forward to receiving clarification about these questions as well soon.

All the best,
[Member of OCJC]

Email 15:
Tue 23/03/21 10:02

Dear [FOI Oxford],

Could I just check received my latest email has been received?

Thank you very much,
[Member of OCJC]
Email 16:
Wed 24/03/21 17:41

Dear [Member of OCJC]

Apologies for the slow reply. I can send an updated response letter through with the data from the last funder if that would be helpful.

I've looked back at the data we have received, and the data we provided to you does seem to be accurate. If you could provide a bit more detail about the other information you have received I'll try to look into this further.

Just to confirm that we have only redacted parts of the Shell project descriptions where there was reference to individual researchers, under s40(2) FOIA (explained in our letter of 18 December attached).

Hope that is of help and I will get back to you shortly.

[FOI Oxford]

Email 17:
Wed 24/03/21 18:11

Dear [FOI Oxford],

Thank you for your reply, and for your clarification of Shell's projects. An updated letter would be very helpful, thank you!

I found this data, released from a researcher recently, which showed that Mitsubishi gave grants in years 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. However, the data received from my FOI requests show that Mitsubishi only gave research grants to Oxford in 2015-2016, 2016-2017 and 2019-2020. I have attached the FOI response to this researcher. Please let me know which data are correct.

Best wishes,
[Member of OCJC]

Email 18:
24th March
Dear [FOI Oxford],

Apologies for sending a second email in a row. I was wondering if you could please get back to me within the next 24 hours.

Thank you very much,
[Member of OCJC]
Email 19:
Thu 25/03/21 16:44

Dear [Member of OCJC]

I’ve been back to the relevant department and attach an updated version of the annex I sent yesterday, which includes those extra projects from Mitsubishi – apologies for the confusion over this. I hope to be able to provide the final response in the next few days.

Email 20:
Thu 25/03/21 17:31

Dear [FOI Oxford],

Thank you for your reply and clarification. In the data released from the researcher mentioned (pdfs attached in previous email), there are also research grants given to the University from Total in 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. Is this the final funder you are waiting to hear from? If so, please could you specify how much was received during the period 2015-2020.

Also, I notice that Mitsubishi is the only funder in 2015-2016. Please can check that this is correct?

Please can you also provide the exact amount received from Shell for the Shell Professor in Earth Sciences in 2015-2016?

Thank you very much and I look forward to your reply soon.
[Member of OCJC]

Email 21:
Tue 30/03/21 11:46

Dear [Member of OCJC]

Please find attached an updated cover letter and annex. I’ve re-checked the data with the department and as far as we know this is correct. As explained in the letter we have provided the banding for Shell Professor in Earth Sciences as this related to the individual's salary.