

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (Section 50)

Decision Notice

Date: 9 February 2011

Public Authority: The University of York
Address: Heslington
York
YO10 5DD

Summary

The complainant requested that the University of York (the 'University') provide her with information regarding Doctor of Philosophy Music degrees conferred on 10 July 2002. The Commissioner is satisfied that the University has provided this information; however the complainant remains dissatisfied with its response. The Commissioner finds no breaches of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

The Commissioner's Role

1. The Commissioner's duty is to decide whether a request for information made to a public authority has been dealt with in accordance with the requirements of Part 1 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the "Act"). This Notice sets out his decision.

Background

2. Since March 2008, the complainant has been in correspondence with the University concerning a Doctor of Philosophy (D.Phil) degree in Music awarded to [name redacted] in 2002. This degree was submitted as part of a job application. The complainant wishes to verify the authenticity of the degree awarded to [name redacted] on 10 July 2002.
3. On 29 June 2009, the University Registrar and Secretary confirmed that the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Music was awarded by the University of York to [name redacted] on 24 June 2002 and was conferred on Thursday 11 July 2002 in York.

4. On 30 June 2009 the complainant responded to the University and asked it to explain the discrepancy between this information and the date on the certificate which states that the degree was conferred on 10 July 2002. She asked the University to verify or deny that it had issued a certificate conferring a D.Phil to [name redacted] on 10 July 2002.
5. On 30 June 2009 the University Registrar and Secretary informed the complainant that it might be that the certificate was issued on 10 July 2002 and the ceremony took place on 11 July 2002. He would not regard a difference of one day as in any way significant.

The Request

6. On 1 July 2010 the complainant requested the following information from the University:

'...whether York University conferred any D.Phil in Music degrees on July 10, 2002, and if so to whom?'
7. On 8 July 2010 the University informed the complainant that she would find this information recorded in the graduation booklet for the July 2002 ceremonies that she had been provided with.
8. The complainant then asked the University to answer her question directly and clarified that she wished to know whether or not the University issued any D.Phil in music degrees, dated 10 July 2002 and if so, to whom? It appeared from the graduation booklet that it did not.
9. The University confirmed that it considers the graduation booklet to be an accurate record and that no music students graduated as part of the ceremonies held on 10 July 2002.
10. On 21 July 2010 the complainant asked the University whether it considered that a certificate conferring a D.Phil in Music on 10 July 2002 to be an authentic document from the institution.
11. On 22 July 2010 the University explained that it considered that it had already answered this question in June 2009. It had informed the complainant that the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Music was awarded by the University of York to [name redacted] on 24 June 2002 and was conferred in the graduation ceremony held on Thursday 11 July 2002 in York.
12. With regard to the registration date on the certificate, the complainant was informed that the Registrar would not consider a difference of one

day to be significant. The University's Examination Office had previously confirmed the dates and details of the award of the degree. The University has no reason to question the award of the degree or the certificate. The University considered that it could not provide further assistance.

The Investigation

Scope of the case

13. On 4 June 2010 the complainant contacted the Commissioner to complain about the way her request for information had been handled. The complainant specifically asked the Commissioner to consider her complaint that the University had failed to confirm whether it issued the certificate she had in her possession.
14. On 3 August 2010 she clarified the questions she wished to be answered:
 - (i) *Is the degree in question authentic or not?*
 - (ii) *Did York University issue the degree in question?*
15. The complainant has therefore raised issues of authenticity that are not addressed in this Notice because they are not requirements of Part 1 of the Act.
16. The Act is concerned with the provision of recorded information and does not oblige public authorities to answer general questions, provide opinions or explanations. It does not oblige public authorities to provide confirmation as to the authenticity or accuracy of information which is held. This Decision Notice therefore does not address question (i) above.

Chronology

17. On 5 January 2011 the Commissioner informed the complainant that he considered that the University had provided the requested information to her and that a Decision Notice would not consider the authenticity of the degree.
18. The complainant has indicated that she wishes to obtain a direct answer to the question of whether the University issued the degree in question.
19. On 19 January 2011, the Commissioner informed the University that the complainant required a Decision Notice on this matter.

Analysis

Substantive Procedural Matters

Section 1

20. Section 1(1) provides that –

“Any person making a request for information to a public authority is entitled –

(a) to be informed in writing by the public authority whether it holds information of the description specified in the request, and

(b) if that is the case, to have that information communicated to him.”

21. The Commissioner is satisfied that the University has provided the information as required by the question asked on 1 July 2010. The University has confirmed that no music students graduated as part of the ceremonies held on 10 July 2002.

22. From the recorded information that it holds, the University considers that the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Music was awarded by the University of York to [name redacted] on 24 June 2002 and was conferred in the graduation ceremony held on Thursday 11 July 2002 in York. With regard to the registration date on the certificate, the University does not consider a difference of one day to be significant.

23. The Commissioner is satisfied that the University has acted in accordance with section 1(1) of the Act.

The Decision

24. The Commissioner's decision is that the public authority dealt with the request for information in accordance with the Act.

Steps Required

25. The Commissioner requires no steps to be taken.

Right of Appeal

26. Either party has the right to appeal against this Decision Notice to the First-tier Tribunal (Information Rights). Information about the appeals process may be obtained from:

First-tier Tribunal (Information Rights)
GRC & GRP Tribunals,
PO Box 9300,
Arnhem House,
31, Waterloo Way,
LEICESTER,
LE1 8DJ

Tel: 0845 600 0877

Fax: 0116 249 4253

Email: informationtribunal@tribunals.gsi.gov.uk.

Website: www.informationtribunal.gov.uk

27. If you wish to appeal against a decision notice, you can obtain information on how to appeal along with the relevant forms from the Information Tribunal website.
28. Any Notice of Appeal should be served on the Tribunal within 28 (calendar) days of the date on which this Decision Notice is sent.

Dated the 9th day of February 2011

Signed

**Faye Spencer
Group Manager
Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF**