

28 June 2012

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0625-12

Thank you for your request dated 2 June 2012 under the Freedom of Information Act. You asked that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) should provide information to answer the following:

1. Broken down by financial years 2009/10, 10/11 and 11/12, how much did your department pay to meet the costs of independent schooling in Scotland under the "continuity of education allowance"? In each year, how many individuals benefited from independent schooling costs in Scotland, and how many children benefited?
2. Regarding question 1, please name the independent schools in Scotland that were used.

I can confirm that the FCO does hold information relevant to your request.

It is a condition of their employment that members of the diplomatic service must be prepared to serve anywhere in the world at any time during their career, sometimes at very short notice. Most parents prefer to take their children with them abroad, but in some countries we do not permit staff to take their children either for health or security reasons. In others, free local English language schools comparable to those in the UK are not available, or teaching is not geared towards the final school leaving qualifications normally required for entry to British university or employment in the UK (i.e. GCSE and A-level or the International Baccalaureate Diploma).

The financial support for UK schooling is limited to standard term fees up to a ceiling which is reviewed annually. The ceiling is determined by an independent survey conducted by ECA International, which is used by public and private sector employers whose staff work across the world. Staff choosing a more expensive school must pay the difference in cost themselves.

In reply to your specific questions:

1. Management information is not available in a form that allows identification of spending on schools in Scotland, but parents are free to choose schools there provided that the schools meet the basic criteria for FCO funding, including offering full boarding provision.
2. Various factors, including availability of places (sometimes at short notice) and proximity of other family members, influence which schools staff choose for their children. Some staff have used schools in Scotland for their children in recent years. But we do not provide details of individual schools attended by children of staff in the UK and overseas, in order to avoid disclosures that, taken with other information, could identify individual members of staff and their families.