

4 July 2012

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0678-12

Thank you for your email of 15 June 2012 requesting under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) access to information held by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

You asked:

“I would like to request information on how much you have spent in the past three years on any kind of artwork or sculpture; an itemised list of the costs; details of the works; who created them; and whether they are on public display”.

The information you requested is not held centrally and to gather such information will exceed the appropriate limit.

I can however tell you that since 14 May 2010 no original artwork has been purchased for the diplomatic estate by the FCO. Works of art specifically commissioned by the FCO, together with costs, during the period 2006 to date are listed in the GAC's annual reports which can be found at:

<http://www.gac.culture.gov.uk/reports.html>.

Formal works of art displayed in FCO buildings in the UK and throughout the network are from the Government Art Collection (GAC), which publishes an annual list of acquisitions, available at: <http://www.gac.culture.gov.uk/information/publications.asp>. The GAC provide works of art to Posts to support their diplomatic work by promoting British art and culture to visitors. For this reason, this art is usually on public display in our Embassies and Consulates or in the public rooms of the Residences of our Heads of Mission. The FCO has strict guidance covering the purchase of art and its provision to our posts.

Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act makes provisions for public authorities to refuse requests for information where the cost of dealing with them would exceed the appropriate limit. The limit has been specified in the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004. For central government the appropriate limit is set at £600. This represents the estimated cost of one or more persons spending 3 ½ days working days in determining whether the Department holds the information, and locating, retrieving and extracting it. Your request as presently formulated is widely-framed and I estimate that it will take more than 3 ½ working days to locate, retrieve and extract this information. In these circumstances we are not obliged under the Act to comply with your request.

You may therefore wish to refine your request to narrow its scope to bring it within the appropriate limit, for example by defining more clearly what you mean by art. Is this any art displayed in FCO buildings, such as commercial posters, or do you mean original works of art? However, you should be aware that this does not guarantee an automatic release, as all information must be assessed in detail. Any reformulated request will be treated as a fresh request under the Act.