



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

27 April 2015

**FCO Services**  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
King Charles Street  
London SW1A 2AH

Website: <https://www.gov.uk>

Dear

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: FOI Ref: 0315-15**

Thank you for your email of 26<sup>th</sup> March 2015 asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

- 1. How many Queens Messengers are currently employed by the FCO and how has this number changed over the last 10 years?*
- 2. What is the salary of a Queens Messenger?*
- 3. What are the costs of Queen Messengers Corps in the latest available fiscal year?*
- 4. What requirements are there to qualify as a Queens Messenger?*
- 5. What are the current ages and genders of the Queens Messengers, there is no need to provide any information which could identify them.*
- 6. What training do Queens Messengers receive and are they ever armed?*
- 7. What is the job description of a Queens messenger?*
- 9. Have Queen Messengers died within service, as known in modern records?*

I am writing to confirm that we have now completed the search for the information which you requested.

I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Services does hold information relevant to your request.

1. Queen's messengers are employed through open and fair competition under Civil Service guidelines. The approved headcount for Queen's Messengers is 19, which has not changed for the past ten years. At any point the actual number may change and at this time we are currently running with 18, 16 of which are full time and 2 of which are part time,
2. The salary is based on that of a C4 officer, (salary band £25,200 - £33,200.)
3. The cost of Queen's messengers in the latest available fiscal year is £592,500

4. The essential skills to qualify as a queens messenger incorporate those requirements of a C4 Officer, which include
  - Ability to work independently or as part of a team
  - Willingness to work overseas for extended periods
  - Flexibility to travel at short notice (sometimes long and arduous journeys)
  - Understanding of the complexities of escorting, or transportation of, Protectively Marked Material or sensitive materials
  - Ability to think quickly on your feet
  - Remain calm under pressure (occasionally extreme pressure)
5. Currently all Queen's messengers are male with an age range of 40-70
6. Queen's messengers receive the core training of a C4 Officer, Induction, mentoring, security, IT, and SAFE training. We can neither confirm nor deny the last part of your request (see below)
7. The supervision, safe custody and carriage of classified material between the FCO London and UK overseas Missions and between Missions. The role involves a large amount of travel and long periods away from the UK, often in difficult areas and areas of extreme weather. The Role deals with varying levels of authority in many different countries calling for a strong and independent nature that is able to diffuse confrontational situations in order to protect the material carried.
8. No question asked
9. No

The FCO can neither confirm nor deny whether it holds any information that would meet the terms of your request, in reliance on the exemptions contained in section 24(2) 31(3) and 38(2).

To confirm or deny whether further information is held would provide an insight into how the FCO deploys staff in carrying out official business with different bodies and organisations in the transportation of classified documents and material.

It would also enable the public to have a better understanding of effectiveness of the FCO and their available resources. The confirmation or denial that further information regarding whether Queen's messengers are ever armed could allow the public to make informed decisions about FCO procedures and the money spent in such activity. This would greatly assist in the quality and accuracy of public debate, which would otherwise likely be subject to rumour and speculation

As the FCO have responsibility for the safe custody and carriage of classified material, the confirmation or denial that any other information is held regarding whether Queens Messengers are armed or not would compromise the security of both the individual and the documents being transported. Also, it could identify other work which may or may not be undertaken by other agencies and organisations that are required to operate in a similar covert manner within the Law enforcement environment.

The threat to FCO staff will not only affect those persons but also to members of the public that may be in attendance during the courier process.

The confirmation or denial that further information is held regarding the carrying of weapons by FCO staff deployed to other countries is likely to provide a valuable indication of the tactics being used. This will potentially expose any vulnerabilities that could be used by determined individuals or groups that threaten such activity. This information is likely to apply not just to current known operations, but also to future operations where similar tactics and resources may be deployed.

Sections 24, 31 and 38 are qualified exemptions. To the extent that section 24 (2), 31(3) and 38 (2) apply, the department has determined that in all circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining exclusion of the duty to confirm or deny outweighs the public interest in confirming whether the FCO holds the information and to give a statement of the reasons why the exception applies would involve the disclosure of exempt information. The security of the country is of paramount importance and the FCO will not divulge whether further information is or is not held if to do so would place the safety of an individual at risk or undermine National Security. After weighing up the competing interests I have determined that confirming or denying that any other information is held would not be in the public interest. I consider that the benefit that would result from the disclosure that further information is or is not held does not outweigh the confirmation or denial that information is held relating to whether staff carry weapons when acting as diplomatic couriers.

Therefore under section 17(4) of the FOIA, the FCO is not obliged to give such a statement. However, this should not be taken as evidence that any information that would meet your request exists or does not exist.

Once an FOI request is answered, it is considered to be in the public domain. To promote transparency, we may now publish the response and any material released on [gov.uk](http://gov.uk) in the [FOI releases](#) section. All personal information in the letter will be removed before publishing.

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Yours sincerely,

FCO Services – Corporate Knowledge & Security Group

