



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

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12 April 2016

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: FOI 0289-16

Thank you for your email of 10 March 2016 asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

- 1. As part of a response to a Parliamentary Written Answer [Ref 275463 : 15 May 2009 : Column 1066W] you provided a table showing the accompanied and unaccompanied Diplomatic Service Compensation Allowance.; (DSCA) that was paid to your staff as of 1.1.2009. Please could you provide me with an updated table.*
- 2. Could you also provide me with a table showing the varying levels paid at different locations as the Cost of Living Allowance (COLA).*
- 3. For each of the last three financial years please state what the total cost was to the FCO of paying (i) DSCA and (ii) COLA?*

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) does hold information relevant to your request.

The FCO pays staff allowances overseas to compensate costs resulting from frequently spending periods of time living and work abroad during their careers, often in dangerous and challenging environments.

The Diplomatic Service Compensation Allowance (DSCA) comprises of three elements:

- **Diplomatic Service Allowance** which compensates staff for the cost of unforeseen circumstances and added expenditure over a career resulting from the frequent changes of job, location and environment (it is paid at a lower rate to partners Across Government in recognition of the lower frequency of such disturbances);

- **Hardship** which compensates staff for the additional costs of maintaining quality of life throughout a long term posting at hardship Posts. Qualification as a hardship post is based on a number of factors which give an overall assessment of the quality of life against that experienced in the UK. These factors include climatic conditions (including air pollution), availability of goods and services, isolation (both external and internal), cultural impact and restrictions caused by socio-political and personnel security considerations and;
- **Spouse/ Partner Pension Compensation** which compensates those staff whose partners have a long term commitment to full global mobility and to recognise the impact this has on the partner's ability to follow a career and to contribute to a UK pension scheme.

Some of the information you have requested (relating to your first and second questions) is being withheld under Section 43(2) of the FOIA. Section 43(2) protects information which would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of any person (including the public authority holding it).

The DSCA (Hardship element) and Cost of Living Addition (COLA) are calculated on behalf of the FCO by Employment Conditions Abroad (ECA), an independent company that provides similar services to other governments, non-government organisations and multi-national companies. Releasing the current rates could compromise ECA's position in this specialist market.

In applying section 43 we have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the public interest in disclosing it.

The use of this exemption was carefully considered. The factors in favour of disclosure of this information, including the general public interest and greater transparency and accountability, were carefully weighed against the need to allow business-people and commercial organisations the space to conduct their lawful business competitively and without fear of disclosure of sensitive commercial information. We consider that this transparency also poses risks to the protection of commercially confidential information. Failure to protect such commercially sensitive information could limit the number of companies willing to provide their services to the FCO, reducing our ability to keep our costs down. In this case after such consideration we believe that the public interest in withholding the redacted information outweighs the public interest in its release.

For these reasons, we consider that the public interest in applying this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing it.

Our records show that you asked the same questions in your FOI request (reference FOI 0678-15) of 27 February 2015 and I attach our response of 13 August 2015 that answered those questions.

The Diplomatic Service Allowance rates for 2016 are:

DSA 2016 - FCO officers		
GRADE	TOTAL VALUE	TOTAL VALUE
	<u>MARRIED</u>	<u>SINGLE</u>
SMS3/4	£17,430	£8,715
SMS1/2	£12,420	£6,210
D6/D7	£9,420	£4,710
C4/C5	£7,160	£3,580
B3	£4,804	£2,402
A2	£4,264	£2,132

Floaters		
Year 2016		
Grade	<u>MARRIED</u>	<u>SINGLE</u>
B3	£9,608	£4,804
A2	£8,528	£4,264

There has been no change to the attached list of posts receiving a Hardship allowance, as provided in our previous response.

The Spouse/Partner Pension Compensation rate for 2016 is £2,951.

The amount spent on both DSCA and COLA for the last three financial years is shown in the table below:

	2013/14	2014/2015	2015/2016*
DSCA	£20,940,218	£20,489,235	£16,505,474
COLA	£18,171,000	£14,576,406	£12,211,234

* Figures represent actual spend as at the end of February as the figures for March are not yet available.

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 in the [FOI releases](#) section. All personal information in the letter will be removed before publishing.

Yours sincerely,

International Policies Unit (Allowances)
International HR Department



We keep and use information in line with the Data Protection Act 1998. We may release this personal information to other UK government departments and public authorities.