



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Human Resources Directorate
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 - REQUEST REF: 0078-17

Thank you for your request dated 22 January 2017 under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). You asked that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) should provide the following:

- 1) *The Diplomatic Service Allowance (DSA) rates for 2016, broken down by grade;*
- 2) *The total amount spent on DSA during financial year 2015/2016 in pounds sterling;*
- 3) *The DSCA (Hardship) rates for 2016, broken down by grade;*
- 4) *The total amount spent on DCSA (Hardship) during financial year 2015/16 in pounds sterling;*
- 5) *The Spouse/Partner Pension Compensation rate for 2016;*
- 6) *The total amount spent on Spouse/Partner Pension Compensation during financial year 2015/16 in pounds sterling*
- 7) *The Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) rates for 2016, broken down by grade or post;*
- 8) *The total amount spent on COLA during financial year 2015/16 in pounds sterling;*
- 9) *The Travel Package (TP) rates for 2016, broken down by grade or post;*
- 10) *The total amount spent on TP during financial year 2015/16 in pounds sterling*
- 11) *The Continuity of Education Allowance rates for 2016, broken down by grade or post;*
and

12) *The total amount spent on Continuity of Education Allowance during financial year 2015/16 in pounds sterling.*

I can confirm that the FCO does hold information relevant to your request on allowances and provisions for staff serving overseas. Where it has been possible to answer your request we have provided information below and in the attached annex.

The FCO pays staff allowances overseas to compensate for the requirement to spend periods of time living and working abroad during their careers, often in dangerous and challenging environments. A career made up of frequent relocations has an impact not just on the member of staff but on their families too. Families incur a range of costs including costs of living in alternative – sometimes hostile – environments; costs of maintaining contact with family in the UK; costs of maintaining part of their life in the UK and part of their life abroad. Spouses/partners can find it very difficult to pursue a normal career with a resultant loss of income to the household.

For the purposes of this FOI request we are referring to all officers on the FCO payroll, which includes staff from a number of other government departments working overseas on the FCO platform. In most instances those departments reimburse the FCO for the costs associated with their staff. Please note that UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) moved off the FCO payroll system from 1 April 2016. UKVI officers are therefore included in the figures provided. UK Trade and Investment (UKTI – now the Department for International Trade) moved off the FCO platform on 1 April 2014.

FCO budgets also operate according to the financial year rather than the calendar year. We have therefore provided, where relevant, information on full spending from the last complete financial year of 2015-16.

Diplomatic Service Compensation Allowance (DSCA)

Three of the allowances you have asked about form the DSCA package. These are:

- **Diplomatic Service Allowance (DSA).** Paid to officers at all overseas Posts according to grade and family status to compensate for the range of additional costs that result from the career-long disruption caused by frequent changes of location, and any indirect representational expenses.
- **Spouse/Partner Pension Compensation.** Paid to officers in recognition of their contractual commitment to serve anywhere overseas. It recognises the impact this has on the spouse's ability to follow a career and to contribute to a UK pension scheme (including State Pension contributions). Paid monthly to married

accompanied staff or those accompanied by an established partner provided they meet the qualifying criteria.

- **Hardship.** Paid according to family status to staff at qualifying Posts to compensate for the additional costs of maintaining a quality of life. Based on a location ranking scoring system prepared by ECA International who gather data from expatriate and independent sources on such factors as climate, pollution, health, isolation, security and social tension.

The rates for DSA and Spouse/Partner Pension Compensation for 2015 and 2016 are provided in Annex A.

DSCA is paid as a single amount calculated on a combination of the DSA rate, Spouse/Partner Pension Compensation rate (if claimed) and, where applicable, the Hardship rate. The annual amount reflects all three elements. In the 2015-16 financial year the total DSCA spend for all officers on the FCO payroll was £23,055,100.

We do not hold the relevant data in order to calculate the amount spent on each element on an annual basis. To establish these amounts would entail checking the records of each and every member of our diplomatic service and staff from other government departments who were working for the FCO at the time.

Cost of Living Addition (COLA)

UK-based staff serving overseas are paid COLA to compensate them for the additional cost of maintaining a standard of living comparable to the UK. COLA is not sufficient on its own to cover local living costs and is not provided as an incentive to work at any particular Post. COLA is paid with salary as a tax free non consolidated allowance.

The total amount provided to staff overseas through COLA in financial year 2015-16 was £16,395,178.

COLA and Hardship Rates

We are withholding the Hardship and COLA rates under section 43(2) of the FOIA. COLA rates vary by salary bands (linked to disposable income) and family status. Hardship rates are provided on either an accompanied or unaccompanied basis and not by grade. Both rates 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 this data would breach commercial confidentiality of ECA data and could compromise ECA's position in this specialist market.

Travel Package (TP)

Staff posted overseas by the FCO are entitled to a travel package to pay for their and their qualifying dependents travel during a posting. The TP is based on a set number of fare paid journeys which an officer is entitled to over the course of a posting. The travel package is designed to allow staff to undertake leave travel while overseas, within their overall TP ceiling and subject to travel package policy. A member of staff with dependent children who are not resident at Post (i.e. at University) may use savings from their own journey entitlements to pay for travel by those children to enable them to be reunited at Post or elsewhere.

The total spend on the FCO's TP in 2015-16 was £14,915,958.

TP Rates

We are withholding TP rates under section 43(2) of the FOIA. The Crown Commercial Service has confirmed that Crown rates negotiated with airlines are commercially sensitive. They have also confirmed that supplier booking fees negotiated with Clarity Travel Management (the organisation contracted by the FCO to manage travel arrangements) have the same status. We cannot therefore release the full travel package information and rates under section 43(2) of the FOIA.

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 Hardship, COLA and full TP rates outweighs the public interest in releasing them.

Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA)

CEA is not based on an officer's grade or posting, but provided to all staff who meet certain eligibility criteria to cover school fees on a term-by-term basis up to a maximum ceiling. CEA enables staff to choose to provide an uninterrupted education for their children at a British boarding school in the UK, while they continue to take up posting opportunities overseas at regular intervals during their career. This includes potential postings to locations where the FCO does not allow children to live at post. Children for whom CEA is paid are expected to

remain at school in the UK from the time a claim for CEA starts, until they complete their schooling via GCSE to A-level or IB Diploma, complete Scottish Highers, or the staff member no longer meets the eligibility criteria to continue their claim.

Staff may claim CEA towards the cost of standard tuition fees plus boarding, up to the applicable ceiling per term for a junior or senior pupil. The ceilings are reviewed annually each summer, by independent review conducted by ECA. Any changes to the ceilings are applied from the start (Autumn Term) of the following school year.

The ceilings for the current 2016/17 school year (per term, 3-term school year). are included in Annex A. The total amount spent on CEA in the 2015-16 financial year was £12,409,062.

As part of its commitment to continuously ensure value for money the FCO regularly reviews the allowances we pay to our staff at overseas Posts. In line with changes across the Civil Service, the FCO phased out many of its allowances to be replaced by a system of reimbursement of actual spend. As a result of changes introduced during 2011/12 the FCO is saving more than £8 million per year on allowances paid to staff.

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Yours sincerely,

Human Resources Directorate

Annexes:

Annex A: DSA and Spouse/Partner Compensation rates 2016.



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