



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

15 August 2013

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0668-13

Thank you for your email dated 18 July asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

“The 20 most accessed websites for the last 12 months within your department.

That information broken down into each site's URL, the number of visits and the total time spent on each site.”

I am writing to confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has now completed its search for the information you requested. I can confirm that the FCO does hold some information which falls within the scope of your request.

Information which can be disclosed is attached. This consists of a list of the twenty most viewed domains, which received the most hits from centrally monitored computer terminals in the UK and at our diplomatic offices overseas. It covers a period of three months, from 29 April 2013 to 1 August 2013. This aggregated list includes the domains of advertisements and social media sites, which appear as content within frames of other websites viewed by staff. This means a user may visit a particular website, but also generate a number of “views” for other sites not intentionally selected. The volume of viewed content does not equate to the number of times staff have visited a website. This imprecision is unavoidable and a limitation of how websites are constructed and work on the modern Internet.

The FCO provides access to the Internet to help staff to do their jobs. Reasonable personal use is permitted, with the provision that it does not interfere with their performance of duties. Business access is not separated from personal access, and staff are required to follow an “Acceptable Use Policy”. FCO staff also have access to social media, including Twitter and Facebook. Social media tools like Facebook are an important platform for the FCO’s digital presence and an integral part of modern diplomacy. They allow staff to monitor events, formulate more informed policy, identify and build relationships with key influencers and increase our reach beyond more traditional channels, allowing, for example, to provide up-dated travel advice in real time and to respond to questions from the public.

The FCO has software and systems in place that can monitor and record all Internet usage on official systems. However, I wish to advise you that some of the information cannot be disclosed for the reasons given below.

The data we are able to provide is limited and does not cover your specified time period, ie over the past year, nor the number of visits and the total time spent on each site. Neither does it cover all Information Communications Technology (ICT) systems used by staff for broadband access, for example standalone terminals are not included. We estimate that the

cost of complying fully with your request would exceed the appropriate limit of £600. Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act makes provision 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 working days in determining whether the Department holds the information, and locating, retrieving and extracting it.

Under section 16 (1) of the FOI Act we have a duty to provide you with advice and assistance on how to refine your request to bring it within the £600 limit, where it is reasonable to do so. However, on this occasion we are unable to provide you with any advice which would enable you to refine this particular request.