



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

Parliamentary Relations Department  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
King Charles Street  
London SW1A 2AH

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

30 October 2014

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 - REQUEST REF: 0726-14**

Thank you for your email of 28 July 2014 asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

*'How much did the department spend on travel for special advisors in each of the following years: 2010/11, 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14.*

*Please provide me with all electronically held details available for each item of expenditure eg destination, method of travel, standard/business class, reason for trip'*

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.

However, some of the information has been withheld under section 21 (information accessible to the applicant by other means) of the FOIA. We are not required to release information if it is reasonably accessible to you in another way. Section 21 is an absolute exemption and not subject to a public interest test. The information can be found on the FCO pages of the gov.uk website, at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office/series/minister-data>

Some of the information is also exempt from disclosure under section 22 (information intended for future publication). This information will be published in due course (quarterly) on the FCO pages of the gov.uk website, and will be accessible via the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office/series/minister-data>

Section 22 is a qualified exemption subject to a public interest test. We have considered the public interest in releasing the information that falls under section 22 against the interest in withholding it:

There is a public interest in transparency being demonstrated by releasing the information with this reply. However, transparency is also achieved by the Government publishing this information on the FCO website.

There is a public interest in government departments providing information they hold that falls within the scope of a Freedom of Information request as quickly as possible. But this needs to be balanced with the public interest in government ensuring the maximum cost effectiveness. Providing this information in response to a Freedom of Information request is not the most cost effective way of placing this information in the public domain, when it will be published in due course on the FCO website.

We have therefore concluded that the public interest in withholding this information in our response to your request outweighs the public interest in releasing it.

While the Gov.UK website information does not specifically show the cost of the trip for anyone other than the Minister, the cost of Special Advisers (SPAD) travel would be the same for travel on commercial flights and there would be no extra cost for RAF or charter flights as the SPAD and all officials travelled on those aircraft with the Foreign Secretary.

Any more detailed information is exempt under Section 12 (exceeds the cost limit) as all information held for every trip would have to be checked to establish exact cost breakdown where possible.

Section 12 of the FOIA 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. 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. You should be aware that there are a large number of individual costs involved with any visit and any information held on each visit is very time-consuming to check. The large number of visits in the time periods you have requested greatly exceeds the cost limit. You would need to be very much more specific in any future request on this subject, for instance making a request about a specific visit.

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the FOIA, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless it is exempt. The information we have supplied to you may now be published on our website together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context.

Yours sincerely,

Parliamentary Select Committee Liaison Officer & Correspondence Manager for Mr  
Simmonds and Mr Swire, OGLO  
Parliamentary Relations Department



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