



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

**Royal, Ceremonial & Honours Unit  
Protocol Directorate**  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
King Charles Street  
London SW1A 2AH

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22 February 2016

Dear

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0082-16**

Thank you for your email of 23 January asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

*"I would be pleased to receive information and correspondence held by the FCO between and within the offices of FCO ministers, FCO protocol and Royal matters unit department concerning the rules and regulations pertaining to the use of titles of honour, such as knighthoods, granted by The Queen or her official representatives in right of another Commonwealth Realm, to UK and dual nationals of the Queen's Commonwealth realms, any correspondence on the changing of such rules and regulations for UK nationals and dual UK nationals who are also a national of another Commonwealth Realm."*

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

Some of the information that we hold which is relevant to your request is, in our view, already reasonably accessible to you. Under section 21 of the Act, we are not required to provide information in response to a request if it is already reasonably accessible to the applicant. Responses to Parliamentary Questions on this subject are available to view at [www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-questions-answers](http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-questions-answers) using the keyword "knighthoods".

However, other information and correspondence on the use of titles of honours has been withheld as it is exempt under section 37(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) – communications with, or on behalf of, the Sovereign.

Some of that information is also exempt under section 40(2) of the FOI. Section 40(2) exempts personal information from disclosure if that information relates to someone other than the applicant, and if disclosure of the information would, amongst other things, contravene one of the data protection principles in schedule 1 of the Data Protection Act. In this case, I believe disclosure would contravene the first data protection principle, which provides that personal data must be processed fairly and lawfully.

Some information has also been withheld under section 41(1), as it is information that was provided in confidence. It is our view that disclosure of this information would constitute an actionable breach of confidence and so disclosure would also be unlawful under the Act.

Section 37(1)(a), section 40(2) and section 41(1) are absolute exemptions on disclosure and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is not obliged to consider whether the public interest favours disclosing the information.

Some of the information has also been withheld under section 37(1)(b) - conferring by the Crown of any Honour or Dignity which also requires the application of a public interest test. It is in the public interest to ensure that the award of honours and dignities is accountable and transparent. It is also, however, in the public interest to maintain the integrity of the honours system. For these reasons, we consider that the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing it.

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,

Deputy Head  
Royal, Ceremonial and Honours Unit  
Protocol Directorate

