

20 August 2012

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0769-12**

Thank you for your request dated 16 July 2012 under the Freedom of Information Act.

You asked that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) should answer:

1. How many people are in the FCO Corporate Pool of tax funded civil servants?
2. How long have they been in the FCO Corporate Pool?
3. What jobs were they doing? I am told they include Ambassadors. What are their jobs?
4. What are their salaries?
5. What is the cost of the Corporate Pool per year?
6. What is the longest period anyone has been in the FCO Pool?
7. What is the longest period the current lot has been in the FCO Pool?
8. Is there a maximum number of people allowed to be in the FCO Pool?
9. What is the purpose of the Pool?
10. People in the pool are not supposed to come into work so can stay at home. They are being paid to stay at home. How does the government justify this?
11. Which other departments run a pool of civil servants who are allowed to stay home on pay.
12. How many people are in each pool? What are their salaries?
13. What is the total cost of each pool for the different departments?
14. How long has this pool system been going on?
15. What is the annual cost of the pools?

I can confirm that the FCO does hold information relevant to your request. Taking each of your questions in turn:

1. The FCO does not employ staff specifically to be part of the Corporate Pool. FCO staff undertake a number of postings at home and overseas which typically last between two and four years. When they are due to complete one tour of duty they apply for their next posting. But the end date of one posting and the start date of the next do not always coincide exactly. As a result, staff who are between substantive postings, or who have gaps in their schedule of essential job related training for their next overseas posting, are required to join the Corporate Pool so that they can be usefully deployed. The Corporate Pool is an important corporate resource which is actively managed to ensure that staff between substantive postings are deployed temporarily to areas of the FCO which require additional temporary staff. The Corporate Pool supplies staff at short notice to cover unforeseen absences in substantive positions, to help staff crisis units, to

meet temporary surges in demand and to work on new initiatives. In the last year, for example, the pool has been invaluable in providing additional staff to work on The Arab Spring and to manage major events, such as the recent Somalia Conference.

The exact number of officers in the pool fluctuates on a daily basis as officers move into substantive jobs and others join, having just finished an overseas posting or home tour. On 24 July 2012 there were 128 officers in the Corporate Pool, of which 124 were deployed covering temporary gaps or working on short-term projects. (see breakdown of grades below). This is a significant reduction from 189 officers in the pool at the end of July 2011. Where officers are not deployed, this is usually very short-lived. For example their skills or their grade may not match the current outstanding requests for temporary cover, they have imminent leave or training plans which make an assignment impractical or because they are returning from long-term sickness absence and are waiting for a phased return-to-work programme to be arranged.

Grade	Number of Staff	Salary Scales	
		Min	Max
<b>A1</b>	7	£17,135	£17,906
<b>A2</b>	24	£19,245	£21,696
<b>B3</b>	27	£21,432	£27,385
<b>C4</b>	9	£26,102	£32,509
<b>C5</b>	14	£32,748	£40,500
<b>D6</b>	15	£43,084	£55,782
<b>D7</b>	21	£54,340	£67,861
<b>SMS</b>	11	£58,200	£208,100
<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>		

2. Of the 128 staff in the pool on 24 July, 59 have been in the pool for more than 3 months, of which 17 have been in the pool for more than six months.
3. FCO officers perform a wide range of work across the organisation throughout their careers and so it follows that officers in the Corporate Pool were previously filling roles across the spectrum of FCO work both at home and overseas. The information to answer this question fully is not held centrally therefore to answer would require us to manually examine every personnel file for the staff in question. We estimate that to locate, retrieve and extract such information would exceed the appropriate limit of £600 or 3.5 days. This limit has been specified in the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004. Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act makes provisions for public authorities to refuse requests for information where the cost of dealing with them would exceed the appropriate limit.
4. Salary scales for FCO UK based staff are in the table above

5. As stated in the answer to Question 1, all but a very small number of Corporate Pool officers are covering vacancies and working on projects across the FCO and their salary costs while in assignments are covered by the relevant Directorate's devolved salary budget. The number and grades of staff on standby fluctuates daily, but using the current figure of four staff as an average, this would amount to no more than 0.1% of the total pay bill, based on the number of staff in the workforce. None of the officers in the Corporate Pool are surplus to the FCO's overall headcount and so there is no additional cost of them being temporarily in the Corporate Pool between substantive positions.
6. The majority of Corporate Pool officers move into substantive jobs within a few weeks or months of joining. In a very small number of cases, factors such as ongoing health problems can make it difficult for officers to move into a substantive job in which case they may remain for longer in the Corporate Pool, and the longest period anyone has been in the Corporate Pool is six years. The Corporate Pool works closely with other teams in Human Resources as appropriate, for example the Health and Welfare Team and the Disability Policy and Support Team. These teams ensure that staff who are in the pool for longer periods are supported with finding substantive positions wherever possible. However, even where staff do remain in the pool for longer periods, they are nevertheless deployed wherever possible into temporary vacancies or assigned to short-term projects.
7. Repetition of question 2.
8. See question 1. The number of staff in the Corporate Pool at any one time fluctuates and there is no maximum number.
9. See question 1.
10. Officers in the Corporate Pool are assigned to departments temporarily wherever possible and are expected to come in to work. On the few occasions where officers are not deployed, they are expected to come in to the office to undertake e-learning or other training and development activities. They are also required to be available during office hours to come into work at short notice, e.g. in the event of an unforeseen crisis requiring additional staff.

Questions 11-15 are about other government departments and the FCO does not hold information to answer these questions, which should be directed at the relevant departments.