

14 February 2012

**Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request: Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)  
Reference Number: 0063-12**

Thank you for your e-mail of 17<sup>th</sup> January 2012 asking for:

“records held of all ministerial visits completed between the election of the Coalition in May 2010 and December 2011 including:

- Information for all ministers in the department, up to and including Secretary of State, as well as their names and dates of travel. Please include those who undertook ministerial visits but are no longer in the Government. Please also include the names and positions of those that travelled in the ministerial parties between the dates in question
- Details of all visits undertaken including those in London, the UK and overseas
- The cost of each visit
- The means of transport
- The purpose of each visit, and who the minister met with

To note, there have been no changes to FCO Ministers since May 2010.

I can confirm the FCO does hold information relevant to your request.

However, this information is exempt from release under section 21 (information accessible to the applicant by other means) and section 22 (information intended for future publication) of FOIA.

**Overseas visits, May 2010 – 30 June 2011:** information the FCO holds on Ministerial meetings that took place between May 2010 and 30<sup>th</sup> June 2011 is exempt from disclosure under section 21. Information on overseas visits by FCO Ministers - including the name of the Minister who went on the visit, the dates of travel, the cost of the visit, the means of travel, the purpose of each visit and who the Minister met with - is published on the FCO website, and is accessible via the following link:

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/publications-and-documents/transparency-and-data1/hospitality/#Ministers>

**Overseas visits, 30 June 2011 – December 2011:** information the FCO holds on Ministerial meetings that have taken place between 30<sup>th</sup> June 2011 and 1<sup>st</sup> December 2011 is exempt from disclosure under section 22. Information on overseas visits by FCO

Ministers since 30<sup>th</sup> June 2011 will be published on the FCO website in due course at the following link:

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/publications-and-documents/transparency-and-data1/hospitality/#Ministers>.

We anticipate that it will be published by the end of February. When published, the same information as outlined above will be available at this link.

Section 22 is subject to a public interest test. We have considered the public interest in releasing the information against the interest in withholding it. There is a public interest in transparency being demonstrated by releasing the information with this reply. There is also a public interest in government departments providing information they hold that falls within the scope of a request as quickly as possible.

However, transparency is also achieved by the government publishing this information on the FCO website. Providing this information now 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 outweighs the public interest in releasing it.

**Names and positions of accompanying officials** – information the FCO holds on names and positions of officials who accompanied Ministers on overseas visits cannot be provided to you without incurring disproportionate costs as set out under section 12. This makes provisions 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 days 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, as the FCO does not maintain centrally held records of which officials accompanied Ministers on all overseas visits, it will take more than 3 ½ working days to locate, retrieve and extract this information. In these circumstances we are not obliged to comply with your request.

You may therefore wish to refine your request to narrow its scope and bring it within the appropriate limit. The FCO website lists a large number of meetings that have taken place. You might like to narrow the scope of the information you are requesting, perhaps asking for this information in relation to specific visits listed on the FCO website. We will then consider whether the information requested in your new request can be provided within the appropriate cost limit. Please note refining a request does not automatically guarantee a request will fall within the appropriate limit.

**Visits undertaken in London and the rest of the UK** - information the FCO holds on Ministerial visits undertaken in London and the rest of the UK cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate costs (as explained above). The FCO does not maintain centrally held records of every Ministerial visit undertaken in London or the rest of the UK.

You may therefore wish to refine your request to narrow its scope and bring it within the appropriate limit. You might like to consider asking for this information in relation to a specific Minister, a narrower time period or a specific place within the UK. We will then consider whether the information requested in your new request can be provided within the appropriate cost limit.