



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

29 April 2013

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0301-13

Thank you for your request dated 24 March 2013 under the Freedom of Information Act. You asked that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) should provide:

1. What high ranking officials are members of certain groups.
2. What are the statistics in the FCO, regionally and nationally in relation to members of these groups.
3. Have there been any reported criminal activities between the FCO and individuals of these groups.
4. How many of these resulted in prosecutions.
5. Does the FCO operate a policy to any of the standards set by Government legislation in any capacity to those employed by the FCO to being members of any fraternities, cults etc? in particular, any members of the named groups.
6. What is the FCO's position on a number of offences? Do we cover any aspect of this in our professional standards and employment policies?

The information you have requested on membership of the named groups is not stored centrally. Therefore, to answer your questions 1-4 would entail searching through the personnel and vetting files of every member of staff. This would clearly exceed the appropriate cost limit.

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. 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. Under section 16 of the FOI Act we are obliged to provide advice and assistance to a requester to enable them to refine their request to bring it within the £600 limit however on this occasion we are not able to provide such advice.

We believe that in relation to questions 1-4, any information that we may hold, would constitute personal data and we judge that the disclosure of such information would contravene one of the data protection principles. In such circumstances, Section 40 (2) and

(3) of the FOIA applies. In this case, our view is that disclosure would breach the first data protection principle. This states that personal data should be processed fairly and lawfully. It is the fairness aspect of this principle which, in our view, would be breached by disclosure. In such circumstances, Section 40 confers an absolute exemption on disclosure.

In relation to question 5, in Security Vetting terms, we do not prohibit staff from being members of certain groups. However, we seek assurances that the person being vetted does not engage in extreme activity (political/terrorist/otherwise) which would conflict with their position.

Finally, the offences listed in question 6 are or could be considered as criminal activities. The FCO considers such activities as extremely serious and depending on the circumstances and relevance to their employment, would consider formal disciplinary action which if substantiated would almost certainly result in dismissal. Were a member of staff found guilty by the authorities and receive a custodial sentence the FCO would summarily dismiss the member of staff.



We keep and use information in line with the Data Protection Act 1998. We may release this personal information to other UK government departments and public authorities.