



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

12 November 2014

Human Resources Directorate
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

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

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0962-14

Thank you for your email of 15 October asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

- 1. How many first class flights in total did civil servants in your department take during each of the following financial years as part of their work – 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14.*
- 2. Please provide a list of all such first class flights taken during each of the above years, including the departure and arrival airports, the reason for each flight and the cost of each of flight.*
- 3. What are the rules governing whether a civil servant can or should take a first class flight as part of their work as opposed to a standard economy flight?*

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.

The FCO has over 260 posts worldwide so have comprehensive travel policy guidance for both staff going overseas to work as British Diplomats, and for official duty travel. We are committed to ensuring that travel is as cost effective as possible. Where possible and appropriate, we encourage secure video-conferencing around the FCO network in a further effort to reduce the number of flights needed. However, face-to-face meetings are a vital part of diplomatic work and this necessarily involves travel. Senior civil servants are expected to undertake a heavy work load of travel to help promote UK interests throughout the world. There is no provision for staff to fly first class.

1. How many first class flights in total did civil servants in your department take during each of the following financial years as part of their work – 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14.

2. Please provide a list of all such first class flights taken during each of the above years, including the departure and arrival airports, the reason for each flight and the cost of each of flight.

The information requested in questions 1 and 2 is not held centrally but our travel policy does not permit staff to take first class flights. To obtain the information would entail contacting every department and overseas post within the FCO to ask them to search their records. It includes duty travel (both at home and overseas), transfer journeys to and from posts and leave journeys for officers and their families posted abroad. Travel is not all booked and accounted for centrally, but in a variety of ways; some is booked in London, some at post and some directly by officers using corporate credit cards. This would 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.

In order for your request to fall within the appropriate limit we would recommend you narrow your request by identifying flights for a particular department or post and time period, for instance, within the last 2 years. However, you should be aware that this does not guarantee an automatic release, as all information must be assessed in detail. Any reformulated request will be treated as a fresh request under the Act.

3. What are the rules governing whether a civil servant can or should take a first class flight as part of their work as opposed to a standard economy flight?

Staff are not permitted to travel first class. Attached below are the relevant elements of our travel policy as requested.

Our Duty Travel policy states:

FCO policy is that all staff should travel by the most appropriate means and class of travel according to the demands of their job and to ensure maximum efficiency, remembering that it is public money being spent. Staff should also consider if the journey is necessary and

their aims can be achieved by other means such as video conference, teleconference, or WebEx facilities as alternatives to travel.

Staff should not book or incur any travel costs without first obtaining approval from their line manager, RMU, or Budget Holder/approver as applicable, and the appropriate medical clearances.

Staff are expected to book the lowest fare available – if there are other more expensive fares available staff must provide a reason explaining why the lowest fare was not booked

Flying Time	Class of Travel
Up to 5 hours	All journeys at public expense: Economy
Over 5 hours	All journeys at public expense: Economy (but see * below)
Over 10 hours	All journeys at public expense: Up to Business (subject to agreement with budget holder)

* Subject to the authority of Directorates the next higher class (but not first class) may be used

- where strict application of the class-of-travel rules would not be cost effective
- for short duty visits out and back in a working day - staff are not entitled if they stay overnight
- when bookings are not available in the lower class and the timing or date of the journey cannot be changed
- if staff will be required to work immediately on arrival
- on disability/medical grounds recognised by HR.

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the Freedom of Information Act, 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,

Human Resources Directorate



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.