



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Middle East and North Africa Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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22 July 2015

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0664-15

Thank you for your email of 6 July asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, I would like to ask about the technical assistance programme the FCO has provided to Bahrain. This is in reference to the same assistance which in [December 2014](#), Mr Tobias Ellwood MP stated had cost £1.5 million in 2014/15.

Please could you inform me of:

- 1) The date the programme started and the expected date that the programme will end;*
- 2) The final figure and breakdown of the budget;*
- 3) How the project will be evaluated; and*
- 4) The expected date for when an assessment of the programme will be published.*

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

All FCO programmes run in line with the financial year, from April to April, and as such are reviewed on a yearly basis. However, individual projects within a programme can be longer or shorter than a year depending on the type of training we are delivering to a country.

The UK has been providing a range of technical, practical assistance to the Government of Bahrain since 2012. The range of assistance supports the Government of Bahrain's implementation of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry and UN Universal Periodic Review recommendations.

Of the £1.5million Gulf programme for 2014-2015, £1.2 million went towards our reform assistance programme in Bahrain. All our work with the Bahrainis supports the strengthening of rule of law and human rights and includes:

- Capacity-building support to the Ombudsman's Office through Northern Ireland Cooperation Overseas (NI-CO) to increase accountability;
- UK-based training to the Prisoners' and Detainees' Rights Commission through Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP);
- Supporting local NGOs and youth societies to promote responsible freedom of expression through Causeway Institute for Peace-building and Conflict Resolution;

- Reforming the youth justice system.

The FCO does not publically list the full details and financial breakdown of our assistance programmes due to commercial sensitivities. These details have therefore been withheld under Section 43 (2) of the FOIA (see below).

It is standard practice to evaluate all FCO programmes and project work. The outcome of the evaluation is used to inform and improve any future assistance that we provide. Programmes are monitored on a quarterly basis to ensure that they are on track for delivery. The FCO provides updates on its programme work through the annual FCO Human Rights report, in which Bahrain is a case study. There is no plan at present to publish standalone assessments of the Bahrain programme.

In your request, you asked for the final figure and breakdown of the budget for our Bahrain programme. This information has been withheld under Section 43 (2), which relates to commercial interests. The use of this exemption was carefully considered. The factors in favour of disclosure of this information, including the general public interest and greater transparency and accountability, were carefully weighed against the need to allow commercial organisations the space to conduct their lawful business competitively and without fear of disclosure of sensitive commercial information. Failure to protect such commercially sensitive information would limit the sources of information and interlocutors available to the FCO. In this instance it could impact the FCO's ability to deliver its assistance programme in Bahrain if project implementers felt that commercially sensitive information regarding their work could be released into the public domain. For these reasons we have concluded that the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in its release.

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 in the [FOI releases](#) section. All personal information in the letter will be removed before publishing.

Yours sincerely,

Gulf Team

