



Ministry of Defence

Air Command Secretariat
Spitfire Block
Headquarters Air Command
Royal Air Force
High Wycombe
Buckinghamshire
HP14 4UE

Our Ref: 2016/00431

14 January 2016

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your e-mail of 12 January 2016 asking for information about unauthorised aircraft entering UK airspace.

You requested the following information:

- “1.) The number of unauthorised aircrafts that entered UK airspace between 01/01/2015 - 31/12/2015*
- 2.) The number of occasions military aircrafts were deployed to intercept unauthorised aircrafts between 01/01/2015 - 31/12/2015 in UK airspace*
- 3.) A breakdown of the country of origin of the aircraft.”*

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). We have now completed a search of our paper and electronic records for the information you requested and I can confirm that information within the scope of your request is held.

The table below gives the number of days in 2015 on which QRA aircraft were launched.

Year	No. of days QRA was launched	In response to Russian military aircraft	In response to others
2015	12	8	4

QRA launches in 2015, or any other year, were to determine the identification of any aircraft approaching, or in, NATO monitored or national airspace without prior approval or not having identified themselves and which could not be identified by any other means. I can therefore confirm that all launches within the period requested were either for Russian military aviation which approached the NATO Air Policing Area for which the United Kingdom has responsibility or civil aircraft within UK civil airspace that were causing concern to Air Traffic Controllers. Not all launches resulted in an interception, as some incidents were resolved before interception occurred. All Russian military aircraft remained

in international airspace and did not enter UK sovereign airspace. The civil aircraft that were causing concern were registered in a range of countries, including those registered in the United Kingdom.

We do hold recorded information on the number and nature of Quick Reaction (QRA) incidents. Section 26(1)a of the FOI Act provides that we should withhold information which would be likely to prejudice the defence of the British isles or any Colony. Section 26(1) a of the Act provides that we should withhold information which would be likely to prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of relevant forces. The Act requires that we have to carry out a public interest (PI) in this respect to show that the reasons for withholding the information outweigh the reasons for releasing the information.

Public Interest (PI) factors in favour of disclosing the information requested:

- The public interest in ensuring that the UK is protected from airborne threats and that the resources invested in QRA is properly employed.
- To provide a detailed measure of the level of activity in the air policing area for which we have responsibility.
- To promote an understanding of the RAF's ability to respond efficiently, effectively and appropriately to potential threats in UK airspace.

Public Interest (PI) factors against disclosing the information requested:

- If precise or comprehensive information on the identity or country of origin of aircraft were released, any potential aggressor or terrorist organisation wishing to use aircraft as a means to attack the UK could extrapolate this information if they were probing our defences. It would consequently provide details of which probing flights triggered a QRA reaction.
- This in turn could give the criteria that provoke Quick Reaction Alerts and indicate the effectiveness of our QRA capability.

Because deterrence is a principal function of QRA and QRA is in turn an integral part of the air defence of the UK, the disclosure of information that might compromise the QRA deterrent capability, which is an ongoing armed operational capability, would also be a disclosure prejudicial to the defence of the UK. A limited disclosure of the requirement to launch Quick Reaction Alert would provide a reasonable level of overall understanding of the level of QRA activity. As a limited amount of information has been released for some incidents as examples of how the RAF is able to respond to this kind of incident, the public interest in further disclosure of detailed incident details is therefore limited. There remains a very strong public interest in preserving the RAF's ability to defend the UK through the effectiveness of its air defences and to maintain its full deterrence value.

I conclude that the balance of the public interest for providing full details of the number of QRA launches and the nature of the missions is firmly in favour of maintaining the exemption under S.26(1)(a)&(b) and thus of withholding the information.

If you are not satisfied with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact me in the first instance. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an

independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, 1st Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <http://www.ico.gov.uk>.

Yours sincerely,



Air DRes Sec 3b1