



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

Arabian Peninsula and Iran Department  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
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11 May 2016

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0023-16**

Thank you for your email of 8 January asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

*Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 I would like to request the following information with regards to the technical assistance given to the Kingdom of Bahrain (KoB) since 2012. 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, and which cost £2.1 million in 2015/16.*

*What was the UK Government's actual and allocated expenditure on the programme for the 2012/13 and 2013/14 financial years? What were the evaluations of these projects over the two financial years?*

*What was the total allocated budget to the Gulf programme by the UK government for the financial years 2012/13 and 2013/14?*

*As these projects are reviewed on a yearly basis, to what extent have subsequent funding been based on previous results?*

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.

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.

We believe that UK support to Bahrain's reform programme is the most constructive way to achieve long-lasting and sustainable reform in Bahrain. While it will take time to see the full results, UK support is having a direct, positive impact on areas of concern.

In particular we welcome the progress made by Bahrain in the areas of youth justice, the establishment and increasing effectiveness of the Ombudsman's office, the Prisoner and Detainees' Rights Commission and the reformed National Institute of Human Rights. We will continue to work with the Government of Bahrain to ensure momentum and progress on its reforms, for the benefit of all Bahrainis.

We do not hold figures for allocated expenditure for Bahrain for 2012-13 and 2013-14 as allocations were by region rather than by country. The allocated budget for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states was £1.8m in 2012-13 and £4.8m in 2013-14. The actual expenditure for Bahrain in 2012-13 was £114,797 and £450,292 in 2013-14.

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.

After careful consideration, we have decided not to release copies of the project evaluations as the information is exempt from disclosure under section 27 (1) (a) and (c) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 27(1)(a) and (c) of the FOIA recognises the need to protect information that would be likely to prejudice relations between the United Kingdom and other states and the interests of the UK abroad if it was disclosed. The application of s.27(1)(a) and (c) requires us to consider the public interest test arguments in favour of releasing and withholding the information. We acknowledge that disclosure could meet the public interest in transparency and accountability. Indeed, we are transparent about the UK government's support to Bahrain's reform programme – it is detailed in the FCO's human rights report, which is updated annually, and through public correspondence and parliamentary questions.

However, the effective conduct of international relations depends upon maintaining trust and confidence between governments. If the UK does not maintain this trust and confidence, its ability to protect and promote UK interest through intentional relations will be hampered, which will not be in the public interest. The disclosure of the project evaluations could potentially damage the bilateral relationship between the UK and Bahrain. This would reduce the UK government's ability to protect and promote UK interests, which would not be in the public interest. For these reasons we consider that, the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing it.

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Yours sincerely,

Head of Arabian Peninsula and Iran Department



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