



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Knowledge and Technology Directorate
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
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Website: <https://www.gov.uk>

26 January 2016

Dear

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 - REQUEST REF: 1077-15

Thank you for your email of 8 November 2015 asking the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO):

“Under the Freedom of Information Act I request the following information.

I would like to know, covering the period of the past 12 months, a list of all websites visited by computers within your government department.

If the above timescale is too far-reaching, please provide the information for whatever period is available.

If the above request is too far-reaching in terms of number of websites, please provide the top 500 visited websites ranked by number of hits and bottom 500 visited websites ranked by number of hits.”

I am writing to confirm that the FCO has now completed its search for the information you requested. I can confirm that the FCO does hold some information which falls within the scope of your request.

Information which can be disclosed is attached. This consists of a list of the 200 domains, which received the most hits from centrally monitored computer terminals across the FCO's estate. It covers a period of the previous five months, from June to November 2015. This aggregated list includes the domains of advertisements and social media sites, which appear as content within frames of other websites viewed by staff. This means a user may visit a website once, but generate a number of “views” for other non-related content. The volume of viewed content does not equate to the number of times, staff have visited a website. This is a limitation of how websites are constructed and work on the modern Internet, rather than limitations of the data available to us. Access to the internet is vital for FCO staff to do their jobs, for example monitoring global news and using social media to communicate with British nationals around the world.

The FCO has software and systems in place that can monitor and record all Internet usage on official systems. However, I wish to advise you that some of the information cannot be disclosed for the reasons given below.

The data we are able to provide is limited and does not cover your specified time period, i.e. over the past year. Neither does it cover all Information Communications Technology (ICT) systems used by staff for broadband access.

We estimate that the cost of complying fully with your request would exceed the appropriate limit of £600. 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 we estimate that it will take more than 3 ½ working days to locate, retrieve and extract information on standalone terminals. In these circumstances we are not obliged under the Act to comply with your request.

We are withholding details about some Government web sites that are not in the public domain under Section 31(1)(a) Law Enforcement of the Freedom of Information Act, this exemption is subject to the balance of the public interest test. This means that a public interest test must be carried out to determine whether the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

In favour of release, we acknowledge that disclosure of information regarding how internet usage is recorded would provide assurance that the FCO is ensuring that its IT systems are used appropriately. However, in favour of not providing this information, we consider that disclosure would include some technical information, which would be useful to those wishing to harm the FCO's IT systems. Attacks on the FCO's IT systems could of themselves constitute a crime or create a vulnerability to criminal activity. Therefore, on the balance we have decided that it is not in the public interest to provide that information.

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Yours sincerely,

Knowledge and Technology Directorate



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