



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Middle East and North Africa Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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06 May 2016

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0118-16

Thank you for your email of 29 January asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked for:

1. *A full list of all projects being undertaken by the UK Government as part of its “package of technical assistance” in “support of the Government of Bahrain’s reform programme” (as referenced here: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/459108/FOI_ref_0249-15_military_police_training_for_Bahrain.pdf)*
2. *Where available, the cost of each of those projects*
3. *A list of any assessments which have been undertaken of those projects; and where available, copies of those assessments.*

I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office does hold information falling within the terms of your request.

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.

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.

I attach a full list of all projects being undertaken by the UK Government as part of its package of technical assistance in support of the Government of Bahrain's reform programme.

In response to your request for the cost of the projects this information is exempt under Section 43 (2) of the Act, 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 business-people and commercial organisations the space to conduct their lawful business competitively and without fear of disclosure of sensitive commercial information. We consider that this transparency also poses risks to the protection of commercially confidential information. Failure to protect such commercially sensitive information would limit the sources of information and interlocutors available to the FCO and limit the FCO's ability to promote the British economy and lobby for the interests of British businesses overseas. In this case after such consideration we believe that the public interest in withholding the redacted information outweighs the public interest in its release.

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.

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

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Yours sincerely,

Head of Arabian Peninsula and Iran Department



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