



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Arabian Peninsula & Iran Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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08 July 2016

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0580-16

Thank you for your email of 13 June asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked for:

This request relates to a previous response from the FCO to an FOI request submitted by Reprise. In that response, the FCO attached "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." Below, I provide a list of all of the project titles and descriptions supplied to Reprise by the FCO. For each of the project titles below, can you:

- 1. Please state which UK bodies or individuals are providing the support or training for the concerned project.*
- 2. Please state which Bahraini bodies or individuals are receiving the support or training for the concerned project.*
- 3. Please state when work commenced on the concerned project*

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

I attach an updated list including the start dates 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.

The information on which UK bodies or individuals are providing the support or training for the concerned projects and which Bahraini bodies or individuals are receiving the support or training for the concerned project is exempt under section 27 (1) (a) and (c) and section 43 (2) of the Freedom of Information Act.

The use of these exemptions was carefully considered.

Section 43(2) of the Act relates to commercial interests. The factors in favour of disclosure of this information includes the general public interest in the disclosure of commercial information to ensure effective, open and honest use of public money and the scrutiny of public licensing in accordance with published policy and to provide an environment where business can better respond to government opportunities.

These factors 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.

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](https://www.gov.uk) in the [FOI releases](#) section. All personal information in the letter will be removed before publishing.

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Yours sincerely,

Head of Arabian Peninsula and Iran Department



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