



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Human Resources Directorate
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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Website: <https://www.gov.uk>

24 November 2015

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: FOI 0912-15

Thank you for your email of 22 October in which you clarified the information you were seeking under your original Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000 request of 15 September. You asked:

What I am essentially looking for is the preparation that individuals are given before undertaking an international assignment - for example, how far in advance does an individual generally know that they are going on assignment? Are they given any location-specific training before they go? Is there an HR liaison contact in both the home and host country for staff on international assignment? Does support extend to a workers family - for example finding housing, schools, language classes, jobs for spouses (if families tend to travel with workers, ignore this if not).

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.

It is worth noting that FCO and other Government staff working overseas are not considered expats in the general sense, in that all crown servants living and working overseas on behalf of HMG are considered resident in the UK for tax purposes. Taking the remainder of your points in order:

- a) *how far in advance does an individual generally know that they are going on assignment?*

In most cases, staff will have a minimum of 8 months notice of going on a full posting. It is often much longer if the role requires full-time language training. However, operational

requirements mean that some jobs need to be filled more quickly and staff will be aware of this when applying for roles. Shorter-term temporary duty opportunities arise to cover unexpected gaps or provide additional short-term resilience. These necessarily require the member of staff to arrive at post as soon as possible, though may have up to 3 months notice. Temporary duties are undertaken on an unaccompanied basis.

Information on all of our overseas Posts and guidance on preparing to move to an overseas Post is published on our internal web pages. In addition, our Overseas Posting and Allowances Team (OPAT) assist officers with the process of obtaining necessary medical and travel clearance and in getting their personal effects shipped to Post.

b) *Are they given any location-specific training before they go?*

There is no location specific training provided to officers before they go on an overseas assignment. However, we do run a generic going overseas course for those officers and their dependants going overseas which covers the range of administrative issues they may face.

Language skills are key to the FCO's delivery of the Government's objectives overseas. Full-time Language Training is provided for those officers going overseas into positions where the ability to communicate effectively in another language is considered essential to meet the requirements of that role or where an advanced level of skill in a language will clearly increase our impact and influence overseas. The length of the training varies according to the complexity of the language. All other staff going overseas (and their partners and spouses) are entitled to a limited number of optional language training hours which provides a basic knowledge of the language making it easier to settle in and to help with day to day living.

c) *Is there an HR liaison contact in both the home and host country for staff on international assignment?*

Continuing HR support is available via HR Direct (an internal call centre) who provide a second line of support for officers who have questions about their overseas postings. The HR Direct team can assist the officer in ensuring that the postings process is followed and point officers in the direction of guidance, expanding where necessary, to ensure that the move is as smooth as possible. The team provides information on allowances and travel arrangements and advise staff on medical and security clearance. Once the posting has ended, HR Direct provide the same service to officers to ensure their arrival back in the UK is straightforward. Whilst the officer is at Post, HR Direct remain available to provide advice on general HR queries.

d) *Does support extend to a workers family - for example finding housing, schools, language classes, jobs for spouses (if families tend to travel with workers, ignore this if not).*

Accommodation is provided by the FCO and is managed through the relevant Embassy, High Commission or Consulate corporate services team and is based on the officer's personal and family circumstances. Similarly, children's education is supported by the FCO and officers going on an overseas assignment may, depending on their circumstances

choose to either put their children in boarding school in the UK during their assignment (if the child is in UK school year 3 or above) or to use local schooling. Embassies, High Commissions and Consulates will hold a list of locally approved schools that provide education to a similar standard as that in the UK.

As noted under b) above, spouses and officially recognised partners are eligible for limited language training. Whilst we are unable to assist spouses/partners in finding employment locally, we provide funding for a scheme that allows spouse/partners to receive country specific advice and coaching in order to help them find employment.

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 [FOI releases](#) section. All personal information in the letter will be removed before publishing.

I hope you are satisfied with this reply. However, if you wish to make a complaint or if you would like a review of our decision, please write to the FOI and DPA Team, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Room K4.14, King Charles Street, London, SW1A 2AH. E-mail: foi-dpa.imd@fco.gov.uk. You have 40 working days to do so from the date of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of your complaint, you may then apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by the FCO. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF.

Good luck with your dissertation.

Yours sincerely,

International Policy (Allowances)
International HR



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