



# Foreign & Commonwealth Office

**Consular Directorate**  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
King Charles Street  
London SW1A 2AH

Website: <https://www.gov.uk>

25 February 2015

Dear

## **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF 0082-15**

Thank you for your email of 28 January 2015 asking for information that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) might hold under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

### **Your Request**

You asked for:

- 1. The number of complaints your department received in 2010/11, 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15 so far?***
- 2. The number of complaints your department has outstanding from 2010/11, 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15 so far?***
- 3. The mean average length of time it took to resolve a complaint (from receiving it to closing it) in 2010/11, 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15 so far?***

***I would like to request that my name and contact details be redacted from any external publication of the outcome of this Freedom of Information request'***

### **Refinement of Request**

I emailed you on 2 February 2015 to let you know that the scope of your request was too wide as you asked for information relating to complaints handling across the FCO organisation. You replied on the same date agreeing to a refinement. You replied:

***'Thank you for your help - would it be helpful if I said non-policy related correspondence where British nationals have contacted FCO saying they are unhappy with an aspect of service they have received from the FCO'***

I emailed a confirmation to you agreeing the revised terms (for consular related complaints only)

### **Outcome of Search**

I am writing to confirm that the FCO does have information relevant to your request. We do not hold the information in as much detail as you have requested but what we do have is set out below.

### **Information Released**

Please see the breakdown below of **reported** figures relating to centrally reported consular complaints handled by the FCO.

### **High Level Statistics**

	Complaints Received	Outstanding	Time Taken To Resolve (In working Days)
2010	1166 (161)*	0	Not Known**
2011	393	0	Not Known**
2012	248	0	21 (estimate)
2013	206	0	18 (estimate)
2014	272	1	15
2015	46***	16	12

**\* Includes passport/visa/nationality**

**\*\* Not recorded centrally see cost limit information below**

**\*\*\* As at 23 February 2015**

### **Other Information**

The FCO operates a 4 stage consular complaints process; how this operates is detailed below. I hope that this will enable you to put the figures above into context.

- Stage 1 is managed by Team Leads in London or at our overseas missions.
- Stage 2 is managed independently and the Director Consular Services sends the response.
- Stage 3 is a referred complaint from MPs for ministerial response.
- Stage 4 is a referred complaint from MPs for Parliamentary and Health Services Ombudsman investigation

The statistics in the table above do not reflect Stages 2-4 because this would result in duplication; instead they represent all complaints as they are received at Stage 1. The average time take to respond to Stage 2 complaints in 2014 was 23 working days; we do not have information for previous years as we did not record this data until 2014.

There are currently no outstanding Stage 2-4 complaints (as at the date of this response).

### **Cost Limit Partial Refusal**

The FCO introduced a more robust method of recording consular complaints in February 2014 which has enabled us to accurately record the data covering your specific request. Prior to 2014 all complaints related communication was filed in our database but specific data about the time taken to resolve complaints was not accurately recorded centrally. We have been able to manually extract

this information for 2013 and 2014 as reflected in the table but to do so for previous years would invoke the Section 12 of the FOIA and exceed the cost limit.

### **Section 12**

Section 12 of the FOIA 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.

We estimate that the time needed to fully answer your third question would breach Section 12 of the FOIA. It took 2 days to manually calculate completion times for 2012/13 complaints (because of the way the documents had been filed) and we are not able to guarantee accuracy. We estimate that to provide similar data from 2010 to 2011 would take a further 4 working days.

In these circumstances, we are not obliged under the Act to comply fully with your request.

### **Publication of your Data**

We acknowledge and will comply with your request to withhold your personal data from any future publication of this response in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

### **Copyright**

The information supplied to you continues to be protected by the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. You are free to use it for your own purposes, including any non-commercial research you are doing and for the purposes of news reporting. Any other re-use, for example commercial publication, would require the permission of the copyright holder. Most documents supplied by the FCO will have been produced by government officials and will be protected by Crown Copyright. To re-use Crown Copyright documents please consult the [Open Government Licence v3](#) on the National Archives website.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me. Please remember to quote the reference number noted above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,  
Head of Customer Interaction Team  
Consular Directorate



We keep and use information in line with the Data Protection Act 1998. We may release this personal information to other UK government departments and public authorities.