



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Policy Unit

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

19 July 2016

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0610-16

Thank you for your email of 21 June 2016 asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

“a copy of the FCO’s internal manual or guide for staff on how to compose diplomatic telegrams”.

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.

Please find attached the information falling within the scope of your request which I am releasing.

Yours sincerely,

Policy Unit



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.

What makes a good DipTel?

DipTels need to be timely, sharp and short. 800 words maximum; shorter is better. Readers want insight and analysis which is focused on the UK interest and honest about the UK's ability to shape events. DipTels are valued when they contribute to policy-making, when they stimulate or contribute to live debate in London. The "Summary" section is the most widely read. The "Comment" section is often the most valuable.

DipTels irritate and damage FCO's reputation when they cover issues which are not important to senior readers in London, add nothing to press reporting, are frivolous or jokey in style, contain Summaries which are teasers for the main content, or do not address the UK interest.

There is no filter between the DipTel "send" button and senior readers across Whitehall. So you need to get the content right first time.

The Summary

Maximum 600 characters, which the template will enforce. This should state the key point you want to convey. It should summarise the DipTel, avoiding the need for most readers to read the detail. The Summary should not seek to draw readers into the Detail. Teasers such as "Implications for x" or "What should we do about why?" should be avoided.

If you are recommending action, state what and by whom. Please do not rely on the Distribution Lists to make clear who a DipTel is for. Distribution Lists are not visible to readers of the twice-daily DipTel Summaries.

The Detail

Brevity is key. Too many DipTels are too long. You will soon be unable to send a DipTel exceeding 800 words, and are discouraged from sending attachments unless these will be genuinely useful to a large number of recipients (eg "Lines to Take"). Where there is further information which might be useful to some, you should say from whom it can be obtained and consider e-mailing it separately.

You should follow normal best practice in drafting. See the Diplomatic Academy's foundation module on "Writing with Impact". Make sure your DipTel is accurate, brief and clear. Give it a structure. Feel free to use headings. The template allows you to use capitals, but other formatting (bold, italics or underlining) should be avoided since it is likely to be corrupted in transmission. Try to analyse, not just report. Make sure you address the UK interest.

The Comment

You are encouraged to include comment, which is best kept separate from factual reporting. Set out the implications for UK interests and policy.

Sign-off

DipTels issue from posts in the name of the Head of Mission, and the HOM is responsible for ensuring their quality. DipTels can of course be issued by other staff, but senior quality control is expected, and Comment should reflect the HOM's views.

DipTels from London issue in the Foreign Secretary's name. They should be cleared at Director or Head of Department level, and the person clearing must satisfy themselves that the DipTel represents or implements Government policy.

DipTels should be signed off with the surname only in UPPERCASE, e.g. HAMMOND.