



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

**Economic Growth and Business  
Department**

Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
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21 February 2018

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0911-17**

You asked for:

*All correspondence with members of the Foreign Secretary's private office relating to the event held at the Foreign Office on September 27 launching the Institute for Free Trade.*

*This should include internal correspondence/documents and correspondence/documents with the Foreign Secretary.*

*This should include letters, emails, texts, call logs, briefing notes, agendas and minutes from meetings, draft remarks, and follow-up correspondence.*

We attach here information that we hold in response to your request, with redactions as explained below.

You will note that some of the information that we are providing concerns the arrangements under which IFT used the FCO's Map Room for its launch event on 27 September 2017. It has been the established policy of the FCO under successive governments to allow a wide range of non-government organisations, including think tanks, to use their premises. Where the events supported the Government's objectives, the FCO's established practice allowed for a waiver of the room hire charge. The event was handled in line with that longstanding policy.

Following the event, it was suggested that this FCO practice might not be in line with that elsewhere in Government and accordingly the Foreign Secretary asked for a review of the room hire policy. As a result of this review the updated policy makes clear that non-government organisations must pay a fee and secure the support of an FCO or Department for International Trade team in order to host an event in rooms at the FCO. Any exception to the policy will only be considered in exceptional circumstances and must be approved by the Permanent Secretary.

The FCO also considered whether to charge IFT a booking fee retrospectively. However, as the event was held in line with the longstanding FCO policy that applied at the time, it was decided it would not be appropriate to do so.

Turning to the redactions that have been made to the information attached, some information has been withheld under Section 27 (International Relations) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 27(1)(a) recognises the need to protect information that would be likely to prejudice relations between the United Kingdom and other states if it was disclosed. Its application requires us to consider the public interest test arguments in favour of releasing and withholding the information. We acknowledge that releasing information on this issue would increase public knowledge about our relations with some of the countries represented at the IFT event. However, Section 27(1)(a) recognises that the effective conduct of international relations depends upon maintaining trust and confidence between governments. If the United Kingdom does not maintain this trust and confidence, its ability to protect and promote UK interests through international relations will be hampered, which will not be in the public interest. The disclosure of information detailing our relationship and discussions with representatives of countries attending the IFT launch event could potentially damage our bilateral relationship with these countries, and our ability to protect and promote UK interests through those relationships, which would not be in the public interest. We therefore consider that the public interest in withholding this information outweighs the public interest in disclosing it.

We have withheld some information under Section 35 (Formulation of Government Policy) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 35(1)(d) protects information relating to the operation of a Ministerial private office. Some of the information that we hold in the scope of your request relates to administrative matters within the Foreign Secretary's private office, for example the management of his diary, and therefore engages this exemption.

We have considered whether the balance of the public interest favours our release of this material. We recognise the general public interest in disclosure of information, that openness in government may increase public trust in and engagement with the government, and that there is a public interest in understanding how ministerial private offices operate. However, this information on its own will not add to the sum of public knowledge in terms of the way in which ministerial private offices are run, or in respect of the administrative support provided to Ministers. We consider rather that disclosure would prejudice the effective running of the ministerial private office, and that there is a stronger public interest in ministerial private offices' freedom to operate and, specifically in this case, to make arrangements for the minister's diary to facilitate the most efficient and effective carrying out of ministerial business.

Some of the information you have requested is personal data relating to third parties, the disclosure of which would contravene one of the data protection principles. In such circumstances Sections 40(2) and (3) of the Freedom of Information Act apply. In this case, our view is that disclosure would breach the first data protection principle. This states that personal data should be processed fairly and lawfully. It is

the fairness aspect of this principle, which, in our view, would be breached by disclosure. In such circumstances, Section 40 confers an absolute exemption on disclosure. There is, therefore, no public interest test to apply.

Yours sincerely,

Economic Growth and Business Department



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.