

MAY 2024 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION RESPONSES

Year	Month	FOI Reference	Topic
2020	May	FOI/20/074	Staff expenses
2020	May	FOI/20/078	Prompt payment data
2020	May	FOI/20/080	Bridge project between Northern Ireland and Scotland
2020	May	FOI/20/081	Usage of disposable cups, cutlery and bottles
2020	May	FOI/20/082	Workforce management information
2020	May	FOI/20/084	Home working expenses

FOI Request Reference	FOI/20/074
Month Issued	May 2020
Request	<i>Questions:</i> <i>1. Have there been investigations relating to expense compliance in your department in the last 24 months?</i> <i>2. If so, how many?</i> <i>3. Do you have a clear expense policy in place at your department?</i> <i>4. What has been your departments employee expenses spend over last 2 financial years?</i> <i>5. Does your department have software in place that allows staff to book trips and submit expenses, or are they expected to book it by their own means?</i>
Response	<i>Questions:</i> <i>1. Have there been investigations relating to expense compliance in your department in the last 24 months?</i> <i>2. If so, how many?</i> Response: There have been no investigations into expense compliance within the department in the last 24 months. <i>3. Do you have a clear expense policy in place at your department?</i> Response: NIO includes staff seconded from the Northern Ireland Civil Service and Home Civil Service staff under Ministry of Justice. Both Departments publish clear and detailed expenses policies and guidance for staff on their internal websites. <i>4. What has been your departments employee expenses spend over last 2 financial years?</i> Response: Departmental spend on Staff Travel & Expenses in the last 2 financial years has totalled; • 18/19 - £79,920.53 • 19/20 - £71,775.18 <i>5. Does your department have software in place that allows staff to book trips and submit expenses, or are they expected to book it by their own means?</i> Response: The department provides software to both allow staff to book trips and claim expenses.

FOI Request Reference	FOI/20/078
Month Issued	May 2020

Request	<i>I am looking to get hold of the data on the performance of each government department against its prompt payment targets for the years 2015-2020. I am unable to find this information online for your organisation. The government's prompt payment policy requires departments to report their performance against payment targets on a quarterly basis. Under Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (PCRs) Regulation, this data should be freely available online via GOV.UK. The Department for Transport prompt payment data provides an example of how this can be formatted.</i> <i>I am able to find this data for the Northern Ireland Office up to quarter two of 2018-19 financial year. After this point, I am unable to find the data.</i> <i>Please can you provide me with this data for the Northern Ireland Office performance, or the link for me to find it myself?</i>																
Response	The information requested is set out below: <table><tr><th>Financial year</th><th>Percentage of invoices paid within 5 days</th><th>Percentage of invoices paid within 30 days</th><th>Total amount of liability to pay</th></tr><tr><td>2018/2019</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>3rd Quarter</td><td>91%</td><td>99%</td><td>Nil</td></tr><tr><td>4th Quarter</td><td>90%</td><td>99%</td><td>Nil</td></tr></table> I can also advise that the prompt payment data for 2019-20 has now been published at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nio-prompt-payments-2019-20?utm_source=0b1f9dc7-4e9b-4b6e-abc7-53dde076a370&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate Section 21 of the Freedom of Information Act exempts disclosure of information that is reasonably accessible by other means, and the terms of the exemption mean that we do not have to consider whether or not it would be in the public interest for you to have the information.	Financial year	Percentage of invoices paid within 5 days	Percentage of invoices paid within 30 days	Total amount of liability to pay	2018/2019				3 rd Quarter	91%	99%	Nil	4 th Quarter	90%	99%	Nil
Financial year	Percentage of invoices paid within 5 days	Percentage of invoices paid within 30 days	Total amount of liability to pay														
2018/2019																	
3 rd Quarter	91%	99%	Nil														
4 th Quarter	90%	99%	Nil														

FOI Request Reference	FOI/20/080
Month Issued	May 2020
Request	<i>All records relating to any proposal for a bridge linking Northern Ireland and Scotland from 1 August 2019 to present.</i>
Response	Freedom of information law allows us to decline to answer FOI requests when we estimate it would cost us more than £600 (equivalent to 3.5 working days' worth of work, calculated at £25 per hour) to identify, locate, extract and then provide the information that has been asked for in a request (section 12 FOIA).

	We have made the decision to decline your request on this basis, as to comply with the request and to enable us to identify whether we hold any such material, officials would be required to open and read a large amount of different records individually stored in a number of locations, and given the broad scope of your request we consider this would cost over £600. Although we cannot answer your request at the moment, we might be able to answer a further refined request within the cost limit. You may wish to reconsider the scope of your FOI request and submit a revised and more targeted request by providing a shorter timeframe/date range or more specific types of correspondence. You should not infer from this that the Northern Ireland Office holds a large amount of information relating to the subjects you have asked about, only that we would need to search through a large number of records in order to find out whether we hold any information relevant to your request. You can find out more about Section 12(1) by reading the extract from the Act and some guidance points we consider when applying this exemption, attached at the end of this letter. You can also find more information by reading the full text of the Act, available at http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/section/12. Please note that, as in this instance, a further refined request may still not fall within the FOIA cost limit.
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FOI Request Reference	FOI/20/081
Month Issued	May 2020
Request	<i>I am writing to you under the Freedom of Information Act. I wish to request information on the amount of disposable plastic or paper items bought by your Department or its caterers over the last 10 calendar years.</i> <i>Specifically, I would like information on:</i> <i>1) The total number of disposable coffee cups bought by your Department, or your Department's catering and facilities providers for use in the Department's offices, in the last 10 calendar years (2010-20). Numbers should be broken down by calendar year.</i> <i>2) The total number of disposable plastic cups (i.e. those used to drink water) bought by your Department, or your Department's catering and facilities providers for use in the Department's offices, in the last 10 calendar years (2010-20). Numbers should be broken down by calendar year.</i>

- 3) *The total number of disposable plastic cutlery items (forks, knives and spoons) bought by your Department, or your Department's catering and facilities providers for use in the Department's offices, in the last 10 calendar years (2010-20). Numbers should be broken down by calendar year.*
- 4) *The total number of items of disposable plastic bottles bought by your Department, or your Department's catering and facilities providers for use in the Department's offices, in the last 10 calendar years (2010-20). Numbers should be broken down by calendar year.*

Please send me this information in an Excel spreadsheet, similar to the suggested format below:

Category	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
<i>Coffee cups</i>									
<i>Plastic cups</i>									
<i>Plastic cutlery</i>									
<i>Plastic bottles</i>									

Response

Freedom of information law allows us to decline to answer FOI requests when we estimate it would cost us more than £600 (equivalent to 3.5 working days' worth of work, calculated at £25 per hour) to identify, locate, extract and then provide the information that has been asked for in a request (section 12 FOIA).

We have made the decision to decline your request on this basis, as to comply with the request officials would be required to open and read a range of documents held by the Department in order to extract and categorise the information, and this would involve a large amount of different records individually stored in a number of locations.

Although we cannot fully answer your request at the moment, we might be able to answer a further refined request within the cost limit. You may wish to reconsider the scope of your FOI request and submit a revised and more targeted request by providing a shorter timeframe/date range or more specific types of key phrases.

You can find out more about Section 12 of the FOIA by reading the extract from the Act and some guidance points we consider when applying this exemption available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/section/12>.

FOI Request Reference	FOI/20/082
Month Issued	May 2020

Request	<i>In line with the government's transparency agenda, all government organisations are required to report their workforce management information on a monthly basis. This includes the number of non-payroll staff, and the pay bill costs relating to staff, broken down into component parts. The Department for Work and Pensions workforce management information data provides an example of how this can be formatted.</i> <i>I am unable to find this data for the Northern Ireland Office.</i> <i>Please can you provide me with this data, or the link for me to find it myself?</i>
Response	As you are aware, the Government is committed to publishing a range of workforce data by department, including payroll and non-payroll staff by grade or type, headcount staff numbers and staff costs. While the Northern Ireland Office is fully committed to making this information available in the public domain it has proven difficult to collate and publish accurate data. We are currently working on resolving the issues and plan to commence publishing the data later this year. We will also publish backdated data once we are satisfied with its accuracy. For this reason, the information is exempt from disclosure under Section 22 of the FOIA. In line with the terms of this exemption in the Freedom of Information Act, we have considered whether it would be in the public interest for us to provide you with the information ahead of publication, despite the exemption being applicable. In this case, we have concluded that the public interest favours withholding the information until we are satisfied that it is accurate. Although the specific information you have requested is being withheld on this occasion you may wish to note that the NIO has nil non-payroll payroll staff and that further information on the department's overall headcount, full-time equivalents, and staff at Senior Civil Service by grade and pay range is published annually in the NIO's Annual Report & Accounts. This annual publication can be found at www.nio.gov.uk. Data on Civil Service employment in the UK is published by the Office for National Statistics. This data includes the Northern Ireland Office and provides information showing the relationship between the salary of the highest-paid employee and median salary of all employees. Data for the period 2015-2018 can be found at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/publicsectorpersonnel/datasets/medianpayannexb In addition, information is also published showing the Civil Service professions by department and grade. Data relating to the Northern Ireland Office is included in this publication. Information relating to the periods 2012 and 2017 can be found at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/publicsectorpersonnel/adhocs/007875civilserviceprofessionsbydepartmentandresponsibilitylevel2012and2017>

FOI Request Reference	FOI/20/084
Month Issued	May 2020
Request	<i>I am sending this request under the Freedom of Information Act.</i> <i>Please provide a copy of your dataset containing centrally submitted expenses claims, covering expenses claimed to assist with or set up home working environments, for the period 01.03.20 to 05.05.20.</i> <i>Please provide fields of this database including the amount claimed, the date claimed, the type of item claimed for and any free text description of the claim.</i> <i>Please also provide all other fields in this database that do not contain exempt information. Exempt fields, such as fields containing personal details can be removed in full, but please replace individual names with an unique identifier (such as claimant 1, 2 etc) if possible to allow claims by the same person to be recorded without revealing the identity of the individual making them.</i> <i>Please state the total amount</i> <i>Claimed by your staff in expenses,</i> <i>Awarded to your staff in grants.</i> <i>To assist with setting up home working environments from 01.03.20 to 05.05.20.</i> <i>This could include grants for items such as, but not limited to, desks or chairs for your staff or expenses claimed for such items used by homeworkers.</i> <i>Please provide any other costs relating to home working to your authority that are centrally recorded (such as central purchase of laptops to issue to staff) incurred between 01.03.20 to 05.05.20.</i> <i>Please only provide centrally recorded information (I.e. by core departmental HR) to keep this request within cost.</i>
Response	In response to Q1 and Q2, no expenses claims were made to assist with or to set up home working environments; nor were any expenses claimed by staff or grants awarded to staff for the period 01/03/20 to 05/05/20 inclusive.

	In response to Q3, the centrally recorded costs relating to equipment provided to staff working from home, during the period from 01/03/20 to 05/05/20 inclusive, is £22,451.88. This equipment will be returned to the office as part of an ongoing renewal programme once the current situation changes.
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