

MARCH 2021 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION RESPONSES

Year	Month	FOI Reference	Topic
2021	Mar	FOI/21/020	Engagement with InfraStrata Plc, Islandmagee Energy Ltd and Harland and Wolff (Belfast) Ltd
2021	Mar	FOI/21/021	IT operating systems
2021	Mar	FOI/21/022	Covid-19 lockdown: staff resources and IT provisions
2021	Mar	FOI/21/023	FOI round robin list: royal referrals
2021	Mar	FOI/21/024	Spending on advertising and marketing
2021	Mar	FOI/21/025	Staff recruitment: protected characteristics breakdown
2021	Mar	FOI/21/026	Staff recruitment: white males over 50 years old
2021	Mar	FOI/21/027	Office buildings: utilities usage and environmentally friendly policies
2021	Mar	FOI/21/028	Night security guards: allocation of hours
2021	Mar	FOI/21/029	New Decade New Approach Joint Board: funding
2021	Mar	FOI/21/030	Unconscious bias training
2021	Mar	FOI/21/031	Archival file request: intelligence gathering and PIRA activities
2021	Mar	FOI/21/038	Challenge Consultancy contracts

FOI Request Reference	FOI/21/020
Month Issued	March 2021
Request	<i>Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and further to a recent official Regulated News Story (RNS) released by Infrastrata Plc on 26th January 2021 where they state:</i> <i>“Having held meetings with... the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland”</i> <i>I would be grateful if you would provide me with minutes of any meetings between the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (or any representatives or employees acting on his behalf) and Infrastrata Plc as indicated in their RNS and also any notes, e-mails and notes of telephone conversations between the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland or the Northern Ireland Office and any Directors, employees, officials or representatives of InfraStrata Plc /Islandmagee Energy Ltd /Harland and Wolff (Belfast) Ltd, including any agencies acting on their behalf.</i>
Response	Please see attached several documents relating to your request. We do hold some further information in relation to your request. However, the information you have requested is exempt under section 35(1)(a) and (b) of the Freedom of Information Act, which protects the formulation of policy and communications between Ministers. Disclosure would weaken Ministers’ ability to discuss controversial and sensitive topics free from premature public scrutiny. Section 35(1)(a) is a qualified exemption, which means that the decision to disclose the requested material is subject to the public interest test. When assessing whether or not it was in the public interest to disclose the information to you, we took into account the following factors: <u>Public interest considerations favouring disclosure</u> • The public having a greater understanding of Government policy; • Greater transparency of Government policy. These public interests have been weighed against a strong public interest that policy- making and its implementation are of the highest quality and informed by a full consideration of all the options. Ministers must be able to discuss policy freely and frankly, exchange views on available options and understand their possible implications. The candour of all involved would be affected by their assessment of whether the content of the discussions will be disclosed prematurely. If discussions were routinely made public there is a risk that Ministers may feel inhibited from being frank and candid with one another. As a result the quality of debate underlying collective decision making would decline, leading to worse informed and poorer decision making. This could potentially damage the Government’s policy-making process for economic investment, which

	remains ongoing. Taking into account all the circumstances of this case, we reached the view that, on balance, the public interest favours withholding this information at this time. Information you have requested is also being withheld because it is exempt under section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 40(2) exempts personal information from disclosure if that information relates to someone other than the applicant, and if disclosure of that information would, amongst other things, contravene one of the data protection principles set out in Article 5 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). In this case, I believe disclosure would contravene data protection principle (a), which provides that personal data must be processed fairly and lawfully. Section 40(2) is an absolute exemption and the Northern Ireland Office is not obliged to consider whether the public interest favours disclosing the information. Section 40 – Personal information guidance
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FOI Request Reference	FOI/21/021
Month Issued	March 2021
Request	<i>I am writing to make a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.</i> <i>1. How many computers within your department run the Windows Vista operating system?</i> <i>2. How many computers within your department run the Windows XP operating system?</i> <i>3. How many computers within your department run the Windows 7 operating system?</i>
Response	Regarding your request, the Northern Ireland Office can neither confirm nor deny that it holds the information you requested as the duty in section 1(1)(a) of the FOI Act does not apply, by virtue of both section 24(2) that relates to national security and sections 31(1)(a) and 31(3)(a) that relates to law enforcement and the prevention of crime. However, this should not be taken as conclusive evidence that the information you have requested exists or does not exist. Section 24 is a qualified exemption and so we have considered whether it would be in the public interest for us to confirm or deny whether we hold the information. In this case, we have concluded that the public interest favours neither confirming nor denying whether the requested information is held. Section 31 is a prejudice based exemption and is subject to the public interest test. With regard to your request, we recognise the public interest in knowing whether the government holds particular information. Balanced against this, is the public interest in not releasing information that would aid a criminal intent on launching cyber-attacks on the Department's IT systems. In this case we consider that the wider public interest lies in neither confirming nor denying that information, which may have been disclosed in an unauthorised manner, is held.

FOI Request Reference	FOI/21/022
Month Issued	March 2021
Request	<i>I would like to submit an FOI request regarding your department's communications and working practices during the lockdown.</i> <i>Specifically I would like responses to the following questions:</i> 1. <i>For the period of lockdown (between March 23rd 2020 – January 2021), please answer the following questions regarding the staff in (XXXX government department) – if a question isn't possible to answer in the time allowed, please let us know:</i> a. <i>What is the total number of civil servants (excluding third party contractors such as cleaners, security etc) in the department?</i> b. <i>Of the department staff whose roles could have been performed from home – i.e. who did not have to be in the office in order to perform their jobs AND would not usually be expected to travel for work – how many couldn't work from home during lockdown due to device or connectivity issues (such as insufficient or unreliable broadband connectivity at home, or not having access to a suitable laptop or smartphone)?</i> c. <i>How many department staff were put on furlough for some or all of the lockdown period?</i> d. <i>How many staff could not perform their roles from home and so had to come into their regular workplace during lockdown?</i> e. <i>How many staff were able to work from home during lockdown?</i> f. <i>If possible, how many staff were restricted from full activities due to home devices not being capable of accessing secure information (such as information classified 'Official Sensitive', 'Secret' and 'Above Secret')</i> 2. <i>The next questions relate to IT spending:</i> a. <i>What was the department's budgeted IT spend for the last tax year (April 2019 - January 2021)</i> b. <i>How much was spent to get people online between March 23rd 2020 - January 2021</i> c. <i>Did the department have to request extra budget in order to respond to Covid-19?</i> d. <i>If possible, how much extra budget did the department have to request?</i> e. <i>If possible, how much was spent per person on internet and connectivity</i> 3. <i>Out of the following services, please let us know: i) which (if any) were used by staff who were working from home, and which (if any) staff were not permitted to use due to security concerns?</i> a. <i>Zoom</i> b. <i>Skype</i>

	c. <i>Microsoft Teams</i> d. <i>BlueJeans</i> e. <i>WebEx</i> f. <i>Google Hangouts</i> g. <i>Were any other technologies used not listed above</i> 4. <i>For the same period as the other questions (i.e. March 23rd 2020 – January 2021), was the department’s minister ever unable to join meetings, virtual parliament or select committees as a result of technical issues such as device or connectivity problems? If yes please specify the number of occurrences.</i> 5. <i>If possible, how often did employees in your department experience the following during the lockdown (between March 23rd 2020 – 31 January 2021) which affected their ability to communicate:</i> a. <i>Connectivity failures that meant staff couldn’t communicate</i> b. <i>Slow connection speeds</i> c. <i>Lack of appropriate equipment where people were working – e.g. suitable laptops or smartphones for secure video calls, or fast enough home broadband</i> d. <i>Broader communications outages e.g. the virgin media outage on June 25th</i>
Response	In response to your questions:- 1. For the period of lockdown (between March 23rd 2020 – January 2021): a. There are currently 170 civil servants in the Department. b. Of the members of staff who could work from home there were no staff who could not work from home due to device or connectivity issues. c. No staff were put on furlough during the lockdown period. d. Around 35 members of staff continued to come into the workplace at some point in order to fulfil their roles during lockdown, however, this was not on a full-time basis. e. The majority of staff were able to work from home during lockdown to fulfil their roles, with some needing to attend the office on a rotating basis to fulfil their duties as outlined in answer d above. f. Information you have requested is exempt under section 31(1)(a)(b) and (g) of the Freedom of Information Act. The relevant parts of section 31 exempt information if its disclosure would prejudice the prevention or detection of crime, the apprehension or prosecution of offenders or the exercise by any public authority of its functions for the purpose of ascertaining whether any person has failed to comply with the law. The information contains details about the detection and prevention of crime which would assist criminals to plan and execute criminal acts and to avoid

detection. Disclosure would thus make the prevention of certain crimes more difficult and reduce the effectiveness of the police service in detecting the perpetrators.

The exemption in Section 31 is a qualified exemption and whether the balance of the public interest favours releasing or withholding this information. There is a general public interest in disclosure of information and I recognise that openness in government may increase public trust in and engagement with the government. I also recognise a public interest in assuring the public that effective arrangements are in place for the prevention and detection of crime. I have weighed these public interests against a strong public interest in the prevention and detection of crime. It is contrary to this public interest to disclose information which would facilitate the commission of crime or hinder its detection. Taking into account all the circumstances of this case, I have concluded that the balance of the public interest favours withholding this information.

2.

- a. The Department spent a total of £1,952,191 against IT during the period April 2019 to January 2021.
- b. £78 was spent getting people online between 23 March 2020 - January 2021
- c. No
- d. Nothing
- e. Nothing

3. The following services were used by staff; Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, Webex, Google Hangouts. There are no records held for any other specific technologies used. In relation to your question about security advice provided. Information you have requested is exempt under section 31(1)(a)(b) and (g) of the Freedom of Information Act. The relevant parts of section 31 exempt information if its disclosure would prejudice the prevention or detection of crime, the apprehension or prosecution of offenders or the exercise by any public authority of its functions for the purpose of ascertaining whether any person has failed to comply with the law. The information contains details about the detection and prevention of crime which would assist criminals to plan and execute criminal acts and to avoid detection. Disclosure would thus make the prevention of certain crimes more difficult and reduce the effectiveness of the police service in detecting the perpetrators.

The exemption in Section 31 is a qualified exemption and whether the balance of the public interest favours releasing or withholding this information. There is a general public interest in disclosure of information and I recognise that openness in government may increase public trust in and engagement with the government. I also recognise a public interest in assuring the public that effective arrangements are in place for the prevention and detection of crime. I have weighed these public interests against a strong public interest in the prevention and detection of crime. It is contrary to this public

	interest to disclose information which would facilitate the commission of crime or hinder its detection. Taking into account all the circumstances of this case, I have concluded that the balance of the public interest favours withholding this information. 4. The Department does not hold this information. 5. Parts a-d. The Department does not hold this information.
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FOI Request Reference	FOI/21/023
Month Issued	March 2021
Request	<i>This is a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act.</i> <i>I would like to request the following information.</i> <i>Since 1st January 2019 to the day this request is processed, please provide copies of all FOI/EIRs requests that have been sent from this department to the Cabinet Office Clearing House which refer to members of the Royal Family.</i> <i>Since 1st January 2019 to the day this request is processed, please provide copies of all FOI/EIRs requests that have been sent from this department to the Cabinet Office Clearing House which refer to the Royal Household.</i>
Response	I must inform you that the Northern Ireland Office is unable to comply with your request. Section 12(1) of the Freedom of Information Act relieves public authorities of the duty to comply with a request for information if the cost of dealing with it would exceed the appropriate limit. Freedom of information law allows us to decline to answer FOI requests when we estimate it would cost us more than £600 to identify, locate, extract and then provide the information that has been asked for in a request (section 12 FOIA). In order to provide a response, staff would have to open, read and identify the contents of hundreds of FOI records, then further search the relevant files to establish whether they were referred to the Cabinet Office, this is because we do not categorise our FOIs by content or by whether they are referred to the Cabinet Office. We have made the decision to decline your request on this basis, as to locate, identify and retrieve the information would cost over £600. We might be able to answer a revised request if you can reconsider the scope of your FOI request, for example by requesting a shorter time-frame and/ or by specifying a particular individual. However, please note that a revised request may still not fall within the FOIA cost limit. You can find more information by reading the full text of the Act, available at http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/section/12

FOI Request Reference	FOI/21/024
Month Issued	March 2021
Request	<i>Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 I seek the following information on advertising spending:</i> <i>The total amount of money your department has spent on advertising and marketing.</i> <i>I would like this information for the last two years, broken down by year i.e. 2019 and 2020.</i> <i>If it is possible to provide, the total amount of money your department has spent on advertising and marketing, broken down by type of advertising platform e.g. TV, radio, social media etc.</i> <i>I would like this information for the last two years, broken down by year i.e. 2019 and 2020.</i> <i>If it is possible to provide, the total amount of money your department has spent on advertising and marketing through each of the following: Google, Facebook, Twitter.</i> <i>I would like this information for the last two years, broken down by year i.e. 2019 and 2020.</i> <i>Information on your department's most expensive advertising campaign in 2019. For this campaign I would like to know:</i> <i>The name of the campaign</i> <i>The advertising platform(s) used for the campaign e.g. TV, radio, social media etc.</i> <i>The total amount of money spent on the campaign</i> <i>Information on your department's most expensive advertising campaign in 2020. For this campaign I would like to know:</i> <i>The name of the campaign</i> <i>The advertising platform(s) used for the campaign e.g. TV, radio, social media etc.</i> <i>The total amount of money spent on the campaign</i>
Response	In response to your query I can confirm that the Northern Ireland Office holds some of the information that you have asked for and you can find information on any departmental costs over £25,000 in our monthly transparency data publication, which can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nio-transparency-data-on-gpc-and-spending-over-25000-november-2020 In relation to your other requests, we have checked our records and we are unable to provide you with this information because the cost of complying with your request would exceed the limit set by the Freedom of Information Act. Freedom of information law allows us to decline to answer FOI requests when we estimate it would cost us more than £600 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 other requests on this basis, as to locate, identify and retrieve the information would cost over £600. We have made the decision to decline the majority of your requests 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 locate, open and read 1000s of archived records, 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 time frame bearing in mind we are only obliged to keep accounting records for 7 years. We cannot guarantee that a revised request will fall within costs limits. 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/21/025
Month Issued	March 2021
Request	<i>I am writing to you under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to request the following information:</i> <i>Please provide anonymised raw data for the protected characteristics of age-group, gender and ethnicity for successful and unsuccessful job applicants to roles at Civil Service grades Executive Officer and Senior/Higher Executive Officer (or equivalents) across your department over the period ranging from 01/01/2016 - 31/12/2020.</i> <i>NB: (1) If unsuccessful applicant data is only retained for a shorter period, please provide whatever historical amount is retained. If no data on unsuccessful applicants is retained, please fulfil the part of the request for data pertaining to successful applicants in any case.</i>

	<i>(2) Also, if it is quicker to simply provide all demographic data (i.e. covering more characteristics than those identified above) feel free to provide it all.</i>
Response	I can confirm that the Northern Ireland Office does not hold the information in the format it has been requested and to go through the files to create this information would exceed the fees limit. The law allows us to decline to answer FOI requests when we estimate it would cost us more than £600 to identify, locate, extract and then provide the information that has been asked for in a request (section 12 FOIA). Based on £25 an hour, it would take 36 hrs (1 hour for each competition) which is £900 to identify, locate, extract, and then provide the information that has been asked for. You can refine your request to reduce the scope and bring it within the cost limit by identifying specific topics and a shorter time-frame, but we should explain that as a small department with limited recruitment, if there are fewer than five applicants in any characteristic group the information would be exempt under S.40, Personal information and we would be unable to provide that data.

FOI Request Reference	FOI/21/026
Month Issued	March 2021
Request	<i>I am writing to request Information under the Freedom of Information Act.</i> <i>I would like to know the answers to these two questions:</i> <i>What percentage of successful applicants to all jobs at your council were white males over 50-years-old in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020?</i> <i>What percentage of all applicants to all jobs at your council were white males over 50-years-old in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020?</i>
Response	The information provided relates only to Home Civil Servants employed by the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) and excludes staff seconded to the NIO from the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) who remain on NICS terms and conditions. In respect of your request regarding the percentage of successful applicants to all jobs at our Department who were white males over 50 years old from 2016-2019, firstly recruitment data is only kept for 2 years so we would not hold the information requested for the years 2016, 2017 or 2018. In relation to the years 2019 and 2020, I can confirm that the department holds information that you have asked for, but in this case we will not be providing it to you as it is exempt from disclosure. We are not obliged, under section 40(2) of the Act, to provide information that is the personal information of another person if releasing would contravene any of the provisions

	in the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA). In this instance and where the figures are fewer than five we believe that the release of this information would contravene the first data protection principle and therefore section 40 (2) is engaged. The terms of this exemption in the Freedom of Information Act mean that we do not have to consider whether or not it would be in the public interest for you to have the information. In respect of your request regarding the percentage of all applicants to all jobs at our Department who were white males over 50 years old from 2016-2020 we cannot provide this information as our recruitment process does not require applicants to provide this data at the initial application stage. Government guidance states that you may only ask for an applicant's age if there is a need for them to be a certain age to do the job, such as serving alcohol.
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FOI Request Reference	FOI/21/027
Month Issued	March 2021
Request	<i>Please could you answer as many of the following questions as possible?</i> 1. <i>Could you provide the following environmental information on the department's office and administrative buildings, as well as identifying if this information is based on actual or estimated data?</i> • 2020 • 2019 • 2018 • 2017 • 2016 Environment Indicators • Electricity (MWh) of which renewable electricity • Heating natural gas (MWh) • Water consumption (m3) • Business travel (km) <i>Total all activities (tCO2e)</i> <i>Total per FTE</i> <i>Carbon offsetting commitment (tCO2e)</i>

	<i>Net carbon commission (tCO2e)</i> <i>2. How much of the energy the department purchases come from renewable sources?</i> <i>3. Please could you also provide the split in percentage terms between renewable and non-renewable energy to Question 2?</i> <i>4. Does the department have an energy-efficient LED system, controlled by automatic presence detectors and perimeter dimming to take account of daylight levels?</i> <i>5. Does the department have Photovoltaic panels on rooftops to supplement the supply of purchased electricity?</i> <i>6. If yes, how much energy does the department generate in this way?</i> <i>7. Does the department have a complete greywater system, whereby non-contaminated waste water is harvested from plant machinery, hand basins and rainfall? Therefore, allowing to reduce consumption of mains water.</i> <i>8. Does the department have recycling awareness campaigns across its main office locations?</i> <i>9. Does the department have facilities to separate out paper, glass and plastics used in its offices for recycling?</i> <i>10. Are non-recyclable materials from department office locations sent to a special processing plant, where they are used to generate heat and power, reducing waste that is sent to landfills?</i> <i>11. In internal cafeterias, does the department refrain from providing single use items and provide employees with reusable crockery and cutlery?</i> <i>12. Does the department offer a discount to customers with reusable coffee cups in their cafeterias?</i> <i>13. Does the department send food waste to an anaerobic digestion plant where it can be used to produce electricity as well as organic fertiliser?</i> <i>14. How much has the department invested in video conferencing across its offices.</i> <i>15. The number of video conferences held in a typical month?</i> <i>16. To help cut paper consumption, has the department replaced any ageing office printers across its locations with new Eco-friendly photocopiers?</i> <i>17. Do employees engage in an active 'Sustainability Network' of volunteers that, among other activities, decides which project to support as part of a carbon offsetting program? This can include investments in renewable energy, community infrastructure, and conservation and reforestation initiatives.</i> <i>18. Please could you provide information on any new environmental initiatives you have introduced?</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).

	In relation to your request, 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 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, 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.
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FOI Request Reference	FOI/21/028
Month Issued	March 2021
Request	<i>Can you confirm the number of hours given to SOs on nightguard, and the number of hours given to NCO's on nightguard from January 2020 to January 2021?</i>
Response	Regarding your request, the Northern Ireland Office can neither confirm nor deny that it holds the information you requested as the duty in section 1(1)(a) of the FOI Act does not apply, by virtue of section 24(2) that relates to national security. However, this should not be taken as conclusive evidence that the information you have requested exists or does not exist. Section 24 is a qualified exemption and I have considered whether the balance of the public interest favours releasing or withholding this information. There is a general public interest in disclosure of information and I recognise that openness in government may increase public trust in and engagement with the government. I have weighed these public interests against a very strong public interest in safeguarding national security. It is important that this sensitive information is protected, as disclosure of information in this case, if held, would damage national security. Taking into account all the circumstances of this case I have determined that the balance of the public interest favours withholding this information.

FOI Request Reference	FOI/21/029
Month Issued	March 2021
Request	1. <i>This is an FOI request in relation to the minutes or similar records of all NDNA Joint Board meetings that contain information on considerations and decisions in relation to NDNA funding. Specifically:</i> <i>a) what information does the NIO hold in relation to this request;</i> <i>b) copies of the information captured by request (1a)</i>

	<i>The timeframe for the request is to the present day (1 March 2021) from when such information was first generated on the Joint Board following the January 2020 NDNA agreement. We assume this was its first meeting in July 2020.</i>
Response	I can confirm that the Northern Ireland Office holds information falling within the scope of your request, however this information is exempt under s.35(1)(a) and (b) and s.28 of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 28 states that information is exempt if its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice relations between any administration in the United Kingdom and any other such administration. Section 35 is a qualified exemption and I have considered whether the balance of the public interest favours our release of this material. There is a general public interest in disclosure of information and I recognise that openness in government may increase public trust in and engagement with the government. These public interests have to be weighed against a strong public interest that policy-making and its implementation are of the highest quality and informed by a full consideration of all the options. Ministers must be able to discuss policy freely and frankly, exchange views on available options and understand their possible implications. Disclosure in this case would weaken NIO and NI Executive Ministers' ability to discuss certain topics free from premature public scrutiny. It would affect the candour of all involved if the content of these recent discussions were disclosed prematurely. As a result the quality of discussion would decline, leading to poorer outcomes. Taking into account all the circumstances of this case, I have concluded that the balance of the public interest favours withholding this information.
FOI Request Reference	FOI/21/030
Month Issued	March 2021
Request	<i>I am writing to request information under the Freedom of Information Act. I am looking for information about unconscious bias training.</i> <i>Please could you provide me with the following:</i>

	1. <i>How many civil servants in the department have undergone unconscious bias training over the last five calendar years? Please could you break down the number by year for 2021 (up to and including the end of February), 2020, 2019, 2018 and 2017.</i> 2. <i>How much money has been spent unconscious bias training for civil servants over the last five calendar years? Please could you break down the figure by year for 2021 (up to and including the end of February), 2020, 2019, 2018 and 2017. In each case where there has been expenditure on unconscious bias training, please could you state which company the money went to, how much, and the date of the payment?</i> 3. <i>If unconscious bias training has been provided to civil servants, please could you provide details of the format of the training is - its title, how many hours/days the training lasts, and any other relevant detail which summarises what it entails.</i> 4. <i>If possible, please could you provide a copy of any training material - documentation including, but not limited to, training packs, worksheets, fact sheets etc - distributed to civil servants as part of the unconscious bias training in any of the above years. Please note, if this is not possible, please proceed with the remainder of the request.</i>
Response	1. This information is not held at department level and therefore unavailable. To note, unconscious bias training no longer forms or is part of core curriculum civil service learning as of 01 January 2021. 2. The Northern Ireland Office does not hold this information. The cost is included in an annual fee paid to Civil Service Learning for learning services where staff can access various products. The platform on where this training was originally available was managed by Civil Service Learning. 3. Title - Diversity and Inclusion (2019), Unconscious bias training formed a module within this learning activity. Delivery was through an online learning portal – Civil Service Learning. Duration of the module is unknown and no longer available. 4. As this was an online activity via the Civil Service Learning portal, materials are unavailable. The Civil Service is committed to maintaining a strong focus on diversity and inclusion. This includes deploying a range of evidence-based interventions, for example those relating to decision making and removing bias in the system; whether this is through updating training (for example to improve fairness in recruitment decisions), or creating new and different interventions (for example those targeted at working on creating more inclusive work cultures). We are also using data both to inform where bias may be occurring and to help eradicate it, for example in our approach to recruitment. This approach also includes stopping interventions where the evidence does not support its continued use, as is the case with Unconscious Bias Training and we would encourage anyone who is interested in understanding this decision to read the recent evidence review undertaken by the Behavioural Insights Team, which was published alongside the Written Ministerial Statement on this. This will allow us to ensure that activity can be focused on those interventions which do make a difference in order to progress this important work.

FOI Request Reference	FOI/21/031
Month Issued	March 2021
Request	<i>I am writing to request, under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the release of four Northern Ireland Office records. These records are:</i> <i>CJ 4/3102</i> <i>CJ 4/3104</i> <i>CJ 4/3108</i> <i>CJ 4/3112</i> <i>According to the National Archives catalogue each of these records is currently closed or retained by the Northern Ireland Office, under Section 3(4) of the Public Records Act 1958.</i>
Response	We confirm that the department holds information that you have asked for, but we will not be providing it to you as it is exempt from disclosure. Some of the information you have requested could be exempt under section 23(1) of the Freedom of Information Act, which relates to the bodies dealing with security matters, although it is also possible that the information relates to none of the bodies dealing with security matters. Sections 23(1) and 24(1) are being cited in the alternative as it is not appropriate, in the circumstances of the case, to say which of the two exemptions is actually engaged so as not to undermine national security or reveal the extent of any involvement, or not, of the bodies dealing with security matters. Section 23 is an absolute exemption and the Northern Ireland Office is not required to consider whether the public interest favours disclosure of this information. Any information that is not exempt from disclosure under section 23(1) could be exempt under section 24(1) of the Freedom of Information Act, which exempts information from disclosure if its exemption is required for the purpose of safeguarding national security. For the reasons given above under section 23, we cannot say which of the two exemptions is actually engaged, and to the extent to which section 24(1) is engaged we are not obliged to give any further explanation by virtue of section 17(4) because to do so would involve the disclosure of information which would itself be exempt. Section 24 is a qualified exemption and I have considered whether the balance of the public interest favours releasing or withholding this information. There is a general public interest in disclosure of information and I recognise that openness in government may increase public trust in and engagement with the government. I have weighed these public interests against a very strong public interest in safeguarding national security. It is important that this sensitive information is protected, as disclosure of

	information in this case, if held, would damage national security. Taking into account all the circumstances of this case I have determined that the balance of the public interest favours withholding this information. You can find more information by reading the full text of the Act, available at http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/section/23 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/section/24
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FOI Request Reference	FOI/21/038
Month Issued	March 2021
Request	<i>I would like to submit the following FOI request:</i> <i>1. Please could you tell me whether the Northern Ireland Office has ever awarded a contract to Challenge Consultancy, the consulting firm?</i> <i>2. If the answer is yes, what is the total value of the awarded contracts?</i>
Response	I can confirm that the Northern Ireland Office has not awarded any contracts to Challenge Consultancy.