



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

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30 October 2014

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0337-14**

Thank you for your email of 18 February 2014, which we received on 19 March 2014 and an acknowledgement was sent to you on 20 March 2014, asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

*I am seeking information about hospitality expenditure by the FCO spent on foreign guests/ministers who visited Chevening between May 2010 and up to the point at which you can respond.*

*Specifically I need:*

- 1. Names and titles of foreign guests/ministers*
- 2. How many people accompany them*
- 3. What was the purpose of the visit*
- 4. Length of stay*
- 5. Total spending on the visit*

*Some parts of this request may be easier to answer than others, and should this prove to be the case, I would ask that you release available data as soon as possible rather than hold up the entire request.*

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. I apologise for the late response.

However, in relation to questions 1, 3, 4, and part of 2, the information is exempt from disclosure under Section 21 (information accessible to the applicant by other means). We are not required to release information if it is reasonably accessible to you in another way.

Information that falls within the scope of your request is published on the FCO website at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guests-to-chevening-may-2010-to-june-2013>.

This information covers bilateral visits by Foreign Ministers and also the G8 Multilateral dinner. It lists names and details of senior guests (but not officials or special advisers). Regarding your question about the purpose of the visit. The Foreign Secretary engages with his counterparts from other countries to lead the Government's foreign policy and to represent British interests, and it is in this context that the previous Foreign Secretary hosted these guests at Chevening. The length of stay was less than one day in all cases.

Regarding the rest of the time period that you asked about, from June 2013 where the published information ends to the present date, the information that you have requested relating this subject is exempt under Section 22 of the FOIA as it is information intended for future publication. Section 22 provides that:

1. Information is exempt if –
  - a) The information is held by a public authority with a view to its publication, by the authority or any other person, at some future date (whether determined or not).
  - b) It is reasonable in all circumstances that the information should be withheld from disclosure until the date referred to in paragraph a).

Section 22 is a qualified exemption subject to the public interest test. We have considered the public interest in releasing the information against the interest in withholding it. There is a public interest in transparency being demonstrated by releasing the information with this reply. However transparency is also achieved by the Government publishing this information on the FCO website.

There is a public interest in Government Departments providing information they hold that falls within the scope of an FOI request as quickly as possible. But this needs to be balanced with the public interest in Government ensuring the maximum cost effectiveness. Providing this information in response to an FOI request is not the most cost effective way of placing this information in the public domain, when it will be published in due course on the FCO website.

The exemption under Section 22 of the FOIA recognises that it must be reasonable to withhold the information until the date of publication. Given the necessary preparation and administration involved in publishing the information, which includes liaison with other organisations, and collation and submission of the information to Ministers, we consider that our publication timetable is reasonable.

We have therefore concluded that the public interest in withholding this information outweighs the public interest in releasing it.

This leaves question 5 about total spending on the visits and part of question 2 about the number of people accompanying them.

The information is as follows:

8 August 2011 – German Foreign Minister – 7 guests costing £1,451.13

22 January 2012 – Australian Foreign Minister - 8 guests costing £650.00

11 May 2012 – Chilean Foreign Minister – 8 guests costing £911.21

10 April 2013 – G8 Foreign Ministers – 20 guests costing £4,388.45

26 April 2013 – Australian & Canadian Foreign Minister – 8 guests costing £1,431.70

The costs vary according to the nature of the visit and hospitality for the occasion.

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the Freedom of Information Act, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless it is exempt. The information we have supplied to you may now be published on our website together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context.

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Yours sincerely,

Parliamentary Relations Department



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