



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

**Commercial Procurement Group**  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
King Charles Street  
London SW1A 2AH

Website: <https://www.gov.uk>

04 November 2015

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0981-15**

Thank you for your email of 7 October 2015 asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

- 1. How much has the FCO been billed for the mobile phone call and text charges of diplomats per financial year since 2012/13 and including the first quarter of 2015/16?*
- 2. How much has the FCO been billed for the data roaming charges of diplomats per financial year since 2012/13 and including the first quarter of 2015/16?*
- 3. How much has the FCO paid out for the mobile phone call and text charges of diplomats per financial year since 2012/13 and including the first quarter of 2015/16?*
- 4. How much has the FCO paid out for the data roaming charges for diplomats per financial year since 2012/13 and including the first quarter of 2015/16?*
- 5. What were the ten most expensive payments for mobile phone call and text charges for individual diplomatic phone numbers per financial year since 2012/13 and including the first quarter of 2015/16; in what countries were the charges accrued; and what position did each person using the phone hold? NOTE - I am not asking to see the numbers themselves as I am aware this would breach data protection.*
- 6. What were the ten most expensive payments for data roaming charges for individual diplomatic phone numbers per financial year since 2012/13 and including the first quarter of 2015/16; in what countries were the charges accrued; and what position did each person using the devices hold? NOTE - I am not asking to see the numbers themselves as I am aware this would breach data protection.*
- 7. What guidance has the FCO issued to staff regarding saving money on data roaming, for example by turning devices off when abroad?*

*By diplomats I mean FCO staff based in any location but who work overseas and there accrue data roaming and overseas phone charges.*

I am writing to confirm that we have now completed the search for the information which you requested and can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) does hold information relevant to your request.

We hold centrally the mobile phone charges for staff based in the UK. Staff based overseas hold local mobile phone contracts and to obtain the charges from the 170 countries in which we operate could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act makes provision for public authorities to refuse requests for information where the cost of dealing with them would exceed the appropriate limit. The limit has been specified in the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004. For central government the appropriate limit is set at £600. This represents the estimated cost of one or more persons spending 3 ½ working days in determining whether the Department holds the information, and locating, retrieving and extracting it. For UK based staff, we hold records on mobile phone call, text and data roaming charges from July 2014 onwards. We have paid all the charges we have been billed, so the amounts for billed and paid out are the same.

Officials are expected to keep mobile communications usage to a minimum whilst abroad and only use for essential business. However, staff often need to work remotely overseas, for example when assisting British nationals during the crises in Nepal and Tunisia, or at critical summits such as the Iran nuclear talks in Vienna.

In response to questions 1 and 3, the FCO has been billed and paid out the below for mobile phone call and text charges for a workforce of 2,700 UK based staff when travelling overseas from the UK:

FY 2014/15 (September 2014 - March 2015): £48,672.63

FY 2015/16 (April 2015 - October 2015): £47,246.07

In response to questions 2 and 4, the FCO has been billed and paid out the below for data roaming charges for a workforce of 2,700 UK based staff when travelling overseas from the UK:

FY 2014/15 (July 2014 - March 2015): £22,807.63

FY 2015/16 (April 2015 - June 2015): £8,440.11

For questions 5 and 6, we are unable to provide a full breakdown of the information as requested. We hold the total charges for each phone number, which includes usage in the UK. To extract the ten most expensive payments for charges incurred whilst overseas for each category of mobile phone calls, texts and data roaming would exceed the appropriate limit. Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act makes provision for public authorities to refuse requests for information where the cost of dealing with them would exceed the appropriate limit.

We have withheld the countries the charges were accrued and the job titles of the staff using the device. There is a risk that this information could be aggregated and used to identify individuals and so comprises 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, s.40 confers an absolute exemption on disclosure. There is, therefore, no public interest test to apply.

However, we are able to provide the ten most expensive monthly payments for the total usage of mobile phone call, text and data roaming charges for individual diplomatic phone numbers. The charges represent users across different Departments/grades of the FCO including Geographical Commands (including Africa, Middle East, North Africa and the Overseas Territories), Political, IT/Technology, and Corporate Services. The main roaming regions were Africa and the Middle East.

**FY 2014/15 (July 2014 – March 2015):**

£856.06  
£691.02  
£600  
£593.74  
£591.69  
£565.45  
£519.25  
£504.81  
£495.71  
£480.70

**FY 2015/16 (April 2015 – June 2015):**

£681.90  
£453.78  
£421.06  
£271.84  
£262.55  
£258.98  
£219.98  
£191.55  
£188.26  
£179.28

In response to question 7, FCO mobile devices are issued with data caps and data usage notifications are in place to ensure users are aware of any roaming charges they are incurring. Also, if their usage is nearing the data cap limit, the user is required to contact the mobile administrator/account manager to justify/explain the reason for the usage and the need for the caps to be removed to continue usage. The nature of the FCO's business requires an amount of overseas travel and the use of mobile communications. Where possible, users are advised to use local facilities to help reduce costs such as local sim cards or hard wired telecom networks.

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Yours sincerely,

Commercial Procurement Group



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