



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

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24 November 2015

## **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: FOI 0903-15**

Thank you for your email of 12 September asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

*1. Concerning allowances available to UK-based FCO staff when posted overseas I would like to know:*

*(i) **Transfer grant** – the rates paid in each of the years 2011 to 2015 (or relevant financial years if easier) for single, couple and couple plus one child for staff moving either from the UK to an overseas posting or in the other direction, or from one overseas posting to another;*

*(ii) **COLA and hardship allowances** – for the date of 1 April in each of the years 2011 to 2015 the highest, lowest and median rates payable, for single, couple and couple plus one child (where applicable) and the posts concerned; and the percentage of all FCO posts to which any level of either allowance applied on those dates;*

*(iii) **travel package ceiling** and rates of **Diplomatic Service Allowance** and **Spouse Pension Compensation** - for each of the years 2011 to 2015 (or relevant financial years if easier)*

*Please confirm whether any of these allowances is pensionable.*

*2. Please confirm the current rate of London Location Allowance and the FCO grades to which this is payable for London-based posts.*

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.

Some of the information you have requested (in your first question (ii)) is being withheld under Section 43(2) of the FOIA. Section 43(2) protects information which would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of any person (including the public authority holding it).

The DSCA (Hardship element) and Cost of Living Addition (COLA) are calculated on behalf of the FCO by Employment Conditions Abroad (ECA), an independent company that provides similar services to other governments, non-government organisations and multi-national companies. Although these tables have been released previously this was an error on our part as it breached commercial confidentiality. Releasing the current rates could compromise ECA's position in this specialist market.

In applying section 43 we have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the public interest in disclosing it.

The use of this exemption was carefully considered. The factors in favour of disclosure of this information, including the general public interest and greater transparency and accountability, were carefully weighed against the need to allow business-people and commercial organisations the space to conduct their lawful business competitively and without fear of disclosure of sensitive commercial information. We consider that this transparency also poses risks to the protection of commercially confidential information. Failure to protect such commercially sensitive information could limit the number of companies willing to provide their services to the FCO, reducing our ability to keep our costs down. In this case after such consideration we believe that the public interest in withholding the redacted information outweighs the public interest in its release.

For these reasons, we consider that the public interest in applying this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing it.

Taking your questions in order:

Question 1(i): Transfers grant are paid to officers in order to cover the range of expenditure which arises when relocating to another country. While not an exhaustive list, this includes the cost of buying or replacing household or electrical equipment, losses on household goods that cannot be shipped and the cost of replacement, additional transport and other costs on first arrival and departure, purchase and replacement of luggage etc. The rates payable for the period 2011 through to 2015 for single, married and married plus one are shown in the table below.

Grade	Single	Married	Per Child
2011			
SMS 3 & 4	£5,632	£7,509	£343
SMS 1 & 2	£4,546	£6,061	£343
Band D	£3,574	£4,766	£343
Band C	£2,688	£3,584	£343
Band B	£1,859	£2,478	£343
Band A	£1,544	£2,059	£343

2012			
Head of Mission	£2,250	£3,000	£350
Band C / D / SMS	£3,510	£4,680	£350
Band A / B	£2,250	£3,000	£350
2013			
Head of Mission	£2,250	£3,000	£350
Band C / D / SMS	£3,510	£4,680	£350
Band A / B	£2,250	£3,000	£350
2014			
Head of Mission	£2,273	£3,030	£354
Band C / D / SMS	£3,545	£4,727	£354
Band A / B	£2,273	£3,030	£354
2015			
Head of Mission	£2,296	£3,060	£358
Band C / D / SMS	£3,580	£4,774	£358
Band A / B	£2,296	£3,060	£358

A transfer grant is paid at the applicable rate to officers moving either from the UK to an overseas posting or in the other direction, or from one overseas posting to another;

Question 1(ii): For the reasons set out above, we are unable to release the lowest and median rates payable of COLA and Hardship, for single, couple and couple plus one child (where applicable) and the posts concerned for the years 2011 to 2015.

Question 1(iii): Officers posted overseas are entitled to a travel package to allow them and their dependents to return to the UK to visit family and friends and to conduct personal business. Officers may also use their travel package to travel more widely whilst based overseas, but within the limit of their travel package provision.

The travel package provision is calculated based on the officer's location, personal circumstances and length of appointment using fare costs produced independently by Hogg Robinson Group which are reviewed every six months.

Diplomatic Service Allowance is paid to officers to compensate them for the cost of unforeseen circumstances and added expenditure over a career resulting from the frequent changes of job, location and environment (it is paid at a lower rate to other government departments in recognition of the lower frequency of such disturbances).

Spouse/ Partner Pension Compensation is paid to compensate for the impact on the partner's ability to follow a career and to contribute to a UK pension scheme.

The rates for Diplomatic Service Allowance and Spouse Pension Compensation are set out in the attached annex.

None of the above compensatory allowances are pensionable.

Question 2: The current rate of the London Location Allowance is £4,520. It is payable to FCO officers at all grades who are working in a London based position. This allowance is non-pensionable.

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Yours sincerely,

International Policy (Allowances)  
International HR



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