



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála  
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Property Management Unit,  
Department of Foreign Affairs  
and Trade,  
76-78 Harcourt Street,  
Dublin 2.

Our Ref: FoI/Req/17/094

Ciarán D'Arcy  
The Irish Times

Dear Mr. D'Arcy,

I refer to the request which you have made under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 for access to records held by this Department, as follows:

- *Expenditure by Irish embassies, consulates and ambassadorial residences gardening between 1st January and 31st December 2016 inclusive by mission.*
- *Major Maintenance in excess of €10,000 between 1st January and 31st December 2016 by mission*

I refer also to the acknowledgement of your request which was sent to you on 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2017. I have identified 2 records that fall within the scope of your request. The records are listed in the schedule attached. I have made a decision to grant access to all of these records. The records are two spreadsheets describing; expenditure by Irish embassies, consulates and ambassadorial residences gardening and grounds maintenance between 1st January and 31st December 2016 inclusive by mission and a list of major maintenance costs in excess of €10,000 between 1st January and 31st December 2016 by mission.

I am not releasing one item from the spread sheet on major maintenance to you at this time. The information which is not being released relates to ongoing capital and refurbishment works. It is not being granted under section 36 of the 2014 Act – Commercially Sensitive Information.

The records relate to commercial information where disclosure could reasonably be expected to result in financial loss or gain to the person to whom the information related or could prejudice the competitive position of that person in the conduct of her/his profession/business/occupation. I have considered the public interest in releasing this information as the public have an interest in how the Department spends tax payers' funds. However, on balance, I believe that the public interest is best served by not disclosing commercial information where it could prejudice the competitive position of the Department. The Department is open to considering granting access to this item on conclusion of this project. This is expected to conclude by the final quarter of 2017.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade currently manages and maintains 113 properties abroad for which 34 are State-owned. These properties are utilised by the Department in pursuit of its goals on behalf of the State. They consist of offices, public and promotional areas and official accommodation. They provide platforms for our missions to support Ireland's political, trade, economic and cultural interests and values, provide services to our citizens, develop strategic stakeholder relationships and represent Ireland in international organisations. The network of missions abroad now stands at 80 which is smaller than many similar-sized countries such as Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and Finland.

As part of the Department's duty of care to staff and visitors to our buildings for meetings and promotional events, we must ensure that its buildings are functional adequate and that security and health and safety standards, as well as universal access facilities, are met. The Department maintains appropriate health, safety and security standards in its properties overseas while also implementing any additional international standards where necessary.

Many of our overseas premises come with grounds attached which need to be maintained to an appropriate level, given that the buildings and their surrounds must project a positive and attractive image of Ireland. In many cases the gardens are used extensively for official promotional activities which promote Ireland's interests and trade internationally. Gardening expenditure will vary from location to location, depending on the size and character of the garden, local climatic conditions and local gardening charges.

Additional information on expenditures over €25,000;

- In relation to our Embassy in Canberra, the property contains Embassy offices, official accommodation, and ancillary buildings over a 7,500 sqm compound which the state owns and has a responsibility to look after and maintain the value of the key asset.

Canberra has particular local climatic challenges, which add to the costs of maintenance and reflect the market conditions.

- In Rome, which is a heritage building owned by the state since 1946 which houses our Embassy offices, official accommodation, and ancillary buildings, the grounds are also extensive. They are used for hosting major promotional events throughout the year and are a major asset for the state.

Given the varied global locations, currency fluctuations, higher local costs, and challenging climatic conditions, the expenditures differ from location to location.

The department strives to achieve value for money in all of its expenditure.

**Right of Appeal**

Should you wish to appeal this decision, you may do so in writing to the Freedom of Information Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 76-78 Harcourt Street, Dublin 2 or by email to [foi@dfat.ie](mailto:foi@dfat.ie). A fee applies for an appeal for access to non-personal information; the level of this fee has been set at €30. For methods of payment, please contact FOI Unit at [foi@dfat.ie](mailto:foi@dfat.ie), or 01-4082857.

You should make your appeal within 4 weeks (20 working days) from the date of this notification. However, the making of a late appeal may be permitted in appropriate circumstances. The appeal will involve a complete reconsideration of the matter by a more senior member of the staff of this Department.

Yours sincerely

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Robert Higgins  
Property Management Unit