

Our Ref: FOI/Req/17/008

Darragh McDonagh

10 February 2016

Dear Darragh,

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:

'1) The total amount paid to staff by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in the form of allowances during 2014, 2015 and 2016

2) The total 2016 figure broken down into the following categories of allowances:

- *cost of living,*
- *local post (which will include the figure for hardship),*
- *children's foreign allowance,*
- *rent reimbursement,*
- *furniture allowance,*
- *school fees*
- *medical and*
- *total representational figures*

3) The number of overseas officers and their families for 2016'

I refer also to the acknowledgement of your request which was sent to you on January 20th.

I have identified one record that falls within the scope of your request. I have made a decision to grant access to this record.

Foreign Service Allowances

In common with most diplomatic services, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade incurs costs for officers who are assigned abroad to serve the State in an official capacity. The purpose is to assist officers in defraying the additional costs to officers and their families of moving and living abroad. Foreign Service Allowances are based on independently sourced data. In line with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform sanction, Foreign Service Allowances are required to be reviewed once a year or more often in locations that experience substantial fluctuation in key economic indicators on currency and exchange rates.

The components of the Foreign Service Allowance system are:

- Cost of Living Allowance (COLA), which is designed to estimate and defray costs associated with a higher cost of living at the post abroad. The Department uses the services of an independent firm to provide cost of living indices for the various locations required. COLA only becomes payable at posts with a higher cost of living index than Dublin.
- Local Post Allowance (LPA), which assists mainly with the additional indirect costs arising from the representational role of officers. This allowance which varies according to marital status and grade is payable at all locations abroad. Officers serving in designated “hardship” posts may also be currently entitled to a hardship allowance as part of their LPA. Where payable, this hardship element takes account of factors such as personal security and political tension, health, environmental factors, climate and isolation.
- Children’s Foreign Allowance (CFA), which compensates an officer for the additional costs incurred with regard to qualifying children at post.

The total amount paid to staff in the form of allowances in 2014 was €9,905,263; the total amount in 2015 was €10,957,698. In 2016, COLA amounted to €3,829,738; LPA (including Hardship) amounted to €6,251,432; CFA amounted to €1,092,948.

In terms of staff numbers, in addition to DFAT staff who undertake postings, the Department oversees the posting of officers from all Government Departments and Offices to Ireland’s network of 80 diplomatic missions. The number of Irish officials posted to our diplomatic missions as of September 2016 is 380. The number of accompanying family members is 392 for the 2016/2017 period.

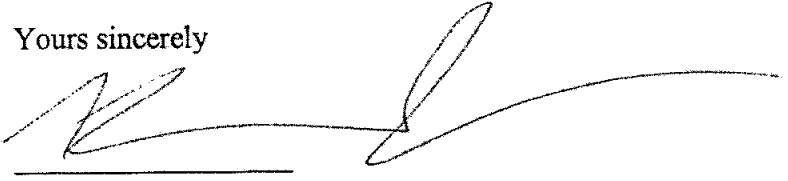
Upon consideration, your request sought a breakdown of a wide variety of figures under the term allowances. However the majority of items listed are not considered allowances. As such, these have not been included in this response.

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. 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, 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

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'K' followed by a long horizontal stroke that ends in a small loop.

Kevin Byrne