



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

Our Ref: FOI/Req/18/314

17 January 2019

Dear Mr Coyle,

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:

Access to minutes of meetings during 2017 and 2018 of the High Level Panel that makes recommendations to government for the selection of candidates for the Presidential Distinguished Service Award for the Irish Abroad.

Please also include correspondence between the High Level Panel and the Department and/or Government in 2017 and 2018.

I refer also to the acknowledgement of your request which was sent to you on 21 December 2018.

In the case of the unsuccessful nominees for the Presidential Distinguished Service Award, and the names of the persons who nominated them, the Department's position is that the individual's right to privacy outweighs the public interest in knowing their names and that those records should not be released. In addition, we agreed on 19 December that records relating to unsuccessful nominees and the persons who nominated them would be excluded from the scope of your request.

I have identified 75 records (107 including attachments which are sub-numbered) that fall within the scope of your request. The records are listed in the schedule attached. I have made a decision to release 83 (to include attachments which are sub-numbered); part release 13 and refuse 11 (again including some sub-numbered attachments) of the records.

Section 37 – Personal Information

Contained in many of the records within the scope of this request is information that constitutes personal information within the meaning of section 37 of the Act. Under Section 37(1) I am obliged to consider whether the public interest would be best served by releasing the records in full. In this regard, I have considered whether the public interest in openness and transparency outweighs the rights to privacy of the persons to whom the personal

information relates. I am satisfied that in this instance the public interest does not outweigh the right to privacy of the persons to whom the information relates.

Section 29 – Deliberations of FoI Bodies

Records 41(a), 47, and 48 have been withheld or part withheld under section 29(1)(a) of the FOI Act which provides that a record may be withheld if it contains matter relating to the deliberative processes of an FOI body. A deliberative process involves the consideration of various matters with a view to making a decision on a particular issue. Having reviewed the records I am satisfied that these records contain matter which falls within the scope of 29(1)(a). I have considered the public interest test as required by section 29(1)(b) and I am satisfied that it does not require the release of these records.

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@dfa.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@dfa.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. An appeal will involve a complete reconsideration of the matter by a more senior member of the staff of this Department.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Campbell