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Our Ref: FoI/Req/15/082

Mr. Cormac McQuinn
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Independent House
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Dublin 1
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6 November 2015

Dear Mr. McQuinn

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:

“Details of all social/official functions for 20 or more guests held at the Irish Embassy in London between September 1, 2014 and September 2, 2015.

The Information should include:

- *The title and purpose of each function*
- *Copies of the full guest lists*
- *Copies of invitations sent for each function*
- *Copies of menu for each function*
- *Full costs of the following: catering; transport; gifts, photography; decorations; flowers; food; drinks; accommodation for guests (if paid by the Embassy) and copies of all invoices submitted to the Embassy. “*

In order to reduce the scope of your request you have opted to exclude functions hosted by the Ambassador on behalf of state agencies (costs of which are recouped from them).

I refer also to the acknowledgement of your request which was sent to you on 18 September 2015 by Frances Kiernan.

I have identified 221 records that fall within the scope of your request. The records are listed in the schedule attached. I have made a decision to grant 195 of these records in full; part-grant/redact 23; refuse/fully redact 1 and refuse 2.

For ease of reference, I have divided the schedule into a number of different sections listing records in groups as follows:

- List of Functions,
- Menus,
- Security (Template Invitation & Guest List)
- Economic/Trade Functions (Template Invitations & Guest Lists),
- Political /Press (Template Invitations & Guest Lists),
- Community/Cultural (Template Invitations & Guest Lists),
- General Networking (Template Invitations & Guest Lists),
- Invoices for Functions within the scope of the request and
- Additional Staff costs.

Purpose of functions held at Embassy of Ireland London

The promotion and strengthening of bilateral relations with the UK in all their dimensions, as an essential basis for promoting Irish interests, is the core objective of the Embassy. Representational activity plays a vital role in this regard and is important in affording opportunities to put across effectively Ireland's position on a range of issues, in particular on the economy, Northern Ireland and the EU and also in showcasing Irish music and culture (which in turn is important for brand Ireland generally). Representational activity also plays an important role in harnessing the good will of the vast and diverse Irish community in Britain including recognising the valuable contribution of charity and voluntary organisations. Another priority for Embassy London is assisting in supporting the Irish economy and trade in every possible way. In total there were approximately 150 events hosted at the Embassy of Ireland in 2014, many of which were hosted in co-operation with the State Agencies, such as Enterprise Ireland, IDA, Bord Bia and Tourism Ireland. Others were hosted in association with third parties or business networks and organisations.

Those functions which are funded by the State Agencies are outside the scope of the request, however there are a number of other economic/trade relation functions with more than 20 guests which took place during the period in question. The Embassy incorporates to the fullest extent possible a range of representational activities which include business promotion and networking events, political meetings and media briefings.

In the list of functions provided (R1) events are described under the broad area within which they fall e.g. Community/Cultural, Press/Political etc. and a brief description of the event is provided. A brief description of the function is also outlined in the Schedule of Records. Each specific template invitation gives the date and time of the function, host, guest of honour or speaker along with a more detailed outline of the event and its purpose.

Costs

Due to the scale of representational activity carried out at Embassy London, the majority of which is catered in house, supplies of food and drink for the various

functions held are purchased in bulk, quite often well in advance. In view of the purchases in bulk and the large number and extent of the events, it is not possible to ascribe with precision actual costs to each specific function. This also applies to the purchase of flowers which are purchased at market, in general once a fortnight or so, and which costs are spread over a large number of functions.

I have provided invoices which detail direct costs of any functions falling within the scope of the request. In many cases the invoice will cover a number of functions within the scope of the request and this is written in hand on the invoice and summarised on the schedule. The invoices are listed alphabetically by supplier and a number of invoices from different suppliers might be included for each function. I have provided a list of staff costs (R221) which is the additional cost of hiring ad hoc catering staff on a "once off" basis for particular functions.

In addition to the State Agencies, the Embassy hosts functions in association with other third parties e.g. the VSO/UN "*Women in Power*", "*At the Races*" and the *Rory Gallagher 40th Anniversary Irish Tour*. All records falling within the scope of the request for these functions including invoices has been provided, although some or all of the costs would have been recouped afterwards.

I can confirm that there are no costs/records for transport, gifts, decorations nor accommodation which fall within the scope of the request.

Menus

Template menus have been provided for the lunches and dinners which fall within the scope of the request. In the case of receptions, a composite list has been provided. It would be normal to serve a total of 8 canapés (4 hot and 4 cold) from that list along with one cheese course.

Invitations

A copy of the template invitation for each function within the scope of the request has been provided. In a very small number of instances no formal invitation was issued.

Guest Lists

The guest lists which have been provided include the names of invites who indicated their intention to attend the particular function; there is no indication as to whether they actually did attend.

The Embassy of Ireland has a wide and varied list of contacts and individuals with whom it interacts and are invited to official functions from time to time. The majority of those are invited to attend functions in some manner of official capacity or are well known members of either the British or Irish Community. The names and titles of such guests are being released in full.

The records which have been part-granted/redacted and refused/fully redacted are guest lists where the particular redacted contents are exempt from release under section S 35 (1) and S 37 (1).

These particular 23 records (numbered R24, R62, R64, R66, R68, R70, R72, R76, R78, R80, R82, R84, R86, R88, R90, R92, R96, R98, R102, R104, R106, R108,

R110) are guest lists where the names and title are of individuals who were invited to functions solely by virtue of being a member of the Irish Community in Britain and known to the Embassy in a personal capacity. Unlike the other guests whose names have been released, these individuals agreed to attend functions in a personal capacity and gave their details to the Embassy with an expectation of confidentiality. The fact that they may have agreed to attend a function at the Embassy of Ireland in London would not be generally known and they would not expect nor give permission for this information to be made public. In addition, with regard to R100, the guest list for those at Fáinne presentation reception only included those who had completed an Irish language course and were therefore entitled to receive a fáinne. This information would not be public knowledge nor would the individuals expect it to be made so. In R24 the dietary preferences of four guests has been redacted to maintain their entitlement to privacy. In R86 which is the guest list of those who attended the Irish Women Survivors Support Network (IWSSN) Reception, all of those who attended in a personal capacity has been redacted in the same manner as the personal information of the other records mentioned above.

The records which have been refused are R13 and R43, the guest list for the St. Patrick's Day Law Enforcement Reception in March 2015 and the guest list for dinner on the occasion of the Exhibition of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland in London in December 2014.

R43 has been refused under five sections of the Act, S 32 (1), S33 (1) S35 (1), S37 (1), and S42 (m). The St Patrick's Day Law Enforcement Reception is an event solely for law enforcement/security agency contacts, many at very senior levels, who are known to the Embassy in a professional capacity. Unlike other guests attending functions in a professional capacity the fact that these individuals work in security or law enforcement is not necessarily a matter of public knowledge or record, and in many cases for reasons of personal and family safety this may be kept secret. It would be inappropriate for the Embassy to release these names as it could endanger the safety of the persons concerned and/or their families and might also inhibit their abilities to carry out their official functions. It is also likely to damage the relationship between the Embassy and the particular agencies concerned affecting exchange of information on security matters and damaging international relations generally.

S 42 (m) particularly applies to this record and states that the Act does not apply to a record relating to information whose disclosure could reasonably be expected to reveal the identity of a person who has provided information in confidence in relation to the enforcement or administration of the law to an FOI body, or any source of such information which is in the possession of an FOI body. On this basis I deem the guest list related to this function to be outside the scope of the request and therefore refused.

If the record was within the scope of the request, S 32 (i), (ii) and (iii) would apply. This refers to the release of a record which might prejudice or impair the prevention of offences, the effectiveness of lawful processes or the enforcement or compliance with law or procedures for ensuring the safety and security of the public.

S 33 (1) would also apply to this record. This states that a record may be refused if it could reasonably be expected to affect the security or defence of the State, or matters to do with Northern Ireland or the international relations of the State.

Finally those individuals attending the Law Enforcement Reception did so with the expectation that they could do so without any reference to their attendance being brought within the public domain, and only provided information to the Embassy with the expectation that in any and all events it would remain confidential and private; therefore S 35 (1) and S37 (1) also apply to this particular record.

In respect of R13, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade works with a wide range of non-governmental organisations, community groups and voluntary organisations to support reconciliation and to create a better understanding between people and traditions on the island of Ireland and between Ireland and Britain. In this context, Ambassador Dan Mulhall hosted members of the Grand Orange Lodge in the Irish Embassy in London in December 2014. The Embassy maintains a wide network of contacts and the Ambassador was pleased to host the Grand Orange Lodge for the first time. This function was organised in conjunction with Tourism Ireland on the occasion of an exhibition organised by the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland in London. Representatives of the Grand Orange Lodge attended along with a number of other invited guests. The guest list for this function is being refused under three sections of the Act S33 (1) – on the grounds that given the particularly sensitive relationships between individuals and groups in Northern Ireland the fact in itself of having agreed to attend this dinner might adversely affect the security of the state or Northern Ireland. In addition, the guests did agree to attend with an implicit understanding that their information would not be released into the public domain and would remain confidential. Therefore S 35 (1) and S37 (1) also apply.

For ease of reference I have also enclosed full extracts from the relevant sections of the Act.

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

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Noeleen Curran
Embassy of Ireland
London