



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

Ref: FOI/Req/20/061
12 June 2020

Dear Mr. Foxe

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

“A copy of the review undertaken by DFA of its system for transmission of urgent and sensitive material.”

I refer also to the acknowledgement of your request, sent on March 12th and our update on March 30th. As outlined in our correspondence, the Covid 19 public health emergency means that all Departmental staff have been required to work remotely and this has made it difficult to access records, especially to perform checks for hard copy records. I sincerely appreciate your patience in this regard.

Context of review:

The review referred to in the email correspondence you provided related to the processing of urgent and sensitive external correspondence received by the International Security Policy Unit of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Unit carried out an internal review of its work practices concerning external correspondence. I would like to take this opportunity to outline the process that the Unit now employs to manage external correspondence. According to a new procedure introduced, urgent and sensitive external correspondence received by the Unit, which requires consultation with other government departments and a response to issue to external parties, is recorded in a dedicated shared folder with the necessary follow up action detailed, along with a deadline by which it must be completed. Confirmation that follow-up action has been undertaken is then recorded. These steps are now in place and being followed to ensure that all necessary actions with regards to external correspondence are taken at the appropriate times.

Release of records – summary

I have identified 8 records that are pertinent to your request. The records are listed in the schedule attached. I have made a decision to grant full access to 2 records and to partially grant access to 6 records. I have not refused access to any records.

Where access has been partially granted, exemptions apply pursuant to Section 37(1) of the FOI Act: Personal Information. While Section 37(1) Personal Information is a mandatory exemption I am still obliged to consider whether the public interest would be best served by releasing the records in full. I have taken into account the benefit to the public to be given access to correspondence in a manner which demonstrates transparency and accountability of the Department. I have particularly considered whether releasing the personal information, which includes names, addresses, email addresses etc., would provide any additional benefit in this regard. I have weighed this against the right of individuals to have their personal information remain private. The personal information which I have redacted does not have any bearing on the substance or detail of the records, and does not diminish or alter the views expressed, and as such, I am satisfied that on balance the decision to partially redact the records and remove identifiable information is correct.

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

Yours sincerely



Andrew Byrne
Deputy Director
International Security Policy Unit