



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

Ms. Laura Colgan

Our Ref: FoI/Req/17/141

17th August, 2017

Dear Ms. Colgan,

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

- 1. Details of the number of passport applications submitted through the staff box in the years 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 respectively.*
- 2. Details of the percentage of passport applications submitted through the staff box in the years 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 respectively that were refused/not granted.*
- 3. Details of the policy and process in place for passport applications made through the staff box.*

I refer also to your conversations with Frances Kiernan, FOI Manager, regarding the scope of your request.

With reference to your request No. 1 above, I have decided to part grant your request for access to these records. Certain records relating to the staff box were recorded manually for the years 2011 to May 2012. Having conducted extensive searches, I wish to advise that these hard copy records cannot be located and are therefore refused under Section 15(1)(a) of the FOI Act – *the record concerned cannot be found after all reasonable steps to ascertain its whereabouts have been taken.*

The figures available on passport applications submitted through the staff box for the years 2011 – 2014 are as follows:

Year	Number of applications
2011	1167
2012	2006
2013	1777
2014	17

There are no records for the years 2015 and 2016 as the staff box was discontinued in 2014.

No record exists showing percentage of passport applications submitted through the staff box in the years 2011 to 2016 that were refused/not granted and the Act does not require this Department to create a new record. In that light, I am refusing this part of the request under section 15(1)(a) of the Act - *the record concerned does not exist or cannot be found after all reasonable steps to ascertain its whereabouts have been taken.*

As per your conversations with Frances Kiernan, FOI Manager, we have examined our system capabilities and it is not possible to gather this information through an automated, anonymised process. There is no separate search field to identify an application submitted through the staff box system. Compilation of this information could require visual access to each individual application record to allow staff to electronically search for each application to ascertain if it was approved or not. In certain cases, only the number of applications were logged and no unique identifier recorded.

As the collation of this information would cause an unreasonable disruption to the work of the passport office it is being refused under section 15(1) (c) of the Act - *in the opinion of the head, granting the request would, by reason of the number or nature of the records concerned or the nature of the information concerned, require the retrieval and examination of such number of records or an examination of such kind of the records concerned as to cause a substantial and unreasonable interference with or disruption of work (including disruption of work in a particular functional area) of the FOI body concerned*

It also raises Data Protection issues in that the applicant's personal, and possibly sensitive, information would be accessed for a process other than that for which it was originally supplied and which is now complete. For this reason it will not be possible to provide the information required.

All passport applications are processed in accordance with the provisions as set down by the Passport Act, 2008 (as amended). The usage of the staff box was discontinued in 2014. Prior to that, a facility existed that allowed staff of the Department to lodge an application, via the staff box, with the Passport Service.

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



Teresa McHugh
Passport Service