



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha
Department of Foreign Affairs

Our Ref: Fol/Req/21/116

Date: 26 May 2021

Dear Gerard Down,

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:

I am submitting an FOI request under the FOI Acts for the email address of each individual section of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The department's website does not provide emails addresses for each section of the department (other than the FOI email) which is standard practice for Government Departments.

I refer also to our subsequent email exchanges of 30 April and 20 May 2021.

I have identified 1 record that falls within the scope of your request. The record is shown in the schedule attached. I have made a decision to refuse the release of this record.

Where access has been refused, the record is exempt from release under section 30 (1) (b) and section 32 (1) (c) of the FOI Act.

Section 30 (1) (b) of the FOI Act states that;

“A head may refuse to grant an FOI request if access to the record concerned could, in the opinion of the head, reasonably be expected to –

... (b) have a significant, adverse effect on the performance by an FOI body of any of its functions relating to management. . .”

It is my opinion that the publication of the email addresses of individual sections of the Department could have a significant, adverse effect on the management of our customer services and IT functions by;

- providing cyber attackers with a means to easily gather information and launch spam/phishing campaigns.

- facilitating the sending of emails to the Department by automated systems.
- clogging up our Customer Services sections' mailboxes with unsolicited emails/spam.

The misuse of these channels of communication could reasonably be expected to have a significant adverse effect on the management of customer services. The inflow of unrelated emails or SPAM into these email accounts could significantly increase the risk of missing or delayed reaction to genuine customer requirements. The increased risk of cyber attack through these channels could lead to a significantly worse impact across management functions of the Department as well as a serious impact on its services to the public.

Section 32 (1) (c) of the FOI Act states that;

“A head may refuse to grant an FOI request if access to the record concerned could, in the opinion of the head, reasonably be expected to —

... (c) facilitate the commission of an offence.”

As previously communicated to you in my email of 20 May 2021, the email addresses of individual sections of the Department of Foreign Affairs are not published on security grounds. The Department has a “Contact us” link on its website through which email enquiries can be sent and it is the view of our IT section that this minimises the risk of cyber attacks. In my opinion, the release of the email addresses you are seeking could reasonably be expected to facilitate the commission of an offence by cyber attackers.

Under the provisions of Sections 30 (1) (b) and 32 (1) (c), I am obliged to consider whether the public interest would be better served by the release of the records you are seeking than by their refusal. I am of the view that no public interest would be served by releasing the individual email addresses as;

- The email contact form on our website provides a means for customers to send email enquiries to individual sections of the Department. Knowing the actual email addresses does not therefore confer any benefit on the public.
- The email contact form simultaneously provides a level of protection to the Department from cyber attacks.
- In addition to the email contact form, the “Contact us” page also lists details of the postal addresses, phone numbers and webchat links (where applicable) of each individual section of the Department.

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, (€10 for medical card holders). A copy of the medical card should be provided to avail of the reduced fee. For methods of payment, please contact FOI Unit at foi@dfa.ie, or 01-4082618.

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

David Ormond
FOI Section
Department of Foreign Affairs