



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

Our Ref: FOI/Req/18/111

1 June 2018

Dear Mr. Foxe,

I refer to the request which you have made under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 for the following information:

1. A list of all staff, ministers, spouses, or partners who travelled abroad for St Patrick's Day 2018 on official departmental business.
2. A table of costs associated with their travel to include flights, hotel, transport, entertainment, gifts, dining, subsistence, and all other related expenditure.
3. Copies of the actual invoices/receipts relating to all of the above.

St Patrick's Day celebrations across the globe attract levels of publicity and media attention unmatched by the national day of any other country. Ministerial visits during the St. Patrick's Day period are organised to ensure that we make positive use of this exposure by strengthening links with our diaspora, spreading a positive message about Ireland, and maximising the promotion of Ireland's trade, tourism and investment interests in important overseas markets. Visits are undertaken in the most cost efficient way possible and each Minister and Department is responsible for their own costs.

This year over 1300 events were hosted or supported by the Embassy network as part of the celebrations. Members of the Government and accompanying officials participated in 131 high-level political meetings and trade, tourism and investment in Ireland were promoted at 197 dedicated business events, attended by over 8,400 Irish and international company representatives.

Feedback from the Embassy network, from State Agencies, and from other Government Departments has been overwhelmingly positive on the impact of this year's programme of visits which it is hoped will deliver long-term benefits in terms of strengthening alliances at a political level and building business links.

Three Ministers from this Department travelled abroad on official departmental business as part of the programme of Ministerial visits for Saint Patrick's Day this year.

The Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Mr. Simon Coveney, T.D., travelled to China, visiting Beijing, Shenzhen, Shanghai, and Hong Kong. He was accompanied by three officials from this Department.

The Minister for the Diaspora and International Development, Mr. Ciarán Cannon, T.D., travelled to Chicago and was accompanied by one official from this Department.

The Minister for European Affairs, Ms. Helen McEntee, T.D., travelled to Austria and Slovakia and was accompanied by two officials from this Department.

Your request relates to data contained in more than one record and in that light I have searched for and extracted the relevant information. I have made a decision to grant access to information related to these visits held by this Department and identified as falling under the scope of parts (1) and (2) of your request. The relevant information is set out in a spreadsheet for ease of reference (this is listed in the schedule as record number 18/111/01).

Please note since the transfer of responsibility for the processing of travel claims to the Payroll Shared Services Centre (PSSC) this Department no longer processes or has access to receipts submitted with travel claims. However, in the interests of transparency and where available, the overall travel and subsistence amount approved by the PSSC has been entered in the spreadsheet. These figures were obtained from the PSSC.

I have identified 13 records falling under the scope of part (3) of your request. These are listed in the schedule as Record numbers 18/111/02 to 18/111/14. As noted in the schedule these records have in a number of cases been partially redacted under Section 36 (1) (b) of the Freedom of Information Act 2014 in respect of information deemed commercially sensitive. The public interest arguments I have considered include the need to enhance accountability/transparency around the workings of this Department given that as a Government Department we are accountable to the public. The argument I have considered against release of the information is that the company concerned would be impeded in the effective pursuit of its business if the information was released. On balance I have decided to withhold access.

Please note that Minister McEntee stayed in the official Residence during her visit to Vienna so no hotel costs were incurred on her behalf for that leg of her visit. I also wish to confirm that any incidental charges appearing on hotel invoices were personally settled on checkout by the individuals concerned and were not charged to 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. 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



Sean Norton