

Karim
request-224402-9b41c339@whatdotheyknow.com

21 August 2014
Our Reference: 32578

Dear Karim

Thank you for your email of 11 August, in which you ask for information regarding SET (LR) application statistics from April 2014 to June 2014. Your request has been handled as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

You have requested the following information;

I will be very thankful to you if you can provide me with below requested information regarding SET LR applications.

1) How many SET LR applications HO has received for April 2014 and how many of them have been decided?

2) How many SET LR applications HO has received for May 2014 and how many of them have been decided?

3) How many SET LR applications HO has received for June 2014 and how many of them have been decided?

In answer to this question, I can confirm that the Home Office holds the information that you requested. However, after careful consideration we have decided that the information is exempt from disclosure under section 36(2)(c) of the Freedom of Information Act. This provides that information can be withheld where disclosure would prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs and the public interest falls in favour of applying the exemption.

Arguments for and against disclosure in terms of the public interest, with the reasons for our conclusion, are set out below.

Public interest test

Some of the exemptions in the FOI Act, referred to as 'qualified exemptions', are subject to a public interest test (PIT). This test is used to balance the public interest in disclosure against the public interest in favour of withholding the information, or the considerations for and against the requirement to say whether the information requested is held or not. We must carry out a PIT where we are considering using any of the qualified exemptions in response to a request for information.

The 'public interest' is not the same as what interests the public. In carrying out a PIT we consider the greater good or benefit to the community as a whole if the information is released or not. The 'right to know' must be balanced against the need to enable effective government and to serve the best interests of the public.

The FOI Act is 'applicant blind'. This means that we cannot, and do not, ask about the motives of anyone who asks for information. In providing a response to one person, we are expressing a willingness to provide the same response to anyone, including those who might represent a threat to the UK.

Considerations in favour of disclosing the information

There is a general public interest in statistics relating to migration. Disclosure of the information requested would increase accountability and transparency and enhance the public's understanding of current trends in types of applications and processing times. All of these factors are in the public interest and there is some weight to be given to the considerations in favour of disclosing the information.

Considerations in favour of withholding the information

The department publishes migration statistics quarterly and intends to publish migration statistics for the second quarter of this year on 21 August 2014. Although the exact breakdown of the information requested will not be published, it will form part of the overall figures. Premature release of the subset of data requested could form part of a series of requests which together could build up a picture of the overall data due to be published. Although it is accepted that you may not necessarily be interested in making subsequent requests, information released to one person under the FOI Act is in effect released to the public at large. This would provide an opportunity for others to submit additional requests ahead of the planned publication date in order to obtain the information prematurely. Premature disclosure of statistics without adhering to established pre-publication procedures (which includes internal consultation about the final statistics being published) would undermine the department's ability to use its staff resources effectively in a planned way, so that reasonable publication timetables are not affected. We conclude that the overall balance of the public interest lies in favour of withholding the information to ensure that the Home Office is able to conduct publication of migration statistics in a managed and coherent way.

In keeping with the Freedom of Information Act, we assume that all information can be released to the public unless it is exempt. In line with normal practice we are therefore releasing the information which you requested via the Home Office website.

I hope that this information meets your requirements. I would like to assure you that we have provided you with all relevant information that the Home Office holds.

If you are dissatisfied with this response you may request an independent internal review of our handling of your request by submitting a complaint within two months to the address below, quoting reference number **32578**. If you ask for an internal review, it would be helpful if you could say why you are dissatisfied with the response.

Information Access Team
Home Office
3rd Floor, Peel Building
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF
e-mail: info.access@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

As part of any internal review the Department's handling of your information request will be reassessed by staff who were not involved in providing you with this response. If you remain dissatisfied after this internal review, you would have a right of complaint to the Information Commissioner as established by section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act.

We also value your feedback, please use the link below to access a brief anonymous survey to help us improve our service to you":
<http://www.homeofficesurveys.homeoffice.gov.uk/s/108105TAZNG>

Yours sincerely

Cliff Walls
Customer Service Operations