



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

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Dr Emma L Briant
Email: request-639176-603926f0@whatdotheyknow.com

23 March 2020

Dear Dr Emma L Briant

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: FOI2020/00096

Thank you for your email of 27th January asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. I apologise for the delay in our response. You asked:

Any correspondence regarding the 21 March 2017 Meeting with Russia Experts, as well as a guest list for that meeting and minutes from that meeting, which is mentioned in the document released as part of FOI request 1122-19.

I am writing to confirm that we have now completed the search for the information which you requested.

I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) hold some information relevant to your request.

One person from each of the following were invited to attend the meeting:
The Center for Eurasian, Russian & East European Studies, Georgetown University
Russia and Eurasia Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies
Russia and Eurasia Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Hudson Institute

Some of the information you have requested is personal data relating to third parties, the disclosure of which would contravene one of the data protection principles. In such circumstances sections 40(2) and 40 (3A)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act apply. In this case, our view is that disclosure would breach the data protection principle that personal data should be processed lawfully, fairly and transparently. It is the fairness aspect of this principle, which, in our view, would be breached by disclosure. In such circumstances, s.40

confers an absolute exemption on disclosure. There is, therefore, no public interest test to apply.

Some of the information you have requested has been withheld under Section 27 of the FOI Act (Section 27(1)(c)).

Section 27(1)(c) is a qualified exemption and as such we have considered where the greater public interest lies. Disclosure could meet the public interest in transparency and accountability. However, the effective conduct of international relations depends upon maintaining trust and confidence between governments. If the UK does not maintain this trust and confidence, its ability to protect and promote UK interests through international relations will be hampered, which will not be in the public interest. The disclosure of information setting out the thoughts of officials on our relationship with a state could potentially damage the relationship between the UK and that state. The relationships are on-going and comments - even dating back several years - could be taken into account by those states. This could reduce the UK Government's ability to protect and promote UK interests which would not be in the public interest. For these reasons we consider that the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

Furthermore, I would like to confirm that a full search has been carried out and we do not hold any correspondence relating to, or minutes taken at the meeting that took place on 21 March 2017.

Once an FOI request is answered, it is considered to be in the public domain. To promote transparency, we may now publish the response and any material released on gov.uk in the [FOI releases](#) section. All personal information in the letter will be removed before publishing.

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If you would like a review of our decision, or if you wish to make a complaint, please write to the Central FOI Unit, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Room WH2.177, King Charles Street, London, SW1A 2AH. E-mail: foi-dpa.pmcs@fco.gov.uk. You have 40 working days to do so from the date of this letter.

You can apply directly to the Information Commissioner. However, the Information Commissioner will not normally make a decision unless you have first exhausted the complaints procedure provided by the FCO. The Information Commissioner can be

contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely,

Central FOI Unit



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