

Mr. Cian McCormack
Morning Ireland
RTÉ
Donnybrook
Dublin 4

April 2017

Our Ref: FoI/Req/2017/059

Dear Mr. McCormack,

I refer to your request for information of 21 March 2017 made under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2014. In order to reduce the scope of your request, and as outlined in the acknowledgement sent to you on 7 April 2017 by Frances Kiernan, you opted to amend your request as follows:-

- 1. Records of total expenditure on receptions held to mark St. Patrick's Day 2017 in Irish embassies, or hosted by Irish Ambassadors / Consulates / the Irish State in all locations broken down by Mission/Consulate.**
- 2. Records of "household names" who attended these functions.**
- 3. Records of the travel expenses of any guest(s) whose travel expenses to attend these functions were paid for by the Irish State.**
- 4. Records of expenditure on receptions held to mark St. Patrick's Day 2017 in London and Washington broken down by expenditure on food and drink, flowers, entertainment, transport, limousine hire, venue hire or any other important items.**

I have made a decision to grant your request, as amended.

The purpose of this letter is to explain that decision. This explanation has the following parts:

1. Overall context of St. Patrick's Day promotional visits abroad;
2. A schedule of all the records covered by your request;
3. Context for those records to which access is granted;
4. A statement of how you can appeal this decision should you wish to do so.

Overall Context of St. Patrick's Day promotional visits abroad

St. Patrick's Day offers a unique opportunity to promote Ireland's economic and political interests overseas, with levels of publicity and media attention unmatched by the national day of any other country. Over the 2017 St. Patrick's Day period, the Embassy network, in coordination with the State agencies, undertook an extensive programme of activities in support of trade, tourism, and investment and to enhance Ireland's reputation internationally. These activities include hosting events and receptions, which help to promote our values and extend our influence on matters of interest to us, enhancing global visibility and outreach.

The Embassy network supported the visits of the Taoiseach, Tánaiste, 26 other Ministers and the Chief Whip to 66 cities across 27 countries to promote Ireland and Irish business. The visits of the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and Ministers during the St. Patrick's Day period provided an extremely valuable means of advancing Ireland's strategic interests, including in the context of Brexit, by providing access to high level interlocutors, enabling enhanced levels of political, commercial and media engagement in the markets involved, raising the profile of Ireland as well as facilitating discussions on a range of important bilateral issues.

The participation of "household names" at Embassy hosted events to mark St. Patrick's Day helped to increase the public profile of Ireland and of our national day in a competitive international media environment.

Our national day also provided an excellent opportunity to deepen our bilateral relationship with countries around the globe and to strengthen our ties with the Irish diaspora.

I have enclosed for your information a paper (R5) setting out highlights from each Ministerial programme, showing trade, economic, investment, political, visibility, cultural, diaspora and community activities undertaken in-market in 2017.

Schedule

I enclose a schedule setting out the records held by this Department in respect of parts (1), (2) and (4) of your request, amended as set out above.

There are no records in respect of the third part of your request, pertaining to records of travel expenses of any guest(s) whose travel expenses to attend these functions were paid for by the Irish State.

I have identified four records which fall under the scope of your request. These are listed in the schedule attached as R1 to R4. I have made a decision to grant access to all of these records in full. For ease of reference the records are provided in a spreadsheet. R1 and R2 are set out under the first tab of the spreadsheet and R3 and R4 are set out in the second tab of the spreadsheet.

Records to which access is denied

There are no records to which access is denied.

Records to which access is granted

I have granted access in full to the four records identified as falling under the scope of this request, as amended.

Records (R1) have therefore been made available in respect of expenditure on receptions hosted by all missions in our network. These records provide the net cost to the mission in Euro, rounded to the nearest Euro. In some cases missions were able to reduce the cost of hosting events through sponsorship and cost-sharing arrangements including in-kind support/provision of products and/or services. There are also some cases where finalised costs are not yet available and they are clearly marked on R1. Where VAT has been paid in respect of certain services or purchases, this will normally be recouped from the local tax authorities in due course, thereby reducing the ultimate cost of the receptions in question.

At a number of locations, because of security and / or space constraints at official premises, costs were incurred relating to the hire of outside venues. Those costs are included in figures provided as part of R1.

There are no records in respect of expenditure on receptions in respect of the Consulate General in San Francisco, USA and the Embassy of Ireland in Riyadh. In the case of San Francisco, the Consulate General co-hosted events with a number of partner organisations, with the costs borne in each case by the partner organisation in question. As such, no reception costs were paid by the Consulate General in San Francisco in respect of St. Patrick's Day receptions. In the case of the Embassy of Ireland in Riyadh the cost of the reception is met by the local Irish society so no costs were paid by the Embassy.

In respect of guests who may be considered "household names", they have been taken as those who could be reasonably considered to be well-known figures in Ireland, and are released in R2. Ministers and Ministers of State attending receptions as part of St Patrick's Day 'Promoting Ireland' programmes are not listed.

R3 – London

Embassy of Ireland London worked closely with the four state agencies in the UK (Enterprise Ireland, Tourism Ireland, Bord Bia and IDA Ireland) and with Irish community organisations, Irish business and professional networks, political, cultural and media contacts to maximise the opportunities provided by St. Patrick's Day to promote Ireland in Britain and to further develop political, economic and cultural relations between Britain and Ireland.

The Embassy supported a five-day Ministerial visit by Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton T.D., which included a number of significant political and trade-focussed events and extensive engagement with the Irish business, arts and wider community in Britain.

The Ambassador hosted four large-scale St. Patrick's Day receptions at the Embassy: a reception for security and law enforcement contacts attended by over 200 guests, the annual St. Patrick's Day reception for political and media contacts, attended by over 300 guests, the annual reception for the wider Irish community attended by 450 guests and a National Day vin d'honneur for members of the Diplomatic Corps attended by 150 guests, the latter of which Minister Bruton attended as keynote speaker. Irish food and drink was promoted at all of these events.

Due to the scale of representational activity carried out at the Embassy of Ireland London, the majority of which is catered in house, supplies of food and drink for the various functions held are purchased in bulk, quite often well in advance. In view of the bulk purchases and the large number and extent of the events, it is not possible to ascribe with precision actual costs to each specific reception. This also applies to the purchase of flowers which are purchased at market, in general once a fortnight or so, and which costs are spread over a large number of functions. Accordingly, it is not practical to give the exact food and drink costs per reception, and for this reason, a global figure is given under each category. Figures provided reflect the final net cost to the Embassy.

R4 - Washington D.C.

The Ambassador of Ireland to the USA traditionally hosts a St. Patrick's Day reception in Washington DC, at which the Taoiseach is keynote speaker. The guest list is drawn primarily from the US Administration, Congress, business community, Irish-America, and other key Embassy contacts. Due to the limited reception areas in the Embassy and Residence, neither has the capacity to accommodate a reception of the size appropriate to St. Patrick's Day, so a suitable alternative venue is identified.

In 2017, the reception was held at the Willard Hotel (chosen for its proximity to the White House). In line with normal attendance, approximately 500 guests were present.

With respect to the costs released in respect of the St. Patrick's Day Reception hosted by the Embassy of Ireland, Washington DC, the venue hire cost was incorporated into the food costs. For this reason, a common entry has been provided in R (4) in respect of the food and venue hire expenditure of Embassy of Ireland, Washington DC. Figures provided reflect the estimated final net cost to the Embassy.

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@dfat.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@dfat.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
Trade Division
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade