



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

E-mail request

Our ref: ATISN 14948

Date: 25 March 2021

Dear

ATISN 14948

Thank you for your request which I received on 25 February 2021. I have set out at Annex 1, the questions you submitted and my response to each.

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government's handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response. Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government's Freedom of Information Officer at:

Information Rights Unit,
Welsh Government,
Cathays Park,
Cardiff,
CF10 3NQ

or Email: Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales

Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

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

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

Yours sincerely

Annex 1

Question 1

Regarding the cost to the Welsh Government of developing its overseas partnerships including (but not limited to): Argentina, Australia, Italy, Malaysia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Singapore, South Korea, Spain and Vietnam:

- a) **What is the total annual cost to the Welsh Government of developing its overseas partnerships including, but not limited to: travel and accommodation costs; advertisement costs; staffing costs; costs of hosting exhibition's, meetings and events, temporary or permanent office costs; expenses occurred via expense accounts.**

The Welsh Government does not hold this information.

There is no single dedicated budget for developing our overseas partnerships. Developing these partnerships is part of the core work of the International Relations and Trade Department, our overseas teams and many other Departments across Welsh Government, including Education, Health, Welsh Language, Science and Innovation. Calculating a total cost to the Welsh Government of developing the overseas partnerships would involve calculating all of the elements listed in the question, plus calculating the proportionment of staff time and resources from several Departments and up to, potentially, 300+ staff

Any calculation would be based on estimated staff time spent on developing our overseas partnerships over the course of the year and therefore any figure would not be definitive.

- b) **If possible, a list of purchases made by Welsh Government staff using Welsh Government credit cards during trips whilst developing the government's overseas partnerships. (Information requested from the last three financial years.)**

Engagement of section 22(1) (Information intended for future publication)

Whilst I can confirm that the Welsh Government holds information of this description, it is considered exempt under section 22 of the Freedom of Information Act. This states (inter alia):

1) *Information is exempt information if—*

(a) the information is held by the public authority with a view to its publication, by the authority or any other person, at some future date (whether determined or not),

(b) the information was already held with a view to such publication at the time when the request for information was made, and

(c) it is reasonable in all the circumstances that the information should be withheld from disclosure until the date referred to in paragraph (a)

I can confirm that Welsh Government does hold the information being requested – which will be published later this year. For that reason, we believe it is reasonable for the publication plans to remain so as to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the information.

Public Interest Test

Section 22 is a public interest tested exemption. This means that in order to withhold information under it, it has to be shown that the public interest in withholding the information outweighs that in releasing it.

Public interest arguments in favour of disclosure

- The general presumption of openness that the FOIA aspires to; and
- General interest on Welsh Government's expenditure.

Whilst Welsh Government acknowledges the general public interest in openness and transparency that release would engender, we believe the release of information at this stage would be confusing and may not present complete overall data compared to that which will be published.

Public interest arguments in favour of withholding

- The intended publication date is in the not too distant future;
- Information released through the Freedom of Information Act is released to the world and not just the requester. Publishing the requested information now may not reflect the information that will be published on the Welsh Government's website; it could be misleading and not present an accurate picture – time is required for credits for disputed transactions to be applied to the accounts prior to publication as well as time to undertake quality assurance on the transactions and apply any necessary redactions - data that is protected under the Data Protection Act and data that might be commercially sensitive;
- Confusion could arise when comparing different versions of information and potentially leading to incorrect conclusions being drawn; and
- Disclosure of this information before the publication date may compromise trust in the accuracy of official information.

Balance of public interest test

On the basis of the above, we conclude that on balance the public interest arguments are in favour of withholding information at this time. The public interest in this data will be met with the publication later in 2021.

Question 2

Regarding the cost of the Welsh Government's regional partnerships, including (but not limited to): The Basque Country, Brittany, Flanders and Quebec:

- a) Does the Welsh Government have any offices or properties in the regions mentioned above and, if so, what is the annual rental cost/purchase cost?**

Welsh Government has an office in Quebec.

Information on the running costs of the overseas office in Quebec is exempt under Section 21 of the Freedom of Information Act (2000) – information readily accessible to the applicant by other means. Information can be found within respective State of the Estate reports at the following link <https://gov.wales/state-estate-report-2018-to-2019>

- b) What is the total annual cost to the Welsh Government of developing its regional partnerships including, but not limited to: travel and accommodation costs; advertisement costs; staffing costs; costs of hosting exhibition's, meetings and events, temporary or permanent office costs; expenses occurred via expense accounts.**

The Welsh Government does not hold this information. Response as above at 1 a).

- c) A list of purchases made by Welsh Government staff using Welsh Government credit cards during trips whilst developing the government's regional partnerships.**

Information requested from the last three financial years.

Response as above at 1 b).