



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

1 May 2009

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST

Thank you for your request dated 1 April 2009, under the Freedom of Information Act. You asked that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) should disclose the percentage of FCO staff currently signed off sick with anxiety and depression or other ailments.

I can confirm that the FCO does hold information to answer your request. We employ approximately 16,000 employees. 5970 (figure taken from 1 April 2009 statistics) of these are civil servants recruited in the UK and either work here or in our posts overseas. We call these members of staff UK-based employees and it is these people who are asked to centrally record their sickness absences. Our HR IT system is currently being updated. We are, therefore unable to download central statistics. However, based on the manual information we hold, less than 1% of the FCO's UK-based workforce are currently off sick with anxiety, depression and other related ailments.

The FCO is committed to protecting the health, welfare and productivity of its employees and recognizes the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors. We have both effective occupational and traumatic stress policies in place as well as an e-learning package on managing stress. We carry out stress risk assessments, based on Health and Safety Executive's Management Standards, for both FCO departments and Posts overseas and also stress management workshops for staff. Staff and their families also have access to a team of dedicated FCO welfare officers and an in-house occupational health team. We also offer an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) which is available to staff based in the UK, officers and their families overseas and locally engaged staff overseas. The EAP provides staff with unlimited telephone/e-mail support on a 24/7 basis and up to 3 free face-to-face counseling sessions. Staff are encouraged to take their full annual leave entitlement and wherever possible to work to conditioned hours. We are also fully supportive of flexible working arrangements where this is operationally possible.

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the Freedom of Information Act, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless exempt.