



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

19 May 2009

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office received a request under the Freedom of Information Act (2000) in which the requestor asked for;

“Information about the compensation and benefits received by employees of the FCO. The request made specific mention of additional benefits, such as an expatriation allowance or relocation allowance, educational allowance for dependent children etc.”

I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office does hold information relevant to the request.

Staff working overseas are paid a Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) to compensate them for the additional cost of maintaining, at their overseas Post, a standard of living comparable to that in the UK. Rates of COLA vary from one country to another and from individual to individual (since they are calculated by deducting salary from a notional household budget). In countries where the cost of living is cheaper than in the UK COLA might be zero. COLA rates are revised every six months: staff are warned that they can change significantly during the course of a posting.

Rates of COLA are calculated for the FCO by an independent organisation, Employment Conditions Abroad (ECA). ECA is a private company that provides data on expatriate terms and conditions to a wide range of international companies, organisations and other governments. ECA's data is based on information sent in by their members, i.e. expatriates employed by the companies and organisations who are part of the network. It is checked against independent sources such as the Internet, international surveys etc. The information they gather is treated as commercial in confidence. If you would like further information about their methodology you should contact ECA International, Anchor House, 15 Britten Street, London SW3 3TY (Telephone: 020 7351 5000). ECA have a website at: <http://www.eca-international.com>.

In addition to COLA, staff may also receive a number of other allowances when working overseas. The allowances can vary according to location, grade and family size. I attach a guide to these allowances.