

Data Protection and Information
Management Branch,
Digital Services Division



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk

DAERA/24/119

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29 March 2024

Dear [REDACTED]

Freedom of Information Act 2000

Thank you for your request of 7 March 2024 in which you requested:-

“For the last 3 tax year's (23/22, 22/21, 21/20) please provide the total cost of:

- **Total number of staff hired with responsibility for freedom of information requests, (full time equivalent) .**
- **Total salary costs for staff with responsibility for freedom of information requests.**
- **Total for all other costs associated with handling freedom of information requests.**
- **Total number of freedom of information requests received, and total number responded with the requested information.”**

DAERA possesses most of the information that you have requested though not all of it in the precise format that you have requested. Freedom of Information requests (including requests under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004) which include the number of requests received each year and the outcomes (granted in full, information not held, handled under normal business etc) are recorded by calendar year and not by financial year so will be provided in that format.

In answer to your first and second question, DAERA employs four full time staff on co-ordinating and providing expert advice across the Department to four staff (one Deputy Principal, one Staff Officer, one Executive Officer II and one Administrative Officer). Given the small number of staff involved and the fact that the amount of

salary they receive is based in part on their annual performance and length of service in that grade releasing either their individual salaries or their collective cost would be to release personal data about them. However, I refer you to the Department of Finance's web page where, under the sub-heading of Civil Service Pay, you can find the pay scales for all grades for 2021 and 2022 (the 2023 pay settlement has not yet been arrived at, at the point of writing) and can estimate the range of costs for the central unit. This link should take you to where this information is located.

<https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/topics/working-northern-ireland-civil-service/civil-service-pay>

As well as the above central FOI Unit who manage the FOI process, the processing of requests is decentralised and there is no definitive number of staff across the Department involved in this. Each individual request/response requires varying input from staff across the Department and it is not possible to calculate either the number of staff involved or the cost of the amount of time spent by grade and then calculating full time equivalence without substantially exceeding the £600 limit on the costs of answering a request. There have been over 350 such requests in each calendar year and to contact each business area or areas involved in each request and have them calculate a breakdown of the number of staff and amount of time involved would, for even one calendar year and at a *minimum* of 15 minutes per individual contact and calculation, exceed 87 hours of staff time at £25 per hour. This would cost at least £2,175 and, in practice, probably substantially more than that.

You may be able to roughly calculate the likely maximum cost to the Department by looking at the number of requests in each year that were not treated as normal business or refused on excessive cost grounds (or information not held) and multiplying by 600. This would not be in any way a precise figure but would be crudely indicative.

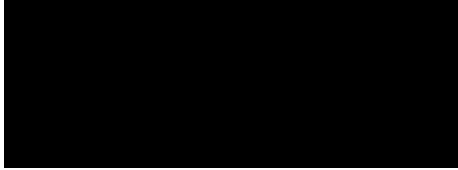
In response to your third question there have been no requests for either braille or foreign language translations in the last three calendar years and only a very small number of requests that required a response in paper rather than electronic format so any additional costs would have been de minimus and absorbed by our general stationery budget, if not non-existent.

In response to your fourth question, I attach copies of the DAERA statistics for FOI requests for 2021, 2022 and 2023 that I refer to in my first paragraph above as Annexes to this letter. These have been subject to redaction of third party data of which you are not the data subject.

If you are unhappy with the way your request for information has been handled or the decision to release/withhold information, you have the right to request a formal review by the Department. If you wish to do so, please contact The Review Section either by e-mailing daera.informationmanager@daera-ni.gov.uk or by post at The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Data Protection & Information Management Branch, Floor 2, Jubilee House, 111 Ballykelly Road, Ballykelly, Limavady BT49 9HP, within two months from the date of this letter. If after such an internal review you are still unhappy with the response, you have the right to

appeal to the Information Commissioner at Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, CHESHIRE, SK9 5AF, who will undertake an independent review of the Department's decision.

Yours sincerely

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