



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Our Ref: FOI/Req/19/229

27 August 2019

Dear Mr. De Vaal,

I refer to the request which you have made under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 for the following information:

1. A list of the costs associated with sending ministers abroad for St. Patrick's Day in 2019 and / or any departmental staff that accompanied the Minister on the trip i.e. flights, accommodation transfers, etc.
2. A copy of all the expenses claimed by the Minister – or other departmental staff - associated with the 2019 St. Patrick's day trip.

Ministerial travel is undertaken in the most cost efficient way possible and each Minister and Department is responsible for their own costs. In many cases where official accommodation is provided in the country of primary accreditation, Ministers and accompanying officials avail of this in order to realise cost savings.

St. Patrick's Day celebrations across the globe attract levels of publicity and media attention unmatched by the national day of any other country. Ministerial visits during the St. Patrick's Day period are organised to ensure that we make positive use of this exposure by strengthening links with our diaspora, spreading a positive message about Ireland, and maximising the promotion of Ireland's trade, tourism and investment opportunities in important overseas markets.

Feedback from the Embassy network, from State Agencies, and from other Government Departments has been overwhelmingly positive. It is envisaged that the impact of this year's programme of visits will deliver long-term benefits in terms of strengthening alliances at a political level and supporting business links.

This year's St. Patrick's Day programme served as a useful platform to underline Ireland's continued commitment to and membership of the European Union. Ministers visited all 27 EU capitals over the St. Patrick's Day period and met with their counterparts to discuss Brexit developments and to communicate Ireland's position.

The 2019 programme also reflected Ireland's expanding diplomatic and state agency presence around the world, as part of the Global Ireland initiative. Ministers visited Vancouver, Bogota, Santiago and Amman, where Ireland has recently opened new diplomatic missions. Mumbai and Los Angeles also received Ministerial visits, in advance of the opening of new Consulates there later this year.

The Taoiseach, Tánaiste, Ministers, Attorney General, Ceann Comhairle and Cathaoirleach visited 56 countries in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, the Americas, and the Asia Pacific region. This year's programme saw the largest number of countries ever visited by Ministers for St. Patrick's Day.

A total of 1,796 events were organized by Embassies and Consulates this year, representing a 38% increase on 2018.

Three Ministers from this Department travelled abroad on official departmental business as part of the programme of Ministerial visits for St. Patrick's Day this year.

The Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Mr. Simon Coveney, T.D., travelled to France and Belgium, visiting Paris and Brussels. He was accompanied by three officials from this Department. The Tánaiste attended a meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels on 18th March, after which he participated in a St. Patrick's Day event organised by the Embassy of Ireland in Belgium and the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the European Union.

The Minister for the Diaspora and International Development, Mr. Ciarán Cannon, T.D., travelled to the USA and Canada, visiting Vancouver, Calgary and Seattle. He was accompanied by one official from this Department.

The Minister for European Affairs, Ms. Helen McEntee, T.D., travelled to Denmark and Sweden and was accompanied by one official from this Department.

Your request relates to data contained in a single record, and in that light I have searched for and extracted the relevant information. I have made the decision to grant access to information related to visits held by this Department and identified as falling under the scope of parts (1) and (2) of your request. The relevant information is set out in a spreadsheet for ease of reference.

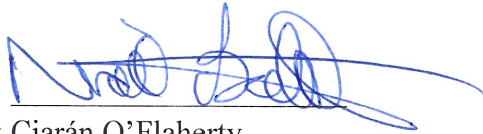
Please note, since the transfer of responsibility for the processing of travel claims to the Payroll Shared Services Centre (PSSC), this Department no longer processes or has access to receipts submitted with travel claims. However, in the interests of transparency, and where

available, the overall travel and subsistence amount approved by the PSSC has been entered in the spreadsheet. These figures were obtained from the PSSC.

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@dfa.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@dfa.ie, or 01-4082857.

You should make your appeal within four 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,



Ciarán O'Flaherty

