



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha
Department of Foreign Affairs

Our Ref: Fol/Req/ 21/052

Date: 18 March 2021

Dear Mr Corkery

I refer to the request which you have made under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 for access to records held by this Department, as follows:

1 - any correspondence or research exchanged by Minister Coveney or any officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs (at or above the grade of Assistant Principal) with ministers or officials of a similar grade in the British government's Northern Ireland Office, regarding plans to mark the centenary of the creation of Northern Ireland.

2- any correspondence or research exchanged by Minister Coveney or any officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs (at or above the grade of Assistant Principal) with ministers or officials of a similar grade in the British government's Northern Ireland Office, regarding any of the following; (a) the centenary of the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December 1921, (b) the handover of Dublin Castle in January 1922 or (c) the subsequent Irish Civil War.

I refer also to the acknowledgement of your request which was sent to you on 22 February 2020.

Following our discussion on 23 February, a time period for relevant records of 1 July 2020 – 16 February 2021 was added to the request.

I have identified 75 records that fall within the scope of your request. The records are listed in the schedule attached. I have made a decision to grant 2 records, to part-grant 29 records, and to refuse 44 records.

Where access has been part-granted, the names and contact details of private citizens or NIO officials have been redacted under section 37 (1) (Personal Information) of the Freedom of Information Act 2014.

Where the release of records has been refused, these records are exempt from release under Section 33 (1) (c) of the FOI Act which states that “A head may refuse to grant an FOI request in relation to a record. . . if, in the opinion of the head, access to it could reasonably be expected to affect adversely- matters relating to Northern Ireland”. They are also exempt

from release under Section 33 (2) (b) (i). This is a mandatory exemption where the record is a diplomatic communication containing information that was given in confidence.

It is the Department's strongly held view that the granting of access to records provided by the Northern Ireland Office could introduce major doubts with regard to the security and confidentiality of our diplomatic communications. It is important to maintain that mutuality of trust. The information in the records being refused was communicated in confidence by the Northern Ireland Office.

I have considered the likelihood that the release of the records in this case could result in negative consequences and have taken into account their likely impact. On balance, I am satisfied that the circumstances favour refusal rather than release of the relevant records in this case.

Right of Appeal

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, (€10 for medical card holders). A copy of the medical card should be provided to avail of the reduced fee. For methods of payment, please contact FOI Unit at foi@dfa.ie, or 01-4082618.

You should make your appeal within 4 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

Shane Griffin
Ireland, UK & Americas Division