



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

15 MAY 2017

Dear

On 16 March 2017, you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, information relating to Ministry staff that has been seconded to work at locations outside of their home base.

The Ministry employs almost 7,000 staff who work at more than 230 locations in New Zealand. Secondments provide the Ministry with an efficient and effective way of meeting business needs. The Ministry uses secondments to fill skill gaps, build the leadership and management capability across the Ministry and enhance relationships between the Ministry and the wider public service. Secondments provide an excellent and cost-effective opportunity for staff to develop skills and gain experience while exploring opportunities for transferring their skills and institutional knowledge across the Ministry and the wider public sector. Without the ability to second staff, the Ministry would incur the additional cost of having to recruit temporary and fixed term contract staff. Usually these arrangements are more expensive than seconding existing staff for short periods.

Internal secondments provide staff with a range of experiences and opportunities to broaden their understanding of the Ministry's operations and objectives. For instance, corporate staff can be seconded to operational service delivery roles and senior staff in service delivery can often be seconded to National Office.

Staff serving the Ministry and its clients, are not expected to move to a seconded position at their own expense or at the cost of their personal and family responsibilities. The Ministry's policies clearly outline the Ministry's expectations for the payment of secondment related costs and expenses. Ministry staff exercise probity when considering where, when and how to accommodate staff and reimburse costs associated with secondments.

- *When your staff are seconded to work at locations outside of their home base, where do they stay? (eg hotel, motel)*

The Ministry's policy states that rental or private board should be used for secondments longer than one month in duration. Where the Ministry has significant numbers of seconded staff working on projects, shared Ministry-leased apartments are used where possible. Payment of temporary expenses such as a serviced apartment, motel or hotel, should not exceed two weeks, while the Ministry works with the seconded employee to find suitable rental accommodation. Accommodation expenses are only paid when distances are such that it is not practical for the seconded employee to travel daily between home and the new location. Costs must be reasonable, appropriate to the secondment and consistent with the Ministry's policies.

- *What price per night is paid on average?*

The average price per night varies across a range of secondments in different locations. The Ministry's financial system does not enable the isolation of all costs specifically relating to the price per night for secondments.

In order to provide the average price per night of accommodation for all seconded staff, the Ministry would need to divert personnel from their core duties and allocate extra time to complete this task. The diversion of these resources would impair the Ministry's ability to continue standard operations and would be an inefficient use of the Ministry's resources. As such, your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act, requires substantial collusion. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your requests given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

- *What else is paid for? (eg travel, food, allowances)*

An employee is not expected to be out of pocket or benefit financially from a secondment. The seconded employee may be paid expenses and allowances for travel and accommodation, to help meet costs directly related to a secondment. Agreements on the reimbursements of costs are required to be aligned with the Ministry's Finance and Human Resource policies and the individual's employment agreement. A location allowance is available to a seconded employee who is located away from home. It is paid at a standard rate and is intended to cover extra costs of food and incidentals while at the secondment location.

The Ministry supports staff on secondment to stay connected with their families, managers and home teams. Staff on secondment are also entitled to the actual and reasonable cost of travel home at agreed intervals within limits, for example, staff on secondments in excess of eight weeks may have a return trip home on a fortnightly or monthly basis. The Ministry may pay additional expenses and allowances for long term secondments in excess of eight weeks, including car parking, daily travel to work, and/or dependant care, if the secondee will be out of pocket during the secondment.

- *Does your department "shop around" for the best rate and why/why not?*

Secondment related costs must be reasonable, appropriate to the secondment, agreed to by the secondee, and consistent with the Ministry's policies. The Ministry's code of conduct requires that all staff exercise probity when making decisions about where to spend Ministry money and that expenditure is reasonable, demonstrates value for money and is relevant to what the Ministry's goals and business operations are.

- *If staff are seconded for a long period of time, how long does your department fund their accommodation etc before they must make their own arrangements?*

When arranging a long term secondment (over eight weeks) from a distant location, the Ministry will weigh the likely costs of allowances and expenses (including the secondment location allowance, accommodation, travel etc) for the full term of the secondment against the costs of relocating the seconded employee (and their family) to and from the new location. If a staff member is relocated they need to make their own arrangements from this point.

- *How many of your staff were seconded over the last year?*

During the 2015/16 financial year, a total of 2,110 staff held acting or secondment positions during this period. Some staff may have held more than one acting or secondment position during this period, and some of these employees may not be seconded away from their home location and therefore would not have had accommodation costs paid.

- *What was the total spend on accommodation for staff on secondment last year and how does that compare to previous years?*

Below is a table that shows the total accommodation costs for staff seconded to another role in the financial years 2012/13 to 2015/16.

Financial year	Total accommodation costs \$'000
2015/16	663
2014/15	616
2013/14	756
2012/13	901

The Ministry is committed to being a responsible employer and ensuring that staff can make the most of development opportunities arising within the Ministry and across the sector. Secondments enable staff to develop their skills, build leadership and management capability, while also gaining knowledge and experience of other parts of the Ministry. Secondments increase the diversity of thought within the organisation which helps the Ministry to achieve better outcomes for its clients. Secondment opportunities are open to all permanent staff of the Ministry.

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

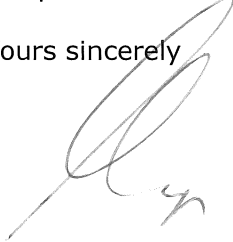
- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter available to the wider public shortly. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter on the Ministry of Social Development's website. Your personal details will be deleted and the Ministry will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

If you wish to discuss this response about seconded staff with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Murray Edridge', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Murray Edridge
Deputy Chief Executive, Corporate Solutions