ANNEX A

FOI DOF/2025-0373

Request

Under the Freedom of Information Act, I wish to request details of a meeting the Finance Minister held recently with the China's Consul General in Belfast, Li Nan.

Please disclose the following:

1. **A copy of any minutes taken of the meeting (redacted where appropriate if necessary).**
2. **A copy of any handwritten notes of the meeting (redacted where appropriate if necessary).**

DoF response

I can confirm the department holds some of the information requested.

The information you have requested at 1 is attached in Annex B. No information held in relation to part 2 of your request.

Please note, some of the information in relation to part 1 of your request is withheld because it is exempt under section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 40(2) exempts personal information from disclosure if that information relates to someone other than the applicant, and if disclosure of that information would contravene one of the data protection principles in schedule 1 of the Data Protection Act 2018.

In this case, I believe disclosure would contravene the first data protection principle, which provides that personal data must be processed lawfully and fairly.

Having considered all the information contained within the Legitimate Interest Test – lawful, fairness and transparency test (attached as a separate document – Annex C), the department has established that, on balance, there is no lawful basis for the disclosure of third-party personal data falling within the scope of the request of which the requester is not the data subject.

Some of the information you have requested is exempt under Section 27(2) which exempts confidential information obtained from another state other than the United Kingdom. Information obtained from a State is confidential at any time while the terms on which it was obtained require it to be held in confidence.

Section 27 is a qualified exemption and the Department has considered whether the balance of the public interest favours releasing or withholding this material.

The public interest considerations for disclosure

- The Department recognises there is a public interest in openness in public affairs to ensure that the public can scrutinise the way public authorities reach important decisions.
- The release would make for greater accountability.
- Increases public confidence in government decision making.

The public interest considerations against disclosure

- Disclosure of this information would result in prejudice to the relationship with the State that provided the information and undermine trust and confidence.
- There is public interest in respecting international confidences to ensure that States are not deterred from providing information.
- The provider of the information has explicitly requested that this information is treated confidentially at this time.

Taking into account all the circumstances of this case, I have concluded that the balance of the public interest favours withholding this information.