

FOI DOF/2026-0280

Request

I would like to request the following information in relation to attendance by Northern Ireland Civil Service staff at external conferences, seminars, events and study visits.

For the period 1 January 2021 to the most recent date available, please provide:

1. The total expenditure by each Northern Ireland Executive Department on attendance at external conferences, seminars, events and study visits.
2. The total expenditure by each Department on associated travel, accommodation and subsistence costs relating to attendance at such events.
3. The ten highest-cost external conferences, seminars, events or study visits attended by staff during this period, including:
 - o event name;
 - o event organiser;
 - o location;
 - o number of attendees;
 - o total cost to the Department.
4. Details of any conferences, seminars, events or study visits attended outside Northern Ireland during this period, including:
 - o destination;
 - o purpose;
 - o number of attendees;
 - o total cost.
5. Copies of any current policies or guidance governing approval for attendance at external conferences, seminars, events and study visits.

DoF response

I can confirm that the Department holds some of the information requested.

1. The Department holds some of the information requested. The total expenditure by the Department of Finance on attendance at exhibitions and conferences from 1 January 2021 to 31 March 2026 is set out in the table below. Costs relating specifically to seminars, events and study visits cannot be separately identified, as this level of detail is not recorded within the Department's financial system. Each Northern Ireland Executive department is responsible for its own expenditure.

	2025-26	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	Jan to Mar 2021
Attendance at Exhibitions and Conferences	£79,908	£58,952	£60,738	£108,162	£35,403	£8,349

2. The Department does not hold the information requested. The Department's financial systems do not directly record associated travel, accommodation and subsistence costs relating to attendance at exhibitions and conferences.
3. The Department does not hold the information requested. The Department's financial systems do not routinely record key details such as the event name, organiser, location or number of attendees. In addition, expenditure is not recorded in a way that allows costs to be readily identified and aggregated for individual conferences, seminars, events or study visits. As a result, the Department is not able to provide a list of the ten highest-cost events or the associated information requested.
4. The Department does not hold the information requested. Full details of any conferences, seminars, events or study visits attended outside Northern Ireland are not recorded on the Department's financial system.
5. The Career Development and Staff Attendance at Training Events policies provide a clear governance framework for approving attendance at development-related activities, including external events. The Career Development policy establishes the strategic requirement that such activities align with business need and individual development plans, while the Training Attendance policy provides the operational control mechanisms, including line manager and budget holder approval and oversight of resource use.

Together, they ensure that attendance is justified, authorised, and managed in line with organisational priorities and financial accountability. Copies of 5.05 Staff Attendance at Training Events and 5.07 Career Development policy are provided at Annex C and Annex D.