

Frequently Asked Questions

How can I view the files from The Foreign and Commonwealth Office 141 record series?

The first batch of records will be available to view free of charge in The National Archives' reading rooms to anyone with a valid [reader's ticket](#) from Wednesday 18 April 2012.

What is contained in the 'migrated archives'?

The migrated archives is a collection of files that were sent to the United Kingdom from some former British territories generally at the time of their independence. The files contain a range of material relating to former colonial administrations, including some material of a sensitive nature covering policy, security, intelligence and other issues.

Why has The Foreign and Commonwealth Office waited until now to transfer the records?

These colonial administration records, referred to as the "migrated archives", were the subject of a review commissioned by the Foreign Secretary which looked into the nature of the records and their past handling.

Why will it takes two years to transfer the records?

The transfer of such a large collection of files involves a significant amount of work by both The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and The National Archives staff. The transfer process from The Foreign and Commonwealth Office to The National Archives includes The Foreign and Commonwealth Office reviewing the files for any residual sensitivity, physical preparation to ensure minimal deterioration over time, and the cataloguing of files so they can be identified via [The National Archives Catalogue](#).

Why are records from some former colonial territories being released in a number of batches?

In most cases, it is possible to release all of the records for a particular territory in a single batch. However, this is not always the case when there are significantly large quantities of records associated with certain territories. If the records of a territory are divided into separate batches, the timetable indicates release over an extended period. This approach ensures that records are available as soon as they have been prepared for public release.

How will the transfer of records from The Foreign and Commonwealth Office be overseen?

The Foreign Secretary appointed Professor Tony Badger, Paul Mellon Professor of American history and Master of Clare College at the University of Cambridge, to provide independent oversight of the transfer. The Foreign Secretary described the role of the independent reviewer in a [Written Ministerial Statement](#) to Parliament on 30 June 2011.

How will the series be catalogued and arranged?

The individual piece reference numbers are arranged in the storage order in which they arrived at The National Archives. This means that records from each individual territory of origin may not be listed together or in numerical order, and the former piece reference numbers may not be maintained. A guide to the first batch of records will be

made available as a finding aid and will provide more information on how to search for the relevant records.

Why are the records being treated as one collection as opposed to separate series for each country of origin?

All the material from The Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the migrated archives collection will be treated as one series (FCO 141) with the individual territories listed in each piece description. By having all of the records in one place, this should help readers to search the records, regardless of their level of expertise and ensures that the history of the collection is clear to all.

How much information from these records will be withheld by The Foreign and Commonwealth Office or redacted?

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is only expecting to withhold around 1% of the information contained in records eligible for transfer to The National Archives. This is in line with the typical rate of redaction for FCO files. Any such redactions (blocking of content) are only carried out using legal exemptions set out in the Freedom of Information Act or retained under section 3.4 of the Public Record Act and are subject to external scrutiny by the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Council on Public Records. The Foreign Secretary's Written Ministerial Statement on 5 May 2011 made clear that the withholding of any content from the migrated archive files would be kept to an absolute minimum.

Are there plans to digitise the series?

The National Archives does not have the funds or resources available to digitise this collection given the scale.