

# INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

## Sending money via the FCO

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Charity Number 1093710



**While your friend or relative is detained overseas, it is likely that they will need financial support to help them through the experience. In many countries, very little practical support is provided by the prison authorities so prisoners are expected to pay for everything themselves: bedding, food, toiletries, cleaning products, stationery, etc. Work is not always available so prisoners are unable to earn money to purchase such items.**

The most convenient way to send money to somebody in a foreign prison is through the "Prison Comforts" system operated by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). Contributions must not collectively exceed £200 per month.

The FCO recognises that some money transfers are intended to protect the welfare of prisoners. These transfers are referred to by the FCO as "Prison Comforts", and are handled free of charge up to a certain amount (see below). Other money transfers (e.g. for payments for lawyers) are subject to handling fees. Payments can be made by Postal Order, Bankers Draft, or Building Society cheque or by a bank/CHAPS transfer direct to the FCO.

The money is sent weekly (every Thursday) to the British Consul nearest to the prison where the person is held, and takes around 7-10 days (sometimes longer) to clear into a prisoner's account. If the prisoner is then moved to another prison, the money is forwarded with the relevant files.

Prisoners Abroad recommends that money transfers be made only through the FCO. Although there are alternative ways of sending money which are faster (via companies such as Western Union, for example), there is normally a cost incurred with each transaction. In addition to this, you will need a trusted person to collect the money at the other end and take it into your friend or relative. Consular staff are not able to do this for you. Cash should never be sent through the mail direct to the prison.

At present, contributions via the FCO must not collectively exceed £200 per month. From 1<sup>st</sup> January 2010 the limit will reduce to allow just one free transfer per month of up to £100. Any subsequent transfers in the same month, even under the £100 threshold, will incur a charge as set out in the sliding scale below.

<b>Amount</b>	<b>Charge</b>
<b>One monthly payment up to £100</b>	<b>Free</b>
<b>Any further payments in the same month £0-£50</b>	<b>£8</b>
<b>Any further payment in the same month £51-£100</b>	<b>£16</b>
<b>Any Single Payments of £101-£500</b>	<b>£32</b>
<b>Any Single Payments of £501-£1500</b>	<b>£74</b>

## Postal Orders

To send a Postal Order, please go to your local Post Office and ask them to write out a Postal Order for the agreed amount to the 'Foreign and Commonwealth Office'.

## Banker's Draft

To send a Bankers Draft, or a Building Society Cheque you need to ask your local bank/building society to issue a draft or cheque for the agreed amount made payable to the 'Foreign and Commonwealth Office'.

## Cheques

Personal cheques can be accepted but be advised that they will take 6 weeks to clear. Ensure that the cheque guarantee card number and expiry date are written on the back of the cheque. The FCO will not be able to process your payment without these details. The cheque should be made payable to the 'Foreign and Commonwealth Office'.

### **If you are sending a postal order or a draft/cheque, send it to the following address:**

FAO (Name of desk officer and/or relevant desk, e.g. John Smith, France desk)  
Consular Directorate  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
King Charles Street  
London  
SW1A 2AH

If you are sending a postal order or a draft/cheque, send it with a note briefly explaining:

- who the money is from;
- how much is enclosed;
- who it is going to; and
- where they are being held

If possible you should find out the way the prisoner's name is recorded in the prison as this may differ from the correct spelling or order. This will help ensure the prisoner receives the money promptly. Enclose a stamped addressed envelope if you would like a receipt.

**The FCO do not accept 'prison comforts' in the form of cash.**

## Electronic transfer

To arrange for a CHAPS (received within 12 –24 Hours) or BACS transfer (takes 3 to 5 days to clear), simply ask your bank to give you an appropriate application form to fill with the FCO's account details which are as follows:

Bank name:	Citibank
Address:	N.A. London Branch, Canary Wharf London, E14 5LB
Account name:	GBS Re FCO Multi Vote
Sort code:	08-33-00
Account #:	12537125
OPG Account:	7250

If you arrange a CHAPS transfer then please ask your bank to send a copy of the CHAPS form to the relevant desk officer by fax. You can obtain the fax number from the desk officer themselves or from Prisoners Abroad. Once the FCO's bank has confirmed the funds have reached their account they will release the funds. Please ensure that you quote the invoice number when paying in any manner.

If you require this leaflet in a large print format, please contact us. Our details are below.

Tel: 0808 172 0098 (free from within the UK)  
+44 20 7561 6820 from outside the UK

Email: [info@PrisonersAbroad.org.uk](mailto:info@PrisonersAbroad.org.uk)

Mail: Prisoners Abroad, 89-93 Fonthill Road, London  
N4 3JH, United Kingdom