

Questions on various aspects of diplomatic protocol

Can you give me information on the process that happens when a new diplomat enters the UK?

In accordance with Article 10 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (VCDR) the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is notified of the appointment of members of the mission; their arrival and their final departure or the termination of their functions within the mission. This notification would also include details of any person belonging to the family of the member of the mission and any private servants in the employment of them.

How are diplomatic premises identified to the relevant authorities? Are there any special signs? If so, what are they?

Under Section 1(1) of the Diplomatic and Consular Premises Act 1987, missions are required to seek the Foreign Secretary's consent for land to be regarded as diplomatic or consular premises. Once missions have identified suitable premises, they are required to write to the FCO seeking the consent of the Foreign Secretary for the premises to be used for mission purposes. The Foreign Secretary's permission is subject to missions obtaining any necessary planning permission from the local authority concerned. Once the Foreign Secretary's consent has been given, the relevant local authority is informed. There are no special signs used for the identification of diplomatic premises, although many, of course, display their national flags and other signs/plaques declaring the buildings purpose.

Are diplomats issued with any kind of identity card? If so, what do they say?

The FCO issues Diplomatic & Consular Agents/Admin & Technical/Service Staff/Honorary Consuls/Consular Officer & Employees with Diplomatic Identity Cards. They contain a photograph, the person's name, designation and mission at which they work. The reverse states that "*The holder of this card may be entitled to certain privileges and immunities in the United Kingdom under the Diplomatic Privileges Act 1964, the Consular Relations Act 1968 or the International Organisations Act 1968.* It is requested that any person finding this card should return it without delay to: *Protocol Division, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Old Admiralty Building, London, SW1A 2PA.*" A telephone number is also given in order that UK authorities can verify the exact status of the holder of the card.

Apart from diplomatic number plates, do diplomatic cars have any other markings or permits or special tax discs, etc on them?

Heads of Diplomatic Missions, together with the members of the diplomatic and administrative and technical staff of missions, are exempt from payment of motor car road fund licence duty, and are not required to display a tax disc on their vehicles. Heads of Mission whose vehicles have "special" number plates (e.g. letters denoting their country) are encouraged to apply for an exempt licence disc to the Department of Transport. Diplomatic vehicles may sometimes also display a resident's parking permit.

How do the authorities know that an Ambassador’s flag car is a diplomatic vehicle when it doesn’t have a diplomatic number plate, but a vanity (or “cherished”) plate, that looks like a normal private plate?

Flag cars will usually, when being used by a Head of Mission, display the national flag of the country to which it belongs. However, all diplomatic numberplates are registered with the Vehicle Registration Office of the DVLA and authorities would be able to verify whether or not they were diplomatic by checking with them or the police.

Does a diplomat’s private residence have the same immunity as the Embassy?

Article 30 of the VCDR states that “*The private residence of a diplomatic agent shall enjoy the same inviolability and protection as the premises of the mission*”.

Is the inside of a diplomatic car treated as the sovereign territory of the country to whose Embassy it belongs to?

No. The concept of ‘extraterritoriality’, is the premises of a mission are the sovereign territory of the country, is a common misunderstanding. Whilst the premises of the mission/private residence of diplomatic agents and any property held are inviolable under Articles 22 and 30 of the VCDR, the territory itself is that of the country in which the premises/property is held.

Are diplomats allowed to keep firearms or keep them in the Embassy or their private residence or cars?

Article 41 of the VCDR states that persons enjoying privileges and immunities have a duty to “*respect the laws and regulations of the receiving State*”. In the United Kingdom all firearms require a firearm or shotgun certificate from the police in accordance with the Firearm Act 1968-88. All missions must comply with the requirements by obtaining Firearms Certificates in respect of any arms and ammunition.

If a country doesn’t have an Embassy, Consulate or Honorary Consulate in the UK, how would one of their citizens obtain any help they would need?

We are not able to comment on what assistance is available to those whose country does not have any representation in the United Kingdom. However, it is common practice for those countries who are not represented in any host country, to come to an arrangement with another country or Mission to look after their interests.

What countries currently do not have an Embassy, Consulate or Honorary Consulate in the UK?

This information is available on the FCO website

(<http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029396086>).

How would someone apply (or market themselves to a government) to become an Honorary Consul to a country without any diplomatic representation in the UK? What sort of qualifications and experience would they need?

We do not hold any information on the individual procedures that foreign missions undertake in order to recruit an Honorary Consul. However, any mission wishing to appoint an Honorary Consul would send a Note Verbale to Protocol Directorate requesting recognition of their candidate as Honorary Consul in whatever town or city

s/he will be based. The basic criteria for the appointment of Honorary Consuls are that they should be permanently resident in the UK, live a short distance from the seat of the Honorary Consulate and be of good character. The candidate's CV would accompany the Note. Protocol Directorate will then carry out the necessary background checks and seek agreement to the appointment from the local authorities that fall within the proposed consular district.

Do you have any historical information (and any copies of documents etc) of the old "CD" stickers that used to be used before the introduction of diplomatic plates?

Following a search of our paper and electronic records, I have established that we do not hold any information on this subject.