



Note No. A193/18

Protocol Directorate of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office presents its compliments to all diplomatic missions in the United Kingdom (UK) and has the honour to refer to the operation of official bank accounts.

The Directorate is aware that a number of diplomatic missions and consular posts occasionally encounter difficulties opening or maintaining official bank accounts in the UK. The Directorate understands that such decisions are based on a number of factors, including the costs, regulatory burden and reputational risks of operating such accounts, but which are commercial decisions for banks alone. Her Majesty's Government is unable to compel any financial institution in the UK to operate a bank account of any description, whether diplomatic or otherwise.

However, with a view to advising diplomatic missions as to "Best Practice" and to better understand the risk factors banks in the UK routinely consider for regulatory or commercial reasons, please refer to the attached practical guidance prepared by UK Finance. UK Finance represents nearly 300 of the leading companies providing finance, banking, markets and payments-related services in or from the UK. UK Finance was created by combining most of the activities of the Asset Based Finance Association, the British Bankers' Association, the Council of Mortgage Lenders, Financial Fraud Action UK, Payments UK and the UK Cards Association. Diplomatic missions and consular posts should aim to address these risk factors in their dealings with financial institutions in the UK. Ultimately all financial transactions passing through official bank accounts must relate to the maintenance and operation of the mission or consular post or to the performance of the mission's diplomatic or consular post's consular functions as representing States, compliant with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961 and the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations 1963.

In addition the Directorate is able to assist diplomatic missions and consular posts seeking banking services in the UK on a case-by-case basis by issuing a “letter of introduction”, confirming for banks the legal status of the mission, the location of the mission premises, and the name of the Head of Mission. Enquiries about such letters should be directed to Team Leaders in Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations Unit (DMIOU) within the Directorate.

Protocol Directorate of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office avails itself of this opportunity to renew to all diplomatic missions the assurances of its highest consideration.

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