



Note Verbale No. 231/23

Protocol Directorate of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) presents its compliments to all Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations in London and has the honour to remind them of the procedures for security arrangements for VIP visitors to the United Kingdom.

Arrival and departure arrangements are key elements of any inward VIP visit. Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations are requested to use the information in this Note Verbale to help plan the arrival and departure arrangements of their visitors.

It is important to note that the UK Government does not operate any of the airports in the UK. UK airports are commercial entities owned and operated by private companies. Therefore, Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations should always contact the relevant airport directly with questions about their services.

Recent VIP Visits Note Verbales

Please see below our latest Note Verbales issued to Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations, in relation to Inward VIP visits including:

- NV A198/23 - Booking Arrangements and Access to the Royal Suite at Heathrow
- NV A152/23 - Heathrow VIP Update, Diplomatic Rates Increase as of 01 June 2023
- NV A052/23 - UK Border Process at Heathrow
- NV A057/22 - Heathrow ID Centre / Authorised Signatories
- NV A108/22 - Heathrow VIP Update, Spelthorne Suite

Visas

It is the responsibility of the sending State to ensure that all persons travelling to the UK have a valid passport and, if required, the appropriate visa to enter the UK border.

UK Visa's and Immigration (UKVI) guidance on which countries nationals require a visa, if a visa is needed for transit and how to apply for a visa can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/check-uk-visa>

Some visa nationals including diplomats, Government Ministers on official business, specified International Organisation employees and Heads of State may be 'exempt' from UK immigration control and can apply for an 'Exempt Vignette' visa which is issued free of charge. Further details about who is eligible for exempt status can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/exempt-vignette>

Please note:

- those who hold an Exempt Vignette will still be examined at the UK border to determine their exempt status

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- an Exempt Vignette can help avoid delays when travelling to and entering the UK, but is not a requirement

Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA)

Those travelling to the UK or transiting through the UK who currently do not need a visa for short stays in the UK, or do not already have a UK immigration status prior to travelling, will soon need to get an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA). This will primarily impact short term non-visa national visitors.

This is a new requirement that gives permission to travel to the UK, and it is electronically linked to the traveller's passport. Those who are currently exempt from immigration control will not be required to obtain an ETA.

It will launch for Qatari nationals from 25 October 2023 and from 1 February 2024, the scheme will be introduced for nationals of Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. The scheme will be rolled out to other non-visa national countries such as the member states of the EU, the USA, Canada etc. throughout the remainder of 2024, exact timings will be confirmed shortly. Further details of the scheme can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/electronic-travel-authorisation-eta>

Mission Enquiries

UKVI has a team that can liaise with Missions about visa enquiries for inward visitors and staff connected to the Mission. The team can be contacted at:

UKVIembassyteam@homeoffice.gov.uk

Immigration

All foreign visitors, regardless of their position, undergo some level of immigration check on arrival into the UK.

For all types of visit including landside transit (see below for more details), Missions are requested to complete an **Advanced Passenger Information (API) form**, attached as **Annex A – API Form** to this Note Verbale, detailing all passengers in the delegation, including the Lead VIP.

The completed API should be emailed to the FCDO Protocol VIP Visits Team:

VIParrivals.departures@fcdo.gov.uk

The FCDO Protocol VIP Visits Team will forward the completed API to UK Border Force so they and the arrival airport/ port are aware of the visit in advance. This should minimise the risk of there being issues at immigration on arrival.

Please Note:

- that submitting an API form does not entitle the VIP and accompanying delegation to fast-track the immigration queue
- there are no diplomatic lanes at UK airports/ ports
- medical lanes are not for VIP use to fast track through the airports
- authorities are unable to support Mission requests to fast track VIPs through the airport in any circumstance

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For FCDO-designated State Visits and Guest of Government Visits only, the Lead VIP plus a small accompanying delegation can be exempt from normal immigration control. This policy is owned by UK Border Force who have the final decision on implementation. The immigration process will be discussed as part of the pre-planning meetings between the Mission and the FCDO.

For all other types of visits, normal immigration procedures will apply.

The immigration process for private flights may differ from the immigration process of commercial flights. Therefore, it is recommended that Missions discuss the immigration process with the FCDO Protocol VIP Visits Team and the UK flight handler, also known as Fixed Based Operator (FBO) that they are using.

Entry Guidance

The UK Government website www.gov.uk has helpful guidance for:

- Entry:
<https://www.gov.uk/uk-border-control/before-you-leave-for-the-uk>
<https://www.gov.uk/uk-border-control/at-border-control>
- Transit:
<https://www.gov.uk/uk-border-control/layovers-and-transiting>
- CTA (Common travel Area: Ireland, Channel Islands, Isle of Man):
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travelling-between-the-uk-and-ireland-isle-of-man-guernsey-or-jersey>

Airport Transits

There are 2 types of transit through a UK airport while on the way to another country:

- *'airside'* - you do not pass through UK border control before you leave on your connecting journey.
- *'landside'* - you do pass through UK border control, but come back through it and leave the UK within a short amount of time (usually 24 hours).

You may need a visa to transit the UK. The visa you need depends on whether you are going through UK border control when you arrive in the UK. Your airline can tell you if you will go through border control. Further information can be found: <https://www.gov.uk/transit-visa>

If changing flights in the UK and not going through UK border control, a *Direct Airside Transit visa* is required <https://www.gov.uk/transit-visa/direct-airside-transit-visa>

If going through UK border control but leaving the UK within 48 hours via a different flight or airport or checking in luggage for a connecting flight, a *Visitor in Transit visa* is required <https://www.gov.uk/transit-visa/visitor-in-transit-visa>

Everyone who boards an aircraft departing from a UK airport has to be security screened to UK government standards.

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Even if a passenger has already been through security checks at another airport, there is an obligation to conduct another screening before departing the UK.

Please see the *Exemption from Security Screening on Departure from UK Airports & Ports* section for guidance on how to request exemption from security screening for those eligible.

Facilitation through Immigration at UK Airports & Ports

It is with regret that the FCDO cannot arrange facilitation of VIPs and their delegations through immigration on their arrival.

If a Mission requires facilitation for their VIPs through immigration, it is recommended that a VIP suite or other service at the airport/ port is used (where available). Missions are responsible for the cost of any of these services. Not all airports provide facilitation services, or these services may only be available for qualifying passengers.

The FCDO Protocol VIP Visits Team recommend that Missions contact the relevant airport or view their website, for further information about what facilitation services an airport/ port offers, and their associated costs/ eligibility requirements.

VIP Suites at UK Airports

VIP suites at airports/ ports provide a quick, private and efficient way for VIPs and their accompanying delegations to arrive and depart the UK. Staff at the VIP suites are experienced in handling high-level visitors, including royal families, heads of state, heads of government, and senior ministers. The FCDO Protocol VIP Arrivals and Departures Team recommends that where possible, Missions book and pay for VIP suites to ensure their VIP visitors' arrivals and departures operate smoothly and are handled efficiently.

The VIP suite services available at each airport/ port can vary. Some airports/ ports have no VIP facilities and therefore VIPs and their accompanying delegations will be required to use the normal arrival and departure channels. Protocol Directorate advise that Missions contact the relevant airport directly or view their website for further information about what VIP Suite facilities an airport/ port offers, and their associated costs.

As the most used and requested service, further information in regards to Heathrow is attached as **Annex D - Heathrow VIP Service** to this Note Verbale.

Further guidance is provided on VIP facilitation at other UK Airports and Ports on the VIP Visits pages of the Protocol Missions website: <https://protocol.fcdo.gov.uk/about/protocol-directorate/vip-arrivals-and-departures-ad/vip-suites-and-fast-track-immigration-at-uk-airports-and-ports/>

Costs

The FCDO only covers the costs of VIP suite services for FCDO-designated State Visits and Guest of Government visits. Missions are responsible for the cost of VIP facilities for all other categories of visit including transits, with the exception of the first arrival and final departure of their Head of Mission (HOM) where applicable.

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Head of Mission's First Arrival and Final Departure

The FCDO has agreements with Heathrow and Gatwick in regards to the first arrival and final departure of their Head of Mission. Please see the guidance attached as **Annex C – First Arrival and Final Departure of Head of Mission** to this Note Verbale.

Further guidance is provided on the VIP Visits pages of the Protocol Missions website: <https://protocol.fcdo.gov.uk/about/protocol-directorate/vip-arrivals-and-departures-ad/first-arrival-final-departure-of-a-head-of-mission-hom/>

Private Flights and VIP Suites

The cost of using a VIP suite for private flights is included in the aircraft handling fees.

HMG hosted Events

For HMG hosted events, it is not guaranteed that the FCDO will provide the invited VIPs with arrival & departure arrangements (complimentary VIP suites / FCDO Special Representatives) at airports/ ports, and such arrangements may vary from event to event.

Missions will be informed via the '*Administration Note*', of any FCDO provided arrival & departure arrangements for the specific HMG hosted event.

Exemption from Security Screening on Departure from UK Airports & Ports

UK Government policy is that all departing passengers must be security screened prior to entry to an airport's airside area. However by exception, there are a very small number of cases in which exemption from security screening may be requested, reflecting royal or diplomatic protocol. Anyone not falling within the category of persons eligible to seek an exemption from security screening (established and maintained by the Department for Transport), will need to submit themselves for security screening at the airport/ port prior to departure from the UK.

Security Screening and Sensitivity

Airport security staff have been trained to handle sensitive issues around surgery, mobility and disability and will treat passengers respectfully when they are security screened.

Further information on your rights at a UK airport relating to security searches (which includes hand searches, body scans and private searches), essential medical supplies, airport services for disabled people and mobility aids can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/airport-rights>

Exemption Requests

All exemption requests should be directed through the relevant airport/ port. Exemption requests are also required for eligible passengers transiting UK airports. The airport will check whether the applicant falls within the exemption eligibility category and authorise or decline the application as appropriate. It is important to note that even where a person is eligible to seek an exemption from security screening, the airport/ port of departure may respectfully decline the request for operational or other reasons.

For private flights only, Missions should discuss security screening requirements with the UK handling agent/ FBO they are using.

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Some airlines have additional security screening requirements. These enhanced security measures are sometimes dictated by the country the airline is flying to. Missions should contact the relevant airline directly for more information.

Please note:

- that airports/ ports require a minimum of 24 hours' notice to process exemption requests
- it may not be possible to process requests received at short notice
- if an exemption request is declined, the FCDO cannot override the airport/ ports decision

Exemption requests for commercial flights at UK airports and for Eurostar should be sent by Missions directly to the relevant e-mail address below:

Heathrow Airport:	VipDutyManagers@heathrow.com
Gatwick Airport:	SDM@gatwickairport.com
London City:	securityoperationsmanager@londoncityairport.com
London Luton:	LTNSecurityDutyManager@ltn.aero
RAF Northolt:	NOR-VIPProtocol-MovPlans@mod.gov.uk
Eurostar (St Pancras):	VIP.Services@eurostar.com
Manchester Airport:	tdm@manairport.co.uk
Edinburgh Airport:	securitycompliance@edinburghairport.com
Birmingham Airport:	SDMs@birminghamairport.co.uk SecMan@birminghamairport.co.uk

Private Flights

Airports to consider using when arranging private flights are: RAF Northolt, London Stansted, Farnborough, London Luton, London Gatwick and Biggin Hill. There are also many other airports within the UK that are not listed here. Please contact the FCDO Protocol VIP Visits Team for advice.

There are many flight handling agents/ FBOs in the UK that can handle private flights. Some handling agents have restrictions, including opening times and the size of aircraft they can handle.

Missions should contact a handling agent/ FBO directly to find out more about their services.

Before approaching a handling agent/ FBO, the FCDO Protocol VIP Visits Team recommend that Missions first check that their nominated country handling agent does not have any pre-existing agreements or contracts with a particular UK handling agent, as this may dictate the airport/ UK handling agent used.

Please note:

- the FCDO does not cover the costs of any handling fees associated with the arrival or departure of a private flight in any circumstance

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Arrival and Departure Slots

Arrival and departure slot timings for private aircraft should be requested and confirmed by a Mission's nominated country handling agent in conjunction with the chosen UK handling agent/ FBO.

Due to limited capacity, particularly at London Heathrow airport, a Mission's preferred slot may be difficult to obtain. Therefore, if the arrival and/ or departure slots a Mission require are not available, they will either need to accept an alternative available slot or consider using a different airport.

For FCDO designated State Visits and Guest of Government visits only, the FCDO Protocol VIP Arrivals and Departures Team may be able to help Diplomatic Missions secure their preferred slots.

Diplomatic Flight Clearance (DFC)

Diplomatic or Overflight clearance is required for official flights using state registered aircraft (i.e. those used in Military, Customs and Police Services), which intend landing in/ or overfly the UK, and it's Crown Dependencies, Overseas Territories or overseas military bases. This is not applicable for repatriation related flights.

Clearance should be arranged with the Ministry of Defence by completing a **Diplomatic Flight Clearance form** attached as **Annex B – DFC Request Form UK** and sending via e-mail to the Ministry of Defence team:

Working hours:

E-mail to: SPOCTandUK-DipFlightClearance@mod.gov.uk

Tel: 0300 156 3962 (in extreme circumstances only)

Only to be used Outside working hours 1800-0700, Weekends and Bank Holidays:

Tel: 0306 788 8938

E-mail to: DCMC-DCDSDO-Office@mod.gov.uk

Please note:

- that diplomatic flight clearance does not grant private aircraft permission to land/use an airport – this must be arranged separately with the airports themselves
- only the airport / UK flight handler can grant permission to land at an airport
- airports issue PPR numbers which are needed for landing – the DFC form is not a PPR request

All enquiries should be directed to the Diplomatic Flight Clearance Officer at the Ministry of Defence.

Airside Access and IDs at UK Airports

An Airside ID usually allows the following airside access at UK airports:

- 1 – Internal area of CPSRA (departure lounges, piers and interiors of other buildings)
- 2 – Baggage Reclaim Halls
- 4 – The Ramp
- 5 – Aircraft and Their Footprints

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Missions Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of Missions to:

- ensure that they have arranged airport Airside ID accounts for their Mission staff
- have nominated an Authorised Signatory to manage the online airside ID Mission account and that they have undertaken relevant training
- that if an Authorised Signatory is leaving their post/ position, that the ID Centre is notified at the earliest and a replacement Authorised Signatory nominated in good time to ensure no issues with airside ID management between signatories
- ensure that airside IDs are fully operational and valid at all times
- have applied for airside full/ temporary IDs in good time
- establish those Mission staff that have a need to hold an ID for regular airside access, and within FCDO quota limits
- make certain that all mission airside ID holders are aware of their responsibilities when airside at an airport and have undertaken any relevant training

Mission Accounts for Managing Airside IDs

Paper airport airside ID applications are no longer accepted by most airports. Instead, Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations are required to have an online account (via ID Gateway or Airport Gateway) with the relevant ID centre through which airport airside full or temporary ID applications should be submitted.

The Mission should also nominate a dedicated administrator (known as an '*authorised signatory*') for the airports online ID application system. Most airports have their own ID Gateway system, so multiple ID Gateway online accounts may be required by a Mission.

In order for your Mission to set up a Missions online account, please contact the relevant airport ID Centre.

Private Flights and Airside Access

For private flights, Missions should liaise with the UK handling agent/ FBO they are using to arrange airside access for their vehicles and staff (where possible).

Full & Temporary Airside IDs

UK airports are responsible for issuing airside '*full*' or '*temporary*' identification cards (IDs) to those wishing to enter their airside area, not the FCDO. Missions should contact the relevant airport's ID centre directly with any queries or to apply for a full or temporary ID.

Both diplomatic and locally engaged (UK resident) staff can apply for Airside IDs, however the application process and level of information required differs between the two types of application, due to a diplomat's privileges and immunities, which locally engaged Mission staff do not have.

Missions should contact the relevant airport's ID centre directly with any queries on applying for a full or temporary ID.

Costs of Full and Temporary IDs

The applicable airport may have costs relating to the application of full, temporary airside IDs, lost, stolen and/ or the non-return of expired and cancelled IDs. Please contact the Airport ID Centre for details.

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Costs are payable by the Mission and the FCDO does not cover, and cannot waiver, any of these charges.

Returning Expired IDs or IDs That Are No Longer Required

Airport airside full or temporary IDs which are expired/ no longer required should be returned directly to the ID centre which issued the card.

Missions are requested not to return IDs to the FCDO.

Airside ID Holder Responsibilities

- Holders of an airport Airside full/ temporary ID must carry the same personal identity document they used when applying for the full/ temporary Airside ID
- Temporary ID holders must be escorted at all times by someone from the Mission holding a full airport airside ID
- Each airport will have their own ID Holder Responsibility guidance, which can be obtained by the relevant airport ID Centre

Airport Airside ID Centres

For advice on how to apply for an airport Airside ID account, please contact the relevant Airport ID Centre. Contact details and further information below.

Heathrow Airport ID Centre:

Tel: 020 8757 0990

E-mail to: idgetresurgery@heathrow.com

<https://www.heathrow.com/company/partners-and-suppliers/id-centre>

Gatwick Airport ID Centre:

Tel: 01293 503636

E-mail to: idgetre@gatwickairport.com

<https://business.gatwickairport.com/b2b/id-centre/>

Stansted Airport ID Centre:

Tel: 01279 66 2500

<https://www.stanstedairport.com/about-us/business/id-centre/>

London Luton Airport ID Centre:

Tel: 01582 395 310

E-mail to: idunt@ltn.aero

<https://www.london-luton.co.uk/corporate/all-about-official-lla-passes/tell-me-everything>

Edinburgh Airport ID Centre:

Tel: 0131 344 3292

E-mail to: idgetre@edinburghairport.com

<https://www.edinburghairport.com/about-us/doing-business-with-us/id-centre>

Birmingham Airport ID Centre:

Tel: 0121 767 7168

E-mail to: IDCentre.Administration@birminghamairport.co.uk

idgetregeneralcomms@birminghamairport.co.uk

<https://www.birminghamairport.co.uk/id-declarations/>

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Manchester Airport ID Centre:

Tel: 0161 489 3545

E-mail to: security.pass.office@manairport.co.uk
idccompanyteam@manairport.co.uk

<https://www.manchesterairport.co.uk/help/pass-office/security-id-centre-documents/>

Airside ID Quotas at Heathrow

A system has been established between Heathrow and the FCDO that manages the ID quotas for each Diplomatic Mission and International Organisation.

Each Mission has an adequate number of passes up to a maximum of 12 for their diplomatic and locally engaged (UK resident) staff.

[NV A226-17 Heathrow airport ID passes](#)

[NV A227-17 Requirement to register with Heathrow Airport IDGateway.doc](#)

Authorised Signatories

It is recommended that a Mission appoints two (2) Authorised Signatories at any one time. Authorised Signatories are required to undergo appropriate training, and have an important role in managing their Missions Airside IDs and ensuring that they are always operational and valid.

Authorised Signatories and Airside ID holders must comply with the airports terms and conditions of use at all times. Should an Authorised Signatory or ID holder breach these Terms and Conditions, the airport may revoke their Authorised Signatory access, deactivate a Missions ID account or permanently disable a full Airside ID.

An Authorised Signatory must not share their personal account details with anyone else.

Heathrow Authorised Signatory Guidance: [NV A057/22](#)

ID Validity and Parking

The Authorised Signatory need to ensure that Mission staff Airside IDs are fully operational and valid at all times, to avoid issue at time of use.

Airside ID passes become 'parked' (temporarily suspended) if they are not used for **60 days**. This is a security requirement of the airport. Passes can be 'unparked' by the Authorised Signatory of the Diplomatic Mission or International Organisation and can take up to 3 working days.

Unparking of an ID is unable to be requested at the airport / on the day of required use.

Further guidance is available from the Airport ID Centre.

Protocol Missions Website

The [Protocol Missions website](#) has a section dedicated to VIP Arrival and Departures, which is updated regularly and has the latest A&D NVs listed. Protocol Directorate encourage Missions to use this website as it may help to answer a question you may have.

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Contacting the VIP Visits Team

If you have a question that is not covered by the information in this section or you are seeking clarification, please email the Protocol VIP Visits Team:

VIParrivals.departures@fcdo.gov.uk

Protocol Directorate of the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office avails itself of this opportunity to renew to all Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations the assurances of its highest consideration.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH & DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

13 September 2023

