

Importing Goods into the UK – A Step by Step Guide (Sea Freight)

The steps listed below are to be used as a guideline only

1. NOTICE OF ARRIVAL

When any goods are ready to be shipped via Sea Freight, a Bill of Lading (B/L) is raised for each shipment, either by the shipper or the agent working on behalf of the shipper. The number on the B/L acts as the tracking number for the shipping line. Depending upon whether it is a FCL or LCL shipment, will determine who will send you the Notice of Arrival, once the goods arrive. The Notice of Arrival is a document that lists all the details surrounding the arrival of your goods into the UK, such as:

- The vessel the goods are arriving on
- Estimated date of arrival
- Port of arrival
- Total pieces and weights, etc

Once you have received this Notice of Arrival you can then instruct an agent to Customs clear your goods.

2. INSTRUCTING AN AGENT TO ACT ON YOUR BEHALF, TO CUSTOMS CLEAR YOUR GOODS

Once you have found an agent who can Customs clear either at the Port of Arrival (FCL) or E.R.T.S./Bonded Warehouse (LCL), then you need to provide them with all the information they will need to Customs clear your shipment. What is required? See our PDFs on the 'Clearance' page, which lists:

- i) all the relevant paperwork that will be required
- ii) an example of an instruction sheet, which explains who you are, what you're importing in to the UK, and why (your clearing agent will advise you if you need to complete any other Customs forms).

3. THE CUSTOMS ENTRY

As soon as you have given all the necessary paperwork to your preferred Clearing Agent, they will then complete either a Customs Form C88 – full entry or a Form C21 – simplified entry, whichever is applicable, and submit that and your paperwork to Customs, to apply for release of your goods. Once Customs are happy, and any Import Duty and/or VAT have been paid, your goods will be released.

4. POSSIBLE DELAYS

At any point between the arrival of your goods, to them being collected or delivered, your shipment may be x-rayed or examined by Customs or another government body e.g. DEFRA, Port Health, etc. The selection may be based on the contents of your goods, or just randomly selected by a computer. Not only would this delay the release of your goods, you may be charged, via your Clearing Agent, for this.

5. ONCE GOODS HAVE BEEN CUSTOMS CLEARED

Once you have been advised that your goods have cleared Customs, you MUST check with either the shipping line (FCL) or co-loader/E.R.T.S. (LCL) to ensure all outstanding monies have been paid (including any rent or storage), prior to arranging collection or delivery by yourselves or a nominated haulier.