

ANYTHING TO DECLARE, SIR?

Customs officers are to be given etiquette lessons as part of a new traveller's charter, it was reported last week. Gillian Shephard, the Minister responsible for Customs & Excise, claimed that the charter will set standards of service and behaviour for Customs which will include, among other things, a maximum of a ten minute wait in the red channel without a full explanation for the delay.

In future, travellers will not be kept in the dark about their rights. For example, they already have the right to compensation if their property is damaged by officials, but most are not aware of the complaints procedure. A special leaflet advising disgruntled travellers how to complain is to be issued. Customs officers will also wear name badges, an attempt to do away with the faceless bureaucrat image. On the surface this sounds good news for travellers, but haven't we heard it all somewhere before?

Duty-Free Limit To Be Raised?

While travellers will appreciate these attempts to give the Customs & Excise folk a friendlier face, something they will undoubtedly appreciate a great deal more is the British government's attempt to substantially raise the duty free limit. The current limit for goods brought into the country from non-EEC countries is £32, a figure that has not been increased significantly for over 20 years! Customs officials themselves are said to be in favour of the limit being raised to at least £250 to bring it more into line with the £420 European duty limit.