

## A.C.D

### Training Courses for the Spouses

#### Madrid Diplomatic School

Following the lines of the EUFASA conferences, in 2003 the Spanish Spouses Association took the initiative of presenting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation with a specific plan for training courses for spouses, with two aims: one of facilitating greater adaptation to the new destination, and the other of providing solid support for their work outside the country, both contributing to an improvement in the quality of life of the whole family.

This programme has been developing over the last six years, with the invaluable help of the Madrid Diplomatic School, in whose classrooms it takes place. It offers spouses the following courses:

1. First, throughout the entire academic year, from September to June, language classes of two hours per week are given by native English, French and German teachers from the School.
2. The Diplomatic School also offers **three scholarships** for members of the Association with degrees to participate in a **Master's in Protocol**, in collaboration with the University of Oviedo. They receive the title of University Specialist in State and National Protocol and Ceremony. Several members have already graduated with this qualification.
3. Thirdly, we also have the possibility of using the Diplomatic School's extensive Library and its Computer Laboratory to carry out specific research, of attendance at the Conferences and Book Presentations that are held throughout the year, and participation in courses on themes of special interest to diplomats' spouses, such as: International Cooperation, NGOs, Human Resources, Protocol, Electoral observers, etc.
4. And above all we are able to collaborate in a week of training and preparation for spouses of civil servants, focused on their new destination abroad. This seminar is normally held in the School itself in May, once the country of destination has been announced.

Initially, our aim was to develop a comprehensive programme which would provide a preliminary approach to a series of themes covering legal, administrative, organizational, medical, protocol aspects, as well as (presenting) the different organs and channels of the Ministry, or of the relevant Embassy or Consulate.

However after some years' experience, and especially after listening to the comments of the participants each year, we have reconsidered that plan and restructured the programme to cover areas of real current interest.

Spouses of civil servants from the Foreign Service of several Ministries attend this course. Those from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation are usually young people who want, above all, practical information about what they can expect to find in their new destination. The official technical report from the Ministry does not cover these personal aspects that they are looking for. For this reason, we decided to offer information on the following themes:

- **Institutional Themes:** The organisation of the Spanish State ( The Constitution, the Constitutional Court and the State of the Autonomous Regions)
- **Legal and Administrative Matters:** Effects on the family of Diplomatic Status. The working spouse and bilateral agreements.
- **Security:** Protective and safety measures for the family in conflictive countries. Behaviour in situations of high stress. Particular emphasis is placed on current problems areas, with instruction in habits aimed at protecting the family unit (i.e. the spouse, the children and the household staff).
- **Practical Protocol:** This course was originally organised by the Head of the Protocol Section of the Foreign Affairs Department, but we realised that our students were already well informed about State Protocol, official visits, etc. What they really wanted was information about the basic norms of protocol, almost daily life, since customs can vary greatly from country to country. They therefore needed confidence in themselves, and to be able to ask questions that they would never ask an official. So we decided to offer a session given by a member of our Spouses Association with

experience in many different countries, since they had asked for personal anecdotes and advice.

- **Education:** Clearly this is a very important chapter for those with school-age children. We have always striven to provide the most up to date information on the ratification and homologation of degrees and qualifications, and now, above all, to explain the Bologna Process. This course is given by experts from the Spanish Ministry of Education.
- **Health:** This course always creates enormous interest, and each year we add new themes.

The first part usually deals with advice about health in foreign travel, information about official medical centres, hospitals and vaccinations, as well as epidemics, maps of diseases, risk areas, etc.. This part of the course is given by the Medical Section of the Ministry, and there are plans for a possible future course on First Aid.

The second part focuses more on the psychological problems of adaptation to the new post. Each year a Doctor in psychiatry, who has been working with us since 2002, instructs us in new techniques for approaching this new life. She talks of change as an opportunity for the whole family, of the personality and self-knowledge, of conflict management: advice on how to avoid stress, and the importance of resilience. These are very practical and dynamic sessions, which the students participate in actively.

- **Interculturality:** this year we want to include some data on interculturality, to explain what it means for the family unit to live in a civilisation that is totally different, above all in terms of values and customs. This is a new theme that we have been asked for precisely because of the growing interest in it.
5. Once the functionary and the family know their country of destination (mid April), the couple can attend intensive language classes, once again in the Diplomatic School, for two months, until they take up their post. There is always English and French, and in addition, German, Portuguese, Arabic or Chinese, depending on the country they are posted to.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Director of the Diplomatic School and all the teaching staff for the invaluable help offered to the Spouses Association, supporting whatever reasonable initiative which we propose to them.

They are well aware of the difficulties the spouses experience on their return to Madrid, or when they are beginning to prepare their future and that of their families from Madrid. For that reason the knowledge that the doors of the School are always open for us is an enormous physical and moral support.

For the Association, the Training Courses for Spouses have always been an important theme that we will continue to support and foster. And because of that we will not cease to look for solutions in order to reconcile the professional and family lives of our spouses.

There are still many steps to be taken, such as training courses for foreign wives, bilateral agreements for the spouses to be able to work, the recognition of the spouse's work, the promotion of their work in the Foreign Service Administration and even the acceptance of the right to a pension for the years when the spouse could not continue to pay contributions to the Social Security because of the fact of accompanying the civil servant.

As you see, we are going to carry on working hard, and the fact of being able to take part in a Forum such as this one organised by the EUFASA offers us many possibilities for finding new channels for our problems, which can only be beneficial to the greater efficiency of the Spanish Foreign Service.

Thank you.