



Home Office

# Confirming ID: countersignatory and digital referees

Version 1.0

Her Majesty's Passport Office guidance about who can confirm a customer's identity and how they do this.

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# About: Confirming ID: countersignatory and digital referees

This guidance tells Her Majesty's Passport Office staff:

- about the purpose of a person who confirms a customer identity
- about the criteria to be a person, who confirms a customer's identity,
- when staff may use discretion (when examining a person who confirms a customer identity)

## Contacts

If you have any questions about the guidance and your line manager or senior caseworker cannot help you or you think that the guidance has factual errors then email Guidance & Quality, Operating Standards.

If you notice any formatting errors in this guidance (broken links, spelling mistakes and so on) or have any comments about the layout or navigability of the guidance then you can email Guidance & Quality, Operating Standards.

## Publication

Below is information on when this version of the guidance was published:

- version **1.0**
- published for Home Office staff on **29 June 2021**

## Changes from last version of this guidance

This document forms part of HM Passport Office's guidance transformation. The content has been taken from the Digital referee and Countersignatures guidance, which have been split between this guidance and Countersignatory: how to examine and Digital referee: how to examine.

### Related content

[Contents](#)

# Why we need a countersignatory or digital referee

This page tells Her Majesty's Passport Office staff, why we have a person to confirm a customer's identity when they apply for a British passport and when we need a person to confirm a customer's identity.

A person who confirms a customer's identity and countersigns their passport application, are an important part of the passport application process. That person is called a:

- countersignatory, if they completed a paper SE04 or OS application form
- digital referee, if they use the Digital Customer Service (DCS) channel

We ask them to confirm the customer's photo is a true likeness and corroborate (countersign) their personal details on the passport application. A person who countersigns a customer's passport application helps us to:

- confirm a customer's identity
- confirm that the information given by the customer is true (to the best of their knowledge)
- maintain the integrity of the British passport
- safeguard (protect) vulnerable customers

To help us identify and prevent fraud we will complete standard identity checks to:

- check the identity of the person confirming a customer's identity
- confirm the identity of the customer

## When we need a countersignatory

If a customer is applying for a British passport using a paper SE04 or OS application form, we ask them to provide a countersignatory, when they:

- apply for their first adult passport
- replace their adult passport that has been damaged, lost or stolen
- renew their adult passport and their appearance has changed or we cannot recognise them from their current passport
- apply for a child's first passport
- renew a child passport (for children under the age of 11)
- replace a child passport that has been damaged, lost or stolen
- renew a child passport (for children aged 12 to 15) if their appearance has changed or we cannot recognise them from their current passport

## When we need a digital referee

The Digital Customer Service (DCS) channel tells a customer when they apply if they must provide us with a digital referee to confirm their identity (see: Digital Customer Service guidance).

A customer knows if they need a digital referee because, DCS will:

- ask them to select one (to confirm their identity)
- tell them who can be a digital referee

If a digital referee is provided, you (the examiner) must examine them even if you feel you can identify the customer from the old passport.

### Related content

[Contents](#)

# Who can confirm a customer's identity

This page tells Her Majesty's Passport Office staff about the criteria to be a person who can confirm a customer's identity.

A countersignatory or digital referee (the person confirming a customer's identity), must be a person of 'good standing' in the community and someone who:

- has personally known the customer for at least 2 years
- works in a [recognised profession](#) (or who has retired from one)
- will lose something, if they falsely countersign an application (for example, it will have a negative impact on their life if they made a false declaration)
- has a passport we can use to check their identity.

## Countersignatory: who can confirm an identity

Countersignatories who sign (to confirm a customer's identity using a paper SE04 or OS application form):

- a UK application must live in the UK and hold an uncancelled British or current Irish passport
- an overseas application must hold (in order of preference):
  - an uncancelled British passport
  - a current Irish passport
  - a current European Union passport
  - a current United States passport
  - a current Commonwealth passport

## Digital referee: who can confirm an identity online

Digital referees can confirm a customer's identity on a Digital Customers Services (DCS) application online, if they:

- are 18 years old or over
- live in the UK (for UK or overseas applications)
- live outside of the UK (overseas applications only)
- have an unexpired
  - British passport that is on Main Index (UK applications)
  - British (that is on Main Index), [Irish, European Union, United States or Commonwealth passport](#) (overseas applications only)
- can pass our [automatic identity checks](#) (if completed)

If the digital referee cannot complete the online process, we will tell the customer to ask someone else to:

1. Complete the online process.

2. Fill the 1-page countersignatory form, if they cannot find someone suitable to complete the online process

## Automatic identity checks

If a digital referee completes the DCS application online, they agree for us to run automatic identity checks on the information they give.

## Digital referee: who can confirm an identity offline

A customer can provide a digital referee 'offline', using a 1-page (paper) countersignatory form, if their digital referee:

- does not meet the [online criteria](#)
- lives in the UK (for UK or overseas application)
- lives outside of the UK (overseas applications only)
- has a current:
  - British or Irish passport (UK applications)
  - British, [Irish, European Union, United States or Commonwealth passport](#) (overseas applications only)
- cannot pass our [automatic identity checks](#)

## Countersignatory or digital referee: recognised professions

A countersignatory or digital referee must be in (or retired from) a recognised profession. This list is an example of recognised professions. It is not a complete list, and any alternatives a customer provides must be considered:

- accountant
- airline pilot
- articulated clerk of a limited company
- assurance agent of a recognised company
- bank or building society official
- barrister
- chairman or director of a [limited company](#)
- chiropodist
- commissioner of oaths
- councillor (for example a local or county councillor)
- civil servant
- dentist
- director, manager or personnel officer of a [vat registered company](#)
- doctor
- driving instructor (must be listed on the [register of Approved Driving Instructors](#))
- engineer (with professional qualifications)
- fire service official
- funeral director

- financial services intermediary
- insurance agent (full time) of a recognised company
- journalist
- justice of the peace
- legal secretary (fellow or associate members of the Institute of Legal Secretaries and PAs)
- licensee of a public house
- local government officer
- manager or personnel officer of a [limited company](#)
- Merchant Navy officer
- minister of a recognised religion (including Christian Science)
- MP's
- nurse, registered mental health nurse (RMN) or registered general nurse (RGN)
- officers of the armed services
- optician
- paralegal (certified paralegals, qualified paralegal and associate members of the institute of paralegals)
- person with honours (for example, an OBE or MBE)
- photographer (professional)
- police officer
- post office official
- president or secretary of a recognised organisation
- Salvation Army officer
- social worker
- solicitor
- surveyor
- teacher or lecturer
- trade union official
- travel agent (must hold a professional travel agent qualification)
- valuers and auctioneers (fellow and associate members of the incorporated society)
- warrant officers and chief petty officers

## Who cannot be accepted to confirm a customer's identity

A person cannot confirm a customer's identity if they are:

- living at the same address
- a relative or where it's clear they are in a relationship or partnership similar to marriage (for example, in laws, cousins, step-parents or partners)
- a doctor, unless they know the customer well (for example, they are a good friend) and can recognise them easily from their photo
- an overseas agent helping the customer with their application (for example, a solicitor or commissioner of oaths)
- holders of an expired non-British passport
- [HM Passport Office staff](#)

- [UK Visas and Immigration staff](#), dealing with applications for British citizenship or right of abode in the UK
- [a civil servant](#), providing a service on behalf of HM Passport Office
- [Sopra Steria Ltd. staff](#), providing a service on behalf of HM Passport Office

## Civil service staff confirming a customer's identity

Civil servants are a recognised profession to countersign an application. However, if a civil servant provides a service on behalf of HM Passport Office, they are not acceptable. For example, they are working as part of a surge team at the time of the customer's application.

You, the examiner, must refer an application to your operational team leader (OTL), if the customer's identity has been confirmed, by:

- HM Passport Office staff
- UK Visas and Immigration staff dealing with applications for British citizenship or right of abode in the UK
- someone who is providing a service on behalf of HM Passport Office, from:
  - HM Revenue and Customs
  - Local Service or Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (unless the application is from a prisoner held overseas and they have personal knowledge of the individual)
  - the Home Office, for example a member of the Passport or Nationality Policy team
  - UK Visas and Immigration

If any of the above are a countersignatory or digital referee on a British passport application, you, the OTL, must:

- speak to the member of staff's line manager to find out why they countersigned the application
- reject them as a countersignatory or digital referee, and ask the customer for a new one

If you are the OTL dealing with the member of staff who has acted as a countersignatory or digital referee on a British passport application, you must:

- consider whether you need to follow disciplinary procedures in line with the HR personal conduct guidance (for example, if they have been told before they must not countersign)

If you suspect fraud, you must refer the member of staff to the HO Security Central Referrals team who will refer them to the Professional Standards Unit (PSU).

## Supplier staff confirming a customer's identity

If a person works for our supplier, Sopra Steria Ltd. and provide a service on behalf of HM Passport Office, they are not acceptable. For example, they are working as

part of the Document Management Service (DMS) at the time of the customer's application.

If they have confirmed a customer's identity, you, the examiner, must reject them as a countersignatory or digital referee, and ask the customer for a new one

You may accept a person who works for a partner organisation (for example Post Office and Royal Mail) if they meet the criteria to countersign an application. This is because they are not:

- able to influence the outcome of an application
- are not at the same risk of being sought out by criminals

### **Related content**

[Contents](#)

# How a person confirms a customer's identity

This section tells Her Majesty's Passport Office staff, how a person confirms a customer's identity when they are applying for a British passport.

A person who meets the [criteria to confirm a customer's identity](#) can countersign the customer's application (for example, length of time they have known the customer).

## Confirm an identity using a paper application form

A person confirming a customer identity using a paper SE04 or OS application form is called a countersignatory.

A countersignatory must be able to confirm the:

- customer's identity and photo is a true likeness, by [signing the back of 1 photo](#)
- information the customer gives on the application is true and correct, to the best of their knowledge

The person confirming a child's identity (for their application), must be able to confirm the:

- identity of the person making the application on the child's behalf
- identity of the child
- relationship between the person making the application and the child

If a third party makes an application on the customer's behalf, we ask the person confirming the customer's identity to confirm the:

- identity of the third party that is making the application
- identity of the person who the passport is for
- relationship between the third party and the customer

## How a countersignatory fills in an application

A countersignatory must complete section ten of the paper application form after the customer has completed all the other sections. We will ask the countersignatory to:

- give their full name, full address, profession and contact details
- give their current passport number
- give the years they have known the customer
- give the date they signed the application
- sign inside the box
- put their initials next to any mistakes they may make

## How a countersignatory confirms a customer's photo

The certification (signature) on the back of the photo must confirm the photo is a true likeness of the person named and match the name on the customer's application.

A countersignatory must sign 1 of the photos the customer sends with their application. On the back of the photo, the countersignatory must:

- write a statement to say: 'I certify that this is a true likeness of Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms or title [full name of customer]'
- sign and date it (under the statement)

For legal reasons, we must not accept 'true likeness' certifications on a separate piece of paper, even if it's attached to the back of a photo.

## Confirm an identity using the Digital Customer Service

A person confirming a customer identity using the Digital Customer Service (DCS) channel are called a digital referee.

We use 2 types of digital referees, these are online and offline digital referees. A digital referee can confirm a customer's application:

- online (digitally)
- offline (using a 1-page countersignatory paper form)

A digital referee must be able to confirm:

- a customer's identity
- an intended passport holder's identity (child and third party applications)
- that the questions they answer about the customer are true (to the best of their knowledge)

The questions we ask a digital referee, helps us to:

- confirm a customer's identity
- confirm an intended passport holder's identity (child and third party applications)
- prevent passport fraud
- maintain the integrity of the British passport
- safeguard (protect) vulnerable customers

You (the examiner) must examine the digital referee if there is one provided on the customer's application.

## Digital referee: confirming an adult's application

A digital referee on an adult application, must confirm the customer's identity by checking their:

- [photo \(for example, if it is a true likeness\)](#)
- [address](#)

## Digital referee: confirming a photo is a true likeness

If the digital referee completes the process online, DCS will show the digital referee a photo of the customer and ask them to confirm if it is a true likeness of the person named on the application. The digital referee will answer 'yes' or 'no', if they answer 'no', they must provide a reason why.

If the digital referee completes the process using the 1-page countersignatory form, they are asked to sign the declaration to confirm the photo is a true likeness of the customer.

There are 4 reasons why a digital referee may not be able to confirm if the photo is a true likeness:

1. They recognise the photo but not the customer's name.
2. They know a person by that name but cannot identify the customer from the photo.
3. They recognise the photo but know the customer by another name.
4. They do not know the customer's name and do not recognise their photo

## Digital referee: confirming a customer's address

If the digital referee completes the process online, DCS will show the digital referee the customer's address and ask them to confirm if it's correct. The digital referee will answer 'yes' or 'no', if they answer 'no', they must provide a reason why using the free text box.

If the digital referee completes the process using the 1-page countersignatory form, they are asked to sign the declaration to confirm the customer's address.

## Digital referee: confirming a child's application

The purpose of a digital referee on a child's application is to confirm details, about the:

- customer
- child
- relationship between the customer and the child
- child's link to the address on the application

DCS asks the digital referee to confirm:

- [the parents' details](#)
- [if a child's photo is a true likeness](#)
- [the customer's address \(and the child's link to it\)](#)
- [if the person making the child's application has the right authority](#)
- [the child's place of birth](#)

## Digital referee: confirming the parents' details

If the digital referee completes the process online, DCS will show the digital referee the details of the child's parents and ask them to confirm if they are correct. The digital referee will answer 'yes' or 'no', if they answer 'no', they must provide a reason why using the free text box.

If the digital referee completes the process offline, they confirm the parents' details:

- if they sign the declaration on the 1-page countersignatory form
- in their response to AMS letter 920
  - you (the examiner) must contact the digital referee if you have [no response to the additional questions](#) in AMS letter 920

There are 3 reasons why a digital referee may not be able to confirm the identity of the child's parents:

1. The referee has no knowledge of or are unable to confirm either parent.
2. One of the parent's details are missing.
3. The parents' details are incorrect (for example, their name).

## Digital referee: confirm a child's photo is a true likeness

If the digital referee completes the process online, DCS will show the digital referee a photo of the child and ask them to confirm if it's a true likeness of the person. The digital referee will answer 'yes' or 'no', if they answer 'no', they must provide a reason why using the free text box.

If the digital referee completes the process offline, they confirm the photo is a true likeness:

- if they sign the declaration on the 1-page countersignatory form
- in their response to AMS letter 920
  - you (the examiner) must contact the digital referee if you have [no response to the additional questions](#) in AMS letter 920

There are 4 reasons why a digital referee may not be able to confirm if a photo is a true likeness of a child. For example:

1. They recognise the photo but not the child's name.
2. They know a child by that name but cannot identify the child in the photo.
3. They recognise the photo but know the child by another name.

4. They do not know the name of the child and do not recognise the photo.

### Digital referees: confirming a child's address

If the digital referee completes the process online, DCS will show the digital referee the customer's address and ask them to confirm if it's correct and if the child is linked to it. The digital referee will answer 'yes' or 'no', if they answer 'no', they must provide a reason why using the free text box.

If the digital referee completes the process offline, they confirm the customer's address and the child's link to it:

- if they sign the declaration on the 1-page countersignatory form
- in their response to AMS letter 920
  - you (the examiner) must contact the digital referee if you have [no response to the additional questions](#) in AMS letter 920

### Digital referee: confirming a person applying for a child

If the digital referee completes the process online, DCS will show the digital referee the details of the person making the application for a child and will ask them to confirm if they are responsible for the child. The digital referee will answer 'yes' or 'no', if they answer 'no', they must provide a reason why using the free text box.

If the digital referee completes the process offline, they confirm the person making the application has parental responsibility for the child:

- if they sign the declaration on the 1-page countersignatory form
- in their response to AMS letter 920
  - you (the examiner) must contact the digital referee if you have [no response to the additional questions](#) in AMS letter 920

The reasons why a digital referee may not be able to confirm the person making the application, has parental responsibility for the child, can be because they:

- do not know the person making the application and their link to the child
- do not know or believe the person making the application has parental responsibility for the child

When dealing with a child application, you (the examiner) must:

- look at the details of the person making the child application, to confirm if they are responsible for the child
- make sure the documents the customer has provided support the child application

## Digital referee: confirming a child's place of birth

If the digital referee completes the process online, DCS will show the digital referee the child's place of birth and ask them to confirm if it's correct. The digital referee will answer 'yes' or 'no', if they answer 'no', they must provide a reason why using the free text box.

If the digital referee completes the process offline, they confirm the child's place of birth:

- if they sign the declaration on the 1-page countersignatory form
- in their response to AMS letter 920
  - you (the examiner) must contact the digital referee if you have [no response to the additional questions](#) in AMS letter 920

There are 2 reasons why a digital referee may not be able to confirm a child's place of birth, including when they:

1. Do not know the child's place of birth.
2. Know the child was not born in that location.

### Related content

[Contents](#)

# How to check a person confirming an identity is acceptable

This page tells Her Majesty's Passport Office examiners how to check a person who has confirmed a customer's identity is acceptable for the purposes of British passport applications.

If you (the examiner) have an application with a countersignatory or digital referee confirming the customer's identity, you must decide if they meet [the criteria](#) and if you need to [use discretion](#).

## Person confirming an ID and customer's details are the same

If you (the examiner) have an application where there is a countersignatory or digital referee, you must check the surname, email address and phone number of a customer and the person confirming their identity. This is to make sure they are not the same person, or it is not a family member.

If the phone number or email address are the same, you must reject the person confirming the customer's identity and ask the customer for a new person to confirm their identity.

## Checking the signature of a person confirming an identity

If you (the examiner) have an application where there is a countersignatory or digital referee, you may have to check their signature.

## Digital referee: checking their signature

If you (the examiner) have an application with a digital referee (who has completed the online or the 1-page countersignatory form process) is a British passport holder and:

- is the customer's first nominated digital referee, you must not compare their signature with the one on Main Index (as the Digital Customer Service does not capture customer's signatures)
- has been nominated to replace a previous digital referee, you must check their signature is genuine

If they are not a British passport holder and have completed the:

- online process, you cannot compare their signature, but you must check the copy of their passport matches the details provided on the application

- 1-page countersignatory form, you must compare their signature on the 1-page countersignatory form with the one on the copy of their passport (they are told they must provide this)

If they have not provided a copy of their non-British passport, you must ask for a copy:

- using the task on the Digital Application Processing (DAP) system
- by sending a T201 using the Application Management system (AMS)

If you do not accept the digital referee, you must ask the customer for a new digital referee.

## Countersignatory: checking their signature

If you (the examiner) have an application where the countersignatory has completed the paper SE04 or OS application form and you are using them to prove the customer's identity. You must check the countersignatory's signature on the paper application form against the customer's photo.

If you have concerns about the countersignatory's signature, you must compare their signature on the application form and photos to the one on their passport.

If a countersignatory holds a British passport and their signature does not exist on MI you must ask for more information to prove their signature is genuine (see authorisation and consent: checking consent is genuine).

If they hold a non-British passport you must check the details against the photocopy they have provided.

## Checking a person's British passport

If you (the examiner) have an application with a countersignatory or digital referee, they must provide their name and British passport number on the application so the system can check it against our passport records.

## Checking a British passport: online process

If you (the examiner) have an application where the digital referee has completed the Digital Customer Service online process. Their British passport has already been checked by our systems.

A digital referee cannot continue the online process to confirm a customer's identity, if the system cannot find their British passport number on our records.

## Checking a British passport: offline process

If you (the examiner) have an application where the countersignatory or digital referee has completed:

- the 1-page countersignatory form (the Digital Customer Service offline process)
- a paper SE04 or OS application form

Their British passport has not been checked until the form they have completed is scanned onto the system.

If the system does not complete the checks on the countersignatory or digital referee's British passport or their details are missing or incorrect, you must do a manual check using MI or G-search.

You must only accept a countersignatory or digital referee if their British passport is an uncanceled digital, biometric or machine-readable passport (MRP). We cannot accept uncanceled Old Blue passports for our purposes.

If the countersignatory or digital referee's British passport has been cancelled and they have had a new one issued:

- you must ask them for their new passport number [by sending a T201 letter as we need more information](#)
- and the old or new passport is a MRP issue, you must:
  - check the countersignatory address using reference sources (for example, the General Medical Council, Royal Mail or the Yellow pages)
  - contact the countersignatory for confirmation of signing the application form and ask them for their new passport number [by sending a T201 letter as we need more information](#)

If the countersignatory confirms that the current passport is the one that raised the warning you must ask for a new countersignature.

If you have any fraud or safeguarding concerns, you must refer the application to CFT.

## No trace of their British passport

If you (the examiner) have an application where you cannot find the countersignatory or digital referee's British passport on Main Index (MI) or G-search. You must:

1. Carry out standard checks on the customer and countersignatory.
2. Check we can [accept the person confirming the customer identity](#).
3. Contact the person confirming the customer's identity to ask for their passport number (if the results show no signs of fraud).

If a passport number appears to be genuine and there is no sign of fraud or safeguarding concerns, you must follow the adding records to MI guidance to add the passport.

## Checking a person's non-British passport

If you (the examiner) have an application where the countersignatory or digital referee is a non-British passport holder (they hold an Irish, European Union, United States, or Commonwealth passport). They must send a colour or black and white photocopy of the personal details page of their passport, with the customer's British passport application or at our request (if we contact them).

You must check the details (for example name and passport number) on the application match the photocopy of the personal details page of their passport.

If their details do not match or they do not include them, you must ask the countersignatory or digital referee, for them:

- using the task on the Digital Application Processing (DAP) system
- by sending a T201 using the Application Management system (AMS)

## Checking a person's profession and address

Before you (the examiner) accept a countersignatory or digital referee. You must make sure they are in a [recognised profession for passport purposes](#) and you can trace the address they gave us.

If you have concerns about them, you must check their details and if their company is registered if they are:

- a driving instructor
- a limited or unlimited company

Before you contact the person, who confirmed the customer's identity, you must check their details on third party reference sources, such as 192.com, Yell.com and larger company websites to check the address, they gave us (for example their company name and address) exists.

If a home address is provided, you can use Main Index (MI) to see if they used the same address for their passport application.

## Confirming if a limited or unlimited company is genuine

If you (the examiner) have an application where the countersignatory or digital referee is part of a limited or unlimited company and you need to do more identity checks. You must confirm the company is genuine.

If the company is unlimited:

- [contact the person](#), confirming the customer's identity, to ask for the VAT details of the company
- confirm the VAT details by searching the [Companies House register](#)
- add a case note on the application to confirm the company is registered

If the company is limited:

- confirm the company details by searching the Companies House register
- add a case note on the application to confirm the company is registered or limited

## Confirming if a driving instructor is genuine

If you (the examiner) have an application where the countersignatory or digital referee is a driving instructor and you need to do more identity checks, you must confirm they are genuine by:

1. Contacting the person, confirming the customer's identity, to ask for their approved driving instructor (ADI) number.
2. Confirm the ADI number by searching the [register of Approved Driving Instructors](#).
3. Add a case note on the application to confirm they are registered.

## Confirming a teacher during school holidays

If you (the examiner) have an application where countersignatory or digital referee is a teacher and you:

- do not need to complete any further checks, for example, [contact them using a T200](#), you can accept them as a person who confirms the customer's identity and continue examining the application as normal. It does not matter if they have provided their work or home address.
- [must contact them](#) and it is the [school holidays](#), and the teacher has given their work address. You must contact the customer by phone, to explain you cannot contact teachers during the school holidays, and they can:
  - ask a new person to confirm their identity, for the application to continue
  - have their application put on hold (by putting it into pigeonhole) until the school holidays end, and we are able to contact the teacher

When you get the new the countersignatory or digital referee you must contact them by email or fax (to speed up the process). If you cannot, you must send them a letter.

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# When information about person confirming identity is incomplete

This section tells HM Passport Officer examiners what to do if the information given by a person confirming a customer's identity, is incomplete or incorrect.

Sometimes the information given by a countersignatory or digital referee, when confirming a customer's identity, is incomplete or incorrect.

If there is missing information from a countersignatory or digital referee, you must [contact them](#) to ask for it.

If a person confirming a customer's identity:

- gives you the missing information, you must complete the relevant checks and decide if you have any fraud or safeguarding concerns. If you do not have any concerns, you must consider the application as a whole and continue to examine it
- does not give you the missing information, you must ask the customer for a new countersignatory or digital referee

## The person does not provide their qualifications

If you (the examiner) have an application where the countersignatory or digital referee tells us their profession but does not give us their professional qualifications (for example, a dentist does not need to list their qualifications). You can accept them.

If you have any concerns about their qualifications, you must [contact them](#) to ask for more information about their qualifications.

If the person is not employed and does not hold a qualification in a recognised profession, you must ask the customer for a new countersignatory or digital referee.

## The person's passport number is missing or incorrect

If you (the examiner) have an application where the countersignatory or digital referee has an acceptable profession and appears genuine but does not include their passport details, you must [contact them](#) to ask for their passport number.

If the person's passport appears to be incorrect (is it in a different surname or person), see [the person's passport is in a different name](#).

If they have a non-British passport, they must send us a [copy of their non-British passport](#) personal details page.

## AMS: missing the person's passport number

If you (the examiner) are dealing with an application on the Application Management System (AMS), where the countersignatory or digital referee has not provided their passport number. You must [contact them to ask for it](#).

When they respond with their British passport number, you must:

1. Enter it in the 'countersignatures passport number' section on the 'countersig' tab on the Application Management System.
2. Select '**save**'.

The system will carry out an automatic check on the British passport number.

## There is no person confirming a customer's identity

If the customer has applied through the Digital Customer Service (DCS) channel, we will tell them when they must provide a digital referee (a person confirming their identity). If a digital referee is provided, you (the examiner) must examine them even if you feel you can identify the customer from the previous passport.

If a customer has not provided a countersignatory or digital referee, either online, using the 1-page countersignatory form or the paper SE04 or OS application form, or a partially completed form and you (the examiner) don't need one (for example, you can clearly ID the customer), you must:

- case note your decision
- explain your reasons

If you decide you do need a countersignatory or digital referee, because you cannot identify the customer or to replace a current digital referee who is unacceptable. You must ask the customer to provide one using:

- DCS, you must ask the customer to provide one:
  - using the task (on DAP)
  - follow the [DCS application received: with documents but no digital referee online](#)
  - by [sending the 1-page countersignatory form](#)
- a paper SE04 or OS application form, you must reject the application and ask the customer for a new countersigned application. If you have:
  - any fraud or safeguarding concerns
  - an application that must have the countersignature section completed but it has been left blank

## First time adult applications (UK applications only)

If you, the examiner, are dealing with a customer's first time adult application and they have not included a countersignatory or digital referee. For example, they have sent us their documents before having a person confirm their identity online.

You must decide if the customer must attend an Authentication by Interview (ABI). If we:

- refer the customer to ABI, you must not ask for a person to confirm their identity
- do not refer the customer to ABI, you must request the customer to provide a person to confirm their identity

## Documents received: there is no digital referee online

If the customer has applied through the Digital Customer Service (DCS) channel, and sends us their documents but their digital referee has not completed their section online, you must follow the DAP to AMS guidance.

## Documents received: there is no 1-page countersignatory form

If the customer has applied through the Digital Customer Service (DCS) channel and has selected to send us the 1-page countersignatory form. But does not send it to us with their documents, SSL will:

1. Case note the application with 'no csig form enclosed'.
2. Send the application to examination.

If you receive an application like this, you (the examiner) must:

- tell the customer we have not received the 1-page countersignatory form
- send the customer a 1-page countersignatory form (for adult applications)
- send the 1-page countersignatory form and AMS letter 920 (for child applications)

## Countersignatory incorrectly certifies the customer's photo

If you (the examiner) have a paper SE04 or OS application form with 2 passport photos provided, you must check the countersignatory [correctly certifies them](#).

If a countersignatory does not correctly sign the customer's photo, and you must [contact them](#):

- for more information
- to confirm they countersigned the application

You do not need to ask for a correctly certified photo that matches the one the customer sent with the passport application.

If a countersignatory does not correctly sign the photo, and you do not need to contact them for more information, you must ask the customer to send a correctly

certified photo that matches the one the customer sent with their passport application.

## If a customer does not send a certified photo

If you (the examiner) have a paper SE04 or OS application form and it does not have a [correctly certified photo](#). You must ask the customer to send a certified photo if they:

- do not need to go for an interview (UK applications only)
- need to go for an interview (overseas applications only)

### Related content

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# Problems submitting a digital referee online

This page tells Her Majesty's Passport Office staff what a customer must do if they cannot provide a digital referee online and about the 1-page countersignature form we use in place of an online digital referee.

When a customer asks a digital referee to countersign their application online, they may have problems using the online process.

## A customer cannot provide a digital referee online

If a customer's digital referee meets the [online criteria](#), but:

- cannot pass our [automated identity checks](#)
- has problems logging into the system to complete the process

The digital referee can still be nominated as the customer's digital referee, using the offline process. To do this, they must ask the customer for a 1-page countersignatory form. The customer must then send the completed 1-page countersignatory form back to us to complete the application process.

Customers can get a 1-page countersignatory form by:

- downloading and printing it themselves by logging into their application
- phoning Teleperformance to ask the examiner to send them one (we send different forms depending on if it's an [adult application](#) or [child application](#))

DAP (Digital Application Processing) will automatically transfer an application with a 1-page countersignatory form to AMS (Application Management System).

## 1-page countersignatory form: adult applications

If a customer asks us to send them a 1-page countersignatory form, Teleperformance (TP) will transfer the customer to the Customer Service Management team (CSMT) who must follow the digital referee exception process.

If you, the examiner, receive the application, you must send the customer the 1-page countersignatory form.

## 1-page countersignatory form: child applications

If a customer asks us to send them a 1-page countersignatory form, TP will transfer the customer to CSMT who must follow the digital referee exception process.

If you, the examiner, receive the application, you must send the customer a 1-page countersignatory form and AMS letter 920.

## Applications with a 1-page countersignatory form

When a customer sends us a 1-page countersignatory form, the system automatically sends the application to an AMS examiner, who will get the:

- application
- 1-page countersignatory form - Sopra Steria Ltd (SSL) will scan it on the system
- supporting documents

If you (the examiner) receive a 1-page countersignatory form, you must deal with them using the digital referee guidance.

## 1-page countersignatory form: cannot be scanned

If we get a 1-page countersignatory form that we cannot scan on the system, SSL will:

- add a case note to say 'unscannable csig form'
- send the application to examination

When you, the examiner, get the application, you must:

- tell the customer we received their 1-page countersignatory form but could not scan it on our system
- send the customer a new 1-page countersignatory form and ask them to fill it in

## Digital referee received: there are no documents

If a customer completes the digital referee section online or sends us their 1-page countersignatory form but not their documents, you must follow the DAP to AMS guidance.

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# Using discretion on a countersigned application

This section tells HM Passport Office examiners, when to use discretion when examining an application that has been countersigned.

You (the examiner) may need to use discretion when examining a countersignatory or digital referee, if they:

- are unqualified or has not listed their qualifications
- are an unemployed professional
- have known the customer for less than 2 years (SE04 or 1-page forms only)

When considering using discretion to accept or reject a person (who has confirmed a customer's identity), you must:

- check the person using reference sources (for example, [the General Medical Council](#), [Royal Mail](#) or the Yellow pages) before you contact them for missing information
- record your decision when you apply discretion (for example, by adding a case note) and include the reasons why
- consider the application as a whole and check if there are any other fraud indicators

If you have any fraud or safeguarding concerns, you must refer the application to the Counter Fraud team (CFT).

## The person confirming an identity is unqualified

If you (the examiner) have an application where the countersignatory or digital referee, is an unqualified person. You can accept them if the application has no fraud indicators and the countersignatory or digital referee:

- is 70 years old or older
- fulfils the rest of the criteria to confirm the customer's identity but are not in (or retired) from a recognised profession
- can produce original documents to confirm their identity

For example, a person can countersign an application if they are the customer's retired next door neighbour who was a cleaner.

## The person confirming an identity is unemployed

If you (the examiner) have an application where the countersignatory or digital referee is an unemployed person. You can accept them if:

- they fulfil the criteria to countersign an application, but may not be currently employed in the relevant and recognised profession
- they have an acceptable passport
- they can provide the correct qualifications for their profession
- there are no fraud indicators

For example, a person can countersign an application if they are a qualified dentist but currently unemployed.

## The person confirming an identity uses their home address

If you (the examiner) have an application where the countersignatory or digital referee provides a home address. You (the examiner) can accept their home address, as long as they are in a [recognised profession](#) or retired.

If you have any fraud or safeguarding concerns, you must refer the application to CFT.

## The person's passport is in a different name

If you (the examiner) have an application where the countersignatory or digital referee's current passport number shows a passport on Main Index or G-search with a different name to the one on the application form, you must consider if it's a different:

- surname (or minor change of name)
- person

If it is a different surname (or minor change of name) you must [contact the person](#), who confirmed the customer's identity, to confirm if there has been a change of name. If they respond with:

- an explanation for the change of name (for example, marriage) you must accept their response, as long as all checks are clear and add a case note confirming their response on the customer's application

If it is a different person, you must check the passport number on the application is the same number you are checking on the system. If the passport number is:

- not the same, you must change the incorrect number on the system and do the checks again
- the same, you must [contact the person](#), who confirmed the customer's identity, to confirm the correct passport number

If the person, confirming the customer's identity, responds with:

- a different passport number, you must change the incorrect number on the system and do the checks again

## Discretion: the 'capacity known' section blank

If you (the examiner) have an application where the countersignatory or digital referee leaves the 'how do you know them' section blank (or has not provided a reasonable response), you may use discretion:

- if there is no suggestion the person is related to the customer
- if you have no fraud or safeguarding concerns (for example, child protection)

If you have any fraud or safeguarding concerns, you must refer the application to an Enhanced Application Checking (EAC) examiner.

If you have no fraud or safeguarding concerns but do not accept the 'capacity know' section as blank, you must [ask for a new a person to confirm their identity](#).

## The person has known the customer less than 2 years

You (the examiner) may use discretion if you have an application where the countersignatory or digital referee has known the customer for less than 2 years, as long as they have known them for at least for 1 year.

You may also accept a person who has countersigned an application, who has known the customer for less than 2 years, if they fit the criteria to countersign an application sent to us by:

- a member of Her Majesty's Armed Forces and their dependents, using the dedicated armed forces route
- a prisoner who is overseas with a member of the Local Service or FCDO staff who have personal knowledge of the individual

If you have any fraud or safeguarding concerns, you must refer the application to an Enhanced Application Checking (EAC) examiner.

## Overseas customer cannot find a person

If you (the examiner) have an application where the customer lives overseas and the countersignatory or digital referee [meets the criteria](#) but live in a different country to the customer (for example, a customer lives in Bangladesh but their person, confirming a customer's identity, lives in the UK), you can accept them.

If you are dealing with application where a customer (living overseas) is unable to find a person, who holds 1 of the accepted passports but can find an alternative, they must tell us why they have been unable to get a suitable person.

You must refer the application to your operational team leader (OTL) or above who may decide to accept the person, who has confirmed the customer's identity after considering:

- the application as a whole

- why the customer is unable to provide a person, that does not hold 1 of the accepted passports
- the documents and information provided
- other identity checks that we will make on the application (for example, if the customer will attend an interview)

The OTL must case note their decision.

## Countersignatory dated the form before the customer

If you (the examiner) have a paper SE04 or OS application form where the countersignatory (person, confirming the customer's identity) has dated the application form before the customer signed their declaration, you can use discretion and accept them. Unless you have any fraud or safeguarding concerns.

If a countersignatory countersigns and dates a paper SE04 or OS application form more than 6 months before we receive it, you must:

- reject the application
- ask the customer for a new fully completed and countersigned paper SE04 or OS application form

## The same handwriting is used throughout the application

If you (the examiner) have a paper SE04 or OS application form with a countersignatory (person, confirming the customer's identity) and it appears the same handwriting has been used to complete all sections of the application form, you can use discretion and accept it, if:

- the customers and countersignatory's signature are clearly different
- you have no fraud or safeguarding (for example, child protection) concerns

If it appears the same handwriting was used to fill in the paper application and the customer's and countersignatory's signatures, you must [contact them](#), to ask, if they:

- completed the countersignature section
- certified the photo

If the countersignatory confirms they did not complete or sign the application, but they know the customer, you must:

- ask the customer for a new countersigned application form, 2 photos and a new countersignatory
- send AMS letter 171 'Forged countersignature warning letter' to the customer

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# Contact the person who confirmed a customer's identity

This section tells Her Majesty's Passport Office examiners, the timescale we allow for a person confirming a customer's identity to respond, when you do and do not need to send a T200 or T201 letter and how the person can reply to us.

You, the examiner, may need to contact the person who confirmed the customer's identity as part of the application. Before you contact them, you must check [they are acceptable](#) and genuine.

You must contact a countersignatory or digital referee if you need:

- [confirmation they countersigned an application](#) (T200)
- [more information](#) (T201)
- [a response to AMS letter 920](#)

Any contact made must be by phone or email in the first instance, before post.

You must use the withdrawing passport applications guidance to confirm the timescale given for a customer or the person confirming their identity, to respond.

If you do not receive a response from the countersignatory or digital referee, you must reject them and ask the customer for a new countersignatory or digital referee.

## Check a person countersigned an application (T200 letter)

If you need to check a countersignatory or digital referee has countersigned an application, you must:

You must:

1. Check their details, including their address and phone number in outside reference sources.
1. Check they are [acceptable to confirm a customer's identity](#) and examine them using the:
  - countersignatory guidance
  - digital referee guidance
2. Send the AMS letter T200, by [email](#) or [post](#).
3. Remove the customer's or child's name from the letter.
4. Follow the withdrawing passport applications guidance to confirm the timescale to wait for the person to respond.

## When we need more information (T201 letter)

If you (the examiner) need more information to confirm if a countersignatory or digital referee is acceptable, you must:

1. Check their details, including their address and phone number using outside reference sources.
2. Examine them using the:
  - countersignatory guidance
  - digital referee guidance
3. Contact them by:
  - [phone](#)
  - [email](#)
  - [post](#)
4. Follow the withdrawing passport applications guidance to confirm the timescale to wait for the person to respond.

## No response to AMS letter 920

If you (the examiner) are dealing with a digital referee (who has completed the 1 page countersignatory form) have not received a response to the additional questions in AMS letter 920, you must:

1. Check the digital referee's details, including their address and phone number in outside reference sources.
2. Examine the digital referee guidance.
3. Send the digital referee AMS letter T200 including the phrase 920L from AMS letter 920, by email or post.
4. Follow the withdrawing passport applications guidance to confirm the timescale to wait for the person to respond.

## Contact a person confirming an identity, by phone

You may contact the countersignatory or digital referee, by phone, to confirm:

- how they know the customer
- how long they have known the customer
- their profession
- their professional qualifications
- their passport number
- if they have had a passport in any other name

When you contact the countersignatory or digital referee, by phone, you must:

- check their phone number using outside reference sources
- confirm the person you are speaking to is the same person who countersigned the application
- tell them we are making checks on an application they have countersigned
- not tell them who the customer is (for security reasons)

- not tell them the customer's name as this defeats the purpose – we expect the person confirming an identity to be able to confirm the application they have countersigned

If you are dealing with an urgent or compassionate application, you must contact the person to confirm information by phone, as long as you are certain they can correctly identify the customer.

## Contact a person confirming an identity, by email

If you contact a countersignatory or digital referee, by email, you must send it from your team email address and not your personal email address.

You must:

- manually enter the digital referee's (person confirming an identity) email address, on the 1 page countersignatory form, onto the AMS system. It is not scanned in
- check that the email address on the paper SE04 or OS application form and 1 page countersignatory form matches the one on the system. If it doesn't you must change it

You may accept email responses that do not have physical signatures from a countersignatory (in line with the Electronic Communications Act 2000).

When you get an email response, you must:

1. Add a case note to confirm you received it.
2. Scan the email on the system as a permanent record.

## Contact a person confirming an identity, by post

When you contact a countersignatory or digital referee, by post, you must follow the sending a letter guidance.

## Contact a person confirming an identity, by fax

Some countersignatories or digital referees may contact us by fax, which you must accept.

## Unable to contact the person confirming an identity

If you are unable to contact a countersignatory or digital referee, you must:

- reject them
- ask the customer for a [new person to confirm their identity](#)

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# Asking for a new person to confirm a customer's identity

This section tells HM Passport Office examiners how to ask the customer for a new person to confirm their identity if we rejected their original one or they did not give us one.

You may decide to ask for a new countersignatory or digital referee to confirm a customer's identity (for example, if the digital referee does not meet the criteria to countersign). What you must send depends on if you are requesting a new:

- [countersignatory](#)
- [digital referee](#)

## How to ask for a new countersignatory

If you (the examiner) must ask the customer to give us a countersigned application and you have rejected the original countersignatory (or the customer did not use one) you must:

1. Send the correct system letter to the customer, with a blank paper SE04 or OS application form by post. You must use system letter:
  - 170 (if you reject a countersignatory and need a new one)
  - 172 (if you reject a countersignatory and need a new one and there are multiple applications from the same address)
  - 171 (if you need to send a warning letter to confirm the countersignatory is forged)
  - 274 (if an adult application form is incomplete)
  - 276 (if a child application form is incomplete for children aged 0 to 15)
2. Store the application in your team, while you wait for the customer to respond.

When you get the new application, you must:

1. Send it to Sopra Steria Ltd and ask them to scan it on the system.
2. Check the countersignatory is genuine and examine the countersigned application.

## How to ask for a new digital referee

If you (the examiner) are asking the customer for a new digital referee. What you must send depends on if the application is on the:

- Digital Application Processing (DAP) system
- Application Management System (AMS)

When you get the new digital referee (on the 1-page countersignatory form), you must check their signature is genuine.

## AMS: what to send when you ask for a new digital referee

If you need to ask the customer for a new digital referee to replace their current digital referee (or the customer did not use one), you must send them, by email:

- AMS letter 918
- AMS letter 920 (if it's a child application)
- a 1-page countersignatory form using the **Digital Referee template** (see: **forms and templates** on the examiner toolkit)

To complete the 1-page countersignatory form, you must add the customer's details, shown on the application:

- reference (barcode) number
- forename and surname
- date and place of birth
- telephone number
- address
- photo

## Ask for a new digital referee: British national (overseas)

If you are dealing with an application to renew a British national overseas (BN(O)) passport and need a digital referee, you can accept, by email, a completed 1-page countersignatory form sent to you by the customer.

## DAP: how to ask for a digital referee

DAP examiners can ask for a digital referee (if a customer has not provided one), when:

- you compare the customer's photo to their child photo in their old passport
- you cannot confirm the customer's identity from their previous photo

If you, the examiner, must request a digital referee from the customer (if they have not provided one when the application was submitted), you must select the option to ask the customer for a digital referee in the task you are processing.

## DAP: after asking a customer for a digital referee

If you have asked a customer for a digital referee (for example, if you are unable to confirm their identity) their application will remain in DAP. After the customer provides us with a digital referee and completes our questions, we will assign their application to the next available DAP examiner.

## Notifications DAP sends to the customer

If a customer has not supplied a digital referee, they will get automatic reminders to submit a digital referee for their application. If they do not provide one their application can be withdrawn.

## AMS: withdrawing a customer's applications

If you lose contact with a customer after asking for a new form or any other reason you must withdraw the application, in line with withdrawing passport application guidance.

## Three people cannot confirm a customer's identity

If you have asked the customer for 3 different people to confirm their identity (digital referees or countersignatories) and they cannot confirm the customer (or intended passport holder's) details, you must refer the application to your operational team leader (OTL).

You, the OTL, must:

- consider the person confirm the customer's identity responses
- decide if there are fraud or safeguarding concerns (for example, child protection) that we must investigate

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