



Home Office

Damaged British passports

Version 13.0

This guidance tells His Majesty's Passport Office staff how to check a damaged British passport sent as a supporting document and how to replace a damaged British passport.

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About: Damaged British passports

This guidance tells HM Passport Office staff how to assess British machine readable passports for damage, wear and tear or fraudulent tampering and how to handle applications to replace these passports. Machine readable passports have a burgundy or dark blue (soft) cover.

This guidance does not cover Old Blue (hardback style) passports.

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 the 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 the Guidance & Quality, Operating Standards.

Publication

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

- version **13.0**
- published for Home Office staff on **27 September 2022**

Changes from last version of this guidance

This guidance has been updated to reflect the change in our sovereign from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to His Majesty King Charles III.

Related content

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How we deal with damaged British passports

This section tells HM Passport Office staff working on the Application Management System (AMS), why they must check the customer's British machine readable passport for damage or potential fraudulent tampering.

HM Passport Office must check all British passports sent by customers for renewal or replacement or as supporting evidence for an application, for signs of [damage](#) or [fraudulent tampering](#). Damaged passports can mask fraudulent tampering and the examiner or Document Management Service must carefully check the passport for any indication of this.

We will not issue any passport until we are satisfied the customer:

- is a British national
- is entitled to hold a British passport (for example, they are not banned from holding a British passport because of a court order)
- holds the claimed identity
- is not at risk because they are vulnerable

How we identify damage or fraudulent tampering

When customers apply to renew or replace their old passport, they can tell us if their passport is damaged and how the damage happened. They can tell us:

- as part of their application (for example, online as a free text option, at section 8 on a paper application form)
- in a separate letter or email
- by phone
- when they attend an appointment at a public counter

There may be times where the customer does not tell us their passport is damaged and DMS staff identify the damage (or potential fraudulent tampering) during their validation checks. For example, the passport may have been sent as a supporting document on another application and the customer is not currently applying to replace it. When DMS staff identify damage (or potential fraudulent tampering) on any passport they will record the information on the Digital Application Processing (DAP) application and a DMS: British passport validation form.

Dealing with passports with fraudulent tampering

You must refer the application to the Counter Fraud team (CFT) if you or the DMS discover potential fraudulent tampering on a British passport, for example:

- a British passport has damage due to [fraudulent tampering](#)

- missing personal details page, observation or visa page (see risk indicators)
- the polycarbonate personal information page in a blue e-passport has snapped or has pieces missing

CFT will deal with the application using Counter Fraud: casework and referral types guidance.

Confirming how the passport was damaged

Before we issue a replacement passport, we need to understand how the damage occurred. On some passports, how it happened will be obvious and there will be no need to contact the customer, in others the customer must tell us what happened to their passport.

If we receive an application to renew a passport and we discover it is damaged, you must check if another colleague has already given an explanation. For example, they may have written an explanation on a document receipt or the customer's envelope (if it was damaged in the post). These colleagues could be from staff working in:

- Local Services
- Sopra Steria Ltd
- Post Office Ltd

You must check [if you can accept the damage and issue a new passport without asking the customer for an explanation](#). If you need an explanation how the damage occurred you can contact the customer by phone, letter or email.

If the customer tells us the passport is faulty, we must investigate the fault before we issue a replacement, unless they are travelling urgently.

You must add a case note to the application explaining how the damage happened (either your decision, a colleagues or customer's explanation) and scan the customer's letter or email if they send one.

Documents needed to replace a damaged passport

In most cases the customer will only need to send in their damaged passport unless they are [overseas and must send in extra identity evidence](#). Local Service offices will send damaged passports back to HM Passport Office for processing.

You, the examiner, must ask the customer for extra documents if any of their personal details have changed since we issued their previous passport. For example, you must ask for documents to confirm a different:

- name
- date of birth
- place of birth
- gender

You must also ask the customer for their documents if you are unable to confirm their identity or nationality from our records. For example, we must ask for more documents if:

- we do not have a record of the passport
- our records show the customer previously held a different British nationality (with no evidence why it was changed)
- we are unable to confirm their identity from the information given

You must deal with the customer's application using the lost, stolen and recovered guidance, if they cannot send us their damaged passport because they have destroyed it.

Service type needed for replacing damaged passports

You must use the service type replacement if you are replacing a customer's [damaged passport](#) on the Application Management System (AMS). If you change the service type on AMS you must add a case note to record your decision. We will process passports which have slight damage due to [wear and tear](#) as renewal application provided there is no evidence of fraudulent tampering.

Applications to replace damaged passports on Digital Applications Processing (DAP) will show the service type as renewal. We will deal with damaged passports on DAP using the renewal service type, the case note you must add when you deal with these applications will show the passports was damaged.

To keep a historical record that the application was to replace a damaged passport, DAP will cancel the customer's passport on Main Index and record it as:

- **Damaged**, if the Document Management Service (DMS) or Document Handling Unit (DHU) report it is damaged
- **Replaced**, if the DMS or DHU report the passport has no damage or has wear and tear

See also Tiered Application Service and Digital Premium Service for applications submitted at a public counter.

We will process passports which have slight damage due to [wear and tear](#) as renewal applications provided there is no evidence of fraudulent tampering.

Case noting when the passport is damaged

You must case note all your decisions and actions when you examine any passport application. We must make sure we capture information which [may be relevant to a future application](#).

When the application is to replace a damaged passport your case note must also include all the following information:

- the passport number and year it was issued (for example, ppt 12345678/08)
- what the damage is and how it occurred (for example, laminate lifting caused by water damage), unless this is recorded on the scanned validation form on DAP
- how you confirmed the customer's identity (for example, could you identify them from passport photos on Main Index, or did you use a countersignatory or digital referee)
- whether you returned the damaged passport to the customer or securely destroyed it (if you destroyed the passport you must explain why. Your OTL must add a case note confirming your decision)

Where the application is processed on DAP the DMS will provide this information on a DMS: British passport validation form. If you are processing on DAP, you do not need to transfer the information from the form into a case note (because the form is scanned as a permanent record). If the application is transferred to AMS you must case note the information from the DMS: British passport validation form onto the system. You must case note your actions and decisions.

Investigating and referring damaged passports

When we receive an application to renew or replace a British passport or if the passport is sent to us as a supporting document, AMS examiners and the DMS must check the passport for damage and potential fraudulent tampering. If it is a supporting document, we must be sure the passport does not have fraudulent tampering and is in an acceptable state, to confirm the holder's identity and nationality. If it is not, you, the DAP or AMS examiner, may need additional evidence from the customer.

You must investigate the application and passport further if this or other guidance tells you to. For example, you must investigate further if you:

- are unsure if the damage to the passport is because of reasonable wear or tear or because someone fraudulently tampered with it
- have doubts about the reason given for the damage
- have doubts about the application

If we must investigate the application and damaged passport further, you must case note the details of the damaged passport and:

- refer the application to the back office counter if the application was submitted at a public counter
- refer an Application Management System (AMS) application to an Enhanced Application Checking examiner (EAC) if processing on AMS
- complete additional checks if processing on DAP

Counter managers, EAC examiners (working on AMS) and DAP examiners (completing additional checks) must complete tier 1 checks, case note the results and decide if the application must be referred to CFT.

Following investigation, the CFT may interview the customer under caution or we may decide to send the customer for a Passport Application Interview (PAI) to confirm their identity.

Returning a damaged passport to the customer

We must cancel and return the customer's damaged passport when you have completed the application to replace it, confirmed the customer's identity and authorised a new passport.

We will not return a damaged passport to the customer if it:

- appears to have fraudulent tampering
- is extremely damaged and you must securely destroy it. For example, it is so badly damaged that we do not want to handle the passport or there is very little passport to return (if the personal details page of the passport is damaged, it can still be returned to the customer)
- was declared lost or stolen and has now been found
- is newly issued and [the customer received it already damaged](#)

If you intend to destroy the customer's damaged passport you must clearly case note this, explaining why you are not returning it. Before you authorise the new passport, you must refer the application to your operational team leader (OTL) with a recommendation to destroy the damaged passport.

Your OTL must check your decision to securely destroy the customer's passport and add a case note to the application to confirm they agree with your decision.

We return damaged passports to the customer in most cases, this follows an Ombudsman review in 2006 which found:

- the customer expected to receive their old passport and raised a complaint when they did not receive it
- there were no benefits in securely destroying the document on site

DAP examiners: when to transfer to AMS

When dealing with a damaged passport you, the DAP examiner must check if you can deal with the application or if you must refer it to AMS (Application Management System). You must only transfer the application to AMS if:

- the passport was previously declared lost or stolen and has now been found
- the passport is newly issued and [the customer received it already damaged](#)
- the customer tells us the passport is faulty, for example, the chip may be damaged or faulty
- DMS tell you the passport is too damaged for us to return it to the customer
- you need to refer the application to a Counter Fraud team (CFT), for example, because you suspect potential fraudulent tampering

If the application you are processing in DAP does not meet one of these criteria, you must keep the application in DAP and investigate.

AMS examiners: dealing with damaged passports referred by DAP examiners

You, the AMS examiner must:

1. Review the information on the DMS: British passport validation form (recording the damage found) and the DAP case notes.
2. Check the old passport for [damage or tampering](#).
3. Case note the information held on the DMS: British passport validation form and your own assessment of the old passport and change the service type if necessary.
4. [Examine the application in full](#), applying all standard policy and guidance
5. Refer the application:
 - for further checks if you have any doubts
 - to your OTL to confirm the passport must be destroyed

You must keep the DMS: British passport validation form with the application until it reaches a terminal state (for example, a decision has been made to pass for issue, fail or withdraw). When you have made a final decision, you must put the referral form in confidential waste.

Replacing new passports damaged by our couriers

The Customer Service Liaison team will investigate and reprint any newly issued passport damaged by our courier service, free of charge.

Related content

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DAP: dealing with damaged passports

This section tells HM Passport Office examiners working on the Digital Application Processing (DAP) system how to deal with damaged passports using the **Passport failed validation checks** or **Customer reported passport damaged** tasks in DAP.

Digital Application processing (DAP) can create 2 tasks for processing a damaged British passport. The tasks that are created will depend on the information the customer has provided, and the passport validation in the Document Management Service (DMS) or Document Handling Unit (DHU).

DAP will create a **Customer reported passport damaged** task if, when the customer applies, they tell us they believe their old British passport is damaged (or faulty) and they want to replace it. The task will show the customer's passport details and the information they gave about the damage.

DAP will create a **Passport failed validation checks** task, if the DMS reports:

- the customer's old British passport has failed the validation checks (regardless of whether the customer has declared their passport damaged)
- any other British passport received has failed the validation checks, for example, if the customer sends a supporting British passport belonging to:
 - them, if they are a multiple passport holder
 - the parent or guardian of a child
 - a countersignatory or digital referee
 - a third party

The second-line DMS (SLDMS) must record on the validation form if the passport has passed the extra validation check. They will record:

- **Yes, document passed extra validation check** if they decide the passport is not damaged (for example, it only shows wear and tear)
- **No, document did not pass extra validation check** if they decide the passport is damaged, or has potential counterfeiting or fraudulent tampering

DMS will scan the validation form on to the application (so you can see this on the **Documents** tab) and record the pass or fail of the validation checks on the DAP system.

DAP: where a customer has reported damage

Customers can tell us their passport is damaged when they apply to replace it. If they tell us there is a problem with the chip, you must transfer the application to AMS.

If the customer tells us their passport is damaged in any other way, you must keep the application in DAP and investigate.

You must check DAP for a scanned image of a DMS: British passport validation form, to see the SLDMS's assessment of the damage. If a scanned image of a DMS: British passport validation form is present and SLDMS has provided enough information for you to process the application (and you don't need to transfer the application to AMS), you must proceed with the application on DAP.

You must ask the SLDMS to review the passport and provide an assessment, if the customer has reported their passport damaged beyond wear and tear, and either of the following apply:

- there is no DMS: British passport validation form
- there is insufficient information provided on the DMS: British passport validation form for you to make a decision

You must not ask the SLDMS to review the passport if the SLDMS staff have already reviewed the passport and recorded the damage as wear and tear.

When the SLDMS revalidate the passport, they will complete a DMS: British passport validation form and have it scanned onto the application. This will create a **Documents received** task on DAP for you, the examiner, to review the form and decide how to proceed.

How to ask for revalidation of a damaged passport

When you need the SLDMS to revalidate a damaged British passport, you must tell them what you want them to check. You must tell the SLDMS:

- whose British passport you want them to review
- the reason for the review (for example, due to damage reported by the customer, or the passport has been recorded as failed validation checks but the validation form has not been scanned)

You must:

1. Put the application on hold on DAP.
2. Create an email instruction to be sent to SLDMS and send this by email to the DMS or DHU storing the document:
 - using email heading 'SLDMS Ppt review'
 - to tell the SLDMS what to review

DAP task: Passport failed validation checks

DAP will create a **Passport failed validation checks** task, if the DMS reports the customer's old British passport has failed the validation checks. You may also see a **Customer reported passport damaged** task if the customer also reports damage.

DAP will also create a **Passport failed validation checks** task, if the DMS reports any British passport sent with the application has failed the validation checks, for example, a parent's British passport that has been sent as a supporting document.

If the civil servant working in DMS reports the document has failed validation checks they will complete a DMS: British passport validation form to tell the receiving examiner about the document and record their concerns. They will record:

- **Yes, document passed extra validation check** if they decide the passport is not damaged (for example, it only shows wear and tear)
- **No, document did not pass extra validation check** if they decide the passport is damaged, or has potential counterfeiting or fraudulent tampering

DMS will scan the validation form on to the application (so you can see this on the **Documents** tab) and record the pass or fail of the validation checks on the DAP system. If a form has not been scanned, you must request SLDMS to revalidate the passport.

How to deal with passport failed validation checks task

You, the DAP examiner, must investigate any concerns reported by DMS. For example, by using the Damaged British passports, Confirming identity and Risk indicators guidance.

To process an application when DAP reports the **Passport failed validation checks**, whether the passport belongs to the customer or to a third party, you must:

1. Open the task and check the information provided onscreen.
2. Find out why the passport failed the validation checks by checking the DMS: British passport validation form. You do not need to case note the information the SLDMS has recorded on the validation form (because the form is scanned) but you must case note your decision.
3. Check if you can deal with the application in DAP or if you must transfer it to AMS (Application Management System).

If the passport that has failed the validation checks belongs to the customer, you must then:

1. Check the customer's passport history on Main Index (MI) to:
 - check for evidence of potential fraud and risk indicators
 - confirm their identity
 - check for replacement passports over the last 10 years
2. Contact the customer (by phone if possible), if DMS report the passport is damaged, and ask how the damage occurred if:
 - you need more information from the customer (for example, if no explanation is given for the damage and it's not obvious how the passport was damaged)
 - the customer's explanation (shown on the **Customer reported passport damaged** task) does not match the damage reported by DMS

3. Answer **Yes** on screen and add a case note, if you are happy to accept the passport because there is no indication of fraud and:
 - you do not need the customer to explain how the damage occurred (for example, because it is obvious what has happened)
 - the customer's explanation of the damage matches the DMS validation
4. Answer **No, need new documents**, add a case note and email the customer, if you need more documents or information, for example:
 - you need to know how the damage reported by DMS happened
 - the customer did not send in the documents you need for their application
 - you need more documents because you are unable to confirm the customer's identity or nationality from our records
5. Answer **Delay decision on this task** and add a case note if you are contacting the customer on another task to ask for information or documents that will enable you to process this task.
6. Complete additional checks, add a case note and answer **Refer for investigation** if you decide to refer the application to the Counter Fraud team (for example, because DMS has reported potential fraudulent tampering).
7. **Save** your decision.

If the passport that failed the validation checks belongs to a third party (for example, a parent), you must add a case note and complete the task by:

- answering **Yes**, if you are happy to accept the passport because there is no indication of fraud and you do not need further information from the customer
- emailing the customer if you need more documents or information and answering **No, need new documents**
- answering **Delay decision on this task** if you are contacting the customer on another task to ask for information or documents that will enable you to process this task
- completing additional checks (where required) and answering **Refer for investigation** if you decide to refer the application to the Counter Fraud team (for example, because DMS has reported potential fraudulent tampering)

You must then **Save** your decision.

DAP task: Customer reported passport damaged

DAP will create a **Customer reported passport damaged** task if, when the customer applies, they tell us they believe their old British passport is damaged (or faulty) and they want to replace it. The task will show the customer's passport details and the information they gave about the damage.

If DMS believes the passport is damaged, you will also see a **Passport failed validation checks** task, and a DMS: British passport validation form which will give you an assessment of the passport.

If DMS has not reported the passport as damaged, you will only see the **Customer reported passport damaged** task.

How to deal with a 'Customer reported passport damaged' task

You must trust the DMS assessment (unless there is no assessment and the customer has indicated there is severe damage, for example, 'the passport has been in the washing machine' or 'my dog chewed the passport'). If a form has not been scanned, you must request SLDMS to revalidate the passport.

To process the task you must:

1. Open the task and check the information provided onscreen.
2. Find out why the passport is being replaced by checking:
 - the DMS: British passport validation form (if DMS believe the passport to be damaged)
 - the customer's explanation of the damage
3. Check if you can deal with the application in DAP or if you must refer it to AMS (Application Management System), see when to transfer to AMS.
4. Deal with the **Passport failed validation checks task** if it has been created.
5. Select:
 - **Clear this task** if you can identify the customer from our photo records and you have no concerns about the application
 - **Ask for documents** if you need more information from the customer, either about how the damaged occurred or to confirm their eligibility or entitlement to a British passport
 - **Ask for a digital referee** if you need a referee to confirm the customer's identity
 - **Withdraw the application** if the customer asks us to withdraw their application
 - **Delay decision on this task** if you are contacting the customer on another task to ask for information or documents that will enable you to process this task
 - **Refer for investigation** and add a case note, if you decide to refer the application to the Counter Fraud team
6. Case note your actions and decisions.
7. **Save** the changes.

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Definitions of damage or fraudulent tampering

This section tells HM Passport Office examination staff what we consider to be, damage, potential fraudulent tampering or general wear and tear. This section also explains what types of damage examiners can accept and deal with, without asking the customer how the damage occurred.

When you, the examiner, check the customer's old passport or read the validation assessment from the Document Management Service, you must use the definitions of damage, wear and tear and potential fraudulent tampering to assess whether we consider it to be:

- damaged:
 - [without any immediate concern](#)
 - and the [customer must explain how](#)
 - due to general [wear and tear](#)
- tampered with a [potential fraudulent intent](#)

Definition of a damaged passport

A damaged passport is one which the customer cannot use as proof of identity because of its condition.

Damage can include:

- when the personal details or observation page are unreadable
- laminate peeling or lifting away from the personal details page
- unreadable security details
- missing or detached pages
- where the front, back or personal details page has been cut
- damage or discolouration to any part of the passport caused, for example, by:
 - water
 - chemical or ink spills
 - tears, rips, bite marks
- on a blue e-Passport, where the:
 - perforated passport numbers have been torn (the perforations will show slight charring, this is normal)
 - personal details page is broken or cracked
- where the chip or antenna shows through the:
 - endpaper on back cover of a burgundy e-Passport
 - personal details page of a blue e-Passport
- when, after investigation, we identify the passport chip as damaged and not faulty

Damage that does not need an explanation from the customer

You, the examiner can continue with the application without asking the customer how the passport damage occurred, if all the following apply:

- the damage is not on the personal details or observation pages
- any visas, vignettes or immigration stamps are unaffected by the damage and you are happy there are no security features or details missing
- damage or discolouration to the passport cover and blank visa pages is caused by:
 - water, chemical or ink spills
 - tears, rips, burning
 - bite marks
 - writing or drawings

Definition of fraudulent tampering

Fraudulent tampering is a deliberate attempt to change the identity or travel history of the passport holder.

Definition of wear and tear

Wear and tear is more likely if the customer travels extensively, their travel history (stamps and multiple visas) in the passport will help the assessment of wear and tear.

HM Passport Office will [renew a passport showing general wear and tear](#) when they have confirmed the customer's nationality and identity. We will cancel the passport and return it to the customer.

Signs of normal wear and tear are when:

- the personal details page of the passport is legible (readable)
- there is no obvious trace of amendments or tampering
- the binding is intact
- the laminate is secure
- there are minor tears around the edges of pages or the cover (indicating normal use)
- there is only slight water damage to the page edges (crinkling or curling)
- there are minor scratches on the personal details page on a blue e-Passport
- the personal details page is bent on a blue e-Passport

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