



Home Office

# Storage, retention and destruction of documents

Version 7.0

Guidance for His Majesty's Passport Office staff about documents we cannot return to customers

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# About: Storage, retention and destruction of documents

This guidance tells HM Passport Office staff how to deal with British or foreign documents we cannot return to the customer as we have lost contact with them. It tells staff how they must:

- immediately return foreign passports to the issuing authority
- immediately return bank cards, bank books and cheque books to the organisation that issued them
- archive customer's documents and:
  - how we keep records of these documents
  - what we do with documents we have held for 1 year
  - what we do if we archive documents due to a crisis event
  - how to destroy documents we have kept for 1 year

The guidance also tells staff how to ask for documents from storage and how to deal with customer questions about documents we have stored. If you are dealing with an application on the Digital Application Processing system, see Document Management Service – long term storage.

## 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 **7.0**
- published for Home Office staff on **28 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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# Storage and destruction of documents

This section tells HM Passport Office staff when and why we will store customers' documents. It includes how we store customers' documents and how long we keep them if we do not return them to the customer.

We archive (store) certain documents for 1 year when we cannot return them to their owner and return others to the issuing authority immediately. We can hold documents longer than 1 year if we archive them during a known crisis event.

We keep unclaimed documents, for example, because:

- we lost contact with the customer and withdrew their application
- the documents have been returned to us, undelivered, by:
  - Royal Mail
  - our UK delivery partners
  - our international delivery partners
  - local service providers
- there are documents we are unable to link to an application

We must keep all documents and correspondence sent by customers to support their application, including photocopies of documents.

We must not keep letters addressed to HM Passport Office (for example, cover letters or photocopies of documents made by examiners or local services).

To decide if you need to archive a document or correspondence, you must:

- consider if it was an important part of the examination decision process
- decide, if (during the examination process) you would have returned it to the customer

If it was an important part of the examination decision process or you would have normally returned the document to the customer, you must archive it. You must not change, remove or alter any information on a document you send to archives.

You must not archive a customer's British passport sent to us as a recovered document (for example, from the Police, immigration or from our secure delivery service). You must send it to the Lost, Stolen and Recovered team, who deal with recovered passports (with a cover note). They will update Main Index and destroy the passport.

## How we deal with archived documents

All HM Passport Office staff must make sure we securely record and store documents we cannot return to their owner.

When we have stored the documents for 1 year and the customer has not claimed them, we will return the documents to the original issuing authority or securely destroy them. You must look at [what to do with archived documents](#) to confirm what to do with a customer's documents.

By dealing with the documents in this way, we:

- reduce potential fraud
- protect documents
- minimise impacts on storing documents
- keep an audit trail of all documents returned to us

## How we keep records of unclaimed documents

We record all unclaimed documents on a spreadsheet called the 'retained document spreadsheet'. A team in each office (known in this guidance as the 'archiving team') are responsible for archiving customers' unclaimed documents and maintaining the spreadsheet.

The archiving team must use the retained document spreadsheet to record archived documents:

- held by the archiving team
- returned to their owner
- returned to examiners or issuing authorities
- destroyed after 1 year

## Responsibility for the retained document spreadsheet

The Security Liaison Officer is responsible for the retained document spreadsheet, they must:

- give permission to the office KIM (knowledge and information management) champion for staff to access the retained document spreadsheet
- make sure the retained document spreadsheet is:
  - maintained correctly
  - only accessed by authorised staff
- carry out spot checks on the retained document spreadsheet
- make sure the archive teams fill in the retained document spreadsheet
- make sure the records show a clear audit trail

This is part of the Security Assurance team assurance programme and is subject to assurance visits.

### Related content

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# How to send unclaimed documents to the archiving team

This section tells HM Passport Office staff how to send unclaimed documents to the archiving team so we can store them securely.

If you withdraw an application because we have lost contact with the customer, you, the examiner, must send the documents and passport application to the team in your office, responsible for archiving customers' unclaimed documents. In this guidance we call these teams the 'archiving team'.

You must:

1. Complete an Archived documents form.
2. Highlight the 'Examiners Comments' box on the form using a highlighter pen and:
  - add the name of the crisis, if you have archived the application because of a crisis event
3. Put it in the application wallet with the customer's documents.
4. Complete the archive log if your examination team uses one.
5. Put the application wallet in your team's 'Withdrawn' box.

The examination team support clerk must take the team archive log, application and documents to the archiving team daily.

## Archiving documents, returned by Royal Mail

The Customer Service Management team (CSMt) deals with customers' documents returned to us by Royal Mail.

If a customer does not respond to any contact attempts by members of CSMt, they must:

1. Re-seal the envelope so nothing can fall out.
2. Attach a completed Inter Office Transfer Label to the envelope. These are available in your stationary cupboard.
3. Complete an Archived documents form.
4. Add a passport note or case note to the customer's application or passport record. For example:
  - RM RETURN SUP DOCS – UNABLE TO CONTACT APP. REFERRED TO (ISSUING OFFICE NAME) TO BE ARCHIVED
5. Send the envelope by internal post to the archiving team in the passport office who dealt with the passport application.

## Archiving documents returned by our delivery partners

How we archive documents returned to us by our delivery partners will depend on whether the documents were posted to an address in the UK or overseas.

### Archiving documents from UK delivery partners

When our UK delivery partners return documents to the UK delivery team, the UK delivery team must:

1. Add a case note or passport note to the passport application to confirm the return of the documents.
2. Store the documents securely for 12 weeks.

If there has been no request to return the documents within the 12 weeks, the UK delivery team, must:

1. Check the Application Management System (AMS) to see which Application Processing Centre (APC) examined the application.
2. Complete an Archived documents form.
3. Send the form and documents to the archiving team in the APC who examined the application.
4. Add a case note or passport note confirming your actions.

You, the examiner, must send:

- newly issued British passports to the central Lost, Stolen and Recovered (LSR) team, who will cancel them and make a record
- cancelled British passports that do not contain a valid visa to confidential waste
- cancelled or current British passports (that contain a valid visa) to your local archive team

### Archiving documents from international delivery partners

When our international delivery partners return documents or a British passport because they were unable to deliver them to the customer, the International delivery team, must:

1. Log the documents on the retained document spreadsheet.
2. Contact the customer by phone or email (these details are found on the application on AMS).
3. Send a contact letter by air mail, if the customer has not replied in 2 weeks.

If there is no reply to the contact letter, the International team, must:

1. Check AMS to see the APC that examined the application.
2. Complete an Archived documents form and send it to the archiving team in the passport office the application was dealt in.
3. Send any:

- newly issued British passports to the central LSR team (so they can record them as recovered and cancelled)
  - cancelled British passports to confidential waste
  - cancelled or current British passports that contain a valid visa to your local archive team
4. Record all actions they have taken as a passport note.

## Archiving documents returned by our Local service providers

A Local service provider must inform you (the International delivery team member) if they are unable to return a customer's passport or documents because a customer has:

- supplied a UK telephone number (Local services do not use these)
- not responded to the Local service contact attempts

You must:

1. Try to contact the customer by email, using the email address on the application, to say their documents are waiting to be collected.
  - two weeks after the first email, you must phone them (if there is a UK number) and send another email
  - after another 2 weeks, you must send a letter by air mail
2. Confirm with the customer the correct name of the person collecting the documents from Local service.
3. Tell the customer, if the person collecting the passport is different from the customer, the person collecting the passport must have:
  - a signed letter of consent from the customer
  - an overseas contact number
4. Email this information to the Local service, using the current Local service contact details.

After 30 days of a Local Service provider receiving a British passport or any supporting documents, the Local service provider, must:

1. Send the British passport (and any supporting documents) to the International delivery team by Secure Delivery or similar.
2. Email or write to the customer to tell them we have returned their passport or documents to the UK.

When the documents arrive with the International delivery team, you must try to contact the customer again.

You must:

1. Try to contact the customer, to tell them their documents are waiting collection.
2. Confirm with the customer the correct name of the person collecting the documents from Local service.



3. Tell the customer, if the person collecting the passport is different from the customer, the person collecting the passport, must have:
  - a letter of consent from the customer
  - an overseas contact number
4. Email this information to the Local service using the current Local service contact details.

If you are unable to contact the customer, you must send the documents to HM Passport Office Durham to be archived.

## Archiving documents not linked to an application

If you find a document that is not linked to an application, you must:

- search for the application on AMS using the details on the document
- link the document to the application

If the application has been passed for issue, you must return the document to the customer, using the details on the application.

If the document cannot be linked to an application, you must:

1. Complete an Archived documents form.
2. Put it in a plastic wallet with any other documents relating to the customer.
3. Complete your team's archives log (if you use one).
4. Put the plastic wallet in your team's 'Withdrawn' box.

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# How to ask for documents in the archive

This section tells HM Passport Office staff, how to get a customer's documents out of an archive, if the customer asks us to return them, the customer re-applies or we need them for a related application.

A customer may contact the examiner directly or our CSMt to ask us to return their documents. The examiner or CSMt must ask the customer to send a written and signed request for the return of their documents. They can email the letter as an attachment, using the email address they gave us on their application form.

When the name or address on the letter is different from the application, you must request evidence of the change of name or the new address.

When you get the written request, you must find:

1. The customer's application on Main Index.
2. The application processing centre (APC) that archived the customer's documents
  - o the customer's application was processed on DAP (Digital Application if Processing) system, (DAP, see: Document Management Service: long term storage)

CSMt will:

1. Email a scanned copy of the letter to the Customer Service Liaison team (CSLt) in the correct APC and tell them to return the stored documents to the customer.
2. The CSLt will arrange to get the documents out of storage and return them to the customer.

You, the CSLt or examiner, must:

- complete an Archives request form and email it to the archiving team responsible for unclaimed documents (unless the Archives team is in CSLt)

The archiving team will get the customers' documents from storage and give them to you.

When you receive documents from the archiving team you, must:

1. Return the documents following the Posting Passports and Documents guidance.
2. Return the documents secure delivery when this has been paid for.
3. Include a letter to tell the customer the documents are in the envelope.

4. Add a case note or passport note to the customers' Main Index record (if possible) to record you have returned the documents to them (listing what documents you have returned to them).

## If we no longer have a customer's documents

If a customer asks for documents we no longer have, you must:

1. Send the correct stock letter telling them we have destroyed or returned the documents to the issuing authority.
2. Refer to the complaints guidance if the customer wants to make a complaint.

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# How the archiving team deals with unclaimed documents

This section tells HM Passport Office staff working in the teams responsible for archiving customers' unclaimed documents (known in this guidance as the archiving teams) how to archive (store) customers' unclaimed documents. It includes how to identify and send documents that you must return to the issuing authority immediately.

To archive a customer's documents, you, the member of staff working in the archiving team, must:

1. Check the Archive form is filled in correctly and the documents received match the documents on the form.
2. Write your initials on the Archive form to confirm the documents are correct and sign the examination teams archive book (if you need to).
3. Put passport application forms, empty envelopes and correspondence not written on the Archive form in confidential waste.
4. Update the retained document spreadsheet to confirm, the:
  - application number
  - customer's forename and surname
  - date the archiving team received the documents
  - documents received
  - documents serial numbers
5. Separate those documents you must return to the [issuing authority immediately](#).
6. Write on the Archive form:
  - the date the archiving team received the documents
  - a review date 1 year in the future
7. Put the documents in a plastic wallet and place the Archive form at the front.
8. Add a case note or passport note on the passport issuing system to the correct application or passport record to confirm you have received the documents.
9. Store the plastic wallet, archive form and customer's documents in the dedicated archive area, ordered by date (using the date the archiving team received the documents).

## Returning documents to the issuing authority immediately

When you receive unclaimed documents into your archiving team, you must check the documents and separate those you must return to the issuing authority. You must:

1. Search on the internet for the address of the correct foreign embassy or financial institution you must return the documents to.
2. Draft a letter to send with the documents and put the letter and documents in an envelope addressed to the embassy or financial institution.

3. Make a note on the retained document spreadsheet to say:
  - you have returned the documents to the issuing authority
  - what documents you have returned
4. Add a passport note or case note to the customer's application or passport record (if possible) explaining:
  - you have returned the document to the issuing authority
  - the type of document you have returned
  - the address you sent the documents to

## How to manage the archiving area

You, the archiving team member, must update the retained document spreadsheet when a document is:

- destroyed
- returned to their rightful owner
- returned to the issuing authority
- returned to the issuing office
- kept due to an ongoing crisis event

## How to deal with a request for documents

When the archive team gets an Archive request form, you the archive team member of staff, must add the following information to the retained document spreadsheet:

- the details of the CSMT member, examiner or Customer Service Liaison team
- team number (or name)
- reason for the return of the document

## How to deal with a customer's documents in storage

If a customer (or examiner) asks for a customer's archived documents and they are in storage, you must:

1. Print the entry on the retained document spreadsheet and take it and the documents to either the staff member or the support clerk on the team asking for them.
2. Ask the member of staff collecting the documents to sign and date the printed entry and print their name.
3. Send the Archive document form to confidential waste.
4. Update the manual records and the electronic spreadsheet with details of your actions.

## How to deal with documents we have archived for 1 year

Every month the archiving team must review the unclaimed documents they have stored for 1 year and return them to the issuing authority or destroy them.

Each month, you must:

1. Find all the archived documents that are in storage for 1 year or more.
2. Decide if the document must be:
  - destroyed
  - returned to the issuing authority
  - sent back to an examiner to reassess a crisis event
3. Fill in a destruction log for each application number to record the documents you are destroying.
4. Update the retained document spreadsheet to confirm the documents were:
  - returned to the issuing authority
  - destroyed, the date of destruction, who destroyed them and who witnessed the destruction
  - returned to examination for more checks
5. Put the archive document form in confidential waste.

You must return British passports to the central LSR (Lost, Stolen and Recovered) team with a note, asking them to create a Recovered (R) record for the passport.

## How to maintain the return and destruction log sheet

You must complete the return and destruction log sheet with your actions taken, if you have:

- destroyed a document
- returned a document to an issuing authority

The person who witnessed the destruction of the documents and the type of documents destroyed, must print their name and signature on the destruction log sheet.

You must keep the log for the current and previous financial year. This is subject to assurance visits, as part of the Security Team assurance programme.

## How to destroy documents

To stop the fraudulent use of a document, you must destroy it. To destroy a document, you must:

- shred the document and place it into confidential waste
- tear it up into a minimum of 4 pieces and place them into confidential waste

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# What to do with archived documents

This section tells HM Passport Office staff what to do with a customer's unclaimed documents, when we have lost contact.

The action you, the archive team, must do with archived documents depends on the type of document it is.

## What documents you must immediately return to an issuing authority

Type of document	What to do
Bank cards, bank books and cheque books issued by a UK bank or building society	Return to the issuing bank immediately
Foreign currency	Send to the finance team
Foreign passport and foreign identity cards	Send to the correct embassy or consulate in the UK (for the address, refer to the Foreign and Commonwealth's list of <a href="#">foreign embassies in the UK</a> )

## What documents you must return to the issuing authority after 1 year

Type of document	Send them to
British passport	HM Passport Office's Lost, Stolen and Recovered team
HO Travel documents	See guidance on Home Office Travel Documents
DVLA issued UK driving license	The DVLA Swansea with stock letter
Change of name deeds, statutory declarations, affidavits	The solicitor named on the document. If the solicitor is unnamed or illegible destroy the documents
Care and Court orders	The court authority on the order
Travel tickets	The issuing authority (if valid) - if expired, destroy it
Student enrolment cards or documents	The university or college listed on the card
Foreign birth certificates or family books	The correct embassy or consulate in the UK with a completed Blank Return letter (for the address, refer to the Foreign and Commonwealth's list for <a href="#">foreign embassies in the UK</a> )
Foreign marriage certificates or civil partnership certificates	The correct embassy or consulate in the UK with a completed Blank Return letter (for the address, refer to the Foreign and Commonwealth's list for <a href="#">foreign embassies in the UK</a> )

	<a href="#">the UK</a> )
Foreign adoption certificate	The correct embassy or consulate in the UK with a completed Blank Return letter (for the address, refer to the Foreign and Commonwealth's list for <a href="#">foreign embassies in the UK</a> )
Foreign driving license	The correct embassy or consulate in the UK with a completed Blank Return letter (for the address, refer to the Foreign and Commonwealth's list for <a href="#">foreign embassies in the UK</a> )
Foreign Court and Care Orders	The correct embassy or consulate in the UK with a completed Blank Return letter (for the address, refer to the Foreign and Commonwealth's list for <a href="#">foreign embassies in the UK</a> )

## Documents you must destroy after 1 year

Type of document	Issuing Authority	What to do
All UK birth certificates	England and Wales	Destroy
	Scotland	Destroy
	Northern Ireland	Destroy
UK marriage certificates	England and Wales	Destroy
	Scotland	Destroy
	Northern Ireland	Destroy
UK adoption certificate	England and Wales	Destroy
	Scotland	Destroy
	Northern Ireland	Destroy
British consular birth certificate	Foreign and Commonwealth Office	Destroy
Naturalisation certificate	UK Visas & Immigration	Destroy
Registration certificate	UK Visas & Immigration	Destroy
Change of name deeds, statutory declarations, affidavits		Return to the named solicitor (if shown and clear) otherwise destroy
Bank statements issued by a bank or building society		Destroy
Bank cards, bank books and cheque books issued by a foreign bank or building society		Destroy
Travel tickets		Destroy, if expired

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