



Home Office

# Names: names that cannot be used in passports

Version 9.0

His Majesty's Passport Office guidance on names that cannot be used in passports

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# About: Names: names that cannot be used in passports

This guidance tells His Majesty's Passport Office operational staff about names that cannot be used in passports and how to deal with applications that have them, including names that:

- cause public offence
- breach trademark or copyright
- our system cannot accept for technical reasons

## 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 **9.0**
- published for Home Office staff on **3 November 2022**

## Changes from last version of this guidance

This guidance has been updated to correct a formatting error.

### Related content

[Contents](#)

# Names that cannot be used

This section tells His Majesty's Passport Operational staff about names a customer cannot use in a passport, how to decide if a customer's name can be used in a British Passport and how to deal with an application when we cannot accept a customer's name.

His Majesty's Passport Office issues passports on behalf of the Crown so the name a customer uses in a passport must be of an acceptable standard. In most cases, it will be but there may be occasions when a name is unacceptable and cannot be used.

This includes names that:

- may cause [public offence](#)
- breach [copyright or trademark laws](#)
- contain numbers or symbols that we cannot accept for [technical reasons](#)

## Names that cause public offence

Names that can cause public offence are names that may:

- cause public outrage to a community
- promote unlawful activity

Customers know if their name is acceptable to the public. While the name they use is their choice, they cannot use a British passport to include a name that may cause outrage, offence or promote unlawful activity.

Examples of names that cause outrage or offence may contain:

- swear words
- sexually explicit references
- inappropriate religious meanings that may cause offence to a section of the public
- vulgar or offensive language
- references that may be slanderous to others
- references to a person (living or dead) that may cause public offence

Examples of names that may that promote unlawful activity, include:

- names associated with criminal gangs or extremist organisations
- words that promote racial or religious hatred
- words that promote, encourage or incite crime or anti-social behaviour
- words that reference any past, present or future activity (or event) that may cause public offence
- the ability to hide a crime (for example, being on the sex offenders register)

When considering if a customer's name will cause offence or promote unlawful activity, you, the examiner, must take into account, the:

- words used
- phonetic sound of the name

## If a name causes public offence

The decision to accept or refuse an application because a name may cause public offence relies on your discretion. This is because we cannot definitively set out what may cause offence (and to whom) or promote unlawful activity.

When considering if a name is likely to offend sections of the community or if it promotes unlawful activity, you must:

- use this guidance to help you decide if a name may cause public offence
- remain objective, as you may personally think the name:
  - is offensive, when others may not
  - is not offensive, even though it meets the criteria in this guidance
- consider the application as a whole
- discuss the case with your Operational Team Leader (OTL)

A Higher Executive Officer (HEO) will decide if you must accept or refuse the application. If you decide a name may cause public offence and your line manager agrees, you must:

1. Refer the application to a HEO.
2. Recommend that they refuse the application, stating your reasons why
3. Add a case note to show all actions and decisions you have taken, along with the reasons (see Names: name related case notes, system checks and warnings for what must be included in the case note).

## Names that breach trademark or copyright laws

It is unlikely that a customer will use a name in a passport to advertise goods or services. If they do, we will not issue a passport without the consent of the trademark or copyright owner. This is because British passports are the property of the Crown and allowing a name that breaches trademark or copyright laws, may damage its reputation.

## If a name breaches trademark or copyright laws

We may find a customer's name may breach trademark or copyright laws:

- before we issue a passport to them (for example, when they send a first time or renewal passport application)
- after we have already issued them with a passport (for example, when they send us their passport as part of another application)

If you, the examiner, believes a customer's name may breach trademark or copyright laws, you:

- may use the internet to check for a trademark name (for example, [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) (which will show trademark names registered in the UK))
- must ask the customer to provide evidence to show they can use the name, if you have any doubts – the evidence must either:
  - include permission from the trademark or copyright owner, allowing the customer to use the name
  - confirm the name is not subject to trademark or copyright restrictions

If you are satisfied the name does not breach trademark or copyright laws (either by doing an internet search or from the evidence the customer gave) you must:

1. Scan any evidence the customer gave you on to the system, if it's a live application. If it's not a live application, you must add a passport note to explain what evidence you received and what it said.
2. Refer the application to a HEO.
3. Recommend they:
  - accept the application, explaining the reasons why (if it's a live application)
  - allow the customer to keep the passport, explaining the reasons why (if it's not a live application)
4. Add a case note (or passport note, if it's not a live application) to show all the actions and decisions you have taken, including your reasons (see Names: name related case notes, system checks and warnings for what you must include in the case note).

If you are satisfied the name may breach trademark or copyright laws (for example, using the internet to search for a trademark name) or the customer does not give you evidence, you must:

1. Refer the application to a HEO.
2. Recommend they:
  - refuse the application, explaining the reasons why (if it is a live application)
  - withdraw the passport, explaining the reasons why (if it's not a live application)
3. Add a case note (or passport note, if it is not a live application) to show all the actions and decisions you have taken, including your reasons (see Names: name related case notes, system checks and warnings for what you must include in the case note).

## Names that we cannot accept due to technical reasons

The systems we use to issue passports, meet the passport standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and does not allow us to issue a British passport in a name that contains:

- numbers

- symbols
- punctuation marks (except for hyphens or apostrophes in the name fields)
- diacritical characters (a mark, point or sign added to a letter) or accents marks (there are alternate spellings of names to take these into account, known as transliterations)
- too many characters in the forename or surname

## Names that contain numbers

If the number is clearly part of the customer's name (for example, it is on the birth certificate or acceptable change of name documents) you must spell it out in full on the passport. For example:

Customers name	Name to show on the passport
Thomas 7 Jones	Thomas Seven Jones
Mary Sm1th	Mary Smoneth
7 James Smith	Seven James Smith

## Names that contain apostrophes

The system does accept names that start with an apostrophe.

If a customer's name has an apostrophe that our system does not accept, you must raise a query with Guidance & Quality, Operating Standards using the Quality and Examination Support team (QuEst) referral process.

## Names that have diacritical characters or accent marks

The system does not accept names that include diacritical characters (a mark, point or sign added to a letter) or accent marks. In most languages, there are alternative spellings of names that take this into account. They have been agreed by the [ICAO](#) and are published in a [transliteration table](#).

Some customers may already use an alternative spelling of a diacritical character or accent mark when they send in their passport application. If they do not, we will need to take steps to update the customer's name with an alternative spelling, before we can issue them a passport.

You must be aware that some older passports may have diacritical characters or accent marks, as UK passports issued overseas before 01 April 2014 included them.

When we transferred them to Main Index, we changed them to show the alternative spelling and so they will not be shown on the passport record.

## Customer already using an alternative spelling

If a customer sends their passport application and it is clear from the supporting documents that they already use an alternative spelling shown on the [transliteration table](#), you must:

1. Accept the spelling without asking for any more supporting evidence. Add a case note to explain the difference in the spelling of the name (see Names: name related case notes, system checks and warnings for what must be included in the case note).
3. Deal with the application, in line with current guidance.

## Customer has not used an alternative spelling

If a customer sends their passport with a name that includes a diacritical character (a mark, point or sign added to a letter) or accent mark, you must check if an alternative spelling is shown [transliteration table](#).

## Name found on the transliteration table

If the name is found on the transliteration table, you must:

1. Update the name on the system with the alternative spelling. As the information is on GOV.UK, you do not need to tell the customer you have used an alternative spelling as shown on the transliteration table.
2. Add a case note to explain the difference with the spelling of the name (see Names: name related case notes, system checks and warnings for what must be included in the case note).
3. Deal with the application, in line with guidance.

## Name not found on the transliteration table

If the name is not found on the transliteration table, you must ask the customer to provide written evidence. For example:

- an official document
- a letter from a government authority in the country where the name is from
- a letter from the relevant embassy or High Commission in the UK

If the customer cannot provide evidence of an alternative spelling, they must tell us in writing why and include proof, for example:

- a letter from the embassy, High Commission in the UK or government authority that explains the circumstances
- copies of emails or proof of postage that shows the customer tried to contact the embassy, High Commission in the UK or government authority but did not get a reply

If a customer gives you evidence that they are unable to get an alternative spelling or gives you different information to that on our records, you must:

1. Tell the customer:
  - you need to carry out additional enquiries
  - it may take longer to process their passport application



- we will not pay compensation for missed travel dates or service levels
- 2. Raise a query with Guidance & Quality, Operating Standards using the QuEST referral process.
- 3. Electronically store the application, while you wait for a response.

If the customer fails to provide any evidence of alternative spelling or evidence why they cannot, you must refer to the [accepting or refusing the application](#) section of this guidance.

## Long names

The personal details section of the application allows the customer to use up to 30 characters for their forenames and 30 characters for their surname, including spaces between them.

If the customer has too many:

- characters in a name, we can use a shortened version of it (or the initial, if the name that has too many characters is not the first forename or first surname)
- forenames or surnames, we can use initials (for additional forenames or surnames)

You must:

- be aware:
  - if the first forename or surname has too many characters, you must use a shortened version of the name (as you must not use initials for the first forename or surname)
  - when using a shortened version of the name for a child, you must have the consent of everyone with parental responsibility to use it (for safeguarding (child protection) reasons)
- consider how to show the name in the passport, taking into account the number of characters in the name and how many names the customer has, for example:
  - if 1 middle name is too long, you may use either or a shortened version of the name or the initial of the middle name
  - the first forename is too long, you must use a shortened version of the name
- carry out watchlist checks using the customer's full name

## When using a shortened version of the name

Customers must:

- enter a shortened version of the name they want to be known by on the application form
- include their full name in the 'other information' section of the application form
- provide the consent of everyone with parental responsibility (for child applications)

You must refer to Names: change of name passport applications if the customer cannot provide the consent of everyone with parental responsibility.

The application and supporting documents may show the customer has already shortened their name.

You must:

1. Carry out a watchlist check on the full name.
2. Ask them for the consent of everyone with parental responsibility to use the shortened version of the name (if it's a child application and you do not already have it).
3. Accept the name shown on the application making sure:
  - you do not change the order of the customer's name
  - the shortened name is a name that we can use, in line with this guidance
  - you have the consent of everyone with parental responsibility (if it's a child application)
4. Add an observation to show 'The holder is [full name]' as evidenced by their supporting documents (see observations in passports). If the name is so long you cannot fit it as an observation, you must add an additional observation field, using the system code 'OBTZ'. This adds an additional line of blank text that can be used to include the full name.
5. Add a case note to show all the actions and decisions you have taken, along with your reasons (see Names: name related case notes, system checks and warnings for what must be included in the case note).
6. Deal with the application, in line with current guidance.

The application and supporting documents may show the customer has not shortened their name.

For paper and online applications, you must:

1. Carry out a watchlist check on the full name.
2. Contact them to:
  - explain their name is too long to fit on the passport
  - ask them for a shortened name they want to be known by on their passport
  - tell them you will add an observation that shows their full name
  - tell them you need the consent of everyone with parental responsibility to use the shortened version of the name (if it's a child application)
3. Update the system with the shortened name making sure you do not change the order of the name.
4. Add an observation to show 'The holder is [full name]' as evidenced by their supporting documents (see observations in passports). If the name is so long you cannot fit it as an observation, you must add an additional observation field using the system code 'OBTZ'. This adds an additional line of blank text that can be used to include the full name.
5. Add a case note to show all the actions and decisions you have taken, along with your reasons (see Names: name related case notes, system checks and warnings for what must be included in the case note).
6. Deal with the application, in line with current guidance.

For counter applications, you must:

1. Tell the customer:
  - their name is too long to fit on their passport
  - you can issue the passport in a shortened name with an observation that shows their full name
  - you need the consent of everyone with parental responsibility to use the shortened version of the name (if it's a child application)
2. Ask the customer to write the shortened name on the additional information section of their application form.
3. Note on the 'Back Office Examination' form:
  - how the name must be shown on the passport (making sure you do not change the order of the name)
  - the observation you need to add to show the customer's full name

You, the back office examiner, must carry out watchlist checks on the full name.

If the customer fails to give a shortened name, you must refer to the [accepting or refusing the application](#) section of this guidance.

## When the customer has too many names

If a customer has too many names and we cannot fit them in a passport, we will issue it:

- using the:
  - first forename and as many other forenames we can fit on the passport (if the customer has too many forenames)
  - first surname and as many other surnames we can fit on the passport (if the customer has too many surnames)
  - the initials of any forenames or surnames we cannot fit on the passport
- with an observation to show the full name

It may be clear from the application and supporting documents the customer has already done this.

You must:

1. Carry out a watchlist check on the full name.
2. Accept the name shown on the application.
3. Add an observation to show 'The holder is [full name]' as evidenced by their supporting documents (see Observations). If the name is so long you cannot fit it as an observation, you must add an additional observation field, using the system code 'OBTZ'. This adds an additional line of blank text that can be used to include the full name.
4. Add a case note to show all the actions and decisions you have taken, along with your reasons (see Names: name related case notes, system checks and warnings for what must be included in the case note).
5. Deal with the application, in line with current guidance.

It may not be clear from the application and supporting documents the customer has done this.

For paper and online applications, you must:

1. Carry out a watchlist check on the full name.
2. Contact the customer to tell them:
  - they have too many names to fit in the passport
  - how you will abbreviate the name (as shown by the guidance in this section)
  - add an observation to show their full name
3. Add an observation to show 'The holder is [full name]' as evidenced by their supporting documents, (see Observations). If the name is so long you cannot fit it as an observation, you must add an additional observation field using the system code 'OBTZ'. This adds an additional line of blank text that can be used to include the full name.
4. Add a case note to show all the actions and decisions you have taken, along with your reasons (see Names: name related case notes, system checks and warnings for what must be included in the case note).

For counter applications, you must:

1. Tell them:
  - they have too many names to fit in the passport
  - how you will abbreviate the name (as shown by the guidance in this section)
  - add an observation to show their full name
2. Note on the 'Back Office Examination' form:
  - how the name must be shown on the passport (making sure you do not change the order of the name)
  - the observation you need to add to show the customer's full name

You, the back office examiner, must carry out watchlist checks on the full name.

## **Related content**

[Contents](#)

# Accepting or refusing an application

This section tells His Majesty's Passport Office operational staff who decides to accept or refuse passport applications because the customer's name is unacceptable.

Higher Executive Officers (HEOs) will decide whether to refuse or accept an application, if the name:

- causes public offence (if the customer's name is a birth name, they must consult with the Passport Policy team)
- breaches trademark or copyright laws

Examiners will decide to refuse or accept an application, if a name:

- includes a diacritical character or accent mark not shown on the [transliteration table](#) and the customer cannot provide evidence of an alternative spelling
- is too long and the customer refuses to give a shortened name
- does not meet our security standards

## HEO decides name is acceptable

If you, the HEO, decides a name does not cause public offence or breach trademark or copyright laws, you must:

1. Add a case note (or passport note if it's not a live application) to the application to show all the actions and decisions you have made, including your reasons.
2. Refer the application back to the examiner and ask them to deal with it, in line with current guidance.

When you get the application back, you (the examiner) must deal with it, in line with current guidance.

## HEO decides a birth name may cause public offence

If you, the HEO, decides a name may cause public offence and it's the customer's birth name. You must:

1. Raise a query with the Passport Policy team using the Quality and Examination Support team (QuEST) referral process and explain why:
  - the name is offensive
  - we must refuse the application
2. Add a case note that shows all the actions and decisions you have taken and your reasons.
3. Electronically store the application while you wait for a response.
4. Refer the application back to the examiner (when you get a response) and tell them to:

- refuse the application, if the Passport Policy team confirms you cannot accept the name
- accept the name, if the Passport Policy team confirms you can accept the name

If an HEO tells you to accept a name, you, the examiner, must deal with the application, in line with current guidance and issue the customer a passport.

If an HEO tells you to refuse the application, you must tell the customer:

1. You cannot issue a passport using the name they applied in, as it may cause public offence.
2. You will fail the application, unless they change their name and send you evidence:
  - of the change of name
  - that they use the new name for all purposes

If a customer tells you that they will change their name, you must:

- electronically store the application while you wait for the customer to send you the evidence
- deal with the application, in line with Names: change of name passport applications guidance (when you get the evidence)
- withdraw the application, in line with the withdrawal of passport applications guidance (if you do not get the evidence)

If the customer does not want to change their name, you must:

1. Refer the application to your Operational Team Leader (OTL) and recommend they fail the application.
2. Add a case note to show why the application failed.

You, the OTL, must:

1. Fail the application on the system.
2. Add a case note to show why you failed the application.
3. Send an admin IT letter to the customer to explain their application has failed because:

'The passport application submitted by you on [date] does not meet the criteria published by HM Passport Office on the use of names. Your application is deemed to contain a name, which if used in whole or in part may [cause offence to individuals and to the wider public] [result in legal action] [incite criminal activity] [reduce public confidence in the integrity of the passport]. Guidance is set out at: [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).'

## HEO decides a change of name causes public offence

If you, the HEO, decides you must refuse an application because it may cause public offence and the name is a change of name, you must:

1. Add a case note to show all your actions and decisions you made (with reasons).
2. Refer the application back to the examiner and tell them to fail the application.

When you, the examiner, get the application back from the HEO, you must tell the customer:

1. You cannot issue them a passport using the name they applied in, as it may cause public offence.
2. You will fail the application, unless they change their name and send you evidence:
  - of the change of name
  - they use the new name for all purposes

If the customer tells you that they will change their name, you must:

- electronically store the application while you wait for the customer to send you the evidence
- deal with the application, in line with Names: change of name passport applications guidance when you get the evidence
- withdraw the application, in line with the withdrawal of passport applications guidance, if you do not get the evidence

If the customer does not want to change their name, you must:

1. Refer the application to your Operational Team Leader (OTL) and recommend they fail the application.
2. Add a case note to show why you failed the application.

You the OTL must:

1. Fail the application on the system.
2. Send the customer Application Management System letter 321 (or the Digital Application Processing email template, if the application is on DAP) to explain you failed their application (as it does not meet our criteria on the use of names).

## HEO decides a name breaches trademark and copyright laws

If you, the HEO, decides a name breaches trademark or copyright laws and it is on valid passport we already issued to a customer, you must:

1. Add a passport note to show all of the actions and decisions you made with reasons.
2. Refer the application back to the examiner and tell them to deal with the application, in line with the Refusing passport applications and passport facilities guidance.

If you, the HEO, decides a name breaches trademark or copyright laws and it is a live application, you must:

1. Add a case note to show all your actions and decisions made with reasons.
2. Refer the application back to the examiner and tell them to fail the application.

When you, the examiner, get the application back from the HEO, you must tell the customer:

1. You cannot issue them a passport in name they applied in, as it breaches trademark or copyright laws.
2. You will fail the application, unless they change their name and send you evidence:
  - of the change of name
  - that they use the new name for all purposes

If the customer tells you that they will change their name, you must:

- electronically store the application while you wait for the customer to send you the evidence
- deal with the application, in line with Names: change of name passport applications guidance when you get the evidence
- withdraw the application, in line with the withdrawal of passport applications guidance (if you do not get the evidence)

If the customer does not want to change their name, you must:

1. Refer the application to your Operational Team Leader (OTL) and recommend they fail the application.
2. Add a case note to show why you failed the application.

You, the OTL, must:

1. Fail the application on the system.
2. Send an Admin IT letter to the customer to explain their application failed because 'The passport application submitted by you on [date] does not meet the criteria published by HMPO on the use of names. Your application contains a name which may relate to a trademark or copyright and you have failed to provide confirmation that the owner of that trademark or copyright is content for you to make use of the proposed name or confirmation from the person or organisation using that name which is in the public domain it is not subject to any copyright or trademark provisions. Guidance is set out at: [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).'



3. Refer to the customer still wants passport after we refuse the application guidance, if the customer tells you they still want a passport.

## Refusing names: No evidence of an alternative spelling

If the customer's name includes a diacritical character or accent mark not shown on the [transliteration table](#) and they cannot provide evidence of an alternative spelling or evidence why they cannot, you, the examiner, must tell the customer:

1. You need to withdraw their application, as you cannot issue a passport using the name they applied in, as it has a diacritical character or accent mark that cannot be used in the passport and they have not provided:
  - official evidence of an alternative spelling
  - evidence that shows they tried to get an alternative spelling and were not able to
2. You will withdraw the application, unless they either:
  - provide official evidence that shows an alternative spelling
  - provide evidence that shows they have tried to get an alternative spelling
  - change their name and provide us with evidence of the change of name and evidence they use the new name for all purposes

If the customer gives you official evidence of an alternative spelling or evidence that shows they tried to get an alternative spelling, you must refer to: [customer has not used an alternative spelling and it cannot be found on the transliteration table](#).

If the customer tells you that they will change their name, you must:

- electronically store the application (while you wait for the customer to send you the evidence)
- deal with the application, in line with Names: change of name passport applications guidance (when you get the evidence)
- withdraw the application, in line with the withdrawal of passport applications guidance (if you do not get the evidence)

If the customer does not provide official evidence of an alternative spelling, evidence that they tried to get an alternative spelling or they do not want to change their name, we will withdraw their application, rather than refuse it. You must:

1. Add a case note to show why you are withdrawing the application.
2. Send a letter to the customer to explain you withdrew their application because:

'The passport application submitted by you on [date] does not meet the criteria published by HM Passport Office on the use of names. Your application contains a [number] [symbol] which does not accord with the standards required to use as name in the British passport. Guidance is set out at: GOV.UK.'

3. Withdraw the application, in line with the withdrawal of passport applications guidance.

## Refusing names that have too many characters

If a customer's name is too long to fit on the passport and they refuse to give you a shortened name, you (the examiner) must tell the customer:

1. You need to withdraw their application, as you cannot issue them a passport using the name they applied in, as it is too long and they refused to give a shortened name.
2. You will withdraw the application, unless they either:
  - give you a shortened version of their name
  - have another name they want to use (if they do, they need to give you evidence of a change of name and that they use the new name for all official purposes)

If the customer gives you a shortened version of their name, you must refer to [names that have too many characters](#).

If the customer tells you that they will change their name, you must:

- electronically store the application (while you wait for the customer to send you the evidence)
- deal with the application, in line with Names: change of name passport applications guidance (when you get the evidence)
- withdraw the application in line with the withdrawal of passport applications guidance (if you do not get the evidence)

If the customer still refuses to shorten their name and they do not want to change their name, we will withdraw the application, rather than refuse it.

You must:

1. Add a case note to explain why you are withdrawing the application.
2. Send a letter to the customer to explain you are withdrawing the application because:

'The passport application submitted by you on [date] does not meet the criteria published by HM Passport Office on the use of names. The name provided in your application contains too many characters for inclusion in the passport and you have [failed] [refused] to provide an acceptable shortened version. Guidance is set out at GOV.UK'

3. Withdraw the application, in line with the withdrawal of passport applications guidance.

## Application does not meet our identity standards

We must maintain the security of the passport and will refuse a passport application, if we cannot be certain (from a customer's name) that they hold the claimed identity (see Royal Prerogative).

If you have doubts that the customer's name does not belong to the claimed identity, you must:

- refer the application to an Enhanced Application Checking examiner if you are processing on AMS
- complete additional checks if you are processing on DAP

If we suspect fraud, we may consider contacting the police or other law enforcement agencies, in line with current guidance.

## If the customer still wants a passport

If we refuse or withdraw a customer's application because we cannot accept their name but they still want a British passport, they must:

- apply in a name we can accept
- provide evidence of a change of name, including evidence they use the name for all purposes

### Related content

[Contents](#)