

Passports

1. History

1.1 The passport first made its appearance in the reign of Henry V in the form of a 'safe conduct'. The Privy Council granted passports from at least 1540, and one of the earliest still in existence was issued on 18 June 1641 and signed by Charles I. Since 1794, they have always been granted by the Secretary of State, and a record exists of all passports issued since that date. A photograph of the holder became a requirement at the outbreak of World War I in 1914. The familiar blue British passport came into use in 1921. The last of these will expire in 2003.

2. The common format passport

2.1 In September 1988, the first UK passports in the EC common format were issued by the Glasgow Passport Office, and the facility to issue them was extended to other offices by the spring of 1991.

2.2 The passport is burgundy coloured and machine-readable. It has 32 pages. Those issued to British citizens (including Channel Islanders and Manxmen), British subjects with right of abode in the UK and BDTs by connection with Gibraltar bear the words "European Union" (or "European Community", in the case of those issued before December 1997) on the front cover. Passports issued to other British nationals are similar but do not have "European Community" or "European Union" on the front.

2.3 Obtainable from Passport Offices in the United Kingdom and from Foreign & Commonwealth posts abroad, a passport is normally valid for a single period of 10 years. In the case of a child under 16, a passport is valid for a period of 5 years only. (Passports issued before 26 March 1998 to children under 16 can be renewed for a further 5 years free of charge.)

2.4 A digital United Kingdom passport was introduced on 5 October 1998 at the Liverpool office. The technology captures a digital image of the photograph and signature, and reproduces these onto the personal details page of the passport.

2.5 Full documentary evidence of a claim to British nationality is required in support of an application for a United Kingdom passport; it can therefore be accepted as evidence of the holder's nationality status.

3. The jumbo passport

3.1 A 94-page passport, which was introduced on 1 May 1973 to accommodate the needs of business persons and other frequent travellers. The last of these were issued by FCO posts in 1993. The burgundy version of this passport has 48 pages.

4. Restricted – not available for disclosure

5. British visitors' passports

5.1 The British Visitor's Passport (BVP), a simplified version of the standard passport, was introduced in March 1961 and made available to any British citizen, British Dependent Territories citizen or British Overseas citizen resident in the United Kingdom for over 8 years. It was in the form of a 3-fold card, and could be obtained from any post office on sight of the applicant's birth certificate or other specified

documents of identity. It was intended solely for holiday or similar private visits not exceeding 3 months in duration to specified European countries. It was valid for one year only. Due to many concerns arising in connection with the easy availability and security of this document, the BVP was withdrawn with effect from 1 January 1996.

5.2 In view of these uncertainties, the BVP should, under no circumstances, be accepted as evidence of citizenship.

6. Children included in United Kingdom passports

6.1 Between June 1970 (for posts overseas) and July 1971 (for United Kingdom Passport Offices) and February 1972, the Passport Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office posts overseas did not make any observation about the nationality status of a child who was not a citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies if the child was included in the passport of a person other than the parent. It is therefore important that the inclusion of a child in a United Kingdom passport issued between these dates should not be regarded as conclusive evidence of the child's nationality status.

6.2 In February 1972, Passport Office and posts abroad ceased, except in the most exceptional circumstances, to include in United Kingdom passports the particulars of children who were citizens of other Commonwealth countries, citizens of the Republic of Ireland or aliens. When these arose, posts were instructed to include the name of the child in the parent's passport with a note to the effect that the nationality status of the child had not been determined. To avoid future difficulties, and to encourage parents to get their children properly documented as soon as possible, the validity of the parent's passport was restricted (or cut back) to 6 months.

6.3 If a child's name has been added without observation it should not be assumed that the child's nationality status has necessarily been established by documentary evidence other than that needed to establish the parent/child relationship. Full supporting documents will need to be requested when an application is received for a child whose particulars have been included in a parent's passport by an overseas post.

6.4 Passport offices investigated whether children were British citizens etc before including their particulars in a parent's passport, and records should indicate the derivation of the child's status where this was established. If an investigation could not be completed before the date of travel for lack of satisfactory evidence, for example, of legitimate descent or legitimation, children may, if there was every indication that they were British citizens etc, have been included in the parent's passport with a note to the effect that their nationality status had not been determined. The validity of the parent's passport was restricted and the index card noted.

6.5 Until 4 October 1998, children under 16 years of age were able to be included on the passport of any family member. Since that date, all children have been required to hold their own passports. Children whose particulars were already included in their parents' passports were not immediately affected by this change, and may continue to travel with their parents until the passport concerned expires or needs to be replaced.

6.6 Normally, either parent may consent to the issue of a passport for a child. Where the parents were not married to each other at the time of the child's birth, the mother must give consent if the father has not been given parental responsibility for the child.

The UKPA operates a scheme whereby either parent can lodge an objection to passport facilities being granted to a child if they have a court order requiring their consent, or the sanction of the court, for the removal of the child from the jurisdiction of the court. An unmarried mother can lodge an objection without a court order if the father has not been given parental responsibility.

7. Spouses

7.1 Until August 1988, the particulars of a wife or husband could be included in the UK passport if both partners were British citizens. This practice was discontinued when the EC common format passport was introduced.

8. Passports of convenience and "camouflage" passports

8.1 Certain governments occasionally issue 'passports of convenience' to persons who do not possess the nationality of the country concerned and have little or no connection with it. These documents are neither counterfeit nor falsified, and the majority have the appearance of full national passports, but either make no reference to nationality or refer to nationality only by a numerical coding.

8.2 "Camouflage" passports are occasionally encountered, issued by commercial organisations to people who wish to assume an alternative identity and/or nationality for the purposes of travel to less secure parts of the world (e.g. to avoid being singled out by hostage takers or terrorists). These documents may bear the name of non-existent countries (e.g. Republic of San Cristobal) or countries whose names have changed (e.g. Republic of Ceylon, Upper Volta, etc). Their design is similar to that of the EC common format passport (this is believed to be a deliberate policy to enhance the international acceptability of the documents).

8.3 Neither form of passport constitute satisfactory evidence of nationality and identity and, for immigration purposes, the holders require UK visas unless they hold further and satisfactory evidence.

8.4 Immigration Service National Forgery Section (ISNFS) should normally be consulted if a passport of convenience or "camouflage" passport is submitted in connection with a nationality application or claim to citizenship. ISNFS may also be consulted for an interpretation of the nationality coding, if applicable.

9. Emergency passports

9.1 Emergency passport facilities may be granted by an immigration officer at a port or by FCO posts abroad (e.g. when "distressed British citizens" are being repatriated from abroad at Government expense and are required to surrender their passport until the fare has been repaid). Such documents are not acceptable as evidence of the holder's nationality status.

10. For information on liaison with the Passport Agency see "UNITED KINGDOM PASSPORT AGENCY".