



Home Office

Customer conduct

Version 3.0

This guidance tells His Majesty's Passport Office staff how to deal with customers who are abusive towards them.

Contents

Contents.....	2
About: Customer conduct.....	3
Contacts	3
Publication	3
Changes from last version of this guidance	3
Customer conduct: supporting our staff.....	4
Customer conduct: how we support staff.....	4
What training is available to deal with threatening customers.....	4
What a line manager must do if a member of staff is threatened.....	5
Customer conduct: how to record and deal with incidents	5
How to record an incident.....	5
How to deal with a physically abusive customer.....	6
How to deal with serious incidents.....	6
Customer conduct: abusive customers in a public facing area.....	7
Public facing area: customer’s behaviour improves.....	7
Public facing area: customer’s behaviour does not improve.....	8
Public facing area: how to remove a customer	8
Public facing area: how to bar a customer.....	8
How to bar a customer from a CSC	9
Public facing area: telling CSOs and CSCs about an incident.....	9
Customer conduct: face to face interviews.....	11
Face to face interviews: behaviour does not improve	11
Face to face interviews: customer did not complete 3 interviews	12
Customer conduct: Skype interviews	13
Skype interviews: behaviour does not improve.....	13
Skype interviews: customer did not complete 3 interviews	14
Customer conduct: how to deal with abusive telephone calls	15
Telephone calls: customer’s behaviour does not improve.....	15
Customer conduct: abusive written communications.....	17
Written communications: customer continues to be abusive	18

About: Customer conduct

This guidance tells HM Passport Office staff how to deal with customers who are abusive towards them.

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 and 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 and Quality, Operating Standards.

Publication

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

- version **3.0**
- 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

[Contents](#)

Customer conduct: supporting our staff

This section tells HM Passport Office staff about customer conduct and how we deal with conduct that is abusive or threatening to our staff. It includes how line managers must record and deal with incidents of threatening or abusive behaviour towards our staff.

We assume all customers will behave correctly when dealing with staff, however, some customers may be abusive or threaten staff or other people. Abusive or threatening behaviour can be verbal or physical and may:

- be sexist, racist or homophobic or may involve discrimination because of a [person's protected characteristics](#)
- use intimidating language, such as swearing or aggressive body language

Customer conduct: how we support staff

We do not expect staff to feel they must deal with customers showing threatening, abusive or violent behaviour. For example:

- in a [face to face](#) setting (such as a public counter)
- over [the phone](#)
- in [written communications](#) (for example, in digital or paper applications, letters and emails)
- during [video calls](#) (such as Skype interviews)

You, the person dealing with the customer, can refuse to serve them if they are being threatening, abusive or violent towards you.

If you refuse to serve a customer, you must:

- refer them to your line manager (if you are in a face to face setting)
- end the call and give your line manager the customers details (if you are talking to the customer over the phone or in a video call)
- give your line manager the customers details (if the customer sends us an abusive written communication)

What training is available to deal with threatening customers

There are courses on Metis Learning and Civil Service Learning, if you want to have training in dealing with threatening customers.

What a line manager must do if a member of staff is threatened

If a member of staff has dealt with or refused to serve a customer showing threatening, abusive or violent behaviour, you (the line manager) must:

1. Speak with the member of staff to check how they are feeling.
2. Remind the member of staff there is support available. For example, through:
 - the Employee Assistance Programme
 - the Public and Commercial Services union
 - staff contact officers
3. Give the member of staff time to seek extra support (if they need it).
4. Make a record of the incident and:
 - include the steps you have taken after the incident (for example, if you made a referral to the Employee Assistance Programme)
 - ask the member of staff to read and sign the report if they agree with what you've written
 - keep the record in the staff member's human resources file
5. Check if you need to [fill in an incident report form](#).

Line managers can also consider if members of staff would benefit from having a panic alarm.

Customer conduct: how to record and deal with incidents

You, the line manager, must fill in an incident report form, for incidents:

- involving abuse related to a protected characteristic in [section 4 of the Equality Act 2010](#)
- when a staff member feels they've been threatened or abused

You will be subject to disciplinary action, if you:

- deliberately do not record incidents
- encourage staff not to record incidents

How to record an incident

If you need to record an incident, you must:

1. Fill in the incident report form and add:
 - the date of the incident, to the **date** column
 - where the incident took place, in the location column (for example, a Customer Service Office)
 - what time the incident happened, in the **time** column
 - what happened, in the **details of incident** column
 - what you did to resolve the incident and any support you put in place for the staff involved, in the **action taken** column
 - who was involved in the incident, to the **staff involved** column

- who you reported the incident to, in the **reported to whom** column
 - any other information that you think is important, to the **comments** column
2. Send the incident report form to the:
- human resources service centre
 - Equality and Diversity team
 - PCS (Public and Commercial Services) branch health and safety representatives
 - security help desk if there has been a security or data breach (for example, if the customer accessed a restricted area)

How to deal with a physically abusive customer

If a customer physically assaults a member of staff in a public facing area, you, the executive officer (EO) counter manager, must refer to the security incident and breaches page on Horizon.

How to deal with serious incidents

You must refer cases to a senior executive officer (SEO) if both of the following apply:

- an incident is very serious, for example a customer is threatening violence towards HM Passport Office staff
- you know the customer's identity (for example, they have a live application)

You, the SEO, must:

1. Consider if the incident is serious enough to make the police aware of the incident.
2. Tell your Grade 7 manager about the incident (if you agree the police should be made aware of the incident).

You, the Grade 7 manager, may consider informing the police about the incident, in line with current guidance.

Related content

[Contents](#)

Customer conduct: abusive customers in a public facing area

This section tells HM Passport Office staff how to deal with abusive customers in public facing areas. It also tells them how to remove a customer from a public facing area and how to bar a customer.

Customers may come to a public facing area because:

- they want to submit an application using a priority service
- they must attend an interview to complete their application

We consider it offensive and unacceptable for a customer to refuse to be served by a staff member because of the staff member's [protected characteristic](#).

If a customer refuses to be served because of a staff member's [protected characteristic](#), you (the person dealing with the customer), must refer them to the executive officer (EO) counter manager.

You, the EO counter manager, must:

- not allow the customer to be served by someone else
- only allow the customer to be served by someone else, if the staff member asks for it

If a customer shows violent, threatening or abusive behaviour toward you, you must:

- be aware a customer's behaviour may be because of a mental or physical disability (for example, anxiety and depression)
- tell the customer:
 - their behaviour is unacceptable
 - they must apologise to the member of staff
 - they must behave in a civil manner
- allow the customer the opportunity to improve their behaviour, taking into account their needs

Public facing area: customer's behaviour improves

You, the person dealing with the customer, must consider if you still want to serve the customer.

If you decide to serve the customer, you must deal with them as normal, if:

- their behaviour improves
- you received an apology from the customer

Public facing area: customer's behaviour does not improve

If the customer's behaviour does not improve, you, the EO counter manager, may:

- allow the customer to use the internal post box (if your office has one) to:
 - prevent a conflict in the public facing area
 - remove the risk of more disruption
- tell the customer to post their application to us or to apply online
- remove the customer from the public facing area, because of their behaviour (see: [public facing area: how to remove a customer](#)), and:
 - not allow them to use the internal post box (if your office has one)
 - tell them they must apply online, or by post

Public facing area: how to remove a customer

If a customer's behaviour has not improved and we must remove them from a public facing area, you, the EO counter manager, must:

1. Ask the customer to leave.
2. Ask security guards (if your office has them) to escort the customer off the premises (if the customer refuses to leave).
3. Call the police to remove the customer from the public facing area (if your office does not have security guards and the customer refuses to leave).
4. Decide if the customer must be barred from public facing areas (see: [public facing area: how to bar a customer](#)).

Public facing area: how to bar a customer

If a customer's behaviour was so unacceptable, the EO counter manager had to remove them from a Customer Service Office (CSO), you, the higher executive officer (HEO) counter manager, must:

1. Draft a warning letter on the day of the incident, that explains the customer must attend a CSC to finish the interview process (see: public facing area barring letter (CSO) template).
2. Send the draft of the letter to your senior executive officer (SEO) for sign off.

When you receive the reply from your SEO, and they have agreed to bar the customer from the CSO, you must:

1. Send a copy of the letter to the:
 - senior executive officer
 - security liaison officer
 - Grade 7 manager of the office where the application was dealt with
2. Scan a copy of the letter on to the application (see: how to keep scans of supporting documents).
3. Send the letter to the customer.
4. Record the incident (see: [customer conduct: how to record and deal with incidents](#)).

5. Tell the other CSOs and CSCs about the incident (see: [public facing area: telling CSOs and CSCs about an incident](#)).

How to bar a customer from a CSC

If a customer's behaviour was so unacceptable, the EO counter manager had to remove them from a Customer Service Centre (CSC), you, the HEO counter manager, may consider writing to the customer to tell them:

- they are barred from attending all passport offices
- they can only apply using the standard post or online service

If you believe the customer must be barred from attending a CSC, you must:

1. Draft a public facing area barring letter (CSC) on the day of the incident, that explains the customer:
 - is barred from attending all passport offices
 - can only apply using the standard post or online service
2. Send the draft of the letter to your SEO for sign off.

When you receive the reply from your SEO, and they have agreed to bar the customer, you must:

1. Send a copy of the letter to the:
 - senior executive officer
 - security liaison officer
 - Grade 7 manager of the office where the application was dealt with (if the application was not dealt with in your office)
2. Scan a copy of the letter on to the application if we have a live application (see: how to keep scans of supporting documents).
3. Send the letter to the customer.
4. Record the incident (see: [customer conduct: how to record and deal with incidents](#)).
5. Tell the other CSOs and CSCs about the incident (see: [public facing area: telling CSOs and CSCs about an incident](#)).

Public facing area: telling CSOs and CSCs about an incident

You (the higher executive officer) must tell the executive officer (EO) counter manager to tell the other CSCs and CSOs about the incident, so they are aware of any problem customers, when you have:

- warned a customer about their behaviour (for example, during a Skype interview)
- barred a customer from a CSO or CSC

To tell the other CSOs and CSCs about the incident, you, the EO counter manager, must send an email to the regional counter manager's inbox, to let them know:

- about the incident
- the customer's name
- the application number (if the application was submitted)

Related content

[Contents](#)

Customer conduct: face to face interviews

This section tells HM Passport Office staff how to deal with abusive customers during face to face interviews.

If a customer becomes abusive or threatening during a face to face interview, you, the interview officer, must:

- tell the customer the interview will not continue, unless they improve their behaviour
- be aware a customer's behaviour may be because of a mental or physical disability (for example, anxiety and depression)
- allow the customer the opportunity to improve their behaviour, taking into account their needs

You must consider if you can continue with the interview, even if the customer's behaviour improves. If you decide you can continue with the interview, you must deal with the interview, in line with the interviews – customer service office role guidance.

If the customer's behaviour does not improve, you must refer to [face to face interviews: behaviour does not improve](#).

Face to face interviews: behaviour does not improve

If a customer's behaviour does not improve during a face to face interview, you must:

1. Tell the customer:
 - you have warned them, and their behaviour has not improved
 - you will now end the interview
 - we will contact them in writing about their application
2. End the face to face interview.
3. Tell your higher executive officer (HEO) counter manager, you have:
 - ended the customer's interview
 - why you had to end the interview

You (the HEO counter manager) must

1. Draft an interview warning letter on the day of the incident, that explains the customer must:
 - do an interview as part of the application process
 - contact us to book another interview
2. Send the draft of the letter to your senior executive officer (SEO) for sign off.

When you receive the reply from your SEO, and they have agreed to warn the customer, you must:

1. Send a copy of the letter to the:
 - senior executive officer
 - security liaison officer
 - Grade 7 manager of the office where the application was dealt with (if the application was not dealt with in your office)
2. Scan a copy of the letter on to the application (see: how to keep scans of supporting documents).
3. Send the letter to the customer.
4. Record the incident (see: [customer conduct: how to record and deal with incidents](#)).
5. Tell the executive officer (EO) counter manager they must tell the other CSOs and CSCs about the incident (see: [public facing area: telling CSOs and CSCs about an incident](#)).

Face to face interviews: customer did not complete 3 interviews

If a customer has already been warned 2 times about their behaviour during a face to face interview however, they continue to be abusive, you (the interview officer), must:

1. End the face to face interview.
2. Return the application to the examiner as an **admin refusal** (in line with the interviews – customer service office role guidance).

You, the examiner, must deal with their application in line with the interviews UK applications guidance.

Related content

[Contents](#)

Customer conduct: Skype interviews

This section tells HM Passport Office staff how to deal with abusive customers in Skype interviews.

If a customer becomes abusive or threatening during a Skype interview, you, the interview officer, must:

- tell the customer the interview will not continue, unless they improve their behaviour, if they:
 - become abusive during a Skype interview
 - do something during the Skype interview that causes you to suffer an acoustic shock (for example, screaming or loud noises)
- be aware a customer's behaviour may be because of a mental or physical disability (for example, anxiety and depression)
- allow the customer the opportunity to improve their behaviour, taking into account their needs

You must consider if you are able to continue with the Skype interview, even if the customer's behaviour improves. If you decide you can continue with the interview, you must deal with the Skype interview, in line with current guidance.

If the customer's behaviour does not improve, you must refer to [Skype interviews: behaviour does not improve](#).

Skype interviews: behaviour does not improve

If a customer's behaviour does not improve during a Skype interview, you must:

1. Tell the customer:
 - you have warned them, and their behaviour has not improved
 - you will now end the interview
 - we will contact them in writing about their application
2. End the Skype interview.
3. Tell your higher executive officer (HEO), Customer Service Office (CSO) or Customer Service Centre (CSC) manager, you have:
 - ended the Skype interview
 - why you had to end the interview

You (the HEO, CSO or CSC manager) must

1. Draft an interview warning letter on the day of the incident, that explains the customer must:
 - do an interview as part of the application process
 - contact us to book another interview
2. Send the draft of the letter to your senior executive officer (SEO) for sign off.

When you receive the reply from your SEO, and they have agreed to warn the customer, you must:

1. Send a copy of the letter to the:
 - senior executive officer
 - security liaison officer
 - Grade 7 manager of the office where the application was dealt with (if the application was not dealt with in your office)
2. Scan a copy of the letter on to the application (see: how to keep scans of supporting documents).
3. Send the letter to the customer.
4. Record the incident (see: [customer conduct: how to record and deal with incidents](#)).
5. Tell the executive officer (EO) counter manager they must tell the other CSOs and CSCs about the incident (see: [public facing area: telling other CSOs and CSCs about an incident](#)).

Skype interviews: customer did not complete 3 interviews

If a customer has already been warned 2 times about their behaviour during a Skype interview however, they continue to be abusive, you (the Interview Officer), must:

1. End the Skype interview.
2. Return the application to the examiner as an **admin refusal** (in line with the interviews – customer service office role guidance).

You, the examiner, must deal with their application in line with the interviews UK applications guidance.

Related content

[Contents](#)

Customer conduct: how to deal with abusive telephone calls

This section tells HM Passport Office staff how to deal with abusive customers over the phone.

If a customer is abusive over the phone, you, the call handler (anyone dealing with a call to or from a customer) must:

- tell them the call will not continue unless they improve their behaviour for example, if they:
 - are abusive or become abusive toward you
 - do something that causes you to suffer an acoustic shock (for example, screaming or loud noises)
- be aware a customer's behaviour may be because of a mental or physical disability (for example, anxiety and depression)
- allow the customer the opportunity to improve their behaviour, taking into account their needs

If the customer's behaviour improves, you must deal with their questions, in line with current guidance. If the customer's behaviour does not improve, you must refer to [telephone calls: customer's behaviour does not improve](#).

Telephone calls: customer's behaviour does not improve

If a customer's behaviour on the phone does not improve, you must:

1. Tell the customer:
 - you have already warned them about their behaviour
 - the call will now end
2. End the call.
3. Add a case note to the application to record the incident. In your case note, you must include:
 - who you spoke to
 - what the customer's query was
 - what you told the customer
 - what the customer said or done
4. Give your line manager (for example, your operational team leader) either of the following:
 - the application (if you have it)
 - the customer's application reference number (if you do not have the application)

You (the line manager) must:

1. Check the case notes to see what happened.

2. Call the customer back and tell them:
 - who you are
 - where you are calling from
 - why you are calling (for example, the examiner had to end the call because of their behaviour)
 - you are going to look into their query for them
3. Deal with the customer's query in line with current guidance.
4. Record the incident (see: [customer conduct: how to record and deal with incidents](#)).
5. Add a case note to the application to record the incident. In your case note, you must include:
 - who you spoke to
 - what the customers query was
 - what you told the customer

If you call the customer back and their behaviour has not improved, you must:

1. End the call.
2. Record the incident (see: [customer conduct: how to record and deal with incidents](#)).
3. Add a case note to the application to record the incident. In your case note, you must include:
 - who you spoke to
 - what the customers query was
 - what you told the customer
 - what the customer said or done

If the customer must attend an interview as part of the application process, the interview officer, will:

- review the application and your case notes when they prepare for the interview
- know the customer may become abusive during the interview

Related content

[Contents](#)

Customer conduct: abusive written communications

This section tells HM Passport Office staff how to deal with customers who are abusive in any of their written communications, on any letter, email or application (paper or digital)

You, the person dealing with the written communication, must tell your line manager (for example, an operational team leader), if a customer sends you an abusive written communication (for example, a letter or an email) or includes abusive words or comments on an application, these include:

- threats
- personal abuse based on a protected characteristic
- intimidating or abusive language (for example, swearing)

You (the line manager) must:

- be aware a customer's behaviour may be because of a mental or physical disability (for example, anxiety and depression)
- tell your higher executive officer (HEO), so they can reply to the customer

You, the HEO, must:

1. Draft a warning letter on the day of the incident, that explains their behaviour is not acceptable and if it continues, they will be barred from sending HM Passport Office written communications (see: written communications warning letter template).
2. Send the draft of the letter to your senior executive officer (SEO) for sign off.

When you receive the reply from your SEO, and they have agreed to warn the customer, you must:

1. Send a copy of the letter to the:
 - senior executive officer
 - security liaison officer
 - Grade 7 manager of the office where the application was dealt with (if the application was not dealt with in your office)
2. Scan a copy of the letter on to the application (see: how to keep scans of supporting documents).
3. Send the letter to the customer.
4. Record the incident (see: [customer conduct: how to record and deal with incidents](#)).
5. Send the warning letter to the customer.
6. Consider if the case must be referred to the police (see: [how to deal with serious incidents](#)).

Written communications: customer continues to be abusive

If a customer continues to send abusive written communications to HM Passport Office, you the HEO, must:

1. Draft a written communications barring letter to the customer on the day of the incident that explains:
 - their behaviour is not acceptable
 - they are barred from sending HM Passport Office written communications
 - they can track the progress of their application online (if they applied online)
 - they must call the passport helpline if they have a query with their application
2. Send the draft letter to your SEO for sign off.

When you receive the reply from your SEO, and they have agreed to bar the customer from sending written communications, you must:

1. Send a copy of the letter to the:
 - senior executive officer
 - security liaison officer
 - Grade 7 manager of the office where the application was dealt with (if the application was not dealt with in your office)
2. Scan a copy of the letter on to the application (see: how to keep scans of supporting documents).
3. Send the letter to the customer.
4. Record the incident (see: [customer conduct: how to record and deal with incidents](#)).
5. Send the letter to the customer.
6. Consider if the case must be referred to the police (see: [how to deal with serious incidents](#)).

Related content
[Contents](#)