



Home Office

Types of British passports

Version 5.0

This guidance tells His Majesty's Passport Office staff about the different types of British passports they may receive as part of a passport application

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About: Types of British passport

This guidance tells His Majesty's Passport Office staff about the different types of British passports that customers send in as part of a passport application. It explains what the passports look like and some of their identifying features.

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 **5.0**
- published for Home Office staff on **14 November 2022**

Changes from last version of this guidance

This guidance has been updated to reflect the change from Queen's Messenger Service to King's Messenger Service.

Related content

[Contents](#)

Types of passport

This section tells HM Passport Office staff about the types of British passports that we issue to British nationals, including passport features and who can hold these documents.

The British passport is an international travel document that meets the recommendations and standards of the International Civil Aviation Organisation convention. Machine readable British passports follow a common format (layout) used by many countries.

During 2020 the UK prepared to leave the European Union (EU) and we changed our passports from [EU](#) and [non-EU](#) burgundy coloured passports to [non-EU passports with a blue \(soft\) cover](#). A phased roll out of the new passport meant customers could receive either type of passport with added immigration observations where needed.

The British passport is now a [non-EU passport with a blue \(soft cover\)](#) and a gold Royal crest.

British passports are:

- available in 2 sizes - standard (34 pages) or Frequent Traveller passport
- valid for 10 years for adults and 5 years for children

Passports may have an expiry date that is less than the standard 5 or 10 years, if:

- we have issued the passport with a restricted validity (for example, if the customer has lost multiple passports)
- we have issued a passport with the validity remaining from a previous passport (for example, when we have corrected a passport error)
- the passport is a Diplomatic or Official passport

If a customer applied to renew their passport before September 2018, any remaining months (up to a maximum of 9 months) were added to their new passport. HM Passport Office stopped adding the remaining months from 10 September 2018.

Blue British passports

During 2020, HM Passport Office started to issue a (non-EU) passport with a blue soft cover and a gold Royal crest. These passports have the holder's personal details and their photo added to a polycarbonate page at the back of the passport.

As we phased in the issue of the blue passport during 2020, any customer may have received one regardless of their nationality and immigration status.

After 31 December 2020 (following the end of the transition period after the UK left the EU) all customers receive a blue (non-EU) passport.

Holders of the blue passport may have immigration observations added to their passports, depending whether the passport was issued before or after 31 December 2020. See Immigration and Right of Abode and Observations in passports.

Burgundy British passports

Before the end of 2020 our machine readable passports were issued in an [EU](#) and [non-EU](#) common format which used a burgundy cover. The use of a burgundy coloured cover to identify EU member states was agreed in 1981 by the European Community member states.

We stopped issuing burgundy passports before 31 December 2020 (the end of the transition period following the UK's exit from the EU).

Burgundy non-EU common format British passports

We issued non-EU passports to British nationals who were not entitled to hold an EU common format passport (CFP), (for example, British subjects without the right of abode in the UK).

Non-EU passports are similar to the EU common format passport but do not have 'European Union' on the front cover or the first page. No other European language except English and French were used in the passport.

Who we issued non-EU common format passports to

We issued non-EU common format passports to:

- British Overseas citizens
- British Overseas Territories citizens (not connected to Gibraltar) who do not live in a British overseas territory
- British Overseas Territory citizens living in the Falkland Islands
- British Protected Persons
- British Nationals (overseas)
- British Subjects who do not have the right of abode in the UK

These passport holders may have other immigration observations added to their passports. See Immigration and Right of Abode and Observations in passports.

HM Passport Office stopped issuing these passports before 31 December 2020 (as the blue passport was phased in, and before the end of the transition period following the UK's exit of the EU).

Burgundy EU common format passports

'European Union' (EU) is written at the top of the front cover and on page 1 if the customer (the intended passport holder) was entitled to certain privileges under European Treaties (for example, free movement and the right to work). Passport information is given in each of the official languages of the Member States (see the [PRADO](#) website).

Who we issued EU common format passports to

We issued British EU common format passports (CFPs) to customers who were British nationals for European Union purposes, including:

- British citizens
- British subjects with the Right of Abode in the United Kingdom
- British overseas territories citizens with a connection to Gibraltar
- British citizens from the Channel Islands and Isle of Man

These passport holders may have other immigration observations added to their passports. See additional guidance in Immigration and Right of Abode and Observations in passports.

HM Passport Office phased out the issue of these passports during 2018, as we approached the date for the UK leaving the EU. We stopped issuing these passports before 31 December 2020.

Channel Islands and Isle of Man passports

Passports issued in the [Channel Islands](#) or [Isle of Man](#), are similar in style to those issued in the UK.

These passports are also CFPs, except the name of the territory (for example, Isle of Man) is used instead of the words 'United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland' on the passport cover and page 1. The salutation (greeting) on the inside of the front cover will be in the name of the relevant lieutenant governor or governor instead of the reigning monarch. See Knowledge base examples.

British citizens from the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man may not have had the right to free movement for employment or establishment in other European Union countries. Before 31 December 2020 (when the transition period ended following the UK's exit from the EU) we added an observation to an EU CFP when a British citizen did not have the right to free movement in the EU. See Immigration and Right of Abode and Observations in passports.

British overseas territory variant passport

Customers who are eligible to hold a British overseas territories citizen (BOT) passport and who are living in a BOT (except those living in the Falkland Islands) must apply for a variant passport from their local government office.

Variant passports are similar to passports issued in the UK (blue or burgundy coloured covers), except the name of the territory (for example, Anguilla) is used instead of the words 'United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland' on the front cover and page 1 of the passport.

The salutation (greeting) on the inside of the front cover will be in the name of the relevant lieutenant-governor or governor, instead of the reigning monarch. See examples in the Knowledge base.

Diplomatic and Official passports

Diplomatic or Official passports look like standard passports ([blue](#) or [burgundy EU passports](#)) but have additional gold lettering on the front cover saying 'Diplomatic' or 'Official'.

Older passports may only show the words 'Diplomatic' or 'Official' written above the photograph on the personal details page. The system will add an automatic passport note to the Main Index to confirm whether the passport is a 'Diplomatic' or 'Official' passport.

We strictly control the issue of Diplomatic or Official passports (see Diplomatic and Official passports and observations).

King's Messenger Service passports

We issue King's Messenger Service (KMS) passports (previously Queen's Messenger Service until 14 November 2022) to Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) staff members who act as diplomatic couriers, transporting government documents overseas.

Prior to 2014 Queen's Messenger passports were [Old Blue](#) style hardback passports, which had 'Queen's Messenger Service' printed in gold letters on the front cover. Since 2014, HM Passport Office issue Messenger Service staff Diplomatic passports that have an observation showing the holder is a King's Messenger (see Diplomatic and Official passports and observations).

Collective passports

We issue collective passports to groups of young people under the age of 18 years, such as students and recognised youth organisations (for example, Scouts and Guides) who are travelling for educational or cultural purposes.

We issue two types of collective passports:

- Collective Passports for Young People
- Council of Europe Collective Passport for Young People (issued under the European Agreement on Travel by Young Persons on Collective Passports)

A collective passport is only valid for travel to and from the UK to certain European Union countries. We do not accept applications for a collective passport from overseas.

Specimen passports

Specimen passports are genuine British CFP used for training purposes and fraud prevention by other UK government departments or foreign governments. We also provide them to entertainment companies (film, theatre or television) to be used during productions or filming.

Old Blue (hardback style) passports

The passport known as Old Blue (hardback style) passports was first issued in 1920 and:

- followed a standard internationally agreed format
- was dark blue (almost black) in colour
- had a hardback cover
- had 30 pages (in a standard passport) or 94 pages in a Frequent Traveller passport (Frequent Traveller passports were introduced in May 1973), the number of pages changed to 32 and 48 in August 1988
- was printed in English and French
- was personalised by hand with the customer's details

See Knowledgebase – United Kingdom for examples of this document.

British visitor passports

British visitor passports (BVP) were introduced in March 1961. Customers could obtain BVP's from the Post Office quickly and easily. They were considered a cheap alternative to a full British passport.

The customer applied for a BVP from the Post Office and was required to provide a birth certificate and any change of name document (for example a marriage certificate). The BVP was:

- made of card folded into 3 parts
- hand written and contained a photo of the customer
- used for travel to specified European countries
- only used for holidays and private visits abroad (not over 3 months)
- valid for 1 year
- not a secure document

BVP's were available to customers living in the UK for over 8 years, who were also:

- British citizens
- British Dependent Territories citizens

- British Overseas citizens

HM Passport Office withdrew the BVP on the 1 January 1996, because of concerns about its easy availability and the security of the document.

Dealing with a BVP

HM Passport Office staff must never accept a BVP as evidence of nationality, identity or entitlement. Examiners must ask the customer for other nationality and identity documentation.

Related content

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