



Home Office

Observations in passports

Version 22.0

This guidance tells His Majesty's Passport Office staff about passport observations; what they are, when they are used, and how to add them to a passport.

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About: Observations in passports

This guidance tells His Majesty's Passport Office operational staff about passport observations, when we use them and how to add them to a passport application.

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 the Guidance team.

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 the Guidance team.

Publication

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

- version **22.0**
- published for Home Office staff on **29 November 2023**

Changes from last version of this guidance

The guidance has been updated to remove the instruction to add the APC (Application Processing Centre) office in the restricted validity observation (OBTU).

Related content

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Passport observations

This section tells His Majesty's Passport Office operational staff about passport observations, where observations are printed in British passports and the wording of each passport observation and where to find guidance which tells you when they are used.

Passport observations are printed, stamped or handwritten notes added to some passports to show important information about the passport or the holder. We add observations into British passports to explain to immigration staff and other government officials about:

- the customer's British nationality or immigration status
- the customer's identity (for example, if the holder has a hereditary title)
- why the passport will expire earlier than a standard passport
- the customer is in diplomatic or official service

The International Civil Aviation Organization decided that:

- a person's name, place and date of birth, nationality status and photo must be included in the details page of their passport
- observations must not be added to the personal details page

We print observations in capital letters in British passports on page 3 (the observations page) of the current digital passport.

If a passport does not require an observation, the system will automatically print the observation page with the words:

THERE ARE NO OFFICIAL OBSERVATIONS.

You must:

- not automatically renew all previous observations like for like when a person applies to renew their passport
- ask for further documents or evidence to confirm the observation where this is needed in line with existing guidance

You can:

- view observations held on passport records using the 'observations' tab on Main Index
- find information about where observations were printed in older style passports in the UK Knowledge Base

How we create observations

We identify each observation on the passport issuing system using an individual observation code, (for example, OBTB) but these codes are not printed on the passport.

Observations must have no more than:

- 44 characters per line (including spaces)
- passports issued using Application Management System (AMS):
 - can have a maximum of 15 lines (including line breaks)
 - must include a line break between observations
- passports issued using Digital Application Processing (DAP) can have up to 21 lines of observation text

Order of observations: applications on AMS

If you are processing an application on the Application Management System (AMS) and need to add more than one observation to a passport (as shown in relevant guidance), you must add them in the following order:

- [Immigration and nationality observations](#)
 - UK immigration observations
 - Hong Kong immigration observations
 - British overseas territory or Crown dependency immigration observations
- [Diplomatic, Official and King's Messenger Service observations](#)
 - diplomatic observations
 - official observations
 - King's Messenger observations
- [Identity observation](#)
 - Names observations
 - Titles observations
- Employment observations
- [Validity observations](#)

If the observations needed on AMS are more than 15 lines of text, see [How to add observations of more than 15 lines on AMS: examiner](#).

Order of observations: applications on DAP

If you are processing an application on DAP, you:

- must add observations as needed in line with the tasks presented to you
- do not need to:
 - order the observations manually

- add them in a specific order (DAP will order the observations automatically when the passport is sent to print)

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Immigration and nationality observations

This section tells His Majesty's Passport Office staff about observations we use to give information about the holder's immigration or nationality status.

There are various types of immigration and nationality observations we use to give information about the passport holder's immigration or nationality status.

UK immigration observations

You must add the United Kingdom (UK) immigration observations in line with the following guidance documents, as applicable:

- British subjects
- British overseas territories citizens
- British overseas citizens
- British national (overseas) citizens
- British protected persons

Observation code OBTB: subject to control under Immigration Act 1971

THE HOLDER IS SUBJECT TO CONTROL UNDER THE IMMIGRATION ACT 1971

You must use observation code OBTB in line with the following guidance:

- British subjects
- British overseas territories citizens
- British overseas citizens
- British national (overseas) citizens
- British protected persons

OBTC: Right of abode in the UK

THE HOLDER HAS THE RIGHT OF ABODE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

You must use observation code OBTC in a passport for customers who are British subjects with right of abode in the UK under the Immigration Act 1971.

OBTE: entitled to readmission to the UK

THE HOLDER IS ENTITLED TO RE-ADMISSION TO THE UNITED KINGDOM

You must use observation code OBTE in line with the following guidance:

- British subjects
- British overseas territories citizens
- British overseas citizens
- British national (overseas) citizens
- British protected persons

Hong Kong immigration observations

You must add Hong Kong observations to a British National (overseas) passport in line with British national (overseas) (BN(O)) guidance.

OBTS: entry certificate not required for UK

IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE UNITED KINGDOM IMMIGRATION RULES, THE HOLDER OF THIS PASSPORT DOES NOT REQUIRE AN ENTRY CERTIFICATE OR VISA TO VISIT THE UNITED KINGDOM

You must add this immigration observation (code OBTS) to all (BN(O)) passports.

OBTT: Hong Kong PIC number and Right of abode

THE HOLDER OF THIS PASSPORT HAS HONG KONG PERMANENT IDENTITY CARD NO [INSERT FREE TEXT] WHICH STATES THAT THE HOLDER HAS THE RIGHT OF ABODE IN HONG KONG

You must use observation code OBTT in passports for customers who have (BN(O)) citizenship and the right of abode in Hong Kong. You must type the customer's permanent identity card number into the free text field on the system when you have confirmed it.

OBTG: The holder [free text up to 74 characters for AMS and 77 characters for DAP]

THE HOLDER [INSERT FREE TEXT UP TO 74 CHARACTERS FOR AMS AND 77 CHARACTERS FOR DAP]

You must not use observation code OBTG for customers who have (BN(O)) citizenship who have lost Right of Abode in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region who have the right to land in Hong Kong.

It was previously used in some (BN(O)) passports but is no longer used by HM Passport Office (see British National (overseas) guidance).

OBTV: Chinese commercial code

THE HOLDER'S NAME IN CHINESE COMMERCIAL CODE IS [INSERT FREE TEXT]

You must not use observation code OBTV. It was previously used in some (BN(O)) passports but is no longer used by HM Passport Office.

British overseas territory or crown dependency observations

We no longer add the following 2 observations to British passports.

OBTA: British overseas territory citizens

THE HOLDER IS A BRITISH OVERSEAS TERRITORIES CITIZEN

You must not use observation code OBTA. It was previously used in some BOTC passports but is no longer used by HM Passport Office.

OBTD: Right of abode in overseas territories

THE HOLDER HAS THE RIGHT OF ABODE IN [INSERT FREE TEXT]

We no longer add observation code OBTD to British overseas territory citizen passports. If a customer wants this observation adding to their passport, they must contact the immigration office in their territory.

Free text observations for immigration purposes

OBTZ: free text for immigration purposes.

[INSERT FREE TEXT UP TO 352 CHARACTERS]

If you need to add an observation which needs more text than the observation code on the system allows, you must:

- use observation code OBTZ which is entirely free text and has a maximum of 352 characters (8 lines of 44 characters on both DAP (Digital Application Processing) and AMS (Application Management System))
- type the free text so that the observation is the same as in the relevant observation code

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Diplomatic, Official and King's Messenger observations

This section tells His Majesty's Passport Office staff about observations we add to standard passports if the customer is entitled to a diplomatic or official observation. See Diplomatic and Official service - passports and observations guidance.

If a customer holds a standard passport, we can add an observation if they are entitled to a diplomatic or official observation.

Diplomatic observations

From the 14 November 2022, you must not use the following diplomatic observation codes in Digital Application Processing (DAP) or the Application Management System (AMS), as the wording is no longer correct:

- code OBTJ
- code OBTK
- code OBTL
- code OBAA
- code OBAC
- code OBAD

You, the examiner, must:

1. Add a case note to the application to say:

'Customer requires diplomatic observation'.

2. Refer the application to an operational team leader (OTL).

You, the OTL, must use the free text observation OBTZ if a diplomatic observation is needed in a standard passport. You must copy the required observation from this guidance and paste it into the observation field on AMS.

OBTZ: member of the diplomatic service

THE HOLDER IS A MEMBER OF HIS BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S DIPLOMATIC SERVICE

Observation code OBTZ is used for members of the diplomatic service.

OBTZ: spouse, member of the diplomatic service

THE HOLDER IS THE SPOUSE OF A MEMBER OF HIS BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S DIPLOMATIC SERVICE

Observation code OBTZ is used for the spouse of a member of the diplomatic service.

OBTZ: dependent, member of the diplomatic service

THE HOLDER IS A DEPENDENT OF A MEMBER OF HIS BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S DIPLOMATIC SERVICE

Observation code OBTZ is used for a dependent of a member of the diplomatic service.

Observations for people seconded to the diplomatic service

Members of the home-based civil service and their families, working in the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and posted overseas (including FCDO Services staff and those who are seconded or attached to the FCDO) will have a diplomatic observation added to their passport.

OBTZ: attached to diplomatic service

THE HOLDER IS ATTACHED TO HIS BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S DIPLOMATIC SERVICE

Observation code OBTZ is used for staff attached to the diplomatic service.

OBTZ: spouse, attached to diplomatic service

THE HOLDER IS THE SPOUSE OF AN OFFICER ATTACHED TO HIS BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S DIPLOMATIC SERVICE

Observation code OBTZ is used for the spouse of someone attached to the diplomatic service.

OBTZ: dependent, attached to diplomatic service

THE HOLDER IS A DEPENDANT OF AN OFFICER ATTACHED TO HIS BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S DIPLOMATIC SERVICE

Observation code OBTZ is used for a dependant of someone attached to the diplomatic service.

Official observations

These official observations are used for staff working in British Diplomatic Missions abroad and their families.

OBTM: Official, member of government service

THE HOLDER IS IN BRITISH GOVERNMENT SERVICE

Observation code OBTM is used for official staff working in British Missions abroad.

OBTN: Official, spouse of

THE HOLDER IS THE SPOUSE OF A PERSON IN BRITISH GOVERNMENT SERVICE

Observation code OBTN is used for the spouse of an official staff member working in British Missions abroad.

OBAB: Official, dependant of

THE HOLDER IS A DEPENDANT OF A PERSON IN BRITISH GOVERNMENT SERVICE

Observation code OBAB is used for the dependant of an official staff member working in British Missions abroad.

King's messenger observations

These observations are used for staff working in the King's Messenger service. They must only be used by the Diplomatic and Official Passport team when they issue a Diplomatic passport to a King's Messenger.

OBTX: King's Messenger service

THE HOLDER IS A KING'S MESSENGER

THE HOLDER IS [INSERT FREE TEXT ' A MEMBER OF THE KING'S MESSENGER SERVICE']

Observation code OBTX must be completed by typing in the free text field on the system.

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Identity observations

This section tells His Majesty's Passport Office staff about identity observations used to show information about a customer's name, title or other passport.

Names observations

You must add these observations as directed by the Names guidance.

OBTG: the holder [free text up to 74 characters for AMS (Application Management System) and 77 characters for DAP (Digital Application Processing)]

THE HOLDER [FREE TEXT UP TO 74 CHARACTERS FOR AMS AND 77 CHARACTERS FOR DAP]

You must use observation code OBTG if a customer has a:

- name or place of birth which is too long to show on the passport details page

When you do, you must complete the free text field on the system with the relevant information for the name or place of birth.

You must use observation code OBTZ (which is entirely free text and has a maximum of 352 characters, which is 8 lines of 44 characters on both DAP and AMS) if:

- you are processing on DAP and the observation needs more than 77 characters
- you are processing on AMS and the observation needs more than 74 characters
- you need to add an observation to show the customer has a foreign document in a different name

OBTO: holder also known as [free text]

THE HOLDER IS ALSO KNOWN AS [FREE TEXT UP TO 56 CHARACTERS]

You must complete the free text field on the system with the relevant information and use observation code OBTO when customers are also known by a different name.

OBTW: reference to [free text] is to forename not title

THE REFERENCE TO [FREE TEXT] IS TO THE HOLDER'S NAME AND NOT TO THE HOLDER'S TITLE

You must type the relevant information into the free text field and use observation code OBTW in a passport to show a customer has changed their first forename to a title of nobility or knighthood (for example, from John Smith to Sir John Smith).

OBTX: holder is [free text up to 30 characters]

THE HOLDER IS [FREE TEXT UP TO 30 CHARACTERS]

You must not use observation code OBTX to show the customer is also known by another name or has a passport in a different name. Instead, you must use observation code:

- OBTZ, if you need to show the customer has a foreign document in a different name
- OBTG or OBTZ, if you need to show the customer is known by another name (depending on the length of the name)

Titles observations

You must type the relevant information into the free text field add these observations where a customer has a title. See Titles guidance.

OBTX: holder is [free text up to 30 characters]

THE HOLDER IS [FREE TEXT UP TO 30 CHARACTERS]

Observation code OBTX must be used if the observation needs up to 30 characters.

OBTG: the holder [free text up to 74 characters for AMS and 77 characters for DAP]

THE HOLDER [FREE TEXT UP TO 74 CHARACTERS FOR AMS AND 77 CHARACTERS FOR DAP]

Observation code OBTG must be used if the observation needs over 30 characters.

Free text observations for identity purposes

This observation is used if you need to add a free text observation for identity purposes.

OBTZ: free text for identity purposes

[FREE TEXT UP TO 352 CHARACTERS]

You must use this entirely free text observation if you need to add an:

- observation to show the customer has a foreign document in a different name

- identity observation which needs more text than the observation code on the system allows
- observation to show which of the customer's identity details on their nationality certificate are not true, (when told to do so by the Counter Fraud team - see EAC: dealing with Enhanced Application Checking referrals)

You must type the free text so that the observation is the same as in the relevant observation code or specified in the relevant guidance.

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Validity observations

This section tells His Majesty's Passport Office staff about observations used to show information about a passport's validity.

OBTZ: free text for replacing a cancelled passport

(FREE TEXT UP TO 352 CHARACTERS)

You must use observation code OBTZ (which is entirely free text and has a maximum of 352 characters, which is 8 lines of 44 characters) when you issue a free of charge non-standard validity replacement passport because we previously made an error. You must manually type the observation using the following format:

REPLACES PASSPORT NUMBER [INSERT PASSPORT NUMBER BEING REPLACED] DATED [INSERT DATE IT WAS ISSUED IN DD/MM/YYYY FORMAT] WHICH HAS BEEN CANCELLED AND DESTROYED

See Preventing and resolving errors guidance.

OBTU: valid for [free text] for restricted validity passports

VALID FOR [INSERT FREE TEXT] MONTHS, MAY NOT BE REPLACED WITHOUT REFERENCE TO THE PASSPORT OFFICE

You must use observation code OBTU when you issue a restricted validity passport. You must complete the free text fields on the system with the correct information.

See Restricted validity passports guidance.

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Application Management System: adding observations

This section tells His Majesty's Passport Office operational staff how to add observations to passports using the Application Management System (AMS).

You (the examiner) can add multiple observations into a British passport (if they are needed), making sure that:

- each observation is no longer than 44 characters (including spaces) on each line
- no more than 15 lines of text is added to the page
- you add them in the correct order

How to add observations on AMS

If you need to add an observation to a passport you must:

1. Click on the **Prepare passport** tab on the examination screen.
2. Click on the **Observations** sub tab.
3. Choose the observation you want to add from the list.
4. Click on the **add** button (this will show the observation you selected).
5. Type all the information you need, in the free text box.
6. Enter dates using the DD MM YYYY format.
7. Make sure you show multiple observations in the [correct order](#). You can move them by clicking on the 'up' or 'down' arrow.
8. **Save** the details on screen.

How to add observations of more than 15 lines on AMS: examiner

You, the examiner, must not add manual observations.

You must refer the application to your local Quality Examination Support team (QuEST) using the query referral process if the system cannot fit all the required observations on the observation page. This will be needed if the observations exceed 15 lines of text.

If the observations exceed 15 lines, you must:

1. Add as many full observations as the AMS system will allow.
2. Complete the guidance referral template and confirm:
 - the observations needed are more than the 15 lines of text allow
 - the observations needed in the correct order
3. Email the completed guidance referral template to your local QuEST (using the guidance referral process).

4. Add a case note to the application saying, 'referred to QuEST' and the reason for the referral.
5. Pigeonhole the application until a response to your query is received.

QuEST will refer the application to Guidance & Quality, Operating Standards (G&Q) using the QuEST referral process.

G&Q will work with the Passport Policy team to shorten and amend the observations needed and provide a response to the examiner.

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Digital Application Processing system: adding observations

This section tells His Majesty's Passport Office examiners working on the Digital Application Processing (DAP) system, how DAP will identify if a passport needs an observation, how to add and remove an observation and how to complete a DAP observation task.

DAP (Digital Application Processing) will run checks to identify if:

- an observation is shown on the customer's old passport
- the information the customer provides shows they may need an observation

If DAP identifies a passport may need an observation, it will create a task for examiners to complete.

- **Observation on previous passport** task (if the old passport includes an observation)
- **Other title request** if the customer needs an observation about their professional titles

If you need to review any observations held in the customer's old passport to deal with a task (for example, if they are not recorded on Main Index), you must follow Dealing with customer documents guidance.

How to add an observation using DAP

You can add an observation in DAP in any order (as DAP will make sure they are printed on the passport in the correct order).

You, the DAP examiner, can also add multiple observations if needed.

To add an observation, you (the DAP examiner) must:

1. Go to **Application Details**.
2. Select the **Observations** tab in the left hand menu.
3. Enter the observation code you want to add, into the box on the screen and select **Add to passport**. If you do not know the observation code, you can click on **Show codes** to see a list of all available codes.
4. Complete the free text areas. You must record dates as DD MM YYYY.
5. Check the observation is correct.
6. Add a case note in the case note text box, to explain why you added the observation.
7. Click **Save**.

If you need to add another observation, click **Add new** and follow steps 3 -7 again.

DAP will allow you to add observations of up to 21 lines of text.

For the observation:

- OBTG 'THE HOLDER [INSERT FREETEXT]' - DAP allows 77 characters over 2 lines
- OBTX 'THE HOLDER IS [INSERT FREETEXT]' - DAP allows 30 characters over 1 line
- OBTZ [INSERT FREETEXT] – DAP allows 352 characters, over 8 lines

How to remove an observation

If you add an observation in error, or make a mistake when you enter the observation, you must:

1. Click **remove**, next to the observation you want to remove.
2. Enter a case note in the case note text box to explain why you are removing the observation.
3. Click **confirm**.
4. Add the correct observation (if you need to).

Completing an observation task

You may process an application where the old passport includes an observation, but you do not need to include an observation in the new passport you are issuing. For example, if the old passport was non-standard validity, it may include OBTZ. When this happens, you must add a case note in the observation task to explain why:

- the observation is included in the old passport
- you do not need to include this in the new passport

To complete the observation task, you must:

1. Return to the **Tasks** tab.
2. Select the correct observation task.
3. Clear the task.

If you have been unable to complete the task, you must:

- transfer the application to AMS (if you do not have any fraud concerns), for example if DAP does not have the functionality for you to process the application
- complete additional checks and refer the application for investigation (if you have fraud concerns)

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