



Home Office

Guidance on examining identity documents 2025

National Document Fraud Unit

Introduction

Secure identity documents are presented as proof of identity, nationality, status within the United Kingdom, and for employment or renting accommodation. Document verification is crucial in ensuring that the documents presented are both genuine and presented by the rightful holder.

The aims of this guide are to:

- Increase awareness of different types of identity documents used for identification purposes
- Outline what identity documents are encountered in the United Kingdom
- Gain knowledge of what to look for when presented with an identity document
- Provide a basic awareness of document abuse
- Introduce a checklist that can be used (Checklist A & B)

Types of Identity Document

An identity document is any document which may be used to verify aspects of a person's personal identity. These can include:

- Passports
- National identity cards
- Biometric residence permits and cards
- Other residence documents
- Driving licences
- Military identity cards
- Official identity documents (police warrant cards, etc)



Types of Identity Document and guidance

Various documents are acceptable for employment and renting accommodation in the United Kingdom (UK).

Further guidance on Right-to-Work is available here:

- <https://www.gov.uk/legal-right-work-uk>
- [Right to Work checklist](#)

Further guidance on Right-to-Rent is available here:

- <https://www.gov.uk/check-tenant-right-to-rent-documents/who-to-check>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/right-to-rent-document-checks-a-user-guide>

United Kingdom passports

UK passports are valid for up to 10 years and 9 months. There are currently 4 styles in circulation, issued to British citizens.



Will no longer be valid



Will no longer be valid



Will no longer be valid



Issued from 2006



Issued from 2010

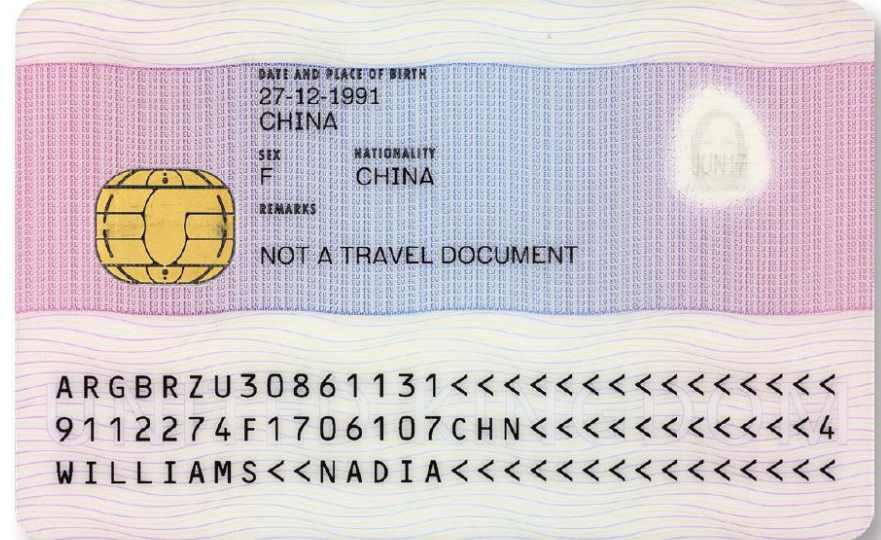
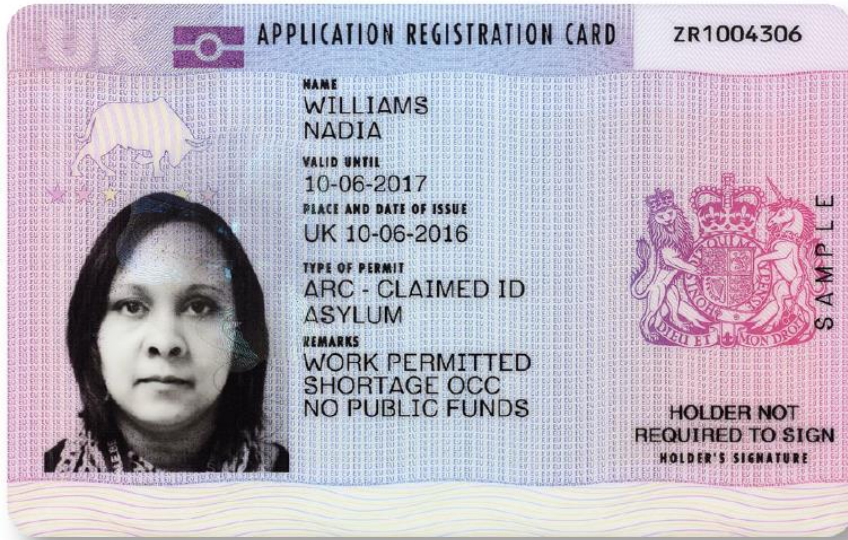


Issued from 2015



Issued from 2020

Application Registration Cards (ARCs)

[illegible]

REMARKS
WORK PERMITTED
STUDENT
NO PUBLIC FUNDS

REMARKS

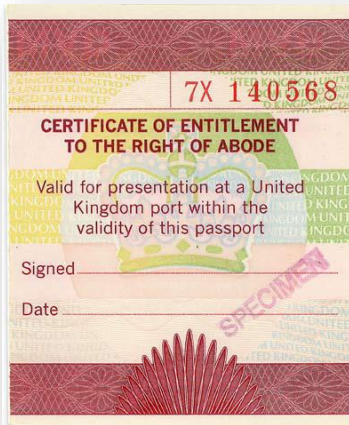
**WORK PERMITTED
OTHER _____
NO PUBLIC FUNDS _____**

REMARKS
WORK PERMITTED
SHORTAGE OCC
NO PUBLIC FUNDS

REMARKS
WORK PERMITTED
NO PUBLIC FUNDS

ARCs are issued to foreign nationals who have made an application to stay in the UK and are having their application considered. Once the application is either granted or refused the card should be withdrawn. If the card says 'forbidden from taking employment', you are not allowed to work in the UK. If the card says 'allowed to work', you're allowed to work in the UK as normal but your employer must confirm this with the Employers' Checking Service.

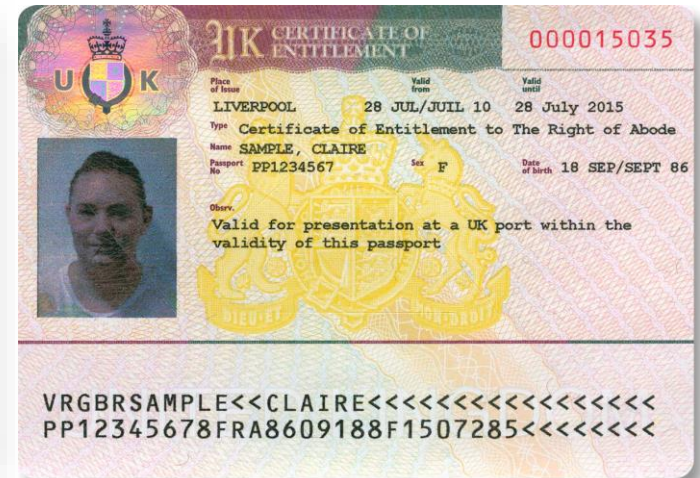
Certificate of Entitlement to the Right of Abode



Old style



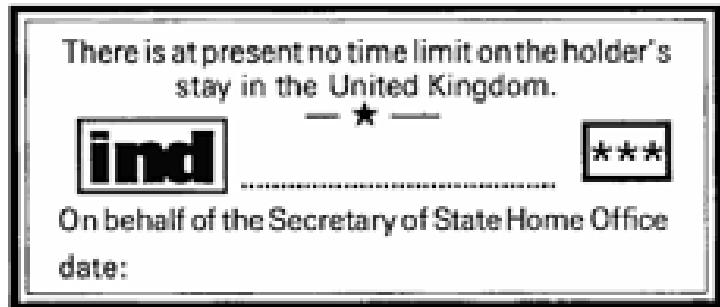
Interim style (with or without a machine readable zone (MRZ))



Latest style

These vignettes (stickers) are evidence of the holder's Right of Abode in the UK. They are affixed inside the holder's foreign passport. They provide evidence that the holder is entitled to travel to, or live, in the UK.

Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) Stamps & Vignettes



+ Home Office ink date stamp



+ Immigration Officer ink date stamp



ILR stamps and vignettes allow a non EU / EEA national to remain indefinitely in the UK. They were last issued in August 2006 having been replaced by the residence permit. However, there are many in circulation because they have no expiry date.

Category D Entry Clearance



A Category D Entry Clearance is a visa to enter the United Kingdom for a period of 6 months or more. They can typically be endorsed with a variety of conditions / restrictions, for example, as a spouse, to work, or to join family. They can also grant indefinite leave to enter. From 15 July 2025, the phased transition from vignette stickers to eVisas will commence. Up-to-date information is available at: [Online immigration status \(eVisa\) - GOV.UK](#)

United Kingdom Residence Permit (UKRP)



This is a residence permit that replaced the green ILR vignettes and ink stamp endorsements that were previously used (see page 9). They give permission to reside in the UK for the purpose stated on the vignette, e.g. student or work permit holder.

First issued in 2003, this is placed into a passport or onto an 'Immigration Status Document' (ISD - a white piece of A4 paper). They were last issued in 2012 and were replaced by the Biometric Residence Permit (see next slide).

Biometric Residence Permit (BRP)



Biometric residence permits (BRPs) are cards that were used to prove immigration status. You might have a BRP if you were granted permission to live or work in the UK on or before 31 October 2024.

All BRPs have now expired and have been replaced by eVisas. An eVisa is an online record of your immigration status. If you have an expired BRP and still have permission to stay in the UK, you need to create a UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) account to get access to your eVisa.

Not allowed to work / Maximum 6 month stay

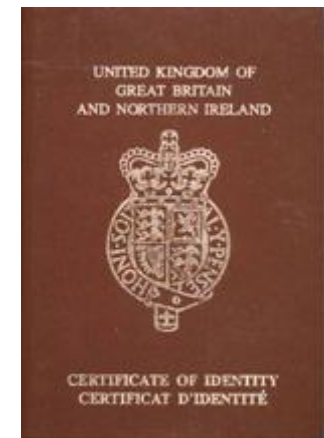
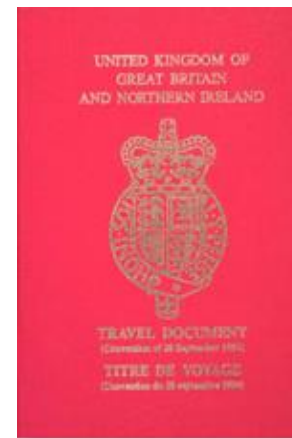
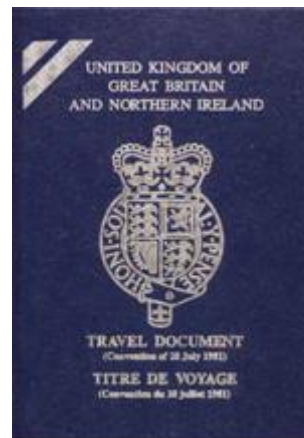


These visas are issued to visitors to the UK – they are valid for a maximum stay of six months and holders are not allowed to undertake paid or voluntary work in the UK.

Home Office Travel Documents

In all cases, the holder's status (leave to enter or remain) in the UK will be recorded on the observations page.

Original version
(top three images)

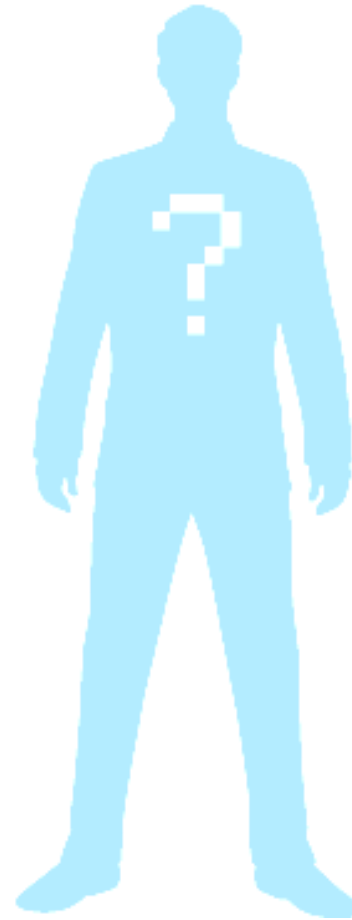


New biometric version
(bottom three images)



Why abuse an identity document?

- **Illegal working**
- **Immigration abuse**
- **Financial fraud**
- **Benefit fraud**
- **Hide true identity**



Types of document abuse

Impersonation: The person is simply a “look-alike” presenting a genuine document.

Counterfeits: A complete reproduction from scratch to resemble an officially issued document.

Forgeries: A genuine document that has been unlawfully altered in some way, for example:

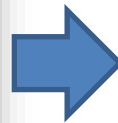
- substituting a page
- substituting a photograph or image
- altering the personal details

Pseudo / Fantasy Documents: Documents which may have the physical appearance of a passport or identity card but are not officially recognised. They are not acceptable proof of either nationality or identity.

Impersonation

Initial checks

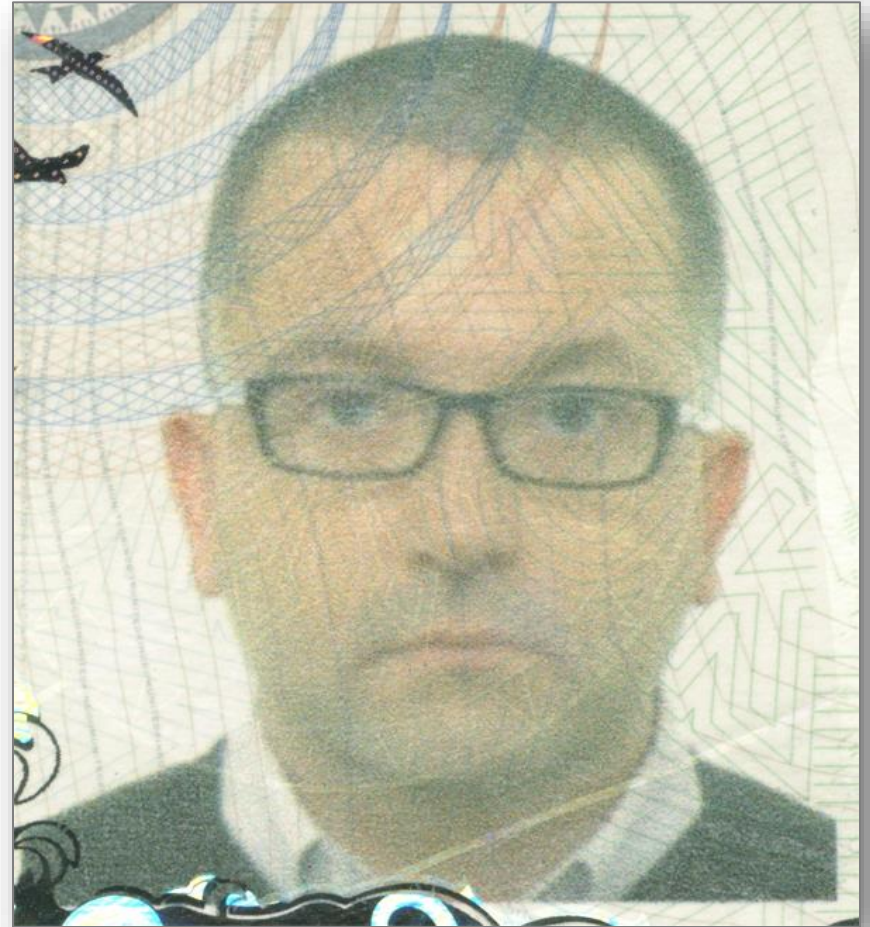
- Check the signature – can the person recreate it without sight of the document?
- Does the person in front of you look the correct age?
- Does the person have any distinguishing features eg. moles, scars etc?



Impersonation

Comparing features

- Compare the shape of the face
- Look at the features of the face individually
- Look at the position of each in relation to the rest of the face
- Ears are unique to each person



Equipment

The following pieces of equipment are easy to obtain and can enhance your ability to detect fraudulent documents. However, the use of this equipment will only be effective if the user has an understanding of secure documents and their security features.

Magnifiers: Standard handheld magnifying glasses can be useful when examining documents to see if they are counterfeit (eg. looking at print quality), or if they have been forged (e.g. damage around photographs and images).

Ultraviolet (UV) light sources: These are useful tools for identifying whether documents are made from secure paper or UV safeguards are genuine.

Transmitted light: Shining light through paper (e.g. using light from above, a lamp, or a torch) is a useful way to view features such as watermarks, and also any damage to paper.

Document scanners: These can provide a quick and easy way to establish the authenticity of documents presented for identity verification purposes. More guidance [here](#).

Security Features

Base Fluorescence

Here you can see a range of purported secure documents viewed in normal light.



Security Features

Base Fluorescence (using ultraviolet light)

Using ultraviolet (UV) light you can see counterfeit documents that fluoresce (shine) more brightly than genuine documents which use dull, secure paper / material.



Security Features

Watermarks



A watermark is created during the paper manufacturing process by varying the thickness of the paper. It is best viewed using **transmitted light** (e.g. holding the paper up to a lamp or by shining a torch light through the paper). A real watermark should usually consist of subtle changes in tone and both lighter and darker areas.

A watermark should never react under UV light.

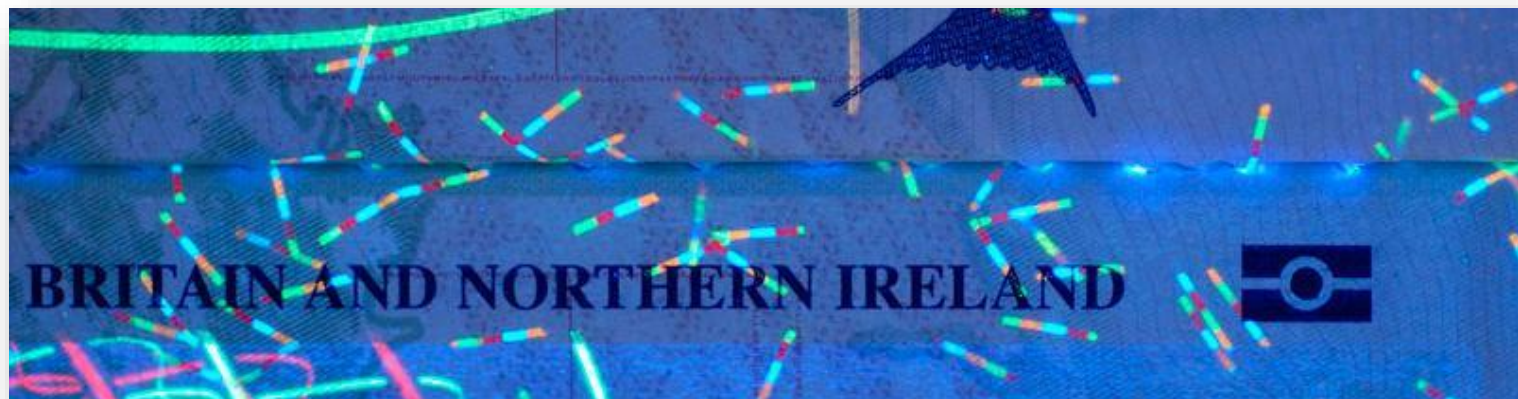
You will notice that many security features in passports can also be found in banknotes.



Security Features

Random Fibres

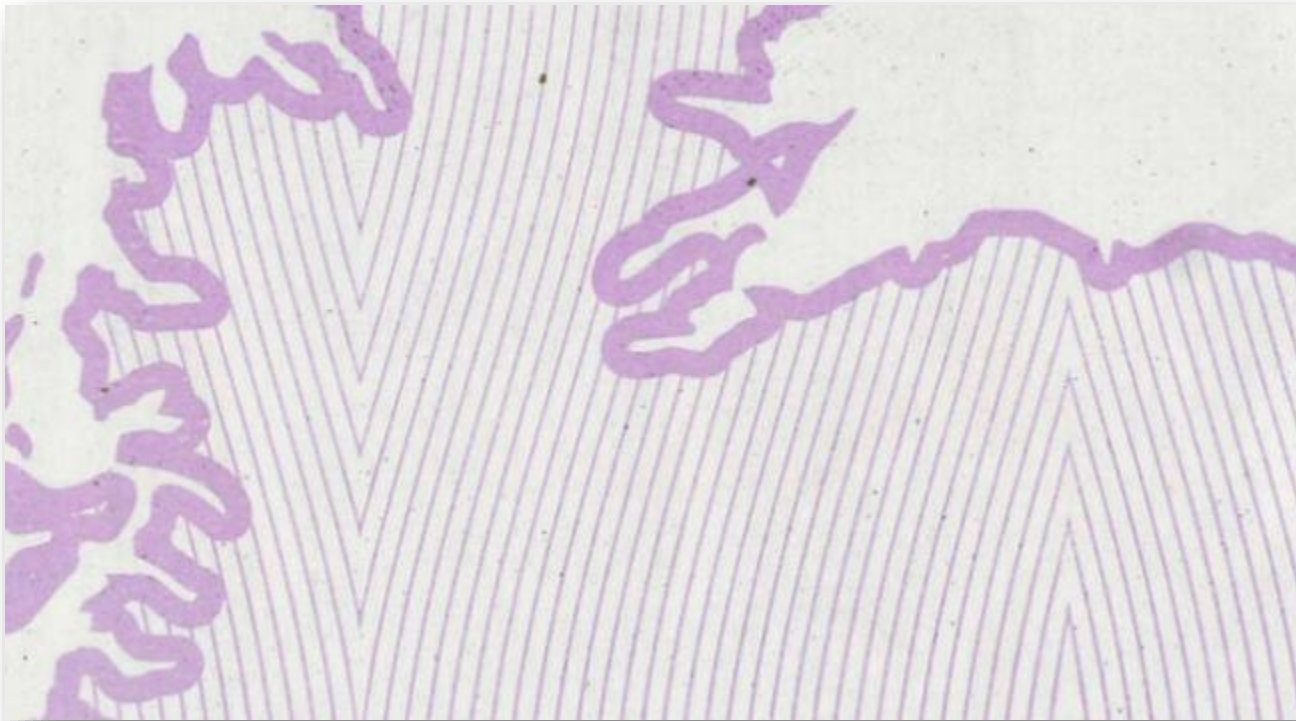
Security fibres which appear randomly across the paper. They can be visible to the naked eye, or react when exposed to UV light.



Security Features

Background Print

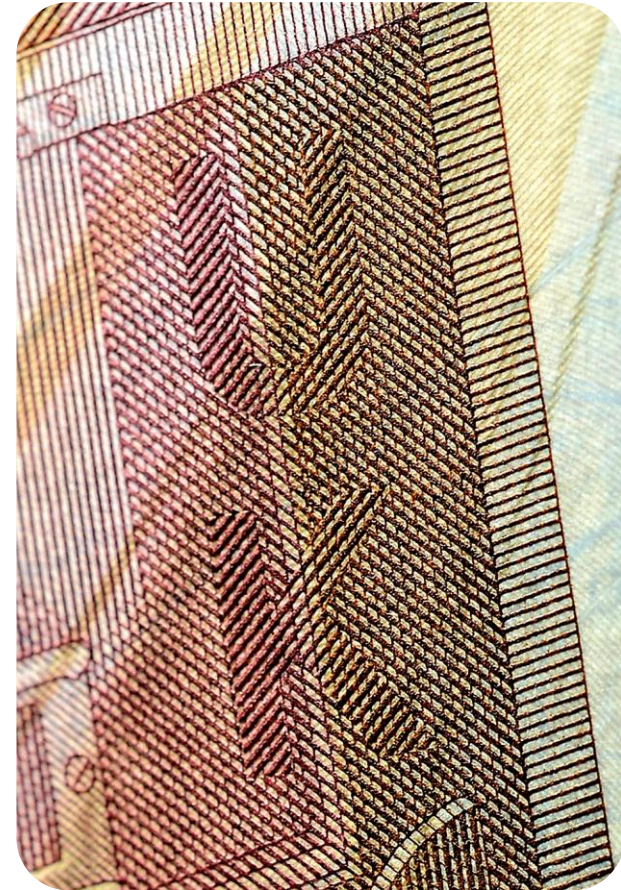
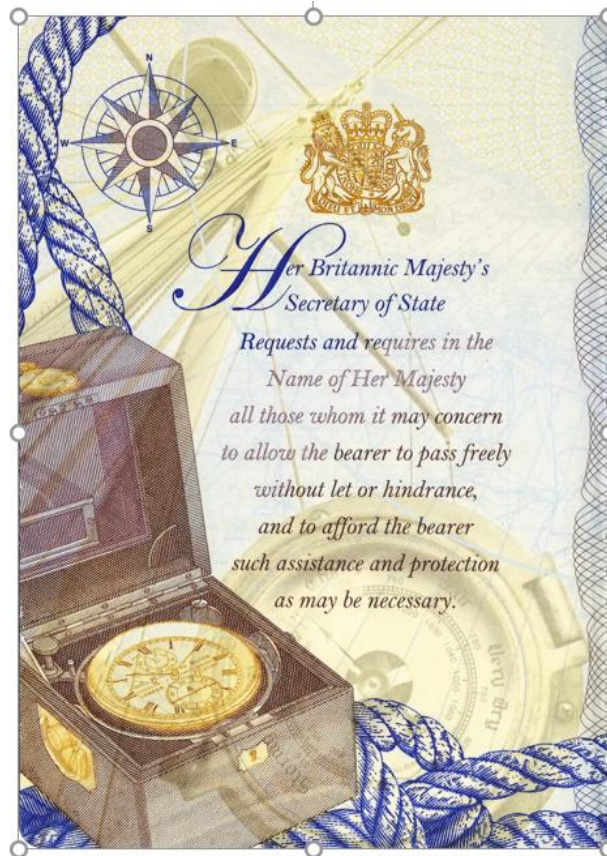
Background areas on secure documents are printed to a high standard. Using magnification, solid lines and detailed designs should be visible.



Security Features

Intaglio Ink

A printing process which results in the ink having a raised feel which can be felt by running a finger over the paper. Intaglio printing can be found on the inside cover of most (but not all) passports. You can often find a hidden pattern, revealed when the page is viewed at an oblique angle. The images below are of the intaglio printed area in a British passport.



Security Features

Optically Variable Ink

Many secure documents have designs formed of optically variable ink.

A clear colour change from one colour to another should be seen when the document is tilted.

These examples are from a version of the UK driving licence (top) and the BRP (bottom).



Machine Readable Zone - Optical Character Recognition

Most passports and identity cards have a standardised machine readable zone (MRZ). Below is a chart of the **only** characters that should be seen in these lines. The presence of any characters that do not match this font exactly could indicate that the document may be a counterfeit or a forgery.

P<GBRUK<SPECIMEN<<ANGELA<ZOE<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<
9256654166GBR8812049F2010050<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<08

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
A B C D E F G H I
J K L M N O P Q R
S T U V W X Y Z <

N.B. Some countries have issued genuine passports with a non-compliant font within the MRZ.

Counterfeit Documents

A counterfeit is a complete reproduction from scratch to resemble an officially issued document. The counterfeiter will often simulate security features that you would expect to see.

Things to consider:

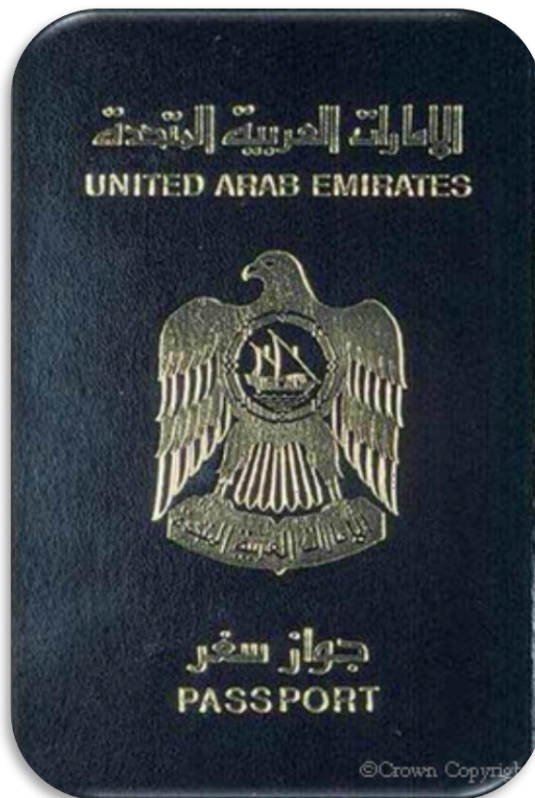
- What is the overall quality of the document?
- What is the reaction under UV light – bright or dull?
- Are there watermarks and other paper features e.g. random fibres?
- Has it been securely printed?

Counterfeit Documents

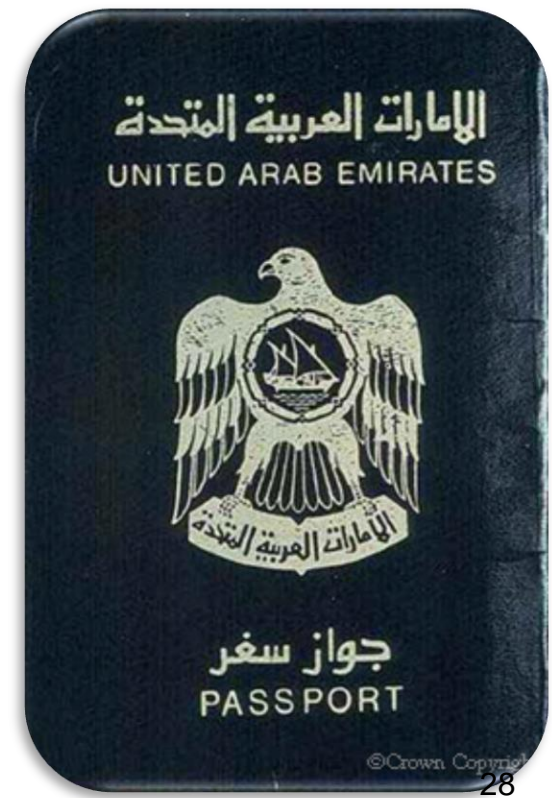
Quality of manufacture

Look at the **quality** of the document – it should be manufactured to a high standard. Consider the detail of the embossed design on the front (usually gold foil stamped into the cover) and feel the texture of the cover material. Compare the quality and fine detail of the genuine example (left) with the counterfeit (right).

Genuine



Counterfeit



Counterfeit Documents

Look at the fluorescence (brightness) of the document **using ultraviolet light**.

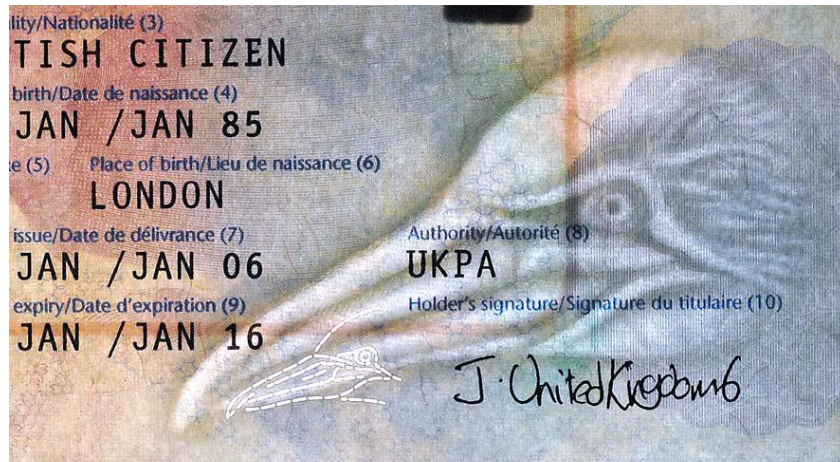


Genuine using ultra violet light

Counterfeit Documents

Watermarks

Nearly all passports contain watermarks (some paper based identity cards also have one). When light is shone through the page the genuine watermark (left) has subtle variations in the light and dark areas (thinner or thicker areas of paper), unlike the counterfeit (right) which has been printed onto the surface.



Genuine watermark in transmitted light



Counterfeit watermark in transmitted light

Counterfeit Documents

Random security fibres

Security fibres appear randomly across the paper. No repeated pattern should be seen as the process is completely random. Looking at two pages from a Greek passport (below) under a UV light source, you can see that the fibres on pages 13 and 15 are in the same place. This is **not** possible in genuine documents.



Counterfeit

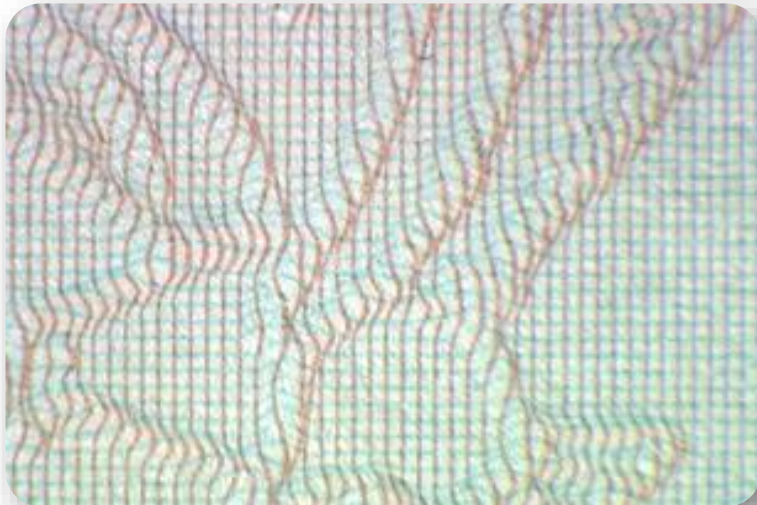


Counterfeit

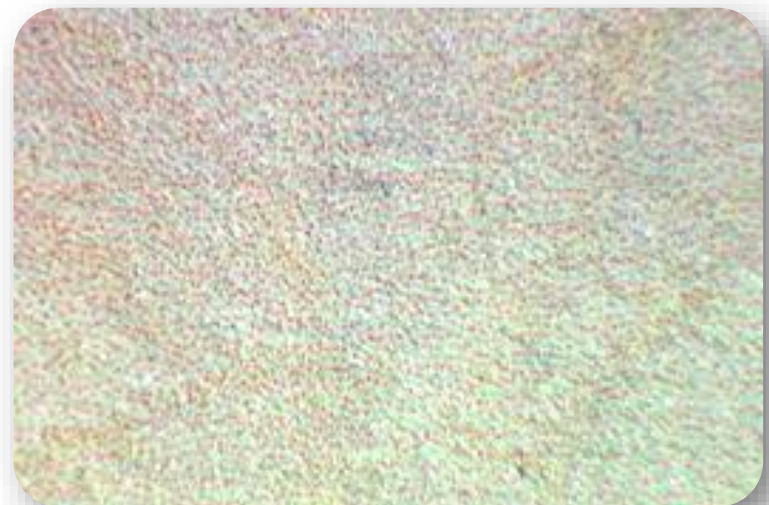
Counterfeit Documents

Quality of the printing

Look at the **quality of the printing** - it should be solid lines of high quality.



Genuine



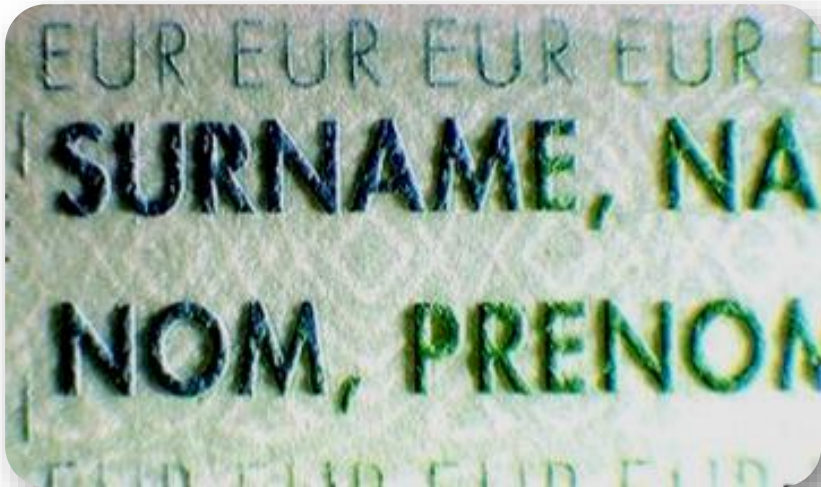
Counterfeit

The printed patterns on the pages are deliberately complex, like banknotes, to make copying difficult. The background print in the genuine passport (left) consists of solid fine lines unlike the random dots of the counterfeit (right), a characteristic of readily available home printers. Print quality is often a quick indicator of a counterfeit document. Commercial printing cannot produce the same quality as security printing.

Counterfeit Documents

Intaglio (raised) printing

Genuine intaglio printing will have raised print which can be identified by touch. In contrast the counterfeit document on the right does not have raised print.



Genuine



Counterfeit

Counterfeit Documents

Holographic devices

Many documents have holographic devices which are highly detailed and display different colours and designs when rotated and tilted. The counterfeit document below has a generic hologram with the word GENUINE in it.



Genuine



Counterfeit

Forged Documents

Unlawfully Altered Documents

There are a number of different ways to alter a genuine document:

- substitution of a page – usually the bio-data page
- substitution of the photograph or image
- alteration of personal details

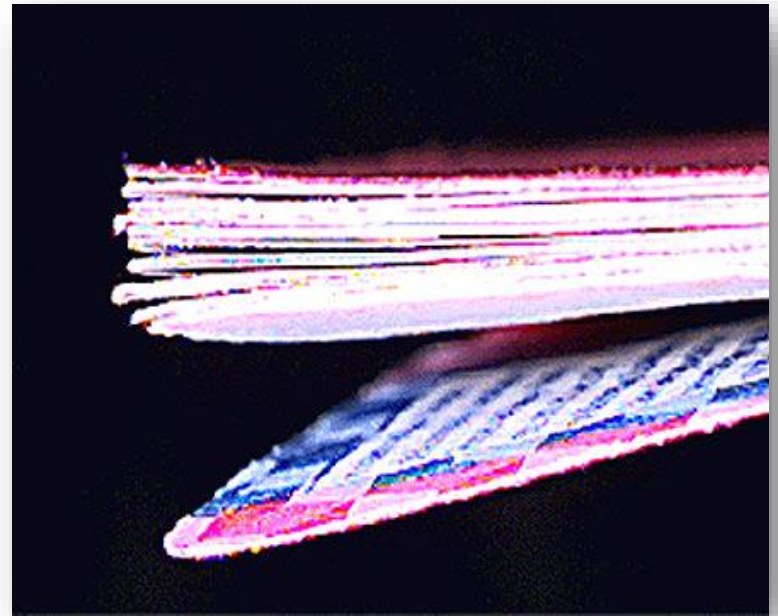
Forged Documents

Substituted Pages

Passports are made up from sheets of paper which are then stitched together and cut to size. The pages and cover should therefore all be in perfect alignment. To forge a document it may first be taken apart and then re-assembled by hand, making it difficult for all the pages to sit flush as before.



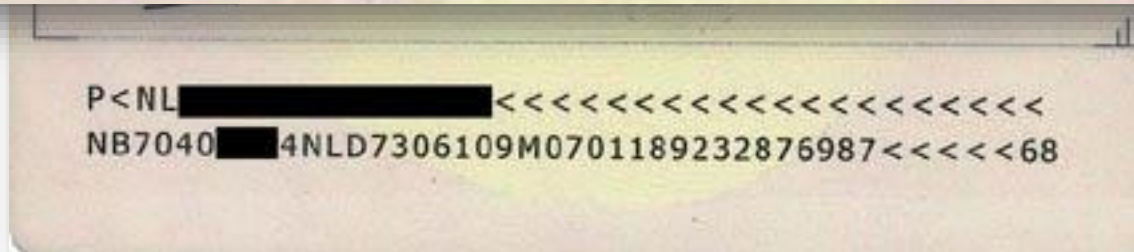
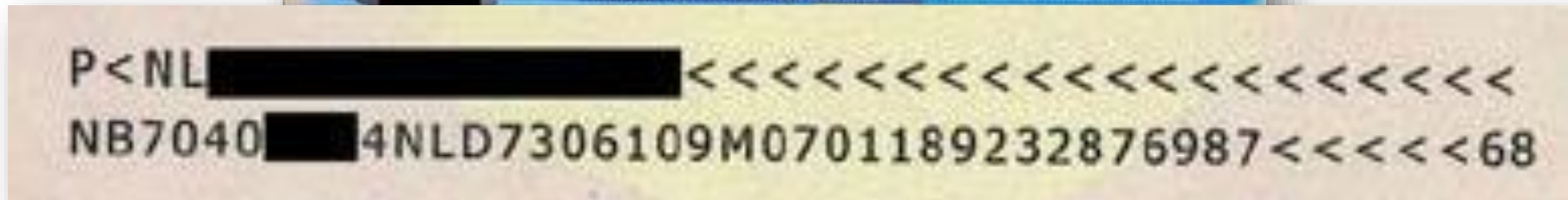
Cover misaligned with pages



Misaligned pages

Substituted Pages – the Machine Readable Zone (MRZ)

Note the incorrect characters in this machine readable zone (MRZ) on a forged Dutch passport (compare with those on page 27).



Forged passport using with magnified MRZ area

Forged Documents

Substituted Photographs & Images – Image protection

Most photographs and digital images in passports or ID cards will be protected by an ink stamp, an emboss, or a laminate with visible safeguards.

An ink stamp is produced with wet ink and should not be printed.



Forged Greek ID card with ink stamp highlighted



Forged ink stamp

Note the printed portion of the stamp on the photograph in the forgery differs from the stamp on the rest of the card.

Forged Documents

Substituted Images - Printing

Documents have evolved, with most moving away from traditional 'stuck-in' photographs. Most paper biodata pages contain images which are digitally printed directly onto the page, as seen in this genuine Portuguese passport. This printed image should not react any differently when viewed under a UV light.



Genuine passport using transmitted light



Genuine passport using UV light

Forged Documents

Substituted Images - Use different light sources

In this forged Portuguese passport the image has been substituted. The new image has been printed onto a piece of paper and placed onto the page under the laminate. Using a transmitted light source (left) you can see the edges of the new piece of paper. Under a UV light source (right), you can see the new piece of paper fluorescing brightly under UV light - ordinary commercial paper has been used.



Forged



Forged

Forged Documents

Substituted Photographs / Images - Laminate overlays

Many forgers simply print a new image (or parts of an image) onto a thin clear laminate and place it on top of the page. In this forged USA passport a new face has been added to the original holder's image. Examine holographic and UV features as the new image may incorrectly sit above them.



Forged



Forged

Forged Documents

Substituted Images – Laser engraving

Passports or ID cards made with polycarbonate (a type of plastic) will have a laser engraved image of the holder. This image should display shades of grey / brown (burned carbon). Forgeries usually have printed images which contain jet black or coloured dots. Neither of these should be seen in laser engraved images.



Genuine

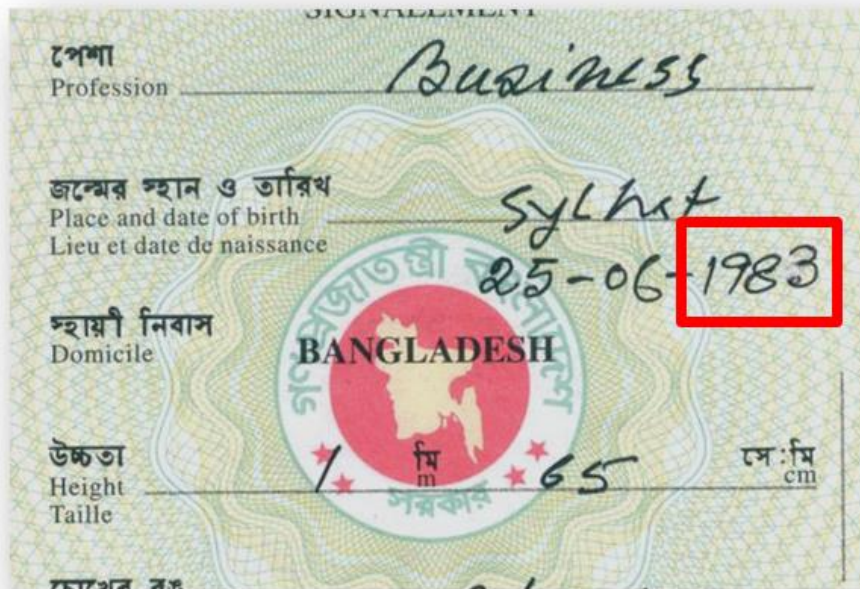


Forged

Forged Documents

Altered Details

A forger will often alter details in conjunction with changing a page or photograph / image. The passport has been forged by changing the date of birth. The forger has abraded the original pen ink and then over-written a new date.



Forged



Forged

Pseudo / Fantasy Documents

Pseudo or fantasy documents are ones that have no legal basis; they are normally not based on any legitimate document. They may have the appearance of an official document, are not issued by a legally recognised state authority or institution, or by an organisation recognised under international law, and as such have no legal validity.



Pseudo document



Pseudo document



Pseudo document

Further information

Useful Websites

UK Government - guidance for employers:

<https://www.gov.uk/uk-visa-sponsorship-employers>

PRADO - information and images of genuine documents, (European and other countries):

<http://prado.consilium.europa.eu/en/homeindex.html>

EDISON – information and images of genuine documents:

<http://www.edisontd.net/>

CPNI document verification guidance :

<pre-employment-screening-document-verification-guidance.pdf> (cpni.gov.uk)

Basic Document Checks

Checklist A

CAUSE FOR CONCERN	Yes	No
Does the document allow the person to live and work in the United Kingdom?		
Is the person presenting the document the same as the image / photograph?		
Is the document genuine or counterfeit? Check for :		
General quality / cover - is it manufactured to a high standard?		
Watermarks - view the page with a light source, e.g. a torch or lamp		
UV reaction - check if the document reacts dully, if a UV light is available		
Random fibres - are there random fibres on each of the documents pages?		
Print quality - is the quality of the print of a high standard (no dots)?		
Intaglio ink on inside cover of passports - is there raised ink on the document?		
Optically variable ink - move the document under a light source		
Machine readable zone (font) - use an online MRZ checker if available		
Holographic devices - move the document under a light source		

Basic Document Checks

Checklist B

CAUSE FOR CONCERN	YES	NO
Have any pages been substituted? Check for :		
Construction / page alignment/ page numbers/ page design		
Counterfeit pages (see above)		
Has the photograph / image been substituted? Check for :		
Damage around the photograph / image		
Any safeguards over photograph / image e.g. ink stamp, emboss, laminate		
Correct image type		
Evidence of a second laminate – move the document under a light source		
Have any details been altered? Check for :		
Damage to paper around details e.g. date of birth		
Is the document a fantasy / pseudo document? – Can you find it on the PRADO or EDISON websites?		

Who do I contact?

If you encounter a suspected false document then contact the Police or your local Immigration Enforcement Office:

<https://www.gov.uk/report-immigration-crime>

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