



Home Office

Dealing with customer documents

Version 51.0

This guidance tells His Majesty's Passport Office staff about how to accept and deal with customer documents, including UK immigration reference numbers and some digital documents issued by overseas authorities.

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About: Dealing with customer documents

This guidance tells His Majesty's Passport Office staff why customers must send documents to support their claim to a British passport and how staff must deal with them. It explains the:

- common requirements for acceptable documents
- types of documents we can accept
- process for HM Passport Office examiners in how to deal with customer documents, including:
 - copies of documents
 - UK immigration reference numbers
 - digital documents issued by overseas authorities

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 **51.0**
- published for Home Office staff on **22 September 2025**

Changes from last version of this guidance

This guidance has been updated:

- to correct links
- to tell examiners about a new section, Envelope scans, this section tells them:
 - the Document Handling Unit now scan the envelope the customer used to send documents to HM Passport Office onto the system; and,
 - what they, the examiner, must use the image for
- in the Letters addressed to HM Passport Office section to tell examiners:
 - they must update the document handling instructions on Application Receive Domain (ARD) to send any letters to confidential waste, when an application has either been processed or failed

- to change terminology from “overseas” to “international” when referring to passport applications

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Documents we need to support passport applications

This section tells HM Passport Office staff when we need supporting documents for passport applications.

We use the term 'documents' to mean anything physical the customer sends us while we are dealing with their application (for example, a birth certificate with security features or a letter or payslip which has none). Documents are usually sent by post but guidance will tell you when you can accept digital images or information that can be checked against other systems. There is separate guidance for passport photos which includes photo standards, facial matching and Confirming identity checks.

Before we issue a British passport to a customer, we must be satisfied of their identity, nationality, entitlement and that there are no vulnerability concerns. Your aim is to link the person applying to the claimed events (for example birth or marriage) and that the events took place (for example a birth or marriage certificate was issued).

When we need supporting documents

There are standard document requirements for each type of application (for example, first time applications or renewals).

However, you may need extra documents if:

- a customer is applying from overseas
- the standard documents do not provide sufficient evidence (for example, for authorisation or consent)

If we do ask the customer for documents, we must be satisfied they have sent everything we need and make sure the document:

- is genuine (not a photocopy unless guidance tells you we can accept it) and there are no fraud concerns
- is acceptable for nationality, identity, entitlement and vulnerability purposes
- shows the applicant is who they claim to be
- shows they are more likely than not to be the holder of the identity on the document (for example, a marriage certificate or change of name deed)
- links them to an event (for example, their birth)
- shows a link to their parents or grandparents (if the claim is by descent)
- shows the person applying for a passport, on behalf of a child, can consent to the application or any changes

When we may not need supporting documents

We may not always need supporting documents when processing a passport application, for example, when:

- it is for a like for like replacement of a lost passport
- depending on the customer's circumstances, we can check the information on a document using passport and application record systems where this is agreed in guidance
- we can use an immigration reference number or personal details provided by the customer to search UK Visas and Immigration systems
- you are dealing with a crisis application, where an exception has been agreed meaning all or some of the supporting documents are not needed
- the customer is not able to provide the standard supporting documents (and we can consider an application based on balance of probability from the documents they can provide)

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Document validation checks

This section tells HM Passport Office staff about the document validation checks we do when we receive a document, to check it is genuine

When we receive a customer's document, we will check for damage, counterfeiting or potential fraudulent tampering. We call this a document validation check.

You, the examiner, must:

- check the document is acceptable for our purposes
- make sure the details on the document confirm information in the application

You must confirm the customer's document is acceptable for passport purposes by checking the sample documents and information held on the Knowledge Base. For example, some countries issue celebration marriage certificates that we do not accept.

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Document verification checks

This section tells HM Passport Office staff about the document verification checks we do, to check a document is acceptable.

You, the examiner, may be required to carry out a document verification check on a document that we have received. Document verification is the process of confirming the authenticity of a document and the information on it.

A document verification check can be done on some country's official issuing authority websites or online portal. You must only verify overseas documents using online portals or websites named in the individual country's profile document section on Knowledge Base.

A document verification check is in addition to our standard document validation checks.

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Envelope scans

This section tells HM Passport Office staff about how to deal with scans of envelopes on Digital Application Processing (DAP).

The Document Handling Units (DHU's) will scan an image of the front of the envelope the customer used to send their documents to HM Passport Office, showing the PEX reference number and any post marks.

The DHU will scan all the envelopes the customer uses to send in their documents. This includes any subsequent envelopes containing correspondence or further documents. The envelope image will be available to view for all passport applications which include supporting documents.

You, the examiner, will be able to view the envelope image in the **Documents** tab. This will be recorded as **DHU envelope**. The envelope will be destroyed by the DHU, you do not need to change or update the item details on ARD (Application Receive Domain).

If you think the documents on the application have been associated incorrectly, you can view the PEX reference number on the envelope image to help you confirm if:

- the PEX number has been scanned and recorded correctly
- there is a link between the documents and the application
- the documents have been associated to the correct application

Where the PEX number has been scanned and recorded incorrectly, you can use the information from the envelope image to search for the application the documents should have been associated to using ARD.

If the documents are not associated to the correct application, you must follow ARD: how to associate and disassociate documents guidance, to associate the documents to the correct application, before disassociating them from the incorrect one.

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Damaged documents

This section tells HM Passport Office staff about how to deal with damaged documents.

If the customer sends a damaged document, we may ask them to get a replacement. Before asking them for a replacement you must consider:

- can the [document be validated](#)
- the age of the document, making sure:
 - the core details are clear and concise (normal wear and tear is acceptable if the details are still legible); and,
 - there are no lines, tears or folds through the core details obscuring the information or any possible amendments
- why we need the document; if you intend to accept a document that has been damaged other than by normal wear and tear and you need it to confirm identity, nationality, entitlement or safeguarding you must complete additional checks
- whether other documents could be accepted instead of asking for a replacement (for example, a statutory declaration)
- if guidance supports alternatives if the document is damaged (for example, Balance of probabilities, Confirming identity checks , Names: aligning names on foreign documents, Supporting documents not available

If you are uncertain whether to accept another document in place of the damaged document or have any doubts you must refer the application to a correctly trained caseworker or operational team leader (OTL).

If you, have fraud concerns about the document (for example, it appears to have been tampered with) refer to DAP: additional checks before referring for investigation.

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Original documents

This section tells HM Passport Office staff what an original document is.

We tell customers to send us original or replacement documents in our customer guidance.

Original documents are given out by an official organisation that is responsible for producing the original document. For example, the General Register Office (GRO) are responsible for issuing a birth certificate in the UK. They will not be photocopies (see: [contemporaneous \(original\) documents](#) guidance).

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Replacement documents

This section tells HM Passport Office staff what a replacement document is.

We tell customers to send us original or replacement documents in our customer guidance.

A replacement document is an official copy of a document given out by an issuing authority. It will not be a photocopy. If a person born in the UK, for example, sends us a replacement of their birth certificate, it must be issued by the General Register Office for England and Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland or a local registration service. For documents issued overseas, you must refer to the country's profile section in Knowledge Base.

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Certified copies of documents

This section tells HM Passport Office staff about how to deal with certified copies of documents.

A certified copy of a document is a photocopy of a document, certified (confirmed) by a third party (for example, a solicitor, or notary) stating the document is a true copy of the original.

You must never accept a certified photocopy of a document issued by the General Register Office (GRO), as replacement certificates are available to everyone. GRO issue birth, adoption, marriage, civil partnership and death certificates.

We normally need [original documents](#) for security purposes. We will only accept certified copies of documents, when there is a justifiable reason why the original or replacement documents cannot be obtained and:

- a solicitor or Commissioner for Oaths confirms the document is a true copy
- Local Services have validated the document and certified it as a true copy
- UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) hold the original document and the information can be checked on UKVI systems

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Photocopies and digital copies of documents

This section tells HM Passport Office staff about how to deal with photocopies and digital copies of documents, including when we can accept UK immigration reference numbers and some digital documents issued by overseas authorities.

When a customer sends in documents to support their passport application, they may not always be able to send the original version.

We do not usually accept photocopies of documents or digital documents except in certain circumstances outlined in this guidance.

If the customer sends us a photocopy or a physical version of a digital document to us direct, we must return this to the customer (along with any other documents we return, at the end of processing).

Where our full Local Service have certified a photocopy of a document they received from the customer we do not need to return the certified photocopy to the customer. Any documents (or photocopies) received from a full Local Service that are not certified by the Local Service must be returned to the customer as they may be the only copy they hold.

Why we do not accept copies of documents

We ask for original versions of documents instead of photocopies because copies of documents are easier to change and any security features may be obscured or missing. We may also accept an overseas digital civil registration document where [this guidance](#) tells you.

In exceptional cases, we may consider [accepting photocopies of documents](#) if it is impossible for the customer to send originals. In these cases, we will only accept photocopies if they are authenticated by a solicitor or Commissioner of Oaths as true copies.

We will not accept documents that an independent provider has certified as a true copy (for example, the Post Office Ltd). You must decide if you can accept a photocopy by following: [when photocopied documents can be accepted](#) guidance.

See also the Crown Copyright page for more information about copying government documents, including passports.

When we will accept an overseas digital document

We will accept printed copies and photocopies of digital overseas civil registration documents (for example a birth certificate) where all the following points apply:

- Knowledge Base confirms the overseas country no longer issues original physical documents
- you have [verified the document](#) using the country's official issuing authority website shown on Knowledge Base (not using a QR code)

HM Passport Office will only add an official issuing authority website to Knowledge Base when it has been approved. You must only use those listed on Knowledge Base. If you cannot verify the document on the relevant website you must follow Supporting documents not available guidance.

You must refer to [document verification](#) and the Knowledge Base when deciding whether to accept a digital overseas civil registration document.

When we will accept photocopies of documents

We will accept:

- a photocopy of a digital overseas civil registration document, when:
 - Knowledge Base confirms the overseas country no longer issues original physical documents; and,
 - you have [verified the digital document](#) using the country's official issuing authority website on Knowledge Base (not using a QR code)
- colour photocopies of all pages in a foreign passport, when dual nationals are renewing their British passport

We can also accept colour photocopies for other application types, but the customer will be told we may request the original passport if it is needed. An example of where we would accept a colour photocopy for another application type includes where:

- we have returned the original foreign passport to the customer
- they need to show us they have changed the foreign passport

Customers may be unable to send original documents, for example, because the law where they live states they must always carry identity documents, or they cannot send identity documents over borders. In these cases, the customer may send us certified photocopies of the originals. We will scan the documents on the system, in line with Scanning and uploading customer documents.

We will sometimes accept a colour photocopy when:

- it is not a core nationality or identity document
- we can confirm the details on passport records (except for renewal applications, where the customer must send their British passport)

In most cases a photocopy can only be accepted when HM Passport Office have asked for it as part of a case note or when contacting the customer. We will accept colour photocopies where there is a justifiable reason for not sending the original, for example:

- if the original document was photocopied, checked against the original and sent by HM Passport Office's overseas Local Service Provider
- where UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) hold the original document and we can confirm the information shown on the photocopy on UKVI systems
- the photocopy is the personal details page of a standard passport where the customer is applying for a diplomatic or official service passport
- if the customer lives overseas and all the following applies:
 - it is a first time, change or replacement passport
 - is a dual national
 - they submit colour photocopies of their foreign passport
 - an exception applies in the guidance
- if the customer is a frequent traveller or airline crew renewing their current British passport if they need to keep it until their new passport is issued
- the photocopy is the details page from a parent's passport when the passport differs on Digital Application Processing (DAP) (see DAP change of parent details)
- if the customer provides a new style PIC (Permanent Identity card), as Hong Kong residents over the age of 15 must always carry valid legal identification, see: British National Overseas (BNO) guidance
- if the photocopy is of a death certificate for Tiered Application Service (TAS) compassionate cases
- where other guidance tells you that you can accept a photocopy

Where guidance allows, you may be able to accept a photocopy of a British passport instead of the original if you can confirm the details on passport records. For example:

- if a customer is applying for an additional passport and cannot send in their passport due to travel requirements
- if local services sent the application by post and validated the photocopy because the customer needed to retain their passport

When we will accept an immigration reference number to check a UKVI record

We will accept an immigration reference number provided by the customer to prove their settlement claim, on either:

- a copy of their Home Office letter or email; or
- section 8 of a paper application form (if they apply by post); or
- a signed and dated letter; or
- an email from the email address entered on their application (where the number is requested after application)

When a customer holds an eVisa showing their immigration status in the UK, this reference will be either a 16 digit:

- global web form (GWF) number
- unique application number (UAN)

You, the HM Passport Officer staff member, must check the immigration number on UKVI systems to make sure the UKVI records match the application details and any supporting documents.

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Laminated documents

This section tells HM Passport Office staff about how to deal with laminated documents.

A laminated document is a document that has a clear layer of plastic over either one or both sides of the document. Some customers believe that by laminating their document they are protecting it from damage.

We do not usually accept laminated documents, but we may in certain circumstances.

Why we do not accept laminated documents

Laminated documents make it difficult for an examiner to check if the document is genuine. More importantly, it can hide the absence of or incorrect security features in the document, including:

- watermarks
- quality and texture of the paper
- heat reactive ink (for naturalisation and registration documents)

If you receive a laminated document, you must not accept it and ask for an unlaminated version of the document, unless it meets [exceptions for accepting laminated documents](#).

If you have concerns about the document or you are accepting a laminated document and there are other risk indicators, you must complete additional checks, if you are processing on DAP.

When you can accept a laminated document

We will also accept laminated documents, if:

- it is clear from case notes, correspondence and conversations with the customer that they are blind and you receive an application or document with a braille sticker present
- the customer has supplied a change of name deed or marriage certificate (evidence of change of name only)
- the birth certificate was issued by the Singapore Registry of Births (birth certificates in Singapore are laminated by the Singapore Registry of Births)
- the birth certificate was issued in Oman (birth certificates are laminated on one side in Oman)
- the birth certificate was issued in Cyprus (birth certificates are laminated in Cyprus)

- it is a naturalisation or registration certificate and we can confirm the information shown on the laminated certificate, using UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) systems
- it is a digital civil registration certificate that guidance says you can verify online

If a customer provides a laminated document from a different country to the ones listed here, you must refer to the country's profile section of Knowledge Base. If the information in Knowledge Base confirms the laminated documents are not acceptable, you must ask the customer to send you, either:

- an unlaminated version of the document
- written evidence from the authorities that they officially validate the laminated document or confirm the document was officially laminated
 - if the authorities confirm the document is official, you must contact the Guidance team so they can add the information to Knowledge Base

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Contemporaneous documents

This section tells HM Passport Office staff about how to deal with contemporaneous documents.

A contemporaneous document is a document issued as close as possible to the time when the event took place. For example, a contemporaneous marriage certificate is the certificate issued when the marriage took place.

A non-contemporaneous, civil registration document is a document recording an event. For example, a birth certificate showing a birth was registered several years after it took place.

Digitally produced civil registration documents will show the date the event was registered. Although the event itself is contemporaneous, we cannot tell if the digital certificate produced by a customer from an online portal was one printed out at the time of the event. As they can be requested at any time, there is no historic link to the identity. Therefore, you must treat all digital documents as non-contemporaneous, including [overseas digital civil registration documents](#) and digital UK court orders.

Why we ask for additional documents

We will usually ask for contemporaneous documents or documents as close to the time of the claimed event.

For example, if we:

- are unable to validate standard documents a customer has supplied
- need to confirm a link between the customer and their parent for example when dealing with a Balance of probabilities application

We will usually ask for documents that only a customer, claimed parent or person acting on behalf of a child would be able to provide (for example, school records, family photos, medical records) or other documents that may help us decide based on a balance of probability, for example a statutory declaration. For more information, see: [confirming identity and standard documents not available guidance](#).

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Letters

This section tells HM Passport Office staff what to do if they receive a letter addressed to HM Passport Office or the customer.

As part of the passport application process, customers will send documents to HM Passport Office usually by a letter or in an email.

Letters addressed to HM Passport Office

Correspondence addressed to HM Passport Office becomes part of the application. You, the examiner, must not return them to the customer. This applies to all letters (for example, from countersignatories and other government departments) in the UK and overseas.

The exception to this is, if a parent asks us to return a consent letter written by the other parent in support of a child's application for a change of name, as it may be difficult for them to get consent again, although there may be occasions where this cannot be provided. For example, where there are safeguarding risks and the letter has the other parent's address on it which could put them in danger if disclosed.

Unless the application meets the exception above, when we have issued the passport (or failed the application) we will destroy the letters and cannot return them to the customer. You must update the document handling instructions on the Application Receive Domain (ARD) to send any letters addressed to HM Passport Office to confidential waste. This is to prevent the risk of a data breach.

Letters addressed to a customer or third party

These will be seen as documents supporting the application. You must return letters addressed to the customer or third party (for example, utility bills and bank statements) to the customer (see: posting passports and documents). Where the documents are deemed as not genuine, they can be either:

- kept, where the Counter Fraud team (CFT) have requested
- returned to the claimed issuing authority

You must:

- decide whether to scan the document by following How to keep scans of supporting documents guidance
- case note all important information, as the scanned copy may not be available immediately on the system
- return third party letters by secure delivery to the customer or nominated third party

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Supporting documents

This section tells HM Passport Office staff about supporting documents, they may receive. This is not a complete list of every supporting document but covers most supporting documents, that we may receive.

When examining supporting documents, you, the examiner, must refer to the Risk indicator guidance. Many of the documents listed in this section could be issued by UK or foreign authorities.

If a customer asks for any of their documents returned to them before the passport has been issued, see Returning documents on live applications.

For details of how to check and view supporting documents in DAP (Digital Application Processing) see: DAP: how we handle customer documents guidance.

The list below covers most document types we receive to support passport applications; however, this list is not exhaustive.

Documents: A to C

- Act of Parliament to change a name
- Address (residency evidence)
- Adoption certificates, adoption orders and overseas adoptions
- Affidavits
- Bank statement
- Baptismal certificates
- Biometric residence permits
- Birth certificate
- Certificate of no marriage record or CRS form Number 5
- Certificates from the court of the Lord Lyon of Scotland
- Certificate of registry of birth
- Civil partnership certificate
- Civil partnership: overseas
- Confirmation certificate
- Consular birth certificates
- Court orders

Documents: D to F

- Death certificates
- Dissolution certificate (civil partnerships)
- Divorce documents
- DNA evidence
- Domicile questionnaire
- Driving licence

- Educational records
- Emergency travel documents
- Emergency passports
- Employment records
- Enrolled deed polls
- Evisas
- Form E
- Foreign language documents: translations

Documents: G to I

- Gender recognition and interim gender recognition certificates
- Government letters
- His Majesty's Forces birth certificate
- Hong Kong Special Administrative Region passports
- Hong Kong identity cards
- Identity cards

Documents: J to L

- Letters and correspondence
- Lost and stolen form

Documents: M to O

- Marriage certificate: UK
- Marriage certificates from His Majesty's Forces
- Marriages overseas
- Multi language standard forms (MSF)
- Naturalisation certificates

Documents: P to R

- Parental order
- Passports: British passports
- Passports: foreign passports
- Post-dated (PD1 and PD2) forms
- Registration certificates
- Residence permit cards

Documents: S to U

- Status letters
- Statutory declarations
- Tax record
- Temporary passports
- Un-enrolled deed poll

Documents: V to Z

- Visas or resident permit cards

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