



Home Office

Observations in passports

Version 32.0

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. It tells staff about immigration, validity and name observations.

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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 **32.0**
- published for Home Office staff on **10 October 2025**

Changes from last version of this guidance

The guidance has been updated:

- with a minor change to the wording for age observations
- to change the name of observation OBTZ to OBTP
- to remove references to the Application Management System
- to tell examiners when to use observation OBTZ and OBTP
- in the Diplomatic, Official and King's Messenger observation section as the free text process is no longer required. The observations on the Digital Applications Processing system are updated and must be used
- in the section Immigration and nationality observations, to remove the British overseas territory and crown dependencies observations we no longer use. These have been moved to the Historic passport information guidance

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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 passport records
- 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)
- 21 lines of observation text

Order of observations

When you are processing an application, 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 (Digital Application Processing (DAP) will order the observations automatically when the passport is sent to print)

DAP will not allow you to use the same observation code more than once. If you need to add more than one of the same observation, you must use 2 different observation codes. For example, use OBTZ and OBTG if you need to add 2 'free text' codes.

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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 full permanent identity card (PIC) number (for example, AS111111(2)) into the free text field on the system.

You must do this when you have confirmed the PIC number using the documents the customer sent you.

OBTG: The holder [free text up to 77 characters]

THE HOLDER [INSERT FREE TEXT UP TO 77 CHARACTERS]

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.

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)
- type the passport number and issue date
- 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

These observations are placed on passports for diplomatic staff and their families.

OBJ: member of the diplomatic service

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

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

OBTK: spouse, member of the diplomatic service

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

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

OBTL: dependent, member of the diplomatic service

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

Observation code OBTL 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.

OBAA: attached to diplomatic service

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

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

OBAC: spouse, attached to diplomatic service

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

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

OBAD: dependent, attached to diplomatic service

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

Observation code OBAD 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, dependent 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

Diplomatic passports which are needed for the King's Messenger Service must have an observation added to the passport. The customer's letter confirming they can hold a King's Messenger Service passport will explain which observation you must add to the Diplomatic passport.

These official observations are used for staff working in the King's Messenger Service.

OBTX: King's Messenger Service

You must use the system observation code **OBTX** and type in the free text field to show one of the following observations:

- **THE HOLDER IS A MEMBER OF THE KING'S MESSENGER SERVICE**
- **THE HOLDER IS A KING'S MESSENGER**

Free text observations for diplomatic or official purposes

These official observations are used when a diplomatic or official observation needs more text than the observation code on the system allows.

OBTZ: free text for diplomatic or official purposes

[INSERT FREE TEXT]

If you need to add a diplomatic or official observation which needs more text than the observation code on the system allows, you must:

- use observation code OBTZ which is entirely free text
- type the free text so that the observation is the same as in the relevant observation code

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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 77 characters]

THE HOLDER [FREE TEXT UP TO 77 CHARACTERS]

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, that is 8 lines of 44 characters) if:

- the observation needs more than 77 characters
- you need to add an observation to show the customer has a foreign document in a different name

OBTG: 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 OBTG 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 when:

- a customer has changed their first forename to a title of nobility or knighthood (for example, from John Smith to Sir John Smith)
- a customer is born with a first forename that could be a title of nobility or honour (for example, birth certificate shows forename Prince)

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 77 characters]

THE HOLDER [FREE TEXT UP TO 77 CHARACTERS]

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 DAP: additional checks before referring for investigation)

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.

Age observations

You, the examiner, must use the OBTZ observation when the customer is:

- over 100 years old
- over 90 years old and may turn 100 years old during the validity of the passport

Some immigration systems only show the last 2 numbers of the year of birth. For example, if the customer was born in 1923, the immigration system may show 23 and think this is 2023. To make sure the immigration authority can correctly confirm the customer's age (for example, an entry clearance officer), you must include the OBTZ observation.

OBTZ: free text for date of birth purposes

THE HOLDER'S DATE OF BIRTH IS [DD/MM/YYYY]

You, the examiner, must:

1. Phone the customer to:
 - explain the reason why you added the observation; and,
 - tell them we will send them a letter to keep with their passport in case they have any problems with immigration authorities.
2. Deal with the application in line with current guidance.
3. Send letter 336 to explain the reason why you added the observation to their passport.

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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.

OBTP: free text for replacing a cancelled passport

[FREE TEXT UP TO 352 CHARACTERS]

You must use observation code OBTP (which is entirely free text and has a maximum of 352 characters, that 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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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 passport records), you must follow DAP: how we handle customer documents guidance.

How to add an observation

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

You can also add multiple observations if needed. DAP will not allow you to use the same observation code more than once. If you need to add more than one of the same observation, you must use 2 different observation codes. For example, use OBTZ and OBTG if you need to add 2 'free text' codes.

To add an observation, you 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 to 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

You must add or amend any observations before clearing the **Observation on previous passport task** to make sure the correct details are added to the new passport.

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 must complete additional checks and refer the application for investigation if you have fraud concerns.

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