



Home Office

# Complaints: handling overview

Version 2.0

His Majesty's Passport Office guidance about customer complaints and how these are resolved.

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# About: Complaints: handling overview

This guidance tells His Majesty's Passport Office staff about customer complaints and how to deal with them.

It includes:

- HM Passport Office's definition of a customer complaint
- considerations when dealing with a complaint
- HM Passport Office's agreed processes when dealing with customer complaints
- the different stages in complaints and who deals with them:
  - stages 1 and 2 are dealt with by the Central Correspondence team
  - stage 3 is dealt with by the Independent Examiner of Complaints
  - stage 4 is dealt with by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

## 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 **2.0**
- published for Home Office staff on **09 March 2026**

## Changes from last version of this guidance

This guidance has been updated in the section:

- [Complaints handling process overview](#) to update HM Passport Office's definition of a complaint
- [HM Passport Office's 4 stage formal complaints procedure](#), to make it clear, the customer must complete stages 1 and 2 of the complaints process before they can escalate to the IEC

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### Related external links

Compensation

Compensation: reimbursing out of pocket expenses

Complaints MP enquiries

Gratis passport applications: how to apply for and deal with them

# Complaints handling process overview

This section tells HM Passport Office staff about the service a customer can expect from HM Passport Office and the definition of a complaint.

HM Passport Office strives for a professional approach to all our services and interactions with the customer. We want to give a good service whenever we interact with the customer.

Occasionally things may go wrong, or circumstances beyond our control affect service delivery standards. Wherever possible, staff must explain what has happened, apologise and try to resolve problems when they arise, allowing the customer's application to progress quickly.

If the customer is not satisfied with the service they have received they can use the [formal complaints procedures](#) to achieve a solution.

## The definition of a complaint

HM Passport Office defines a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction, either spoken or written, that requires a response. It can be about an act, omission, decision, or about the standard of service provided or professional conduct of staff, contractors or both.

We will not normally accept complaints where there has been a delay of more than 12 months between the complainant becoming aware of the relevant facts and making a complaint to HM Passport Office. We can consider those where there is good reason for the delay or where the issues raised are so serious as to override the time factor. Our suppliers and Contact Centres only keep delivery and call information for 6 months, so are usually unable to give specific information about a complaint that is received after this date.

If a customer is unhappy with the way their complaint has been dealt with, they can escalate their case.

If the complaint is not dealt with effectively, the customer may be entitled to compensation. For further information on compensation, see Compensation and Compensation: reimbursing out of pocket expenses.

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# Customer complaints: supporting the customer

This section tells HM Passport Office staff how to deal with an informal complaint from a customer to help resolve the problem. It also includes how to help the customer escalate their complaint formally

The customer may raise a complaint about their live (in progress) application informally:

- by phone
- by email
- at the counter

If the customer makes a complaint by these methods, you, the examiner, must try and resolve the problem using the how we communicate with customers guidance.

## Raising a complaint online

If you cannot resolve the complaint to the customer's satisfaction, you must tell the customer they can get advice on how to raise a formal complaint on GOV.UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/passport-advice-line>.

If the customer does not have access to the internet or asks you to log a complaint on their behalf, you must go to <https://www.gov.uk/passport-advice-line> and select 'online enquiry form' under the 'To make a complaint' heading and complete the form.

You must include all relevant details as shown in [Stage 1 complaint](#) and provide full details about the customer's complaint.

## Raising a complaint: customer call back

If the customer does not want to raise a complaint online and insists they want to speak to someone regarding their complaint, you must:

1. Ask the customer the details shown in [Stage 1 complaint](#).
2. Tell the customer you will pass their details to the complaints team.
3. Send an email to Customer Service Management team (CSMT) with the details of the customer's complaint.

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# HM Passport Office's 4 stage formal complaints procedure

This section tells HM Passport Office staff how the customer can make a complaint and the 4 stages of a customer complaint

HM Passport Office has a formal 4-stage process when dealing with formal customer complaints. The customer must follow this process when making their complaint (for example, they cannot contact the Independent Examiner of Complaints before contacting HM Passport Office).

## Stage 1 complaint

A customer can make a complaint by:

- completing the on-line enquiry form at <https://www.gov.uk/passport-advice-line>
- calling the Passport Adviceline on 0300 222 0000 or Text Relay 18001 0300 222 0000
- sending a letter to the Customer Service Management team (CSMT) at:

HM Passport Office  
PO Box 767  
Southport  
PR8 9PW

We will need the following information:

- the customer's contact details
- the name and date of birth of the intended passport holder (person the passport was for)
- the application reference number and date it was submitted
- the passport number, if the intended passport holder has one
- address where the:
  - application form was sent to (if a paper application was submitted)
  - documents were posted to (if the application was submitted online)
- full details of the problem, including the date and time:
  - of their appointment, and an appointment reference number if the application was submitted using an appointment service
  - of the interview if the complaint is about an interview

All complaints submitted in Welsh must be answered in Welsh. Customer Voice are responsible for managing stage 1 and stage 2 complaints made in Welsh and must arrange translations through the approved translation provider

## Stage 2 complaint

If after following Stage 1 the customer is not satisfied with the response, they can ask us to review their complaint. The customer should follow the [Stage 1 instructions](#) again but also provide their complaint reference number and the reason(s) why they would like to escalate the complaint.

## Stage 3 complaint

If the customer has followed Stage 1 and Stage 2 and is still not satisfied, they can escalate their complaint to the [Independent Examiner of Complaints \(IEC\)](#) within 3 months of receiving the response. The customer must complete stages 1 and 2 of the complaints process before they can escalate to the IEC.

Email: [iec@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:iec@homeoffice.gov.uk) or write to:

PO Box 6147  
Sheffield  
S2 9JD

If the customer decides to escalate their complaint to the IEC, they will need to provide them with a copy of the final review response from Stage 2.

## Stage 4 complaint

If the customer is dissatisfied with the answer they receive from the IEC, they may ask their MP (Member of Parliament) to raise the issue with the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. They can only do this through their MP.

If the customer lives outside the UK, they can:

- contact the MP responsible for the place where they previously lived in the UK; or,
- write to
  - HM Passport Office Director General using the [online enquiry form](#) or by writing to the Director General using the same Southport address shown in Stage 1; or,
  - write to a Home Office, Minister through the Direct Communication unit at [public.enquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:public.enquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk)

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# How we deal with a Stage 1 or 2 complaint

This section tells HM Passport office staff, how Customer Voice investigate and resolve a Stage 1 or 2 complaint.

When a customer makes a complaint, the Customer Service Management team (CSMT) will review and attempt an early resolution. This may include:

- processing compensation claims
- issuing a gratis passport application

If the CSMT officer cannot resolve the complaint to the customer's satisfaction, they will send the customer's details to the Complaints Referral mailbox. The case will be passed to Customer Voice and logged as a stage 1 complaint.

Customer Voice have 15 working days, from the date HM Passport Office have received the complaint, to provide the customer with a full reply or to let them know what is happening if they have not finished their investigation.

## How Customer Voice deal with complaints

When Customer Voice receive the complaint, they will create a case using the Digital External Correspondence System. They will read over the notes of the case and establish:

- if consent is required
- the reason for the complaint
- which business area they need information from. It could be:
  - contact centres
  - Document Handling Unit (DHU)
  - Senior Caseworking team
  - Guidance team
  - counter managers
  - LSR team
  - Secure delivery team
  - International delivery team
- the facts in the case

When Customer Voice establish the facts of the case, they will respond to the customer. If they uphold the customer's complaint, they will also tell the customer how HM Passport Office are going to put things right.

## Stage 2 complaints

If the customer is unhappy with HM Passport Office's response, they can request a review. The customer must:

- request the review within one month after receiving the response
- provide specific reasons why they have requested the review

Customer Voice will follow the same procedures to review the stage 2 complaint.

## The customer is unhappy with the response

The customer can escalate their complaint to the [Independent Examiner of Complaints \(IEC\)](#) if they are not satisfied with the results of the investigation into their complaint. The customer can only escalate the complaint if:

- their complaint has been investigated through Stages 1 and 2 and have received the final response from HM Passport Office
- they contact the IEC within 3 months of receiving the final response

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# Stage 3 complaint: Independent Examiner of Complaints

This section tells HM Passport Office staff how the customer can escalate their complaint to the Independent Examiner of Complaints (IEC) and how the IEC would settle their complaint.

The Independent Examiner of Complaints (IEC) is an independent complaint investigation service for customers who are unhappy with the Home Office's final response to their complaint.

## The role of the IEC

The IEC is responsible for:

- investigating complaints which have not been resolved or settled to the customer's satisfaction
- providing recommendations to the Home Office to resolve the complaint
- identifying wider issues or learning, which could affect the service provided by the Home Office

The IEC is supported by the Office of the Examiner of Complaints (OIEC) who help the IEC to:

- reviewing complaints,
- attempt to resolve them to the complainant's satisfaction; and,
- examine the case records to establish whether the Home Office worked in line with its own procedures and guidance

## Resolving the complaint

The OIEC contacts the customer by phone to find out:

- the facts about the complaint
- if it can be resolved before investigation

If the OIEC can resolve the complaint, they will close the case and send the customer a resolution closure letter.

If the OIEC cannot resolve the claim, they will ask the Home Office and the customer for more information.

## Settling the case

The OIEC may try and settle the customer's case if it is clear what went wrong and what needs to be done to put matters right. This may include the Home Office apologising for the mistake or providing compensation.

If the OIEC can resolve the complaint, they will close the case and send the customer a settlement closure letter.

If the OIEC cannot resolve the claim, they will establish the facts on the case and produce a report for the IEC to review.

## IEC investigation report and systematic letter

When the OIEC has finished their investigation, they will provide a report and pass this to the IEC. The IEC will review the report and decide whether to uphold the complaint and if any recommendations for redress are needed.

The IEC will send the report to the customer and HM Passport Office. This report will include:

- their decision
- the reasons for their decision
- actions which they believe HM Passport Office need to take (if they uphold all or part of the complaint)
- the customer's next steps

The IEC may also send a letter to senior Home Office managers with recommendations to improve their service whether they uphold the customer's complaint or not.

## The IEC Liaison team

The IEC Liaison team is part of the Home Office and are responsible for providing information that the OIEC needs to complete their report. This could include but is not limited to:

- archived guidance
- call logs
- emails sent to the customer
- case notes

The team will arrange for all responses to system cases to be passed to the Director General for sign off.

## Customer's next steps

If the customer is unhappy with the IEC report, they can escalate the complaint to the [Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman](#).

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# Stage 4 complaint: Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

This section of the guidance tells HM Passport Office staff what happens if the customer raises a complaint to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

The customer can raise a complaint to Stage 4 if they are not satisfied after the Independent Examiner of Complaints (IEC) report. They must do this by asking their Member of Parliament (MP) to request an investigation by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.

The customer must contact their MP within a year of the initial complaint.

## The role of the Ombudsman

The Ombudsman will review the case, tell the customer a correct solution and let HM Passport Office know the outcome. If they think HM Passport Office made a mistake, they will ask us to:

- take action to put things right for the customer, this could include:
  - an apology
  - financial redress
- look at our decision again, but only if we:
  - made mistakes
  - acted unfairly
  - did not follow our process
- review our policies, procedures, or guidance to avoid further complaints

## Customer complaints: legal action

The Ombudsman cannot investigate the case if there is a legal route to take (this includes court action or a tribunal) but will advise the customer if there is a legal route to answer their complaint.

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# Customer complaints received through an MP

This section tells HM Passport Office staff how the Home Office receives customer complaints from Members of Parliament (MPs)

Members of Parliament (MP) receiving complaints from a customer about a Home Office department or application will contact the Home Office MP team by email, phone, or letter. MPs can contact HM Passport Office at any point in the complaints process.

If the complaint is about a HM Passport Office application, policy or guidance, and the Home Office MP team cannot reply to the complaint, they will email the correct HM Passport Office team (for example, Senior Casworking team or the Guidance team) to ask for more information.

The Home Office MP team have a 20-day service level agreement (SLA) to reply to the MP.

If you receive a complaint from an MP, you must follow Complaints MP enquiries.

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