



Home Office

Names: names that cannot be used in passports

Version 18.0

His Majesty's Passport Office guidance on names that we cannot use in passports

Contents

Contents.....	2
About: Names: names that cannot be used in passports	3
Contacts	3
Publication	3
Changes from last version of this guidance	3
Names that cannot be used	4
Names that cause public offence.....	4
If a name causes public offence.....	5
Names that we cannot accept due to technical reasons.....	5
Names that contain numbers	6
Names that have diacritical characters or accent marks	6
Customer already using an alternative spelling	6
Customer has not used an alternative spelling	6
Name found on the transliteration table	7
Name not found on the transliteration table	7
Long names.....	8
When using a shortened version of the name.....	8
When the customer has too many names.....	9
Accepting or refusing an application	12
HEO decides a name does not cause public offence	12
HEO decides a birth name may cause public offence	12
HEO decides a change of name may cause public offence.....	12
Accepting or refusing an application: examiner action.....	13
Refusing names: No evidence of an alternative spelling	13
Refusing names that have too many characters.....	14
Application does not meet our identity standards	15
If the customer still wants a passport.....	15

About: Names: names that cannot be used in passports

This guidance tells His Majesty's Passport Office operational staff about names that we cannot use in passports and how to deal with applications that have them, including names that:

- cause public offence
- our system cannot accept for technical reasons

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 **18.0**
- published for Home Office staff on **1 June 2026**

Changes from last version of this guidance

This guidance has been updated in the:

- When the customer has too many names section to explain that examiners need to get permission from a customer when shortening a name
- section HEO decides birth name may cause public offence to tell higher executive officers (HEOs), they must consult with the Senior Caseworking team (SCT), when deciding if a customer's birth name may cause public offence
- section Names that cannot be used, to tell examiners to send a guidance query when:
 - the name is too long or has too many names; and,
 - we cannot get consent from everyone with parental responsibility

Related content

[Contents](#)

Names that cannot be used

This section tells His Majesty's Passport Office operational staff about names a customer cannot use in a passport, how to decide if a customer's name can be used in a British passport and how to deal with an application when we cannot accept a customer's name. This section includes names that cause offence, names we cannot accept due to technical reasons, long and multiple names.

His Majesty's Passport Office issues passports on behalf of the Crown so the name a customer uses in a passport must be of an acceptable standard. In most cases, it will be but there may be occasions when a name is unacceptable and cannot be used.

This includes names that:

- may cause [public offence](#)
- contain numbers or symbols that we cannot accept for [technical reasons](#)

Names that cause public offence

Names that can cause public offence are names that may:

- cause public outrage to a community
- promote unlawful activity

Customers know if their name is acceptable to the public. While the name they use is their choice, they cannot use a British passport to include a name that may cause outrage, offence or promote unlawful activity.

Examples of names that cause outrage or offence may contain:

- swear words
- sexually explicit references
- inappropriate religious meanings that may cause offence to a section of the public
- vulgar or offensive language
- references that may be slanderous to others
- references to a person (living or dead) that may cause public offence

Examples of names that may that promote unlawful activity, include:

- names associated with criminal gangs or extremist organisations
- words that promote racial or religious hatred
- words that promote, encourage or incite crime or anti-social behaviour
- words that reference any past, present or future activity (or event) that may cause public offence
- the ability to hide a crime (for example, being on the sex offenders register)

When considering if a customer's name will cause offence or promote unlawful activity, you, the examiner, must consider the:

- words used
- phonetic sound of the name

If a name causes public offence

The decision to accept or refuse an application because a name may cause public offence relies on your discretion. This is because we cannot definitively set out what may cause offence (and to whom) or promote unlawful activity.

When considering if a name is likely to offend sections of the community or if it promotes unlawful activity, you must:

- use this guidance to help you decide if a name may cause public offence
- remain objective, as you may personally think the name:
 - is offensive when others may not
 - is not offensive, even though it meets the criteria in this guidance
- consider the application as a whole
- discuss the case with your operational team leader (OTL)

A higher executive officer (HEO) will decide if you must accept or refuse the application. If you decide a name may cause public offence and your line manager agrees, you must:

1. Refer the application to a HEO.
2. Recommend they refuse the application, stating your reasons why.
3. Add a case note to show all actions and decisions you have taken, along with the reasons (see Names: name related case notes for what must be included in the case note).

You, the HEO, must follow [Accepting or refusing an application guidance](#).

Names that we cannot accept due to technical reasons

The systems we use to issue passports, meet the passport standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and does not allow us to issue a British passport in a name that contains:

- numbers
- symbols
- punctuation marks (except for hyphens or apostrophes in the name fields)
- diacritical characters (a mark, point or sign added to a letter) or accents marks (there are alternate spellings of names to take these into account, known as transliterations)
- too many characters in the forename or surname

Names that contain numbers

If the number is clearly part of the customer's name (for example, it is on the birth certificate or acceptable change of name documents) you must spell it out in full on the passport. For example:

Customer's name	Name to show on the passport
Thomas 7 Jones	Thomas Seven Jones
Mary Sm1th	Mary Smoneth
7 James Smith	Seven James Smith

Names that have diacritical characters or accent marks

Digital Application Processing (DAP) will accept an apostrophe anywhere in a name but does not accept names that include diacritical characters (a mark, point or sign added to a letter) or accent marks. In most languages, there are alternative spellings of names that take this into account. They have been agreed by the [ICAO](#) and are published in a [transliteration table](#).

Some customers may already use an alternative spelling of a diacritical character or accent mark when they send in their passport application. If they do not, we will need to take steps to update the customer's name with an alternative spelling before we can issue them a passport.

You must be aware that some older passports may have diacritical characters or accent marks, as UK passports issued overseas before 1 April 2014 included them.

When we transferred their passport record, we changed them to show alternative spelling and so the diacritical character will not show on the record.

Customer already using an alternative spelling

If a customer sends their passport application and it is clear from the supporting documents that they already use an alternative spelling shown on the [transliteration table](#), you must:

1. Accept the spelling without asking for any more supporting evidence. Add a case note to explain the difference in the spelling of the name (see Names: name related case notes for what must be included in the case note).
3. Deal with the application, in line with current guidance.

Customer has not used an alternative spelling

If a customer sends their passport with a name that includes a diacritical character (a mark, point or sign added to a letter) or accent mark, you must check if an alternative spelling is shown [transliteration table](#).

Name found on the transliteration table

If you find the name on the transliteration table, you must:

1. Update the name on the system with the alternative spelling. As the information is on GOV.UK, you do not need to tell the customer you have used an alternative spelling as shown on the transliteration table.
2. Add a case note to explain the difference with the spelling of the name (see Names: name related case notes for what must be included in the case note).
3. Deal with the application, in line with guidance.

Name not found on the transliteration table

If you do not find the name on the transliteration table, you must ask the customer to provide written evidence. For example:

- an official document
- a letter from a government authority in the country where the name is from
- a letter from the relevant embassy or High Commission in the UK

If the customer cannot provide evidence of an alternative spelling, they must tell us in writing why and include proof, for example:

- a letter from the embassy, High Commission in the UK or government authority that explains the circumstances
- copies of emails or proof of postage that shows the customer tried to contact the embassy, High Commission in the UK or government authority but did not get a reply

If a customer gives you evidence that they are unable to get an alternative spelling or gives you different information to that on our records, you must:

1. Tell the customer:
 - you need to conduct additional enquiries
 - it may take longer to process their passport application
 - we will not pay compensation for missed travel dates or service levels
2. Raise a guidance query with QuEST.
3. Electronically store the application, while you wait for a response.

If the customer fails to provide any evidence of alternative spelling or evidence why they cannot, you must refer to the [accepting or refusing the application](#) section of this guidance.

If you, the examiner, are told to issue the passport in the requested name, without the accent mark, you must:

1. Contact the customer by phone to tell them you will:
 - issue the passport in the requested name, without the accent mark
 - send them a letter to confirm this

2. Send the customer Comms builder letter 328 to confirm the passport has been issued without the accent character.
3. Deal with the application, in line with current guidance.

If the customer is unhappy with the change of name, you must refer to the [accepting or refusing the application](#) section of this guidance.

If you have not been able to speak to the customer, you must:

1. Send Comms builder letter 328 to tell them we can add their name to the passport without the accent character.
2. Put the application on hold and when the customer responds and follow [accepting or refusing an application: examiner action](#).

Long names

The personal details section of the application allows the customer to use up to 30 characters for their forenames and 30 characters for their surname, including spaces between them. If the system is unable to accommodate the customer's name you must consider how to show the name in the passport, by considering the number of characters in the name and how many names the customer has.

If the customer has too many:

- characters in their name, we can use:
 - an [abbreviated or shortened version](#) of it; or
 - the initial letter of any additional names, on condition it is not the customer's first forename or first surname
- forenames or surnames, we can use the initial letter of any additional forenames or surnames (but not the first forename or first surname)

When using a shortened version of the name

When the customer submits their application, they may:

- enter a shortened (abbreviated) version of the name they want to be known by on the application
- include their full name in the 'other information' section of the application or in an accompanying letter
- provide supporting documents may show the customer has already shortened their name.

You must:

1. Conduct a watchlist check on the customer's full name.
2. Contact the customer and tell them:
 - their name is too long to fit on the passport
 - you will add as many characters as possible and include an observation that shows their full name

3. Update the system with the shortened name making sure you do not change the order of the name.
4. Add an observation to show 'The holder is [full name]' as evidenced by their supporting documents. If the name is so long you cannot fit it as an observation, you must add an additional observation field using the system code 'OBTZ'. This adds an additional line of blank text you can use to include the full name.
5. Add a case note to show all the actions and decisions you have taken, along with your reasons (see Names: name related case notes for what must be included in the case note).
6. Deal with the application, in line with current guidance.

For counter applications, you must:

1. Tell the customer:
 - their name is too long to fit on their passport
 - you will add as many characters as possible and include an observation that shows their full name
2. Scan the document and upload it onto DAP.
3. Update the system with the shortened name making sure you do not change the order of the name.
4. Add an observation to show 'The holder is [full name]' as evidenced by their supporting documents. If the name is so long you cannot fit it as an observation, you must add an additional observation field using the system code 'OBTZ'. This adds an additional line of blank text you can use to include the full name.
5. Add a case note to show all the actions and decisions you have taken, along with your reasons (see Names: name related case notes for what must be included in the case note).
6. Deal with the application, in line with current guidance.

When the customer has too many names

If a customer has too many names and we cannot fit them into the character limit in the forename and surname fields of a passport, we will:

- use the customer's first forename and:
 - fill the remaining characters with as many other forenames and initials as needed
- use the customer's first surname and:
 - fill the remaining character limit with as many other surnames and initials as needed
- add an observation to show the customer's full name

It may be clear from the application and supporting documents the customer has already reduced their name to fit the character fields.

If they have you must:

1. Conduct a watchlist check on the full name.

2. Accept the name shown on the application.
3. Add an observation to show 'The holder is [full name]' as evidenced by their supporting documents. If the name is so long you cannot fit it as an observation, you must add an additional observation field, using the system code 'OBTZ'. This adds an additional line of blank text you can use to include the full name.
4. Add a case note to show all the actions and decisions you have taken, along with your reasons (see Names: name related case notes for what must be included in the case note).
5. Deal with the application, in line with current guidance.

If the customer has not already reduced the character limit of their name or their supporting documents indicate they have too many characters for our system, you must:

1. Conduct a watchlist check on the full name.
2. Contact the customer (if an adult) or the parent who has applied (if the application is for a child) to tell them:
 - they have too many names to fit in the passport
 - how you will abbreviate the name using initials
 - you will add an observation to show their full name
3. Add an observation to show 'The holder is [full name]' as evidenced by their supporting documents. If the name is so long you cannot fit it as an observation, you must add an additional observation field using the system code 'OBTZ'. This adds an additional line of blank text you can use to include the full name.
4. Add a case note to show all the actions and decisions you have taken, along with your reasons (see Names: name related case notes for what must be included in the case note).

For counter applications, you must:

1. Tell the customer:
 - they have too many names to fit in the passport
 - how you will abbreviate the name using initials
 - you will add an observation to show their full name
2. Update the system with the shortened name making sure you do not change the order of the name.
3. Add observation code 'OBTG' to show 'The holder is [full name]' as evidenced by their supporting documents. If the name is so long you cannot fit it as an observation, you must add an additional observation field using the system code 'OBTZ'. This adds an additional line of blank text you can use to include the full name.
4. Add a case note to show all the actions and decisions you have taken, along with your reasons (see Names: name related case notes for what must be included in the case note).
5. Deal with the application, in line with current guidance.

If the customer is unhappy with the shortened name, you must refer to the [accepting or refusing the application](#) section of this guidance.

Related content

[Contents](#)

Accepting or refusing an application

This section tells His Majesty's Passport Office operational staff who decides to accept or refuse passport applications because the customer's name is unacceptable.

Higher executive officers (HEOs) will decide whether to refuse or accept an application, if the name causes public offence (if the customer's name is a birth name, they must consult with the Passport Policy team)

Examiners will decide to refuse or accept an application if a name:

- includes a diacritical character or accent mark not shown on the [transliteration table](#) and the [customer cannot provide evidence of an alternative spelling](#)
- [is too long and the customer is unhappy with a shortened name](#)
- [does not meet our security standards](#)

HEO decides a name does not cause public offence

If you, the HEO, decide a name does not cause public offence, you must follow HEO (third) authorisations guidance to tell the examiner to deal with the application in line with current guidance.

HEO decides a birth name may cause public offence

Where a birth name may cause public offence and you, the HEO, agree with the examiner's recommendation, you must:

1. Raise a guidance query which will be escalated by the Quality and Examination Support team (QuEST), to the Senior Caseworking team (SCT). You must explain why you feel:
 - the name is offensive
 - we must refuse the application
2. Add a case note that shows all the actions and decisions you have taken and your reasons.
3. Put the application on hold while you wait for a reply.
4. Follow HEO (third) authorisations guidance (when you get a response) to tell the examiner to:
 - refuse the application, if the SCT confirms you cannot accept the name
 - accept the name, if the SCT confirms the name is acceptable

HEO decides a change of name may cause public offence

If you, the HEO, decide a change of name may cause public offence, You must follow HEO (third) authorisations guidance to tell the examiner to refuse the application.

Accepting or refusing an application: examiner action

You, the examiner, must check the application case notes for the HEO's decision when there has been a concern about a potentially offensive name.

If the HEO tells you to accept a name, you must deal with the application, in line with current guidance and issue the customer a passport.

If the HEO tells you to refuse the application, you must tell the customer:

- you cannot issue a passport using the name they applied in, as it may cause public offence; and,
- you will have to withdraw the application, unless they change their name (to one which will not cause offence) and send you evidence:
 - of the change of name
 - they use the new name for all purposes

If a customer tells you they will change their name, you must:

- electronically store the application while you wait for the customer to send you the evidence
- deal with the application, in line with Names: change of name passport applications guidance (when you get the evidence)
- withdraw the application, in line with the withdrawal of passport applications guidance (if you do not get the evidence)

If the customer does not want to change their name, you must:

1. Refer the application to your operational team leader (OTL) and recommend they withdraw the application.
2. Add a case note to show why the application was withdrawn.

You, the OTL, must:

1. Add a case note to show why you withdrew the application.
2. Send the customer letter 321 from the Comms builder to tell them why you are withdrawing their application.
3. Withdraw the application.

Refusing names: No evidence of an alternative spelling

If the customer's name includes a diacritical character or accent mark not shown on the [transliteration table](#) and they cannot provide evidence of an alternative spelling or evidence why they cannot, you, the examiner, must tell the customer:

- you need to withdraw their application, as you cannot issue a passport using the name they applied in, as it has a diacritical character or accent mark that cannot be used in the passport, and they have not provided:
 - official evidence of an alternative spelling

- evidence that shows they tried to get an alternative spelling and were not able to
- you will withdraw the application, unless they either:
 - provide official evidence that shows an alternative spelling
 - provide evidence that shows they have tried to get an alternative spelling
 - change their name and provide us with evidence of the change of name and evidence they use the new name for all purposes

If the customer gives you official evidence of an alternative spelling or evidence that shows they tried to get an alternative spelling, you must refer to: [customer has not used an alternative spelling and it cannot be found on the transliteration table](#).

If the customer tells you that they will change their name, you must:

- electronically store the application (while you wait for the customer to send you the evidence)
- deal with the application, in line with Names: change of name passport applications guidance (when you get the evidence)
- withdraw the application, in line with the withdrawal of passport applications guidance (if you do not get the evidence)

If the customer does not provide official evidence of an alternative spelling, evidence that they tried to get an alternative spelling or they do not want to change their name, we will withdraw their application, rather than refuse it. You must:

1. Add a case note to show why you are withdrawing the application.
2. Send a letter to the customer to explain you withdrew their application because:

‘The passport application submitted by you on [date] does not meet the criteria published by HM Passport Office on the use of names. Your application contains a [number] [symbol] which does not accord with the standards required to use as name in the British passport. Guidance is set out at: GOV.UK.’

3. Withdraw the application, in line with the withdrawal of passport applications guidance.

Refusing names that have too many characters

If a customer’s name is too long to fit on the passport and they refuse accept the shortened version of their name, you, the examiner, must tell the customer:

1. You need to withdraw their application, as you cannot issue them a passport using the name they applied in, as it is too long and they refused to accept the shortened version of their name.
2. You will withdraw the application, unless they either:
 - accept how the name will be shown on the passport
 - have another name they want to use (if they do, they need to give you evidence of a change of name and that they use the new name for all official purposes)

If the customer accepts the shortened version of their name, you must refer to [names that have too many characters](#).

If the customer tells you that they will change their name, you must:

- electronically store the application (while you wait for the customer to send you the evidence)
- deal with the application, in line with Names: change of name passport applications guidance (when you get the evidence)
- withdraw the application in line with the withdrawal of passport applications guidance (if you do not get the evidence)

If the customer still refuses to accept the shorter version of their name and they do not want to change their name, we will withdraw the application, rather than refuse it.

You must:

1. Add a case note to explain why you are withdrawing the application.
2. Send a letter to the customer to explain you are withdrawing the application because:

‘The passport application submitted by you on [date] does not meet the criteria published by HM Passport Office on the use of names. The name provided in your application contains too many characters for inclusion in the passport and you have refused to accept a shortened version. Guidance is set out at GOV.UK’

3. Withdraw the application, in line with the withdrawal of passport applications guidance.

Application does not meet our identity standards

We must maintain the security of the passport and will refuse a passport application, if we cannot be certain (from a customer’s name) that they hold the claimed identity (see Royal Prerogative).

If you have doubts that the customer’s name does not belong to the claimed identity, you must complete additional checks.

If we suspect fraud, we may consider contacting the police or other law enforcement agencies, in line with current guidance.

If the customer still wants a passport

If we refuse or withdraw a customer’s application because we cannot accept their name, but they still want a British passport, they must:

- apply in a name we can accept
- provide evidence of a change of name, including evidence they use the name for all purposes

Related content

[Contents](#)