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Introduction

Before the issue of a passport can be authorised, the Identity and Passport Service (IPS) has to be satisfied the identity of the applicant and the information given on the application form is correct. A convenient way of confirming an applicant's identity is for a first time application and one photograph to be verified by a reliable person (but not a relative) of "some standing" who has personally known the applicant for more than two years. This is a useful anti-fraud measure which aims to ensure that countersignatories are persons who:

- not only enjoy a good reputation in the community;
- have credentials that can be checked; i.e. current British passport
- would lose something by wrongly countersigning applications.

The criteria for a countersignature

A person deemed qualified to countersign a passport application may be either:

- a Member of Parliament, Justice of the Peace, Minister of Religion, a professionally qualified person (e.g. doctor, engineer, lawyer, teacher), local councillor, bank officer, established civil servant, Police Officer; or,
- a person of similar standing (see sections 3.1 and 3.2 below); and,
- who has personally known the applicant for at least two years; and,
- not a relative of the applicant (this includes partners, in-laws, and step-parents). Definition of "partner", if evident from the application form, is a partnership or relationship that is akin to marriage.
- The countersignatory **must** hold a current British, or Irish, passport.
- Members of staff should not sign applications

Interpretation of a "person of similar standing"

A countersignature must be a person who enjoys a good reputation in the community, possesses a current British passport and has credentials that can be checked, and who would have something to lose by wrongly countersigning an application. For logistical reasons it is not possible to provide a comprehensive list of all professions and organisations where persons holding a responsible position are acceptable to verify passport applications.

While there is no qualification for a "person of similar standing" this may be interpreted in the widest sense, but it must always be borne in mind that a countersignature should normally be someone who:

- has qualifications that can be checked; and,
- it is believed will not risk a career or reputation by knowingly making an untrue statement in completing the countersigning section of an application form.

NOTE: An unemployed person who has appropriate credentials is not precluded from countersigning an application.

Countersigning photographs

One photograph submitted with an application must be certified by the countersignatory as follows:

- "I certify that this is a true likeness of Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms or title....."

and signed and dated.

NOTE: There is no objection to a certification being altered providing the alteration is initialled by the countersignatory.

For legal reasons a "true likeness" certification on a separate piece of paper affixed to the back of a photograph is not acceptable.

Standard identity checks

Definition of "current"

The underlying principle is that we should be able to confirm the passport details on the system.

Expired passports

All expired old blues should be rejected as not being "current".

Definition of British passport

A British passport is one that shows the passport holders status as British Citizen (BC), British Overseas Citizen (BOC), British National Overseas (BN(O)), British Dependant Territories Citizen (BDTC), British Subject (BS), British Protected Person (BPP), or British Overseas Territories Citizen (BOTC). The passport can either be one that is issued in the UK or by a passport issuing post overseas.

Irish passport

Given the special circumstances of our relationship with Southern Ireland those persons who hold an Irish passport may also be accepted as a countersignatory where the application is supported by a new birth certificate as defined by the standard identity check policy. The passport number should be verified with the Irish Authorities.

Foreign Passport

Holders of foreign, Commonwealth, or EU passports are not eligible to countersign British passport applications.

Section 10 of the application form

This policy is to aid examiners in what is acceptable and what is not acceptable or where Examiners can use discretion at section 10 of the application form.

Section 10 is a fundamental part of the application form, whereby the countersignatory is confirming the identity of the applicant. Also, by signing the photo they are confirming that they have known the applicant in the claimed identity. The certification on the photograph should show the link between the photo and the applicant. At present there is no guidance for examiners to follow if section 10 is not fully completed.

This policy is to help examiners determine what is acceptable and what is not acceptable at section 10 of the application form. This policy will give clear guidance and explanation relating to what information is mandatory at section 10 and what if any information can be left to the examiner's discretion to resolve.

The guidelines should be easy to understand; they should also reduce the risk of fraud and maintain the integrity of the UK passport. The purpose of this policy is to maintain consistency of examination practice throughout the regions.

A countersignatory must be a professional person or a person of similar standing, who enjoys a good reputation in the community, possesses credentials that can be checked, who would have something to lose by wrongly countersigning an application. The countersignatory must have also known the applicant for at least two years and hold a current British or Irish Passport. In addition IPS must be able to contact the countersignatory if necessary.

Mandatory fields

The following are mandatory fields:

- Countersignatory Name
- Signature
- Number of years C/sig has known the applicant
- Profession **or** Professional Qualification
- Full postal address which can be business **or** home
- Passport Number
- Capacity Known

Where information is missing in any of these fields the examiner must raise a query to resolve the issue.

Certified photographs

Current IPS policy indicates that the photographs should be taken within six months. Please see Photographic Standards. Provided the signature and the name matches on certification, i.e. "I certify that this is a true likeness of [applicant's full name]," then the photo does not need to have the same date as at section 10.

Where a photograph has been submitted with an application and it has partial certification (e.g. "I certify this is [applicant's full name]" or "This is [applicant's full name]"), as long as the photo shows the applicant's name, has been signed and dated, examiners can use discretion and proceed with the application.

Section 10 not fully completed

Where an application has been received and there is information missing from the mandatory fields at section 10, the examiner should look at the application as a whole, and retrieve the missing information by contacting the countersignatory either by letter or

telephone and case note all actions. The Examiner must check the countersignatory using reference sources before contacting the countersignatory. If this fails then the examiner should reject the application and request a new countersigned form.

Irish passport

Where an application has been submitted and the countersignatory states an Irish passport number, a warning will show that the passport has not been found the system.

Capacity known

Where an application has been received and the capacity known section of the application form has been left blank, unless there is reason to believe that the applicant and the countersignatory are in a relationship, related or living together, and there are no other fraud indicators, the examiner can use discretion and proceed with the application.

Where there is evidence then the examiner should confirm the relationship by telephone or otherwise and request a new countersignatory if need.

In cases where it is a child application and the countersignatory has inserted the child's name instead of the person named at section 9 then the examiner can accept.

Number of years the countersignatory has known the applicant

Where an application has been received and it is evident that the number of years known field has been amended, the examiner should reject the form and request a new form.

Countersignatory omitted qualification

Where an application has been received and is otherwise straightforward, the countersignatory of a professional person (for example nurse, teacher, Government servant, JP) may be accepted without asking for specific qualifications or for the name and address of the employer. This does not stop an examiner from writing out to the countersignatory if they have doubts.

Where the countersignatory is a nurse, teacher or of a similar profession and have provided a home address, then this can be accepted.

Where an application has been received and it has been countersigned by a person with a degree, if that person is not in professional employment then the form must be rejected and a new one requested.

What if there is no countersignatory

If the application is for a renewal and the applicant can be identified from their previous passport then no countersignatory is required.

If the application is for urgent travel and the identity can be established through previous files the application maybe accepted in line with the Restricted Validity Passport policy. Please see Restricted Validity Passports.

Retired countersignatory

Under the Countersignatory policy a retired person can countersign a passport application form, if they were qualified whilst working. Where it is clear from the application form that the retired countersignatory was suitable this can be accepted. If the retired countersignatory has not provided enough information on the application form, then the form must be rejected on the principle that they don't appear to be qualified. If the applicant subsequently confirms that the countersignatory was qualified we may accept a written confirmation from the countersignatory, all information should be case noted and documentation scanned.

Application countersigned by a member of IPS staff

Since February 2009 IPS staff have not been permitted to countersign applications for passports. This policy is also mentioned in the Notes for Guidance included with the application form, information on Directgov and previous news articles. Staff who countersign applications may be subject to disciplinary action.

If an application shows the countersignatory's employer as IPS or if an examiner knows that the person countersigning the form is an IPS employee, the application should be referred to the examiner's immediate line manager to allow action under IPS disciplinary procedures to be considered.

This policy, the Notes for Guidance included with the application form, information on Directgov and previous news articles on Exchange explain that **IPS staff are not permitted to countersign applications.**

Countersignatures will still be accepted from any person working for a partner organisation who meets the usual criteria for countersignatories.

No passport number

Where an application has been received and the countersignatory has not provided a valid passport number, the examiner should contact the countersignatory by telephone to obtain the passport number. The passport number given by countersignatory can be accepted and entered onto the system; if this number is incorrect a warning will be generated. If the application has been submitted over the counter, the counter examiner can accept the number verbally from the applicant. Examiners should instruct back office staff to insert countersignatory passport number onto the system.

Advice where the countersignatory refuses to state their passport number

In cases such as this the countersignatory should be advised that we recommend they take the completed application form, supporting documents, fee and photograph from the applicant. They complete their part of the application form, certify the photograph, place all the documents, fee, form, and photographs in the envelope, and seal the envelope. They can then either return the sealed envelope to the applicant for posting, or they can accept the responsibility for posting the package themselves. Either way the countersignatory can be assured that there is little advantage in any person knowing their passport number. IPS

would not action a passport service on production of a passport number alone, and private industry would not normally accept a passport number alone as evidence of ID.

Applicants unable to write

(see also Illiterate applicants and others with learning and writing difficulties)

Where an applicant is unable to write, the thumbprint in the signature box of the application form may be accepted, providing a letter confirming the reason(s) the applicant is unable to sign/write is submitted from a responsible person i.e. relative, doctor, countersignatory, etc.