



HM Passport Office

Freedom of Information Team
Globe House
7th Floor
89 Eccleston Square
London
SW1V 1PN

Email: foi@hmpo.gsi.gov.uk
Website: www.gov.uk/hm-passport-office

Tewfiq al-Sharaiyra
request-494810-cfe9fd57@whatdotheyknow.com

Reference: FOICR 49236/18

25 July 2018

Dear Mr al-Sharaiyra

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST

Thank you for your email of 29 June, in which you ask for the caseworker guidance on first time adult UK passport applications.

The first question of your request has been handled as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). Your second question has been answered outside of the FOIA because it is not a request for recorded information.

I would like to request all caseworker guidance in respect of (i) first British passport applications for adults and (ii) first British passport applications for adults who have naturalised as British citizens.

Her Majesty's Passport Office holds the information that you have requested; however, after careful consideration we have decided that the information is exempt from disclosure under sections 31(1) (a) and (e) of the FOIA. These exemptions provide that information can be withheld where disclosure would or would be likely to prejudice the prevention or detection of crime; and the operation of immigration controls and the public interest falls in favour of maintaining the exemption.

Public interest test in relation to sections 31(1) (a) and 31(1) (e)

Some of the exemptions in the FOIA, referred to as 'qualified exemptions', are subject to a public interest test (PIT). This test is used to balance the public interest in disclosure against the public interest in maintaining the exemption. We must carry out a PIT where we are considering using any of the qualified exemptions in response to a request for information.

The 'public interest' is not the same as what interests the public. In carrying out a PIT we consider the greater good or benefit to the community as a whole if the information is released or not. Transparency and the 'right to know' must be balanced against the need to enable effective government and to serve the best interests of the public.

The FOIA is 'applicant blind'. This means that we cannot, and do not, ask about the motives of anyone who asks for information. In providing a response to one person, we are expressing a willingness to provide the same response to anyone, including those who might represent a threat to the UK.

Considerations in favour of disclosing the information

We recognise there is a general public interest in disclosure of information in the interests of openness, and fairness and which would facilitate the accountability and transparency of public authorities for decisions taken by them. It would also allow individuals to understand decisions made by public authorities for the services provided both nationally and internationally.

Considerations in favour maintaining the exemption

We also recognise; however, that disclosure of the guidance used by examiners making decisions on UK passport applications would provide potential fraudsters with avenues and hints on how to gauge the potential strengths and weaknesses of the process. The guidance to examiners is to assist in preventing crimes like identity fraud and also to ensure that only those entitled to a UK passport are issued with one. The UK passport is a universally trusted document and allows UK nationals to prove who they are in a range of situations, and also gives the freedom to move around the world. It would not be in the public interest to release information which undermines the security of the document, or the freedoms it permits.

Conclusion

We conclude that the balance of the public interest lies in maintaining the exemption.

If you are dissatisfied with this response you may request an independent internal review of our handling of your request by submitting a complaint within two months to foirequests@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk, quoting reference FOICR 49236/18. If you ask for an internal review, it would be helpful if you could say why you are dissatisfied with the response.

As part of any internal review the Department's handling of your information request would be reassessed by staff who were not involved in providing you with this response. If you were to remain dissatisfied after an internal review, you would have a right of complaint to the Information Commissioner as established by section 50 of the FOIA.

Yours sincerely

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Freedom of Information Team

Furthermore, what is the rationale for requesting all other uncanceled foreign passports that the applicant may hold and what does HM PO and/or the Home Office do with or in respect of those foreign passports?

In addition to any explanation, please provide any and all internal documents that may be in any way relevant to this query.

We are replying to your question outside of the FOIA and can advise that requesting sight of any passport held establishes that an applicant who was born abroad is currently in the UK, or in the country they say they are applying from. It can help to establish the travel history and immigration status of an applicant which may have a bearing on eligibility and also provides additional evidence that can assist in determining identity, and eligibility in descent claims. This supports our one-name policy; where dual nationals hold a passport issued by another country in a name different to that set out in the application for a British passport, HM Passport Office is unable to issue a passport until the names across passports are aligned.

Our one-named policy can be found at GOV.UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/change-of-name-guidance>