



# HM Passport Office

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Richard Gadsden  
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Reference: FOICR 49256/18

31 July 2018

Dear Mr Gadsden

## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST

Thank you for your email of 2 July in which you ask for information on workforce planning to meet possible increased passport demand after March 2019.

Your request has been handled as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

**Her Majesty's Government has announced their intention to switch to issuing passports with a blue cover after the United Kingdom leaves the European Union on 29 March 2019.**

**My Freedom of Information Act Request is this:**

**For each of the following items, does the Passport Office have plans, and if so, can you release those plans, redacted if necessary?**

- a) For dealing with unusually high demand for early renewals shortly before 29 March 2019, that demand being expected from strong supporters of the European Union wanting an EU passport to be valid for as long as possible**
- b) For dealing with unusually high demand for early renewals shortly after 29 March 2019, that demand being expected from strong opponents of the European Union wanting a blue passport as soon as possible**

Her Majesty's Passport Office holds the information that you requested, however after careful consideration we have decided that the information is exempt from disclosure under section 35 (1)(a) of the FOIA. This provides that information can be withheld if it relates to the formulation and development of government policy and the public interest falls in favour of maintaining the exemption.

Arguments for and against disclosure in terms of the public interest, with the reasons for our conclusion, are set out in the attached Annex.

Passport Adviceline: 0300 222 0000  
Email us at [foi@hmpo.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:foi@hmpo.gsi.gov.uk)  
Visit our website at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)



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](mailto:foirequests@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk), quoting reference FOICR 49256/18. 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

**D Hjej-Andaloussi**  
**Freedom of Information Team**

**Freedom of Information request from Richard Gadsden reference FOICR 49256/18****Information requested**

Plans around handling the possible increase in demand for UK passports after March 2019

**Response**

The information is exempt from disclosure under section 35 (1)(a) of the FOIA. Section 35 (1)(a) provides that information held by a government department is exempt information if it relates to the formulation and development of government policy.

**Public interest test in relation to section 35 (1) (a)**

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 necessarily 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.

**Considerations in favour of disclosing the information**

There is a general public interest in disclosure so that the public can have greater reassurance in the processes of formulating policy and the fact that openness in government increases public trust in, and engagement with, the government. The public will want to have confidence that HM Passport Office has made plans to accommodate any possible surge in demand for UK passports as a result of the UK leaving the European Union.

**Considerations in favour of maintaining the exemption**

Releasing information relating to the formulation or development of government policy before a policy decision is made may prejudice the formulation of that policy. This applies particularly in the case regarding the release of policy information that is still being developed. Good government depends on sound decision-making and must be based on the best available advice and full consideration of all the options without fear of premature disclosure. Ministers and officials need to consider the pros and cons of policies and advice without premature disclosure which might have the effect of closing off options.

Release of the information covered by this exemption would likely lead to an adverse impact on decisions made. HM Passport Office has to take account of a number of factors that could affect UK passport demand and has to formulate policy to manage demand overall; the UK leaving the European Union will form part of the consideration with regard to the formulation of this policy.

## **Conclusion**

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