Right to Work Check Procedure

SOP · UK · Updated 2026-07-11 · Square brackets are placeholders to replace with your own details.

A right to work check procedure is the step-by-step process your organisation follows to confirm, before someone starts work, that they are legally allowed to work in the UK — which check route to use, how to examine documents or online records, what to copy and keep, and when to check again.

This is one of the few HR processes where a paperwork slip carries direct financial consequences: employing someone without the right to work exposes the business to civil penalties, and a check done incorrectly gives you no protection at all. The procedure exists so the check is done the same correct way for every hire, by whoever happens to be hiring that week.

This template gives you a complete, ready-to-edit procedure: choosing between manual, online, and digital identity checks, the step-by-step for each, follow-up checks for time-limited permission, and the records that preserve your statutory excuse.

Purpose and scope

This procedure sets out how [Your company] checks and records every new starter's right to work in the UK. It applies to all hires — permanent, fixed-term, part-time, and casual — at every site, with no exceptions for referrals, returners, or people known personally to the hiring manager.

When this procedure applies

- Before any new starter's first day of work — the check must be completed and recorded before they start, and the offer letter states that employment is conditional on it.
- Before an employee's time-limited permission to work expires (a follow-up check).
- When [Your company] takes on staff through a transfer or acquisition — check current GOV.UK guidance for the timescales that apply.
- Agency workers are checked by their agency, but [name/role] confirms in writing that the agency does so.

Roles and responsibilities

- Checking officer ([name/role, e.g. hiring manager or office manager]): carries out the check, makes the copies, and records the result before confirming a start date.
- Procedure owner ([name/role]): keeps this procedure aligned with current Home Office guidance, maintains the follow-up diary, and is the escalation point for any doubtful case.
- Hiring managers: never allow a start date before the checking officer confirms the check is complete.

Before you start — choose the right check

There are three routes, and the right one depends on the person's status: a manual check of original documents; an online check using a Home Office share code (the only valid route for most people with digital immigration status, such as an eVisa); or a digital identity check through a certified identity service provider (IDSP) for British and Irish citizens with a valid passport [where [Your company] has engaged a certified IDSP — name it here, or delete this route].

Never accept a photocopy or a photograph of a document. If you are unsure which route applies, check GOV.UK or ask [name/role] before proceeding.

Manual document check

1. Ask the candidate to bring original documents from the Home Office's current list of acceptable documents — check GOV.UK for the list in force on the day of the check.
2. Check the documents with the holder present (in person, or by live video call while you hold the originals): confirm the photograph and date of birth match the person in front of you.
3. Check the documents are valid and consistent: dates, name spellings across documents (with marriage or deed poll evidence for any difference), and no signs of alteration.
4. If the permission is time-limited or restricts the type or hours of work, record the expiry date and the restrictions, and confirm the role fits within them.
5. Copy each document clearly in a format that cannot be altered, including every page with personal details, the photograph, and any permission stamps or vignettes.
6. Mark the copy with the date of the check and your name, in the format: checked on [date] by [name].
7. Return the originals, store the copies in [secure system/location], and enter any follow-up date in the follow-up diary.

Online and digital checks

1. Ask the candidate for their share code and date of birth, and open the Home Office online right to work checking service via GOV.UK.
2. Run the check yourself on the employer service — do not accept a screenshot or a profile page the candidate generated.
3. Check the photograph on the online profile against the person, in person or on a live video call.
4. Confirm the online result covers the work in question, and note any expiry date or restrictions shown.
5. Save the profile page as a dated PDF or screenshot, mark it checked on [date] by [name], and store it in [secure system/location].
6. For British and Irish citizens checked through our IDSP, follow the provider's process, satisfy yourself the output matches the person, and retain the provider's output in the same way.

Follow-up checks for time-limited permission

Where a person's permission to work is time-limited, diarise a follow-up check before the recorded expiry date. [Name/role] reviews the follow-up diary [frequency, e.g. monthly] and books the re-check with the employee at least [number] weeks before expiry. A person whose follow-up check cannot be completed by the expiry date must not work beyond it until the position is resolved — see the section below.

Records and proof of completion

For every worker we retain: the document copies or online check output, the date of the check, the name of the checker, any restrictions, and the follow-up date if applicable. Home Office guidance sets how long records must be kept after employment ends — check current GOV.UK guidance for the period and record it here: [retention period].

These records are the statutory excuse. A check that was done but not recorded protects nobody, so the check is not complete until the record is filed in [system/location].

If something goes wrong

- Candidate cannot produce acceptable documents but has an outstanding Home Office application or appeal: do not start them. Use the Home Office Employer Checking Service via GOV.UK, and proceed only if a Positive Verification Notice is received; diarise the follow-up it specifies.
- The check fails or the online service shows no right to work: do not employ the person, keep the evidence, and escalate to [name/role] before communicating the decision — a calm "we are unable to proceed" is enough.
- An existing employee's follow-up check fails or their permission expires: suspend the work, escalate immediately to [name/role], and take advice before dismissing — status problems are sometimes resolvable, and a rushed dismissal creates its own legal risk.
- You discover a check was missed for a current employee: carry out a compliant check immediately, record it, and escalate to [name/role].

How to use this template

1. Read the current Home Office employer guidance on GOV.UK before editing — acceptable documents and routes change more often than any other HR compliance area.
2. Name one checking officer and one deputy per site, and train them on all the routes you actually use.
3. Add the conditional line to your offer letter template now: employment is conditional on a satisfactory right to work check before the start date.
4. Build the follow-up diary in a system that survives staff turnover — a leaver's personal calendar is where follow-up checks go to die.
5. Audit a sample of existing files against the records section before publishing, and fix gaps immediately.

Official guidance

› [GOV.UK — Check a job applicant's right to work]