

UK legalises public documents electronically: 2 September 2022

The UK Legalisation Office (part of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office) will now be able to receive documents digitally and will issue electronic 'e-Apostille' certificates enabling a quicker, cheaper and more efficient service for thousands of people around the globe.

A [legalised document](#) is needed in many international transactions including overseas working visas and managing property. Currently customers send their physical documents to the UK Legalisation Office by post or courier and receive the documents back several days later with a paper certificate, known as an Apostille, attached.

The first UK e-Apostille was issued on 15 December 2021 as part of a pilot initiative. The option to apply for an e-Apostille will now be opened up to more customers.

Secure digital process

Applicants will be able to quickly upload digital documents instead of posting them. Documents must be signed using either an Advanced Electronic Signature, or a Qualified Electronic Signature, which offer high levels of validation.

The Apostille is issued as an attachment to a PDF, with the document/s the certificate relates to also attached. Both the overarching PDF and the Apostille attachment are digitally signed by the Legalisation Office to ensure integrity. The electronic signature/s of the public official/s within the customer's document/s are also preserved.

Customers will still have the option of a paper Apostille, and a small number of documents (such as police record documents) will continue to require a paper-based Apostille for specific security reasons.

Chris Ward, Head of Public-facing Services, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, said:

This is an exciting development which will provide a much more efficient user experience.

A digital Apostille solution has been many years in the making, but this new system is capable of providing a fully digital service.

We want to continue to provide the best possible service to our customers and will develop the system further to meet a range of user needs.

Michael Lightowler, Notary Public and Member of the Notaries Society of England and Wales said:

The process is straightforward and efficient.

Obvious benefits are speed of turnaround and lack of need to use paper and post or couriers, all of which also reduces costs.

Record keeping is simpler, with my digital files saved directly to a folder once the e-Apostille is added, instead of a time consuming document scanning step.

The e-Apostille service offers benefits to international trade and commerce in terms of security and convenience. It will also help to reduce the environmental impact of circulating hard copy public documents around the world.

International acceptance

UK e-Apostilles have been accepted by authorities in Italy, the Netherlands, Panama and the Philippines.

Under an international agreement over 100 countries that are signed up to the [Apostille Convention](#) should equally accept e-Apostilles. Users are advised to check the requirements of the organisation or individual that has requested the Apostille before they apply.

Overseas authorities can view an e-Apostille using a PDF reader. They can check all UK Apostilles, including the new e-Apostilles, by entering a reference [online](#).