

## Letters of Support

A letter of support is like a recommendation letter that can be drafted by a friend, supporter, or organisation to back up the story of someone who is making an asylum claim or an immigration application.

It can be submitted to the Home Office or court as a piece of evidence in the person's case, so it is important that the contents of the letter are relevant to and supportive of their case. The Home Office says that evidence should "be from an official or impartial source", so it can be difficult to know what sort of information to put into a letter of support, and how to present it. This guide lays out helpful drafting tips provided by immigration lawyers in our community.

### Purpose

At the outset, it is important to know exactly what your friend or the person who has requested the letter is asking you to corroborate (this means to confirm or give support to). Are you sure that you are the right person to back up the point they are trying to make in their application?

If they have a lawyer, you should speak with them to confirm what sort of information would make for a strong letter of support. If they do not have a lawyer, it is a good idea to sit down together to make sure you are both clear about what the letter should address and how this would be helpful.

Whether or not they have a lawyer, it might be a good idea to think of the following questions to help you figure out the purpose of the letter of support –

- Is it to support the basis of a claim for asylum (e.g., persecution on the basis of an element of their identity)?
- Is it to support the fact that they have a certain medical condition or disability?
- Is it to support the fact that they attended a certain course / educational training during a certain time?
- Is it to support the fact that they lived at a certain address for a certain period of time?
- Is it to support the fact that they are an active member of your community or group in the UK (for their private or family life application)?

Make sure that both they and you are sure of the purpose that your letter should serve – and that it would benefit, not weaken the application – before you begin drafting.

If the person who has requested the letter has given you consent (this means permission) to access some of the relevant papers in their case – like a Home Office decision letter, interview records, or appeal transcripts – this could be useful in helping you to draft a letter of support. Reading this information can help you to understand things like why their case might have been refused by the Home Office before.

### How to draft a letter of support

We asked the lawyers in our community about how best to draft a letter of support. Here are some general tips that can serve as a guide to you before you start writing....

## Tips for writing a letter of support

**Letterhead:** If possible, use paper or a document with a letterhead (perhaps with your organisation's logo). Always date the letter, and make sure to sign it – this is very important.

**Who are you addressing?** Make sure you know who the letter is going to address. If it is to the Home Office, address it to the Home Office (Secretary of State for the Home Department). If it is to the court, address it to the court.

**Who are you?** Explain who you are, the nature of your relationship with the person who has requested the letter, and why this is relevant to their application or case (purpose of the letter). Set out your relationship with the person: how you know them, how long you have known them, the frequency of your contact with each other, etc.

**Paragraphs:** Number your paragraphs – this will help lawyers to reference the points you make in their submissions, and it will also help the judge to navigate the evidence in court too.

**Stay focused:** Only write about the parts of your relationship that are specific, and that will bolster their application or case.

**Chronology and structure:** Always write in chronological order, starting from when you met the person until the present date.

**Attach relevant documents:** If possible, attach proof of your identification. If the person is a member of your charity or organisation and they have a certificate of membership, it might be a good idea to attach that to bolster your letter, too.

**Attendance notes:** If you are a member of a charity that is supporting the person, you can refer to attendance notes to share exact dates and details of certain events in the letter.

**Certify translation:** If the letter of support or any documents you attach are in a different language, you must have them translated by a certified translator. The translator must sign the translation and certify that it is accurate to the best of their knowledge.

We also asked lawyers about things you should avoid when drafting a letter of support. ..

**Do not write like an expert:** Be aware of the limits of your expertise. For example, if your letter is about someone's mental health, and you are not a mental health professional, you can describe how someone is presenting – things they've said, how they've behaved – but try not to diagnose them as having "depression", "anxiety" or being "traumatised".

**Bias:** Avoid biased language, for example by stating that you think that the behaviour of the Home Office has been "unfair" or "unjust". Try to sound neutral – remember, the Home Office is looking for impartial and objective evidence.

**Unnecessary information:** You need not summarise the facts of the case – this will be done elsewhere.