Age verification for pub staff in England and Wales

For a pub in England or Wales, the age-verification briefing should identify the venue policy, acceptable evidence of age and the person who supports refusals. Show staff the actual point-of-sale process and how they request help discreetly. Keep the conversation calm and consistent. A colleague taking over the transaction needs the relevant facts so that a refused sale is not inadvertently completed at another till.

England and Wales staff awareness. Personal licence qualifications and Scottish mandatory staff training are separate products.

The practical principles

Know your authority

Before a shift, establish who authorises alcohol sales, the permitted hours and the premises conditions. Ordinary bar staff can work under the appropriate authorisation arrangements. A personal licence is a distinct credential. Apply the venue's age-verification policy consistently; Challenge 25 is a common policy threshold for asking for evidence, while the legal purchase age is 18. Learn the approved forms of identification and escalation process.

Make a reliable decision

For physical ID, examine the original acceptable document using the business procedure: match the photograph to the customer, check the date of birth and look for signs of alteration. Use the venue's approved process for any certified digital verification. If adequate proof is unavailable, refuse the sale calmly. Be alert to an adult buying for an under-18 and refer the situation. Sales to a person who is drunk must be refused; involve a supervisor when behaviour or circumstances create concern.

Digital proof of age — checked 21 October 2026: Since September 2026, licensed businesses in England and Wales may choose to adopt certified digital proof-of-age services, subject to the applicable requirements. Physical-ID checks remain available. Use the venue's approved verification process and current premises conditions; a photograph of ID is not the same as certified digital verification. See the GOV.UK announcement and the updated statutory guidance.

Refuse with support

Explain the decision briefly, use a calm tone and offer the appropriate alternative. Ask the duty manager or security for support when needed. Complete the refusal record with factual information, the reason and the action taken. Avoid collecting unnecessary personal data. A manager should support a justified refusal. Staff also need local guidance on the narrow rules affecting alcohol with meals and any conditions applying to their particular premises.

Work through a shift scenario

Fictional exercise: a customer becomes impatient when asked for ID and says another employee served them yesterday. A useful response explains the current check and offers to involve the supervisor. Previous service does not establish that this transaction meets the policy. If suitable evidence is unavailable, follow the refusal process and record the event factually. If behaviour becomes threatening, prioritise staff safety and use the venue assistance route.

Avoid the common failure

A team should understand the difference between a venue age-check policy and the legal age for a sale. Avoid presenting a Challenge 25 policy as permission to sell at 25 only. This article and course cover England and Wales awareness; Scottish staff-training requirements need their own applicable provision.

A second situation to discuss

Fictional scenario: A customer appears under the venue's Challenge 25 threshold and shows a blurred photograph of someone else's ID. A queue is building behind them.

Apply the approved ID policy, explain that the required evidence has not been supplied and refuse the alcohol sale. Offer an appropriate soft drink and request supervisor support if challenged. Record the refusal according to policy.

Use a working record

Record the specific arrangements below before the briefing. Keep the wording short enough for a colleague to use during the shift. Where a field does not apply, explain why; where information is missing, assign a person to resolve it. Store personal or sensitive details in the business's approved system.

- Time
- till or bar
- reason for refusal
- ID issue without unnecessary personal data
- staff member
- supervisor support
- outcome

At the next handover, ask what changed, which action remains open and who now owns it. Close the record only when the agreed follow-up is complete. A recurring problem should inform the next briefing and the relevant operational procedure.

Check understanding

Challenge 25 usually means:

Ask for ID when someone appears under 25 It is an age-check policy with a higher challenge threshold.

An ID check should include:

Photo match and date of birth The evidence must relate to the person making the purchase.

Age-check practice: a familiar face with no acceptable ID

A regular customer brings a younger friend to the bar. The friend orders alcohol and the regular vouches for their age. The server's age-check policy calls for identification. What happens next?

Compare your decision

Apply the venue's approved age-verification procedure consistently. Explain what evidence the venue accepts and involve the duty manager if the situation becomes disputed. A regular customer's assurance cannot complete the required check.

Practise the exact wording with a colleague: “I need to carry out the check for the person buying the drink. My manager can explain our accepted identification.” Use the venue’s refusal-record procedure.

Sources and scope

- Source: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/alcohol-licensing
- Source: https://www.gov.uk/alcohol-young-people-law

Original workplace examples and suggested record. Prepared 19 October 2026. Use the current linked guidance and the venue’s procedures for operational decisions.

Use this on shift

Resource page and fillable working record · Read the online guide · Course details