

If a double glazed window suddenly needs two hands and a bit of a wrestle to open, you notice long before you see a bill creeping up from wasted heat. I spend a lot of time in homes where a stiff sash or reluctant handle becomes the daily annoyance everyone works around. Then a cold snap arrives, the window refuses to shut tight, and the draft tells you exactly where the money is leaking. The good news: most stuck or hard-to-open windows can be corrected without ripping out the frame. The trick is diagnosing the cause before you start tweaking hinges and handles at random.

Double glazing sounds simple, but each window is a system. The panes, spacer bar, gas fill, seals, sash, gearbox, handle, hinges, and packers all influence whether it opens smoothly and seals properly. When one part slips even a few millimetres, another part begins to work harder. That is when friction rises, handles strip, and seals drag. Before you assume a full replacement is inevitable, check the basics. You might be one hour, a Torx driver, and a small bottle of silicone lubricant away from a smooth glide.

## **The hidden causes of stiff double glazed windows**

I keep a mental short list of culprits when a client shows me a stubborn window. Temperature swings top the list. uPVC frames expand and contract through the seasons, sometimes by 2 to 5 mm across a typical 1.2 m sash. In summer, the frame can belly slightly and pinch the sash. In winter, contraction can alter the compression at the gasket so the lock throws too tightly.

Then there is the quiet drift of gravity. Over five or ten years, a sash can drop a hair because the glazing packers were placed poorly or have compressed. That drop shifts alignment at the locking side, so cams start scraping against keeps. Add some neglect - no cleaning of the tracks, no lubrication, a buildup of airborne grit in the friction hinge - and the effort needed to open balloons.

I also see hardware fatigue more often than people expect. Espagnolette gearboxes inside the sash handle the torque when you rotate the handle. A sticky window means the gearbox gets over-torqued. The weakest link gives way, usually a small casting or tooth. The window may still close, but it takes force, and you hear a worrying crunch. Hinges tell similar stories. A bent top hinge from someone pulling the window to climb out for a quick clean is a classic.

Finally, failed perimeter seals and blown units affect operation. If the double glazed unit has lost its hermetic seal and drawn moisture between panes, it may not directly cause sticking, but the same failure often accompanies frame movement or gasket shrinkage. I get regular calls that begin with Can you Fix Blown Double Glazing and evolve into a conversation about warped sashes and dragging locks. The misted glass signals a problem, but the operational issues come from elsewhere.

## **Start with alignment: where metal meets metal**

Windows are honest. They leave witness marks if you know where to look. Open the sash and inspect the frame for shiny rub points along the locking side. Look at the keeps, those metal plates on the frame that receive the mushroom cams. Are they scuffed off center? Do you see black streaks from gasket abrasion? If so, the sash is not entering the frame squarely.



For standard uPVC casements with friction hinges, you can re-align more than most people realize. The keeps can usually move a few millimetres on slotted holes. Back off the screws a touch, slide the keep toward the handle to reduce compression or away to increase it, then retighten. Check the top and bottom keeps one at a time so you don't lose your reference. Small changes matter. A 1 mm shift can turn a struggle into a smooth close.

Hinges also offer adjustment, but the method depends on the hardware. Some friction hinges have a stack height shim or a lateral adjustment by way of eccentric studs. Others require loosening the sash screws and nudging the sash in the direction you need before re-fixing. If the top corner near the hinge is biting the frame as you close, try lifting that corner slightly by re-packing the glass or nudging the sash outward at the top hinge screws. If the locking side scrapes, lift the sash on the hinge side or raise the keeps.

A caution rooted in experience: adjust one parameter at a time. Mark your starting positions with a pencil. A flurry of changes without notes turns a ten-minute task into an hour of guesswork.

## Friction hinges: clean, lubricate, and set

Friction hinges do two [Double Glazing Repairs](#) jobs. They support the sash and provide controlled resistance so the window stays where you place it. When grit builds in the hinge channels, resistance spikes. People respond by

forcing the handle harder, which stresses the gearbox and keeps. The smarter move is a proper clean and lubrication.

I carry a soft brush, a microfiber cloth, and a non-petroleum silicone spray. Wipe the hinge channels inside and out, including the small slider shoes. If you have a top-hung sash, get someone to hold it while you reach the outer track safely. Never lean your full weight on an open sash. Once clean, apply a light mist of silicone spray to the tracks and pivot points, then work the window open and shut a few times. If the hinge has a small tension screw, typically a Phillips head set into the slider, adjust it so the window holds its position without feeling heavy. Over-tightening that screw is a common mistake. Turn it a quarter turn at a time and test.

In kitchens and bathrooms, I often find sticky residue from cooking vapors or aerosols mingled with dust. It forms a glue-like film. A mild detergent solution on a cloth helps here. Just avoid saturating the hinge; trapped water inside a hinge can encourage corrosion.

## **Handles, spindles, and the gearbox inside the sash**

If the handle needs a herculean twist to engage, do not keep cranking. The square spindle that passes through the sash and into the gearbox is stronger than the smallest gears in that box. Keep turning and you will strip a tooth. The handle may then spin freely or jam half-closed. Replacement gearboxes are inexpensive in the context of a full window, but you will still pay for labor and a revisit.

To test whether the gearbox is the issue, open the window and watch the mushroom cams as you operate the handle. Do they move cleanly? Do you feel gritty resistance at the same point every time? If only one cam sticks, the keep near that cam might be too tight. Loosen and adjust. If all cams feel rough or the handle travels with a grinding sensation, the gearbox is likely worn.

Replacing a gearbox is a pragmatic middle ground between living with a fight and replacing an entire sash. Measure carefully. There are multiple backset depths, typically 20, 22, or 25 mm, and different spindle lengths. Take photos before you remove anything. If you are not confident, a window technician can swap a gearbox in under an hour. It is a common part of Double Glazing Repairs because it restores smooth locking and protects the rest of the hardware from over-stressing.

## **The role of glazing packers and why a few millimetres matter**

A quietly dropped sash often traces back to glazing packers that were misplaced on installation. Those plastic blocks support the glass unit inside the sash, transferring weight to the hinge side and preventing racking. If packers sit short of the corners or lack a diagonal pair, the glass can creep downward. That drop twists the sash slightly. You see it as a tight corner at the bottom lock side and a loose corner at the top.

Re-packing is a craft touch. You remove the glazing beads, ease the unit out just enough to insert or relocate packers, then refit while watching your reveals around the sash. I aim for an even 3 to 5 mm gap on all sides in a typical uPVC casement. Move the packers, check the gap, close the window, feel the seal, open and adjust again. It is iterative, but the payoff is a sash that sits square, needs less handle force, and seals evenly. If you hear whistles in wind and the window closes on a skew, odds are packers are part of the story.

## **Weather seals and gaskets: lubricate or replace**

Perimeter gaskets harden with age and UV exposure. A dry, flattened gasket grabs the sash like a brake pad. You feel it mostly in the last 30 degrees of handle travel, when the cams pull the sash tight. Before you replace gaskets,

try a gasket conditioner or a thin wiped film of silicone-based lubricant. I avoid petroleum jelly because it can degrade some rubbers over time.

If the gasket has shrunk and pulled away at the corners, you will see a gap. That is beyond lubrication. Pull a short length of the gasket out from a hidden section to confirm the profile, then source the same shape. Many gaskets push into a channel. Work slowly, do not stretch it as you insert, and leave a tiny bit of extra length at corners to account for future shrinkage. A fresh gasket transforms the closing force and improves thermal performance without touching the glass.

## **Thermal expansion and seasonal tweaks**

I have revisited homes where a window I adjusted in July needed a small tweak in January. The frame had relaxed in the cold, and the lock felt loose. That is normal. If your windows bind during a heatwave, resist the urge to move keeps to the extreme. Set a compromise that works in heat and cold. A light hand on seasonal adjustments will keep you from chasing the weather every few months.

On south-facing elevations with dark frames, expansion is more pronounced. I sometimes recommend slightly lower compression on the keeps to accommodate summer growth. Pair that with well-conditioned gaskets so you still maintain a tight seal in winter.

## **When the glass is the problem: misted units and blown seals**

Operational stiffness and misted glass often go hand in hand in older installations. Misted Double Glazing Repairs focus on the sealed unit itself. When the edge seal fails, moisture seeps between panes and condenses, creating a persistent cloud. You can wipe the interior glass all day; it stays. Can you Fix Blown Double Glazing as in restore the original sealed unit without replacement? Not in a way I would stand behind. There are services that drill small holes to vent and dry the unit, then plug it. That may clear the fog temporarily, but it does not restore the insulating argon fill or full moisture barrier. In practice, you replace the sealed unit.

The tie-in to stuck windows is indirect. If a unit has failed due to movement or poor packer placement, the same forces often misalign the sash. Replace the failed glass and correct the packers at the same time. I have seen energy bills drop noticeably after replacing two or three fogged units and tuning the hardware because the windows finally sealed consistently, not because the new glass was magic.

## **Common uPVC and aluminum differences**

uPVC and aluminum frames share principles but behave differently. uPVC is more forgiving to adjust. You can shift keeps, tweak hinges, and re-pack glass with modest fuss. Aluminum frames are stiffer. If an aluminum sash is binding, it may be due to a bent hinge, a warped thermal break, or a manufacturing tolerance issue. You still adjust keeps and hinges, but you have less margin. Aluminum also conducts temperature, so gasket condition matters even more for comfort.



Older timber frames with double glazed units add another layer. Swelling from humidity changes can bind a sash overnight. Sanding and refinishing may be part of the repair, and hardware screws may need longer bite into fresh wood. The lubrication and keep alignment advice still applies, but watch for water ingress. If you see blackened wood near the hinge screws, the substrate has softened, and short-term adjustments will not hold.

## **A practical sequence that solves most sticking cases**

Use this as a tidy, minimal checklist for tackling a hard-to-open or hard-to-close casement. Keep notes as you go.

- Inspect reveals, keeps, hinges, and gaskets for witness marks, gaps, or corrosion.
- Clean tracks and hinges thoroughly, then lubricate with a silicone spray.
- Adjust keeps in small increments to set sensible compression, testing after each change.
- Check handle action and cam travel; if gritty or inconsistent, consider gearbox replacement.
- If the sash sits out of square, re-pack the glass to correct reveals before making final keep adjustments.

## **Lubricants and what not to use**

Not all lubricants are equal for window hardware. Silicone sprays are my default for hinges and gaskets because they do not attract dust the way oil does. A dry PTFE spray can also work on clean friction hinge tracks. I avoid thick greases that accumulate dirt into a grinding paste. For the handle mechanism, a tiny drop of light machine oil at the spindle interface is enough, but keep oil away from the gasket. If you accidentally overspray, wipe the glass and frame immediately. A sleek-looking film today can become a grey grime band in three months.

## **Security and child-safety features that mimic stiffness**

Trickle vents, restrictors, and night-latch positions on some handles can feel like resistance if you are unfamiliar. I have been called to several homes where a new tenant thought a window was jammed, but the restrictor had engaged. Learn where the button or tab sits on your hinge restrictor. You should be able to release it with a thumb press while opening. If you have to use a screwdriver every time, the restrictor may be bent and needs replacement. Similarly, some espag handles have a night vent position that leaves the window slightly ajar but locked. Forcing past that position can wear the gearbox. Operate the handle in clear 90-degree steps, not with a wrench-like roll.

# When replacement makes sense

I see three common thresholds where repair shifts to replacement:

- The sash or frame is visibly twisted or bowed, and re-packing does not restore even reveals.
- Multiple components have failed in sequence, for example, a worn gearbox, bent hinges, and shrunk gaskets across several windows, suggesting end-of-life for the suite.
- The double glazed units are widely blown, and the profiles are obsolete, making it hard to source matching gaskets and hardware.

If ***Misted Window Repairs*** you are facing more than half the cost of new windows in cumulative repairs within a short time, it is reasonable to price a replacement. That said, many homes benefit from a round of targeted Double Glazing Repairs that reset the clock: new sealed units where misted, fresh gaskets where shrunk, a handful of gearboxes, re-packed sashes, and hinge cleaning. I have turned houses from drafty and stiff to quiet and smooth in a day or two without touching a single frame.

## Safety, practicalities, and the value of small tools

I would rather see a homeowner pause than lean dangerously out of a first-floor window with a can of spray in one hand. If you must work at height, use a stable platform or wait for a professional with the right access gear. Wear safety glasses when spraying lubricants into overhead hinges. Mask the surrounding plaster if you are new to spray control; silicone mist on paint is a nuisance to clean.

A small toolkit makes these jobs straightforward: a set of Pozi and Phillips screwdrivers, a Torx set for certain keeps, a 4 mm and 5 mm hex key, a trim removal tool for glazing beads, plastic glazing packers in a few thicknesses, a microfiber cloth, and silicone spray. Add a pencil and a tape measure for marking keep positions and checking backset depths. None of this is exotic, but it prevents the improvisations that cause damage, like prying a bead with a butter knife or rounding a screw head.

## Edge cases worth noting

Some tilt-and-turn windows develop stiffness for different reasons. The tilt and turn mechanisms rely on stays and corner drives that must remain synchronized. If a sash was closed with the handle not fully vertical or horizontal, the mechanism can half-engage. The fix is to support the sash, relieve pressure on the hardware, and reset the handle position while guiding the corner drives back into place. If you are unfamiliar with tilt-and-turn gear, calling a specialist is wise. A misstep can cause the sash to drop on one corner.

Another subtlety shows up in coastal properties. Airborne salt accelerates corrosion in hinge rivets and slider shoes. The hinge may look fine, but the internal friction rises sharply. Cleaning helps, but you often need hinge replacement sooner than inland installations. Stainless-grade hinges designed for coastal use are worth the small premium.

Finally, consider ventilation. Over-pressurized interiors from powerful extract fans can make lightweight sashes whistle or resist a gentle push until pressure equalizes. If a window is hard to open only when a fan runs, the issue is air balance, not hardware.

## Costs, timelines, and realistic expectations

Homeowners often ask for rough numbers. Regional pricing varies, but as a working average in many areas:

- Clean and lubricate, with minor keep adjustments: typically a service visit, 30 to 60 minutes.
- Replace an espag gearbox: 45 to 90 minutes, part cost modest, labor the main component.
- Re-pack a sash and adjust hinges: 60 to 90 minutes, depending on access and beading type.
- Replace a misted double glazed unit: measure visit, then a return visit to fit. Lead times for glass can range from 3 to 10 working days. Fitting takes 20 to 40 minutes per unit.

If several windows need attention, a day on site often transforms the lot. Set expectations with whoever does the work. Ask for before-and-after photos of reveals or hardware if you will not be home. Good tradespeople are happy to explain what they adjusted so you understand future tweaks.

## Small habits that prevent big headaches

Treat windows as moving machines, not just pieces of glass. Once a year, clean the hinge tracks, check for loose keep screws, and run a finger along the gaskets to feel for hard spots or gaps. Operate every window fully, not just the two you use daily. Problems announce themselves first in the seldom-used ones. If a handle begins to feel tight, investigate then, not after a winter of forcing it.

CST Double Glazing Repairs

4 Mill Ln

Cottesmore

Oakham

LE15 7DL

Phone: +44 7973 682562

If you are ordering new windows, ask about serviceability. Choose hardware with known spare availability. Confirm that gaskets are a common profile. A decade on, you will be glad you did. Well-chosen hardware turns future Double Glazing Repairs into straightforward maintenance instead of part-hunting adventures.

## Bringing it together

A stuck double glazed window rarely means the window is finished. It usually means a few parts need attention and the sash wants to be put back into balance. Clean friction hinges, a sensible keep adjustment, healthy gaskets, and, when necessary, a new gearbox restore the feel you had when the window was new. If you see misting between panes, plan for a sealed unit replacement and use that visit to correct packers and alignment. That holistic approach solves both the annoyance and the energy loss.

I have left countless homes where the final test is simple: the sash opens with two fingers, holds its position without wobble, then closes with a light turn of the handle and a gentle, uniform seal all around. That is the standard to aim for. With a careful eye and the right steps, you can get there without replacing the whole window.