



# **Inspection of UK Border Agency operations in Wales and the South West**

November 2009 – January 2010





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# Foreword

I am pleased to present the report of my recent inspection of the UK Border Agency's immigration and border operations in Wales and the South West. This was the first comprehensive inspection of the Agency's regional operations within the UK and will be repeated as part of my inspection programme for the UK Border Agency throughout 2010 and 2011.

I was impressed with the enthusiasm and commitment demonstrated by staff throughout the region; they consistently displayed resilience and professionalism in the face of difficult tasks. I was disappointed to find evidence of a lack of basic equipment required by staff to carry out their duties effectively and that some staff were expected to work in completely unsatisfactory accommodation, especially at Holyhead and Plymouth seaports.

I am also concerned that the current level of immigration work undertaken at Holyhead seaport is not balanced against the known and prevailing high risk of immigration offences being committed there. In addition, I found there to be a lack of accurate knowledge regarding the levels of risk prevalent at smaller ports in the region which are staffed only intermittently. The UK Border Agency should reassess how it will respond to the challenges presented by the Common Travel Area.

Finally, I encountered criticism from a wide range of staff at all grades within the region about the way in which change is managed and the visibility and style of leadership. I was also concerned to note staff perceptions of bullying. If the UK Border Agency is to perform its role effectively, it is important that managers are active and visible in the workplace and that staff feel supported and respected as well as held to account.

I have set out my findings, along with 17 recommendations that I believe would strengthen the UK Border Agency's operations in Wales and the South West.

**John Vine CBE QPM**  
**Independent Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency**

# Executive summary

1. The UK Border Agency has set clear targets for the region for both Immigration Group and Border Force. We found mixed evidence of staff understanding targets and the reasons behind them. Problems identified included a lack of communication, potential for conflicting priorities, and a failure to maximise cross-functional working. However, one example of good practice was the way in which Border Force has trained legacy customs staff from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs in operating the primary checkpoint control in order to help minimise queues and customer waiting times.
2. There was some evidence of strategic stakeholder engagement, but this was an area where stakeholders commented that there was a need for greater engagement with more senior managers. We found clear evidence of effective joint working with stakeholders and delivery partners across the region, although this was largely at an operational level.
3. We identified a number of issues regarding the UK Border Agency's failure to make the most effective use of, and maximise benefits from, technology in the region. The lack of adequate tools and technology provided to staff had a negative impact on staff's ability to perform their roles in securing the border as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Examples of this included the following:

- Staff had to use slow, unreliable IT systems and this affected efficiency as well as morale.
- In some locations there were insufficient computer terminals for staff to use, and legacy customs staff had no access to Immigration Group systems at all.
- The lack of a fingerprint scanner in the Bristol enforcement office resulted in a drain on staff resources, as staff had to take fingerprints to Cardiff to be scanned, as well as the increased costs of detaining people while they waited for the results of the scans. It was also completely unacceptable that people should be detained for longer than absolutely necessary simply because of a lack of equipment locally.
- Facial recognition gates had been rolled out in Cardiff and Bristol airports, but resource constraints meant that they could only be used to a limited extent. No evaluation of their effectiveness at those locations had been carried out at the time of our inspection.

4. Immigration Group had been carrying a significant number of vacancies since the region was created in 2007. At the time of our inspection, it proved difficult to obtain consistent figures about the number of vacancies, although some managers thought it amounted to 70. It has subsequently been confirmed that at the time of the inspection there were 18 vacancies. In November 2009, further pressure was put on resources when the contracts of 26 temporary agency staff were terminated as a cost-saving measure. We were concerned about the additional pressures being put on staff, the impact on their performance, and how long the region can sustain this way of working.
5. Staffing levels at Holyhead seaport were only sufficient to cover five out of a possible 21 eight-hour shifts each week. Resource constraints severely limited the amount of immigration work that could be carried out at Holyhead, and we were concerned that the level of immigration work undertaken is not balanced against the known high risk that is present. Staff raised concerns that some of the smaller ports in the region were not staffed and there was a risk that potential immigration offenders were not being detected. This brings into question the current level of security of the border.

6. It was clear from our observations of the primary checkpoint, and from interviews with managers and staff, that all flights and ferries are met at Cardiff and Bristol airports and Plymouth seaport. We observed that 100% of passports were checked and scanned by staff as required. Staff have been trained in how to detect fraudulent documents and we observed them doing this while they were checking passports.
7. Our file sampling considered the timeliness of actions taken and the quality of decisions made in cases where people were refused entry to the UK at ports in the region, or where enforcement papers had been served on immigration offenders. We found no significant issues with regard to delays, and found correct procedures had been used to reach fair and balanced decisions. However, we found no evidence of a formal quality-checking mechanism to provide managers with assurance about levels of both quality and consistency of decision making and authorisation.
8. At all times, staff were seen to act in a professional, polite and respectful manner in their dealings with customers. Staff took care to be informative, use authority appropriately, and cause minimal inconvenience to business operators and members of the public while they carried out a difficult job in potentially emotive circumstances.
9. Accommodation at Plymouth and Holyhead seaports was inadequate and we found several serious issues that did not appear to conform to health and safety legislation. Problems had been ongoing for a considerable period of time and staff were very frustrated at a perceived lack of action on the part of the UK Border Agency.
10. We found some evidence of the UK Border Agency's efforts to embed the concept of risk management into its operations. However, although staff were aware of the need to escalate risks, and risk registers were in place, we found only limited evidence of mechanisms in place to ensure that risks were managed.
11. We received criticism of the effectiveness of the UK Border Agency's management of change in the region. For example, at the time of our inspection, the implementation of the Agency's local immigration teams (LITs) initiative within the region – designed to introduce closer working within communities – had so far been only a change in name rather than in structure.
12. Clearly, the forthcoming rationalisation of the terms and conditions of the different legacy organisations was a major concern for both staff and managers. Managers told us that they were frustrated at not being able to provide their staff with information on what is an emotive and worrying issue.
13. A significant number of staff raised concerns about the quality of leadership and management in the region, particularly staff from Immigration Group. These included comments about a lack of visibility and engagement by managers and some staff perceptions of bullying. We did not receive any specific complaints or allegations during the inspection, but the overwhelming number of staff who raised concerns about management indicates the need to treat this issue seriously.



14. Generally, we obtained mixed evidence in relation to the quality of training provided. For example, a considerable number of staff and managers complained about the poor quality of the Points Based System training. However, staff praised the quality of 'control and restraint' training and classroom-based 'Keeping Children Safe' training. E-learning was not considered by many to be an effective method of training.
15. In respect of the UK Border Agency's annual appraisal system, we were concerned to note that:
  - a significant number of staff had not yet had an annual appraisal opened despite it being over halfway through the appraisal year;
  - some staff had not yet received their key work objectives for the year or an interim review; and
  - there is no effective monitoring system to ensure that performance is reviewed regularly and consistently.
16. We found widespread evidence of a perception among staff that they were not valued by more senior managers, or by the organisation itself. This was of some concern, especially when one of the published Home Office values is 'We treat everyone with respect'. Generally, staff told us that they felt valued and respected by colleagues and by their immediate line managers.
17. We found little evidence of an effective communications strategy within either Immigration Group or Border Force across the region. On the whole, stakeholders seemed reasonably happy with the level of communication from the UK Border Agency. However, staff at various levels and in various locations criticised the quality, regularity and effectiveness of the communications they received. Particular reference was made to the lack of communication regarding integration and rationalised terms and conditions.

# Summary of recommendations

We recommend that the UK Border Agency should:

1. Ensure that targets and priorities are made clear to all staff, and introduce working practices to minimise possible conflicts and maximise cross-functional working.
2. Develop regional stakeholder engagement plans, to ensure effective engagement with stakeholders at both strategic and operational levels.
3. Evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of facial recognition gates, adopt a consistent approach, and maximise benefits from using the gates.
4. Provide staff with adequate tools to enable them to be as efficient and effective as possible in securing the border.
5. Review resourcing requirements and ensure that resources match the needs of the business.
6. Carry out a comprehensive assessment of risk at Holyhead seaport, and ensure that adequate resources are deployed to fully meet that risk.
7. Review file management and introduce quality-checking processes to ensure consistency of decision making, and cease the practice of officers temporarily 'acting up' to authorise decisions.
8. Ensure that all front-line staff are provided with and wear the new Agency uniform.
9. Confirm that all staff have received the mandatory 'Keeping Children Safe' training.
10. Act to ensure that staff at Plymouth and Holyhead seaports are provided with adequate, safe accommodation that complies with health and safety regulations.
11. Review its detention procedures at ports to ensure that staff do not escort detained passengers unless they are also accompanied by trained guards.
12. Improve its risk management processes in order to provide assurance that risk is being managed effectively.
13. Review its management of change and how change is communicated to staff.
14. Address the concerns of staff regarding leadership and management in the region.
15. Ensure that all staff have the training to equip them to carry out their roles efficiently and effectively.
16. Comply with the annual appraisal process and ensure that appraisals are completed on time and to defined standards.
17. Implement an effective communications strategy within the region.

# The Inspection

## Purpose and aim

To undertake an inspection of UK Border Agency operations in Wales and the South West, collecting evidence to enable the Independent Chief Inspector to make an assessment of the UK Border Agency's efficiency and effectiveness; and to make recommendations for improved efficiency and effectiveness.

## Background

On 1 April 2009, the UK Border Agency acquired full executive agency status and is currently undergoing a large programme of change in order to become a fully integrated agency that will transform front-line and central services. The integration programme has brought together staff from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA) and UKvisas, with the overall aim of: *Unifying services to secure the UK border and control migration for the benefit of the country* (Home Office strategic objective 6).

As the UK Border Agency has taken on a number of visa, revenue and customs functions, it also leads on two other departmental strategic objectives:

- HMRC strategic objective 3: *Reducing the risk of illicit import and export of material which might harm the UK's physical and social wellbeing*; and
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office strategic objective 4: *Support managed migration for Britain*.

The UK Border Agency's own strategic objectives are three-fold and draw on the above. They are to:

- *Protect the border and UK national interests*
- *Tackle border tax fraud, smuggling and immigration crime*
- *Implement fast and fair decisions*.

In the UK, the UK Border Agency is structured into a number of different groups. These include Criminality and Detention Group, Intelligence Group, Immigration Group and Border Force. The majority of UK-based UK Border Agency staff work within either Immigration Group or Border Force.

During the course of the inspection of UK Border Agency operations in Wales and the South West, we inspected the work of two of these groups: Immigration Group and Border Force.

## Immigration Group

Immigration Group operates a regional structure, comprising six regions.<sup>1</sup>

The regionalisation programme commenced in 2007. It sought to improve the way in which the UK Border Agency managed its operations and engagement with stakeholders and the communities within which it operates.

The UK Border Agency's Wales and the South West region (WSW) is a geographically large region with a relatively small population. We have also acknowledged that there are significant cultural, linguistic and political differences within the region, which can present operational challenges for the Agency.

<sup>1</sup> London and South East, East and West Midlands, North West, North East, Wales and South West, and Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The region has around 300 staff, divided between operations, corporate services and the Regional Director's secretariat. The majority of staff work in operations, with 138 working in enforcement and 124 in asylum.

A range of work is carried out in the region, including:

- asylum (including asylum casework, asylum support, the Presenting Officers' Unit and initial accommodation);
- enforcement (including a local immigration team (LIT) in Cardiff and enforcement offices in Mostyn, Plymouth, Poole, Portishead and Swansea);
- migration (including the Public Enquiry Office, Biometric Identity Document Management Unit and Sponsor Management Unit); and
- corporate services and the Regional Director's secretariat.

### **Border Force**

Border Force is also broken down into regions, although these differ from Immigration Group's regions.

The UK Border Agency's Border Force is responsible for the 17 ports<sup>2</sup> that operate within the geographical area covered by the WSW Immigration Group. Responsibility for the control of arriving passengers at these 17 airports and seaports is split between two Border Force commands: Central, which covers Wales; and Southern, which covers the South West. Each Border Force region is headed by a Regional Director.

Given their geographical location, a number of these ports receive Common Travel Area (CTA) passengers. The CTA allows free movement between Britain, Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.

### **Scope**

The inspection assessed the efficiency and effectiveness of the following:

- **Ports:** the operation and management of immigration functions at the primary checkpoint control. The four ports inspected are shown in the box overleaf.

<sup>2</sup> Avonmouth, Bournemouth, Bristol, Cardiff, Exeter, Falmouth, Fishguard, Holyhead, Newquay, Pembroke Docks, Plymouth, Poole, Swansea, Newport, Cardiff Docks, Barry and Port Talbot.

**Bristol airport**

The largest airport in the geographical area, it is used by 4.6 million passengers per year, with flights to both international and domestic destinations. A number of passengers are travelling within the CTA. The port is covered by Border Force's Southern command.

**Cardiff airport**

An airport used by over 2 million passengers per year travelling between both international and domestic destinations. The port is covered by the Border Force's Central command.

**Plymouth seaport**

There are up to three crossings per day and two international routes from this port – to and from Roscoff and Santander. It is covered by Border Force's Southern command.

**Holyhead seaport**

A large number of passengers travelling within the CTA (primarily between the UK and the Republic of Ireland) travel through this port. Welsh ferry ports are unique as all passengers arrive from the CTA. There is no permanent UK Border Agency immigration presence; instead, it is remotely covered by Agency staff from Border Force's Central command (who remotely cover embarkation controls) and Northern command (who are based outside the region and cover inbound passenger traffic).

- **Enforcement:** the use of the LITs and enforcement teams within WSW. The inspection did not assess the work of asylum teams (see below); however, it did examine the effectiveness of the relationship between asylum teams and enforcement teams.
- **Engagement with stakeholders:** how WSW and the two Border Force area commands engage with stakeholders, including the Welsh Assembly Government and the Strategic Migration Partnership for both Wales and the South West.
- **Management and leadership:** within WSW and the two Border Force area commands.

The inspection did **not** examine the following areas and functions:

- **Freight operations at ports:** we decided to exclude freight operations from the scope of this inspection.
- **Detention/short-term holding facilities:** these facilities are largely the responsibility of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons and outside the remit of this Inspectorate.
- **Intelligence functions:** we have decided that any future assessment of the use of intelligence should take place thematically.
- **Asylum support teams:** as with intelligence functions, asylum support should be assessed thematically.
- **Managed migration applications and the Biometric Identity Document Management Unit:** these areas were considered too small for a regional inspection.

- **MPs' correspondence:** this is collated centrally and responded to either centrally or regionally. It is not an exclusive function of the region and we have decided that future assessment should take place thematically.
- **Customs functions:** although the Independent Chief Inspector's statutory role extends to customs activity, it was not felt that a full assessment of these functions should be carried out, as customs staff only recently transferred to the UK Border Agency and the Agency is still undertaking significant work to integrate immigration and customs functions. However, the exercise of **immigration** functions by legacy customs officers was included in the scope of the inspection.<sup>3</sup>

### Inspection criteria

The inspection was carried out against a selection of the Independent Chief Inspector's core inspection criteria. Of the 115 core inspection criteria that make up the inspection framework, Cardiff and Bristol were inspected against 32, Holyhead against 12, Plymouth against 22, enforcement activity against 21, and regional and area commands against 16.

The specific criteria under each heading that were selected for the inspection are listed in full at Annex A. The full details of the core inspection criteria can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's website at [www.independent.gov.uk/icinspector](http://www.independent.gov.uk/icinspector)

The core inspection criteria fall into the following four sections:

- high level outcomes of the business;
- processes and procedures including the quality of decision making and consistency of approach;
- impact on people subject to UK Border Agency services; and
- management and leadership.

### Methodology

The on-site phase of the inspection took place between 2 November 2009 and 19 January 2010. A one day pre-inspection planning meeting was held on-site on 14 May 2009. We carried out file sampling between 19 and 21 October 2009.

A range of methods were used during the inspection, including:

- analysis of documentary evidence and management information;
- file sampling of 100 port cases and 84 enforcement cases;
- observation of service delivery at the four ports and in the Cardiff LIT and Bristol enforcement offices, and of some of the Immigration Group regional headquarters functions;
- interviewing over 80 members of UK Border Agency staff and managers across all levels;
- conducting over 25 focus groups with staff across a range of work areas and grades;
- offering two drop-in surgeries for staff to come and speak to us;

<sup>3</sup> Prior to integration, immigration functions operated under the control of the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA, the predecessor of the UK Border Agency) and customs functions operated under the control of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). For the purpose of clarity, and in line with UK Border Agency's own terminology, in this report these activities are referred to as 'legacy immigration' and 'legacy customs'.

- observation of enforcement and port operations;
- analysis of statistical information and policy guidance;
- meetings with over 30 stakeholders;
- conducting a staff survey – over 300 responses were received; and
- conducting customer surveys at Bristol and Cardiff airports.

Two days after the completion of the on-site phase of the inspection, the inspection team provided feedback on high level emerging findings to the UK Border Agency.

The inspection identified 17 recommendations for improving operational service delivery in both the Border Force and Immigration Group functions in the region. A full summary of recommendations is provided on pages 8–9 of this report.

In inspecting both Immigration Group and Border Force operations, we found clear similarities as well as distinct differences, with the result that some of our findings and recommendations apply to both parts of the organisation while others apply to only one part. We have therefore reported separately under each criterion for Immigration Group and Border Force, unless our findings and recommendations for a specific criterion apply to both areas. The report is clearly signposted to avoid any ambiguity over which part of the organisation we are referring to.

# Chapter 1: Findings – high level outcomes of the business

**General criterion: The borders are secured and immigration is controlled for the benefit of the country**

## **Specific criteria**

**There are clear and realistic performance targets to drive improvement**

### Immigration Group

Immigration Group targets for the Wales and the South West region are set out in the region's business plan for 2009/10. These include targets for illegal working operations, and prosecutions and sanctions against (and the removal of) people committing immigration offences and failed asylum seekers.

The business plan clearly sets out the targets the region is expected to achieve. For example:

To undertake at least 1,524 removals, of which at least:

- *657 will be asylum cases;*
- *867 will be non-asylum cases; and*
- *29% will represent high-harm cases.*

UK Border Agency performance data produced in January 2010 shows that the region is on target to achieve its overall aim of 1,524 removals in 2009/10, with a year-to-date figure of 1,475 removals. Managers told us that, although the region was on course to achieve its overall removals target, it was unlikely to meet all the individual elements of the target (for example the 657 minimum number of asylum cases). This was in keeping with the overall UK Border Agency position. The Agency's performance data for January also shows that the region is not on course to meet the 29% target for high-harm cases – the year-to-date percentage in January was only 21%.

We found that staff were generally aware of the region's priorities and targets, and its performance against them. However, there was very limited understanding of the rationale behind targets or how they were set at national, regional or local levels. We found that staff were not involved or consulted in the setting of targets, and communication relating to how targets were arrived at was at best limited. We reported the same finding in our recent thematic inspection of asylum cases.

Staff questioned whether the targets were realistic and told us that there was often a lack of clarity over the different priorities of targets with the potential for conflict. This was caused by different areas of the business working towards different targets, with staff not necessarily understanding each other's targets, and how they could work together to achieve them.

In order to meet targets, there are various dependencies between teams. For example, the enforcement teams are reliant on cases of failed asylum seekers being referred to them from the asylum teams, and the asylum teams rely on the enforcement teams to carry out removals for them. Enforcement teams also rely on the intelligence team to provide them with up-to-date intelligence to help inform their operations.



We were told by staff and managers of conflicting priorities and difficulties in resourcing enforcement work effectively, because of the high level of unfilled vacancies endured by the region for some time. For example, some vacancies had remained unfilled for some considerable periods of time.

We were told that, on occasion, the limited resources could cause managers who are responsible for allocating resources to become protective of their own targets. Senior managers told us that asylum and enforcement teams were being encouraged to interact more with each other in order to improve their understanding of how they can work together to achieve the best results. For example, successfully removing a failed asylum seeker within a specified timescale counts towards the targets of both the asylum team and the enforcement team.

Limited resources were also said to be causing problems for the intelligence team. At the time of our inspection, there were three vacancies in the team – one each in Poole, Bristol and Cardiff. We were told that staff struggled to meet their targets in respect of the number of intelligence packages, leading to backlogs. This then caused problems with out-of-date intelligence, which had an impact on the success of some enforcement operations.

Senior managers told us that in an effort to improve clarity and joint working, managers from the enforcement and asylum teams were working together to produce a joint delivery plan for 2010/11.

### Recommendation 1:

The UK Border Agency should ensure that targets and priorities are made clear to all staff, and introduce working practices to minimise possible conflicts and maximise cross-functional working.

#### Border Force

Border Force targets are set out in the regional business plans covering the Southern and Central regions. There are targets in relation to maximum expected queuing times for passengers, meeting flights, checking documents, and the time taken to remove passengers refused entry to the country.

The targets are as follows:

- *95% of non-European Economic Area (EEA) passengers to wait no longer than 45 minutes;*
- *95% of EEA passengers to wait no longer than 25 minutes;*
- *to meet 100% of arriving flights and check and scan 100% of passengers' passports/identity cards;*
- *to remove 95% of port Suspensive Appeal refusals within 90 days; and*
- *to remove 95% of port Non-Suspensive Appeal refusals within seven days.*

We found a good general level of awareness of targets, although there was mixed evidence of staff knowledge of specific targets. We were encouraged to see that much emphasis was placed on the need to process queues of passengers as quickly as possible, keeping waiting times to a minimum, while at the same time preventing passengers from entering the country if they have no right to do so.

We observed staff meeting flights and ferries at Bristol and Cardiff airports and Plymouth seaport. It was apparent that customer service was important to staff and that they took pride in clearing the queues quickly, while ensuring that appropriate checks were made to safeguard the border.

Managers were clearly focused on resourcing the primary checkpoint control in order to minimise customer waiting times, helping out themselves during busy periods. In addition, legacy customs staff had been trained to operate the primary checkpoint control to help reduce queues during busy periods. This was a good example of integration, with the legacy organisations of the UK Border Agency working well together and allowing more flexible use of resources.

The UK Border Agency has implemented service-level agreements with port operators, and these were in place at Cardiff, Bristol and Plymouth. Stakeholders commented favourably on the Agency's focus on queue times and noted that improvements had been made as a result.

Overall targets were felt to be realistic; we were told that it was rare for queuing targets to be missed at Cardiff and Bristol airports. This was supported by UK Border Agency performance data. However, staff at Plymouth seaport have particular issues about meeting the target of clearing 95% of passengers within 25 minutes between May and September. This is partly due to logistics and the layout of the port itself, and the number of available lanes and booths.

We were pleased to see a good example of joint working: managers have agreed with the ferry operator that they will clear the Roscoff and Santander ferries in 60 and 90 minutes respectively. We were provided with performance data showing that those targets are largely being met. The ferry operator confirmed to us that there have been significant improvements in queuing times at Plymouth, but ideally it would like to agree clear key performance indicators.

Managers and staff were clearly committed to achieving queuing targets. However, we noted some concern among staff that care should be taken to ensure that this is not at the expense of border security. Staff felt that the UK Border Agency's introduction of a system of checking and scanning 100% of arriving passengers' passports could shift the focus to quantity rather than quality.

### **There is effective joint working with delivery partners and stakeholders including enforcement and security agencies; carriers; local authorities; employers and educational establishments**

#### **Immigration Group**

We received very positive feedback from some external stakeholders regarding improvements made since the regionalisation of the UK Border Agency. They liked the provision of a local point of contact rather than a national one, and told us that they felt the UK Border Agency was now much less London-centric. This was particularly evident with stakeholders based in Wales. However, other stakeholders said that they had noticed no improvements since regionalisation. A number of them, particularly those based outside Wales, said they had no strategic contact with the UK Border Agency and regionalisation had made no changes to day-to-day operational working. Others preferred the previous arrangements and particularly missed the contact with the national managers they used to deal with prior to regionalisation.

Several stakeholders and delivery partners based in the South West commented that they felt there was an over-emphasis on Wales in the region, and this made them feel somewhat excluded.

Overall, consultation of stakeholders was considered to have improved; however, stakeholders generally felt that there was still a need for further improvement. UK Border Agency managers and staff cited various stakeholder events they had held, including a business-planning consultation event in Wales. They acknowledged, however, that they could improve further, for example by holding a similar event in the South West, and by consulting stakeholders earlier in the business-planning process. We were told that plans were being made along these lines for 2010/11.

This would clearly be welcomed by some stakeholders, who commented that consultation is not currently a two-way process; it tends to consist of the UK Border Agency informing them of developments. In addition, a need for engagement of a more strategic nature was identified by some stakeholders.

There was clear evidence of the UK Border Agency working effectively with delivery partners and stakeholders locally at an operational level. Examples included enforcement teams liaising with the local police regarding operations and custody requirements. Although there were some good local arrangements in place, some enforcement stakeholders commented that they felt there was a need for engagement at more senior levels and of a more strategic nature.

It was also mentioned that stakeholders would benefit from more information about the UK Border Agency and its regional structures, together with details of roles and responsibilities, and formal points of contact. Staff and stakeholders also told us that greater formalisation of these partnerships, with agreed Service Level Agreements and/or Memoranda of Understanding, would help effect further improvements.

### Border Force

We found clear evidence of effective local joint working with stakeholders and delivery partners on an operational level, at Cardiff and Bristol airports and at Plymouth and Holyhead seaports.

Stakeholders gave very positive feedback regarding local arrangements, often citing specific members of staff as being responsible for making things work so well. While this reflects well on those staff members, it highlights a potential dependency on individual personalities rather than on effective systems. The stakeholders we spoke to also identified this potential dependence on individuals.

Stakeholders also commented on the need for greater engagement at a more senior level and of a more strategic nature. They also said that they would benefit from being provided with further details of the structure and associated roles and responsibilities of the UK Border Agency and its regions.

The result of our staff survey highlighted that 42% of respondents from Immigration Group and Border Force either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that *UKBA in this region works well with its stakeholders*.

### Recommendation 2:

The UK Border Agency should develop regional stakeholder engagement plans, to ensure effective engagement with stakeholders at both strategic and operational levels.

## **Technology is utilised effectively to increase security and customer service**

### **Immigration Group**

We received general feedback from staff and managers regarding their frustration caused by the slow and unreliable IT systems they require to use on a daily basis. This was compounded by the number of different systems staff need to use, which, are not compatible with each other and do not share information.

We were told that systems are unreliable, frequently crash, and are often unavailable to staff for hours or even days at a time. This has caused staff to become demoralised and has impacted on how efficiently and effectively they can perform their jobs. At the time of our inspection, the UK Border Agency was developing a new integrated IT system, but it is unclear to us and to staff when this will be rolled out.

This, along with other examples we found, was symptomatic of the UK Border Agency's failure to supply staff with adequate tools and technology to enable them to perform their jobs as effectively as possible. A specific example we encountered was the lack of a fingerprint scanner in Bristol.

Enforcement teams use fingerprint scanners to check for matches of the fingerprints of asylum applicants or people they encounter on illegal working operations against international databases, for example to see if the person has claimed asylum previously or is already known to the UK Border Agency.

A significant number of staff spread across the different roles and grades raised concerns about the problems that were caused when the fingerprint scanner that used to be located in the Bristol enforcement office was moved to the Cardiff office in early 2009. The scanner was moved to Cardiff for valid reasons when the production of application registration cards moved to Cardiff. Leaving the scanner in Bristol would have caused inconvenience to customers, significant numbers of whom would have had to travel from Wales to Bristol, and associated increased travel costs for the UK Border Agency.

However, we were concerned about the increased time people are detained in custody while awaiting scan results. Enforcement staff told us that they have to detain asylum applicants until they have checked for any matches with the applicant's fingerprints on an international database.

This is unfair to the people being detained, frustrates police custody sergeants, and incurs significant extra costs in the region. Detention space is limited and expensive, with rates varying from £110 to £463 per night, depending on the area. We find it unacceptable that people should be detained for any longer than necessary, simply because the UK Border Agency has failed to provide a scanner.

As the fingerprint scanner is in Cardiff, staff have to drive fingerprints from Bristol to Cardiff to have them checked. This causes a drain on staff time and increases costs.

Staff and managers in the Bristol enforcement office submitted a request and a business case to senior managers in the region in June 2009 for an additional scanner to be purchased and located in Bristol. This request was made on the basis that it would greatly increase efficiency, and the initial expenditure would quickly be offset by a reduction in costs, particularly detention costs. We were provided with evidence of correspondence between the regional and central finance teams giving further details of costs and projected savings.

At the time of our inspection, staff were frustrated that they had not been kept informed of developments and were not aware how far their request had progressed.

We found that there were several unexplained delays in the correspondence, and do not consider that this matter has been progressed as proactively as it should have been. We spoke to several different senior managers in the region to try to find out the present position with regard to procuring an additional scanner, and were concerned that none of them were sure about the current situation or could give us a satisfactory explanation for the delays involved.

When we were on site in January 2010, this situation had not yet been resolved, despite the initial business case being submitted several months earlier. However, we were told that the central finance team had recently been made aware that the UK Border Agency was in the process of purchasing new mobile scanners, which may alleviate the problems in Bristol. An update was issued to staff on this basis at the end of our inspection; however, it was not clear whether these scanners would resolve the problem in Bristol or when they would be rolled out.

In summary, this example illustrates a failure on behalf of the UK Border Agency to maximise its use of technology to save staff time, effort and costs.

### Border Force

We found that facial recognition gates are in operation at both Bristol and Cardiff airports. These allow EU nationals over the age of 18 who have microchip passports to enter the country without having to see an immigration officer. Generally, feedback from customers using the gates has been favourable. However, many of the passengers using Bristol and Cardiff airports are holidaying families, who are unable to use the gates as children are not allowed to use them and families cannot be split when going through border control.

**Customer survey**

- We carried out a brief survey of arriving passengers at Bristol and Cardiff airports.
- The survey was voluntary and anonymous, and took place over two days in November 2009 at each airport.
- We received 37 responses: 23 at Bristol and 14 at Cardiff.
- The survey asked questions on:
  - > timeliness;
  - > courtesy;
  - > staff answering questions; and
  - > privacy.
- The survey provided customers with the opportunity to make comments. Comments made about the gates were as follows:
  - > Bristol airport: three customers commented that the gates ‘worked well’ or ‘were okay’.
  - > Cardiff airport: one customer commented that ‘the gates did not work but the service had been efficient and quick’.

On the whole, staff liked the gates, although some expressed concern about the potential for lost opportunities to gain valuable intelligence from passengers because of the lack of personal interaction with immigration officers.

The main criticism of the gates from staff and managers was how resource intensive they are. We observed this to be the case and noted that effective operation of the gates is heavily dependent on there being someone to help passengers through the process – commonly referred to by the UK Border Agency as a ‘host’. The Border Force team has a Service Level Agreement with Bristol airport for the airport to provide ‘hosts’ for the gates at the main peak times. However, we were told that it is not always possible for the airport to provide ‘hosts’; this is clearly outside the control of the UK Border Agency but it can have a significant impact on the efficiency of the operation.

Cardiff airport does not supply ‘hosts’; although the operator supplying passenger presenters tries to help, effective operation of the gates requires both a ‘host’ and a presenter to manage the queues. In addition, an officer is required to oversee them, so operating the gates takes up a significant proportion of available resources. For example, when only two or three officers are on duty to clear a flight, it is not considered an effective use of resources to use one officer to staff the gates when perhaps extremely few passengers would use them.

We observed passengers using the gates and noted that some of them clearly had to be supported through the process. Passengers seemed to be happy to use them, however, and those who could not use them appeared disappointed. Business travellers at Bristol airport appeared to particularly appreciate using the gates, and during our observations of the primary checkpoint, a few passengers expressed disappointment when they found that the gates were not staffed and they had to queue to see an immigration officer.

The UK Border Agency pledged to roll out facial recognition gates at 10 UK airports ‘to make arrivals more efficient while making it more difficult for criminals and illegal migrants to get into the country’. We were concerned that the current inconsistent use of the gates is not delivering this intention.

### Recommendation 3:

The UK Border Agency should evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of facial recognition gates, adopt a consistent approach, and maximise benefits from using the gates.

Staff at all four Border Force locations we inspected told us that they did not have sufficient access to the technology they required to perform their jobs efficiently and effectively. Specific issues included:

- the lack of joined-up working between the many different systems staff have to use;
- very few staff having access to the UK passport-issuing database, which causes delays and poor customer service for passengers who have lost a passport or had one stolen;
- a lack of available computer terminals for staff at Bristol airport and Plymouth seaport;
- no or very limited scanning facilities available to staff;
- no access to the Immigration Group IT systems, including POISE at Holyhead seaport; and
- slow and unreliable laptops being used in Plymouth on the primary checkpoint – these were an additional factor that detracted from staff’s ability to meet queuing time targets for arriving passengers.

Staff were also critical about the reliability of information available to them on the UK Border Agency’s intranet, citing problems with duplication and information being out of date. This affected staff members’ confidence about whether they were accessing the latest information. Staff also commented on the time it took them to find information as it was not always easy to know where to look.

We observed the frustration experienced by staff due to the lack of access to IT systems. This was particularly evident at Bristol airport and Plymouth seaport, where there were clearly not enough computer terminals for staff and we saw staff having to physically share terminals. We also witnessed the inconvenience caused at Plymouth by the outdated and slow laptops used on the primary checkpoint. When compared with the networked computers in use at airports, these clearly increased the time taken to scan passports.

We were also concerned that staff at Holyhead seaport had no access whatsoever to Immigration Group IT systems and no networked computer available in the ferry terminal – this clearly impacted on their efficiency and effectiveness.

We reported a similar finding in the Independent Chief Inspector’s Annual Report published in December 2009 following our inspection of juxtaposed controls at Calais.

## Recommendation 4:

The UK Border Agency should provide staff with adequate tools to enable them to be as efficient and effective as possible in securing the border.

**General criterion: UKBA is compliant with equalities legislation and specific duties in relation to race and diversity**

### Specific criteria

**In delivering its services the UK Border Agency delivers policies and practices that ensure no unlawful and/or inappropriate discrimination in relation to gender, gender identity, ethnic or national origin, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or any other irrelevant factor**

#### Immigration Group and Border Force

It is mandatory for all UK Border Agency staff to complete equality and diversity training, usually delivered via e-learning. With very few exceptions, we found that staff had completed this training. Some staff we spoke to expressed concern as to the appropriateness of e-learning as a means of effective staff training, particularly on potentially sensitive issues such as equality and diversity. Those who had experienced the training in a classroom environment said that this was much more useful to them.

We observed staff from both Immigration Group and Border Force, including enforcement teams conducting illegal working operations in Bristol, Cardiff and the surrounding areas, and teams operating the primary checkpoints in Cardiff, Bristol and Plymouth. All staff were observed to act professionally, consistently and fairly, and we found no evidence to suggest that any discrimination was being employed.

We also sampled case files from Cardiff and Bristol airports and enforcement teams, and found that staff had used only evidence pertinent to the case in question in arriving at their decisions.

**General criterion: Reviewing and evaluating information so that improvement can be made**

### Specific criteria

**Comprehensive customer feedback is sought about the services they receive**

#### Border Force

We found no formal mechanism in place at Cardiff or Bristol airports or Plymouth seaport to obtain customer feedback. However, all ports kept an incident log and staff were encouraged to record details of any compliments or complaints received. It was not clear how this information was used; however, we were told that managers reviewed the logs regularly.

We noted posters and leaflets in all ports advising customers what to do if they wanted to make a complaint. We were told that managers would try to deal with any complaints informally in the first instance, and usually managed to defuse problems successfully at a local level. Managers told us that they do not tend to get many complaints but the most common cause of complaints is queuing times.



Port operators carried out regular passenger surveys and we were told that Cardiff airport had recently incorporated questions about the service provided by the UK Border Agency. Results of this were fed back to managers informally.

Our own survey, which was carried out with a small number of passengers at Bristol and Cardiff airports, indicated that passengers were generally happy with the levels of service provided.

### **General criterion: Corporate health – the UK Border Agency is a high performing, customer-focused workforce delivering its strategic objectives**

#### **Specific criteria**

##### **Resources are focused on priorities**

###### **Immigration Group**

Throughout our inspection we were informed by a number of staff and managers that resources in the region were significantly below the levels required to operate the business effectively.

The region had carried a large number of vacancies for a considerable period of time. For example, we were told that when the Regional Director took up post in July 2007 there were 237 staff and 80 vacancies. A period of recruitment moratorium and lengthy recruitment procedures had meant that the region could not fill its vacancies quickly. While we were on site, it proved difficult to obtain consistent figures about the numbers of vacancies, although some managers thought it ran to about 70. It has subsequently been confirmed that at the time of the inspection there were 357 funded posts, of which 18 were vacant.

Although the region was operating with these unfilled vacancies, it should be borne in mind that the overall staff headcount had increased. However, managers told us that they were operating with significantly fewer resources than they had had in the past and that this impacted on the amount of work their teams could undertake effectively.

In November 2009, a UK Border Agency decision was made to reduce the number of temporary agency staff employed in either non-income-generating or non-cost-reducing roles. Although 26 temporary agency staff remained in post as they were deemed to be in key operational areas, the region had to release 26 members of temporary agency staff with immediate effect. This clearly reduced still further the capacity of a region already carrying a significant number of vacancies.

A number of staff we spoke to gave us examples of the impact this initiative was having on their business area, including staff having to work outside their normal grade to carry out necessary administrative functions. Senior managers told us that they were concerned that although they had not 'felt the pain of it yet', the impact of this significant loss of resource would soon start to filter through. One senior manager told us that they had already noticed a negative impact on the region's production of emergency travel documents.

The regional business plan for 2009/10 clearly set out the priorities and targets for the region. Regular tasking and co-ordination meetings were held to decide on resource allocation, for example in enforcement. However, as we have already reported, although on the whole staff were aware of the region's priorities, they were not always clear about what they should be focusing on and why, or how that linked in with what other teams were doing. A greater understanding in this area would help facilitate improved cross-functional working.

There was also a perception among some staff and managers that priorities within the region frequently changed, and that there were 'knee-jerk reactions' without full and measured consideration. We were told that this caused confusion for staff in terms of them understanding their primary areas of focus.

Senior managers told us that resource implications were considered regularly, and that they were thinking about introducing productivity models. We were told that resources were redeployed to provide cover for under-resourced areas if necessary. However, it was acknowledged that action relating to resourcing was often taken in reaction to specific incidents, requiring 'all hands to the pump'. We have already reported how ongoing staff shortages, for example in the intelligence team, have impacted on the effectiveness of the operation.

### Border Force

We found that managers at Bristol and Cardiff airports and Plymouth seaport all focused on their priority to meet 100% of flights and ferries, checking and scanning 100% of passports. They deployed their resources accordingly to ensure that the primary checkpoint was staffed as fully as possible.

We were told that covering all flights and keeping queues to a minimum, especially at peak times, was sometimes problematic. We observed Chief Immigration Officers assisting on the primary checkpoint themselves if the arrivals hall was busy.

Staff and managers told us that the initiative of training legacy customs staff in immigration legislation and policy so that they can assist on the primary checkpoint has helped enormously. However, we were told that this can cause tensions as some legacy customs staff feel that immigration work is taking priority over detection work, and staffing the primary checkpoint is impacting on their ability to meet detection targets.

As staffing the primary checkpoint is the main priority, no other work can be resourced at its expense. Staff were aware that other areas of their work were often not able to be resourced, for example covering the docks and smaller ports in the region for which they are responsible, or searching freight at Plymouth in the busy summer months.

**The UK Border Agency is operating efficiently and effectively, securing its borders and protecting the public against risks and threats**

## Immigration Group

We were interested to note that a number of staff across different roles and grades, interviewed either individually or in focus groups, commented that they thought the region was 'effective in spite of itself'. A significant amount of credit for this effectiveness was attributed to staff. We observed that staff appeared to be very committed to doing a good job.

Generally, managers and staff were of the opinion that the region was working effectively, pointing out that overall targets were being met. We have already reported that the overall target for removals was being met, although individual elements of this target were not all being met.

However, areas for improvement were identified, including devolving greater responsibility from the centre to the region, where local solutions rather than national ones would be faster and less expensive. Examples of this included procurement and property repairs. Although the UK Border Agency has adopted centralised procurement procedures, we could see some merit in this suggestion.

Increased synergy across different parts of the business was also considered necessary in order to facilitate better cross-functional working and minimise the scope for working in silos. We received some positive feedback from staff regarding increased effectiveness following the co-location of different parts of the business in Cardiff.

We have already reported on the UK Border Agency's decision to reduce the number of temporary agency staff in non-income-generating or non-cost-reducing roles, which resulted in the loss of 26 staff from the region in November 2009.

We were told that this has had a significant impact on staff morale, and on the efficiency of the organisation. For example, the loss of a number of staff in administrative roles has meant that more junior administrative functions have had to be picked up by more senior staff working outside their grade, which has had an impact on their ability to fulfil their normal duties. Examples of this included staff at Higher Executive Officer (HEO) level sorting post and photocopying case files, to the detriment of their productivity. Staff and managers told us that there was a reliance on staff goodwill in taking on these additional duties and working longer hours.

We have already reported how senior managers expected to see the impact of the loss of resources on the region's performance start to filter through. We agree that this is highly likely and are concerned about the additional pressures being put on staff, the impact on their performance, and how long the region can sustain this way of working.

We were told that the loss of temporary agency staff had exacerbated already depleted resources, given the large number of vacancies the region had been carrying for a significant period of time. When we were on site, the region was part way through a large recruitment exercise, although this had been on hold since November 2009 pending the results of an inquiry into possible process errors. By the time we completed our on-site work towards the end of January 2010, we were told that the results of the inquiry were such that the recruitment exercise could now be resumed.

There was a common perception among staff and managers of a culture of micro-management, leading to inefficiencies in the region. Examples of this which had exacerbated the situation included the recent introduction of increased authority levels, whereby all travel and procurement has to be authorised at Grade 7 level, and all overtime authorised by a Grade 6 manager. This was a result of a central directive aimed at saving costs, but had had a demoralising effect on staff who questioned whether it was an efficient use of senior managers' time.

We have previously reported on the difficulties caused by the lack of a fingerprint scanner at the Bristol enforcement office, and the resulting inefficiencies caused by increased detention costs and the drain on staff time spent driving fingerprints to Cardiff. However, we were also told of problems caused by a lack of access to technology for staff based at the Mostyn office. As they are unable to access POISE locally, staff have to drive to an office with IT access each week. Not only is this an inefficient use of resources, it causes delays in updating immigration records on the IT system, which could have potentially serious consequences.

### Recommendation 5:

The UK Border Agency should review resourcing requirements and ensure that resources match the needs of the business.

#### Border Force

At the time of our inspection, resources at Holyhead seaport were restricted to a team of legacy customs staff, sufficient to staff only five eight-hour shifts out of a possible 21 shifts each week. Their main focus was legacy customs work; however, approximately half of them had also received some immigration training so that they could deal with any immigration offenders they encountered. While staff were happy to assist in immigration cases, we were told that there had been problems obtaining sufficient mentoring support for them to help build their experience and knowledge.

Staff from the North West Ports team and the Mostyn enforcement office also visit Holyhead seaport periodically to carry out operations. There is no permanent immigration presence based at Holyhead: the only presence on a 24 hour basis is provided by Special Branch. Special Branch told us that it regularly encounters immigration offenders, especially in the evenings at weekends. It deals with them initially and then has to refer them to immigration staff at other ports. This is a significant drain on Special Branch's resources.

The situation at Holyhead is atypical because of the Common Travel Area (CTA) arrangements. The CTA comprises the:

- United Kingdom;
- Republic of Ireland;
- Channel Islands; and
- Isle of Man.

The CTA was recognised by statute under the Immigration Act 1971, and is based on the principle that once a person has been granted leave to enter in one part of the CTA, they will not normally require leave to enter another part of it while that leave is still valid and provided that they do not leave the CTA. This guidance is set out in Section 1(3) of the Immigration Act 1971.

Exceptions to this are set out in the Act and include, for example, persons subject to a deportation order.

For passengers arriving from the Republic of Ireland, exceptions also apply under the Immigration (Control of Entry through Republic of Ireland) Order 1972, for example visa nationals who have no valid visa for entry to the UK.

In effect, this means that there are currently no fixed immigration controls at Holyhead, and the UK Border Agency cannot routinely ask for identification from passengers arriving by sea on ferries from the Republic of Ireland.

However, Holyhead seaport is recognised by UK Border Agency managers and staff as a high-risk area for immigration offenders entering the country illegally, as all passengers come from the CTA. This is borne out by the number of immigration offenders detected, for example, Special Branch encountered 26 immigration offenders in October 2009 alone. In addition, when the UK Border Agency does carry out immigration operations, the results suggest that deploying increased resources at the port would help tighten the security of the border.

We are concerned that the current level of immigration work undertaken is not balanced against the known high risk in Holyhead, and this brings into question the current level of security of the border. We were pleased to note, however, when we brought this to the attention of a senior manager in Border Force, that the UK Border Agency has now deployed additional temporary resources in order to evaluate the immigration risk at Holyhead. We were also told that a bid would be made as part of the region's 2010/11 business plan to increase resources permanently at Holyhead in order to improve the UK Border Agency's ability to meet this risk. We have subsequently been informed that the bid has been approved and a recruitment process has started. In the meantime, mobile team deployments are continuing and Immigration Group is providing a member of staff temporarily to assist with training. The UK Border Agency had plans to participate in a three-month-long multi-agency operation from January 2010 in order to assess the level of risk in the CTA ports.

More generally within Border Force, we were told that inefficiencies were caused by a lack of synergy in the legacy organisations' terms and conditions, pending the completion of the integration process. An example of this was managers not being able to roster staff to work split shifts, despite operational needs caused by flight and ferry arrival times. We were also told that this was compounded by inefficiencies linked to voluntary overtime for staff. For example, even if staff are required to work only an hour to help clear a ferry, they automatically receive extra pay for four hours on top of their shift payments, as this is the minimum that can be paid through the UK Border Agency's pay system. Clearly, rationalising the legacy organisations' terms and conditions will enable the UK Border Agency to minimise these inefficiencies which were of some concern to us.

We considered how effectively Immigration Group and Border Force staff and managers liaise with each other as part of this inspection. We found only limited evidence of effective liaison between the two areas of the business. However, there appeared to be a willingness to liaise with each other and an acknowledgement that this is an area that could be improved.

**Recommendation 6:**

The UK Border Agency should carry out a comprehensive assessment of risk at Holyhead seaport, and ensure that adequate resources are deployed to fully meet that risk.

# Chapter 2: Findings – processes and procedures including quality of decision making and consistency of approach

## General criterion: UK Border Agency staff make lawful and reasonable decisions

### Specific criteria

#### Documentary and physical checks are carried out on people/goods/freight as designated

##### Border Force

It was clear from our observations of the primary checkpoint, and from interviews with managers and staff, that all flights and ferries are met at Cardiff and Bristol airports and Plymouth seaport. It was also clear that 100% of passports are checked and scanned by staff as required. Staff have been trained in how to detect fraudulent documents and we observed them doing this while they were checking them.

We have already reported in some detail on the unique situation at Holyhead; however, we share the concerns raised by staff that some of the smaller ports in the region are not staffed and there is a risk that potential immigration offenders are not being detected. We were told that the UK Border Agency had plans to participate in a three-month-long multi-agency operation from January 2010 in order to assess the level of risk in the Common Travel Area ports.

Concerns were also raised about freight searching at Plymouth seaport. Although we observed staff searching freight from a recently arrived ferry, we were told that resources do not always allow for freight to be searched. We were told that this was a particular issue during the peak summer months, when very little if any freight searching was carried out by staff, although the situation was alleviated somewhat by the local police helping to search freight.

Managers told us that the searching of freight was led by intelligence, but local staff and managers voiced concerns that the low number of searches they were carrying out was the reason why they were not getting results. This brings into question how UK Border Agency managers are satisfying themselves that they are able to meet the strategic objective of 'protecting the border and UK national interests'. In our view, this has potential repercussions for the security of the border.

## General criterion: Decisions made are fair and consistent

### Specific criteria

#### Decisions are consistent, appropriate and proportionate

##### Immigration Group

We sampled a total of 84 cases where enforcement papers had been served on immigration offenders. These were split between the Bristol and Cardiff enforcement offices, with 37 from Bristol and 47 from Cardiff. We had originally asked for 50 files from each office but were concerned to find that 16 of the files requested could not be provided by the UK Border Agency when we asked for them. We were told that this was due to problems encountered in retrieving these files from the UK Border Agency's off-site storage facility. We consider this to be unacceptable file management.

In the sampled cases we considered both the timeliness of actions taken and the quality of the decisions made. We found no significant issues with regard to delays.

- The average time taken between encountering the immigration offender and successfully effecting their removal was one month.
- In 61% of the cases sampled, removals were effected within 0 to 10 days (51 immigration offenders).

In examining the quality of decision making on enforcement decisions, we observed that correct procedures had been used to reach fair and balanced decisions. We found good practice in all indicators of the quality of enforcement decisions. These included:

- rules;
- evidence;
- judgement;
- authorisation;
- appeal rights; and
- file administration.

However, the files did not all contain the full details needed to provide an audit trail regarding authorisation of decisions by a Chief Immigration Officer. There were also some cases where the correct information regarding appeal rights had not been documented.

In all the cases sampled, we found appropriate documentation of the consideration and justification of the immigration offender's detention or temporary release. This clearly demonstrates that the UK Border Agency is giving due consideration to detaining people and not abusing its powers.

Our findings in relation to the quality of removal decisions also demonstrated that, overall, correct procedures had been followed in order to arrive at fair and balanced decisions, although there were a few cases where it was not clear from the files whether due consideration had been given to the potential need to use escorts for unescorted removals.

File administration was reasonable overall, although there was some room for improvement as we found several examples of documents incorrectly left on file and copies of required forms that were not kept on file.

We found no significant variance between the performance of the Bristol and Cardiff enforcement teams. Nor did we find any serious problems that could not be rectified by the region tightening its quality control mechanisms.

### Border Force

We sampled a total of 100 cases where arriving passengers were refused leave to enter the United Kingdom. These were split equally, with 50 files each sampled from Bristol and Cardiff airports.

In the sampled cases we considered both the timeliness of actions taken and the quality of the decisions made. We found no issues with regard to delays.



- The average time taken between a passenger applying for leave to enter the country and their removal was four days.
- In 97% of the cases sampled, customers who were refused leave to enter the country were removed within 0 to 10 days.
- This demonstrates that the Agency is effecting appropriately swift removals at both Bristol and Cardiff airports, and meeting the targets set out in its customer strategy.

In examining the quality of decision making, we observed that correct procedures had been used to reach fair and balanced decisions. In all the cases sampled, we found that the decision was reasonable and correctly authorised.

However, we found a number of cases where decision notices made reference to incorrect paragraphs in the Immigration Rules, and incorrect information was provided regarding appeal rights. This could be rectified by tightening quality control measures before decision notices are served.

Overall, we found decisions either to detain passengers refused leave to enter or to grant temporary admission had been made appropriately. However, some files contained no audit trail showing that decisions had been authorised, no documentation of considerations regarding detention or temporary release, or nothing to indicate that detention reviews had been carried out. The necessary actions may well have been performed appropriately, but they had not been documented on file. This highlights a need for improvement in terms of quality control.

In relation to the quality of removal decisions, we found that correct procedures had been followed in order to arrive at fair and balanced decisions, and that all cases were removed in a timely fashion to appropriate destinations and documented correctly.

We found several examples of cases where required forms were not kept on file. Again, we found this to be unacceptable file management.

We found no significant variance between the performance of the Bristol and Cardiff airport teams. In addition, we did not identify any serious problems that could not be rectified by implementing tighter quality control mechanisms.

We identified an example of good practice at Cardiff airport, where a checklist form had been developed for use with each case file to remind staff what was required.

### **Managers regularly review the quality of decisions and consistency across the UK Border Agency**

#### **Immigration Group and Border Force**

On the whole, we found that the quality of decisions was checked by managers in enforcement teams and at ports. We witnessed senior managers observing staff operating the primary checkpoint, and were told by staff that this was a regular occurrence.

Interviews with staff and managers confirmed that management checking is carried out routinely; this was generally supported by the results of our file sampling. However, our sampling indicated that there was not always a clear audit trail showing that the checking procedures and reviews had been carried out consistently and correctly.

For example, we found cases where officers had signed authorisations on behalf of their managers. This in itself was not necessarily a problem if, for example, the cases had been referred to a manager and verbal authorisation had been given. However, the lack of evidence on file to confirm that the file had been referred to a senior officer left the officers and managers exposed, and gave us cause for concern.

Airport staff told us that there were times when there was no Chief Immigration Officer on duty to authorise decisions to refuse leave to enter the country. Procedures were in place whereby they could contact Chief Immigration Officers at other airports for authorisation but we were told that it was sometimes difficult to get through to the other airports, or that officers there were reluctant to take referrals. A practice had therefore evolved where one immigration officer would temporarily 'act up' as a Chief Immigration Officer solely for the purpose of authorising the refusal decision. This clearly is not acceptable and should cease as a practice immediately.

We found no evidence of a formal quality-checking mechanism to provide managers with assurance regarding levels of both quality and consistency of decision making and authorisation, enabling comparisons to be made between officers, managers and different teams and ports across the regional commands.

### **Recommendation 7:**

The UK Border Agency should review file management and introduce quality-checking processes to ensure consistency of decision making, and cease the practice of officers temporarily 'acting up' to authorise decisions.

# Chapter 3: Findings – impact on people subject to UK Border Agency services

**General criterion: UK Border Agency staff and staff of commercial partners are welcoming and engage positively with customers and other users**

## **Specific criteria**

**UKBA staff are professional, courteous, and respectful when dealing with customers irrespective of their status**

### **Immigration Group**

We observed staff in the Bristol and Cardiff enforcement teams conducting a variety of operations designed to identify people who have no current right to reside in the country, or those working in breach of immigration conditions. We also witnessed an exercise involving the detention of an asylum applicant at a reporting centre and arrangements for them to be handed into police custody so that they could be removed.

Staff were professional, polite and respectful in their dealings with customers, including immigration offenders, employers, the police and other colleagues. Staff took care to be informative, use authority appropriately, and cause a minimum of inconvenience to business operators and members of the public while they carried out a difficult job in potentially emotive circumstances.

Staff were compliant with health and safety regulations and dressed in appropriate protective clothing, maintaining a smart and professional appearance at all times.

### **Border Force**

We observed staff on a number of occasions operating the primary checkpoints at Bristol and Cardiff airports and Plymouth seaport.

Staff were professional, polite and respectful in their interactions with customers, stakeholders and service delivery partners. They were friendly and approachable and tried their best to help answer customers' questions. We observed some passengers initially reacting in an emotional manner to being questioned on often highly private matters. However, staff handled these situations well, using appropriate authority as well as empathy, successfully calming passengers down and defusing any potential difficulties.

Our customer survey provided the following comments from customers regarding the courtesy and helpfulness of staff:

- Bristol airport: 91% of customers who responded thought that staff were welcoming, and 96% thought that staff spoke to them in a respectful way (23 customers surveyed).
- Cardiff airport: 100% of customers who responded thought that staff were welcoming, and 100% thought that staff spoke to them in a respectful way (14 customers surveyed).

We observed a high level of customer service provided by staff from both Immigration Group and Border Force. However, staff told us that they had not received any formal customer service training.

We received positive feedback from a number of stakeholders on the helpfulness and professionalism of staff at the ports, with individual staff members' contributions being recognised.

Stakeholders commented favourably on the UK Border Agency uniforms and the smart appearance of staff. However, while we were on site, we noted that a significant number of staff were yet to receive their full updated uniforms following integration of the UK Border Agency and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). This was a source of great frustration to staff, some of whom were forced to wear a combination of the new and legacy uniforms. We were told that some staff had never received complete legacy uniforms, and as a result they were not confident that they would receive all the individual parts of the new uniform in the near future, particularly if they had any bespoke requirements. In addition, we were concerned to observe the wide variety of staff uniform items, as well as warrants with out-of-date logos and branding.

Given our findings, it was disappointing to note that not all front-line UK Border Agency staff were wearing the new uniforms.

### Recommendation 8:

The UK Border Agency should ensure that all front-line staff are provided with and wear the new Agency uniform.

### **UK Border Agency staff can identify and sensitively support vulnerable and distressed customers especially children**

#### Immigration Group and Border Force

All staff and managers told us that they had undertaken as a minimum the mandatory 'Keeping Children Safe' training through e-learning. A significant number of staff had also undertaken the more in-depth, two-day classroom-based training in this area, and staff considered this to have been very useful and informative. All staff had also completed the e-learning training on human trafficking.

Staff were clearly focused on their duty of care to vulnerable and distressed customers, and were aware of the procedures to follow and where they could turn for support.

We had no opportunity to observe this; however, we were provided with several recent examples where staff had dealt with vulnerable customers, including one example where they had worked with the police to arrange for a vulnerable female minor to be taken into protective custody to ensure her safety. Staff took particular care to ensure the safety of children travelling alone, and kept a log of all unaccompanied minors.

However, staff told us that not all legacy customs staff who were helping on the primary checkpoint had received the mandatory 'Keeping Children Safe' training. Managers confirmed that there was a cross-Border Force deadline for all staff to have received this training by the end of March 2010.

### Recommendation 9:

The UK Border Agency should confirm that all staff have received the mandatory 'Keeping Children Safe' training.

## General criterion: Facilities and services meet the needs of customers and are conducive to ensuring 'business' is progressed

### Border Force

We inspected the accommodation at Plymouth and Holyhead seaports, and at Cardiff and Bristol airports, and noted specific problems at several sites.

#### *Plymouth seaport*

Staff from Border Force and an enforcement team from Immigration Group are located in Ballard House in Plymouth, with limited additional accommodation made available for Border Force staff in the ferry port building, which is approximately five minutes' drive away. The UK Border Agency has acknowledged for some time that the accommodation is insufficient for its needs and has been trying to find alternative accommodation that best meets the needs of the business. We were provided with a copy of a report dated February 2007 in which Home Office health and safety officers documented that they found a number of serious breaches of health and safety regulations when they carried out an assessment of working conditions at Ballard House and the Plymouth ferry port building.

Our observations highlighted various problems, including:

- extremely cramped conditions with insufficient work stations, very limited storage space and inadequate access to IT systems in both buildings; and
- health and safety issues, for example staff having to get changed in a small room at the ferry port which is also used as a kitchen/rest area, as well as to house forgery detection equipment and to store protective clothing.

Privacy and confidentiality for staff were also affected by the lack of suitable accommodation. For example, we saw staff being forced to have meetings in the lift lobby, where they could be seen and overheard by passers-by. We almost had to hold a staff focus group in the lift lobby because of a lack of available space in the office; this would have been far from ideal. However, we were fortunate that a passer-by from another organisation with adjoining offices in Ballard House kindly offered us the use of one of their meeting rooms.

The accommodation in Plymouth is clearly inadequate and this has had a negative impact on staff morale, as well as adversely affecting the efficiency and effectiveness of the business. We were provided with evidence to show that several possible solutions had fallen through for reasons outside the control of the UK Border Agency.

The main criticism we heard from staff and managers either affected by or involved in this issue was about the length of time taken to resolve it. This was compounded by staff feeling that they are not kept informed of developments.

During the on-site phase of our inspection we raised the issue of accommodation with both of the Regional Directors with overall responsibility for staff based in Plymouth. They told us about their continuing efforts to source suitable alternative accommodation as well as about some temporary solutions being put in place to help ease the situation while a more permanent solution is found. These included making space available in other buildings locally, and arranging for staff to have increased access to IT systems by utilising legacy HMRC workstations.

While we accepted that efforts were being made to find a permanent solution to the accommodation issues in Plymouth, we were concerned that managers had allowed staff to continue working in conditions that they knew were unsatisfactory and breached health and safety regulations.

### Holyhead seaport

The Border Force team at Holyhead seaport is located in office accommodation on one of the railway station platforms. The team also has access to limited accommodation inside the ferry terminal building.

We found the office accommodation to be cramped, outdated, dirty and inaccessible for anyone with a disability. There was also limited access to computers, and no access to Immigration Group systems in the office nor to a networked computer system in the ferry terminal. This meant that staff were unable to carry out computer checks on passengers from the ferry terminal.

A significant number of staff told us that the location of the offices in Holyhead gave them cause for concern regarding their personal safety. We observed that, in order to get to and from the ferry port, they have two options, neither of which is ideal. They can walk through either:

- a poorly lit, unmonitored public area that could be hazardous, for example in the dark; or
- the railway station and ferry building, where there is a risk that they might encounter passengers they have just questioned or searched.

We observed a passenger who had been angry and upset about having his luggage searched later ask a member of Border Force staff for information on train times when they were en route to the office through the railway station. Fortunately the passenger had calmed down and there was no trouble, but staff told us that they do sometimes have difficulties with aggrieved passengers.

We noted a significant number of dead insects clustered in light fittings in the offices. Staff told us that this was a result of dead pigeons in the adjoining disused building, and that the situation worsened significantly in warmer months, when the number of insects multiplied and there was an unpleasant odour. We observed several dead pigeons lying on the ground in the adjoining building. There were clearly unacceptable health and safety implications for staff working in the building, and this had an understandable impact on their morale.

We brought our concerns about the poor standard of accommodation and working conditions at Holyhead to the Regional Director with overall responsibility for staff working there. We were advised that the UK Border Agency had asked the port operator to remedy the situation with the pigeons in October 2009, but clearly the problem was still ongoing when we were on site in late November 2009. The UK Border Agency also told us that the local council planned to refurbish the Holyhead buildings and they had discussed possible alternative accommodation solutions, but council plans were currently stalled pending a request for funding.

After we had highlighted the accommodation problems to the UK Border Agency, we were pleased to note that approval was given to spend £2,000 on minor refurbishments to the accommodation, in order to make at least some improvements pending a more permanent solution.

### Recommendation 10:

The UK Border Agency should act to ensure that staff at Plymouth and Holyhead seaports are provided with adequate, safe accommodation that complies with health and safety regulations.

#### Specific criteria

#### **Accommodation, whether interview rooms, waiting rooms etc, are welcoming and clean**

##### Border Force

The scope of our inspection did not include assessing the adequacy of accommodation for customers at Holyhead seaport, and we have already reported on the standard of accommodation for staff at the port.

We have also reported on the accommodation at Plymouth seaport as far as staff are concerned. The passenger areas, including the interview room, were clean and in a satisfactory condition, if a little outdated. We noted the presence of UK Border Agency posters and leaflets, and appropriate signage was in evidence.

We noted reasonably spacious, well presented accommodation at Cardiff airport, with a well signposted arrivals hall in which UK Border Agency posters and leaflets in both English and Welsh provided information to customers. There were two interview rooms available for passengers, both of which were clean and of a satisfactory standard. Accommodation for staff appeared well laid out and adequate.

Bristol airport accommodation for staff was cramped, with insufficient workstations for current staffing levels, resulting in a shortfall in access to IT systems for all staff. Managers had managed to negotiate with the port operator to provide access to an additional small office space. However, this was not ideal as it was located away from the main office and involved staff having to walk through an area often crowded with passengers who had just reclaimed their baggage.

There was a similar situation with the arrivals hall at Bristol, which is comparatively small given the numbers of passengers using it. The size of the arrivals hall is clearly outside the control of the UK Border Agency, but staff have implemented a queuing system using barriers to try to make best use of the available space. However, we were told by staff that customers sometimes complain about the queuing system, comparing it with those used in theme parks.

There is only one interview room at Bristol airport, and it is also used as a short-term holding facility to detain passengers who have been denied entry to the country. They may be detained there if they do not have a long wait for a plane to return them to their port of origin. However, if longer-term detention is required before they can be returned, they are held there only until they can be handed over to the police or to security providers, who detain them safely as required. We observed that the interview room was furnished to an appropriate standard.

We noted that the accommodation at Bristol was clean, with appropriate levels of signage and UK Border Agency posters and leaflets to provide passengers with relevant information.

We were told that the port operator plans to expand accommodation significantly at Bristol airport over the next few years, so managers and staff hope that they will be able to negotiate substantial improvements in their accommodation in the future.

### **The facilities afford customers privacy**

#### **Border Force**

Although the standard of the interview rooms at the ports was found to be adequate, their capacity is limited, particularly at Bristol airport where there is only one interview room. This means that passengers are often interviewed while standing at one of the desks on the primary checkpoint, or in public areas, if the interview rooms are already being used.

However, we were told that this did not usually cause any difficulties, and passengers did not complain about a lack of privacy. This was supported by passengers responding to our survey, and by our observations of the operation of the primary checkpoint. Staff took care to question passengers as discreetly as possible, and we saw passengers being questioned both at the control desks and in public areas without any problems.

Our customer survey provided the following comments from customers regarding the privacy they were afforded:

- Bristol airport: 100% of customers who responded thought that the level of privacy was 'appropriate' or 'very appropriate' (23 customers surveyed).
- Cardiff airport: 100% of customers who responded thought that the level of privacy was 'appropriate' or 'very appropriate' (14 customers surveyed).

### **The facilities are safe and secure with special care over vulnerable and distressed customers, especially children**

#### **Border Force**

We noted that interview rooms were equipped appropriately with panic buttons, and furniture was secured to the floor. While there were no specific facilities for vulnerable and distressed customers, particularly children, staff were aware of the need to take special care of these passengers and were confident in their ability to do so.



We were made aware of problems relating to detention facilities and arrangements at both Bristol and Cardiff airports. The UK Border Agency does not fund a full-time security presence to undertake detention duties, and as a result, the holding rooms at the airports cannot be used in the absence of guards. This means that passengers being detained must be held on the primary checkpoint, and are processed in view of other arriving passengers.

Not only is this unfair on the passengers being detained, as it could cause them potential embarrassment, it results in a drain on resources, as staff are required to sit with them and are therefore unable to work on the checkpoint.

We were also told that staff, in the absence of guards, have had to escort detained passengers to a plane in order for them to be removed from the country. Staff had not been trained to do this and it contravened health and safety requirements, with the potential for both staff and the people being removed to be hurt. Although this practice does not appear to happen more than occasionally, given the potential for serious consequences it should cease with immediate effect.

A pilot exercise had been in operation that provided guards from a security provider on a guaranteed two-hour call-out basis. This was a shared resource between Cardiff and Bristol airports and staff told us that it had been successful. While we were on site it was not clear whether the pilot would be extended. However, we were subsequently provided with evidence to show that funding had been secured to provide two guards on a guaranteed call-out basis at Cardiff and Bristol airports on a more permanent basis.

These new arrangements will not completely eradicate the problems with detention we identified at the airports, as staff will still be required to sit with detained passengers on the checkpoint while waiting for the guards to arrive. Although guards are available on a 24-hour basis, they are a limited resource and must be shared between the two airports. However, this should significantly improve matters for staff and passengers.

### **Recommendation 11:**

The UK Border Agency should review its detention procedures at ports to ensure that staff do not escort detained passengers unless they are also accompanied by trained guards.

# Chapter 4: Findings – management and leadership

## General criterion: Effective and motivating leadership

### Specific criteria

#### There is evidence of diligent business planning

##### Immigration Group and Border Force

We were provided with evidence of business plans for both Immigration Group and Border Force for 2009/10. Clearly, there is a business-planning process in place in the UK Border Agency, although managers acknowledged that this is continuing to evolve as the Agency develops and that the process could be improved.

Staff knowledge of and involvement in the business-planning process was varied. Some staff we spoke to were aware of plans and felt consulted, but others said that they were not aware of and had not been involved in the process.

We were provided with evidence of an event run by Immigration Group to involve staff in the latter stages of business planning for 2009/10. We were also made aware of ‘Pacesetter’ events run for Border Force staff to inform them of the vision and plans for the region.

This was supported by the results of our staff survey:

- 42% of respondents (from Immigration Group and Border Force combined) either ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that: *There is a clear business plan for my part of UKBA.*
- 43% of respondents (from Immigration Group and Border Force combined) either ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that: *My manager helps me to understand how I contribute to the region’s business plan.*

We have already reported that there were attempts to involve Immigration Group stakeholders in the business-planning process in 2009/10 in Wales. Managers told us that they planned to involve stakeholders – and also staff – in both Wales and the South West much earlier in the business-planning process in 2010/11.

#### Business risks are well managed

##### Immigration Group and Border Force

We noted that efforts had been made to embed the concept of risk management in the UK Border Agency. We found risk registers were in place for Immigration Group and Border Force commands, although we found only limited evidence of processes in place to ensure that the registers were reviewed regularly and actively.

In Immigration Group, each business area had appointed, or was in the process of appointing, a risk lead, and we found some evidence of staff being encouraged to report any risks they identified.

We found a more mixed picture in Border Force operations. Good practice was identified at Bristol airport, where individual members of staff and managers were given additional responsibilities linked to identified business risks; these were documented in their key work objectives. However, at other locations, some managers and staff told us that they had little knowledge of, or opportunity to provide input into, the risk register.

Our staff survey results showed that:

- 44% of all respondents said that they ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that: *I am encouraged by managers in my region to bring issues of risk to their attention.*

Overall, in Immigration Group and Border Force, we found limited evidence of mechanisms in place to ensure that risks were managed as effectively as possible. Examples of this included the following:

- Succession planning could be improved in Immigration Group, as the region carried a significant number of vacancies for a long period of time. We made a similar point in our recent asylum report.
- The Common Travel Area was identified as a big risk by staff at Cardiff airport as these members of staff also cover ferry ports, but the level of risk was not known accurately due to a lack of available intelligence.

### Recommendation 12:

The UK Border Agency should improve its risk management processes in order to provide assurance that risk is being managed effectively.

## There is evidence that the Agency is flexible and responsive to changing circumstances

### Change management is effective and leads to improvements in the quality of service

#### Immigration Group

In recent years, staff in the region have undergone considerable changes, for example the creation of the UK Border Agency and regionalisation. We obtained very mixed evidence regarding the Agency’s management of change and whether it was effective.

On a positive note, we were told of two examples of recent successful change initiatives – the opening of the Cardiff Public Enquiry Office in August 2009, and the relocation of the Swansea office. Although it was outside the scope of our inspection, we visited the Public Enquiry Office and noted that it appeared to be operating smoothly: the majority of booths were staffed and customers seemed satisfied with the service they were receiving.

Conversely, however, as already reported, the urgently required relocation of staff from both Immigration Group and Border Force in Plymouth had been an ongoing issue for a considerable period of time and had yet to be resolved.

At the time of our inspection, the UK Border Agency strategy to establish local immigration teams (LITs) in the regions in order to introduce closer working within communities was embryonic. The region's business plan for 2009/10 states that LITs had been set up in Cardiff and Bristol in December 2008. However, we found that in effect this had been a change in name only, and as yet no progress had been made to change the existing enforcement team structure. This caused confusion for staff and stakeholders, who told us that they were not sure what was happening with regard to LITs.

We were told that the main reasons for the lack of progress in implementing the new structure included delays and difficulties in recruiting a LIT manager for Bristol. Managers had been reluctant to design and establish a LIT in Bristol when a manager was not yet in post. A candidate was successfully recruited while we were on site, and was due to take up post in Bristol in March 2010.

The business plan for 2009/10 also makes reference to setting up a further LIT in Plymouth at the end of 2009. We were told that, due to a number of considerations, including a lack of funding, the region has changed its plans and will now operate two 'super' LIT teams, one in Cardiff and one in Bristol.

Many of the staff and managers we spoke to told us that change was not well managed in the region. We heard evidence that generally change was imposed on staff without consultation or explanation of the rationale, and often at short notice. Examples included the decision to terminate the contracts of temporary agency workers, to which we have already referred.

Implementation of large-scale changes such as regionalisation and the introduction of LITs was criticised by staff, mostly in terms of the need to improve communications, and particularly to provide sufficient explanation for and notice of forthcoming changes. Similar criticisms were made in respect of more local changes, for example when changes have been made to staff attending senior management team meetings, and when teams were moved around the office.

Although we found some evidence that change was communicated, a significant number of staff did not feel well informed.

### Border Force

There have been significant changes since the formation of the UK Border Agency and the integration of staff from several different legacy organisations. We obtained mixed evidence from the Border Force staff and managers we spoke to regarding the Agency's management of change and whether it was effective.

Overall, there was a perception among most staff we spoke to that change is not managed well; the major factors commented on were the lack of information, communication and consultation. Staff told us that they did not feel involved in the change management process, change was often imposed on them without any explanation of the reasons for the change, and their feedback was ignored. Examples given included the lack of information provided on the integration of immigration and customs functions.

The forthcoming rationalisation of the terms and conditions of the different legacy organisations was a major concern for staff and managers alike. Managers told us that they were frustrated at not being able to provide their staff with information on what can be an emotive and worrying matter.

On a more local level, staff and managers provided us with evidence of a flexible approach and acceptance of the need for change. For example, joint training on each other's duties for immigration and customs staff was observed to be working effectively, as legacy customs staff now help to operate the primary checkpoint in order to keep queues to a minimum.

Another example was the recent creation of a senior manager role covering both immigration and detection teams. This was a new post that managers and staff felt would help to integrate the teams and their work more quickly, and this approach had been well received.

The recent introduction of the facial recognition gates at Bristol and Cardiff airports was another example of the UK Border Agency introducing change. When we were on site, the initiative was in its infancy and the gates' impact was as yet unknown. However, it was clear from our observations and interviews that staff and managers had readily embraced the change and were doing their best to make it work.

### Recommendation 13:

The UK Border Agency should review its management of change and how change is communicated to staff.

### **Managers are confident and visible; they are engaged, motivated, clear about their responsibilities and committed to delivery**

#### Immigration Group

Although some staff made positive comments regarding management of the region, generally these staff tended to be at higher grades and with greater proximity to the Regional Board, which comprises staff at Grade 7 and above. Generally, line managers up to Senior Executive Officer (SEO) and Grade 7 levels were perceived positively, but there were more mixed views of the more senior managers.

We carried out many interviews and focus groups across the region, with staff at all levels and in different roles. We were concerned to note that 64% of the interviews and focus groups conducted within Immigration Group involved staff and managers raising issues and making negative comments about some of the senior managers in the region. These comments included managers' poor levels of visibility and engagement, and some staff perceptions of bullying.

In addition, there was a perception of some senior managers being unapproachable and sometimes not behaving in accordance with the Home Office values:

- *We deliver for the public.*
- *We are professional and innovative.*
- *We work openly and collaboratively.*
- *We treat everyone with respect.*

The other common issues raised concerned a lack of communication, consultation and engagement with staff.

We did not actually observe any examples of the issues raised, but the overwhelming number of staff who raised them, both individually and in focus groups, indicates a need to treat these issues seriously and gives us cause for concern.

We received some positive feedback on senior managers' visibility given the size of the region. However, there was a perceived lack of visibility of senior managers both within and outside the Cardiff regional headquarters. Staff recognised that some senior managers occasionally visited offices other than Cardiff, but said that this was often to attend meetings and that very little effort was made to engage with local staff.

### Border Force

Generally, operational line managers up to Her Majesty's Inspector and senior officer levels were perceived positively, although there were some exceptions. We received mixed messages regarding more senior managers. Some staff were happy with the visibility of managers at assistant director level and above, while others did not feel that senior managers were sufficiently visible.

We noted some concern about the recent restructuring of commands, which had led to managers working outside their legacy backgrounds and in areas of work with which they were unfamiliar, and in which they had yet to receive formal training. Staff were concerned that they were not receiving adequate levels of support, for example when referring cases to managers for authority to detain people refused leave to enter the country.

### Survey results for Immigration Group and Border Force

Staff from both Immigration Group and Border Force told us that they were not inspired by their senior managers. This was supported by the results of our staff survey, as well as by the results of the 2009 Home Office staff survey.

In our staff survey, 53% of all respondents 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' that: *Senior managers in my region inspire staff with a positive vision.*

The Home Office survey produced the following results for the same question:

- Immigration Group: 51%
- Border Force Central: 50%
- Border Force Southern: 54%.

The surveys also supported staff criticisms regarding the visibility of senior managers in both Immigration Group and Border Force.

In our staff survey, 49% of all respondents ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’ that: *Senior managers in my region are sufficiently visible.*

The Home Office survey produced the following results for the same question:

- Immigration Group: 47%
- Border Force Central: 51%
- Border Force Southern: 51%.

### Recommendation 14:

The UK Border Agency should address the concerns of staff regarding leadership and management in the region.

#### General criterion: There is clarity about an individual’s role and purpose

##### Specific criteria

**Staff receive appropriate good quality training, including diversity and equality, when it is needed to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to enable them to deliver services fairly to customers**

##### Immigration Group and Border Force

Generally, the evidence we received with regard to training was positive, although staff identified several areas for improvement.

There was strong evidence that staff and managers, with very few exceptions, had completed the mandatory equality and diversity training and information management training. Both of these courses were delivered through e-learning. A significant number of staff commented that they did not think this method of delivering training was effective, nor did they like receiving training through this medium. Common criticisms suggested that the training:

- did not really cover the issues in depth;
- encouraged a ‘tick box’ mentality; and
- allowed staff to pass courses without necessarily understanding the issues concerned.

Staff also complained that they were not given sufficient time out of their working day, or a quiet environment in which to complete the training.

We received very positive evidence about the quality of control and restraint training provided to enforcement teams, and training provided to asylum case owners. There were mixed messages from staff regarding the quality of the ‘Keeping Children Safe’ training they received. Generally, the initial level of training delivered by e-learning was not considered particularly useful, but the more in-depth, two-day classroom-based training received very favourable reviews.

We were told by a number of staff that they had not received specific training to help them carry out their roles and were relying solely on workplace ‘on-the-job’ training. We noted that there was a heavy reliance on mentoring, and a lack of access to role-specific training in some areas of the operation. Some staff also told us that they had not received any induction training until they had been in their jobs for quite some time.

An area of particular concern for a considerable number of staff and managers was the quality of training on the national Points Based System. We were told that the level of information provided was poor, as was the notice given of changes. Border Force staff told us that they had largely had to train themselves on this significant change to the immigration system. Staff at Bristol airport had organised local training on this subject, and this was very well received.

We observed that considerable effort had been made to train legacy customs staff on immigration duties so that they can operate the primary checkpoint. Reciprocal detection training was not as extensive or successful. We also noted that local implementation of cross-training was not always consistent. Some staff we spoke to were concerned that they were not being given the opportunity to practise their new skills. In order to maximise the potential of cross-training, it is important that staff should be able to put their training into practice, otherwise their knowledge will be lost.

### Recommendation 15:

The UK Border Agency should ensure that all staff have the training to equip them to carry out their roles efficiently and effectively.

### **Performance of all staff is reviewed regularly and improvement plans are in place for those identified as less effective**

#### Immigration Group and Border Force

We received mixed evidence regarding the operation of the UK Border Agency’s annual appraisal system in both Immigration Group and Border Force.

While staff on the whole confirmed that they had received formal appraisals, we were concerned to note that a significant number of staff had not yet had an appraisal opened or reviewed when we were on site, despite it being over halfway through the appraisal year. Some staff who had an appraisal opened had not yet received their key work objectives for the year, and had not had any interim reviews carried out.

We received feedback from managers that they found the employee and manager IT system (known as Adelphi) difficult to use, so they were not opening appraisals and uploading interim reviews online. We were concerned to note that this appeared to be accepted practice, including at senior management levels. Although some effort had previously been made to run reports to highlight any appraisals yet to be completed, these could not be relied on due to the failure to use the Adelphi system correctly and consistently. In Border Force, this issue was compounded by the fact that not all managers had access to the Adelphi system, particularly legacy customs managers.



We found no evidence of an effective monitoring system being operated by either Immigration Group or Border Force to ensure that performance is reviewed regularly and consistently.

### Recommendation 16:

The UK Border Agency should comply with the annual appraisal process and ensure that appraisals are completed on time and to defined standards.

### Staff feel empowered, valued and respected for their contributions

#### Immigration Group and Border Force

Generally, staff told us that they felt valued and respected by colleagues in their teams, and in most cases by their immediate line managers. We received positive evidence that some staff felt empowered and valued. We were told by staff at Bristol airport that colleagues were supportive and that they worked towards a common goal. We received similar feedback from other parts of the organisation.

However, we found widespread evidence of a perception among staff that they were not valued by more senior managers, or by the organisation itself. We were concerned that so many staff should feel this way, especially when one of the published Home Office values is ‘We treat everyone with respect’, and when some of the issues could be resolved by improving communication.

The results of our staff survey showed that only 27% of all respondents ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement: *I believe that the actions of senior managers in my region are consistent with UKBA’s values.*

This was clearly a cause of some frustration among a considerable number of staff. Examples of problems identified included staff feeling:

- isolated and forgotten by the regional headquarters, particularly those working in more remote parts of the region;
- that their efforts are not appreciated, and that they are not thanked for their contributions by senior managers;
- that favouritism exists, and that staff are treated unequally depending on which part of the region they work in – this view varied between teams, functions and geographical areas;
- concerned over their future pending the post-integration rationalisation of terms and conditions – there was a particular issue regarding the lack of meaningful communication about the UK Border Agency’s plans in this regard; and
- aggrieved about the poor conditions they have to work in, and the lack of progress in resolving longstanding accommodation issues.

## General criterion: Communication

### Specific criteria

#### Strategies and plans are communicated throughout the organisation and to stakeholders

##### Immigration Group and Border Force

We were presented with mixed evidence regarding the effectiveness of communication throughout Immigration Group and Border Force.

On the whole, stakeholders seemed reasonably happy with the level of communication from the UK Border Agency. However, a number of stakeholders commented that much of the communication they receive is of an operational nature and they would like to be provided with information of a more strategic nature, more often and at an earlier stage in the process.

An example given was the Immigration Group business-planning event held in Wales in 2009. Attendees stated that they would have preferred to be involved at a much earlier stage in the process so that they could have contributed more meaningfully. We have already reported that no similar event was held for stakeholders in the South West, and we received negative feedback about this lost opportunity.

Another example was mentioned by several police stakeholders who said that it would be more helpful to be informed earlier of changes in policy and strategy so that they could make timely plans to accommodate any such changes.

Much of the communication staff received was issued centrally by email and through the UK Border Agency's intranet. We were told that this could be problematic, as staff received so much information via email. The Agency therefore had no assurance that all staff had received, read and understood details of important changes.

Staff confirmed that, generally, there were mechanisms such as team meetings at a local level to provide them with information. There was a perception among Immigration Group staff that little information was cascaded from the Regional Management Board. Similar criticisms were made by Border Force staff.

We received some evidence of efforts being made to communicate with staff, including:

- details of staff events in both Immigration Group and Border Force;
- locally issued bulletins at Bristol and Cardiff airports; and
- a Border Force vision statement for Wales.

However, we found little evidence of an effective communications strategy within either Immigration Group or Border Force. We received significant criticism from staff at various levels and in various locations regarding the quality, regularity and effectiveness of the communication provided. Particular reference was made to the lack of communication regarding the integration of immigration and customs and rationalised terms and conditions.

Managers acknowledged that improvements were needed in this area. We were made aware of the delays and difficulties encountered in recruiting a communications manager within Immigration Group, although we were told that the post would be filled soon.

Figure 1: Perceptions of communication in our staff survey

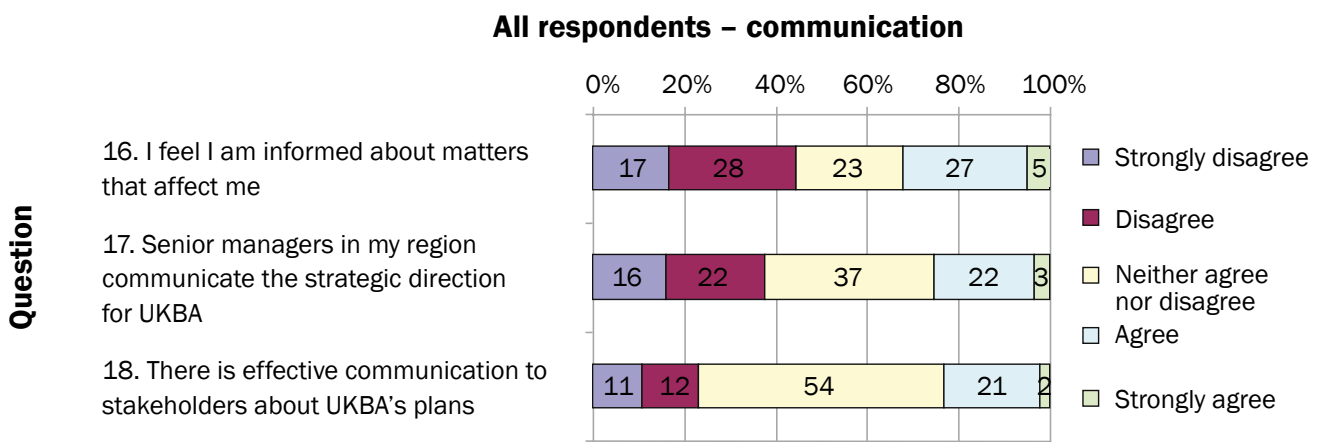


Figure 1 highlights the results of our staff survey with regard to how communication is perceived by staff from Immigration Group and Border Force. Key findings include the following:

- Some 45% of staff either ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ with the statement: *I feel I am informed about matters that affect me.*
- Only 25% of staff either ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ that: *Senior managers in my region communicate the strategic direction for UKBA.*
- Only 23% of staff either ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ that: *There is effective communication to stakeholders about UKBA’s plans.*

**Staff understand key objectives and values of the organisation**

**Immigration Group and Border Force**

Generally, we found that staff were aware of and understood the key objectives of the organisation, particularly with regard to how their specific roles contributed to achieving those objectives, for example in securing the border.

When questioned about Home Office values, most staff knew that the values existed and had some idea of their context, even if they were unable to give us any specific details about what the individual values were.

**Recommendation 17:**

The UK Border Agency should implement an effective communications strategy within the region.

# Annex A: Inspection framework and core inspection criteria

The following criteria used in this inspection were taken from the core inspection criteria. The full details of the core inspection criteria can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's website at [www.ociukba.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.ociukba.homeoffice.gov.uk)

## Chapter 1: High level outcomes of the business

### 1.1 General criterion: The borders are secured and immigration is controlled for the benefit of the country

#### Specific criteria

1.1(a): There are clear and realistic performance targets to drive improvement

1.1(c): There is effective joint working with delivery partners and stakeholders including enforcement and security agencies; carriers; local authorities; employers and educational establishments

1.1(g): Technology is utilised effectively to increase security and customer service

### 1.2 General criterion: The UK Border Agency is compliant with equalities legislation and specific duties in relation to race and diversity

#### Specific criteria

1.2(a): In delivering its services the UK Border Agency delivers policies and practices that ensure no unlawful and/or inappropriate discrimination in relation to gender, gender identity, ethnic or national origin, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or any other irrelevant factor

### 1.3 General criterion: Reviewing and evaluating information so that improvement can be made

#### Specific criteria

1.3(a): Comprehensive customer feedback is sought about the services they receive

### 1.4 General criterion: Corporate health – the UK Border Agency is a high performing, customer-focused workforce delivering its strategic objectives

#### Specific criteria

1.4(c): Resources are focused on priorities

1.4(d): The Agency is operating efficiently and effectively, securing its borders and protecting the public against risks and threats

## **Chapter 2: Processes and procedures including quality of decision making and consistency of approach**

### **2.2 General criterion: UK Border Agency staff make lawful and reasonable decisions**

#### **Specific criteria**

2.2(c): Documentary and physical checks are carried out on people/goods/freight as designated

### **2.4 General criterion: Decisions made are fair and consistent**

#### **Specific criteria**

2.4(d): Decisions are consistent, appropriate and proportionate

2.4(g): Managers regularly review the quality of decisions and consistency across the Agency

## **Chapter 3: Impact on people subject to UK Border Agency services**

### **3.1 General criterion: UKBA staff and staff of commercial partners are welcoming and engage positively with customers and other users**

#### **Specific criteria**

3.1(b): UKBA staff are professional, courteous, and respectful when dealing with customers irrespective of their status

3.1(c): UKBA staff can identify and sensitively support vulnerable and distressed customers especially children

### **3.2 General criterion: Facilities and services meet the needs of customers and are conducive to ensuring 'business' is progressed**

#### **Specific criteria**

3.2(a): Accommodation, whether interview rooms, waiting rooms etc, are welcoming and clean

3.2(b): The facilities afford customers privacy

3.2(d): The facilities are safe and secure with special care over vulnerable and distressed customers, especially children

## Chapter 4: Management and leadership

### 4.1 General criterion: Effective and motivating leadership

#### Specific criteria

- 4.1(a): There is evidence of diligent business planning
- 4.1(b): Business risks are well managed
- 4.1(c): There is evidence that the Agency is flexible and responsive to changing circumstances
- 4.1(d): Change management is effective and leads to improvements in the quality of service
- 4.1(f): Managers are confident and visible; they are engaged, motivated, clear about their responsibilities and committed to delivery

### 4.5 General criterion: There is clarity about an individual's role and purpose

#### Specific criteria

- 4.5(a): Staff receive appropriate good quality training, including diversity and equality, when it is needed to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to enable them to deliver services fairly to customers
- 4.5(c): Performance of all staff is reviewed regularly and improvement plans are in place for those identified as less effective
- 4.5(d): Staff feel empowered, valued and respected for their contributions

### 4.7 General criterion: Communication

#### Specific criteria

- 4.7(a): Strategies and plans are communicated throughout the organisation and to stakeholders
- 4.7(c): Staff understand key objectives and values of the organisation

# Annex B: Staff survey results

## Methodology

The questionnaire was distributed to staff electronically on 16 October 2009 (before the on-site phase of the inspection), to be completed and returned before the end of November 2009. The majority of questions were taken directly from the Home Office staff survey, as these have been rigorously tested.

Participation in the survey was anonymous and on a voluntary basis.

We received a reasonable response rate of approximately 45% (309 responses).<sup>4</sup>

The results of the survey were broken down as shown in the tables below.

## The results

### High level outcomes of the business

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No response given	Total
1. UKBA in this region works well with its delivery partners	24	34	133	97	16	5	309
2. UKBA in this region works well with its stakeholders	24	29	121	110	21	4	309
3. I understand how staff resources are allocated in my region	50	95	82	64	17	1	309
4. Staff resources are focused on the areas/issues of greatest risk	61	76	107	51	13	1	309
5. UKBA in this region is meeting its most important objectives	36	57	128	76	10	2	309
6. UKBA in this region is operating efficiently and effectively	50	79	100	72	6	2	309

<sup>4</sup> The response rate could not be calculated precisely as we relied on team leaders to cascade the survey because some email distribution lists had not been updated following integration of legacy customs and immigration functions. Where there were gaps, we estimated the response rate through communication with the UK Border Agency. As a result, we are confident that our estimate is a good approximation; however, the precise figure should be treated with caution.

### Effective leadership

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No response given	Total
7. There is a clear business plan for my part of UKBA	42	47	89	113	17	1	309
8. My manager helps me to understand how I contribute to the region's business plan	27	62	84	112	22	2	309
9. Overall, I have confidence in the decisions made by UKBA senior managers	72	83	88	59	6	1	309
10. Business risks are well managed in the region	45	55	146	52	8	3	309
11. I am encouraged by managers in my region to bring issues of risk to their attention	44	39	88	111	25	2	309
12. I feel that UKBA in this region as a whole is managed well	62	68	101	67	11	0	309
13. Senior managers in my region are sufficiently visible	60	92	66	65	24	2	309
14. I believe that the actions of senior managers in my region are consistent with UKBA's values	39	52	132	67	16	3	309
15. Senior managers in my region inspire staff with a positive vision	81	82	86	46	11	3	309

### Communication

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No response given	Total
16. I feel I am informed about matters that affect me	51	85	72	83	17	1	309
17. Senior managers in my region communicate the strategic direction for UKBA	49	67	114	68	10	1	309
18. There is effective communication to stakeholders about UKBA's plans	33	38	165	64	7	2	309



# Glossary and abbreviations

Term	Acronym	Description
'Acting up'		Temporarily assume a more senior grade.
Border and Immigration Agency	BIA	The name of the agency responsible for immigration functions prior to creation of the UK Border Agency.
Common Travel Area	CTA	Allows free movement between Britain, Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, subject to conditions set out in the Immigration Act 1971.
European Economic Area	EEA	The European Economic Area (EEA) was established on 1 January 1994 following an agreement between the member states of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the European Community, later the European Union (EU). Specifically, it allows Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway to participate in the EU's single market without a conventional EU membership. In exchange, they are obliged to adopt all EU legislation related to the single market, except those pieces of legislation that relate to agriculture and fisheries.
Higher Executive Officer	HEO	A management grade. Equivalent grades exist within the UK Border Agency, including Higher Officer and Chief Immigration Officer.
Integration		Term used to describe the process of integrating immigration and customs functions within the UK Border Agency.
Legacy customs functions		Term used to describe the customs detection functions undertaken by the UK Border Agency since integration.
Legacy immigration functions		Term used to describe the immigration functions undertaken by the UK Border Agency since integration.
Local immigration team	LIT	A LIT is a local team undertaking as many functions as practicable at a local level in a defined area within a region. LITs will build on the work carried out by the best local enforcement offices but will have a wider remit to encompass community engagement beyond enforcement. They will undertake key enforcement roles in their locality.
Non-Suspensive Appeal	NSA	The term used to describe the policy of certifying a claim as clearly unfounded. A decision to certify means that the UK Border Agency can remove the applicant, who can then appeal only from outside the UK, and therefore the appeal does not 'suspend' removal.
POISE		The IT system/platform used by Immigration Group
Primary checkpoint		An initial border control point combining both customs and immigration functions.
The region	WSW	Wales and the South West
Regionalisation		The creation of six UK Border Agency immigration regions.
Senior Executive Officer	SEO	A management grade. Equivalent grades exist within the UK Border Agency, including Senior Officer and Her Majesty's Inspector.
Suspensive Appeal		An appeal exercised within the UK where the appellant has the right to remain in the UK until the appeals process has been concluded.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Description</b>
United Kingdom Border Agency	UKBA	The agency of the Home Office responsible for border control, enforcing immigration and customs regulations. It also considers applications for permission to enter and stay in the UK, including nationality and asylum applications.
United Kingdom Border Force		The directorate within the UK Border Agency that is responsible for front-line operations.



