



UK Border

**Independent Chief
Inspector of the
UK Border Agency**
and Independent Monitor for
Entry Clearance Refusals
without the right of appeal

Annual Report for 2009-10

Independent Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency

Annual Report 2009 – 2010

Independent Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency, and Independent Monitor for Entry Clearance Refusals without the right of appeal, annual report for the period October 2009 to September 2010

Presented to parliament pursuant to Section 50(2) of the UK Borders Act 2007 and Section 23 (4) of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

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ISBN: 978-1-84987-366-6

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Our Purpose

We ensure independent scrutiny of the UK Border Agency, providing confidence and assurance as to its effectiveness and efficiency.

Our Vision

That the UK Border Agency delivers fair, consistent and respectful services, acting as a catalyst for improvement.

Foreword from John Vine CBE QPM



Introduction

This has been an exciting year in which the Inspectorate has come of age. It is the first year in which I have completed a full, formal programme of inspection work. It therefore gives me great pleasure to present this, my second annual

report as the Independent Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency. I am also reporting in my capacity as the Independent Monitor for Entry Clearance Refusals without the Right of Appeal.

The UK Border Agency is a complex organisation dealing with often difficult and highly emotive cases. Based at a large number of locations overseas, at the border and across the UK, each year it deals with 200 million travellers and 3 million applicants, enforcing the law on fraud, smuggling and immigration crime.

My role as Independent Chief Inspector is to ensure independent scrutiny of the work of the UK Border Agency, providing confidence and assurances as to its efficiency and effectiveness. My programme of inspections have been designed to help ensure this by providing the public with a comprehensive, assessment of the Agency's work, both in the UK and overseas.

To carry out my functions in the United Kingdom, I typically examine the Agency at work in a geographical region, including its activities at an airport or seaport, casework and enforcement activity. I also inspect the Agency's work thematically to investigate specific topics where I believe a particular focus is required in the public interest – for example, complaints-handling or family removals. My third programme of inspections examines the work of the Agency overseas, including its entry clearance procedures. All these programmes, at home and overseas, will include unannounced inspections which, although only a small part of my overall work, I believe are important to ensure public confidence.

Country of Origin Information reports are used by Agency staff and legal advisers in assessing asylum claims and appeals, and are an essential

part of the asylum system. I therefore consider it is extremely important that these reports are as up to date and accurate as possible, and avoid any bias. The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) assesses country of origin documents produced by the UK Border Agency. I am grateful to Dr Khalid Koser and his colleagues for undertaking this work on my behalf.

“Those in contact with the Agency should expect and receive good quality service and be treated with respect, irrespective of their status.”

My Work in 2009-10

Between October 2009 and September 2010, my reports have made 93 recommendations. The UK Border Agency has accepted the vast majority of my recommendations which I would like to see implemented in a timely fashion. These reports and their recommendations, together with the Agency's responses, are available on my website.¹

Organisationally, I have found an openness to our inspections and a willingness from the Agency to improve. I have been grateful for the level of cooperation I have received from Lin Homer, the Chief Executive of the Agency, and her team. Having established a transparent approach to inspections, I have been consistently impressed by the candour and commitment of the Agency's front line staff to contribute to our work. UK Border Agency staff have been very open with me and my inspection teams about what works well and where they perceive there to be room for improvement. A willingness to engage constructively with the Inspectorate has been a feature of our developing relationship, and it enables me to perform my role effectively. This is a good start and it needs to continue.

¹ www.independent.gov.uk/icinspector

Some of my reports have been challenging for the Agency. The concerns they raise will be further examined later in this foreword and in the main body of this report. These findings identify themes that are fundamental to my future work.

My report on Asylum examined how well the UK Border Agency met its published targets, ensured quality of decision-making and provided information to applicants. It exposed information, which stakeholders were previously unaware of, relating to how the Agency measures its performance, and it highlighted clear concerns about target-setting and its consequences. I was, however, pleased to find that the Agency had developed a quality assurance framework in conjunction with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

My report on Wales and the South West identified serious shortcomings in management and resourcing, in particular staffing allocated to ports and the consequences both for passengers and potentially for the security of the border.

My inspection of the removal of families from the UK identified the need for the UK Border Agency both to take a strategic approach to removals and to ensure that, throughout the process, they took account of the circumstances of individual families. It also highlighted poor record-keeping and questioned whether, in every case, the Agency had turned to detention only as a last resort. Individual regions had developed some innovative approaches to managing family cases however these had not yet been shared nationally.

Finally, my inspection of Pakistan settlement cases dealt with by the UK Visa Section exposed serious shortcomings in managing the transfer of decision-making from Islamabad to the UK. In addition, the poor overall quality of decision-making was exacerbated by the organisation's failure to carry out adequate checks before visas were issued or refused.

“I have found in the Agency an openness to our inspections and a willingness to improve.”

Ten UK Border Agency country of origin information reports were reviewed by the IAGCI, providing a strong quality assurance function for this important strand of work. The IAGCI, made

up of expert academics and representatives from agencies such as the UNHCR, the Immigration and Asylum Chamber and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development, operates as an important arm of my inspection programme and reports back to me. The results of each review are published on my website.

I have been delighted with the response to my reports I have received from a range of other organisations and individuals with an interest in the many facets of the Agency's work. Throughout the year they have brought me evidence to support my inspection planning – my Refugee and Asylum Forum has been an outstanding example of this – and I look forward to these relationships continuing.

Key Findings

I should like to highlight four major, recurring concerns from among my findings. These are:

- the need for the Agency to make good quality decisions;
- the need for Agency staff to maintain and have reliable access to accurate case information;
- the need to treat people fairly and consistently; and
- the need to manage change effectively – especially in terms of clearly communicating the Agency's strategy to the staff who must implement it.

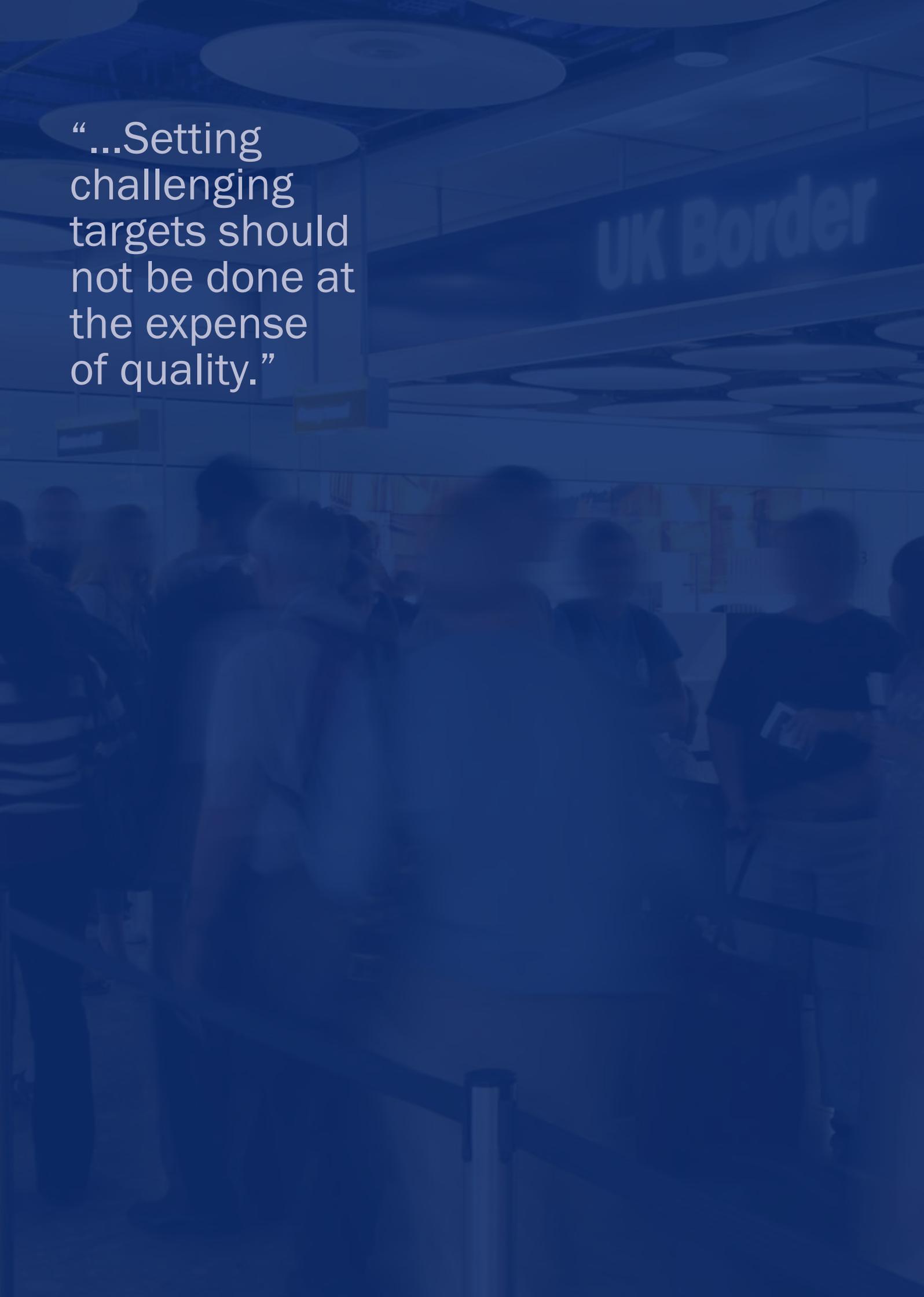
Achieving Consistently Good Quality Decision-making

During my inspections, I repeatedly found examples of Agency staff not following the Agency's own standards and guidance. I would like to see the Agency develop a “right first time” culture to decision-making.

To manage its performance, the Agency employs a range of objectives and targets, which necessarily differ across work areas. Although this is an entirely legitimate approach, setting challenging targets should not be done at the expense of quality. In some cases I found examples of targets which appear to have been handed down with little clear rationale behind their selection. I am surprised that staff are not more closely involved in deciding targets as this approach would strengthen their commitment to them. This issue was a constant thread throughout my international programme of inspections and was also highlighted in my examination of asylum. As part of my Asylum inspection, I was particularly

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UK Border

A blue-tinted photograph of a busy airport border control area. A queue of people is visible, and a sign above them reads "UK Border". The scene is captured from a slightly elevated angle, showing the overhead lighting and the flow of the queue.

concerned to find that the Agency's drive to achieve its targets had resulted in the creation of a large number of new asylum model cases that had not been concluded. This was acknowledged by the Agency in its decision not to apply its proposed target of concluding 90% of new asylum claims within six months.

In my Asylum inspection report recommendations, I urged the Agency to set realistic performance targets that encouraged good quality decision-making balanced against its commitment to make fast decisions. These decisions have a massive impact on people's lives; we must be confident that they are being made correctly and without delay.

Accurate Records and Information

In order to carry out effective inspections, I need up-to-date, accurate information from the UK Border Agency. I have encountered difficulties in obtaining complete, accurate information on time from the Agency. In a number of reports I have had to record that data necessary for my work has been supplied late, in different formats or not at all. This poor management of information raises questions about the Agency's effectiveness in managing information, particularly sensitive personal information concerning some of the most vulnerable people in the immigration system.

Most notably, in my scrutiny of family removals, of 100 files requested at random, 33 were not released to the inspection team. This was because they were 'live' cases (still being actively worked on) or they were requested from the Agency's file management contractor but were either not received or could not be provided within the inspection's timeframe.

Ensuring the basics are correct is vitally important if the Agency is to safeguard itself against unnecessary challenge and possible legal claim (with potential consequences for the public purse). In both the Asylum and the Handling of Complaints and MPs' Correspondence reports, I found that inconsistent record-keeping of key events made it difficult for me to assess properly whether mandatory requirements had been met or not.

In light of these findings, I recommended in both reports that the UK Border Agency reviews and improves its processes for collecting, storing, analysing and publishing information.

Treating People Fairly and Consistently

One of my principal responsibilities is to consider and make recommendations about consistency of approach. As I have found examples of inconsistency across all areas of the Agency's work that I have inspected, I strongly recommend that it takes active steps to ensure that it applies the law and immigration rules fairly and consistently in all its activities.

I welcome the principles underlying the Agency's 'Customer Strategy', which was published in 2008. However, I am concerned that the understanding of this strategy, and their obligations under it, by the Agency's staff is at best patchy. I have seen an example where failing to take individual needs into account caused the unnecessarily protracted detention of people seeking to enter the UK while checks have been made. I also reported on delays in the administrative review of refusal decisions in visa cases, where periods of time between consideration and result were far too long and exceeded the timescale set by the Agency itself. Those in contact with the Agency should expect and receive a good quality of service and be treated with respect, irrespective of their status.

“I have found examples of inconsistency across all areas of the UK Border Agency's work, I strongly recommend that it takes active steps to ensure that it applies the law and immigration rules fairly and consistently in all its activities.”

Feedback from those who are in contact with the Agency can be an invaluable source of information about how the organisation can improve. In my Asylum report, I recommended that case workers should meet and listen to asylum seekers as part of their training to give them a sense of the human aspects and practical problems they are dealing with. I believe such initiatives would help staff make better-informed decisions which materially affect the lives of vulnerable people. Meeting people who had gone through or were still going through the asylum system was invaluable, helping my team understand the human dimension of a process which can too easily be viewed purely in terms of timeliness.

I also looked at the Agency's handling of complaints and MPs' correspondence. An effective and efficient complaints procedure is essential for any large organisation if its customers are to have confidence in how it works. It can also provide an impetus for improving the service. While I recognise the marked progress that the Agency has already made in handling complaints of serious misconduct, I have urged the Agency to develop a much more dynamic approach to addressing the root cause of complaints.

Managing Change

The UK Border Agency has been subject to major structural change in recent years, including the amalgamation of the Border and Immigration Agency, Customs and UK Visas, the move to a regional structure in the UK and the establishment of the hub and spoke model overseas. The Agency's efficiency and effectiveness depend on how well it manages such changes. Change management within the Agency has been a recurring theme throughout my inspections.

The Agency is still coming together as one entity. Awareness among staff of the wider work of the organisation – across internal boundaries – seems to be limited. The Agency must ensure that its regional structure does not inadvertently increase its inconsistency of approach and lead to confusion.

Internal communication in a large organisation is always a challenge, but the integration of large groups of staff from different working cultures and traditions makes the obligation to communicate change clearly all the greater. Integrating customs and immigration functions at the border presents major challenges, not least in training staff in their new duties.

I have found several examples of poor change management, where staff have been left feeling they have not been consulted and uncertain of their role, or where it has caused problems for service users. The former was particularly evident in my inspection of the Wales and South West region, while my assessment of the UK Visa section identified real problems with the way the hub and spoke model was introduced in Pakistan, leading to a failure to deliver either what the organisation wanted or what service users expected.

“As a central part of my continuing programme of inspections, I shall be reviewing the Agency's progress against my recommendations.”

The Future

The coming year will be an important one for the Inspectorate.

My Inspection Programme will continue to be outcome-focused, targeted and proportionate. It will place strong emphasis on data transparency and accountability whilst continuing to place a premium on the strength of the evidence I collect. To achieve this I am reviewing my inspection criteria to take account of the experience of the past two years.

My inspection reports continue to make recommendations that enable the UK Border Agency to improve the service it provides to the public. As a central part of my continuing programme of inspections, I shall be reviewing the Agency's progress against my recommendations.

We have made good progress in the past two years; this will continue.



John Vine CBE QPM

October 2010

Role and Remit

The role of the Independent Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency was established by the UK Borders Act 2007 to examine the efficiency and effectiveness of the UK Border Agency. The initial remit was to consider immigration, asylum and nationality issues but this was subsequently widened in 2009 when the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 gave the Chief Inspector additional powers to look at border customs functions and contractors employed by the Agency.

The Chief Inspector is an independent public servant, appointed by, and responsible to the Home Secretary.

The Legislative Framework

Sections 48-56 of the UK Borders Act 2007 set out the legislative framework for the inspection of the UK Border Agency. In short, the Act:

- requires the Secretary of State to appoint a Chief Inspector to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the UK Border Agency in dealing with asylum, immigration and nationality matters;
- extends the Chief Inspector's remit to cover all UK Border Agency staff, both in the UK and overseas;
- requires the Chief Inspector to publish an annual report which the Secretary of State places before Parliament;
- does not permit the Chief Inspector to investigate individual cases but allows him to use such cases as evidence for wider inspections;
- allows the Secretary of State to require the Chief Inspector to carry out an investigation into any matter regarding asylum, immigration and nationality matters; and
- requires the Chief Inspector to consult the Secretary of State regarding his inspection plans, but this does not prevent him working outside the plans where he regards this as appropriate.

In April 2009, the Chief Inspector was also appointed to the statutory role of Independent Monitor for Entry Clearance (for cases with limited rights of appeal). The functions of this role are executed, primarily, through the Chief Inspector's programme of international inspections, and this document should also be considered as the Annual Report associated with that function.

Our Performance

The UK Programme

I have continued my geographical approach to inspecting the UK Border Agency's operations. The UK inspections involved visiting operations in a number of different locations and inspecting Border Force operations at airports and seaports, and Immigration Group operations responsible for regional operations and in-country decisions, including asylum. Together, these two groups employ nearly 78% of UK Border Agency staff.

This programme can be applied flexibly to allow me to consider areas of widely differing activity. It has allowed me to inspect and report on particular aspects of an entire region. For example, in Wales and the South West I was able to report on management and leadership issues where I found staff highly critical of the way change was managed and the visibility and style of leadership. There was also a worrying perception among staff of an internal culture of bullying from senior managers towards staff.

At the same time I was able to report on potential risks at Holyhead seaport because of the limited amount of immigration work undertaken there. The UK Border Agency should assess how it continues to respond to challenges to the border presented by the Common Travel Area.

“our approach allowed us to listen to a number of refugees and asylum seekers to understand how they had been treated by the UK Border Agency and their contribution was crucial to the findings set out in the Report.”

Overall I was impressed with the enthusiasm and commitment demonstrated by staff throughout the region. I found that they consistently showed resilience and professionalism even when using inadequate equipment or working in unsatisfactory accommodation.

The Thematic Programme

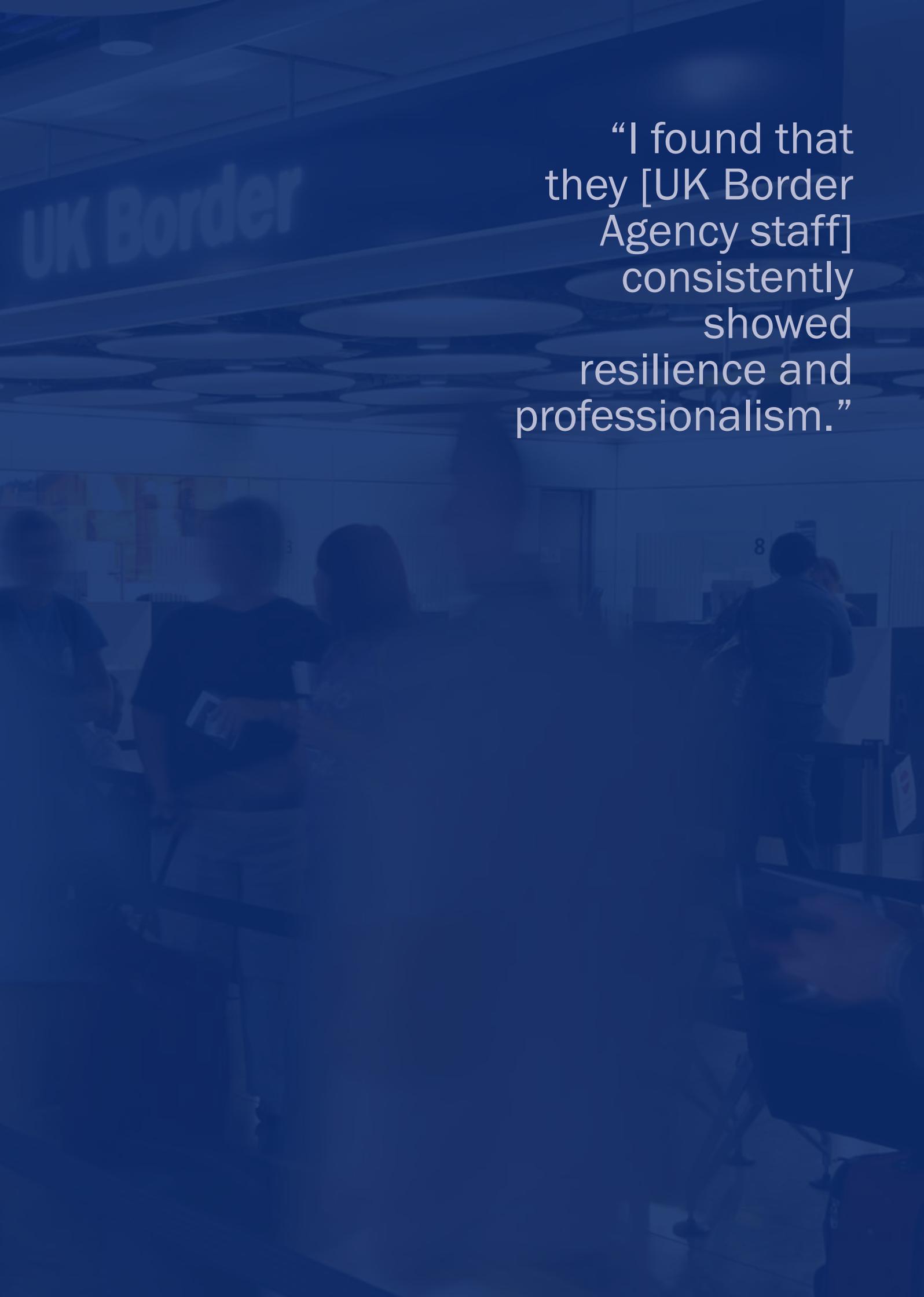
My programme of thematic inspections is designed to explore particular themes of activity that cut across regional and unit boundaries within the UK Border Agency. I look in particular at consistency of approach and invariably conduct the inspections in a number of different locations to assess this. For my first full year of this thematic work, I wanted to focus on areas of particular importance to the overall operation of the Agency, its treatment of potentially vulnerable people, and issues of particular concern to Parliament.

I published three thematic reports – Asylum, the Handling of Complaints and MPs' Correspondence, and Family Removals. I also completed the fieldwork for an inspection of Tier 2 (skilled workers) of the Points-Based System.

In each of these inspections, we gathered evidence from a range of sources. We sampled files, surveyed MPs, interviewed staff and managers, and listened to individuals and groups to understand how they have been treated by the Agency. This work produced some important findings and recommendations, the overwhelming majority of which have been accepted by the UK Border Agency.

As part of my Asylum inspection, I considered the Agency's approach to applications. I placed particular emphasis on its targets for concluding both current cases and its legacy of older claims. This enabled me to make some important findings, notably that the target of concluding 90% of claims within six months was unachievable based on past performance, staffing levels and the complexity of many cases. I found that performance needed to improve if the aim of clearing the backlog of older claims by July 2011 was to be achieved.

Whilst on inspection, I found evidence that staff understood the impact that their decisions had on applicants and as a result, there was a strong commitment from staff to make the right decision.



“I found that they [UK Border Agency staff] consistently showed resilience and professionalism.”

I was particularly pleased that our approach allowed us to listen to a number of refugees and asylum seekers to understand how they had been treated by the UK Border Agency and their contribution was crucial to the findings set out in my report. As a consequence, I recommended that the Agency should also engage with refugees and asylum seekers in its own training for staff.

The removal of families is one of the most difficult and contentious areas dealt with by the Agency. At a time when the issue was under active consideration by the new Government, I was able to highlight the need for individual action plans for each family. These plans would form the basis for a much clearer assessment of how families could be encouraged to return voluntarily while ensuring that all the appropriate agencies could contribute to aspects such as health, education and frequency of reporting.

My inspection of the handling of complaints and MPs' correspondence revealed an appreciable improvement in how complaints of serious misconduct were handled. I did, however, find that much more should be done to analyse complaints and correspondence. This would enable the Agency to identify and tackle the underlying problems, such as delays or loss of documents. The Agency could also turn these processes to positive use, employing them to identify weaknesses and initiate improvements in its service.

The International Programme

Over the course of 12 months, I increased the scope of my overseas inspections considerably, with a primary focus on the quality of decisions. This has seen my inspection team examining different types of visa categories for the first time, including family visits and settlement, both of which attract full appeal rights in the UK. Also for the first time, my overseas inspections examined entry clearance decisions to issue visas, as well as looking at those cases that had been refused. In my role as the Independent Monitor for Entry Clearance Refusals with Limited Rights of Appeal, I continued to examine those cases that attract only limited rights of appeal.

I paid special attention to the services provided by the Agency's International Group in order to assess whether it is meeting the aims set out in its Customer Strategy and Customer Charter. I placed particular emphasis on its performance against customer service standards and the way in which it has managed correspondence and complaints.

The three international inspections I conducted (Kuala Lumpur, Chennai and the UK Visa Section) have seen my inspection team gather evidence from a range of sources, including staff surveys, focus groups and interviews with entry clearance staff and managers, coupled with a detailed analysis of 500 entry clearance decisions. I also spoke extensively to stakeholders to capture their views about the services provided by the Agency's International Group.

The evidence gathered enabled me to make some important findings on subjects such as correspondence and complaint handling, customer service standards, lack of information about the types of documents applicants should provide, and administrative reviews.

Entry Clearance staff in Kuala Lumpur were experienced and committed. There was evidence of clear and realistic performance targets which had driven improvement. There was also strong evidence of effective joint working with stakeholders and delivery partners to manage the high volume of student applications. In Chennai, I found that the quality of decision-making was generally good as complaints were dealt with promptly and work had recently begun to analyse complaints to identify trends with a view to improving customer service.

The recommendations for improvement I made in these areas have helped the Agency to make a number of major changes to its business including: new and simplified customer service targets; standardised, category-specific, supporting document checklists; changes to the style and content of all refusal notices to make them clearer and easier for applicants to understand; a new target for overseas posts to respond to applicants within 10-working days when a decision to overturn a refusal is made as a result of an Entry Clearance Manager appeal review; and improvements to websites to allow customers to navigate and find information more easily.

“I have become increasingly concerned about the quality of decision-making in the Agency's visa operations,”

This is encouraging and demonstrates a strong desire to work with me to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation. However, I have become increasingly concerned about the quality

of decision-making in the Agency's visa operations, especially in respect of their inconsistent application of immigration rules and guidance, their ineffectual Entry Clearance Managers' reviews, and missed opportunities to learn from allowed appeals.

I have also come to the conclusion that decision-making quality is being adversely affected by the continuing strong focus on productivity at the expense of quality. In all categories of applications sampled as part of my international inspection programme, I continue to identify concerns with decisions that do not accord with the evidence provided by applicants. I believe the Agency needs to tackle this problem as a priority, because if it does not do so, its reputation will suffer and applicants will continue to receive a service that is not always fair or equitable.

The Unannounced Programme

My unannounced inspection programme has been established to be used where I believe it can best provide public confidence and assurance in the UK Border Agency's performance and where there are important and sensitive issues around the welfare of vulnerable people. This year it has focused on customer service issues, looking particularly at whether the correct rules and procedures have been followed.

I carried out two unannounced inspections at the Croydon Public Enquiry Office (PEO) and the Loughborough Reporting Centre. These highlighted a number of issues which are covered briefly below.

“Staff were dedicated and professional, and reportees were treated in a welcoming, respectful and courteous manner.”

Croydon is the largest PEO in the UK and can deal with up to 300 enquiries per day. I found that its staff were professional and committed to their work despite being hampered by IT failures and insufficient accommodation.

Croydon had a robust system for monitoring feedback from service users. However, inaccurate information was given out on waiting times, with applicants often waiting far longer than the advertised times.

The Loughborough Reporting Centre opened in 2006. I found it to be clean, bright and modern. As with Croydon PEO, staff were dedicated and professional, and reportees were treated in a welcoming, respectful and courteous manner. People were seen promptly and generally within the target time set locally by the Agency.

However, I did have a concern about the Agency using reportees as informal interpreters for others, which was a clear breach of confidentiality. I was also disappointed by the lack of up-to-date information available to reportees about making complaints, particularly given that I found virtually the same weakness in my inspection of the Liverpool Asylum Screening Unit in 2009.

The Independent Advisory Group on Country of Origin Information

I established the Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) in March 2009 to succeed the Advisory Panel on Country Information. The IAGCI advises me about the content of material produced by the UK Border Agency's Country of Origin Information Service (COIS) as well as making recommendations of a more general nature.

The IAGCI has held three meetings in this reporting period (January, April and September 2010) and undertaken a significant amount of work:

- **January 2010** – Country reviews of China and Somalia.
- **April 2010** – Country review of Sri Lanka; Thematic review of return conditions of origin for asylum seekers in the UK.
- **September 2010** – Country reviews of Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of South Africa, Somalia; and Vietnam.

Reports from all these meetings were published on my website, along with two further reviews on Somalia.

In addition to the meetings outlined above, the IAGCI held an extraordinary meeting in February 2010 to review how the IAGCI had worked in its first year. The terms of reference and membership, including the role of the UK Border Agency representative at the IAGCI meetings, were considered and revised. The meeting also formalised the working process between the IAGCI, my Inspectorate and the UK Border Agency.

The group is chaired by Dr Khalid Koser with membership at my invitation. The group is made up of individuals and organisations operating in the country information and / or the refugee fields. Members are appointed by me for a two year term.

Current Membership:

- *Independent members*

Dr Khalid Koser (Chair) (Geneva Centre for Security Policy, London University)

Dr Laura Hammond (School of Oriental and African Studies)

Dr Christopher McDowell (City University, London).

- *Organisational representatives*

Mr Andrew Jordan (Immigration and Asylum Chamber)

Mr Alan Deve (UNHCR, London)

Mr Jerome Sabety (UNHCR, Geneva)

Dr Gottfried Zuercher (International Centre for Migration Policy Development)

Meetings are also attended by representatives of the COIS at the UK Border Agency, and independent experts at the discretion of the IAGCI Chair.

Further details, terms of reference, minutes and reports from the IAGCI, including the group's own annual report (March 2009-Jan 2010) can be found on my website at <http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/country-information-reviews/>

Our Corporate Projects

Introduction

This year we started work on four corporate projects to refine the efficiency and effectiveness of both our inspection process and our internal ways of operating.

Corporate Project 1 – Continuous Improvement

This programme involved more than fifty individual measures to improve the internal efficiency and effectiveness of the Inspectorate. The programme was divided into four strands grouped around the existing inspectorate values.

More than two thirds of the measures have been implemented, ranging from giving guidance and clarity about corporate processes to improving internal communications. Other examples include improvements to the Inspectorate's website (which has been revamped and its domain name moved,

reinforcing my independence from the UK Border Agency), and a review of the formal agreements about how we will work both with the Home Office and the UK Border Agency.

Corporate Project 2 – Core Criteria

Criteria provide the measures which enable me to inspect against objective standards. All my inspections to date have used a selection of the criteria published on my website under the broad headings of high-level outcomes, processes and procedures, the impact on service users, and management and leadership.

We have learned a great deal from our first full year of inspections and have also received some very helpful comments from stakeholders. To enable us to improve continuously, I have launched a review of our criteria. The product of this will be a set of criteria which:

- is focused more than ever on the Agency's results and effect;
- makes explicit reference to the particular issues that Parliament has decided I should consider; and
- takes account of relevant international standards and assesses the effect on individuals, particularly the most vulnerable.

I will be reducing the overall number of criteria to ensure I concentrate on the most important issues, and I will be applying the criteria consistently across my UK, Thematic, International, and Unannounced Programmes.

Corporate Project 3 – Inspection Handbook

It is vital that all staff involved in inspection are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities and those of their colleagues. An effective Inspection Handbook is a vital tool for ensuring effective inspection. It should establish an effective framework for every aspect of the inspection process, and help ensure that inspections are carried out consistently to improve efficiency and quality assurance.

Our current handbook was drafted when the Inspectorate was established. It followed best practice established by other Inspectorates and began to define the context we operate in. Like any organisation – especially a relatively new one – our approach is changing, and the handbook must change to reflect this. The new document will be shorter, define clearly what needs to be done to deliver an effective inspection, and will be more

flexible about how it should be done. It will also clearly reflect the importance of effective analysis, administration and communications in producing well-evidenced, accurate reports.

Corporate Project 4 – Following up on recommendations

Over the course of the reporting period, I have made 93 recommendations. It is increasingly important for me to be able to see action within the UK Border Agency to implement these recommendations. This allows me both to assess the Agency's progress and to identify how useful my inspection programme has been.

During this reporting period I have initiated a review of the most effective way for me to monitor action against my recommendations. I have agreed with the Chief Executive of the UK Border Agency that she will send me an update every six months, outlining progress made. I have also included consideration of previous recommendations in the planning of all future inspections. This will help me identify areas for re-inspection where progress has been slow.

Where I have explicit concerns about actions taken by the Agency, I am able also to raise specific issues or recommendations directly with the Home Secretary or Minister of State for Immigration.

Working in Partnership

The work of the UK Border Agency is of intense interest to the public, Parliament and the media. The scope and scale of its operations bring the Agency into contact with a vast array of parties and organisations with an interest in its work. Because my own work encompasses all the Agency's activities, it involves working with this large number of stakeholders, who help inform, support and challenge my inspection programme.

In the past year I have actively continued to build and maintain constructive relationships with as many interested parties as possible, ranging from the passenger- and freight-carrying companies to interest groups promoting the welfare of people seeking to stay in the UK. I have also taken the opportunity to develop more formal relationships, such as the Refugee and Asylum Forum, to give organisations the chance to work more closely with my team and to contribute to our work through regular discussions and sharing information.

I welcomed the opportunity to share my inspection findings with the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee when I appeared before them in March 2010.

“In the past year I have actively continued to build and maintain constructive relationships with as many interested parties as possible.”

I also held productive meetings with representatives of the Scottish Parliament and of the Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies. This was a particularly useful development because some issues specific to the devolved administrations will form an important part of my future inspections.

People and Resources

Diversity

We have a diverse team. Through an open recruitment process, conducted on merit, we have attracted people from across and beyond government, and we profit from the range of skills, experience, knowledge and outlook they bring us.

At the end of September 2010, the Inspectorate was:

- 49% female;
- 31% from an ethnic minority group;
- 29% aged under 35; 14% aged 50 and over; and
- 3% worked flexible or reduced hours.

Training and Development

Our work requires staff to be appropriately trained to carry out their duties in an effective and credible way. In the year we identified some mandatory inspectorate-wide training and also other training that is specific to particular groups of staff. For example, all inspectors attended a two-day report-writing course and, in preparation for my asylum inspection, the inspection team received training from the Refugee Council. While corporate needs are being met through a training action plan, we also routinely assess individuals' training needs, and the effectiveness of their training is closely monitored by their managers.

A considerable amount of training and learning is provided on the job, through the informal coaching and feedback that team members and leaders routinely provide to each other, and in particular to new colleagues. I believe this form of learning is every bit as important as attending classroom or computer-based courses.

Our resources

The budget for 2010/11 is £3.5million, of which 63% is spent on staff employment costs and more than 75% on direct inspection costs. The overwhelming majority of our staff are engaged in front-line inspection activity; they are supported by a small number of administrative staff. In light of our experience to date, and to improve efficiency we are concentrating our staff and resources on our front line inspection teams.

The period from October 2009 to September 2010 has seen us publish 20 reports, increasing the breadth of topics covered, the number of locations visited and types of inspection performed.

The table below shows the proportions of permanent and seconded staff in post over the past year.

	Permanent Staff	Second-ments	Total
October 2009	26	3	29
March 2010	30	3	33
September 2010	36	1	37

The reducing proportion of staff on secondment reflects the fact that secondees with inspection and start-up experience were used during the set up phase, but that these have been replaced by permanent staff as the Inspectorate has matured.

Annex A

Inspection Reports published October 2009-September 2010

- UK Border Agency's visa section in Kuala Lumpur (January 2010)
- Asylum: Getting the Balance Right? (February 2010)
- UK Border Agency's visa section in Chennai (March 2010)
- Croydon Public Enquiry Office: Unannounced Inspection (March 2010)
- UK Visa Section: Pakistan Settlement Applications (July 2010)
- Lessons to Learn: UK Border Agency's handling of complaints and MPs' correspondence (July 2010)
- Family Removals: A thematic inspection (July 2010)
- UK Border Agency's operations in Wales and South West (July 2010)
- Loughborough Reporting Centre: Unannounced Inspection. (September 2010)
- Evaluation of the Country of Origin Information Report on Sri Lanka (April 2010)
- Evaluation of the Country of Origin Information Report on Vietnam (September 2010)
- Evaluation of the Country of Origin Information Report on South Africa (September 2010)
- Evaluation of the Country of Origin Information Report on Somalia (September 2010)
- Evaluation of the Country of Origin Information Report on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (September 2010)
- Evaluation of the Country of Origin Information Report on Afghanistan (September 2010)

Reports published by the Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

- IAGCI Review on Expert Review of Country of Origin Information on Somalia (November 2009)
- Evaluation of the Country of Origin Information Report on Somalia (November 2009)
- Evaluation of the Country of Origin Information Report on China (December 2009)
- Evaluation of the Country of Origin Information Report on India (January 2010)
- Review of the Information on Return Conditions of origin for Asylum Seekers in the United Kingdom (April 2010)

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ISBN: 978-1-84987-366-6

HO_01720_ICIU