



# An inspection of the effectiveness of the UKVI Chief Caseworker Unit's referral process

September–October 2021

**David Neal**

Independent Chief Inspector of  
Borders and Immigration

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# Foreword

The creation of the UK Visas and Immigration Chief Caseworker Unit (CCU) in 2018 was a visible and practical response to the Windrush scandal. My inspectors found CCU to be staffed by committed individuals whose outputs contribute directly not only to their unit's own objectives but also to the Home Office's broader aims. The inspection was a positive one, with much to be happy about.

Internal stakeholders were positive about the work of CCU and the quality of its services. Relationships between referring teams and CCU were marked by positive collaborative working, mutual respect and a commitment to improvement.

This inspection focused primarily on the process through which individual cases are referred to, and considered by, CCU. Inspectors found that this referral process generally worked well, but that three areas required attention:

- Management information used to monitor cases and assess performance is poor and requires improvement
- Inspectors found that timescales for the completion of work by CCU were often not met; they should be reassessed
- The smooth running of the unit depends on the effectiveness of its Secretariat, which inspectors found to be stretched and to require additional resources

Additionally, a refresh of, and a renewed focus on, CCU's stalled engagement strategy is required to sell the unit's capabilities and to provide greater clarity on its 'offer' to the rest of the organisation. More can be done to highlight the relevance of CCU's work to a wider range of business areas and to emphasise that the unit exists to provide support to, and not find fault with, caseworking teams. With a relaunch of the unit's engagement efforts, input from senior leadership on its vision for CCU would be timely.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Neal', followed by a period and a horizontal line underneath.

**David Neal**  
**Chief Inspector**

# 1. Background

- 1.1** UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) established its Chief Caseworker Unit (CCU) in 2018 to champion culture change across the organisation in the wake of the Windrush scandal.<sup>1</sup> The creation of the unit fulfilled a commitment to Parliament made by the Home Secretary in a 23 April 2018 statement, in which she announced her intention to put in place a team of “senior caseworkers across the country to ensure where more junior members of staff are unsure about a decision they can speak to someone with experience to ensure discretion is properly exercised”.<sup>2</sup> In the operating mandate for the unit published in October 2018, its terms of reference included:
- **“culture change** – to establish a casework culture which puts the customer at the heart of everything, by empowering, educating and supporting
  - **decision making** – to work with business embedded leads to exercise pragmatic decision making [and] the use of discretion and [to] encourage others to do so
  - **training** – [to] examine ways in which casework can evolve into a profession with externally validated accreditation with continuous development
  - **enabling** – [to] work with partners and business areas to overcome barriers to effective decision making, by developing sustainable solutions”
- 1.2** At its inception, CCU described itself as “not another case working unit with another opinion”; rather, it sought to “guide decisions on challenging cases, putting the customer at the heart of what we do and exercising discretion where appropriate”, and to “lead by example and challenge the status quo so that we get others to follow”. The unit featured prominently in the September 2020 ‘Comprehensive Improvement Plan’ issued by the Home Office in response to the Windrush Lessons Learned Review (WLLR). In that document, the Home Office characterised the establishment of CCU as an example of how the department was “going beyond the recommendations” contained in the WLLR to establish “a more compassionate approach”.<sup>3</sup>
- 1.3** The unit continues to lead on the ‘People, not Cases’ strand of UKVI’s response to the WLLR. CCU developed the mandatory ‘Face Behind the Case’ training, launched for all UKVI staff in August 2020; by September 2021, 8,088 individuals had completed the Face Behind the Case eLearning across the Home Office, the majority (5,782) in UKVI. For decision-makers, where they experience discomfort in a decision, they can consult the CCU to consider the options

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<sup>1</sup> ‘The Response to the Windrush Lessons Learned Review: A Comprehensive Improvement Plan’, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/windrush-lessons-learned-review-response-comprehensive-improvement-plan> September 2020, paragraph 107, p.28.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Home Secretary statement on the Windrush generation’, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/home-secretary-statement-on-the-windrush-generation> 23 April 2018.

<sup>3</sup> ‘The Response to the Windrush Lessons Learned Review: A Comprehensive Improvement Plan’, paragraph 107, p.28. Other examples of “going beyond the recommendations” included the establishment of the UKVI Professionalisation Hub, the opening of seven Service and Support Centres, and the launch of Immigration Enforcement’s Safety Valve Mechanism (paragraphs 107–116). See paragraph 19 for reference to CCU and the Professionalisation Hub as examples of “going further still [beyond the recommendations]” in response to those WLLR recommendations grouped by the Home Office as relating to the theme of “A More Compassionate Approach”.

available and, where possible, the unit will take a holistic approach to finding the best solution for the customer.<sup>4</sup>

- 1.4** CCU also “seeks to identify wider systemic issues and trends that are preventing effective decision making” and to improve “the interaction between policy and operational teams to ensure that policies reflect operational reality”.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the unit may undertake projects and additional workstreams at the request of senior managers or the UKVI/HM Passport Office Joint Executive Board.
- 1.5** To advance its goals, CCU initiated the development of a Chief Caseworker Network, bringing together “a group of Chief Caseworkers” from across UKVI’s operational units “to improve the consistency, quality and sustainability of decision-making”.<sup>6</sup> The Chief Caseworker Network has replaced the network of business-embedded leads (members of staff within decision-making units who took on responsibility for supporting CCU) upon which the unit previously relied to extend its reach, and to raise its profile, across the organisation.<sup>7</sup> CCU also launched a Policy Superuser Network in June 2020 as a mechanism to facilitate communication between policy and operational teams, with a view towards the early identification of situations in which policies might have unintended consequences.<sup>8</sup>
- 1.6** Within CCU, a Casework Team handles individual cases that are referred to the unit and carries out reviews of decisions made through the Windrush Scheme, while an Early Warnings Team (EWT) examines systemic issues. Each team is led by a Chief Caseworker (Grade 7), who is supported by five Senior Caseworkers (Senior Executive Officer). The Casework Team also includes six Technical Specialists; these Higher Executive Officers (HEO) review the individual cases allocated to them. In addition, the Referred Cases Unit, staffed by an HEO based within EWT, reviews entry clearance cases referred to CCU and considers whether they are suitable for discretionary grants of leave outside the Immigration Rules. CCU also includes a Grade 7 Strategy and Policy Lead, though the role was vacant for an extended period in 2020/21 while the incumbent was redeployed to assist with the Home Office’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.7** As of September 2021, according to the position statement provided to inspectors by the Home Office, the Casework Team had concluded 397 individual cases since its establishment in 2018, with 15 remaining open.<sup>9</sup> The EWT had considered 84 systemic issues since 2018. Of these, work on 19 issues remained ongoing, while 57 issues were closed, seven were being kept on a “watching brief”, and one was to be closed following completion of a benefits realisation exercise. At the time of this inspection, work on the systemic issues was suspended, as the EWT had been redeployed to assist with the Home Office response to small-boat arrivals.
- 1.8** CCU is a geographically dispersed unit, with its staff based at Home Office sites around the country, including Croydon, Liverpool, Sheffield, London and Leeds. CCU staff have generally been working from home since March 2020.

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4 ‘The Response to the Windrush Lessons Learned Review: A Comprehensive Improvement Plan’, paragraphs 107 and 108, p.28.

5 ‘The Response to the Windrush Lessons Learned Review: A Comprehensive Improvement Plan’, paragraph 107, p.28.

6 ‘The Response to the Windrush Lessons Learned Review: A Comprehensive Improvement Plan’, paragraph 107, p.28.

7 The creation of the Chief Caseworker Network also prompted the renaming of CCU from the ‘Chief Casework Unit’ to the ‘Chief Caseworker Unit’.

8 ‘The Response to the Windrush Lessons Learned Review: A Comprehensive Improvement Plan’, paragraph 108, p.28.

9 These figures differed slightly from those found in the Casework team’s case tracker which set out the status of all cases received.

**1.9** Since January 2021, CCU has formed part of the Casework, Professionalisation and Intelligence Command (CPIC) within the Immigration, Information, Improvement and Support (3iS) directorate, with a remit covering both UKVI and the Home Office's Asylum and Protection directorate-general. In addition to the two CCU teams that review individual cases and systemic issues, CPIC includes:

- the UKVI Professionalisation Hub (PH), which has taken on the part of CCU's work that is concerned with ensuring "that decision-makers have the skills and capability to do the job and that this is tested and recognised"<sup>10</sup>
- the UKVI Intelligence, Fraud and Corruption Unit, which was created in January 2021 to "raise the awareness of staff responsibilities on intelligence and fraud"
- the CPIC Secretariat, which provides business support, is responsible for receiving, allocating and tracking progress on referrals to the unit, and for communicating CCU advice to referring teams.

All elements of CPIC report to the Head of Profession for UKVI Casework, a Grade 6 who reports in turn to the Head of Immigration Information, Improvement and Support (3iS) directorate, a member of the Senior Civil Service.

**1.10** This inspection is the first by ICIBI looking at a team created in response to the Windrush scandal. Mindful of Wendy Williams' planned return to the Home Office in the autumn of 2021 to assess the organisation's progress against her recommendations, inspectors deliberately excluded from the scope of this inspection any consideration of CPIC's activity on Windrush.

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<sup>10</sup> 'The Response to the Windrush Lessons Learned Review: A Comprehensive Improvement Plan', paragraph 110, p.29.

## 2. Scope and methodology

- 2.1** This inspection examined the process through which individual cases are referred to and considered by the UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) Chief Caseworker Unit (CCU) and sought to assess: the effectiveness of the referral process itself, including the identification of systemic issues; CCU's approach to engagement; and CCU's levels of capacity, resourcing and resilience.
- 2.2** The inspection referred to the ICIBI's expectations<sup>11</sup> particularly "Processes are simple to follow and transparent" and "Each immigration, asylum, nationality or customs function has a Home Office (Borders, Immigration and Citizenship System) 'owner'".
- 2.3** Inspectors undertook the following activities:
- reviewed publicly available information on the work of CCU
  - held a familiarisation call with Grade 7 managers and the Acting Head of Profession for UKVI Casework on 1 September 2021
  - notified the Home Office of the inspection on 6 September 2021, together with an evidence request
  - received 179 pieces of evidence
  - undertook 12 interviews with CCU staff, from HEO to Grade 6 level, together with four interviews with CCU's 'customers' including Grade 7s from a team with low referrals, a team with medium referrals and two teams with high referrals
  - requested four additional documents from the Home Office
  - held a feedback session, sharing initial thoughts and indicative findings, on 27 September 2021 with the Grade 7 Strategy and Policy Lead and the Acting Head of Profession for UKVI Casework

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/icibi-expectations-for-inspection>

## 3. Key findings

- 3.1** The process through which Home Office decision-making teams submit individual cases for consideration by the Chief Caseworker Unit (CCU) is clear, straightforward and flexible. Though there is an inherent tension between the ideal that decision-makers should be able to turn to CCU for advice on any case in which they “experience discomfort with a decision” and CCU’s understandable keenness to ensure that cases have been escalated through the referring team’s internal mechanisms before being brought to its attention, inspectors found no evidence that there were significant barriers to making a referral.
- 3.2** Volumes of referrals to CCU have been low, however, with only 415 individual cases recorded in the unit’s ‘tracker’ between July 2018 and September 2021. The relatively low number of referrals may be due to the robustness of decision-making units’ internal chief caseworking functions, a reluctance among some units to engage with CCU, a need for CCU to achieve greater visibility across the organisation or some combination of these factors.
- 3.3** Inspectors found that target timescales for the provision of CCU advice on referred individual cases were often not met, suggesting that these targets should be reassessed. An ‘internal service level agreement’ that established a target of five working days for the completion of work by a Technical Specialist on a referred case had been set without consideration being given to the complexity of many of the referrals received.
- 3.4** CCU staff bring a wealth of experience from across many Home Office business areas to the unit, and inspectors found that they were dedicated to and engaged in their work. The capacity of the unit is diminished, however, by the understaffing of the pivotal Secretariat function. The heavy demands placed on a small Secretariat team to perform a wide range of functions has affected its ability to focus effectively on the quality of the data it maintains. The Home Office pointed to the April 2021 recruitment of an SEO Data Production and Analysis Lead as evidence that CCU senior management had recognised the need for additional resource within the Secretariat to focus on the unit’s use of data and on risk management. The responsibilities of the Data Production and Analysis Lead do not extend to ensuring the quality of data, however, and the postholder was, in any event, on loan to another Home Office team at the time of this inspection.
- 3.5** The loss of CCU personnel to secondments and emergency redeployments for significant periods of time has had a negative impact on the capacity of the unit. The fact that the members of staff to whom some of the Secretariat’s responsibilities were reassigned have themselves been temporarily redeployed to assist in departmental emergency response efforts, and the fact that work on systemic issues had been paused at the time of this inspection while the Early Warnings Team (EWT) assisted with the Home Office’s response to small-boats arrivals, points to the need for the unit to ensure it can consistently maintain its capacity to progress its workstreams and carry out its functions.
- 3.6** CCU staff recognised that individual case referrals had the potential to reveal the existence of wider systemic issues, but inspectors were concerned that the unit’s structure – with its

separate Casework and Early Warnings Teams – might make the identification of these broader issues more difficult. Managers recognised the importance of ensuring communication and coordination between the two teams, and CCU Casework Team Technical Specialists are required to flag cases that present systemic issues. More thought and attention needs to be given, however, to the development of the processes and skills needed to identify and monitor trends and patterns emerging from individual casework, as without a more sophisticated approach, there is a risk that systemic issues will be missed.

- 3.7** CCU’s ability to spot trends and identify systemic issues emerging from its referrals may also be impacted by shortcomings in the quality of the data that it maintains. Though its ‘trackers’ – locally managed spreadsheets – for individual cases and systemic issues provide an adequate overview of the unit’s work for day-to-day management purposes, easily identifiable data-entry errors compromise their utility as tools to support deeper analysis. Adequate resource and support should be provided to ensure that CCU is able to maintain a more robust and reliable record of its work and of the profile of the cases it receives.
- 3.8** Inspectors found that relatively little engagement work to raise the profile of CCU across the organisation has taken place for at least the past year. The visibility of CCU is essential if it is to fulfil its purpose, so the implementation of an effective engagement strategy must be a priority.
- 3.9** CCU staff acknowledged that the role and remit of the unit has changed over time, with an initial focus on the application of discretion giving way to work on a wider range of complex cases. The unit has also taken on workstreams – such as its recent acceptance of a very specialised class of cases from HM Passport Office – that can only with difficulty be related to either its original purpose or its de facto expanded remit. As CCU’s operating mandate and terms of reference appear not to have been updated since they were originally published in October 2018, a thoughtful redrafting of that document – with guidance from Home Office and UK Visas and Immigration senior leadership on what it wants the unit to be, and what they see as its strategic purpose – is overdue.

## 4. Recommendations

- 4.1 Review the purpose and monitoring of both internally and externally notified service level agreements (or equivalent) to ensure that the case review process is accountable and that all parties are clear on commitments.
- 4.2 Review the remit and responsibilities of the business support function of the Chief Caseworker Unit (performed by the Casework, Professionalisation and Intelligence Command Secretariat) and ensure that the unit's staffing resources are consistently available to meet all current and future needs.
- 4.3 Improve tools and structures to facilitate the recognition of trends and patterns, and improve communication and coordination between the Chief Caseworker Unit's Casework and Early Warnings Teams, to ensure that the unit functions as an integrated whole in its approach to identifying systemic issues.
- 4.4 Improve the data that underpins the production of the Casework Team and Early Warnings Team's management information, ensuring that the quality (relevance, completeness, accuracy, validity and timeliness) of this data, and any associated assurance mechanisms, are the responsibility of a designated, suitably trained individual or team; and that the data can be effectively utilised to monitor the teams' performance and identify trends in Home Office caseworking.
- 4.5 Review the Chief Caseworker Unit's engagement and communication strategy to ensure that it supports the unit's aims and objectives, and ensure that the engagement lead role is maintained at full effectiveness by mitigating or covering for staff redeployments and absences.
- 4.6 Conduct a review of the Chief Caseworker Unit to consider, at a minimum, the following areas:
  - aims
  - objectives
  - remit
  - identity
  - success criteria and impact
  - workstreams (including continued ownership of cases and activities that may sit better with caseworking teams)

and update the Operating Mandate (2018) and Terms of Reference to reflect the results of this review.

# 5. Evidence and analysis

## Referral process – individual cases

### Standard Operating Procedures

- 5.1** Responsibility for the decision on whether to accept or reject an individual case referral to the Casework Team at the Chief Caseworker Unit (CCU), as well as the management of the allocation process, rests with the Secretariat, which reports directly to the Head of Profession for UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) Casework. Referrals are submitted via an email inbox, and the process to manage these referrals is governed by a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). Overall, inspectors found the SOP straightforward and easy to understand, with responsibilities clearly allocated, and relevant timeframes indicated.
- 5.2** The referral inbox was regularly monitored throughout the day as it also received Parliamentary Questions and Freedom of Information requests, both of which are bound by legislatively defined timeframes for response. Responsibility for this monitoring activity lay with the Secretariat's Higher Executive Officer (HEO), overseen by the Senior Executive Officer (SEO). At the time of the inspection, the Secretariat was understaffed – comprising an SEO and HEO, rather than an SEO and two HEOs. An HEO post had been vacant since July 2021.<sup>12</sup>
- 5.3** The referral inbox was considered within the Casework risk register. Risk 1, rated “possible” likelihood and “moderate” impact, considered the consequences of an influx of work/absences leading to emails being missed in the inboxes. At interview, staff reported that a shortage of personnel within the Secretariat had been mitigated by the development of a rota for HEO Technical Specialists (Tech Specs<sup>13</sup>) from the Casework Team to undertake two-week placements in the Secretariat. The impact on the existing Secretariat staff had been well managed with the development of a training manual. Inspectors did not find any evidence that referrals had been missed during this period of understaffing and staff were confident this process was working well.
- 5.4** The SOP notes that “Anyone can make a referral and they have a variety of ways to do this, such as the referral form, verbally or an email summary. These may not come directly to the referral mailbox but through another member of the team.” Secretariat staff indicated that there was no strict requirement to use the referral form as long as the email set out the background to the issue and the “ask”. It was not clear how verbal referrals were recorded or triaged. Inspectors reviewed the referral form, last updated in 2018, and noted it was easy to complete and thorough in terms of questions and areas the referrer should cover.
- 5.5** On receipt of a referral, the Secretariat was required to assess it against two key criteria: was it a UKVI case, and did it involve an issue where CCU could add value? The SOP stated:

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<sup>12</sup> In its factual accuracy response, the Home Office said: “A recruitment exercise had identified a suitable candidate in July 2021, however long delays in obtaining security clearance meant the individual was unable to take up their post.”

<sup>13</sup> A role which focuses on providing support to caseworking staff to ensure accuracy and consistency in decision-making.

“Essentially, acceptance of a referral is about how the CCU can help. If this isn’t clear, then further clarity should be sought. If this can’t be provided, the referral should be rejected.”

- 5.6** When a case is rejected, the Secretariat informs the referring team of the reason for the rejection, while providing the unit with the opportunity to submit any additional information that might be relevant. Secretariat staff were clear that very few cases were rejected outright; CCU records showed that only 14 out of 415 referrals had been rejected since the unit’s inception. Most CCU staff indicated they understood the importance of this approach and the value of CCU’s reluctance to reject cases. However, some staff voiced some frustrations about why referrals had got through to the team and queried why they had not been resolved by the referring team.
- 5.7** The Secretariat can signpost the referring team to other caseworking teams – currently this response accounted for 72 of the 415 cases sent to CCU between July 2018 and September 2021. Signposting appeared to be a prompt process, though the “completion days” data was measured in calendar rather than working days and one case from 2020 was recorded as still awaiting completion, and one case remained open. It was not clear if a signposted case was considered by the Secretariat to also be a rejected case in that it was not allocated to a Tech Spec nor was any caseworking activity undertaken on it. The process for rejecting cases, of the 13 cases for which there was complete data, took an average of 1.69 calendar days to complete. Of the 292 cases accepted by the Secretariat with complete records, the decision to accept was made on average, in 1.51 calendar days. Overall, CCU had accepted 329 cases since inception; on 6 September 2021, there were 11 open cases in the tracker.
- 5.8** When cases are accepted, an email is sent to the referring team within 48 hours, and the case is allocated by the Secretariat to a Tech Spec, taking into account workload and leave, for work to commence; these actions are also recorded on the Case Information Database (CID), the Home Office’s casework management system. The referring team is told they can expect a response in 10 days (with scope to indicate if the timeline needs to be shorter). Tech Specs are expected to complete work on a case within five working days – a timescale that is regarded as an “internal SLA [Service Level Agreement]” – allowing time for any required quality assurance checks to be carried out before advice is delivered to the referring team. The SOP did not define when the SLA “clock” started; it was unclear if it was based on the point of allocation to the Tech Spec, or the point at which the Secretariat accepted the case. The SOP also refers to a “Rapid Response Function” where a case which requires a rapid turnaround or is high profile can be expedited.
- 5.9** One caseworking team manager who made referrals to CCU spoke highly of the flexibility offered by CCU when he highlighted the tight deadline required for a response to the Secretariat. However, senior managers noted that, while CCU sought to be responsive and flexible, the unit needed to be mindful of being pushed to work to deadlines which were a reflection of a caseworking team’s late referral.
- 5.10** According to a senior manager, the impetus for the introduction of the five-day SLA in January 2021 was that:

“... ten days wasn’t ambitious enough. Decision makers need to get decisions out; customers need to know what’s happening with their case. I said to the team, it’s an internal SLA; I think we can aim for five days. If you can’t make it, that’s fine, as long as I understand why. There wasn’t any science behind it.”

Other staff were less clear on the value of the SLA, and its appropriateness, and one manager indicated there might be value in reviewing it.

- 5.11** Information about the referral process, including dates of acceptance, and the status of cases, is recorded in CCU's single cases 'tracker', a spreadsheet maintained by the Secretariat. The tracker does not contain information as to the time taken in working days which would enable an accurate assessment of the average time taken to complete a case prior to the introduction of the SLA. Data collected after the introduction of the SLA contained data errors such that it could not be established whether the SLA was being consistently met or the average number of working days taken to complete a case; the tracker's calculation of the length of time taken to complete work on a case is incorrectly based on calendar days, meaning that weekends and public holidays are included. It was clear that many cases were taking longer than the timescale specified by the SLA.
- 5.12** Tech Specs were required to provide weekly updates to the Secretariat, which monitored progress on individual cases. Where there were problems, the Secretariat's SEO was expected to liaise with line managers to improve performance.
- 5.13** The referral SOP set out next steps for quality assurance (QA), noting that this should take place once per person per month, with the Secretariat selecting cases for the QA process. The SOP stated that the aim should be for "5% of the intake to be assessed", though it acknowledged that "this will not always be possible". The SOP also outlined how relevant parts of the tracker should be completed to reflect the actions taken. This inspection did not look in detail at the QA process or at the quality of responses provided by CCU. Finally, the SOP outlined how the relevant parts of the tracker should be completed to reflect the actions taken.
- 5.14** Inspectors were provided with six referrals received by CCU and the response provided by the unit. Though the sample size is very small, inspectors noted that the issues illustrated in these examples echoed broader challenges within the operation of CCU. For example, one referral resulting from an enquiry by an MP was directed to the CCU to establish if discretion could be applied in a decision which had already been ruled upon by the First Tier and Upper Tribunals. Another referral showed issues with timeliness, and poor communication: the referral was made on 22 January 2021 with a policy unit copied into the correspondence. It appears that CCU took no action on the case for a month and waited on the policy team to respond before confirming that further discussion would be required with a Senior Caseworker (SCW<sup>14</sup>) before CCU could decide whether to investigate. Finally, on 1 March, the case was rejected by CCU. Another highlighted the length of time it can take for a case to reach CCU – a case was raised by an MP on 3 March 2021 but passed through multiple UKVI and Immigration Enforcement (IE) teams before it was referred to CCU by IE's Safety Valve Mechanism (a similar concept to CCU – a virtual community of experts who can provide advice to staff "in cases where they feel that something simply isn't right with the action that the relevant policy and guidance is pointing them towards") on 10 June, three months later. In contrast, a referral requesting that a leave to remain application be expedited due to the vulnerability of the customer was sent to CCU on 25 November 2020, and had been resolved by 8 December 2020.

## Caseworking – individual cases

- 5.15** Guidance to CCU Tech Specs and SCWs as to how they should manage a referral is set out in a Caseworking SOP. The SOP made no reference to the ability of Tech Specs or SCWs to reject cases, save where their capacity is such that they will not be able to undertake the work; the

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<sup>14</sup> This role has responsibility for the quality and efficiency of the decision-making in a caseworking unit and the ongoing support and development of a unit's decision-makers.

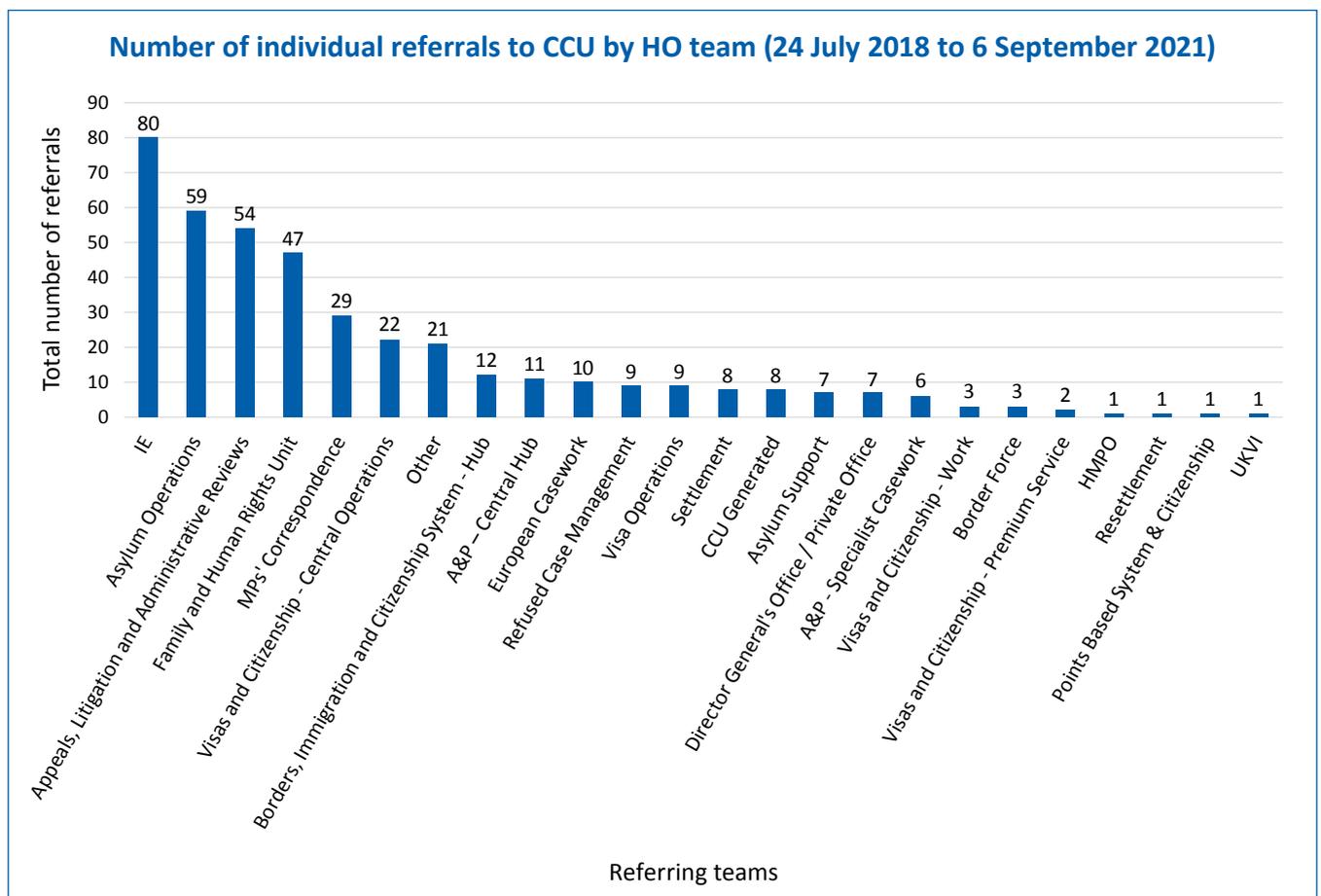
instruction is then to discuss with their line manager, who has to agree before they can reject the case back to the Secretariat.

**5.16** During interviews, inspectors were told that, despite the high volume of acceptances by the Secretariat, some Tech Specs subsequently rejected cases. The extent to which this resulted in a formal rejection or a simple reallocation of the case was unclear. There was no data to support this assertion available in the individual case tracker. However staff did state that “if we are passed something that we think could be dealt with by that unit themselves we can push it back to the referring unit”, an approach which may bypass the Secretariat function.

## Referring teams

**5.17** Reflecting CCU’s cross-cutting purpose, the Casework Team receives referrals from across the Home Office, though the volume of referrals received from different parts of the department varies considerably. CCU staff reflected that, in general, they received the greatest number of referrals from units with workstreams characterised by relatively low case volumes and relatively high levels of case complexity, while units that handled higher volumes of cases, and whose decisions were less likely to involve the application of discretion, referred cases to CCU less often. Data from the unit’s case tracker shows that 24 business areas made individual case referrals to CCU, with IE making the most (80), followed by Asylum and Protection (A&P) Appeals, Litigation and Administrative Review (ALAR) (59) with A&P’s Asylum Operations making the third highest amount of referrals to CCU (54) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1<sup>15</sup>



15 This data is taken from the ‘CCU Single Case Tracker – LIVE’ and includes all referrals regardless of outcome (accepted, rejected or signposted). Concerns about the data quality contained within this tracker have been highlighted at para 5.34 onwards.

While CCU had received at least one referral from all caseworking teams, inspectors were told that there was a perception among some teams that there was limited value of making a referral. Crucially however, this resistance was not rooted in a perception that CCU would find fault but rather concerned with the relevance of CCU to their work or that their caseworking provided little scope for discretion.

## Filtering referrals by caseworking teams

- 5.18** The manner in which CCU had developed, combined with initial and ongoing concerns that CCU would be inundated with referrals, led to the development of a variety of interpretations of gatekeeping mechanisms, roles held by staff in referring teams who managed the flow of referrals. The use of business-embedded leads had been replaced by the Chief Caseworker Network in September 2020. The same process remained; an SEO or Grade 7 within the referring team would make the relevant referral once they were content that the appropriate internal escalation routes had been used and that relevant case considerations had taken place.
- 5.19** Inspectors sought to understand the manner in which these gatekeeping functions were utilised and particularly if they prevented caseworkers from being able to access CCU's services. This was difficult to ascertain. Interviews with the referring managers indicated that they saw their role as preventing irrelevant or inappropriate referrals being made and ensuring that the volume of referrals was manageable. The requirement for cases to have been reviewed by their own team's internal Tech Specs and SCWs also meant, from their perspective, that the work of CCU did not usurp or bypass these roles. One referring manager stated they would monitor the level of referrals, sharing this with senior managers so that their team, not CCU, could "speak to policy and resolve a lot of the issues ourselves". CCU staff noted that these gatekeeping-type functions did act as a filter, adding that "the gatekeepers are very good, very experienced and don't often get confused by what needs signposting to prevent those cases that we don't need to look at hitting our desks." However, there was limited assurance that this gatekeeping was not, albeit unintentionally, reinforcing the culture and approach of a referring team, entrenching a sense of "that's just the way we do it", and limiting the ability of caseworkers to use their discretion or provide space for them to air concerns when there was "discomfort in their decision making". There had been no evaluation by CCU managers as to the impact of this gatekeeping, or assurance that such a role was not preventing a realistic picture of the execution of caseworking from being shared.

## MPs' correspondence

- 5.20** Referrals of cases raised by MPs were also received by CCU – a total of 29 cases since July 2018. These were often considered high priority by CCU due to the need to meet specific deadlines. Staff highlighted some concerns around the use of the CCU by the MPs' Correspondence Unit, namely the appropriateness of some of the referrals – where Secretariat staff would have to refer the case back to the relevant caseworking team – and the perception that CCU could function as a repository for high-profile cases. Some engagement between CCU and the MPs' Correspondence Unit had taken place which had sought to set out firmly the parameters of cases suitable for referral, the extent of the engagement was unclear.

## HM Passport Office referral process

- 5.21** CCU had, in June 2021, taken on referrals from HM Passport Office (HMPO), specifically to confirm the UK immigration status of passport customers with non-British citizen forms of

British nationality (who are therefore subject to UK immigration control) (46% of cases were from China or Hong Kong); for cases where UKVI records show no evidence of the customer being settled, the case was signposted accordingly. By the end of August 2021, 26 referrals had been made. At the time of the inspection however, much of the framework which governed this referral process remained in draft form; for example, the SOP and customer contact letters had received feedback from the relevant policy teams but required final approval from the relevant policy team and Home Office Legal Advisers, and clearance from the Casework, Professionalisation and Intelligence Command's (CPIC's) Head of Unit.

- 5.22** CCU staff indicated that they found this work straightforward, the time taken to work on cases relatively short, and the volume of referrals thus far limited.
- 5.23** The Casework Team risk register considered the HMPO referrals, with a risk focused on the potential for incorrect decisions to be made by CCU. Rated "possible" likelihood and "moderate" impact, mitigation included standing up/down work on referrals, training and the development of a SOP and a QA process. These latter three actions remained outstanding. There was no consideration of the risk of developing a new referral stream without appropriately signed-off supporting guidance and processes in place.

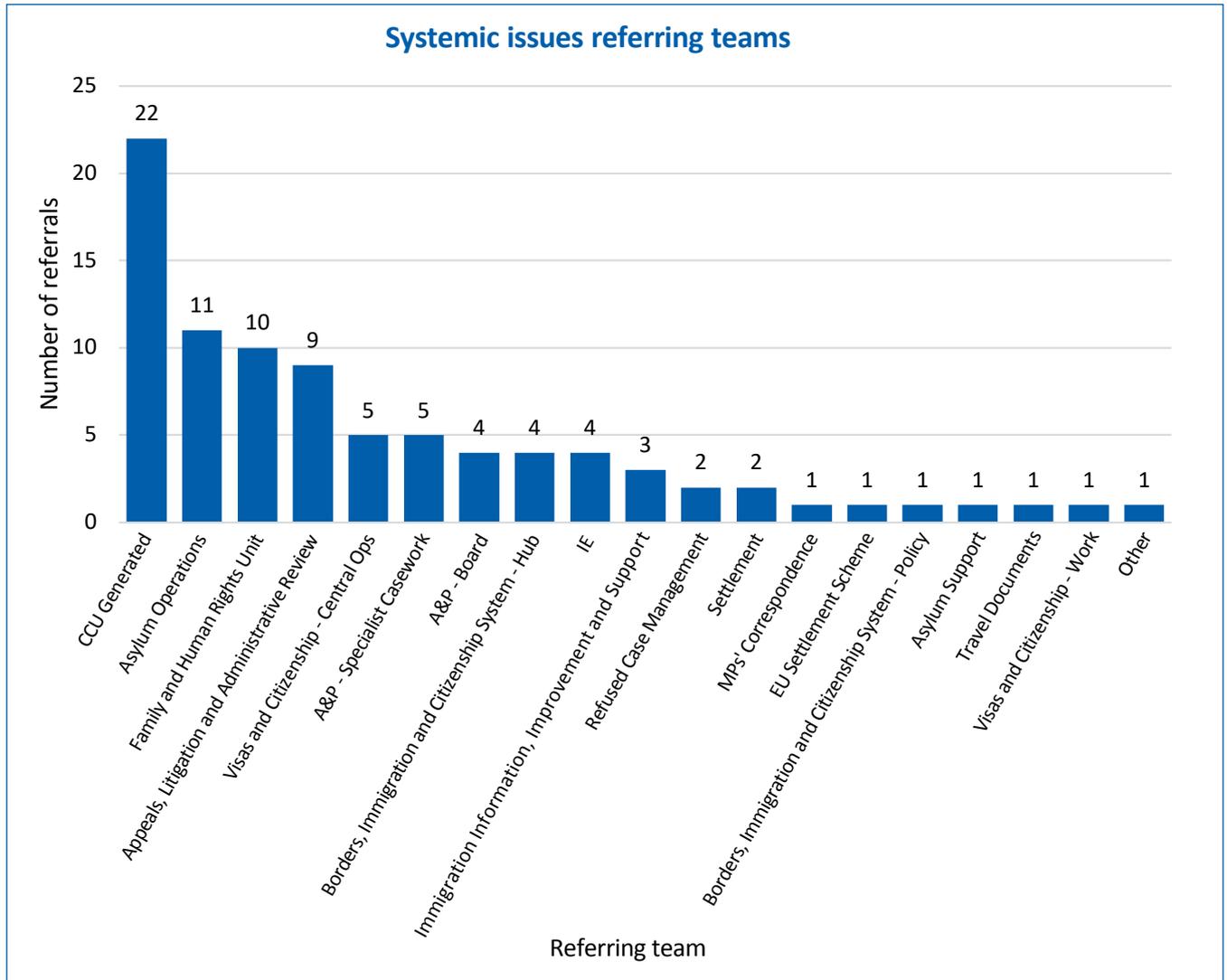
## Identification of systemic issues

- 5.24** Part of CCU's role, as set out in the position statement provided by the Home Office, is to "identify wider systemic issues". This work is undertaken by a designated team – the Early Warnings Team (EWT) – who at the time of the inspection were on loan to assist with the Home Office's response to small boats. Inspectors were told that, when CCU was initially created, the Head of Unit went to "high level people" asking for units to share their longstanding issues in order to generate work for the EWT. As CCU's profile increased, this approach had ceased and a more formal process commenced.
- 5.25** The SOP for Systemic Issues states:
- "Systemic issues can come to the attention of the CCU:
- through meetings between the Casework Professionalisation and Intelligence Command Senior Management Team (CPIC SMT) and the business
  - from interactions between CCU and business areas
  - from the identification of trends through the handling of individual cases
  - direct referrals to the CCU referrals inbox"
- 5.26** Inspectors were provided with the risk register for CPIC, which identified the inability of CPIC to "comission [sic] reports from PRAU [Performance Reporting & Analysis Unit]" and the impact this could have on the unit's ability to identify trends. This risk was marked as "significant" likelihood and impact, but actions to mitigate appeared to have stalled.
- 5.27** The Casework SOP set out a requirement to identify, in the formulation of the Tech Specs' response, "whether the individual case links into the wider systemic work being undertaken by the unit or whether this could be identifying a wider issue", and was combined with an instruction for the Tech Spec to discuss the issue with their line manager. There was also the opportunity to discuss possible systemic issues at the Tech Spec forum. The Secretariat, when serving the feedback document to the referrer, would include reference to systemic issues in the response. However, there was no requirement in the SOP for a potential systemic issue to

be shared with the EWT. The individual cases tracker had briefly recorded, for several months in 2018 only, possible trends; a column dedicated to identifying if a case was a systemic issue had been added in mid-2021, but showed only a couple of negative entries and was not retrospective. There was no coherent way for either the EWT or Casework Team to assess the relationship between individual case referrals and the identification of systemic issues.

- 5.28** The newly recruited SEO Data Production and Analysis role focused primarily on the provision of performance information to the Senior Management Team, though there appeared to be the expectation from other staff that this role would include the monitoring of trends. The postholder was on secondment at the time of the inspection.
- 5.29** Inspectors sought to understand, through interviews with staff, the extent to which the EWT were undertaking proactive horizon scanning. It was clear that there was not currently the capacity for the EWT, or CCU, to undertake this activity. In this respect, the focus of the team was problem solving, rather than problem spotting. Discussions with senior managers revealed the view that this work primarily lay with the Early Warning Unit (part of the Windrush Immigration Implementation Unit within Home Office Strategy), which had the capacity and skills to analyse the relevant data, and with UKVI's risk and assurance teams. Acknowledging concerns about the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS), CCU are engaged with a Working Group on EUSS, though this work was not focused on identifying systemic issues but rather considering the relationship between EUSS and the Routes to Redress workstream (a mechanism designed to enable customers to query their immigration status, due to come online once data-sharing between the Home Office and other government departments recommenced).
- 5.30** A key driver for the identification of systemic issues appeared to therefore be the Senior Management Team – subsequently termed “CCU self-generated” referrals – the single largest individual generating source. Inspectors reviewed the latest available systemic issues tracker which covered the period 31 July 2018 to 16 July 2021. This showed that the EWT had received 89 referrals in total, 22 of which were self-generated by CCU, making up 24.7% of referrals (see Figure 2).

Figure 2



## Standard Operating Procedure – Early Warnings Team

**5.31** Unlike the Casework Team SOP, the approach taken on systemic issues as set out in the EWT SOP required SCWs and Tech Specs to undertake “pre-discovery” or background research to assess if the case was suitable for CCU, with less focus on acceptance/rejection/signposting. This work included contacting the referrer to better understand any previous work undertaken, the identification and reviews of guidance and legislation, and risks. SCWs in the EWT told inspectors that there was no specific definition of a systemic issue; one noted that:

“... you would struggle to put a definition on it, you don’t want to constrain it. I don’t think we can define it; it’s more of a feel, more of a discussion about what is achievable.”

It therefore appeared to inspectors that the referral process was less structured than that required by the Casework Team, and the status of a case when it was in the pre-discovery stage was unclear.

**5.32** Unlike the Casework Team SOP, the systemic issues SOP does not contain a deadline for the closing of a systemic issue. When the SCW considers an issue to be closed they need to inform the Secretariat which will – in most cases – arrange a closure “show and tell” where the SCW provides evidence that the work is either complete or has reached a stage where a case can move to a “watching brief”. The EWT tracker does not contain dates to indicate when the 57 closed referrals were completed so it is not possible to analyse how long it takes the EWT to close a systemic issue. Figure 3 sets out the average time a non-closed case has been held by the EWT process as well the volumes of cases at each stage.

**Figure 3**

Case status	Average working days elapsed since case assigned <sup>16</sup>	Number of issues/referrals
All Non-Closed Cases	389.1	32
Open	291.2	19
Watching	543.3	7
Other <sup>17</sup>	551.8	5
Awaiting Benefit Realised	355.0	1

## Capacity of the Secretariat

**5.33** The CPIC Secretariat performs a vital role in support of CCU, both as its interface with the rest of the department and as the point from which the work of the unit is coordinated and monitored. The Secretariat receives the referrals of cases and issues that are submitted to the CCU, allocates those referrals, tracks the progress of CCU work on the referrals, transmits finished CCU advice to referring team, and monitors the referring teams’ implementation of CCU-generated solutions. The extent to which Secretariat staff had oversight and responsibility for the responses provided by CCU was notable. As set out above, they required regular updates, and could utilise the managerial escalation process when cases were progressing slowly. They were responsible for keeping the referring team informed of progress. Staff also had oversight of the final responses sent to the caseworking team, ensuring that the correct approach had been followed and that the advice was framed in an appropriate manner.

**5.34** The role and remit of the Secretariat had evolved in line with the unit. However, it was not clear that adequate resourcing had been put in place to match this evolution. The Secretariat holds responsibility for a wide range of business support functions; the team had also taken on some limited support tasks for the Senior Management Team after the departure of the Grade 6 and her private secretary. The volume and range of work expected of the Secretariat was broad, though staff indicated that communication with senior managers was open and frank and that work could be reallocated if required. Some parts of the role, such as risk management and data protection, had been included in the newly developed role of the SEO Data Analysis and Production; however, though this post had been recently filled, the postholder was on loan to the response dealing with small boats, meaning that their tasks were not currently being managed. Inspectors considered that Secretariat staff carried out their function efficiently

<sup>16</sup> The number of days has been calculated from the date the case was assigned to 4 August 2021 (the “system day”) used by CCU in the tracker.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Other’ refers to cases from ‘Windrush Lessons Learned Recommendations’ but has no system date associated with it. Work started on 10 December 2018.

and with dedication, but it is not clear that the reallocation of responsibilities has effectively addressed the shortfall in Secretariat capacity.

## Management information

- 5.35** Inspectors reviewed the management information tools used by CCU to understand and assess performance. A number of “trackers” were provided by the Home Office.
- 5.36** For the Casework Team, a continuously updated database, held on Excel, was provided. This spreadsheet contained a wealth of information, including referral date, referring team, case progression (potentially three stages to be completed), name of the assigned caseworker, whether the case attracted MPs’ interest, etc. The spreadsheet had been designed for CCU in 2018, by a Workflow Working Group, before the CCU went live, “with people just guessing what we would need”. Inspectors were told that, in October 2019, a technical team were commissioned to design a bespoke database, but the process took over a year, and the final product was not what was required. As a result, the spreadsheets remained the primary method of data collection.
- 5.37** Inspectors noted a range of data quality issues within the Casework Team tracker, some examples of those found are set out at Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Examples of data quality issues**

Inconsistent data	The United States of America was entered in 3 different ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USA – 9 cases</li> <li>• United States of America – 3 cases</li> <li>• Uninted [sic] States of America – 1 case</li> </ul>
Contradictory data	3 cases that were marked as accepted for a ‘stage 1’ event were not marked as ‘Accepted’ at the referral stage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 were marked as ‘Signposted’</li> <li>• 1 was marked as ‘Rejected’</li> </ul>
Incomplete data	Of the 404 cases that were shown as ‘Closed’, 6 had no data entered in the associated ‘Date Completed/Rejected’ field. Of the 400 cases that had a named individual associated, 17 had no nationality completed. These 17 were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blank – 13 cases</li> <li>• ‘Unspecified’ – 2 cases</li> <li>• ‘Unknown’ – 1 case</li> <li>• ‘Various’ – 1 case</li> </ul>

- 5.38** There was an awareness within CCU of the risks of poor data quality. The Casework risk register noted, at Risk 2, rated “possible” likelihood and “major” impact, concerns that the “Trackers” contain “inacuracies [sic] in recording and reporting CPIC work”, and noted the possibility that manual data entry can be inaccurate with a knock-on effect on performance data. Actions to mitigate, which were outstanding at the time of the inspection, sought to “Work with STP [Strategy, Transformation and Performance] to develop and implement a database to replace

the Trackers and limit access to the Spreadsheet to reduce the risk of corruption”, due for completion in late October 2021. Earlier completed actions focused on an internal data quality process, and the development of an interim tracker.

- 5.39** Similar issues were identified in the systemic issues tracker which recorded the work of the EWT. Of the 89 systemic issues identified on the tracker, 57 were marked as closed, yet no corresponding closure date is recorded. In fact, no field currently exists for this to be recorded, and there is no requirement for this information to be submitted. Using this data source, it is not possible for CCU to be able to review the range of time that it takes to conclude a systemic case. The systemic issues had an additional tracker – the ‘Rejected Systemic referrals tracker’ – this contained only one line of (limited) data relating to “ILR for Children”, which was rejected in July 2021, so no further comparative, in-depth analysis was possible for rejected systemic referrals.
- 5.40** The recruitment of a Data Production and Analysis SEO had been positive in trying to address poor data quality and one of his initial tasks was to review the tracker, streamline it, and build in additional checks and balances. This role did not involve checking the accuracy of the data nor using this information to assess the impact of the work of CCU. Secretariat staff had developed a QA process for the individual case tracker, but it had not yet been signed off and the process had yet to be implemented.
- 5.41** Discussions with CCU staff indicated that caseworking staff were not concerned with data collection or its uses, viewing it more as a burden than a tool for analysis. The management information collected was used to inform senior managers about performance, but no concerns were raised by managers as to the relationship between the accuracy of this data used and the conclusions on performance which were drawn from it.
- 5.42** Inspectors concluded that CCU’s management information is not accurate and subsequently not trustworthy. The absence of high-quality data also had an impact on the capability of managers to determine how well the team is meeting targets, determine the effectiveness of the current resource or assess future resource needs. While recent local efforts to improve the trackers are welcome, a thorough cleanse of the spreadsheets to address data quality issues would leave CCU better placed to extract reliable information from these tools. Over the longer term, the allocation of additional resource to support the development of better technical tools would enhance the unit’s ability to spot trends emerging from the referrals it receives.
- 5.43** Senior managers were aware of the concerns about data quality and had sought to address them, highlighting their preference for a proper database, designed by the Home Office’s Digital, Data and Technology (DDAT) team, and noting the bids they had submitted to acquire this resource. The primary blocker was, in their view, where the team sat in the list of Home Office priorities. As mitigation, they had developed safeguards, such as minimising the number of people who had access to the trackers and reducing the amount of information requested. Senior managers told inspectors that they were confident in the data, in part because it covered a relatively low volume of cases.
- 5.44** It was unclear how staff were able to assess the success of the unit in achieving their objectives using this poor-quality data. There appeared to be limited managerial or staff interest in developing metrics which would enable the robust evaluation of the impact of the unit. One senior manager, in response to a question about what success looked like, said “It’s continuing to deal with systemic issues in a timely fashion, landing professionalisation programme on a mandatory basis, having a complex casework function.” This lack of concrete deliverables, and

reference to vague concepts such as “changing the culture of the Home Office”, another often cited vision of success, is problematic.

## Engagement – CCU’s reputation

- 5.45** All of those with whom inspectors spoke were clear on the value of CCU and the assistance they provided to caseworkers. A referring manager commented:

“They help us to explore, with policy, not only individual decisions but help us to challenge policy and, hopefully, get it amended to make better decisions and support vulnerable customers.”

Another stated:

“It’s about being able to identify the relevant people to get things done, that’s what we rely on them for – they have more visibility than me and it’s central to their role as they can spend more time on it.”

Internal stakeholders saw CCU as adding value in several distinct areas. Firstly, and most commonly, in their ability to bring together a broad range of actors from across UKVI to consider problems, and secondly, in developing traction with these teams to progress solutions. CCU staff themselves echoed these thoughts, adding that their good reputation was centred on the fact that they did not give up on cases, and that they were key to stopping individuals and issues falling through the gaps.

- 5.46** While CCU is primarily concerned with the activities of UKVI, inspectors noted that IE had referred 80 cases to the unit, representing nearly a fifth of all individual case referrals. IE staff clearly articulated the value of CCU, highlighting particularly the benefits of the learning enabled by the Chief Caseworker Network. IE’s experience also drew attention to links between CCU and the Safety Valve Mechanism.

## Engagement strategy – ownership

- 5.47** Inspectors recognised the relationship between the profile of the unit, the importance of CCU’s communication and engagement with caseworking teams, and the volume and shape of referrals received. All of these factors underpinned the ability of CCU to achieve the cultural change the Home Office sought.
- 5.48** It was clear from interviews with internal stakeholders that there had been, at the time of the unit’s formation, a deliberate campaign to raise awareness of CCU and its services. A senior manager outlined the approach taken to raising the profile of the unit, including CCU featuring in standard Home Office communication activity such as articles on Horizon (intranet) and global emails to all staff; later this was complemented with a monthly note from the Head of Unit to all UKVI senior caseworkers. Managers told inspectors that they had good visibility at Senior Civil Servant level, with “senior buy-in” to their work.
- 5.49** At the time of the inspection, there was a Grade 7 Strategy and Policy Lead in post, whose duties included developing CCU’s communication and engagement strategy, chairing the communication and engagement working group, and leading on “engagement around strategic transformation across UKVI”. Inspectors were provided with an undated copy

of CCU's communications and engagement strategy, which had been developed in late 2020. The strategy's primary aim was to:

"Communicate CCU's objectives ... and how the unit can support UKVI (and beyond) in achieving these changes. [and to]

Promote work done to achieve those objectives, including successes, lessons learned, and case studies."

- 5.50** The strategy identified key audiences, such as Directors General, and considered what issues should be communicated, the communication channels which should be used, and assessed each audience on the basis of their interest and power. The paper considered current approaches, such as the use of targeted emails, and made recommendations on how these approaches could be improved. CCU did not engage outside of the Home Office with external stakeholders unless requested to do so, and inspectors were not told of any specific activity in this area. At the time of the inspection this strategy had not been implemented. More broadly, much of this strategic work had been in effective hiatus since early 2021 when a combination of staff movement and ill health meant that limited engagement work had taken place. This lack of strategic activity was reflected in documents outlining actions from six months of Senior Management Team meetings, though some piecemeal engagement was taking place on a local level. Despite this, there were no risks relating to communication and engagement on either CPIC's risk register, or that of the individual caseworking team.
- 5.51** Staff highlighted some of the challenges for CCU in terms of how to communicate their message about the work of CCU. There was an acknowledgement of the difficulty in crafting a positive message about the contribution CCU could make in resolving cases without that message being interpreted as suggesting that referring teams had in some way failed in their handling of those cases.

## Relationship management

- 5.52** Acknowledging the relationship between internal engagement and increased referrals, inspectors sought to understand how the unit engaged with internal stakeholders, namely caseworking teams. Interviews with caseworking teams who made referrals to CCU showed that ongoing and well-developed relationships between the relevant referring manager and the CCU was central to the referral process itself, and engagement with CCU more broadly. Inspectors interviewed four managers from referring teams, representing high, medium and low referral volumes within UKVI as well as one high referring team from IE. All referenced the value of their personal relationships with CCU staff. The fact that many CCU staff had been in post since the unit's inception was a positive contributing factor. Referring managers also spoke highly of the quality of the responses received from CCU which cemented the value of their ongoing engagement. However, there was no formal mechanism in place for CCU to identify and consider feedback on the work of the unit nor how it was perceived by caseworking teams.
- 5.53** More recently, this engagement had been nurtured by the development of the Chief Caseworker Network which had brought together Chief Caseworkers on a regular basis to share learning, for example through the use of speakers, and to empower Chief Caseworkers within their caseworking teams. The overall value of the network was seen by referring teams particularly as a mechanism for building relationships across UKVI. However, inspectors were told that the regularity and consistency of these meetings had begun to slip, and referring

managers raised concerns about the quality of the engagement and the efficacy of the network itself.

- 5.54** The extent to which the caseworkers within referring teams were aware of CCU was more challenging to determine. The impact of COVID-19 had undermined one of CCU's strengths which was to be co-located with caseworking teams across the country. This softer engagement, via informal conversations, and appearances at 10@10 meetings, had ended as the Home Office moved to home-based working. Referring team managers indicated that it had been some time since CCU had engaged with their teams directly.
- 5.55** More broadly, the approach taken internally as to the referral process meant that it was via managers that cases would be sent to CCU rather than direct from the caseworker, as the case required review by the caseworking teams own Tech Spec and/or SCW before being considered eligible for referral. Referring managers argued that there was greater scope for CCU to undertake engagement work, with one commenting they would like to see "more engagement in terms of what they're doing, achieving, delivering, what they are working on, wider business engagement."
- 5.56** In terms of the recent work undertaken by CCU to broaden their reach and profile, inspectors were provided with a tracker which set out details of 35 sessions held by CCU with teams from across UKVI, from August 2020 to March 2021, and included a summary of the questions asked and discussion. Inspectors also reviewed a 14-slide PowerPoint presentation, dated October 2020, used at these sessions, and which provided a comprehensive overview of CCU and the Professionalisation Hub, though it contained few details on how to access CCU's services. However, more recent profile-raising had been very limited, with one internal stakeholder commenting, "I can't recall when CCU promoted themselves other than the updates that are sent out as a global and I can't remember when they last sent that out, I've not seen one recently." The result had been, as perceived by CCU staff, that "Now we're not seeing many cases coming in – because we're not doing any comms and engagement. People have forgotten about us."
- 5.57** At interview, staff from CCU shared mixed views on the efficacy and use of the communication and engagement strategy. While most were clear that there was value in engagement, this often focused on individual relationships, for example, by pointing to the transfer of staff from caseworking units to the CCU. Some understood both the relationship between engagement and increased referral, and more broadly, the need for this engagement activity to be regularly undertaken.
- 5.58** The majority of staff had not undertaken any engagement activity but referenced a working group which had been convened, as an additional part of their role, though this group had only met once. Others mentioned doing some engagement activity, but actual volumes were unclear. Written documents on operational excellence reflected staff disquiet about the role they were supposed to play in relation to engagement.
- 5.59** For those working on systemic issues as part of the EWT, rather than on individual cases, there was perceived to be less of a link between engagement and referrals, and subsequently less engagement activity by this team. However, the value of increased engagement was not only found in relation to an increase in referrals, and therefore a reassertion of the value of CCU, but could also be seen as an area of challenge in terms of the systemic work being undertaken by the EWT. Documents outlining progress on solving systemic issues clearly show that the

lack of effective engagement with policy teams was a blocker to solving systemic issues, with contact being ignored or responses to CCU slow.

- 5.60** Staff working in the Professionalisation Hub (PH), who sit alongside CCU and are overseen by the Grade 6 Head of CPIC, but are managed by separate Grade 7 Assistant Directors, acknowledged that they were well placed to raise the profile of the unit, but indicated that their focus was related to training, rather than the services offered by CCU. One commented that:

“We do our specific presentations and engagements. We do tie in that PH is part of the wider CPIC, which includes CCU and Intel, but no, we don’t go into the workings of what they can do.”

There were conflicting views at a managerial level as to the extent that PH should be promoting CCU, with one senior manager noting that they had different objectives and were quite distinct areas, with another considering this work was integral to PH’s outreach.

- 5.61** CCU’s senior managers acknowledged that there was value in increasing engagement activity and being more strategic in how this work was undertaken. Inspectors were told that a review would commence soon, and senior managers highlighted the value of Wendy Williams’ return to the Home Office to evaluate the implementation of the Windrush Review recommendations as a vehicle for raising CCU’s profile.

## Impact of the evolution of CCU

- 5.62** CCU staff acknowledged that the unit’s role and remit had evolved and expanded since its launch. At the time of its establishment as a response to the Windrush crisis in 2018, CCU’s central aims were to champion culture change and to promote the appropriate use of discretion in immigration decision-making. One senior manager saw CCU’s mission as time-limited, envisaging that the unit would be wound down once its goal of embedding a change of culture across the organisation had been achieved.
- 5.63** Three years on, CCU staff reported to inspectors that, while promoting a person-centric approach to decision-making and encouraging the use of discretion where appropriate remain at the heart of CCU’s mission, the unit had increasingly taken on referrals of complex cases and technical matters not directly related to CCU’s original mandate. Managers spoke of this broadening of the scope of the unit’s work in positive terms, describing it as evidence of CCU’s flexibility and of its ability to build relationships and add value across the organisation. They suggested, too, that CCU’s work on complex cases that cut across UKVI business areas pointed to a permanent need for a unit like CCU – sitting at the centre of the organisation, with the capacity to coordinate the handling of cross-cutting cases that might otherwise fall into gaps in the system.
- 5.64** While the ability of CCU to play a coordinating role and to assist in the resolution of complex cases and issues is welcomed and appreciated by referring teams, the fact that CCU’s remit has expanded gradually, organically and in a piecemeal fashion – without a formal update to its original operating mandate – has had an impact on the ability of the unit to articulate its purpose clearly.
- 5.65** This lack of clarity around the identity and function of CCU is exacerbated by its position as part of CPIC, alongside units – the Professionalisation Hub and the Intelligence, Fraud and

Corruption Unit (IFCU) – that, to a large extent, function autonomously. While senior managers’ efforts to coordinate the operations of CPIC’s constituent units more closely – ensuring that the Professionalisation Hub’s outreach efforts make reference to the work of CCU, for example – are to be encouraged, any rebranding of CCU as CPIC runs the risk of causing confusion among the referring teams that are, in some sense, CCU’s “customers”. The success of any renewed engagement efforts by CCU to raise its profile and build awareness of its work across the department will therefore depend in part on CCU’s ability to define itself and its position in the organisation more precisely and to explain the scope of its activity more clearly.

- 5.66** Moreover, in the absence of a clear, up-to-date delineation of the current parameters of the unit’s remit, CCU has taken on workstreams that cannot easily be related to either its original focus on culture change and discretion or its expanded role as a coordinator of cross-cutting casework. For example, CCU’s handling since May 2021 of referrals from HMPO which is not technically complex, does not cut across different parts of the immigration system, and does not touch upon questions of discretion or culture change. Managers told inspectors that CCU held this work to “plug a gap for the customer” and to prevent them “falling through the gaps”.
- 5.67** Inspectors expected CCU to indicate that that the unit was well placed to take a person-centric approach to ensuring that any rights and entitlements held by a distinctive group of British nationals are recognised – in a way that did not happen with some members of the Windrush generation – but CCU staff did not articulate this as the justification for their taking on this work. Rather, this workstream represented a way of HMPO accessing part of a Home Office system that was inaccessible to them without CCU’s assistance. This points to a danger of CCU becoming a “dumping ground” for tasks that other units either do not wish, or do not have the capacity, to do. While the contribution that CCU makes by carrying out this task is positive, and the work appears not to place excessive strain on CCU resources, the unit should reflect upon its purpose and role, and update its operating mandate and terms of reference accordingly, before taking on other such workstreams, to ensure that they are aligned with CCU’s remit, mission and strategic direction.

# Annex A: Role and remit of the Independent Chief Inspector

The role of the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (until 2012, the Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency) was established by the UK Borders Act 2007. Sections 48-56 of the UK Borders Act 2007 (as amended) provide the legislative framework for the inspection of the efficiency and effectiveness of the performance of functions relating to immigration, asylum, nationality and customs by the Home Secretary and by any person exercising such functions on her behalf. The legislation empowers the Independent Chief Inspector to monitor, report on and make recommendations about all such functions in particular:

- consistency of approach
- the practice and performance of listed persons compared to other persons doing similar activities
- the procedure in making decisions
- the treatment of claimants and applicants
- certification under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum act 2002 (c. 41) (unfounded claim)
- the law about discrimination in the exercise of functions, including reliance on section 19D of the Race Relations Act 1976 (c. 74) (exception for immigration functions)
- the procedure in relation to the exercise of enforcement powers (including powers of arrest, entry, search and seizure)
- practice and procedure in relation to the prevention, detection and investigation of offences
- the procedure in relation to the conduct of criminal proceedings
- whether customs functions have been appropriately exercised by the Secretary of State and the Director of Border Revenue
- the provision of information
- the handling of complaints; and
- the content of information about conditions in countries outside the United Kingdom, which the Secretary of State compiles and makes available, for purposes connected with immigration and asylum, to immigration officers and other officials.

In addition, the legislation enables the Secretary of State to request the Independent Chief Inspector to report to her in writing in relation to specified matters.

The legislation requires the Independent Chief Inspector to report in writing to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State lays all reports before Parliament, which she has committed to do within eight weeks of receipt, subject to both Houses of Parliament being in session.

Reports are published in full except for any material that the Secretary of State determines it is undesirable to publish for reasons of national security or where publication might jeopardise an individual's safety, in which case the legislation permits the Secretary of State to omit the relevant passages from the published report.

As soon as a report has been laid in Parliament, it is published on the Inspectorate's website, together with the Home Office's response to the report and recommendations.

# Annex B: ICIBI's expectations

## Background and explanatory documents are easy to understand and use

(e.g. Statements of Intent (both ministerial and managerial), Impact Assessments, Legislation, Policies, Guidance, Instructions, Strategies, Business Plans, intranet and GOV.UK pages, posters, leaflets etc.)

- They are written in plain, unambiguous English (with foreign language versions available, where appropriate).
- They are kept up to date.
- They are readily accessible to anyone who needs to rely on them (with online signposting and links, wherever possible).

## Processes are simple to follow and transparent

- They are IT-enabled and include input formatting to prevent users from making data entry errors.
- Mandatory requirements, including the nature and extent of evidence required to support applications and claims, are clearly defined.
- The potential for blockages and delays is designed out, wherever possible.
- They are resourced to meet time and quality standards (including legal requirements, Service Level Agreements, published targets).

## Anyone exercising an immigration, asylum, nationality or customs function on behalf of the Home Secretary is fully competent

- Individuals understand their role, responsibilities, accountabilities and powers.
- Everyone receives the training they need for their current role and for their professional development, plus regular feedback on their performance.
- Individuals and teams have the tools, support and leadership they need to perform efficiently, effectively and lawfully.
- Everyone is making full use of their powers and capabilities, including to prevent, detect, investigate and, where appropriate, prosecute offences.
- The workplace culture ensures that individuals feel able to raise concerns and issues without fear of the consequences.

## **Decisions and actions are ‘right first time’**

- They are demonstrably evidence-based or, where appropriate, intelligence-led.
- They are made in accordance with relevant legislation and guidance.
- They are reasonable (in light of the available evidence) and consistent.
- They are recorded and communicated accurately, in the required format and detail, and can be readily retrieved (with due regard to data protection requirements).

## **Errors are identified, acknowledged and promptly ‘put right’**

- Safeguards, management oversight, and quality assurance measures are in place, are tested and are seen to be effective.
- Complaints are handled efficiently, effectively and consistently.
- Lessons are learned and shared, including from administrative reviews and litigation.
- There is a commitment to continuous improvement, including by the prompt implementation of recommendations from reviews, inspections and audits.

## **Each immigration, asylum, nationality or customs function has a Home Office (BICS) ‘owner’**

- The BICS ‘owner’ is accountable for:
  - implementation of relevant policies and processes
  - performance (informed by routine collection and analysis of Management Information (MI) and data, and monitoring of agreed targets/deliverables/budgets)
  - resourcing (including workforce planning and capability development, including knowledge and information management)
  - managing risks (including maintaining a Risk Register)
  - communications, collaborations and deconfliction within the Home Office, with other government departments and agencies, and other affected bodies
  - effective monitoring and management of relevant contracted out services
  - stakeholder engagement (including customers, applicants, claimants and their representatives)

# Acknowledgements

Staff at CPIC and the Pre-Inspection Team

## **Inspection team members**

Lead Inspector: Caroline Parkes

Project Manager: Paul Whitehead

Inspector: Halbert Jones

Inspector: Chris Thompson

