



**THE UK BORDER AGENCY RESPONSE TO THE
INDEPENDENT CHIEF INSPECTOR OF BORDERS AND
IMMIGRATION REPORT: A SHORT NOTICE INSPECTION
OF DECISION MAKING QUALITY IN THE ACCRA VISA
SECTION**

The UK Border Agency thanks the Independent Chief Inspector (ICI) for advance sight of this report that is predominantly focussed on decision quality and is pleased to note that the decision to refuse was correct in all cases examined, with 96% of cases in the file sample meeting all of the ICI's decision quality indicators.

The UK Border Agency response to the Independent Chief Inspector's recommendations:

1. Ensures that all complaints received, whether in person, by telephone, by email or in writing, are treated as complaints and each stage of the handling from receipt to conclusion is recorded accurately: The UK Border Agency accepts this recommendation with the caveat that complaints to visa sections can only be received when made in writing.

- 1.1 The UK Border Agency accepts that there was room for improvement in the way that Accra both recorded some complaints and responded to them. As a result, Accra has introduced a nominated Entry Clearance Manager (ECM) lead for complaints who is responsible for introducing best practice handling and will provide additional quality control of the process of handling complaints for an extended period of time until the issues highlighted in the report are resolved. Accra will also expand complaints handling to its spoke posts enabling applicants to submit complaints directly there. These will be assessed and analysed centrally in Accra and recorded in line with guidance.
- 1.2 The guidance provided to applicants on how to complain about a visa application or the service received is published on the UK Border Agency's website. The process is well established, and states that complaints can only be made in writing. The UK Border Agency will amend internal staff guidance to remove any confusion on this issue.

2. Keeps stakeholders and applicants informed where there are foreseeable delays in meeting its published customer service standards: The UK Border Agency accepts this recommendation

- 2.1 The UK Border Agency agrees that customers should be advised if there are foreseeable delays to service standards. Guidance states that Posts should use their websites to highlight the changed processing times to applicants even if these are still within the worldwide customer service standards together with a brief explanation for the delay. The UK Border Agency will issue a reminder of this best practice to all Posts by the end of the year and will check compliance in January and is looking to improve its websites to give applicants better information updates.
- 2.2 Accra is now regularly communicating with stakeholders such of Heads of Missions at spokes to keep them informed of current turnaround times. Accra is currently processing applications within published customer service times.
- 2.3 The UK Border Agency publishes end to end visa processing times on its website and provides applicants with information on the recent timescales for the resolution of applications in the main visa categories for each its 375 application points across the globe. The UK Border Agency believes this is one of the most comprehensive and transparent guides to processing times of any major global visa service.

3. Conducts a review of ECO targets in the Accra visa section in line with its own guidance ensuring staff are consulted and understand how these are set: The UK Border Agency accepts this recommendation

3.1 A benchmarking exercise was completed prior to the arrival of the staff that were interviewed during the inspection. A large number of staff interviewed were Short Term Entry Clearance Officers (temporary staff), and such staff are not routinely included in benchmarking exercises. Accra has now outlined the rationale for the existing benchmarks to staff. Accra will be undertaking a full review of benchmarks with the arrival of new staff in January.

4. Routinely analyses appeal outcomes in order to identify best practice and opportunities for improvement: The UK Border Agency accepts this recommendation

4.1 The caseworking IT system used by the majority of staff overseas was amended in April 2012 in order to capture the reasons why refusal decisions are overturned by an ECM or by an Immigration Judge. This data is used by a new central decision quality team to analyse where there are issues with decision quality, and use this information to better direct checking levels.

4.2 Accra is committed to making ECOs more involved in the reviewing of appeals. Team exercises with ECMs and the Regional Management Team to monitor decision improvements at the initial stage are underway. Processes will be implemented to ensure that the reasonableness of the original decision and the grounds of appeal are routinely examined.