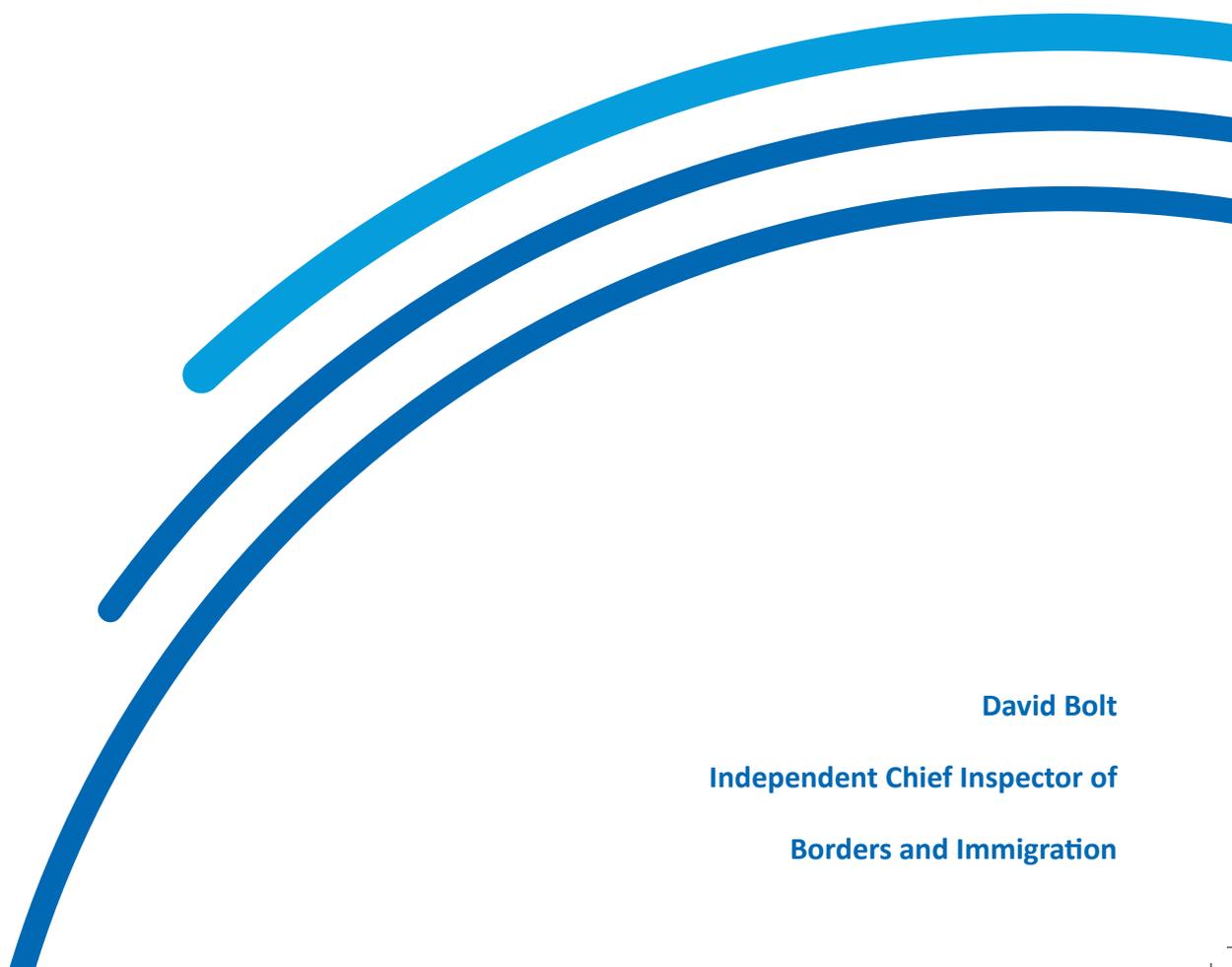




# An inspection of the Home Office's Reporting and Offender Management processes

December 2016 – March 2017



David Bolt

Independent Chief Inspector of  
Borders and Immigration



# **An inspection of the Home Office's Reporting and Offender Management processes**

**December 2016 – March 2017**

Presented to Parliament pursuant to Section 50 (2) of the UK Borders Act 2007

November 2017



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## **Our purpose**

To help improve the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of the Home Office's border and immigration functions through unfettered, impartial and evidence-based inspection.

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# Foreword

In my first three-year Inspection Plan,<sup>1</sup> published in April 2016, I indicated my intention under the theme of 'Compliance Management and Enforcement' to inspect 'Contact management: Reporting arrangements, including Reporting Centres' in 2018/19.

In June 2016, the Home Secretary asked if I would bring these pieces of work forward to the latter part of 2016/17.

Because of the overlapping issues, I decided to carry out two inspections in parallel. One examined the Home Office's management of non-detained Foreign National Offenders (FNOs). This is covered in a separate report. Meanwhile, this inspection examined the efficiency and effectiveness of the Home Office's Reporting and Offender Management (ROM) system, focusing on its understanding and management of the reporting population, and the implementation of policy and guidance relating to the management of absconders.<sup>2</sup>

This inspection looked at whether reporting events are effective in moving cases towards conclusion, including how Reporting Centres were encouraging voluntary departures, carrying out interviews to progress Emergency Travel Document (ETD)<sup>3</sup> applications, working with partners to resolve barriers to removal, and supporting enforced removals by detaining individuals upon reporting.

The inspection found that Home Office guidance was clear that reporting events must have some value beyond compliance, but the volumes made this extremely difficult, and this was compounded by poor internal communication and coordination. The way non-compliance with reporting restrictions was recorded and treated was inconsistent, and there was little evidence that effective action was being taken to locate the vast bulk of absconders.

The report makes six Recommendations grouped under three headings: achieving the stated purpose of the ROM system; concluding cases; and, managing non-compliance.

This report was sent to the Home Secretary on 24 May 2017.

David Bolt

Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration

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<sup>1</sup> <http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Forward-Plan-2016-17-2018-19.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The Home Office defines an absconder as an individual who "breaches one or more of the conditions imposed as a condition of TA(TR), bail or release on a restriction order served to them on the appropriate notice **and**, in all cases, whose whereabouts are unknown and all mandatory procedures to re-establish contact with the migrant have failed." Home Office guidance: 'Non-compliance and absconder process'; Version 7.0. Published on 15 December 2016. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/581034/non-compliance-and-absconder-process-.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/581034/non-compliance-and-absconder-process-.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> An ETD is a document issued by the Embassy of High Commission of an individual's country of origin or residence, which permits a single journey from the UK to that State.

# 1. Purpose and scope

- 1.1 This inspection examined the efficiency and effectiveness of the Home Office's Reporting and Offender Management (ROM) system, focusing on:
- the Home Office's understanding and management of the reporting population
  - the nature of reporting, in particular whether reporting events are meaningful interactions aimed at concluding cases by:
    - encouraging voluntary departures
    - effective use of Emergency Travel Document (ETD) interviews
    - working with partners to resolve barriers to removal
    - detaining and removing individuals from the UK
  - implementation of policy and guidance relating to the management of absconders
- 1.2 The management of non-detained foreign national offenders by the Criminal Casework Directorate (CCD)<sup>4</sup> was inspected in parallel. This is in a separate report.

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<sup>4</sup> CCD is a department within Immigration Enforcement Directorate. It is responsible for monitoring Foreign National Offenders in prison, in an Immigration Removal Centre or in the community and progressing cases towards removal.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Inspectors:

- researched and reviewed open-source information relating to the ROM system
- reviewed relevant legislation, and Home Office guidance and other documentation (such as training materials) and data
- sampled 104 Home Office files where a reporting event was scheduled to take place between 1 January 2016 and 31 March 2017, broken down as follows:
  - 54 cases where the individual failed to report (25 of these individuals later resumed reporting, and the other 29 were declared by the Home Office to have absconded)
  - 26 cases where an ETD interview was scheduled
  - 24 cases where the Home Office planned to detain an individual during the scheduled reporting event
- interviewed Home Office managers at Higher Executive Officer (HEO) and Senior Officer (SEO) grade, and staff at Administrative Officer (AO) and Executive Officer (EO) grades at Becket House, Eaton House and Middlesbrough reporting centres
- met staff in Bedford responsible for managing the ROM system in the East of England Region<sup>5</sup>
- interviewed Home Office (Immigration Enforcement Directorate) senior managers at Senior Civil Service 1 (SCS1), Grade 6 and Grade 7 grades with responsibility for the ROM system

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<sup>5</sup> The East of England region encompasses the area from Norfolk to Essex. There is no Reporting Centre in that region. Reporting events take place at police stations.

## 3. Summary of conclusions

- 3.1 Home Office guidance is clear about the purpose of the Reporting and Offender Management (ROM) system. In short, it provides the Home Office's principal point of contact with individuals who have been notified of their liability for detention and removal from the UK for the remainder of their stay.
- 3.2 The guidance also makes clear that a 'reporting event' (a scheduled visit to a Home Office Reporting Centre, or in around 10% of cases to a police station) 'has to have some value beyond compliance: it must be a means to progress a case to conclusion.' In this context, case conclusion is either a grant of leave to remain in the UK, voluntary departure, or enforced removal.
- 3.3 However, the inspection found that this clarity of purpose, and the intention that reporting events should be meaningful, were seriously compromised by the practical difficulties of managing a large reporting population (c.80,000) and by poor communication and coordination between staff responsible for the ROM system and other Home Office units responsible for managing and making decisions about these individuals' asylum or immigration cases.
- 3.4 As at September 2016, around half of the reporting population (almost 40,000 individuals) was required to report at one of three London Reporting Centres. At the busiest of these, Becket House, the numbers of individuals ROM counter staff were expected to process in a day meant that they had on average two to three minutes per interview. Inevitably, opportunities for meaningful interactions were limited.
- 3.5 Reporting Centres are able to set and amend the frequency with which an individual is required to report, taking into account various factors: history of criminality; record of compliance with reporting restrictions; any safeguarding or medical issues; and the progress of any application submitted to the Home Office or any other Home Office casework activity. In practice, the size of the reporting population meant that three quarters of those reporting were required to do so monthly, quarterly, or less frequently. Individuals whose cases were managed by the Criminal Casework Directorate (CCD) tended to have to report more frequently.
- 3.6 ROM staff are not able to conclude a case. This is the responsibility of different caseworking units (depending on any applications submitted by the individual). These caseworking units can commission actions for ROM staff to complete at reporting events, intended to move the case towards conclusion, particularly enforced removal. However, the inspection found that a significant number of these commissions, especially for Emergency Travel Document (ETD) interviews, are rejected by ROM workflow teams because they are judged unlikely to succeed and therefore to be a poor use of ROM resources.
- 3.7 Meanwhile, ROM teams in London are identifying individuals they believe can be progressed towards case conclusion and prioritising them for interviews. They are doing this themselves at least in part because they fear they will not meet their performance targets if they rely solely on commissioned actions.

- 3.8 This divided view raised inspectors' concerns about how well the reporting population is understood by the Home Office, and the extent to which ROM staff and caseworking units are on the same page. The former were critical of the fact that they did not receive feedback from caseworking units.
- 3.9 In December 2016, there were almost 7,000 recorded instances of a scheduled reporting event not being completed, equivalent to approximately 9%. Home Office guidance sets out a 'three stage process' when an individual fails to report, starting with a telephone call or letter to re-establish contact, progressing to a home visit, and finally putting the case forward for absconder action. Once an individual has been declared an absconder their details are circulated on the Police National Computer (PNC) and automatically flagged to the Home Office National Absconder Tracing Team, which can access data held by other government departments to try to locate them. As at 31 December 2016, there were almost 60,000 declared absconders.
- 3.10 File sampling, and interviews with staff, identified significant inconsistencies in the way non-compliance with reporting restrictions was recorded and treated, in particular regarding the number of missed reporting events before absconder action was initiated. There was little evidence that the process was working as set out in guidance, or that effective action was being taken to locate the vast bulk of those declared as absconders.
- 3.11 At the time of the inspection, roughly 10% of the reporting population was required to report to a police station rather than to a Home Office Reporting Centre, either because they lived more than 25 miles away from a Reporting Centre or because there were concerns about the risks they posed to the community or of behaving disruptively. There were no formal agreements in place with police forces about the use of police stations for this purpose, and arrangements were described as 'historic' and 'legacy'. Of greater concern, police station staff were not trained or empowered by the Home Office to carry out meaningful interviews, for example to promote voluntary departure options, and the ROM system struggled to provide adequate support.
- 3.12 During this inspection, Home Office senior managers spoke a good deal about 'transformation', and their plans to make the ROM system into the main source of volume returns. These plans have many strands, but the underpinning ideas involve automating reporting activities where they can be, through improved IT and use of biometrics, and upskilling ROM staff to "deliver large volumes of returns and add value through activities that require knowledge, judgement and persuasion."
- 3.13 While these are key components, based on the inspection findings, the Home Office also needs to ensure that roles and responsibilities for everyone involved in progressing the cases of individuals subject to reporting restrictions to a conclusion are better defined and support joined-up working. It also needs to improve data collection and analysis about the reporting population so that reporting events and case progression are informed and aligned to organisational priorities.

## 4. Recommendations

### The Home Office should

In relation to achieving the stated purpose of the the Reporting and Offender Management (ROM) system:

1. Define the responsibilities of Reporting and Offender Management (ROM) staff and relevant case working staff for progressing the cases of individuals subject to reporting restrictions to a conclusion, with comprehensive guidance, including service levels agreements between ROMs and caseworking units to ensure that 'signposted' cases and commissions are actioned within agreed timescales.
2. Determine the most effective way(s) to identify changes in the circumstances of individuals subject to reporting restrictions and develop processes and guidance to ensure this is done early and consistently, and that any changes are accurately recorded.
3. Ensure that Reporting and Offender Management (ROM) staff receive the necessary safeguarding training and support to identify where individuals subject to reporting restrictions are at risk.

In relation to concluding cases:

4. Improve data collection about the reporting population, and through regular analysis identify and agree (between Reporting and Offender Management (ROM) and case working units) which individuals are removable, which should be prioritised for a reporting event, the precise purpose of that event, and how to reduce the detentions to removals 'attrition rate'.
5. Based on improved data collection and analysis of the reporting population, develop a strategy to target promotion of voluntary return options more effectively, including to individuals reporting at police stations by publicising and promoting voluntary return schemes at these locations.

In relation to managing non-compliance:

6. Conduct a fundamental review of the failure to report and absconder processes and confirm that:
  - aims and objectives are clearly defined, along with relevant success criteria
  - the priorities of relevant Home Office teams and other agencies (e.g. the police) are aligned
  - assurance measures are in place to monitor the processes and to measure effectiveness

## 5. Background and context

### Liability for detention and removal

- 5.1 Foreign nationals residing in the UK without permission are liable to detention and removal, subject to notification by the Home Office. The notification should specify the reason(s), for example, they:
- have entered the UK illegally
  - have breached the conditions of their original grant of leave
  - face deportation as a result of having committed a criminal offence
  - made an asylum application<sup>6</sup>
- 5.2 A proportion of those served with the relevant notification are detained, normally in an Immigration Detention Centre (IRC). The majority, however, are granted Temporary Release (TR), in accordance with Paragraph 21(1), Schedule 2 of the Immigration Act 1971 (as amended), which states that:
- “A person liable to detention or detained under paragraph 16...may, under the written authority of an immigration officer, be temporarily admitted to the United Kingdom without being detained or be released from detention.”<sup>7</sup>
- 5.3 The Immigration Act 1971 also permits release from detention on bail (Paragraph 29, Schedule 2) and release from detention pending deportation (Schedule 3).
- 5.4 A grant of TR or bail typically requires that the individual resides at a specific address and reports to the Home Office, or police, at a specific location at set times and dates. These requirements are generally referred to by Home Office staff as ‘reporting restrictions’ or ‘reporting conditions’.

### The purpose of the Reporting and Offender Management (ROM) system

- 5.5 Home Office guidance document ‘Reporting – Standards of operational practice’ defines the purpose of the Reporting and Offender Management (ROM) system as:

“the management of customers’ remaining time in the United Kingdom; the regulation of asylum support funds if they receive these; requests for information and updates on progress of their cases; the promotion of assisted voluntary return schemes and of unassisted voluntary departure.”

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<sup>6</sup> Section 71(2) of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 provides the authority for the Home Office to require asylum applicants to report, even where they held permission to reside in the UK at the time of submitting their application

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/41/part/4/crossheading/temporary-release>

<sup>7</sup> Paragraph 21(1), Schedule 2 of the Immigration Act 1971 (as amended); available at:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1971/77/schedule/2>

5.6 The guidance document makes clear that:

“the reporting event has to have some value beyond compliance: it must be a means to progress a case to conclusion.”

5.7 There are three forms of case conclusion:

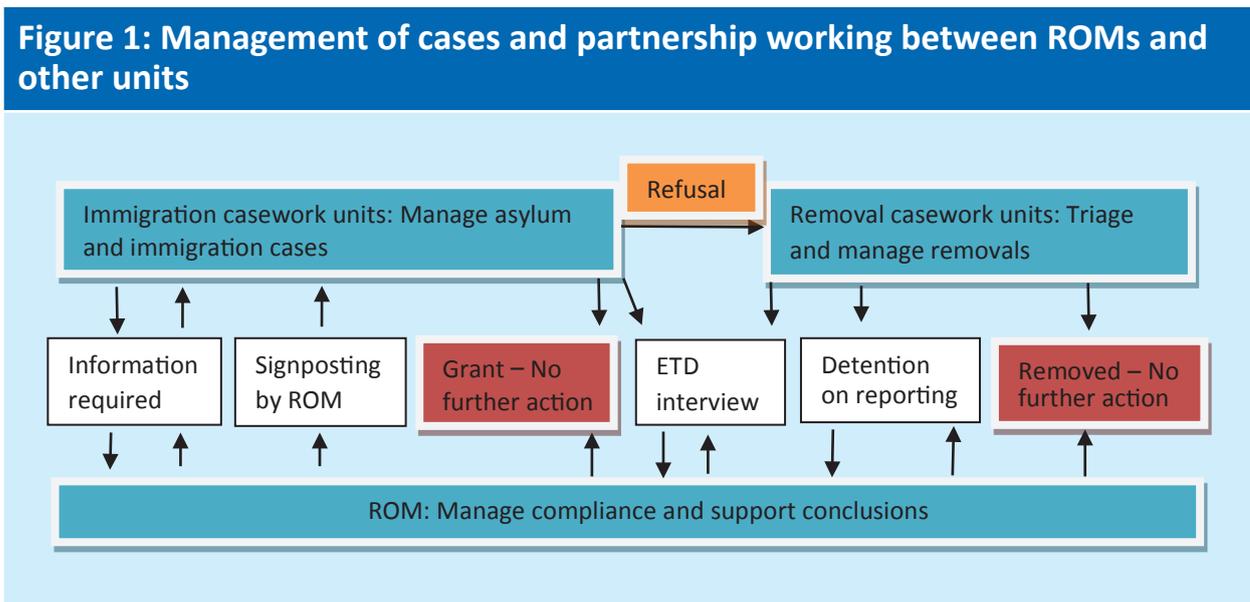
- a grant of leave to remain in the UK
- enforced removal from the UK
- voluntary departure by the individual

5.8 In order to manage reporting towards case conclusion, the guidance sets the expectation that reporting will be ‘meaningful’, with individuals reporting less frequently<sup>8</sup> but having higher quality interactions with ROM staff when they do report. It states “with fewer overall reporting events...we achieve more returns.” The guidance lists the following meaningful interactions:

- appropriate and planned offers of assisted voluntary return (AVR)
- interactions to gather case information
- respectful interactions with enough time for the customer to raise points
- sufficient time to follow-up on cases following individual interactions

## Home Office responsibilities

5.9 Responsibility for managing individuals who have been notified of their liability for detention and removal rests with the Home Office Immigration Enforcement Directorate. It is shared between asylum and immigration casework units across the Home Office Immigration Directorates (Border Force, Immigration Enforcement and UK Visas and Immigration), removal casework units, and ROM units. Interactions by all of those units are intended to progress a case to conclusion, as demonstrated at Figure 1 below.



<sup>8</sup> Prior to the publication of this guidance, individuals were typically required to report on a weekly basis.

5.10 Each individual who has been notified of a requirement to report will have a Home Office case owner, who “will have knowledge of the areas where further information is required. Case owners will direct the reporting centre to ask questions to fill these gaps.” ROM staff are required to respond promptly and clearly to requests from case owners, which necessitates they have some knowledge and general understanding of case progress and are able to update electronic records accurately. The most common directions ROM staff receive from case owners are to do one or more of the following:

- obtain an update on an individual’s current circumstances (known as a ‘mitigating circumstances’ or ‘change of circumstances’ interview)
- serve paperwork notifying the individual of the outcome of an application
- conduct an emergency travel document (ETD) interview
- detain the individual to facilitate their removal from the United Kingdom

5.11 In addition to working closely with case owners to progress cases towards conclusion, ROM staff should have received the necessary training to be able to review individual cases to establish whether there are any barriers to removal. Where there are none, they should refer the case to caseworking colleagues or local ROM managers to progress. In practice, this generally resulted in ROM staff conducting ETD interviews or detaining the individual for the purpose of removal.

5.12 In April 2016, the three London ROMs<sup>9</sup> were given individual targets for the number of ETD interviews and removals they needed to complete. Outside of London, these targets were amalgamated with those of the relevant Immigration Compliance and Enforcement teams.

## The reporting population

5.13 The number of individuals required to report to the Home Office<sup>10</sup> fluctuates on a daily basis. From April 2015 and September 2016, the reporting population was between 74,960 and 84,722 individuals. See Figure 2.

Figure 2: Total reporting population: April 2015 to September 2016	
Time period (quarter)	Number of individuals required to report
<b>2015/16</b>	
Q1 April – June 2015	74,960
Q2 July – September 2015	78,367
Q3 October – December 2015	81,527
Q4 January – March 2016	84,722
<b>2016/17</b>	
Q1 April – June 2016	80,967
Q2 July – September 2016	79,158

9 Becket House, Eaton House, and Lunar House.

10 Depending on where they reside, some individuals are required to report to a police station rather than a Home Office Reporting Centre.

- 5.14 The Home Office had established 16 ROM regions, most of which had one or more Reporting Centres at which most of the individuals subject to ‘reporting restrictions’ were required to report. As at 30 September 2016, almost 90% (70,967 of a total population of 79,158) were required to report to a Home Office Reporting Centre. The remaining 10% (8,191 individuals) were required to report to a specified police station.
- 5.15 The Home Office guidance document ‘Reporting – Standards of Operational Practice’<sup>11</sup> states that “we do not usually require customers to travel more than 25 miles to report.” Those who do not live within 25 miles are required to report at a police station close to where they live. This applies particularly to individuals living in the Home Office’s East of England, South Central, and South West regions, where there are no Reporting Centres.
- 5.16 The guidance also provides for reporting at police stations in instances where there are concerns over the “risk of serious harm posed to the community and/or the disruptive behaviour that the individual poses.”

### Frequency of reporting

- 5.17 Each ROM region has the autonomy to set and vary the frequency of an individual’s reporting events, except for those individuals whose cases were being managed by the Criminal Casework Directorate (CCD).<sup>12</sup> The ‘Reporting – Standards or Operational Practice’ document outlines a number of factors that ROM staff should take into account, which include:
- previous history of criminality
  - previous compliance with reporting restrictions
  - safeguarding and medical issues
  - the progress of any application submitted to the Home Office or any other Home Office casework activity
- 5.18 With a reporting population of c.80,000 to manage, in practice ROMs set the reporting frequency for most individuals at monthly or quarterly. Only a quarter of the reporting population is required to report more frequently. See Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Reporting frequency as at 30 September 2016**

Reporting frequency	Number of individuals
Quarterly or less frequently	22,815 (28.8%)
Monthly	37,910 (47.9%)
Fortnightly	15,275 (19.3%)
Weekly	3,067 (3.9%)
More than once per week	91 (0.1%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>79,158</b>

<sup>11</sup> ‘Reporting – Standards of operational practice’: an internal Home Office document.

<sup>12</sup> See footnote 4.

- 5.19 ROM staff told inspectors that the majority of the individuals reporting weekly, or more than once per week were cases that were managed by CCD. As at 30 September 2016, CCD managed the cases of 3,830 individuals who were subject to ‘reporting restrictions’.

### **ROM Transformation plan**

- 5.20 At the time of the inspection, the Home Office Immigration Enforcement Directorate was in the early stages of developing a transformation programme, which included the ambition that ROM staff will be:

“focussed on, and experts in, enforcing returns through detention or same-day returns, persuading offenders to return voluntarily and generating a hostile environment”

in order that the ROM process becomes

“the main source of volume returns for Immigration Enforcement.”<sup>13</sup>

- 5.21 To achieve this ambition, the transformation plan envisaged widespread use of digital and IT platforms to ensure that:

“where activities can be automated, they will be”

while ROM staff will

“have the skills and capabilities to deliver large volumes of returns and add value through activities that require knowledge, judgement and persuasion.”

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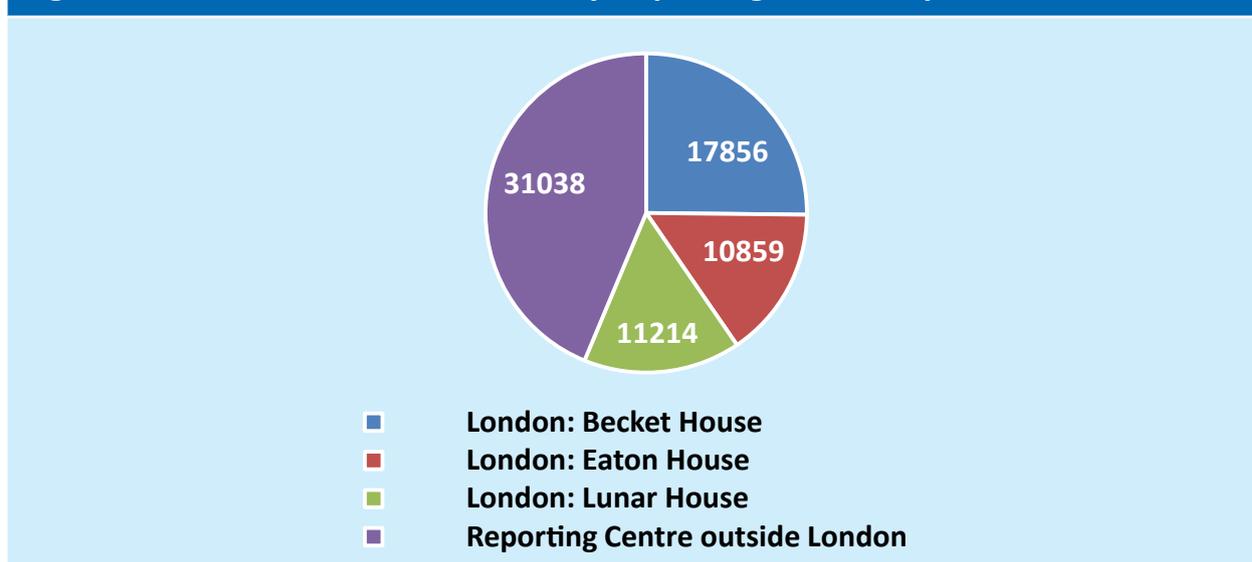
<sup>13</sup> Immigration Enforcement: ROM Transformation update: an internal Home Office document.

## 6. Inspection findings: ‘Meaningful’ reporting events

### Home Office Reporting Centres

- 6.1 Despite being able to set and vary reporting frequency, and setting it at monthly or quarterly for three-quarters of the reporting population, the numbers of individuals required to report mean the ROM counter staff are under pressure not to prolong reporting events. This is particularly true at the busier Reporting Centres.
- 6.2 Of the c.71,000 individuals required to report to a Reporting Centre as at 30 September 2016, almost 40,000 (56%) were required to report at one of three London Reporting Centres. The others were required to report at one of the 10 regional Reporting Centres.<sup>14</sup> See Figure 4.
- 6.3 Staff at Becket House Reporting Centre told inspectors that they routinely managed 1,200 individuals per day, meaning that the average length of time spent with each individual was 2-3 minutes. Staff at Eaton House were under similar pressure. By contrast, some Reporting Centres outside London were much less busy. In Middlesbrough, inspectors observed just nine individuals reporting over the course of one day.

**Figure 4: Breakdown of individuals by Reporting Centre September 2016**



- 6.4 At Becket House, Eaton House and Middlesbrough, inspectors noted that most of the interactions between ROM counter staff and individuals who had come to report were brief, with most exchanges limited to confirming the individual’s name, address and contact details. Where there were more meaningful interactions it was generally because another Home Office unit had commissioned an action or an intervention was pre-planned.

<sup>14</sup> There are no Reporting Centres in the East of England, South Central, or South West Regions.

- 6.5 Commissioned actions were few in number and routine in nature, with case workers in other units seeking an update on a particular element of the individual's current circumstances, for example a check on whether the individual had changed their legal representative or whether they had submitted further documentation in support of their application. Most pre-planned actions related to clearing barriers to removal, for example by completing an ETD interview, or detaining the individual for the purpose of removal.
- 6.6 In a smaller number of cases, ROM staff used the short time with an individual to pursue other Immigration Enforcement priorities. For example, if ROM staff observed that the individual may have driven to the Reporting Centre, they might ask to see the individual's driving licence so that Immigration Enforcement Interventions and Sanctions Directorate (ISD) could liaise with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) to establish whether the licence should be revoked in line with the Immigration Act 2014<sup>15</sup>. Similarly, where an individual reported they were unable to report due to medical treatment, this information would be provided to ISD to liaise with the relevant NHS Trust regarding charging for the treatment.

### Safeguarding and 'mitigating circumstances'

- 6.7 The perfunctory nature of most interactions between ROM counter staff and individuals subject to 'reporting restrictions' mean that opportunities to identify and explore safeguarding concerns are limited. In the file sample of 104 cases, ROM staff had identified safeguarding concerns in 20 instances, although the records did not show how. In the remaining 84 cases, there was no evidence that ROM staff had enquired about safeguarding issues.
- 6.8 Inspectors were told by ROM staff that they had been given basic training on identification of safeguarding risks. ROM staff at Becket House and Eaton House told inspectors that they had significant experience of working in the reporting centre environment, so felt confident in identifying safeguarding concerns. However, staff in Middlesbrough said this was not a priority for them as individuals who were reporting were in contact with legal representatives and other organisations who could provide assistance where required.
- 6.9 During the onsite visits, inspectors did not observe any attempts by ROM staff to update Home Office records with the current circumstances of the reporting individual, for example to discover and record any medical conditions, or changes in the family unit (such as marriage or the birth of a child), which may have a bearing on the individual's case and the Home Office's ability to enforce their removal. The file sample confirmed that these interactions, commonly referred to as 'mitigating circumstances' or 'change of circumstances' interviews, were relatively rare. Of the 104 cases examined, there were 13 where such a discussion had taken place and the outcome had been recorded on electronic or paper records.
- 6.10 ROM staff told inspectors that 'mitigating circumstances' or 'change of circumstances' interviews could be conducted if a member of staff considered it necessary, but they took place routinely only:
- during the individual's first reporting event
  - when an ETD interview was completed
  - when the Home Office served a Red004 form<sup>16</sup>
  - upon detention

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<sup>15</sup> The Immigration Act 2014 introduced a number of 'hostile environment' measures including (Sections 46 and 47) the power to revoke UK driving licences for individuals in the UK with no right to remain. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/22/contents/enacted>.

<sup>16</sup> The Red004 form is served by the Home Office to an individual providing "notice of a removal window during which removal may proceed without further notice", in accordance with Section 2.1, Chapter 60, Enforcement Instructions and Guidance. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/574005/chapter60- v\\_14.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/574005/chapter60- v_14.pdf)

## Police Station reporting

- 6.11 The option of having individuals reporting at a police station is an important part of the ROM system. As well as reducing the journey for some individuals, and providing a more secure reporting environment for individuals with a history of violence or disruption, it reduced the overall burden on Reporting Centres.
- 6.12 Despite its importance, there were no formal agreements underpinning the use of police stations for immigration reporting events. Such agreements as did exist were described by ROM staff and senior managers as 'historic' or 'legacy', dating back to a time before Home Office Reporting Centres existed. Three Home Office regions, East of England, South Central, and the South West, were wholly reliant on police stations as they did not have a Reporting Centre.
- 6.13 Typically, at the beginning of each week, ROM staff from each region would email the police station enquiry offices in that region with a spreadsheet of those individuals who were due to report at that station during that week. In a small number of cases, the spreadsheet may have some questions annotated to an individual record seeking to update the individual's circumstances. The police station enquiry office staff used the spreadsheet to record whether individuals reported, and any answers to annotated questions, and returned it. ROM staff would then update Home Office electronic databases.
- 6.14 Inspectors visited a number of police stations and observed that reporting in this manner was solely about compliance with the requirement to report. Police station staff were neither trained nor empowered by the Home Office to conduct 'meaningful' interventions.
- 6.15 ROM staff attended police stations only for particular events, for example ETD interviews, scheduling a number on the same day in order to maximise the number of events completed during their visit. While this was a more efficient use of their time, ROM staff told inspectors that it might mean delays between being commissioned to take a particular action and the action being completed.
- 6.16 Remote management of reporting at police stations was complicated by other factors. Both ROM and police station staff told inspectors that it was common for an individual to report to a police station without prior notification. These were generally foreign national offenders who had been released from detention and whose cases were managed by CCD.
- 6.17 ROM staff said that communication between ROMs and CCD was limited, and that instances of individuals reporting without prior notification harmed relations between police station staff and ROM staff. CCD senior managers told inspectors they were not aware of such incidents, but would investigate this further as part of ongoing work to build better relationships between CCD and ROM staff.
- 6.18 ROM staff attend a small number of police stations to fulfil the function completed by enquiry desk staff at other stations. ROM staff and senior managers considered this to be the least efficient operating model, as it meant that considerable time was spent preparing (e.g. reading the files) for the reporting events and later updating Home Office systems, since these are not accessible remotely. One senior manager described this as "close to three days effort for one day of reporting events." When ROM staff did deploy in this way interactions with reporting individuals were limited due to the number of events and pre-planned interventions, predominantly ETD interviews, they were expected to complete during their visit.
- 6.19 In the East of England ROM region individual members of staff were allocated responsibility for particular police stations. If the member of staff was unable to access Home Office electronic

systems to record the result of a reporting event, because they were attending a training course or were on leave, no one else could or would do so.<sup>17</sup> This made it more difficult to monitor whether reporting events had been completed.

## Transformation

- 6.20 ROM senior managers recognised that the volume of reporting events militated against more meaningful interactions and that, in most cases, the current regime was simply enforcing compliance with the requirement to report. Plans to transform ROM included making use of biometric technology in Reporting Centres, so that routine reporting events could become 'self service', freeing staff up for more meaningful interactions, such as promoting voluntary return, capturing intelligence, or responding to commissions from case workers. In parallel, work was underway to revise guidance and training so that staff were better equipped to conduct these interactions.
- 6.21 ROM senior managers told Inspectors that the first phase of the roll out of the new technology would be summer 2017, but the amended guidance and training would be ready before then.
- 6.22 As part of the transformation, it was ROM senior managers' intention to reduce the proportion of the reporting population that reported at police stations and bring these individuals into Reporting Centres as this would be a more efficient use of Home Office staff resources.

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<sup>17</sup> In its factual accuracy response to the draft report, the Home Office advised that East of England ROM managers would re-allocate responsibility for monitoring reporting where an individual was on 'any longer term absence'.

# 7. Inspection findings: Progressing cases to conclusion

## Concluding cases

- 7.1 The Home Office guidance document ‘Reporting – Standards of operational practice’ makes it clear that reporting events “must be a means to progress a case to conclusion.” Case conclusion may involve an individual being granted leave to remain in the UK, making a voluntary departure, or being subject to an enforced removal.

## Grants of leave to remain and ‘signposting’

- 7.2 ROM staff do not have case working responsibilities, so concluding a case by granting leave to remain in the UK was outside their remit. However, they may be tasked by caseworkers to play a supporting role by seeking updates about an individual’s circumstances or serving paperwork. In practice, their involvement was minimal, as notifications of grants of leave are typically sent to the individual and/or their legal representative.
- 7.3 More often, ROM staff might identify where an individual had an outstanding application<sup>18</sup> that had not progressed and ‘signpost’ the case to the relevant caseworking unit so that it is aware of the delay. Although there was a formal process for ‘signposting’, it relied on the experience of the ROM staff working on the Reporting Centre counter to identify appropriate cases to ‘signpost’.
- 7.4 In practice, cases were ‘signposted’ where the outstanding application was the only barrier to removal, and were often initiated as a result of a change in the individual’s case, such as agreement from an Embassy or High Commission to issue an ETD. Individuals whose cases are managed by CCD are the exception. The ROM system ensures that reviews and actions have been carried out for these individual.

## Promoting voluntary departures

- 7.5 Home Office data indicated that, between 1 January and 30 September 2016, 3,996 individuals who were subject to ‘reporting restrictions’ made a voluntary departure from the UK. The figure includes individuals who departed without notifying the Home Office, but whose departure had been identified and verified through other means.<sup>19</sup> The data provided was insufficiently granular to show what proportion of the 3,996 individuals made their own arrangements to depart the UK and what proportion sought financial or other assistance from the Home Office Voluntary Return Service (VRS).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For example, asylum applications, human rights submissions or cases where the Home Office is seeking to deport the individual.

<sup>19</sup> Verification is normally by means of exit check data or from a new application for entry clearance made by the individual at an overseas Visa Application Centre.

<sup>20</sup> The Home Office VRS unit provides support and assistance to individuals who wish to depart the UK. This can include assistance to secure employment or educational opportunities in their country of origin.

- 7.6 The Reporting Centres visited by inspectors displayed posters and leaflets promoting the Home Office VRS. Other than at Eaton House, inspectors did not observe ROM counter staff promoting voluntary return except where the individual had first declared an interest in it. In these cases, the ROM staff sought to ascertain whether the individual wished to make their own arrangements, in which case they would assist where required, or to benefit from an assisted voluntary return package, in which case they would make a referral to the Home Office VRS.
- 7.7 ROM staff told inspectors that for individuals reporting at police stations there were no leaflets or posters on display promoting the Home Office VRS or other options. Nor did ROM staff engage with individuals who had requested further information about their options. Instead, these individuals were referred to the VRS helpline.
- 7.8 During the onsite phase of the inspection, Eaton House was operating a pilot project in which individuals who had recently received an adverse immigration decision were identified and referred to specific ROM staff who would reinforce that the individual did not have any outstanding applications and promote voluntary return options. The individual would be required to report again two weeks later when they would be asked if they had any interest in voluntary return and, if not, what their plans were.
- 7.9 ROM staff told Inspectors that this process would test the effectiveness of promoting voluntary return options, ensuring that the individual was made fully aware of their circumstances, including the prospect of enforced removal, and ensure that any further applications were made at the earliest opportunity. The pilot was due to run until 31 May 2017, at which point it will be evaluated and, if appropriate, included in future transformation work.

## **Enforced removals**

- 7.10 ROM staff assist enforced removals in two main ways: by progressing applications for ETDs, and by assisting with the detention of individuals on reporting, including for same day removals.

## **Emergency Travel Document (ETD) interviews**

- 7.11 Between 1 April and 30 September 2016, ROM staff completed 4,425 ETD interviews. As at 10 January 2017, 1,737 of those interviews had resulted in an ETD being issued by the relevant Embassy or High Commission. It was not clear from the data provided what proportion of the remaining 2,688 interviews had been submitted, rejected or remained pending.
- 7.12 ROM staff told inspectors that many of the 'completed' interviews would not result in a submission to an Embassy or High Commission because the individual failed to provide sufficient details or refused to sign the application for an ETD.
- 7.13 Where ETD interviews did enable an ETD application to be submitted, the process varied across ROM regions. ROM staff at the London Reporting Centres submitted ETD applications directly to the relevant Embassy or High Commission, considering this to be the most efficient option. However, ROM staff in the East of England and North-East regions submitted the interview record and signed application form to the commissioning case worker to progress, believing that the case worker will have better knowledge of the case and be better placed to determine when it is appropriate to submit the application.

- 7.14 The written evidence the Home Office provided to the inspection team included the statement that Immigration Enforcement “has a number of specific teams who work very closely with the embassies of the countries they deal with...It is a key part of their role to ensure that they are always fully aware of any issues around quality of submissions etc that may lead to rejections or delays and feed this back to case workers”.
- 7.15 At all four ROM regions visited by Inspectors, staff said they did not receive any feedback on the quality of the ETD interviews they conducted, the quality of the application bundle they provided, or the outcomes. Staff in the London Reporting Centres remarked that the only time they received feedback was when staff from a particular Embassy or High Commission carried out a Home Office-initiated re-documentation exercise<sup>21</sup> at their Reporting Centre.

### Detention on reporting

- 7.16 Between 1 April and 30 September 2016, 2,646 individuals were ‘detained on reporting’. As at 10 January 2017, 812 of those individuals had been removed from the UK, and a further 99 in detention on that date pending removal. The remaining two-thirds, 1,735 (65.5 per cent) individuals, had been released from detention as a barrier to removal had been identified.<sup>22</sup>
- 7.17 Detentions would typically be arranged prior to the reporting event, either following a referral from another Home Office unit or, in the case of the London Reporting Centres, having been identified by local ROM workflow teams.
- 7.18 Inspectors examined 24 sample records where a Reporting Centre planned to detain an individual upon reporting in order to effect their removal. The individual was detained in 23 of the 24 cases. Four of these individuals were subsequently removed. The one individual who was not detained was pregnant. The case record showed that this individual had reported on four previous occasions, but her change of circumstances had not been identified by ROM staff. The effort put into arranging to detain her upon reporting was therefore nugatory and could have been avoided.
- 7.19 In 19 of the 23 cases where the detention upon reporting went ahead as planned the individual was subsequently released from detention because of a barrier to removal, such as an asylum application or Judicial Review. In most cases, the barrier was raised only after they were placed in detention. The reasons for release in the 19 cases are at Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Reasons for release from detention**

Reason	Number
Asylum application	6
Judicial Review lodged	6
Individual refused to leave Immigration Detention Centre for removal	3
Medical reasons	1

<sup>21</sup> Re-documentation exercises involve collaborative working between the Home Office and Embassies or High Commissions. In general, those exercises will involve a member of staff from an Embassy or High Commission attending the reporting centre to conduct interviews with a number of individuals to determine whether they are indeed nationals of that State.

<sup>22</sup> From the data provided, it was not possible for inspectors to ascertain when the barriers to removal had been raised i.e. before or after the individual was detained.

Record unclear	2
Further immigration application lodged	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>

- 7.20 ROM staff confirmed that the ‘attrition rate’ evident from the data and file sample matched their own experience. Staff at the London Reporting Centres worked on the basis that to meet their removal targets they needed to detain twice the number of individuals, as around half of those detained would later raise a barrier to removal and be released from detention. Outside of London, removal targets for Reporting Centres and local Immigration Compliance and Enforcement (ICE) teams were amalgamated, so there were not the same incentives for the former to generate their own detentions upon reporting.
- 7.21 Some staff thought that more ‘mitigating circumstances’ interviews may reduce the ‘attrition rate’ by identifying certain barriers to removal earlier and by encouraging individuals to make further applications or appeals before detention. Others believed that ‘mitigating circumstances’ interviews might simply act as a signal to individuals that removal was imminent, and they would cease reporting, although they recognised that other interactions carried the same risk, particularly ETD interviews or voluntary return discussions.

### Commissioned actions

- 7.22 Much of the Reporting Centres’ work in relation to enforced removals is commissioned by other parts of the Home Office, in particular Immigration Enforcement’s Returns Preparation Team, CCD, Asylum Operations and the Complex Casework Directorate (CCWD).
- 7.23 For example, data provided by the Home Office indicated that in November 2016 Reporting Centres received 2,400 commissions to complete ETD interviews. However, of these, around 1,400 were rejected by ROM workflow teams because they were judged not to be the best use of ROM resources.
- 7.24 Reporting Centre staff explained that family cases, for example, were rejected because it was unlikely they would lead to a successful removal. Meanwhile, a significant number of commissions for ETD interviews were rejected because of the nationality of the individual, as the Reporting Centres’ experience was that the relevant Embassy or High Commission was unlikely to issue an ETD. Staff recognised the risk of this approach becoming self-fulfilling, since there was nothing to challenge the perception that some individuals were ‘too difficult to document’ if such cases were never progressed.
- 7.25 ROM staff told inspectors that if they relied solely on commissions for ETD interviews and detentions on reporting the ‘high attrition rates’ would mean that there would be too few removable individuals now and in six to twelve months. Senior managers reported that the cohort of imminently removable individuals had reduced in the six months to April 2017.
- 7.26 It appeared that Home Office caseworking units were finding it difficult to identify individuals for ETD interviews and other removal actions. ROM senior managers were aware of the significant discrepancy between the number of commissioned ETD interviews and the number actually completed, but had not done any analysis of why this was the case. Nor had any analysis been done of why ROM workflow teams were able to identify individuals suitable for an ETD interview and removal action where caseworking units could not, and the impact this

had on Reporting Centres' capacity to deal with commissioned actions or on workflows within the caseworking units.

- 7.27 ROM Senior managers told inspectors about work that was underway as part of their planned transformation to identify the specific features that made individuals suitable for referral to ROM staff for action, whether to conduct an ETD interview, hold a voluntary return discussion, or to detain. This work would be incorporated into a new IT system and use 'business rules' to automate referrals.
- 7.28 At the time of the inspection, it was not certain whether this process would be applied to the whole reporting population (known to the Home Office as the 'stock'), or to individuals once they were scheduled to report (known as the 'flow').

## 8. Inspection findings: Managing ‘non-compliance’

### Failure to report

- 8.1 Most of the effort of Reporting Centre staff goes into dealing with those individuals who attend a reporting centre or police station as required and set out in their ‘reporting restrictions’. However, they also do some work to follow up on those individuals who fail to report.
- 8.2 The Home Office refers individuals who fail to report as ‘non-compliant’, which it defines in the guidance document ‘Non-compliance and absconder process’<sup>23</sup> as “the non-completion of an event or action that a person is required to adhere by law, such as attending scheduled reporting events.”
- 8.3 In December 2016, there were 6,989 recorded instances<sup>24</sup> of a scheduled reporting event not being completed out of a total of 75,522 reporting events scheduled for that month. This represents a ‘non-compliance’ rate of nine per cent.
- 8.4 The guidance document sets out a ‘three stage process’ to be followed where an individual fails to report at a scheduled reporting event. The first stage is ‘non-compliance action telephone contact’. It requires Reporting Centre staff to “make telephone contact with the person or if this is unsuccessful, their appropriate adult, legal representative, surety, sponsor or family members in the UK, to attempt to establish the reasons for their failure to report and their current whereabouts.” Where contact is made with the individual they should be given a verbal warning and instructed to resume reporting in line with their reporting conditions.
- 8.5 ROM staff told inspectors that they would attempt to call individuals who had not reported and calls often resulted in reporting being re-established, with individuals claiming they had simply ‘forgotten’ to report or had been unwell. Where they failed to make telephone contact, it was standard practice to send an ISE343 letter<sup>25</sup> to the individual’s last known address to inform them of the missed reporting event and instructing them to resume reporting.
- 8.6 ‘Stage two’ requires Reporting Centre staff to refer the case to the local Immigration Compliance and Enforcement (ICE) team to consider whether a visit to the individual’s home address is appropriate. ROM staff told inspectors it was extremely rare to make referrals to ICE Team following a failure to report. This was due to the volume of failures to report and the perception that ICE teams would not act upon any referrals. The Home Office did not provide the inspection team with any data for ‘stage two’ referrals and follow-up actions by ICE teams.
- 8.7 If there is no visit to the individual’s last known address, or one has taken place but the individual has not been found, ‘stage three’ requires Reporting Centre staff to put the case forward for consideration of absconder action.

<sup>23</sup> Home Office guidance: ‘Non-compliance and absconder process’; Version 7.0. Published on 15 December 2016. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/581034/non-compliance-and-absconder-process-.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/581034/non-compliance-and-absconder-process-.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> This figure does not relate to individuals who failed to report, but rather the number of reporting events which were not completed. This could be as a result of some individuals failing to report on multiple occasions or data entry errors by the Home Office.

<sup>25</sup> An ISE343 letter informed the individual that they had failed to report as required and provided an alternative date when they were to report.

## Absconder action

- 8.8 Home Office guidance defines an absconder as an individual who ‘breaches one or more of the conditions imposed as a condition of TA(TR),<sup>26</sup> bail or release on a restriction order served to them on the appropriate notice **and**, in all cases, whose whereabouts are unknown and all mandatory procedures to re-establish contact with the migrant have failed.’<sup>27</sup>
- 8.9 Where this is the case, Reporting Centre staff are required to refer the case to a senior manager to authorise absconder action. Once authorised, the individual is declared an absconder and their details are circulated on the Police National Computer (PNC). As at 31 December 2016, there were 55,974 declared absconders.
- 8.10 Inspectors examined 29 sample files relating to individuals who had failed to report to ascertain whether the guidance on absconder action had been applied. It was not clear from either the electronic or paper records in any of the 29 cases whether the ‘three stage process’ had been completed.
- 8.11 In 21 of the 29 cases, the records captured the number of failed reporting events before absconder action was initiated. See Figure 6.

**Figure 6: Number of missed reporting events prior to initiation of absconder action**

Missed reporting events	Number of cases
1	9
2	3
3	5
6 or more	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>

- 8.12 ROM staff told inspectors they were aware of this inconsistent practice. For the London Reporting Centres, it was attributed to the fact that, since 10 August 2015, failure to report and absconder actions have been managed by a small team in Kent. According to the London-based staff the Kent team was not resourced sufficiently to manage the volumes of absconders and this led to delays in absconder action being initiated. ROM senior managers conceded that the initial transfer of the work to the team in Kent could have been better handled, but the situation had since been remedied.
- 8.13 In the East of England region, ROM staff told inspectors that they normally operated on the basis that absconder action would not be initiated until an individual had failed to report on two successive occasions, since the first failure might have been a simple mistake. London ROM staff confirmed that they had taken the same approach prior to the transfer of this work to the team in Kent.

<sup>26</sup> Temporary Admission (Temporary Release).

<sup>27</sup> Home Office guidance: ‘Non-compliance and absconder process’; Version 7.0. Published on 15 December 2016. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/581034/non-compliance-and-absconder-process-.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/581034/non-compliance-and-absconder-process-.pdf)

## National Absconder Tracing Team (NATT)

- 8.14 The Casework Information Database (CID) automatically captures all cases where absconder action has been authorised and the 'three stage process' is recorded as having been completed. The Home Office's National Absconder Tracing Team (NATT) is able to pull this information from CID. The Home Office has a number of data sharing agreements with other government departments, and NATT makes use of these to try to locate absconders. NATT prioritises cases based on each absconder's harm rating,<sup>28</sup> as well as the likelihood of enforcing their removal.
- 8.15 Between 27 March and 9 April 2016, the Home Office ran Operation Paved, which was designed to test the effectiveness of NATT's tracing activities. In Operation Paved, a cohort of individuals who had been declared as absconders between 1 January and 31 December 2015 was run through the NATT process.
- 8.16 Where NATT discovered new addresses linked to the Operation Paved individuals, these were referred to local ICE teams to carry out enforcement visits. ICE teams made 84 visits, and found 25 absconders. In a further 14 cases, there was evidence that the individual was, or had been, resident at the address provided by NATT but was not present at the time of the ICE visit.
- 8.17 Because the cohort was small and because no follow up visits were made to those addresses where the absconder was not located, Operation Paved was inconclusive. However, ROM senior managers told inspectors that the results would be used to inform the development of future phases of the transformation plan.

## The simplified FTR Process

- 8.18 At the time of inspection, the Home Office was piloting a simplified version of the 'three stage process'. ROM staff were not attempting to establish contact with individuals who had failed to report until 31 days had elapsed. The Home Office considered that this would allow sufficient time for the individual to make contact to explain the missed event or to re-establish reporting at the next scheduled reporting event, while reducing the administrative burden of issuing ISE343 forms. If contact was not re-established by the next scheduled reporting event, ROM staff would begin the 'three stage process' as outlined in the 'Non-compliance and absconder process' guidance.

## Criminal Casework Directorate managed cases

- 8.19 ROM staff operated under different rules where the individual who failed to report was a foreign national offender whose case was being managed by CCD. In these cases, any failure to report had to be referred to CCD's Contact Management Team to take forward, in accordance with internal guidance.
- 8.20 The management of non-detained foreign national offenders by the CCD was inspected in parallel by another inspection team, whose findings are covered in a separate report.

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<sup>28</sup> There are four harm ratings: A- Highest Harm; B – High harm; C – Medium harm; and D – Low harm. Each individual whose case is managed by Immigration Enforcement will be subject to an assessment of harm, using an agreed 'harm matrix' to provide consistency.

# Annex A: Criteria used in this inspection

<b>Inspection criteria</b>
<b>Operational Delivery</b>
1. Decisions on the entry, stay and removal of individuals should be taken in accordance with the law and the principles of good administration.
2. Resources should be allocated to support operational delivery and achieve value for money.
<b>Safeguarding individuals</b>
3. Enforcement powers should be carried out in accordance with the law and by members of staff authorised and trained for that purpose.
<b>Continuous improvement</b>
4. The implementation of policies and processes should support the efficient and effective delivery of border and immigration functions.
5. Risks to operational delivery should be identified, monitored and mitigated.

# Annex B: 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. However, functions exercised at removal centres, short-term holding facilities and under escort arrangements are excepted insofar as these are subject to inspection by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons or Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary (and equivalents in Scotland and Northern Ireland).

The legislation directs the Independent Chief Inspector to consider and make recommendations about, 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
- 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.

# Acknowledgements

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