



A short-notice inspection of decision making quality in the Istanbul visa section

24 and 25 November 2010

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Independent Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency



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Foreword from John Vine CBE QPM



I am pleased to report the findings of my first short-notice inspection overseas. Unannounced and short-notice inspections are an important way of ensuring that the UK Border Agency is meeting its stated objectives and standards and is doing so efficiently and effectively. I gave the UK Border Agency only five days notification of this inspection, primarily to facilitate inspection arrangements including the collation of case files for scrutiny.

This inspection of the Istanbul visa section focused on my statutory remit as the Independent Monitor for Entry Clearance Refusals without the Right of Appeal. I wanted to discover whether decision quality in refused visitor cases was acceptable. I chose Istanbul as it is one of the largest visa issuing posts globally and processes a significant number of limited appeal right visitor cases each year.

I found that refusal notices issued from the Istanbul visa section were among the best I have encountered and clearly set out the grounds for refusal where a visa was denied. I consider this helped applicants in understanding why their application had been unsuccessful. Moreover, I found a number of positive initiatives in place such as the recent implementation of a service user panel and an example of joint working with another part of the Agency in targeting abuse of the immigration system. Whilst it is good to see such innovation, getting decisions right first time must remain the priority for any visa section, particularly as applicants are paying for their applications to be considered.

I am concerned about the fairness and quality of decision making in respect of entry clearance work at this post. In Istanbul I found that key evidence provided by applicants was overlooked in deciding a number of cases. I also found that applicants were sometimes refused on the basis of requirements that would not be clear to them at the time of making an application. This lack of clarity in regards to evidential requirements has been a key feature of other recent overseas inspections, most significantly in Amman, and raises issues of procedural fairness. The UK Border Agency must improve the efficiency, effectiveness and fairness of its visa operations to address these issues.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'John Vine' followed by a period.

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

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This short-notice inspection examined the efficiency and effectiveness of the Istanbul visa section, with a particular focus on decision making quality for visa refusals in non-family visit cases attracting only a limited right of appeal.
- 1.2 The quality of decision making was assessed by an in-depth case analysis of fifty randomly selected limited appeal right visit refusal cases. This involved consideration of how Entry Clearance Officers had assessed and used evidence presented by applicants to determine whether decision making was:
 - efficient, effective and fair; and
 - in line with relevant Immigration Rules and UK Border Agency policy and guidance.
- 1.3 We found a number of positive aspects to the work of the visa section including the quality of refusal notices issued to applicants, which were well-structured, easy to follow and in line with guidance. Our file sampling also identified some good examples of effective decision making and clear evidence of appropriate checks being undertaken to verify information provided by applicants.
- 1.4 A number of positive initiatives were in place to enhance service quality and further develop stakeholder engagement. A Customer Service Team was established in 2010 providing an enhanced focus on the quality of responses to queries and correspondence from applicants and other stakeholders. A service user panel had also been created to provide a regular forum for communication with a number of key stakeholders.
- 1.5 The Risk and Liaison Overseas Network Unit, based within the visa section, was working jointly with Immigration Group in Sheffield to help address immigration abuse in the UK. A recent compliance exercise had also been undertaken to determine the level of abuse of visas granted in Istanbul to short-term student visitors.
- 1.6 However, this inspection also highlighted a number of important concerns regarding the fairness and quality of decision making. Our case file review found errors in the assessment of evidence in almost half of the sampled cases including:
 - key evidence provided by applicants being overlooked in approximately a quarter of the cases sampled; and
 - additional evidential requirements being imposed in almost a third of the cases examined. These are requirements which are not made clear to applicants prior to the submission of their applications.
- 1.7 Applicants were not given the opportunity to address the additional requirements imposed prior to refusal. It was also not clear why such requirements were imposed in respect of particular applicants. The lack of transparency about the requirements applicants are expected to meet raises issues of procedural fairness in the visa decision making process.
- 1.8 Although Entry Clearance Managers were exceeding targets for undertaking case reviews, we consider there needed to be a much stronger focus on the quality of reviews undertaken. We identified a number of cases in our file sampling where errors in the assessment of evidence were not addressed by Entry Clearance Managers on reviewing the case.

- 1.9 We noted the Istanbul visa section consistently meets the UK Border Agency's published customer service standards for processing visa applications. However, the issues raised by our file sampling highlight the importance of striking an effective balance between the speed of processing and decision making quality, in order to ensure decisions are right first time.
- 1.10 We found staff at different grades held varying perceptions about the performance targets in place for the number of applications to be processed by Entry Clearance Officers in a single day.
- 1.11 Supporting documentation was not retained with applications in a number of the cases examined. This is contrary to the latest Agency guidance requiring all documentation key to the decision to be retained with files.

2. Summary of Recommendations

We recommend that the UK Border Agency:

1. Ensures Entry Clearance Officers are not imposing additional evidential requirements for certain applicants where applicants are not informed of the nature of these requirements prior to application and are not given any opportunity to meet these requirements during the decision making process.
2. Improves the effectiveness of Entry Clearance Manager reviews of decisions and considers the impact of current targets on the quality of reviews undertaken.
3. Ensures there is a clear understanding amongst entry clearance staff at all levels about the performance targets Entry Clearance Officers are expected to meet.
4. Ensures guidance is followed regarding the retention of key supporting documents pertinent to the decision made.

3. The Inspection

Background

- 3.1 The role of the Independent Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency was established by the UK Borders Act 2007 to examine and report on the efficiency and effectiveness of the UK Border Agency. In 2009, the Independent Chief Inspector's remit was extended to include customs functions and the work of UK Border Agency contractors.
- 3.2 On 26 April 2009, the Independent Chief Inspector was also appointed to the statutory role of Independent Monitor for Entry Clearance Refusals without the Right of Appeal as set out in section 23 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 as amended by section 4(2) of the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006 (regarding the introduction of the points-based system from April 2008).
- 3.3 This inspection examined the efficiency and effectiveness of the Istanbul visa section with a particular focus on decision making quality in regard to visa refusals falling within the remit of the Independent Monitor for Entry Clearance Refusals without the Right of Appeal, specifically non-family visitor cases attracting only a limited right of appeal¹. This includes applicants intending to visit the UK as tourists, business visitors or those wishing to study on a short-term basis.
- 3.4 Istanbul was within the top ten visa issuing posts globally by application volume during the financial year 2009/2010 (see Figure 1) and is the second largest visa issuing section within the EuroMed region of the UK Border Agency International Group operations.

Figure 1: List of top ten visa issuing posts by application volume for the financial year 2009-2010

Rank	Post	Applications
1	NEW DELHI	210,526
2	MUMBAI	156,186
3	ABU DHABI	156,056
4	CHENNAI	142,966
5	PRETORIA	132,254
6	MOSCOW	126,361
7	LAGOS	94,246
8	RIYADH	92,406
9	BEIJING	88,885
10	ISTANBUL	83,422

Note: Information provided by UK Border Agency, International Group.

- 3.5 International Group is the overseas arm of the UK Border Agency with approximately 3000 staff operating in 135 locations around the world. International Group is structured into six regional locations: Africa; Americas; Asia Pacific; Gulf, Iran and Pakistan; EuroMed and South Asia. EuroMed is further subdivided into East and West operations; Istanbul is located within EuroMed East.

¹ Although the formal title of the Independent Monitor refers to cases without the right of appeal, all requests for entry clearance carry appeal rights on the basis of humanitarian and race relations grounds. This is known as limited right of appeal.

- 3.6 Visa applications processed in Istanbul from within Turkey are received from visa application centres in Istanbul, Ankara², Izmir, Bursa and Gaziantep; these are run by a commercial partner – Worldbridge Services. Initially, applicants submit an online application³ and then attend a visa application centre to provide supporting documentation and undergo biometric processing to enable identity checks. The documents are subsequently forwarded to Istanbul for a decision in regard to the application made.
- 3.7 Since April 2008, applications made in Tel Aviv have been decided in Istanbul and from mid-December 2010 applications from Tbilisi were also to be processed in Istanbul.
- 3.8 In 2009, Istanbul dealt with approximately 81,000 applications with issue and refusal rates of 92% and 8% respectively. Almost 87,000 applications were considered in 2010 (up to 30 November 2010) with the issue rate remaining constant as set out in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Istanbul – visa demand and refusal rate by calendar year (2010 figures cover January – November)

Year	Applications	Refused	Refusal Rate
2007	57,418	3,166	6%
2008	85,302	5,773	7%
2009	81,124	6,435	8%
2010	86,874	6,998	8%

Note: Information provided by UK Border Agency, International Group.

- 3.9 Figure 3 provides a breakdown of the visas processed by application type during 2009.

Figure 3: Istanbul applications by visa category for calendar year 2009

Endorsement	Applications ⁴	% of total	Issued	Refused
EEA Family Permits	265	0.3	240	34
Family Visit	11046	13.6	9903	1365
Other Non Settlement	920	1.1	778	97
Other Visitor	57666	71.1	55141	2666
PBS Tier 1	409	0.5	424	41
PBS Tier 2	403	0.5	381	22
PBS Tier 4	6153	7.6	4837	1119
PBS Tier 5	321	0.4	291	28
Settlement	1994	2.5	1578	395
Student	1495	1.8	1360	642
Transit	270	0.3	252	15
Work Permit	182	0.2	179	11
Total	81,124	99.9	75,364	6,435

Note: Information provided by UK Border Agency, International Group.

1) Percentage figures do not add up to 100 due to presentation to one decimal place.

2) Other visitor refers to non-family visit cases such as tourists, business visitors or short-term students

² Until July 2010 Ankara retained its own visa section dealing with diplomatic applications; this has now been integrated into the Istanbul operations.

³ From mid-October 2010 customers in Turkey also pay online.

⁴ The total applications in a calendar year per category type may differ from the total of figures for issues and refusals in that category for the same period. This is because applications may be withdrawn, applications submitted prior to a calendar year may be decided within the calendar year and applications received towards the end of the year may not be decided until the following year.

3.10 The staff establishment at the time of the inspection is provided in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Staffing numbers at the visa section in Istanbul (Full-Time Equivalent)	
Regional Manager (based in Istanbul)	1
Operations Manager (based in Istanbul)	1
Integrity Manager (regional position)	1
Entry Clearance Manager	3
Executive Personal Assistant	1
Office Manager	1
Entry Clearance Officer	10
Messenger / Porters	2
Entry Clearance Assistant / Visa Writer	20
Risk and Liaison Overseas Network (RALON) Staff⁵	
Immigration Liaison Manager	1
Immigration Liaison Officer	1
Immigration Liaison Assistant	2
TOTAL	44

Note: Information provided by UK Border Agency, International Group.

- 3.11 Two of the Entry Clearance Officer roles have a regional focus and are deployed to work at other visa sections across the EuroMed East region as necessary (for example in covering leave periods).
- 3.12 The Integrity Manager is based in Istanbul and is also a regional resource. This role involves ensuring compliance and good practice in a range of areas including data protection and security issues within visa section operations and also in the visa application centres run by commercial partners.
- 3.13 An additional Entry Clearance Manager resource was added to the post establishment from the end of August 2010.

Methodology

- 3.14 The performance of the Istanbul visa section was assessed against a selection of the Independent Chief Inspector's core criteria set out in Appendix 1, with a particular emphasis on decision making quality and consistency of approach. We assessed whether decision making was:
- efficient, effective and fair; and
 - in line with relevant Immigration Rules and UK Border Agency policy and guidance.
- 3.15 The visa section was also measured against the UK Border Agency's published customer service targets⁶.
- 3.16 The latest relevant policy and guidance were reviewed prior to the inspection programme which was conducted on 24 and 25 November 2010. The onsite inspection activity involved in-depth consideration of fifty case decisions and a number of interviews and focus groups with both staff and stakeholders.
- 3.17 The case file sampling involved the assessment of refusal decisions in fifty visit cases with limited rights of appeal randomly selected from cases concluded between 19 October and 16 November 2010. The breakdown of visit cases within the file sample is shown in Figure 5.

⁵ See glossary for explanation of the focus of RALON work.

⁶ The UK Border Agency customer service targets are available at <http://www.ukvisas.gov.uk/en/customerservices/customerservicestandards/>

Figure 5: Breakdown of sampled cases

Visit category	Number
General visitor (e.g. tourists / those visiting friends)	25
Short-term student visitor	20
Business visitor	5
Total	50

- 3.18 The information provided by applicants in both application forms and in additional supporting evidence was reviewed in order to consider whether the grounds for refusal set out in refusal notices were appropriate in each case. The case file review involved assessment of performance against the following criteria:
- whether the application was assessed according to the correct Immigration Rules;
 - the time taken between application submission and the refusal decision;
 - whether appropriate checks were undertaken;
 - whether all the evidence provided by the applicant was appropriately considered;
 - whether the application was correctly administered; and
 - whether the refusal notice followed the latest guidance and clearly communicated the grounds for refusal.
- 3.19 The following meetings and focus groups were also undertaken to help explore the factors affecting decision quality within the visa section:
- a focus group with Entry Clearance Assistants;
 - a focus group with Entry Clearance Officers;
 - a focus group with Entry Clearance Managers and the Integrity Manager;
 - a meeting with RALON staff including the RALON Regional Manager, Immigration Liaison Manager and Immigration Liaison Officer;
 - a meeting with the EuroMed East Regional Manager (who is based in Istanbul);
 - a meeting with the British Ambassador; and
 - a meeting with the Consul General / Head of UK Trade & Investment.
- 3.20 The Customer Service Team was also observed in performing their duties.
- 3.21 The UK Border Agency was advised of high level emerging findings at the end of the onsite inspection programme.

4. Inspection Findings – High level outcomes of the business

Specific criterion

There are clear and realistic performance targets to drive improvement

- 4.1 Local benchmarks and performance targets were discussed with visa section staff to gauge whether these were considered to be realistic and achievable and to examine their impact on the quality of work.
- 4.2 Entry Clearance Assistants indicated they were generally able to meet their targets in regard to correspondence from applicants, data entry, processing of appeals and visa writing. However, they also acknowledged that data entry targets could be difficult to achieve in peak periods. Concern was also expressed regarding expected increases in workload as further spokes are attached to the Istanbul hub⁷.
- 4.3 There was some confusion within the visa section regarding the current benchmark targets for the work of Entry Clearance Officers in deciding visa applications. These refer to the number of applications officers are expected to process per day according to the type of applications considered. Daily application processing targets are set for Entry Clearance Officers to help ensure that visa sections meet the overall customer service performance targets for processing visa applications.
- 4.4 Targets were discussed at a EuroMed East regional workshop attended by Entry Clearance Officers in March 2010. Delegates at the workshop agreed the following daily targets (already in place in the Moscow visa section) to be realistic while acknowledging that local variation might be appropriate:
- 70 non-straightforward applications;
 - 125 straightforward or fast track applications; or
 - 25 points-based system applications.
- 4.5 Non-straightforward applications involved applicants with no previous travel or those who had previously been refused entry clearance. Straightforward or fast track applications involved applicants who had travelled overseas in the last five years to Five Country Conference countries (UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand), were under 18 years old, or related to European Economic Area family permits.
- 4.6 We found staff at different grades within the visa section held varying perceptions of the benchmark targets in place. While some staff thought that the Moscow targets were applicable, others stated that these targets had not been adopted in Istanbul. We also noted a clear distinction in the views of Entry Clearance Officers and Entry Clearance Managers in respect of the level of applications which could be processed by officers in a single day.
- 4.7 Entry Clearance Officers were of the view that the benchmarks discussed at the regional workshop were not the agreed targets for work in Istanbul and thought these regional targets were under review. They considered a target of about 120 straightforward applications a day would be very challenging but thought that 70 pre-sifted⁸ applications might be possible. A local target of 60-70 fast track cases was thought to be in place and felt to be more realistic than the above benchmark.

⁷ Hubs refer to visa processing centres and spokes refer to locations where visa applications are collected to be sent to hub locations for decisions. Further information is provided in the glossary.

⁸ Pre-sifting refers to the separation of applications according to straightforward and non-straightforward categories as described in paragraph 4.5.

- 4.8 We were surprised at the confusion in respect of the post benchmarks. It is important to resolve the difference in perceptions and ensure staff are absolutely clear about their expected performance levels.
- 4.9 Entry Clearance Officers commented that there was a constant management focus on the volume of applications being completed by the section and felt the pressure to “crack on”. However, we noted that they viewed the quality of the decision to be the primary concern even if this meant overlooking targets.

We recommend that the UK Border Agency:

- Ensures there is a clear understanding amongst entry clearance staff at all levels about the performance targets Entry Clearance Officers are expected to meet.

5. Inspection Findings – Processes and procedures including quality of decision making and consistency of approach

Specific criterion

Documentary checks are carried out as designated

- 5.1 We found examples in our case file analysis of extra checks (beyond the routine checks⁹) being undertaken by Entry Clearance Officers to verify information provided by applicants. These checks included an applicant interview, contacting employers to verify employment status and also using social security records to confirm declared salary and other employment details. Additional checks were undertaken in 11 cases (22% of the sample). Figure 6 outlines two case studies demonstrating how a thoroughness of approach in undertaking checks led to appropriate refusal grounds.

Figure 6: Case studies setting out good practice in undertaking checks

Case study 1:

- The applicant applied for entry clearance as a business visitor on 26 August 2010
- The application was refused on 27 October 2010
- The applicant had previously been refused on 17 August 2010

The applicant was called in for interview because the Entry Clearance Officer was aware that the UK sponsoring company had been employing people in the UK illegally. During the interview it was established that the applicant was in fact undertaking employed work in the UK and had worked on previous UK visits.

Case study 2:

- The applicant applied for entry clearance as a general visitor on 18 October 2010 in order to visit a friend in the UK
- The application was refused on 26 October 2010

The applicant claimed to be working as a manager of a hotel. However, in considering the evidence submitted, the Entry Clearance Officer noticed that the employment letter did not confirm the annual leave period. The employer was contacted and as a result it was discovered that the applicant had in fact resigned from this position prior to the submission of their visa application. Hence, there was a clear intention of deception in regard to the information provided on the application form.

The applicant was refused on the basis of a Paragraph 320 7(A) deception¹⁰.

Chief Inspector's comments:

The above cases illustrate a thoroughness of approach to reviewing evidence and undertaking verification checks observed in a number of the sampled cases.

⁹ Applicants are required to provide fingerprints and are photographed in submitting an application (commonly referred to as biometrics). The UK Border Agency uses this biometric information to check whether the applicant has committed previous immigration or criminal offences in the UK.

¹⁰ Paragraph 320 7(A) of the Immigration Rules requires that applicants must be refused entry clearance if false representations or documents are used or material facts are not disclosed in making a visa application. Refusal in accordance with this paragraph carries up to a 10 year prohibition in respect of entry clearance to the UK and requires a higher burden of proof for refusal on such grounds.

- 5.2 During the period in which the decisions were made for cases in our file sample, social security details of applicants were available via an openly accessible internet channel and it is clear that Entry Clearance officers were making good use of this facility to confirm the personal circumstances of applicants. Several refusal notices referred to discrepancies in the information provided by applicants and the official records and this additional verification work directly contributed to a number of robust refusal decisions. However, it should be noted that this open source information facility is no longer available and the visa section is now exploring whether alternative access to this data can be arranged.
- 5.3 The RALON Unit in Istanbul had recently expanded. We were told that an Immigration Liaison Manager post was redeployed to Istanbul in recognition of the fact that Turkey is a key nexus point for illegal immigration into the European Union and UK and that the Unit was developing its capacity to counter inadequately documented arrivals travelling via Turkey. Since April 2010 the Unit has also included two Entry Clearance Assistants assigned as full-time verification officers to ensure greater consistency in the quality of checks and enhance expertise in this area. We were told that checks were undertaken on a more ad hoc basis prior to this enhanced capacity.
- 5.4 Entry Clearance Assistants utilised a checklist in deciding which documents should be forwarded for verification. We were told that local knowledge was also an important factor in this assessment. Although we observed a few documents submitted by applicants in our file sample which could have merited further verification checks which were not undertaken, the establishment of a dedicated document verification team demonstrates an enhanced focus on verification work within the visa section. This dedicated resource also ensured that enhanced UK sponsor checks were being undertaken in settlement cases in accordance with the latest guidance issued by the UK Border Agency.
- 5.5 It was clear from the staff interviews conducted that risk profiles were infrequently used to inform decision making within the visa section. However, there was some recognition of this by the RALON Unit, who told us they were about to start reviewing and updating risk profiles using the format used in Amman, which they considered to be best practice. We were told this work would be completed by the end of March 2011.
- 5.6 We were informed that a targeted interviewing approach was undertaken in Istanbul to support the identification of visa abuse. Interviews had been reinstated for some Tier 4 student cases, some settlement cases and for European Community Association Agreement¹¹ (ECAA) applications.
- 5.7 A recent compliance exercise had been undertaken to determine the level of abuse in connection with visas issued to short-term student visitors intending to study English in the UK. Fifty cases issued in February 2010 were selected to determine whether the students had in fact attended their course and returned to Turkey on completion of the study programme. Students and relevant colleges were contacted to determine the level of compliance, which was found to be high. Compliance was satisfactorily established in 46 of these cases (a further two cases made applications to remain in the UK under the ECAA Ankara Agreement and were also therefore not in breach of the Immigration Rules). We were told the results of this exercise would inform the planned work on updating risk profiles. We believe compliance work of this nature is important in understanding levels of abuse and helps the organisation to target resources more effectively.
- 5.8 The RALON Unit in Istanbul was working jointly with Immigration Group in Sheffield in regard to verification work for in-country ECAA applications. Over a hundred checks have been undertaken on behalf of Immigration Group since November 2009 and more than 50% of these were found to involve false representations or forged documentation. We were told RALON intended to develop even closer links with Sheffield in the near future to inform risk profiles, share trends and continue this joint working. It was apparent this work was having real benefits, both in tackling abuse of the immigration system and in supporting more robust decision making.

11. The European Community Association Agreement also known as the Ankara Agreement allows Turkish nationals to apply to establish themselves in the UK as self-employed businessmen.

- 5.9 Staff told us the lack of access to the Casework Information Database and Omnibase IT systems was a hindrance to undertaking appropriate levels of checks. While access to these systems could be facilitated by contacting units in the UK to undertake relevant checks, it was felt this restricted access was not ideal. This has been a common finding in previous overseas inspections. Post managers were aware of this issue and commented that the UK Border Agency's Immigration Case Work System (due to be rolled out overseas from 2011) would support advanced checks and risk profiling.

Specific criterion

Decisions are made clearly based on all the available evidence and in accordance with current statutory requirements, published policy, guidance and procedures

- 5.10 Decision making for these cases was assessed against the following two quality criteria:
- whether the correct Immigration Rules had been used; and
 - whether all the evidence was appropriately assessed in reaching the decision.
- 5.11 The findings in relation to these quality indicators and other key aspects relating to the file sample are presented below.

Correct use of Immigration Rules

- 5.12 All but one case was assessed according to the correct Immigration Rules. In this case, paragraph 41 rather than paragraph 56 was applied in regard to a student visitor application. Paragraph 41 of the Immigration Rules sets out the requirements for business visitors to the UK while student visitors must meet paragraph 56 requirements.

Decision is in line with the evidence

- 5.13 Evidence was appropriately assessed in 25 files (50% of the sampled cases). In these cases we observed careful examination of the evidence presented. Positive aspects of case consideration within this group of files included the following:
- thorough consideration of all the evidence presented including close attention to detail e.g. in examining bank statements;
 - noticing inconsistencies / contradictions in the material submitted casting doubt on the validity of the application;
 - noticing inconsistencies / direct contradictions with evidence presented in previous applications;
 - spotting the failure to disclose key information such as a previous entry clearance refusal;
 - undertaking additional checks to verify information e.g. the use of social security records mentioned above;
 - careful assessment of the credibility of the visit intention; and
 - careful application of 320 Paragraph 7(A)¹² in line with guidance.
- 5.14 However, the case analysis also revealed concerns regarding the way evidence had been assessed in a significant proportion of the decisions made. In 20 cases (40% of the sample), errors were observed in the way evidence was considered. Failings in the assessment of evidence in these cases contrasted sharply with the positive examples of case handling described earlier. Moreover, in 11 of these cases (22% of the overall sample) the errors in regard to the assessment of evidence were of such concern as to call into question the overall effectiveness and fairness of the decision making process. The key concerns in regard to the assessment of evidence are presented below.

¹² Since the application of Paragraph 320 7(A) results in severe penalties in regard to future admission to the UK, guidance is in place to help ensure that applicants are not penalised for making innocent mistakes on their application form.

Failure to use positive evidence

- 5.15 In 12 cases (24% of the sample), it was apparent the Entry Clearance Officer had not properly considered all the positive evidence submitted. In these cases the refusal grounds stated that key evidence had not been provided but relevant evidence was in fact included in the supporting documentation. This included cases where evidence pertaining to personal finances / circumstances (such as bank statements, employment letters or company registration details) had been overlooked.

Misinterpretation of evidence

- 5.16 In three cases (6% of the sample) it was apparent that evidence had been misinterpreted to the detriment of the applicant. This included misinterpretation of the level of available funds in a bank account and misreading information provided in a bank letter confirming the level of funds held.

Application of additional evidential requirements

- 5.17 Additional evidential requirements are requirements which would not be readily apparent to applicants at the time of making an application. Such requirements were observed in 14 cases (28% of the sample) and related to:
- requirements for applicants to demonstrate the origin of funds in a bank account where a bank letter outlining the account funds had been submitted. The latest guidance to applicants regarding supporting documentation (category-specific guidance documents for supporting evidence, introduced on 20 September 2010) advises that bank letters confirming the current balance are acceptable evidential formats in order to demonstrate funds;
 - requirements for applicants to present evidence of previous employment even covering a period of many years. The application form merely requires evidence of current occupation and personal circumstances. Hence, applicants would not expect they needed to submit detailed evidence of previous employment history. While it is understandable that Entry Clearance Officers may wish to see evidence of prior employment when employment status has recently changed, applicants are not advised to provide a detailed account of prior employment history;
 - requirements for applicants intending to study beginner's English in the UK to evidence attempts to learn English in the home country first. Applicants are asked to provide evidence of previous studies in English or other courses as part of the general student visitor supporting evidence guidance. However, someone applying for beginner's English might not expect that the lack of previous study in English would be used as grounds for refusal. Indeed, one of the examples of a short-term student visitor given in the guidance to applicants on the UK Border Agency website is someone intending to study beginner's English in the UK. Indeed, we even observed instances where refusal grounds for applicants intending to study beginner's English included the lack of further English studies following the completion of an initial course in Turkey; and
 - requirements for self-employed applicants to demonstrate cover arrangements for their business for the duration of a proposed course of study. While the guidance to applicants clearly requires evidence of personal circumstances and employment details, it is not necessarily obvious that a business owner would need to evidence how their business will operate while they are visiting the UK.
- 5.18 Requirements in relation to the submission of evidence of the benefit of a proposed course of study were also somewhat unclear. Refusal grounds in some cases included the lack of evidence regarding the benefit of undertaking a course of study. Although the application form asks about the benefit of proposed studies, the level of evidence which should be provided is unclear. In some cases detailed letters from the applicant or a company sponsoring the studies outlining the benefits did not appear to be sufficient.
- 5.19 The need for decision makers to observe due process and arrive at decision in a procedurally "fair" way is a fundamental principle. *It is a feature of fair procedure or of a decision making process that the person affected by it will know in advance how it will operate and so how to prepare for it and participate in it'* (extract from Judge Over Your Shoulder 2006 published by Treasury Solicitors¹³).

¹³ http://www.tsol.gov.uk/Publications/Scheme_Publications/judge.pdf

- 5.20 The lack of transparency regarding the additional evidential requirements outlined above placed applicants at a clear disadvantage. Applicants could not have known the level of evidence they were expected to provide and the issues they were expected to address and, were not given the chance to respond to these expectations prior to refusal. Moreover, it is unclear why additional evidential requirements were applied in particular cases e.g. the requirement for applicants to provide detailed accounts of previous employment history was only encountered in two cases.

Implicit value judgements

- 5.21 In a few instances it appeared that Entry Clearance Officers were making a value judgement regarding the intention or means of funding the visit. In one case an applicant intended to spend some of their annual leave with a friend in the UK and the remainder with their daughter who resided in the applicant's country of origin. The wording of the refusal notice suggested that the deciding officer considered it would be more appropriate for the applicant to spend the entire leave period with their daughter. In another case a family provided evidence that they had sold their car to fund a course of study for their son in the UK. While in this case the source of funds was fully evidenced, the Entry Clearance Officer clearly felt it was inappropriate for the family to be making this sacrifice.

Failure to retain supporting evidence

- 5.22 The supporting evidence submitted by the applicant was not retained with the case file in a number of the cases we examined. In five of the cases (10% of the file sample) it was not possible to assess whether the refusal decision was appropriately informed by the information supplied by the applicant. We were advised that supporting documentation was not retained with the file for fast track cases in Istanbul. We noted this local practice was contrary to the latest UK Border Agency guidance addressing the retention of documents which states that 'any document pertinent to the decision is retained'. Failure to retain supporting documentation in line with guidance was also a concern raised in the inspection of the Guangzhou visa section during June 2010 and was highlighted to the Agency in the emerging inspection findings at this time¹⁴. The retention of key supporting documentation and adequacy of caseworking notes is necessary in maintaining an adequate audit trail in regard to decision making.

Post response

- 5.23 We discussed eight of the eleven cases in which the assessment of evidence was of most concern with Entry Clearance Managers while onsite to illustrate the issues raised by the case file review. It was not possible to discuss all eleven cases in detail due to time constraints, but the chosen eight cases reflected the key points we wished to raise.
- 5.24 After further consideration, Entry Clearance Managers agreed with the review findings in a number of the cases discussed and have taken some corrective action as set out below:
- in two cases the applicant is being contacted with a view to issuing a visa if they still wish to travel to the UK;
 - in one case post management agreed with the review findings but stated that further reasons for refusal had emerged after a 'more in-depth examination' of the papers (a new refusal notice has been issued);
 - in three other cases the post have issued revised refusal notices;
 - in one case the managers felt the wording of the refusal notice could have been improved and intended to discuss this with Entry Clearance Officer concerned; and
 - in the final case the post felt the refusal was defensible but agreed that evidence of company sponsorship of a proposed English study course should have been acknowledged.

¹⁴ The inspection report of the Guangzhou visa section was published on 16 December 2010 and is available to read at www.independent.gov.uk/icinspector.

- 5.25 In one of the above cases the applicant had addressed the concerns set out in a previous refusal, but was then refused on new grounds although the applicant's circumstances had not materially changed. Moreover, as mentioned above, in another case the post have issued a new refusal notice covering further refusal grounds that emerged after 'more in-depth examination' of the previously submitted papers.
- 5.26 Ensuring the correct refusal grounds are fully presented in refusal notices provides applicants with a chance to understand the reasons why they have been refused and to address these grounds. Conversely, where all the refusal grounds are not covered in the refusal notice, applicants may find they are subsequently refused on different grounds even having addressed the evidential concerns raised in the initial refusal notice. Again this raises issues of fairness. Moreover, the latest guidance to Entry Clearance Officers clearly requires that all the refusal grounds are presented in refusal notices.
- 5.27 Case studies are presented in Figures 7 and 8 to illustrate some of the concerns identified in our file sampling.

Figure 7: Case study – Student visitor application

The applicant:

- applied for entry clearance as a student visitor on 18 October 2010 intending to undertake a course of beginner's English in the UK
- was refused entry clearance on 26 October 2010 because:
 - they had not provided evidence of their circumstances between 2001-2008 (the applicant graduated from university in 2001)
 - of lack of evidence regarding the origin of funds in the father's bank account

Chief Inspector's comments:

- the applicant provided clear evidence of personal circumstances with robust evidence of continuous employment since 2008
- the applicant had provided evidence of military service during 2005/6
- the father's account demonstrated substantial funds which were maintained in the account for several months

The UK Border Agency response:

The post agreed with our analysis of the refusal decision. The applicant had reapplied on 3 November 2010 and was again refused on 15 November 2010 due to lack of funds. However, following the discussion of our case review with post management, the applicant was being contacted with a view to issuing a visa if they still wished to travel to the UK.

Figure 8: Case study – Student visitor application

The applicant:

- applied for entry clearance on 15 October 2010 to undertake a 16 week course of English in the UK
- was refused entry clearance on 20 October 2010 according to the following refusal grounds:
 - the applicant had not demonstrated how the course would better his career
 - that social security records showed the applicant's last employment ended in June 2010 and the applicant had not demonstrated what they had been doing since that time

Chief Inspector's comments:

- The applicant had supplied a detailed letter setting out the reasons for undertaking the course. He had completed a one year English preparation course in advance of his environmental engineering degree, had realised the importance of English language over the last three years while working on EU funded projects with German and English companies and felt that studying English would afford more opportunities in his career.
- The applicant had also openly stated in his application form that his last contract ended in June 2010; this information was freely given.

The UK Border Agency response:

The post agreed with our case file review and said they would contact the applicant with a view to issuing a visa.

We recommend that the UK Border Agency:

- Ensures Entry Clearance Officers are not imposing additional evidential requirements for certain applicants where applicants are not informed of the nature of these requirements prior to application and are not given any opportunity to meet these requirements during the decision making process.
- Ensures guidance is followed regarding the retention of key supporting documents pertinent to the decision made.

Specific criterion

Decisions are taken within the timescales set out by the Agency

- 5.28 The published customer service standards for processing non settlement visa applications are:
- 90% of applications are processed within three weeks (15 working days)
 - 98% of applications are processed within six weeks (30 working days)
 - 100% of applications are processed within 12 weeks (60 working days)
- 5.29 UK Border Agency performance reports showed that the Istanbul visa section was consistently meeting the customer service standards set out above. We also found these customer service standards were met in all of the 50 files sampled. Indeed, only one of the sampled cases was not processed within three weeks. In this case the applicant was called in for interview incurring delays in the decision making process.
- 5.30 Although meeting customer service standards may be an indicator of high performance, the issues raised by our case file review highlight the importance of striking an effective balance between the speed of processing and decision making quality, in order to ensure decisions are right first time.
- 5.31 None of the sampled files were subject to maladministration. Maladministration refers to administrative failing which is so serious as to adversely affect the decision outcome, such as cases

where processing delays mean the reason for the application is no longer valid (e.g. attendance at a particular event) although the customer applied in good time.

Specific criterion

Managers regularly review the quality of decisions and consistency across the Agency

- 5.32 An Entry Clearance Manager case review was undertaken in 11 of the 20 cases where we observed errors in the way evidence had been assessed by the Entry Clearance Officer making the decision. Moreover, an Entry Clearance Manager review was undertaken in five of the eleven cases causing the most concern in regard to the assessment of evidence. We would have expected managers to have similarly identified some of the concerns we noted in considering these cases and to have addressed them prior to communication of the case outcome to applicants.
- 5.33 Entry Clearance Managers told us they were able to maintain a focus on quality except during peak periods. At the time of the inspection they were expected to undertake random sample checks of 10% of issues and 25% of refusals in visit cases with limited rights of appeal. Entry Clearance Manager reviews were undertaken in 22 of the refusal cases we considered (44% of the sample). While targets for conducting Entry Clearance Manager reviews were exceeded within the file sample, we consider there needs to be a much stronger focus on the quality of reviews undertaken given the doubts raised about the effectiveness of the review process through our case file analysis.
- 5.34 The effectiveness of quality review is particularly important where applicants have no recourse to redress for poor decision making through a formal appeal process (as in the cases considered in this report).
- 5.35 Examples of cases where review by an Entry Clearance Manager did not identify issues of concern in either the assessment of evidence or presentation of grounds for refusal included:
- a case where the refusal notice stated that the applicant had not provided evidence of business, employment and income. However, a company bank statement showing a healthy balance and a company registration document had been provided. The refusal notice also stated that the applicant had not demonstrated sufficient economic and social ties to Turkey even though, in addition to the business interests indicated above, the applicant's wife was resident in the home country; and
 - a case where a prospective student was refused due to lack of explanation of funds transferred into his account. The applicant was previously refused on grounds of lack of funds, lack of evidence of prior English studies and failure to explain how the course would be of benefit. However, the funds were clearly from his mother's account. Evidence of previous study in English was submitted with the second application in addition to a letter from a company confirming they would cover extra expenses incurred through the study programme and intended to employ the applicant on completion of the course. The second refusal notice commented that the applicant had not provided any evidence of further English studies since the completion of the English course in February 2010 and had also not explained why they are currently not employed with the company which intended to employ them on return from the UK.
- 5.36 Ineffective Entry Clearance Manager case reviews have also been observed in recent overseas inspections of other visa posts. It is important for the UK Border Agency to consider whether the current targets for the completion of case file review are adversely impacting the quality of reviews undertaken. Entry Clearance Manager reviews should be a fundamental part of supporting an efficient, effective and fair visa decision making system. Hence, it is advised that the UK Border Agency closely monitors and supports the effectiveness of this process.

We recommend that the UK Border Agency:

- Improves the effectiveness of Entry Clearance Manager reviews of decisions and considers the impact of current targets on the quality of reviews undertaken.

6. Inspection Findings – Impact on people subject to UK Border Agency services

Specific criterion

Customers receive a clear and detailed explanation if their application is refused, with details of any appeal rights

- 6.1 Refusal notices are issued to all applicants denied a visa setting out the reasons an application has been unsuccessful. This enables applicants to understand where they are considered to have fallen short of the requirements of the relevant Immigration Rules and informs any further decision to appeal or reapply.
- 6.2 The latest guidance concerning the format of refusal notices was issued on 14 May 2010 with the intention of simplifying the style and content for applicants. This instruction followed previous comments by the Independent Chief Inspector in regard to the unnecessary complexity and poor presentation of notices seen in other inspections, in addition to the findings of an internal review conducted by the UK Border Agency.
- 6.3 The refusal notices in Istanbul were the first notices we have examined following the implementation of this guidance and generally we found the notices:
- were well-structured and easy to follow;
 - clearly stated the relevant paragraph of the Immigration Rules;
 - clearly stated the period and purpose of visit;
 - gave a clear account of the reasons the application was denied;
 - were written in straightforward English;
 - gave the correct information on appeal rights; and
 - gave all the information required by the latest guidance.
- 6.4 The period and purpose of stay were incorrectly quoted in seven (14%) of the fifty cases sampled and two cases (4%) were considered to have fallen short of professional standards of presentation. All of the refusal notices were considered to have clearly communicated the refusal reasons.
- 6.5 The correct appeal rights were set out in all but one of the refusal notices in the sampled cases. All applicants were advised that any appeal must be limited to grounds of race discrimination or human rights. However, one of the applicants planned to attend her brother's wedding and stay with her nephew in the UK. Since the primary intention was to visit qualifying family members, full appeal rights should have been attributed in this case.
- 6.6 We noted the guidance in place at the time of the inspection lacked clarity regarding the award of appeal rights in cases where applicants submitted a general rather than specific family visitor application form but primarily wished to visit family members in the UK. The UK Border Agency has now issued further guidance to clarify the circumstances when full appeal rights must be notified.

6.7 We consider the clarity of refusal notices is an area of good practice in Istanbul. We were also told about a recent exercise across the EuroMed East region to enhance the quality and consistency of notices. In this exercise examples of refusal wordings were rated by Entry Clearance Managers across the region, in consultation with Entry Clearance Officers, in order to consider and highlight good practice. Such regional initiatives are a positive approach in supporting the sharing of good practice.

Stakeholder Views

6.8 The stakeholders we spoke to were complimentary about the visa section. In particular, they referred to the cooperative attitude of visa section staff in responding to enquiries and commented positively on the management of the visa operations. It was also felt that managers were not complacent and were receptive to new ideas.

Customer Service Team

6.9 Customer service teams were being established at visa sections across the EuroMed East region in order to improve the quality and consistency of communications with applicants by assigning a focused resource to deal with queries and correspondence. The Istanbul Customer Service Team was in place at the time of the inspection and comprised a locally employed Customer Service Manager, and two Entry Clearance Assistants, one of whom was assigned on a rota basis to allow a number of staff to gain experience in this area. The work of the team is overseen by an Entry Clearance Manager.

6.10 Staff were positive about the difference the team was making and the enhanced co-ordination and consistency in responses to applicants. We were informed that the team also intended to work more closely with the visa application centre commercial partner to enhance the quality of responses to queries.

6.11 We were told that applicants generally received a reply to correspondence within five days. Whilst onsite we looked at the post inbox and noted that emails were being dealt with efficiently; the oldest piece of unaddressed correspondence was only two days old.

Service User Panel

6.12 The visa section had recently instituted a stakeholder engagement panel, the UK Border Agency in Turkey User Panel, following the established model of a user panel in Moscow. We were informed that this forum would meet on a quarterly basis and involved the following key stakeholders:

- International Transport Association;
- British Council;
- Travel Agents Association of Turkey;
- Transportation Company;
- Istanbul Chamber of Commerce;
- British Chamber of Commerce; and
- the visa application centre commercial partner.

Post management commented that the intention is to improve user focus, strengthen partnership working and enhance communication and understanding with key stakeholders through this approach.

Appendix 1

Inspection Framework and Core Criteria

The criteria used in this inspection were selected from the Independent Chief Inspector's Core Inspection Criteria and are presented below:

1. High level outcomes of the business

Specific criterion

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

2. Processes and procedures (including the quality of decision making and consistency of approach).

Specific Criteria

2.2(c) Documentary checks are carried out as designated

2.2(d) Decisions are made clearly based on all the evidence and in accordance with current statutory requirements, published policy, guidance and procedures

2.3 (a) Decisions are taken within the timescales set out by UKBA

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

3. Impact on people subject to UKBA services

Specific criterion

3.4 (c): Customers receive a clear and detailed explanation if their application is refused, with details of any appeal rights

Appendix 2

Information on Visa Fees

Visa fees can be found at <http://www.ukvisas.gov.uk/en/howtoapply/visafees/> . All fees are quoted in pounds sterling, but are usually payable in local currency.

Dependants are charged the same fee as the main applicant. All dependants who are travelling must pay the fee whether or not they are included in the main applicant's passport.

Visa fees are non-refundable but if a payment has been made and the application is not submitted or if the applicant refuses to provide biometric details with their application, then the UK Border Agency will refund the fee.

Fees are listed by category: visit, study, work, settlement, transit, others and exempt.

The fees are effective for all visa applications made from 22 November 2010.

Fees are subject to periodic review.

Appendix 3

Glossary

Term	Description
Agency	Refers to the UK Border Agency
Biometrics	All applicants are now routinely required to provide ten digit finger scans and a digital photograph when applying for a United Kingdom visa. There are some minor exceptions to this rule, e.g. Heads of State and children aged under five.
Casework Information Database	An electronic database widely used throughout the Agency to record casework information.
Compliance Exercise	Exercises undertaken to help understand the level of visa abuse linked to particular applicant categories or particular locations which are used to inform a risk profile.
Customer Strategy	Strategy document launched in April 2009, setting out the UK Border Agency's customer service standards.
Data Protection Act 1998	The Data Protection Act requires anyone who handles personal information to comply with a number of important principles. It also gives individuals rights over their personal information.
Entry Clearance	<p>A person requires leave to enter the United Kingdom if they are neither a British nor Commonwealth citizen with the right of abode, nor a person who is entitled to enter or remain in the United Kingdom by virtue of the provisions of the 2006 European Economic Area Regulations. Entry clearance takes the form of a visa (for visa nationals) or an entry certificate (for non-visa nationals).</p> <p>These documents are taken as evidence of the holder's eligibility for entry into the United Kingdom and, accordingly, accepted as "entry clearances" within the meaning of the Immigration Act 1971. The United Kingdom Government decides which countries' citizens require a visa. Non-visa nationals may also require entry clearance if they seek to enter the United Kingdom for purposes other than a visit or intend to stay for a period longer than six months. More detailed information about Entry Clearance can be found on the UK Border Agency website: http://ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/ The Immigration Rules require an individual making an application for an entry clearance as a visitor to be outside the United Kingdom and Islands at the time of their application. They must apply to a visa section designated by the Secretary of State to accept applications for entry clearance for that purpose and from that category of applicant</p>
Entry Clearance Manager	Manages the visa application process within a visa section.

Entry Clearance Officer	Processes visa applications making the decision whether to grant or refuse entry clearance.
European Economic Area (EEA)	<p>The European Economic Area (EEA) was established on 1 January 1994 following an agreement between the member states of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the European Community, later the European Union (EU).</p> <p>All EEA nationals enjoy free movement rights in the EEA. They are not subject to the Immigration Rules and may come to the United Kingdom and reside here in accordance with the 2006 Regulations. They do not require permission from the UK Border Agency to enter or remain, nor do they require a document confirming their free movement status.</p>
European Economic Area (EEA) Family Permits	<p>All European Economic Area (EEA) nationals enjoy free movement rights in the EEA. They are not subject to the Immigration Rules and may come to the United Kingdom and reside here in accordance with the 2006 Regulations.</p> <p>They do not require permission from the UK Border Agency to enter or remain, nor do they require a document confirming their free movement status. An EEA family permit is a form of entry clearance issued to the non-EEA national family members of an EEA national who is in, or intends to come to, the United Kingdom in order to exercise a Treaty right.</p>
Five Country Conference	The Five Country Conference is a forum for cooperation on migration and border security issues and involves the UK, US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. In 2009 the governments of these countries signed a joint agreement to pursue biometric data sharing for immigration purposes.
Home Office	The Home Office is the lead government department for immigration and passports, drugs policy, crime, counter-terrorism and police.
Hub and Spoke	<p>Prior to 2007, virtually all British diplomatic missions had a visa section. Each worked largely independently; handling all aspects of visa processing including taking decisions on site.</p> <p>Hub and Spoke was introduced to move away from the traditional model based on the physical presence of the visa section. Consideration of an application does not need to happen in the same place as it is collected.</p> <p>Applications can be moved from the collection point (the spoke) to the processing point (the hub). This separation between the collection network and the decision making network aims to improve the quality and consistency of decision making, efficiency and flexibility. Work can be moved to staff rather than the other way around.</p>
Immigration Case Work System	The Immigration Case Work programme (ICW) aims to replace the various IT systems in use across the UK Border Agency with one single integrated system called Integrity.
Immigration Liaison Assistant	Performs a range of tasks within RALON e.g. helping in the identification of forged documents or the creation of risk profiles.
Immigration Liaison Manager	UK Border Agency role which encompasses posts previously known as Airline Liaison Officers and Risk Assessment Managers. The Immigration Liaison Manager oversees the work of RALON within the visa sections.

Immigration Liaison Officer	Supports the Immigration Liaison Manager in progressing RALON objectives.
Inadequately documented passengers	Passengers who attempt to travel to the UK without a valid visa or with forged documents
Independent Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency	The role of the Independent Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency was established by the UK Borders Act 2007 to examine the efficiency and effectiveness of the UK Border Agency. The Chief Inspector is independent of the UK Border Agency and reports directly to the Home Secretary.
Independent Monitor and legislation	<p>The legislation which established the role of the Independent Monitor for Entry Clearance Refusals without the Right of Appeal, was set out in section 23 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 and amended by paragraph 27 of schedule 7 of the Nationality, Immigration & Asylum Act 2002 and Statutory Instrument 2008/310 regarding the points-based system (from April 2008).</p> <p>Section 23 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, as amended by section 4(2) of the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006, stipulates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Secretary of State must appoint a person to monitor, in such a manner as the Secretary of State may determine, refusals of entry clearance in cases where, as a result of section 88A of the Nationality, Immigration & Asylum Act 2002 (c.41)(entry clearance: non-family visitors and students), an appeal under section 82(1) of that Act may be brought only on the grounds referred to in section 84(1)(b) and (c) of that Act (racial discrimination and human rights). • The Secretary of State may not appoint a member of his staff. • The Secretary of State must lay a copy of any report made to him under subsection (3) before each House of Parliament. <p>Although the legislation and the Independent Monitor's formal title refer to "no right of appeal", all applicants have limited rights of appeal on human rights and race relations grounds. Parliament decides which categories of visa customers should not have full rights of appeal; the UK Border Agency's role is to implement the laws set by Parliament and as interpreted by Government policies.</p> <p>John Vine, the Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency was appointed to this role by the Home Secretary on 26 April 2009, effectively bringing this work within his remit.</p>
International Group	The overseas arm of the UK Border Agency, responsible for running visa operations in 135 countries. Formerly known as UK Visas.
Locally employed staff	Staff recruited directly by the British Embassy or High Commission in the country where they are employed
Maladministration	Includes cases where the visa decision would or might have been different if there had not been an administrative failing. For example, an applicant applies for entry clearance to attend a fixed date conference in the UK. The applicant would otherwise have been issued a visa but is refused because a delay in processing the application means the conference has already finished.

Non-visa nationals	A national or citizen of any country that is not listed on the UK Border Agency website (Appendix 1 of the Immigration Rules). A non-visa national does not need a visa to come to the United Kingdom for less than six months, unless it is a requirement of the immigration category under which they are entering. A non-visa national coming to the United Kingdom for more than six months will need a visa.
Omnibase	This is an IT database allowing authorised users to view passport records.
Paragraph 320 (7a) – deception rules	From 29 February 2008, under Paragraph 320 (7A) of the immigration rules, an applicant must be refused entry clearance if false representations or documents are used, or material facts not disclosed, whether or not the false representations or documents are material to the application, and whether or not the deception is with the applicant's knowledge.
Points-Based System (PBS)	<p>On 29 February 2008, a new immigration system was launched to ensure that only those with the right skills or the right contribution can come to the United Kingdom to work or study. The points-based system was designed to enable the UK Border Agency to control migration more effectively, tackle abuse and identify the most talented workers. The system:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • combines more than 80 previous work and study routes to the United Kingdom into five tiers; and • awards points according to workers' skills, to reflect their aptitude, experience and age and also the demand for those skills in any given sector. <p>Employers and education providers play a crucial part in making sure that the points-based system is not abused. They must apply for a licence to sponsor migrants, bring them into the United Kingdom and meet a number of duties while they are sponsoring migrants.</p>
Risk and Liaison Overseas Network (RALON)	An amalgamation of the former Airline Liaison Officer Network and Overseas Risk Assessment Unit Network. RALON has responsibility for identifying threats to the UK border, preventing inadequately documented passengers from reaching UK shores, providing risk assessment to the UK Border Agency visa issuing regime and supporting criminal investigations against individuals and organisations which cause harm to the UK.
Risk Profile	An outline that determines the relative potential harm (to the UK of a visa applicant / travelling passenger) based on characteristics of an individual when compared to existing evidence of adverse activity either in the UK or overseas.
UK Visas	One of the legacy organisations that made up the UK Border Agency and is now known as International Group. UK visas was previously responsible for visa operations at overseas locations.
United Kingdom and Islands	The United Kingdom is made up of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Channel Islands and the Isle of Man are not part of the United Kingdom. The geographical term 'British Isles' covers the United Kingdom, all of Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

UK Border Agency	<p>The agency of the Home Office responsible for border control, enforcing immigration and customs regulations. It also considers applications for permission to enter and stay in the UK, including nationality and asylum applications. The UK Border Agency has been a full executive agency of the Home Office since April 2009.</p>
Visa Nationals	<p>Visa nationals are those who require a visa for every entry to the United Kingdom. A visa national is a national of a country listed on the UK Border Agency website (Appendix 1 of the Immigration Rules). Some visa nationals may pass through the United Kingdom on the way to another country without a visa, but in some circumstances they will require a direct airside visa or visitor in transit visa. Visa nationals must obtain entry clearance before travelling to the United Kingdom unless they are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• returning residents;• those who have been given permission to stay in the United Kingdom and, after temporarily leaving the United Kingdom, return within the duration of that permission to stay;• school children resident in a European Union member state who are on an organised school trip from a general education school and accompanied by a teacher.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the UK Border Agency for its help and cooperation throughout the inspection. In particular, we are grateful for the assistance in collating case files and facilitating interviews at short notice. We also appreciate the contributions of all staff and stakeholders who participated in the inspection process.

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