

**IT ain't want you do, it's the way that you do IT**

**Tom Saunders, the head of Home Office IT is a guest blogger on David's blog this week. He'd like to talk to you about [your IT gripes](#).**

I was grateful for the time that David Normington took to discuss the importance of good service from the IT team. The views that he related were strongly aligned with the feedback and discussions that I had when I met with the staff of Home Office IT Shared Services during October. An overwhelming proportion of the input from staff in my Directorate was focussed on maximising our performance in delivering services and projects to our customers.

My management team has committed to driving through a programme to improve service. Our first step is to confirm our commitment to service levels, starting with the most frequently requested services. The top three service requests by volume are:

- a new standard desktop pc;
- a new account;
- access to a shared folder.

Our Service Management and Commercial teams have been working with our suppliers to agree delivery time from request to completion. Starting from the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2007, I am delighted to confirm that we will be operating to our first ever committed service levels. This is a modest but hugely significant achievement that will be followed by further clear commitments to measurable performance in our services to customers.

SERVICE	COMMITTED SERVICE LEVEL	
	1 January 2006	1 April 2007
A new standard desktop pc	80% delivered in 5 (or less) working days.	95% delivered in 5 (or less) working days.
A new POISE or Indigo (TBC) account	90% delivered in 5 (or less) working days.	95% delivered in 5 (or less) working days.
Access to a shared folder	90% delivered in 5 (or less) working days.	95% delivered in 5 (or less) working days.

We currently have a horrible backlog of requests for equipment and services that has been a deep concern to me and our service team. Keeping customers waiting for the things they need to do their work is wholly unacceptable. We clearly need to do far better. It may not provide comfort to our customers, but I can tell you that our service and delivery staff have been equally unhappy and frustrated by the delays. During the coming weeks we will clear the backlog. We will also continue to improve and add to these committed service levels in the coming months.

To get a deeper understanding of what the business needs from Home Office IT Shared Services and what our customers are experiencing, with members of my management team I will be meeting customers in face to face discussions. These events will be taking place in every location where we have customers. The initial programme has been targeted at senior managers as I want to prioritise our efforts to the things that will help the business deliver its key objectives. We will follow up with open events at

which all staff will be welcome. Understanding what it feels like to be a customer is vital if we are going to make the right improvements. Direct engagement with me and my management team will be an ongoing feature of the way that we will work.

**Tom Saunders**  
**Head of Home Office IT**

There is a [Code of Conduct for David's blog](#), please take the time to read this before submitting your comments.

## Blog for 15 Feb 2007

### Tom Saunders responds

**Tom Saunders, the head of Home Office IT, responds to [your comments about IT gripes](#).**

Firstly I would like to thank all the bloggers who took the time to share their thoughts, comments, ideas and, unfortunately, frustrations with me and my team. We have been reviewing the responses since the publication of my entry into David Normington's blog on the 30th January. My team is contacting each individual blogger, where possible, to discuss the points they raised. In addition to that I would like to summarise my reaction to the bloggers' responses so far by addressing the following themes.

The main purpose of my guest blog was to engage directly with our customers in INDand Core at all levels and set delivery expectations for three standard service types. The introduction of the new Service Level Agreements (SLAs), whilst I agree it is a modest beginning, demonstrates our commitment to improve our accountability for the level of service we offer. We are currently finalising the performance figures for January and will publish on Horizon in the near future. I can confirm that the average time to create a new user account is 2.6 days and to grant access to a shared folder is 2.1 days. This is a significant improvement over the previous two months when we have had a backlog of requests that were taking up to 4 weeks to process. There are some areas where we still need to improve such as folders on the Corporate File Plan (CFP) where some of our internal processes have lead to delays in creating new folders and providing early access to them. I was interested to read a couple of blog comments that suggested a better way of requesting services by sending them directly to our suppliers. We are already in discussions with Sirius (Poise) to do just that for all non-chargeable request items such as new user accounts. Atos (tbc/Indigo) already operate this way which cuts down on the number or process steps and minimises any opportunity for delay. Look out for more details on this shortly.

I was disappointed to read that a number of you found it difficult to find the right people to talk to within Home Office IT and that when you did our response via email and telephone was poor. In the last year we realised our presence on Horizon was far from helpful and have been developing the quality of information ever since. We have developed what we call the 'one stop IT shop' providing staff with the information they need including helpdesk numbers, contact details, forms and general information about Home Office

IT. We will publish our performance against the SLAs and I encourage everyone to pay it a visit. Here is a link  
<http://horizon/IND/OneStopIT/index.asp?Nav=splash> /  
<http://www.homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk/IND/OneStopIT/index.asp?Nav=splash>  
which contains information relevant to both our INDand core users.

We are committed to improving both the delivery performance and the customer experience. By reviewing our internal processes, simplifying how we do things and making it easier to do business with us we aim to improve the whole customer experience.

The Home Office is committed to improving delivery of IT and communication services through a Group IST (Information Systems and Technology) Strategy that enables the department to achieve the published aims and objectives including improved sharing of applications, data and information. Within INDand Core, one of the most significant issues with our existing infrastructures is the fact that we currently operate a number of networks. I have sponsored a project that will establish seamless connectivity on key functions between our two main networks (POISE and Indigo) before the end of 2007.

As with all technology platforms, despite all the extensive planning and testing, things sometimes go wrong. In the case of the Indigo rollout we experienced problems after the first few teams were upgraded. Some customers experienced slow response times and on further analysis we diagnosed the causes of the problem. We decided to halt the rollout and address those problems. I'm sorry for the impact this has caused and would like to stress that we have been working closely with ATOS Origin to fix the performance issues and improve the service to those already on the Indigo platform. Once everything has been addressed we will continue with the rollout of Indigo.

We have had a number of comments about USB flash drives (also called USB memory sticks). I know that a number of people across the office are frustrated by the restrictions that prevent them using a USB flash drive to transfer data e.g. between desktops and stand alone laptops. Outside of the Office flash drives are now in everyday use and have practically become the replacement for the floppy disk. Home Office IT have successfully piloted a proof of concept for use of these devices on POISE in a secure way. We expect to have launched a fully supplied service within the next few months on POISE and would hope to follow for Indigo.

In Q2 2007 we plan to commence the rollout of an improved RAS service. Enhancements will include: faster start up, Wi-Fi, 3G connectivity, more user friendly security and better helpdesk support. We hope this will go a long way to improving the experience of our RAS users.

I will write again on David Normington's Blog in a couple of weeks. I expect to be able to provide further updates on our work to improve services to our customers across the Office. Meanwhile, if you have specific suggestions for improving services, please let me know either via the blog or at this new address, Home Office IT Service Improvement.

**Tom Saunders**

## Head of Home Office IT

There is [a code of conduct](#) for David's blog, please take the time to read this before submitting your comments.

## Blog for 18 Apr 2007

### John Marsh takes the helm

I'd like to thank David for giving me the opportunity to host his blog for the next ten days. I know that HR issues are raised regularly on the blog. So I'd like to explain what we're doing in HR to ensure that the Home Office is a place where people are proud to work. I also want to tell you about what we're doing to improve our basic services to you.

I welcome your comments and views. While I won't be able to provide a response to every single individual I will, over the next few days, identify the key issues you raise. Then next week my senior HR colleagues and I will respond to these on the blog. I can already see that there are several comments about the bonus arrangements for those at Grades 6 and 7 – it's obviously a hot topic which we will respond to this week.

I'd also like to add that if you have a specific HR enquiry, for example about your individual pay, you should contact either [the HR Services Contact Centre](#) or, if you work in the Border and Immigration Agency, [the relevant contact in HRD](#).

### Our People Priority

Our People Priority sets out how we are going to deliver our commitment to ensure you are skilled, involved, take responsibility and are determined to make a difference.

There are eight People Priority projects, which together will deliver our commitment to you and help achieve the Home Office ambition. These are:

- Strengthening the Home Office Board
- Building senior leadership capability
- Embedding Home Office values
- Developing skills
- Improving our recruitment and selection process
- Improving our performance management systems and culture
- Better reward and recognition
- Improving sickness absence management

You can find out more about each of these in the People Priority document on [the HR pages of Horizon](#); and this week look out for HOT stories about the progress we have been making.

### Improving our basic services

The People Priority also sets out what actions we are taking to improve our basic services. Some of our improvements to date include:

- Publishing customer service standards which set out what you can expect from us and what to do if you're not happy with the service you've received
- Improving our processes so that 99% of staff receive the correct pay each month, and 90% of basic check security check applications are completed within ten working days of receipt
- Introducing, in partnership with colleagues in the Shared Business Service Programme, 'HR self service' so that you can check and update your personal information
- Setting up challenging targets and measures so that we can monitor our performance.

I know from what you are saying that we still have more to do. And I also accept that unless we are seen to be getting the basics right first time, you will remain sceptical when we say that we are delivering an increasingly efficient, effective and professional HR service. All I can say is that I and my staff are committed to improving our service to you and delivering our People Priority.

As David and I mentioned in our global message on Monday, this is a two-way deal; it is *our* People Priority. We are putting in place improved support, systems and processes; but we need you to help deliver the People Priority in your area. This includes using 'HR self service' to check and update your personal data, agreeing objectives for the forthcoming year, and notifying us as soon as possible of pay and location changes.

Please let me know what you think.

**John Marsh**  
**Head of Group HR**

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**Blog for 23 Apr 2007**

### **HR blog update - responses to your comments from John Marsh and Dusty Amroliwala**

Thank you to everyone who has posted HR-related comments so far on David's blog, which I have been hosting since last Wednesday. I'll be 'in charge' until next Friday 27 April, so please do keep sending in your views.

I've been reading the blog each day to establish some of the key issues that you've been raising. I really do appreciate your views, all of which have been well argued and reasonably put. While there are a number of miscellaneous enquiries that don't readily fit into a broader category, the emerging issues appear to be:

- **Grade 6 and 7 enhanced bonus:** A very hot topic, this one, following Monday's global message from David and me.

- **Performance development review:** Lots of comments about the new system following [Wednesday's HOT story](#).
- **Pay policy:** Since my global message last Friday on the 2007 pay award, many of you have asked again about how you will reach your target rate when so many of you are now on your pay range minima as a result of pay range shortening. I do understand why this is a concern. We have been shortening pay ranges with the aim of providing staff with a reasonable time to reach their target rate and reduce equal pay concerns. Although this has had the effect of a number of individuals remaining on their pay range minima, staff are getting nearer to their target rate. I would like to look at whether we can ensure that as a result of this year's pay award staff will progress away from the pay range minima.
- **Recruitment and selection:** There have been a number of comments and enquiries about our new recruitment and selection process, which will shortly replace our current processes.
- **Quality of HR service:** A number of you have commented on the quality of service you receive from HR both in Home Office HQ and in the Border and Immigration Agency.

Dusty Amroliwala, Director of HR Services, provides a response today about the Grade 6 and 7 enhanced bonus (see below). As I mentioned on Wednesday, my senior HR colleagues and I will respond to each of the remaining issues next week.

We'll deal with as many miscellaneous queries – ie those that don't fit in with the five key issues I've identified above – as we can this week. I'll make sure that those we haven't responded to by the end of this week will be dealt with in future HR Bulletins and other communication channels.

So I'll hand over to Dusty to respond on the Grade 6 and 7 enhanced bonus.

**John Marsh**  
**Group HR Director**

Thanks John. I'm pleased that staff have taken an interest in and posted comments and questions for John on David's blog.

A number of you have raised concerns about the availability of bonuses for staff below grade 7. I would like to reassure you and clarify that **all staff**, grade AA to grade 6, are eligible for a performance bonus within the performance development review (PDR) system. The value of the performance bonus remains at 2 per cent of the target rate for your grade and continues to be non-consolidated, ie it is a one-off, non-pensionable payment.

The PDR provided the opportunity for 10 to 15 per cent of staff to receive a box A bonus. The new PDR will enable more flexibility to award performance bonus payments for up to 35 per cent of staff. In addition, all staff who have met the required standards for their job will continue to receive annual pay progression.

The introduction of an enhanced bonus for grades 6 and 7 is a pilot exercise. The enhanced bonus will be available for up to 10 per cent of grade 6 and 7 staff where they have not only performed well in all aspects of their job and met the requirements for a bonus – such as meeting objectives, demonstrating the Department's values and delivering exceptional performance – but also

demonstrated particular achievements in people management and leadership.

The Reform Board is particularly keen to recognise managers who are demonstrating exceptional leadership and supporting staff to improve performance. This is because feedback from staff has suggested that management skills are not as highly valued as technical or policy delivery skills. Highly effective managers who lead by example are essential for the Home Office to be able to meet future challenges.

**Dusty Amroliwala**  
**Director of HR Services**

There is [a code of conduct](#) for David's blog, please take the time to read this before submitting your comments.

## Blog for 24 Apr 2007

### **Dusty talks money, and Joe talks about HR development in BIA**

In the next set of responses from HR about the issues you've highlighted over the last week, Dusty Amroliwala talks about pay and progression, and Joe Dugdale deals with queries from Border and Immigration Agency staff.

There is [a code of conduct](#) for David's blog, please take the time to read this before submitting your comments.

#### **Pay is complicated – why?**

The Home Office pay system is based on grades that have a pay range minima and a target rate. Your pay progression from the pay range minima to the target rate is by way of movement up a pay milestone structure and it is dependent upon a satisfactory job performance. What makes pay complicated is that we are still in the process of reducing the length of pay ranges. Before 2002, it was taking up to 30 years to reach your target rate.

#### **Why isn't experience being rewarded?**

In 2002, the Home Office introduced the current pay system to respond to concerns about the length of time it took an individual to progress from their pay range minima to the target rate. The new pay system was called "structured progression".

Since 2002, the department has been reducing the length of all pay ranges. Our aim is reach a position where for the majority of staff it will take no more than 5 years to move from their pay range minima to their target rate. However, the method of achieving pay range shortening has been to raise the pay range minima at the same time as staff receive their pay award. This resulted in a number of staff remaining on or near their pay range minima. I cannot make any promises or predictions about when we will achieve our aim as it is dependent on the wider pay negotiation process.

We are asked regularly about why is it not possible to maintain one's position

on the pay scale after pay range shortening has occurred. In response, we have said that to do so would mean that an individual would receive a pay award that would be double the average given to others.

Every year we negotiate with HM Treasury the funding for your pay award. This funding has to be affordable, meet our business needs and be within wider public sector pay policy. As such the Department has a finite sum of money to distribute in a pay award. So, when we know how much money we have to distribute, we negotiate with your union representatives.

In negotiating with the unions we are seeking to distribute the fixed sums of monies to our staff in the fairest way. If we were to provide staff near the pay minima with more money, or a higher pay progression rate then we would have to reduce the pay award given to other staff.

**When was the last equal pay audit?**

The department undertakes an equal pay audit each year. The last one was for the 2006 Pay Award.

**Example pay progression chart**

Set out below is an example of pay progression up the milestone pay system for a satisfactory performer.

<b>EO (London) PayRange</b>			
	<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Current Value</b>	<b>Progression</b>
<b>Target Rate</b>	73	£23,566	6 Years
	72	£23,328	
	71	£23,093	
	70	£22,860	5 Years
	69	£22,629	
	68	£22,400	
	67	£22,174	4 Years
	66	£21,950	
	65	£21,729	
	64	£21,509	3 Years
	63	£21,292	
	62	£21,077	
	61	£20,864	2 Years
	60	£20,654	
	59	£20,445	
	58	£20,239	1 Year
	57	£20,034	
	56	£19,832	
	<b>Minima</b>	55	£19,632

### **Performance pay and the annual pay award**

It is public sector pay policy to provide performance related pay. All employees who provide a satisfactory performance receive pay progression. Box C performers do not receive pay progression above the pay range minima. However, in past pay awards Box C performers on their pay range minima have received the benefits of pay range shortening. This is not the Department's preferred position and it will be the subject of pay talks with the unions as part of the 2007 Pay Award.

### **Why have bonus payments changed for Grade 6 and Grade 7 staff ahead of the 2007 Pay Award?**

The department has reviewed its performance management systems and has introduced a new Performance Development Review. This provides for a new enhanced bonus arrangement for grade 6 and grade 7 employees. The value of the new enhanced bonus will be subject to the normal collective bargaining with the Unions. The introduction of an enhanced bonus for grades 6 and 7 is a pilot exercise. It was launched along with the new PDR guidance to allow sufficient time for evaluation of the pilot.

### **London Locational Allowance – why no increase last year?**

Since 2001 London Locational Allowance has increased by 46% to reflect the local employment market. In addition, for most staff in the London pay area there is a 4.14% pay lead over their National pay area colleagues. Last year the department did not raise the value of London Locational Allowance. Instead the pay milestones were revalued by 0.5%. This benefited staff in both the London and National pay areas.

London Locational Allowance will be discussed with your union representatives as part of the pay negotiation process for 2007.

**Dusty Amroliwala**  
**Director of HR Services**

### **Why are there a distinct lack of people strategies/ initiatives or consistent HR messages being delivered to staff in the Border and Immigration Agency?**

Within the context of the Home Office People Priority we are currently working on a Border and Immigration Agency People Strategy to support the new Agency.

This will support the Border and Immigration Agency business strategy and plan, integrate the strategic aims of the business in terms of people requirements, translate these into supporting HR activities and articulate our approach to people management. The Board will be discussing the draft People Strategy next week and we hope to be in a position to share this with staff in the coming months.

Meanwhile some key elements of the Strategy are already beginning to roll out across the Border and Immigration Agency. Workshops and seminars on the new performance management process have been taking place in the last few

weeks and an e-learning package will be made available to support this. Our new resourcing process – which sees the end of the Assessment Centres and the introduction of Core Skills Assessments – comes into effect in May.

We are also developing a strategy which will set out the vision for HRD as we move towards the implementation of Shared Services for transactional HR, including employee and manager self service, transforming the corporate centre and embedding our business partners in line with the new regional model for the organisation. We have just issued a revised "People News" which explains the current HR issues; other news can be found in the HOT messages.

**What is HRD in general and PACT in particular, doing to improve service to staff?**

We are developing our *Back to Basics* plan which requires all our teams to review their core processes and ways of working to improve service to customers.

Contact with the Croydon Pay Team by email or telephone is managed by a service desk. The telephones are open between 8am and 4pm on weekdays. New technology was introduced in March to help with the management and monitoring of calls, and callers will be notified if they are in a queue. Most calls are answered within a few seconds but it can be busy around pay day when people may have to wait in the queue. All emails receive an automated response so that customers know that their query has been received. We include information in our automated responses to let customers know roughly how long their query might take to be answered.

Pay queries are categorised by priority: top priority cases (nil pay or severely reduced pay) are dealt with in 24 hours. This target was achieved each month between January and March. In March 93 per cent of routine pay work was dealt with in time for the next pay day, and the team is working to deliver 100 per cent on these cases within the next couple of months. Our new Customer Charter, on Horizon at <http://horizon/IND/Directorates/HRD/Teams/Operations/pay.asp>, was launched earlier in the year explaining the case categorisation criteria. Earlier in April only 62 pay queries were older than 30 days and these are the most complex cases.

Finally, our resourcing team has a pipeline of new recruits at AA level, and also some AOs and EOs, waiting to be posted if internal procedures do not secure a suitable candidate.

**Joe Dugdale**  
**Strategic Director, Human Resources & Organisational Development**

**Blog for 25 Apr 2007**

**Dusty feeds back on performance**

**In today's HR blog, Dusty Amroliwala, Director of HR Services,**

## **responds to comments and queries raised about the new performance development review system and performance management.**

It has been useful to see the issues which staff have raised on the blog about the PDR and performance management in the Home Office. I will address some of the specific issues raised by staff but I would like to start by agreeing that it is managers who will improve the way performance is managed and not a change to processes. To this end, over the last two years, both Border and Immigration Agency Learning and Development and the Centre for Learning and Development in Home Office headquarters have introduced development programmes to help improve management and leadership skills. The changes to the PDR process have been introduced to address the concerns many staff have raised about the previous PADR system and to support the Reform Programme.

The PDR emphasises that performance management is a continuous process to support individuals and to help teams understand their contributions to business effectiveness and continuously develop to achieve high levels of organisational performance.

As part of the Reform Programme the department is continuing to develop and improve its business planning processes to ensure staff are engaged in the development of business plans and understand the role they play in successful delivery of output. Some of you have suggested that the removal of the direct reference on the appraisal form to business objectives could make the PDR less IiP compliant; however it is not enough simply to state what the link is. In order to meet standards set out within IiP indicators, managers and staff need to be able to explain the objectives of their team and how they have contributed to developing and achieving them.

It is through business planning that directors, with their management teams, will establish the standards which will feed into individuals' objectives so that they are clear about the expected level of performance and what they need to do to be recommended for a bonus.

The PDR reinforces the expectation that managers and jobholders need to have regular reviews (recommending quarterly, although we know some managers have more regular meetings) as this enables progress to be assessed against objectives and, where objectives are not being met, action to be taken to address this. The management objective has been refocused to address this requirement: in order to qualify for bonus awards managers have to demonstrate they have had regular reviews with their team and addressed performance issues.

### **The form**

The form is part of a new process to enable managers to focus on having quality discussions which will help to motivate staff to improve their performance. The form itself is not a motivator. The form has been changed to meet the request made by staff that it should be less repetitive and more focused.

The form allows you to add and expand sections as it is expected that staff will review and change objectives as the year progresses. It is recommended that staff have no more than five objectives at any one time to ensure that job

priorities are clear, so it is particularly important that objectives cover clear areas of work and not tasks.

The trade unions have been involved in the development of the form and systems as a part of the consultation process and we will continue to work with them to review the implementation and provide advice as the PDR is reviewed over the next year.

Assessment of performance is now related much more specifically to objectives and the skills needed for the job. There is also the opportunity to provide evidence of how a jobholder has demonstrated the values.

### **Training**

The training provided for "Expert Users" – people trained to train others in their units – was reviewed after feedback from the early courses and a number of changes were made. Expert Users have also been provided with a pack of support materials.

Training for new staff will be a combination of e-learning and skills courses available through Border and Immigration Agency Learning and Development and the Centre for Learning and Development. A new course is also being developed for managers to help them understand how to assess performance against objectives and skills. All training will be monitored and evaluated to ensure that it meets the needs of managers and staff, and where necessary course material will be adjusted.

There will continue to be a number of changes effecting the Department over the coming months so new questions and answers will be added to the website regularly to keep you informed of the latest information.

### **Managing poor performers**

Effective management of poor performance requires managers to ensure that underperformance is identified early and discussed openly with jobholders, providing support and development to help the individual to improve. The new PDR system recommends regular, quarterly reviews as a minimum to provide feedback to help underperformers improve their performance quickly. Changes are currently being agreed to the performance management policy to provide clearer guidance on the stages for managing unsatisfactory performance. Managers may need support when dealing with unsatisfactory performance and their HR Advisers will be available to provide advice about the formal three stage process for dealing with unsatisfactory performance.

We are keen to support managers to improve performance in their teams and I would encourage managers to consider whether the management and leadership courses offered by Border and Immigration Agency Learning and Development and the Centre for Learning and Development would help them to improve their skills.

**Dusty Amroliwala**  
**Director, HR Services**

There is [a code of conduct](#) for David's blog, please take the time to read this before submitting your comments.

**John Marsh rounds up his time as blog host . . .**

**. . . plus feedback on HR services, recruitment and redeployment from Dusty Amroliwala**

Well, my time guest hosting David's blog is almost at an end, and this will be my final blog entry. I'd like to think that this has been a worthwhile exercise; it certainly has been for me and my staff.

Below, Dusty Amroliwala provides the final two of our themed responses, dealing with improving HR services, recruitment and selection, and the redeployment network.

As I said on Monday, I'll also make sure that all the miscellaneous comments and enquiries are dealt with too. We've responded to some of these today.

More responses will be posted on the blog over the coming days (we'll flag these up so that you know they're HR responses to comments raised over the last 10 days). And where appropriate, we'll also respond through our HR Bulletins.

What has struck me reading through our responses is we have very good service level agreements and policies but sometimes we need to explain them better and find a way of recognising where the policies get in the way of dealing with individual circumstances. I think HR is getting much better at this and I hope our engagement over the last ten days has been worthwhile.

Dusty has replied to most queries but I will deal with a few now. In response to xxxx question last week, the People Priority projects are being delivered in parallel; the order in which the projects were listed in my first blog entry doesn't refer to the order in which they are being delivered.

Understandably, there have been a couple of queries about the effect that machinery of government changes will have on the terms and conditions of staff transferring to the Ministry of Justice. We have recently published some additional HR questions and answers on [the Home Office restructure website](#), which provide more details about this. In addition, Mandie Campbell, Director of Leadership and Learning, has responded today to the query about training provision for those staff who will transfer.

Earlier this week xxxx asked for my views on making HR a specialist function. Over the last two years in the Home Office we have been working to professionalise HR. We have already designated those policy and business partner team roles in which a Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) qualification is mandatory. All our current staff in these roles either have, or are working towards, a CIPD or equivalent qualification. We have also put in place guidance on the levels of skills and qualification required at entry levels and feeder grades in order to develop a more consistent HR career structure consistent with Professional Skills for Government. And for over a year now, we have been successfully running a

continuing professional development (CPD) network for HR professionals across the Home Office group.

Before I hand over to Dusty, I'd like to finish with some thank yous. Thanks once again to David Normington for giving me the opportunity to host his blog over the past ten days. Thanks to my senior HR colleagues and their teams for providing responses to queries and issues.

And finally, thank you to everyone who has taken the time to read our blog entries, and for continuing to send in your comments and queries. I know that we haven't been able to provide individual responses to every one who has written in, but I hope that we've gone some way towards addressing the key issues raised. I will continue to check the blog so please do keep sending in your comments.

**John Marsh**  
**Group HR Director**

Thanks John.

### **1) Improving HR Service**

I would like to start my response to this with a request – please contact the HR unit that serves your part of the organisation:

- if you work in Home Office headquarters, the HR Pay and Contact Centre on xxxx
- if you work in the Borders and Immigration Agency you have a number of contact points that are set out in [the HR Customer Charter](#) which is available on Horizon.

### **Customer focus**

I am disappointed to hear about the poor impression obtained of the service provided by the HR Pay and Contact Centre by one of our customers. I can confirm that we are committed to providing a high standard of customer service when people get in touch about HR queries and transactions and we work extremely hard to ensure that people's needs are met. Whilst it is important to us to meet our published turn-round times we are very conscious of the need to provide a good quality service and are in the process of implementing a new approach that will help us confirm with our customers that they are satisfied with both the timeliness and the quality of response received. This will also help us identify any areas where we fall below the high standards we set ourselves.

To help us understand the range of queries and transactions that arise and ensure consistent and accurate advice is provided, all contacts do need to go via the Pay and Contact Centre. Where a query needs to be referred to Pay Services, HR will liaise with them throughout the duration of the query to ensure that this is dealt with.

You can find out more about our service levels in the HR Customer Charter.

### **Pay processes**

It is correct that the vast majority of recoveries appearing on pay slips are legitimate. We all have a part to play in ensuring that HR is informed of changes accurately and in good time to reduce the incidences of retrospective

pay adjustments. You can find useful information about roles and responsibilities on [the Adelphi section of Horizon](#) and we are currently preparing some interactive guidance that should make the various processes easier to follow.

When appropriate, steps are taken to offset the effect of larger deductions and staff are given an opportunity to discuss repayment terms. There may be occasions when the process doesn't run as well as it should. However, there are procedures in place in HR and HOPPS to ensure that in such cases, employees are not left with little or no pay.

If you have a query about your pay you should raise the matter with your HR unit who will either answer the question themselves or forward it to Pay Service if appropriate. These arrangements allow us to monitor our overall query handling and performance in this area.

### **Career Advice**

The delegation of greater responsibility for people management – including providing advice to their staff about career development – to line managers, has meant that HR has been able to reduce in size over the last few years. However, in addition to assistance from line managers, advice on how to apply for permanent posts and secondments in other parts of the HO, civil service, other external bodies, and in Europe, can also be obtained from the guidance provided on the HR website, the HR Pay & Contact Centre and the HR Interchange team. You can also find information, links and tools to help you think about your career development on [the Career Development pages of Horizon](#).

### **Security checks**

In response to xxxx query last week, anyone working for the Home Office requires minimum Enhanced Baseline Standard clearance before starting work. Without more details of the case in question it is not possible to give the particular reason for a new clearance being conducted in this case. If the person concerned wishes Departmental Security Unit to provide a more detailed explanation they will be happy to do so. He/she should contact xxxx Head of Personnel Security.

## **2) Recruitment and selection**

### **Why do we still have "assessment centres" (in the form of the local CSA), considering departments such as the DCA allow promotion to any grade based on competencies and interviews?**

The decision was taken a few years ago to introduce a generic assessment for promotion to HEO and Grade 7 and the reasons for this improvement are as valid now as they were when the decision was originally taken. The core skills assessment for promotion to Grade 7 and HEO have been developed to ensure that there is a generic selection process, based upon our Core Competency Framework (CCF). The CCF incorporates the four core skills from the Professional Skills for Government framework that the Cabinet Office has mandated as essential requirements for all Civil Servants from grade 7 upwards. Also, the Cabinet Office has stated that they expect assessment of the core skills to be rigorous at grade 7 level.

### **How will the new system be any better for specialists?**

The Cabinet Office has made clear that the requirement to have the four core

skills applies to all grade 7s and upwards, and this includes specialists. Generally speaking, however, the arrangements and opportunities for specialists are unchanged. So, for promotion to grade 7 the requirement to pass the Core Skills Assessment (CSA) applies across the board, as with assessment centres at the moment. Where there are established Service-wide arrangements (eg, lawyers) these will continue to apply. And at HEO-level, Heads of Profession for the established specialist grades (eg., scientists, research officers, psychologists, etc) will continue to have discretion when it comes to the requirement to pass the CSA. Also, specialists will continue to be able to apply for posts outside their specialism where they have the relevant skills.

**How will the new system be any better in addressing the issue that staff under a certain age were more likely to pass the assessment centre?**

It is true that for both of the assessment centres the likelihood of success decreases with increasing age and this is more marked at grade 7 level than HEO. However, it is likely to be wrong to jump to the conclusion that this is age discrimination, especially as there is no evidence that points to any discriminatory factor(s) in the assessment centre process. Monitoring of the new arrangements will continue and, where we have the evidence we will try to find explanations for the CSA outcomes.

Candidates of all ages will have access to new familiarisation materials and guidance designed to help them understand the various elements of the new resourcing system and specifically the CSA.

**How will prior experience (either outside of the Home Office, or from further back in time) be taken into account when assessing suitability under the new system?**

Experience may be relevant, but can only be assessed in terms of outputs or achievements. So rather than asking about how many years' experience a candidate has, the selection should focus on the results of the skills or behaviours acquired.

**3) Redeployment networks**

**Why must an individual in a redeployment network take the first post offered, especially when there might be circumstances in which it is necessary to turn that post down?**

When an individual joins a redeployment network the main objective is for them to find a new post as quickly as possible. Every effort will be made to ensure that individuals are put forward for posts which provide a reasonable match for their skills and competencies, and account will be taken of personal circumstances including exceptional or compelling factors. However, there cannot be the option of turning down jobs where there is a reasonable skills match simply because something better might come up later. Posting individuals swiftly reduces the level of uncertainty for individuals, and recognises that as the Department progresses towards its HQ reduction targets the number of posts available will reduce. This means that we must ensure that everyone is posted into appropriately matched roles at the first opportunity. To date, individuals, line managers, senior managers and HR professionals have all worked hard to ensure that the majority of individuals who have been entered into a redeployment network have found a new post.

I should add that when individuals are in the redeployment network they are

expected to be proactive in looking for posts through the jobs vacancy database, with the support of their line manager, and therefore have the opportunity to find roles that they would prefer to take up.

As a general principle, staff returning from secondment are expected to re-join their previous Home Office unit. However, the programme of restructuring may affect the availability of posts when the individual is due to return to the Department. An individual who is on secondment is contacted by the Interchange Team before they are due to return in order to discuss their return and to encourage them to start applying for alternative roles where necessary. However, if no post is found then the individual will be placed in a redeployment network. The Department continues to support secondment as an opportunity for staff to gain valuable experience outside the Home Office.

**Dusty Amroliwala**  
**Director of HR Services**

There is [a code of conduct](#) for David's blog, please take the time to read this before submitting your comments.

## Blog for 1 Oct 2007

### **Guest blog entry from Lin Homer, Chief Executive, Border and Immigration Agency**

Hello

I'm hosting David's blog site for the next two weeks and I'm really pleased to have this opportunity to have two-way conversation with you. I'm aware that comments on people's experiences at the border have been posted on the blog recently and would like to explore this further with you.

We have been making considerable efforts to improve the visibility and effectiveness of the border. It's an interesting area because, as we step-up the quality of the checking, adding new technology support to the high quality skills of our staff, we improve the security of the country. But the balance is an increasing wait for some people on some occasions.

I am interested in your own views. What did you think if you went through an air or sea port on your return from holiday? Were you aware of our improved signage, or our uniforms? Did you notice that we now scan all passports and did it increase your queuing time? How do you feel as a traveller? Reassured and protected or irritated?

If you are border staff in the Border and Immigration Agency you will have your own summer stories from a professional perspective too I expect? Perhaps you could share some of the good and no doubt also challenging episodes from the summer. Do you have any thoughts about things we could do to explain or better inform people about what we're doing to strengthen our borders?

A colleague in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office gave me some feedback.

Her wait was quite long, and while we've put signs up to indicate the likely wait time, the queue was restless. However, the Immigration Officer who checked her passport was smiling, professional and briefly explained as she did the checks why we were making changes. The net result was therefore positive.

It would be good to hear from you. I'll be keeping track of the conversation each day. At the end of this week I plan to summarise the hot topics, sharing some personal thoughts on those, and in the middle of next week I will post a further comment. When my hosting period comes to an end I will sum up and let you know what we plan to do about any outstanding queries.

### **Lin Homer**

There is a [code of conduct for David Normington's blog](#) - please take the time read this before submitting your comments.

## **Blog for 8 Oct 2007**

### **Second guest blog entry from Lin Homer**

Last Monday I asked for your views on the changes we're making to our border controls. Many thanks for all your postings, both on this topic and more widely.

I'll make sure all those who need a specific point answered get a response from the right person. But I thought I should make a posting today, half-way through my guest hosting, to respond to some of the emerging themes.

Some bloggers have said that the Border and Immigration Agency is making some superficial changes whilst not focussing enough on substantive issues.

I accept if you look at uniforms or signage in isolation you could treat it as superficial, but for me it's part of a wider agenda. We're making some substantive improvements in technology, in power and processes, to make the border more secure. So the e-Borders programme, the UK Borders Bill, biometric visas, reintroduction of embarkation, 100% checking of all passports, offshoring of the border (e.g. checking passports in Calais not Dover), as well as signage and uniforms are all part of the plan.

Staff and passengers alike, when we asked them, said visibility and visible authority were key. Early responses suggest that the public are responding well to the change. Several of you commented that we find it easier to criticise ourselves for what we're not doing than to praise ourselves for the things we are tackling. I think it's important to remember that.

It's equally important we stay open to comment and prepared to change. So, in introducing 100% checks, queues did get longer, and yes, probably we could have anticipated that better. We've responded well, introducing some ideas from others (such as better information on queuing time for passengers, management information for managers so they can use their staff to the full, conversations with operators about using their staff and ours in better

partnership).

So I think we're doing more than window dressing. I think we're making the border more secure and making people feel more secure. I know we've much more to do and I think having your comments - even when challenging (and occasionally sceptical) - will help that agenda.

Some other comments pick up the issue of our role at the border and the barriers to recording people. I think there's still a lot of confusion about who does what at the border, and that's part of the reason we're working with Customs and the Police to create a unified presence at ports and give much better information. As staff we all have a role to play in explaining and reinforcing that role.

And on getting people with no right to be here out of the country - well yes, there are challenges, but it's not as hopeless as one blogger suggested! Last year we removed over 30,000 - 17,000 of which were Failed Asylum Seekers - and that did include some countries that are difficult to return to. We're working with the judiciary on issues like JR, but the legislative challenge is an important part of our system of checks and balances.

Last but not least, there's been a lot of debate about the jobs done by Immigration Officers and their counterparts in the rest of the Agency. I back the editor's decision to call a halt to these discussions. Our move to shadow agency status and our process of regionalisation are about making the different parts of the immigration system work better together. Or as Tony Smith, our new Regional Director for London and the South East says, 'mixing the paint'. That's the reason for our new branding too - to make clear we're all working for the same organisation, towards the same goals. We can only make improvements if we work together, recognising and valuing each others expertise.

Please keep your comments coming on how we're doing at strengthening our borders. But I'd also like to hear what you think about how the Border and Immigration Agency is perceived by the public. We've been doing lots of work recently to try and improve media coverage of immigration issues, as well as how we work with our stakeholders and how the public see us. Some of that includes uniforms and the visibility work at the border I've mentioned above. How well are we doing? Is the media coverage we get fair? For those in the Agency, are you proud to say you work here? For those in the rest of the Home Office, would you discuss what we're doing to improve immigration with friends and family? If not, what would need to happen to make you do that? How can we improve the way we communicate, to get a better showing in the press and with the public? I'll look forward to reading your thoughts this week, and I'll be posting my next response on Wednesday.

I've not done justice to all the points made but I hope I've covered some of the ground!

**Lin Homer, Chief Executive, Border and Immigration Agency**

There is a [code of conduct for David Normington's blog](#), please take the time to read this before submitting your comments.

**Third blog entry from Lin Homer**

Thanks for the continued lively response to my initial topic and my posting. Particular thanks to those bloggers who are prepared to 'own' their views with a name.

Clearly the issues of how we can all enhance our sense of pride in working for the Home Office and for the Border and Immigration Agency is an important matter to many of us – as it should be. Those of you who know me, know I've always believed that positive advocacy and endorsement by staff is one of the best ways of balancing negative (and often unfair) press.

Your friends and family and those members of the public who are influenced by you directly can help take the debate about public services into a more open and informed place. The variety of views expressed by bloggers illustrates what a complex and often contentious policy area immigration can be. I do think we have made progress in recent months as our regional press officers have established themselves. We are seeing many more accurate stories about our work in local media.

Now let me try to answer some of the specifics:

- We are moving to an approach that bears down on contract, temporary and consultancy staff and makes best use of permanent staff. We've got to think seriously about those on the redeployment list. We have a very good record in the Home Office and Border and Immigration Agency for redeployment, not only internally but from other Government departments. However, people on redeployment do need to be active and realistic about their own future and do their bit to get placed.
- The canteen in Block E is closing. It has been known for some time that a number of our leases in Croydon are coming to an end and this does have an impact on our forward planning. Not all of this is in our control, as landlords have views about the Croydon Estate. I will look to organise a more regular update for Croydon staff, as I can hear clearly that you don't all feel well enough informed. Again though, let me be clear; Croydon is and will remain our biggest staff base. We are not pulling out of Croydon. We are trying to use our assets as well as we can, money spent on buildings that are not full is money not available to spend on more important things like staffing numbers.
- Taking decisions at the right level in the organisation is important. I agree with the comments about end-of prison sentence deportations not necessarily being more important than say, a decision to remove someone else. Some of our key decisions are taken at Board or Ministerial level because of past crises - we have Ministerial and Permanent Secretary support to review some of these as we move towards full agency status. With this and regionalisation we'll be looking to develop a relationship which allows for quicker decisions, makes the Agency responsible for operational judgements, and enables Ministers to spend more time on strategic issues. The fact Ken Sutton and I now

sign Deportation Orders rather than the Minister is a step in the right direction. I'd welcome colleagues identifying the managers' decisions which could be delegated out more.

- Pay and performance is improving. Sorry if you were one of the few whose pay was not right. [Let the pay team know](#) and I'm confident they'll do their best to sort it!
- On correspondence I agree about the need to improve our response times. At least now the vast majority of our MPs' correspondence (close to 80%) is answered in the 20 days, but we do need to do better. The next step is to answer more applicants directly and improve the quality of those responses so they don't feel the need to involve MPs.
- The budget position this year is difficult – we are not “overspending by £2million every week” – but we are under pressure, particularly because we are dependent on income and savings and we will continue to be very careful about money as every public service should be. David recently celebrated the ‘unqualified’ accounts verdict for the Home Office ([read here](#)) - it demonstrates improved financial management as a result of the efforts of staff. It is careful in-year control that will keep the accounts in good shape.

So, I won't have done justice to your comments but I've tried to respond to the main themes. I have read all of your contributions and will continue to pay close attention to your concerns and ideas. Let's keep the conversation going. I look forward to any further blog comments this week and, as always, to seeing you face to face and hearing from you through other routes. Remember, the Border and Immigration Agency board feedback [e-mail](#) box is always open.

**Lin Homer**

There is a [code of conduct](#) for David's blog, please read it before you send comments.

## **Blog for 15 Oct 2007**

Many thanks for all of your comments over the past fortnight. I will ensure that the specific questions posted at the end of last week and today on the EEA nationals policy, long service recognition, reporting centre management, canteen facilities and press office work are responded to via the blog within the next week. A response to the outstanding childcare question [has been be posted today](#). I think we have had an open conversation and I really value that.

**Lin Homer**

