



Home Office

**The Home Office response to the
Independent Chief Inspector of Borders
and Immigration's report:**

**A Short Inspection of Queue Management
at Birmingham Airport based upon onsite
Observations.**

September 2021

The Home Office thanks the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI) for this short inspection report.

This inspection focused on the efficiency and effectiveness of Border Force queue management at Birmingham Airport.

Birmingham Airport is a medium sized port with two terminals - the main North terminal and a smaller South terminal. North Terminal has nine Primary Check Point (PCP) desks and 15 eGates. South Terminal (Terminal 2) has five PCP desks.

Pre-pandemic, approximately 13 million passengers passed through Birmingham Airport every year. In the last financial year ending 2021, one million passengers passed through the port. Our utmost priority has been protecting the health of the public and our enhanced borders regime is helping reduce the risk of new variants being transmitted whilst maintaining border security. At the time of this inspection the South terminal at Birmingham had been designated as a direct and indirect red list arrival location as part of health measures in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In recent months significant work has been done to improve the health measures process for passengers by increasing Border Force staff, updating technology so Border Force officers can check passengers have completed their passenger locator form by scanning their passport, and rolling out e-gate upgrades.

The Home Office is pleased that the ICIBI reported that his Inspectors observed no issue with queue lengths, or breaches of the service performance standard, and that the flow of passengers through the airport was generally good.

The ICIBI identified several areas for improvement and has made three recommendations. The Home Office has fully accepted two recommendations and partially accepted one. Work is already underway to tackle the issues raised.

The Home Office response to the recommendations

The Home Office should:

Recommendation 1 - The Home Office should review the balance of Border Force staff resources allocated to customs and immigration checks, to ensure adequate coverage of both areas, based on identified risks.

Partially Accepted - As the report notes, examination of customs resources was out of the scope of this inspection and ICIBI's finding was based on a short onsite observation at Birmingham Airport. Nevertheless, the Home Office recognises the importance of ensuring that resources are correctly allocated to functions according to identified risks.

Resourcing the border is a complex area of activity and a range of factors will affect our staff deployments on a daily basis including mandatory checks on arriving passengers, known risks, intelligence information and other operational priorities. Whilst the majority of officers carrying out immigration functions will be visible to members of the public as they travel through ports and airports, there are many activities that take place away from the customs channels, as part of our border security operations.

Taking into account global changes in aviation, including as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, Border Force's workforce planners are working closely with front line operations to model and review the numbers of staff needed in each port to provide sufficient coverage for all mandated activities (including Immigration and Customs checks). This work is ongoing and resource levels

are reviewed on a regular basis. An ongoing recruitment pipeline is in place to ensure Border Force has the staff it needs.

At the time of the inspection, Terminal 2 at Birmingham was being utilised as a dedicated arrival point for passengers travelling from red list countries (both direct and indirect) and this did have an impact on Border Force resourcing. It is acknowledged that this resulted in occasions where maintaining a Border Force presence in the customs channels was not always possible however this did not impact the integrity of the border. Border Force remain focussed on ensuring a customs presence.

Recommendation 2 - The Home Office should ensure that staff at Birmingham Airport follow a consistent approach to measuring queue waiting times, using approved data gathering methods as set out in Border Force guidance.

Accepted – The Home Office recognises the need to have consistent methods for collecting queue measuring data. In many ports, including Birmingham, it is the airport operator who provides their own system to gather queue data. However, Birmingham Airport managers have already started work to standardise the methodology by which queue measurements are captured so that they are consistent across their entire Command.

Work is also in hand to look at consistency on a national basis. Border Force Operational Assurance Directorate is conducting a second line review of queue practices and procedures across ports and airports. Recognising that there has been no widescale review of SLAs for some time, the Home Office is keen to ensure that its current and future operating models reflect international developments in border controls, and that its service offer is reflective of current and future demand, including bio-security and economic prosperity. Therefore, a wide-reaching review of these SLAs is being planned in the coming months to assess the fundamental reasons for an SLA, and to re-evaluate how it is calculated and used.

Recommendation 3 – The Home Office should ensure all Border Force Officers performing the ‘Roving Officer’ role are not distracted by having to direct queues and have received the full training necessary to discharge this role effectively

Accepted - The Home Office recognises the benefits hosts can bring to assist the efficiency of queue management. The provision of hosts is the responsibility of port operators, and we are consulting further with industry in ports where their host provision was withdrawn due to Covid-19 impacts.

In terms of training provision for Roving Officers, Behavioural Detection (BD) awareness e-Learning will be rolled out over the coming months. This will be followed up by more specialist BD training courses to relevant front-line staff in 2022.