



Home Office

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

An Inspection of the effectiveness of the UKVI Chief Caseworker Unit's referral process

September – October 2021

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

The Home Office is grateful to the ICIBI for the effort that he and his team have devoted to this inspection, and the attention which has been given to how the Chief Caseworker Unit (CCU) undertakes its responsibilities. Work is already underway to take forward the recommendations in this report to ensure that CCU continues to meet not only its own objectives but also to support the delivery of the Home Office's broader aims in responding to the findings of the Windrush Lessons Learned Review report.

This has included the formation of a working group to review the communications and engagement strategy, a review of the how customer insight data can be used to better understand customer interactions and improving data recording and reporting. We will continue our commitment to improving and contributing to the Windrush Lessons Learned Review Progress Update Visit.

The Department has accepted all six of the ICIBI's recommendations.

The Home Office response to the recommendations:

The Home Office should:

1. Review the purpose and monitoring of both internally and externally notified service level agreements (or equivalent) to ensure that the case review process is accountable and that all parties are clear on commitments.

1.1 Accepted

1.2 The Home Office acknowledges that it is essential cases referred to CCU are dealt with as promptly and effectively as possible due to their complexity and sensitivity. However, the service level agreements in place must be realistic and achievable. The agreements set up when the CCU was established were not informed by data as none existed, there not being a previous equivalent to the unit. As such they represented an aspirational target born out of a desire to answer the challenges facing the team as quickly as possible.

1.3 There is now over three years' worth of data from which to reach sensible conclusions as to the appropriate service level agreement (SLA). Therefore, the SLA for individual cases has been reviewed based on analysis of completing an average case from the past three years of data. This analysis has demonstrated that over 70% of case referrals to CCU were completed within 14 days. Given the data demonstrates there is a clear ability to meet a 14 day SLA, this has been implemented with immediate effect.

1.4 In addition, to the SLA, which is critical to the effective functioning of CCU, further measures will be put in place to improve performance and monitor the effectiveness of the SLA. Measures will include:

- support to coach Technical Specialists to work at pace
- introduction of clearer and more rigid performance reporting
- tracking of blockages preventing case progression (including identifying common trends)
- improved management oversight and review of cases
- establishing an exception to the standard SLA for complex cases subject to delays due to external factors.

1.5 A case which is excluded from the standard SLA will be subject to enhanced support from managers ensuring that cases are proactively managed even if they are excluded from the standard SLA.

2. Review the remit and responsibilities of the business support function of the Chief Caseworker Unit (CCU) (performed by the Casework, Professionalisation and Intelligence Command Secretariat) and ensure that the unit's staffing resources are consistently available to meet all current and future needs.

2.1 Accepted

2.2 Recruitment and workforce planning activities currently undertaken by the Secretariat will now be carried out through the Immigration Information, Improvement and Support (3iS) Workforce Planning network (which was launched in October 2021). This will streamline recruitment processes and reduce the resource required by the Secretariat in recruitment campaigns.

- 2.3 The Secretariat now draws on additional support from within CCU's existing Technical Specialist resource. This has enabled additional resource to be provided to the Secretariat as required, providing much needed additional flexibility to assist at peak times.
- 2.4 Further to these changes, CCU will review current and future resource requirements and recruit additional permanent staff as required. The review will look at further streamlining and centralising opportunities, with some functions potentially being centralised within the 3iS Secretariat. Wherever possible CCU will look to mirror 3iS procedures and train business support staff to share best practice across wider 3iS. The review and recruitment activity were completed in December 2021.

3. Improve tools and structures to facilitate the recognition of trends and patterns, and improve communication and coordination between the Chief Caseworker Unit's Casework and Early Warnings Teams, to ensure that the unit functions as an integrated whole in its approach to identifying systemic issues.

3.1 Accepted

- 3.2 The Early Warnings and Casework teams within CCU will establish a joint working group, supported by a Casework Analyst, to identify trends in individual case referrals to CCU. This will facilitate a qualitative exchange of information between the two teams as well as providing a forum to discuss common issues and trends.
- 3.3 The Casework Analyst role will be to review all individual cases referred to CCU to identify trends according to case type, referral source and common barriers and issues. Any trends identified will be reported to the working group for discussion before being escalated to the CCU Senior Management Team for consideration as to whether they should either be adopted by CCU as a systemic workstream, or should be raised with other units within the Home Office who may be more appropriately positioned to address the issue identified.
- 3.4 The Casework Analyst will be in post and the first working group will meet by the end of January 2022 and monthly thereafter.

4. Improve the data that underpins the production of the Casework Team and Early Warnings Team's management information, ensuring that the quality (relevance, completeness, accuracy, validity, timeliness) of this data, and any associated assurance mechanisms, are the responsibility of a designated, suitably trained, individual or team; and that the data can be effectively utilised to monitor the teams' performance and identify trends in Home Office caseworking.

4.1 Accepted

- 4.2 CCU has already identified this as an area requiring improvement. To this end CCU recruited a Data Production & Analysis lead earlier this year who is leading on improving the tools available to support more in-depth analysis of CCU held data, as well as that available across the wider Migration and Borders group. CCU is currently undertaking a data quality cleansing exercise, addressing the specific errors noted by the inspection team as well as exploring opportunities to streamline our data collection processes. This work was completed in December 2021.
- 4.3 CCU is currently working with the Digital, Data and Technology Team (DDaT) to source a digital solution to recording management information.

5. Review the Chief Caseworker Unit's engagement and communication strategy to ensure that it supports the unit's aims and objectives and ensure that the engagement lead role is maintained at full effectiveness by mitigating or covering for staff redeployments and absences.

5.1 Accepted

5.2 CCU's communication and engagement strategy is under review, with the unit's business relationship managers to ensure it has operational level engagement in each area of the business, including a dedicated member of the team actively managing the relationship with that area according to CCU strategic objectives as well as the needs of the relevant area.

5.3 Within the review of the CCU communication and engagement strategy, a working group of has already been established to produce presentation materials, co-ordinate engagement campaigns and manage the business relationship managers. This group is led by the Chief Caseworker for the Early Warnings team, who has overall responsibility for the communication and engagement strategy. The creation of a working group will ensure that there is always sufficient cover for staff absences and obtain input from all areas of CCU into the overarching strategy. A revised communication and engagement strategy and revised allocation of business relationship managers was completed in December 2021.

6. Conduct a review of the Chief Caseworker Unit to consider, at a minimum, the following areas: Aims; Objectives; Remit; Identity; Success criteria and impact; Workstreams (including continued ownership of cases and activities that may sit better with case working teams) and update the Operating Mandate (2018) and Terms of Reference to reflect the results of this review.

6.1 Accepted

6.2 CCU has been reviewed every year since it was established. This has included a peer review by HMPO; two reviews by the Government Internal Audit Agency and an internal review by the CCU Strategy Lead. As the Inspection also noted, CCU features prominently in the Windrush Lessons Learned Comprehensive Improvement Plan and as such the Windrush revisit is likely to look at CCU in more detail than the initial review.

6.3 Given the current work being undertaken as part of the Windrush Lessons Learned Revisit and the potential for significant findings and recommendations following this, and the fact that senior managers within the Home Office are satisfied with the current direction of the unit, it is considered appropriate to hold such a review after Wendy Williams presents her findings in March 2022. CCU is currently engaged in providing evidence to the Review team and the future direction of the unit will be strongly guided by the outcome of the Windrush revisit. The review will, however, be discussed with Wendy Williams during her return to the department to see if there are additional parameters to what has been suggested by the ICIBI before beginning the recommended review.