



Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration

Annual Report for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

David Neal

Independent Chief Inspector of
Borders and Immigration

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Our purpose

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

All Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration inspection reports can be found at www.gov.uk/ICIBI

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Contents

Foreword	2
Role and remit	8
Inspection findings	12
Independent Advisory Group on Country Information	21
Working with others	23
Resources and planning	26
Appendix 1: Inspection reports published in 2022-23	30
Appendix 2: Expenditure report for financial year 2022-23	31
Appendix 3: ICIBI Inspection Plan 2022-23	32
Appendix 4: ICIBI Inspection Plan 2023-24	34
Appendix 5: ICIBI's 'expectations' of asylum, immigration, nationality and customs functions	36

Foreword

My second year as Independent Chief Inspector has seen the prominence of borders and immigration issues in national life continue to grow. The role of an independent inspectorate in scrutinising a central function of the state is important at any time, but it becomes critical when lives are at stake, and when views are polarised. At a time when border security and the operation of our immigration and asylum systems are the focus of so much public interest, I am proud to lead a small team of capable and dedicated staff, whose high-quality output and rock-solid, evidence-based inspection work shine a light into otherwise dark corners, contributing significantly to wider debates.

I arrived in post prepared to produce a detailed strategy for how I would conduct my work. Two years into the appointment I have settled on a different approach and chosen to build upon the work of previous Chief Inspectors by focusing on reports. I have used the legislation underpinning my role to formulate my mission for the ICIBI, focusing my efforts almost exclusively on what the relevant provisions of the UK Borders Act 2007 require of me. I have interpreted this for my team as: 'inspectors inspecting and producing reports with recommendations to the Home Secretary'. There is clearly more to the ICIBI than just this, but this is what I have sought to focus staff efforts on and deliver.

Recommendations, and publication delays

The Borders Act requires me to make recommendations to the Home Secretary arising from monitoring and reporting on areas that I inspect, but recommendations can be a blunt tool. There is a risk that the Home Office focuses on recommendations as a benchmark rather than improving effectiveness and efficiency. Tracking and reporting on recommendations risks becoming a specialist sport all of its own: whether recommendations are accepted, partially accepted, or not accepted; whether they remain open or closed; how many are made in each report. Tracking recommendations is just one tool of performance management, and the Home Office should maintain a focus on seeking to find answers to the right questions rather than 'answering the question right'.

In the 14 ICIBI reports published in 2022-23, I made 55 recommendations, of which the Home Office accepted 38 (69%), partially accepted 16 (29%), and did not accept one (2%). These figures do not differ significantly from the distribution of the responses to all ICIBI's recommendations since 2009. There is a trend to partially accept recommendations, sometimes based on the inability of the Home Office to implement the recommendations within the specified timeframe.

Whether recommendations are accepted or not is to a certain degree a distraction. To put it bluntly, if the Home Office does not want to change, it will not. The only meaningful way of determining whether a recommendation has been delivered is to review it as part of another inspection. There have been a number of occasions again this year when we have revisited recommendations that have been accepted but not delivered. It is the Home Office's business to assure and satisfy itself that it has the right internal control mechanisms in place. I will continue to call this out when I come across it. There are notable positive exceptions, but these seem all too often to be driven by ministerial attention. I fear that some officials, left to their own devices, would be content to polish and put a positive gloss on far too much, which results in a failure to deliver real change. Nevertheless, there has been progress

towards resuming the routine updates against my recommendations which stopped in 2019. But again, this is just mechanics, process, and tools to hold to account. Addressing recommendations satisfactorily is a matter for the inspected body, not the body making the recommendations. It is poor governance and reflects badly on the Home Office being held to account.

In a similar vein to a reluctance to engage with recommendations, I have also encountered instances during the drafting of inspection reports where there has been significant pushback from the Home Office, and responses during the factual accuracy process have gone way beyond just factual accuracy. Some of this is perhaps down to a culture of defensiveness, but it is not good. Thankfully, these instances are exceptions rather than the rule, and there are many senior officials who embrace the independent oversight and the assurance that our reports provide.

I remain frustrated and disappointed over the delays to the publishing of my reports. Though there is a longstanding ministerial commitment that inspection reports should be published within eight weeks of submission, subject to Parliament being in session, none of the 14 reports published in 2022-23 met the agreed deadline. I have regularly raised this with ministers, I have been questioned on it at the Home Affairs Select Committee, and I currently await a Home Office response to my articulation of the legal position that the ability to publish reports should properly sit with the Independent Chief Inspector. On balance, working with the Home Office has always been my preferred course of action, and I have explained my rationale and approach to stakeholders. At present, I actively manage this challenge to my independence, and I do not sense that it undermines my credibility, but I will continue to keep my position under active review.

ICIBI role and remit review

Much has changed since my post was created by the Borders Act, and from my perspective, the time is right to run the rule over the ICIBI and for others to consider whether the legislation is delivering what Parliament wants of it. An opportunity to do just that was missed at the start of the year when I was formally notified by senior officials (several weeks after I read leaks in the press) that the Home Secretary had decided not to deliver three previously accepted recommendations from the Windrush Lessons Learned Review (WLLR). This was a disappointment, particularly as the WLLR's recommendation 10 called for a review of the role and remit of the ICIBI. For the ICIBI, such a review would have presented an opportunity to examine increasing powers, including the power to publish reports, as well as a number of governance and resourcing issues highlighted previously by the [National Audit Office](#) in 2015 and the unpublished recommendations by Kate Lampard KC in 2020. I have raised my disappointment personally with the Home Secretary and with a succession of ministers and officials, as well as giving evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee in March 2023. Considering the increased centrality of the inspectorate's work and Wendy Williams' considered conclusions in her report, this is a missed opportunity. At the time of writing, it is not clear what, if anything, will replace the role and remit review that was called for in the WLLR.

The WLLR pointed to wider issues in the Home Office of more importance than a review: the need for the department to address some fundamental failings in openness to scrutiny, actioning recommendations, delay to publications of reports, and poor management of information. While the decision not to action all of the WLLR recommendations is a political one, it is in the power of officials to address some of these wider issues.

Relationships

After not having access to the Home Secretary throughout my first 18 months in post, I finally met the current Home Secretary in November 2022. That meeting gave me an opportunity to explain

my inspection priorities and to offer my personal assessment of her department's execution of its borders and immigration functions. I continue to take the view that the direction of one of our great departments of state would benefit from regular contact between the Independent Chief Inspector and the Home Secretary. I have, in any case, continued to meet regularly with ministers, and with the Immigration Minister in particular, and I am pleased with the strong relationships that I have been able to establish at that level. It is important that I am able to speak directly to ministers about what I am finding, which minimises the risk of senior officials putting a defensive spin on my reports. I have also continued to meet shadow ministers and politicians of all parties, stressing my independence and providing an open and unvarnished assessment from visits and inspection evidence.

Meeting with senior officials has continued to be a regular occurrence in order to hear their views and adjust the fine detail of our inspection programme. I have delayed and suspended inspections in response to Home Office requests. These requests have arisen as a result of critical incidents, industrial action, and senior management changes. I have also declined requests to delay and insisted on pushing ahead. I do not consider this in any way compromises my independence, and for the sake of transparency I have published details of any such deviations from my programme on my website and social media. Nevertheless, such delay and programming adjustment reduces productivity, along with sluggish and incomplete evidence returns. I retain the ability to deviate from my published programme, and I have carried out 'in-year' inspections more than once over the past year. I have not felt impeded by the Home Office in doing this, and I am grateful that officials have facilitated access to relevant areas on short notice.

I have maintained strong relationships with similar inspectorates, in particular HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, which provided excellent expertise on an inspection this year. Similarly, I regularly deconflict inspection activity with HM Inspectorate of Prisons, since there is considerable cross-over in our inspection responsibilities.

I have continued to travel across the country and to engage extensively with Home Office staff, migrants, and NGOs. This is a real privilege of my job, and I have been universally well hosted by a massively diverse stakeholder community. I encourage the Home Office to do the same. I sense that there is a reluctance for some officials to get out on the ground and speak to people. Part of that is a legacy of the pandemic, but the bigger part is a lack of self-confidence and a culture that prioritises office-bound policy over on-the-ground experience. I frequently encounter complaints of poor communication and lack of engagement between the Home Office and stakeholders which does not break down barriers and foster understanding. When I speak to business leaders who depend upon the efficient operation of the border, I find the same.

Home Secretary commissions

In October 2022, I visited the Manston asylum processing facility and was shocked by the conditions that I encountered. I wrote to the Home Secretary and then gave evidence 48 hours later to the Home Affairs Select Committee. In December, I was commissioned by the Home Secretary, under section 50(1)(b) of the UK Borders Act 2007, to conduct an inspection into Manston commenting on improvements made to the facility after visiting the site in October 2022. The inspection coincided with an inspection of the facility by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons under his remit under the Prison Act.

The conditions at Manston and the chaotic Home Office response to small boats in the summer of 2022 would have been exposed significantly earlier had the Home Office not sat on my small boats report from February to July 2022. I made clear to the Home Secretary and to the Immigration Minister that I thought this delay was egregious and that I expected my reports to be delivered in a timelier fashion. At the time of writing, the jury is still out.

While the Manston inspection was the first commissioned inspection from the Home Secretary during my tenure, an existing commission from a previous Home Secretary (Sajid Javid, 2018) was terminated. I briefed the Immigration Minister on the findings of the latest (third) inspection of 'Adults at risk in Immigration Detention' policy (AAR 3). I pointed out the Home Office's glacial pace of implementation of our recommendations, the acute vulnerability of immigration detainees, the regular breaches of policy, and the sensitive legal framework. I clearly failed to make a strong enough case because several weeks later the Home Secretary decommissioned the inspection. This is worrying, all the more so as it comes against the backdrop of an increasing likelihood of the increased use of immigration detention following passage of the Illegal Migration Bill. Not deterred, I have included the subject in my 2023-24 programme and will refine the scope in due course.

Themes from inspections

In terms of specific themes I have encountered this year, I will focus on leadership, data, and communication and engagement.

The division between policy and operational delivery is a stark one in the Home Office. It is something that I am not familiar with from my military service since officers can only progress if they have a varied career of staff jobs balanced with command tours. A tour in command forces even senior leaders to confront the daily realities of operational delivery, the friction of battle, and the skills required to motivate large groups of people to deliver a plan. This is not a skillset that I find in abundance in the Home Office. Operational activity is often outsourced to subcontractors. Obfuscation and opacity seem to be the norm. Wiring diagrams of organisations (which should expose lines of responsibility, accountability, and authority) are promised and subsequently fail to appear.

Leadership is a common theme that I have commented on in reports. Everything flows from the tone set at the top, and in a large and diverse organisation like the Home Office, facing daily challenges from the media, politicians, and NGOs, it is critical to set the right tone. If senior leaders use intemperate language or carelessly regurgitate tropes that 'they are all gaming the system' this can have a damaging effect at the operational level. Professionalism is key and that is why independent oversight is absolutely necessary and can assist in holding leaders to account.

The number of senior officials in key roles filled on an interim basis limits the ability of leaders to drive, and to see through, necessary change. My assessment is that temporary appointments at the very senior levels of the Home Office undermine the delivery of strategic objectives and create uncertainty for the staff. Directors General in Border Force and Immigration Enforcement remained in charge on an interim basis throughout this reporting period. They lead organisations of nearly 15,000 people, at the forefront of the country's response to one of the five government priorities. It is not right. This situation would not be tolerated in the higher ranks of the police or the military.

I have seen some excellent examples of strong leadership in the Small Boats Operational Command, for example, but talent should not need to be brought in from outside. Senior leaders need to have the vision and imagination to grow their own leaders within the Civil Service. I personally mentor a number of talented civil servants, and as an organisation we hosted two outstanding young interns last summer. All leaders need to busy themselves in this area and pass on their experience to the next generation.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Border Force. Alexander Downer's report to the Home Secretary in summer 2022 identifies many of the failings that I witness on a regular basis. An organisation full of hard-working staff deserve leaders who are trained and educated to lead. To be even more effective they need to receive better training, a clear identity, and a measure of operational independence. I have spoken to hundreds of Border Force personnel and conducted many inspections into the

organisation, and it is in desperate need of identity. It is hamstrung by the worst aspects of the Civil Service machine while struggling to assert itself as a Law Enforcement organisation. Other European countries have much stronger models and parliamentarians should reflect on whether our country is being secured as effectively as it could be.

A perennial theme of my inspections is poor data. I described it last year as “inexcusably awful”. It remains an accurate description in many areas of Home Office business. Without accurate data the Home Office will struggle to prioritise and respond to situations and people will suffer. Steps are being taken to address this at a strategic level, and future inspections will see how effective this is. The transition from the case working system CID to Atlas is often cited as the reason but poor data is everywhere. I do not propose to include this area as a specific topic in my inspection programme – the Home Office knows it is a huge issue and is massively vulnerable – but I will continue to call it out. Frustration at the local level forces workarounds and localised solutions which in turn drive bad behaviours producing legal risk, gaps in the response to vulnerability, staff and customer confusion, wasted resources, and duplication of effort.

The Home Office is particularly poor at communication and while the theme of poor data can in part be technology dependent, better communication and engagement is completely in the gift of the Home Office to address. Stakeholders constantly raise poor communication and lack of engagement as an issue, and I report on it frequently in reports. I sympathise with stakeholders and those seeking updates from the Home Office because I experience it on an all too regular basis. I often find out second hand on matters that directly involve the ICIBI, whether through leaks in the press or the media contacting me to ask for my views on a matter. It is frustrating to be kept in the dark and it does little to encourage trust. With no sense of irony, a central plank of the One Home Office transformation plan is ‘Customer Service’.

There needs to be a stronger push to engage and work together and use the expertise of those who have experience that would be useful to the Home Office and would improve the services that it provides. I have found, throughout my career, that agencies such as the British Red Cross and the UNHCR are incredibly knowledgeable partners, whose expertise is invaluable. I constantly remind the Home Office to work with these and similar organisations to improve the service that they provide. Improving the conditions which vulnerable individuals find themselves in, whether in detention or the putative barracks or barge accommodation solutions, needs expertise. The failure to engage more broadly limited the ambition of Tug Haven and the Western Jet Foil. I am not yet clear that the Home Office has embedded in it an improvement and lessons identified process that can bring into core the lessons that it has learned across the various sites that it runs. In my experience, suspicion and the wariness of others can be broken down by strong leadership.

Several inspections this year have examined activity which has spanned several government departments, for example the Afghan Resettlement inspection spanned the Home Office, the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, the Ministry of Defence, and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Strong oversight in one area throws into stark relief the lack of oversight in other areas, which raises the risk that relevant evidence will fall beyond the reach of my inspection remit. This has not yet obstructed my inspection activity, but without broader powers to follow the evidence across departmental borders, there is a real risk that the oversight intended by Parliament is reduced.

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) has continued its scrutiny of country of origin information that is issued by the Home Office and used in asylum decision making. I am very

grateful for the expertise, time, and commitment given by the expert members of the Group. In May 2022, I commissioned a review of the Home Office country policy and information notes on Rwanda that had been produced to underpin the Migration and Economic Development Partnership (MEDP) with that country. After the MEDP policy was challenged in the courts, the Home Office informed me in August 2022 of its intention not to engage with the IAGCI review process until relevant legal proceedings had been resolved. On the basis of independent legal advice, I accepted the necessity of suspending the IAGCI process until the legal challenges had run their course. In any case, the review I had commissioned was disclosed to the parties to the litigation over the MEDP as part of routine case disclosure.

ICIBI corporate matters

I reported last year on a change in recruitment and restructuring of the ICIBI. That is now embedded into our daily routine with over 50% of my staff based outside London. The nature of our work means that there are no issues working from home, but we have to make sure that we routinely engage remotely as well as face to face. We have the variety of onsite inspections around the country, but we still come together for study days and continue to maintain a ‘constant conversation’ with staff. To support this, evidence from the Civil Service People Survey points to the ICIBI as ‘best in class’. Out of the 10 question sets, staff report a 75%+ approval rating, and in 6 of those categories we achieved over 93%+ approval. Only 1 (Pay and Benefits) shows dissatisfaction and this is centrally directed.

The recent Grade 7 inspector recruitment exercise saw 105 candidates compete for a single post. I encouraged applications from the armed forces, but I have been disappointed that they are ill-prepared to navigate the Civil Service interview process. The Civil Service is missing out on a significant pool of talent, and the Armed Forces could do better to prepare individuals to learn the language of competency-based interviews to set conditions for success. I have raised this matter with the Veterans’ Minister.

My annual report is one of the few statutory requirements placed on me by the Borders Act. Last year’s annual report was published eight months after submission. I hope, reflecting ministerial pledges from the Home Office, this report might be published in a timelier manner.

This report was sent to the Home Secretary for publication on 27 June 2023.

David Neal
Independent Chief Inspector

Role and remit

Legislative framework

The role of the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (until 2012, the Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency) was established by the UK Borders Act 2007. Sections 48-56 of the Act (as amended) provide the legislative framework for the inspection of the efficiency and effectiveness of the performance of functions relating to immigration, asylum, nationality, and customs by the Home Secretary and by any person exercising such functions on her behalf.

The UK Borders Act 2007 empowers the Independent Chief Inspector to monitor, report on, and make recommendations about all such functions, with the exception of those exercised at removal centres, short-term holding facilities, and under escort arrangements, unless directed to do so by the Home Secretary. The latter matters are subject to inspection by His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons or His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (and equivalents in Scotland and Northern Ireland).

The UK Borders Act 2007 directs the Independent Chief Inspector to consider and make recommendations about, in particular:

- consistency of approach
- the practice and performance of listed persons compared to other persons doing similar things
- practice and procedure in making decisions
- the treatment of claimants and applicants
- certification under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 (c. 41) (unfounded claim)
- compliance with law about discrimination in the exercise of functions, including reliance on paragraph 17 of Schedule 3 to the Equality Act 2010 (exception for immigration functions)
- practice and procedure in relation to the exercise of enforcement powers (including powers of arrest, entry, search, and seizure)
- practice and procedure in relation to the prevention, detection, and investigation of offences
- practice and procedure in relation to the conduct of criminal proceedings
- whether customs functions have been appropriately exercised by the Home Secretary and the Director of Border Revenue
- the provision of information
- the handling of complaints
- the content of information about conditions in countries outside the United Kingdom which the Home Secretary compiles and makes available, for purposes connected with immigration and asylum, to immigration officers and other officials

In addition, the legislation enables the Home Secretary to request the Independent Chief Inspector to report to her in writing in relation to specified matters, referred to as ‘Home Secretary Commissions’. In July 2018, in response to Stephen Shaw’s follow-up review of the welfare of vulnerable persons in detention, the then Home Secretary wrote formally to my predecessor commissioning an annual review of the workings of the ‘Adults at risk in immigration detention’ policy, a responsibility which I continued to deliver this year, carrying out my third annual inspection of that area. Though the Home Secretary subsequently discontinued the commission for an annual review, I will continue to monitor the effectiveness of the Home Office’s identification and management of vulnerability among immigration detainees. Since my appointment in March 2021, I have received one commission in relation to Manston, which I incorporated into my re-inspection of the initial processing of migrants arriving via small boats that was already on my inspection programme for the year.

Section 51 of the UK Borders Act 2007 covers the inspection planning process, which includes the requirement to consult the Home Secretary when preparing a plan. In practice the inspection programme for the coming year is sent to the Home Secretary and published on the ICIBI website, but the legislation also makes clear that this does not prevent the Independent Chief Inspector from doing anything that is not mentioned in the plan. Inspection protocols are agreed with the Home Office and define responsibilities, processes, and timescales that satisfy the legislation and ensure inspections proceed efficiently.

The legislation specifies that the Independent Chief Inspector shall submit to the Home Secretary an annual report on the performance of immigration, asylum, nationality, and customs functions in general, as well as reports on specific matters prepared at her request, with the Home Secretary responsible for laying these reports before Parliament. In 2014, the Home Secretary assumed control of the publication of all inspection reports, deciding when to lay them before Parliament.¹ At that time, the Home Secretary committed to doing this within eight weeks of receipt of the report, subject to both Houses of Parliament being in session.

Reports are published in full except for any material that the Home Secretary determines is undesirable to publish for reasons of national security or where publication might jeopardise an individual’s safety. In such cases, the legislation permits the Home Secretary to omit the relevant passages from the published report.²

Statement of purpose

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

The inspection process

The legislation covers in detail what the Independent Chief Inspector is directed to consider, but it does not prescribe how inspections are to be conducted.

I have adopted three inspection formats: a 100-day (long) inspection, a 40-day (medium) inspection, and a 30-day (short) inspection. My aim for the different types of inspections is to deliver a more flexible and relevant programme, with increased reach across the different areas I am mandated to inspect. I am conscious there is a risk that shorter inspections will be less detailed, but my experience

¹ As soon as they are laid in Parliament, inspection [reports](#) are published on the ICIBI website, together with the Home Office’s formal [response](#) to the report and its recommendations.

² During 2022-23, one inspection report contained redactions: ‘An inspection of the initial processing of migrants arriving via small boats at Tug Haven and Western Jet Foil (December 2021 – January 2022)’, published on 21 July 2022.

since introducing short and medium inspections is that this risk can be managed, and is outweighed by the benefits of increased tempo and a more relevant and responsive inspection programme.

The three stages of ICIBI inspection

The 100-day inspection follows the inspection stages detailed below. The short and medium inspections also consist of planning, inspecting, and reporting stages, but will follow only some of the sub-stages based on the topic and requirements of the specific inspection.

Stage 1: Planning

- Scoping
- Open-source research
- Preliminary evidence request
- Familiarisation visit(s)
- Project Initiation Document sign off by the Independent Chief Inspector
- Formal notification to the Home Office and full evidence request
- Stakeholder engagement – requests for written submissions
- Website ‘Call for evidence’

Stage 2: Inspecting

- Evidence analysis, including sampling of case files
- Stakeholder meeting(s)
- Onsite visit
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Observations
- Surveys
- Review by the Independent Chief Inspector
- Further evidence request (if required)

Stage 3: Reporting

- Presentation of emerging findings to the Home Office
- Drafting of report
- Factual accuracy checks of draft report by the Home Office
- Report finalised and sent to the Home Secretary

ICIBI ‘Expectations’

In November 2018, my predecessor published a set of ‘Expectations’ (see Appendix 5). I have retained these, as they continue to provide a helpful framework for all inspections.

Inspection plans, 2022-23 and 2023-24

I published on my website my 2022-23 inspection plan on 1 April 2022 and my 2023-24 plan on 3 April 2023. I publish single year inspection plans to allow the maximum flexibility and the targeting of resources on topics and areas of the Home Office’s immigration operation that require the most focus. My inspection programmes have been informed by my own observations, findings from previous inspections, discussions with ministers, officials, and external stakeholders, and my team’s views.

As referenced above, section 51 of the UK Borders Act 2007 requires me to consult with the Home Secretary when preparing my plan. I did not receive a response from the then Home Secretary to my draft 2022-23 inspection plan. I wrote to the current Home Secretary on 1 March 2023 with my 2023-24 inspection plan and received a response on 3 April 2023.

Inspection findings

The key points from each inspection report published in 2022-23 are summarised below.

An inspection of contingency asylum accommodation (May – November 2021)³

This inspection examined the use of hotels as contingency asylum accommodation. As disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and a rise in asylum intake led to a greater reliance on hotels, rather than dispersed accommodation in the community, to house destitute asylum seekers, inspectors visited 20% of the contingency accommodation hotels procured by each of the Home Office's three providers.

The inspection found that, overall, the Home Office's service providers were delivering accommodation that was broadly in line with the statement of requirements in their contracts, but that the costs involved were eye-watering, and that consultation with local authorities when opening contingency accommodation hotels had been poor, resulting in damage to a key stakeholder relationship. The inspection also found that Home Office plans to end its reliance on hotels failed to reflect an adequate understanding of the challenge facing the department and were therefore unachievable in their current form. I observed, as well, that quickening the pace of decision making on protection claims would be vital to reducing the pressure on the Home Office to provide asylum accommodation.

The inspection resulted in seven recommendations, including calls for effective consultation mechanisms with local authorities and services and for the development of realistic plans for procuring additional dispersal accommodation and exiting hotels. The Home Office accepted all seven recommendations.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 16 February 2022 and laid in Parliament on 12 May 2022.

An inspection of the immigration system as it relates to the higher education sector (October 2021 – March 2022)⁴

In contrast to ICIBI inspections with a relatively narrow focus on a specific Home Office operational function, this inspection adopted the perspective of the higher education sector, examining how the immigration system serves its needs. Recognising that the success and dynamism of the UK's world-leading university sector depend heavily on international connections and mobility, and that the government's own International Education Strategy has called for a sustained effort to attract more international students to UK higher education institutions (HEIs), the inspection sought to assess how well the Home Office was supporting the sector and contributing to cross-governmental objectives.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-contingency-asylum-accommodation>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-the-immigration-system-as-it-relates-to-the-higher-education-sector-october-2021-march-2022>

The inspection found that, broadly speaking, the Home Office provides an effective system that is open to international students and academic staff, and that the department’s communication and engagement with the sector is relatively good. Inspectors did find that there was a perception among HEIs that the compliance requirements imposed upon them were excessively onerous, and that the quality and consistency of the (charged-for) advice offered by the Home Office’s Premium Customer Service Team for sponsors of study visas could be improved.

The inspection resulted in three recommendations, including calls for a review of the new Graduate route to evaluate its impact, a review of the Premium Customer Service Team to ensure it was meeting the needs of the sector, and an assessment of the proportionality of compliance requirements for sponsors of study visas. The Home Office accepted these recommendations.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 21 April 2022 and laid in Parliament on 30 June 2022.

A re-inspection of Napier Barracks (March 2022)⁵

This re-inspection followed an inspection of the contingency asylum accommodation at Napier Barracks and a since-closed facility at Penally Camp that was carried out by my predecessor between November 2020 and March 2021. That inspection had highlighted a number of issues, including a failure to consult with local authorities and other stakeholders, inadequate assessment of residents’ health and welfare needs, poor communication with the men living at both sites, and a ‘hands-off’ Home Office approach to the management of the facilities. A year on, this re-inspection sought to evaluate the progress made on implementing improvements, to identify good practice, and to make recommendations for further improvements to the management and operation of the site.

The re-inspection found that management and oversight of Napier had improved with the appointment of dedicated site managers for both the Home Office and its contracted service provider. While Home Office staff were not on site every day, there was clear evidence of strong working relationships between the department, the service provider, and its subcontractors. The introduction of a 90-day maximum duration of stay, giving residents certainty over the time they will spend at Napier, had also contributed to a more positive atmosphere on the site. The overall condition of the dormitories had not improved, however, and the tools used to capture and monitor data were rudimentary.

The inspection resulted in four recommendations, relating to tools for the management of data, the suitability criteria for residents, assurance, and the standardisation of procedures. The Home Office accepted three of these recommendations and partially accepted one.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 21 April 2022 and laid in Parliament on 30 June 2022.

An inspection of the global positioning system (GPS) electronic monitoring of foreign national offenders (March – April 2022)⁶

This inspection examined the Home Office’s implementation of a programme of electronic ‘tagging’ of foreign national offenders, in fulfilment of a duty placed on the Home Secretary by the Immigration Act

5 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-re-inspection-of-napier-barracks-march-2022>

6 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-the-global-positioning-system-gps-electronic-monitoring-of-foreign-national-offenders-march-april-2022>

2016 to electronically monitor individuals on immigration bail who were liable to detention because they were subject to deportation proceedings or a deportation order. The inspection focused on the processing and flow of information through the Electronic Monitoring Hub, the Home Office team responsible for: managing the fitting and removal of electronic tags; reviewing, and responding to breaches of, bail conditions relating to electronic monitoring; for addressing legal challenges relating to electronic monitoring conditions.

The inspection found that the staff of the Electronic Monitoring Hub were dedicated and felt well supported by managers, but that the team was hampered by a lack of resources. Understaffing meant that the unit had to prioritise some workstreams over others, with a significant backlog of electronic monitoring reviews for those subject to the tagging requirement developing as a result. Moreover, limited training left staff feeling ill-equipped to carry out certain activities, such as responding effectively to legal representations and challenges. Though the Home Office reported progress towards meeting recruitment targets as the inspection concluded, I found that resource limitations were preventing the team from being able to implement the full range of policies, strategies, and procedures underpinning the electronic monitoring programme.

The inspection resulted in five recommendations, relating to data assurance, quality assurance, training and awareness, supplier performance, and business planning. The Home Office accepted all five recommendations.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 5 May 2022 and laid in Parliament on 7 July 2022.

An inspection of the initial processing of migrants arriving via small boats at Tug Haven and Western Jet Foil (December 2021 – January 2022)⁷

This inspection examined the initial processing of migrants arriving via small boats at the Tug Haven and Western Jet Foil facilities at the Port of Dover, with a particular focus on protecting the border through security checks, and the identification and safeguarding of vulnerable people. The inspection assessed the processes in use, the physical sites, the resourcing of operations including staff welfare and wellbeing, record-keeping, assurance and risk management, and senior management oversight.

The inspection found that the Home Office's performance in delivering an effective and efficient response to the increasing volume of migrant arrivals via small boats was poor, largely because the department remained on an 'emergency' footing, having failed to undertake the planning and investment necessary to establish appropriate facilities, and embed routine procedures, to meet the challenge. Inspectors found that the approach to managing the risk around security checks was inconsistent, that biometrics were not always recorded, and that safeguarding was sacrificed at busy times to ensure that migrants were processed quickly. Of particular concern was the very poor quality of the data collected and relied upon in the reception and processing of small boat arrivals.

The inspection resulted in four recommendations, relating to security, vulnerability, the collection and use of information, and resourcing. The Home Office accepted all four recommendations.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 24 February 2022. In accordance with the ministerial commitment to publish ICIBI reports within eight weeks of submission, the report should have been laid in Parliament no later than 25 April 2022. Following a public statement of my

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-the-initial-processing-of-migrants-arriving-via-small-boats-at-tug-haven-and-western-jet-foil-december-2021-january-2022>

frustration at the delays in publishing this report on 19 July 2022, the report was laid in Parliament on 21 July 2022.⁸

An inspection of juxtaposed controls (May – June 2022)⁹

This inspection examined the quality of decision making at juxtaposed controls operated by Border Force at ports on the territory of the UK's European neighbours, with inspectors visiting Paris Gare du Nord and Coquelles to observe practices on the ground.

The inspection found that decision making at these juxtaposed controls was generally in line with guidance, policy, and the Immigration Rules. Inspectors did however identify concerns about poor record-keeping and incomplete or inaccurate data entry. These are issues that have been highlighted in previous inspections as a wider issue for Border Force. The inspection also found that there were differences in the level of scrutiny and questioning applied to different nationality groups at the observed controls, with available data indicating that Romanian nationals were consistently subject to the greatest number of further examinations of all nationalities at Coquelles and Paris Gare du Nord.

The inspection report contained three recommendations, of which two were partially accepted and one was not accepted. The recommendation rejected by the Home Office called for a review to ascertain on what grounds particular nationalities are being subjected to a greater level of scrutiny than others at juxtaposed controls.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 19 May 2022 and laid in Parliament on 18 October 2022.

An inspection of the Home Office's processing of family visas (September 2021 – February 2022)¹⁰

This inspection examined the Home Office's processing of family visas, with a focus on indefinite leave to remain (ILR) applications. The inspection assessed the efficiency of the process and the quality of decisions made on applications for ILR as the partner or parent of a British or settled person; the accessibility of the application process for applicants; the impact on an applicant and their family when an application for settlement is not successful; and whether recommendations from the 'Windrush Lessons Learned Review' are being acted upon in this area.

The inspection found that for many seeking permanent residence as the family members of British citizens and settled persons, the process of applying for ILR can be complex, time consuming, and expensive. Inspectors found that those applying for ILR on family routes had yet to see any benefit from the Home Office's programme to simplify the Immigration Rules, and that the clarity of communication with applicants required improvement. Encouragingly, decision makers were exercising evidential flexibility where appropriate, leading to positive outcomes for applicants in some cases where more rigid application of documentary requirements might have led to delays or to a refusal.

The inspection resulted in four recommendations, including calls for a shorter service standard for ILR applications and for a review of the impact on applicants and their family members of being placed on the ten-year route to settlement. The Home Office accepted two of these recommendations, and partially accepted the other two.

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chief-inspector-increasingly-frustrated-with-home-office-publication-delay-to-his-small-boats-report>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-juxtaposed-controls-may-june-2022>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-the-home-offices-processing-of-family-visas-september-2021-february-2022>

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 20 May 2022 and laid in Parliament on 18 October 2022.

An inspection of the use of hotels for housing unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) (March – May 2022)¹¹

This inspection examined the Home Office’s use of hotels to accommodate unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, with particular reference to the department’s duty under section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 to have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are in the United Kingdom. This inspection was not included in the Chief Inspector’s original 2021-22 inspection plan but was carried out in response to concerns raised by stakeholders, and following the inspectorate’s own intelligence-gathering activities. The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) supported this inspection, providing advice and assistance to ICIBI inspectors in accordance with terms of reference agreed between the two organisations.

The inspection found that, in its provision of accommodation to unaccompanied children, the Home Office was struggling to move on from an emergency response to a decision by Kent County Council to accept additional young people into its care and to delays in placing children with other local authorities through the National Transfer Scheme. Though the Home Office had been relying on hotels to house children for seven months at the time of the inspection, the fact that the use of such accommodation had been envisaged as a short-term solution meant that the operation had developed in a piecemeal and inconsistent fashion, without a coherent design or sufficient oversight, and that staff still lacked the necessary skills, expertise, and authority to ensure the safeguarding and welfare of the children in the department’s care. While the young people who spoke to inspectors all stated that they were happy and felt safe in the hotels, the inspection revealed gaps in protection and found that marked improvements were needed to make the operation fully child centred.

The inspection resulted in four recommendations, of which one was accepted and three were partially accepted. The recommendations included timescales for delivery, to reflect the urgency of the issues identified and to facilitate the monitoring of implementation. It is disappointing that the Home Office cited an inability to meet these timescales to justify its partial acceptances. A re-inspection of this area is included in ICIBI’s inspection plan for 2023-24.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 9 June 2022 and laid in Parliament on 19 October 2022.

An inspection of the Hong Kong British National (Overseas) visa route (April – June 2022)¹²

This inspection examined the efficiency and effectiveness of the Home Office’s Hong Kong British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) visa route. In doing so, it looked at how the route has been working since launch, including the ability to scale up operations and learnings taken from, and into, other immigration routes.

11 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-the-use-of-hotels-for-housing-unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-children-uasc-march-may-2022>

12 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-the-hong-kong-british-national-overseas-visa-route-april-june-2022>

The inspection found that the BN(O) route, implemented within tight timescales in response to the Chinese government's imposition on Hong Kong of a restrictive national security law, was providing an efficient service, with most applicants benefiting from a fully digital experience. Inspectors found that Home Office caseworkers were engaged, motivated, and understood the importance of good customer service, and that operational teams working on the BN(O) route had clearly benefited from their previous experience of implementing the EU Settlement Scheme.

The inspection resulted in three recommendations, including for a plan to clear a backlog of adult dependent relative applications that had been placed on hold, the publication of data on performance against the service standard, and the recording and sharing of lessons learned from the introduction of the route. The Home Office accepted all three recommendations.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 11 July 2022 and laid in Parliament on 8 November 2022.

An inspection of the immigration system as it relates to the agricultural sector (May – August 2022)¹³

This inspection adopted a broad perspective to gain an understanding of the interaction between the UK's immigration system and the agricultural sector. In particular, the inspection focused on the effectiveness of the immigration routes available to support the UK's agricultural sector, the extent and quality of communication and engagement between the Home Office and the sector, and the effectiveness of compliance requirements on sponsors.

The inspection found that, even as food producers faced challenges arising from Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the conflict in Ukraine, the immigration system, and the Seasonal Worker immigration route in particular, played a significant part in helping the agricultural sector to meet its labour needs. However, the inspection pointed to several areas requiring improvement. Inspectors found that the Home Office needed to do more to assure itself that the scheme operators who sponsor Seasonal Worker visa holders are meeting their compliance requirements. They concluded that better co-ordination, and a clarification of responsibilities, across government was needed to ensure that labour and other relevant standards were being met and that agricultural workers were being protected from exploitation. The inspection also found that stakeholders were eager for a deepening of engagement with the Home Office, and that communication between the department and the sector could be improved.

The inspection resulted in three recommendations, relating to compliance, communication, and clarity of roles and responsibilities. All three recommendations were accepted by the Home Office.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 28 September 2022 and laid in Parliament on 19 December 2022.

Third annual inspection of Adults at Risk Immigration Detention (June – September 2022)¹⁴

This inspection was ICIBI's third annual review of the effectiveness of policies to safeguard adults at risk in immigration detention, carried out in fulfilment of a 2018 commission from the then Home

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-the-immigration-system-as-it-relates-to-the-agricultural-sector-may-to-august-2022>

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/third-annual-inspection-of-adults-at-risk-immigration-detention-june-to-september-2022>

Secretary. That commission followed on from Stephen Shaw’s 2016 and 2018 reports on the welfare in detention of vulnerable persons.¹⁵

This third annual inspection focused on the efficiency and effectiveness of Rule 35 in the Detention Centre Rules 2001 as a safeguard for vulnerable people in detention. Rule 35 stipulates that medical practitioners within immigration removal centres shall file reports on certain classes of vulnerable detainees – including those whose health is likely to be injuriously affected by continued detention, those suspected of having suicidal ideations, and those who may have been victims of torture. Rule 35 reports are transmitted to the Home Office, which considers whether detention remains appropriate.

The inspection found that Rule 35 was not working as a safeguard, and that its effectiveness was undermined by an insufficiently evidenced perception among Home Office staff that the Rule 35 process was being abused. The inspection also found that the overwhelming majority of Rule 35 reports pertained to potential victims of torture, giving rise to concerns that the process was not being used as it should be to identify those facing a deterioration of their health in detention and those at risk of suicide.

The inspection resulted in ten recommendations, of which two were accepted and eight were partially accepted by the Home Office. Though the Home Secretary discontinued the commission for an annual review of this area following the submission of this report, I have, under my own authority, included a further inspection of the safeguarding of adults at risk in immigration detention in my inspection plan for 2023-24.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 30 September 2022 and laid in Parliament on 12 January 2023.

A re-inspection of family reunion applications (September – October 2022)¹⁶

This inspection examined the Home Office’s management of family reunion applications lodged by close relatives of individuals granted refugee status or humanitarian protection in the UK, with a focus on progress in implementing recommendations from ICIBI’s 2019 inspection of this area.¹⁷

The inspection found that limited progress had been made in implementing the 2019 recommendations and that new issues had emerged, in part as a result of the poorly managed transfer of responsibility for decision making on family reunion applications from Asylum Operations to the Reunion and Returns team. Inspectors found that a substantial backlog of applications had built up and that there was no evidence that vulnerability was taken into account in prioritising cases. The inspection report concluded that urgent attention to this area was needed to deliver an effective immigration route and to ensure that the department was prepared for a likely rise in the volume of family reunion applications.

The inspection resulted in five recommendations, all of which were accepted by the Home Office.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 14 December 2022 and laid in Parliament on 21 February 2023.

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-into-the-welfare-in-detention-of-vulnerable-persons> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/welfare-in-detention-of-vulnerable-persons-review-progress-report>

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-reinspection-of-family-reunion-applications-september-october-2022>

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-family-reunion-applications-june-december-2019>

Country of origin information inspection reports

Inspection report on country of origin information, Ethiopia, Iran and Zimbabwe (January 2022)¹⁸

Inspection report on country of origin information, Afghanistan and China (June 2022)¹⁹

As detailed below, two inspection reports on Home Office country of origin information (COI) were published in 2022-23. Both reports were produced with support from the Independent Advisory Group on Country Information and present recommendations from expert reviewers commissioned to evaluate the quality, completeness, and accuracy of selected Home Office COI on particular countries.

A report on selected COI on Ethiopia, Iran, and Zimbabwe was submitted to the Home Secretary on 17 January 2022 and laid in Parliament on 28 April 2022. A report on selected COI on Afghanistan and China was submitted to the Home Secretary on 20 June 2022 and laid in Parliament on 19 October 2022.

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspection-report-on-country-of-origin-information-ethiopia-iran-and-zimbabwe-january-2022>

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspection-report-on-country-of-origin-information-afghanistan-and-china-june-2022>

Completed inspection reports awaiting publication as at 31 March 2023

At the end of 2022-23, the following completed inspection reports were with the Home Secretary waiting to be laid in Parliament:

- An inspection of the Border Force intelligence functions at the Humber ports
- An inspection of visit visa operations
- A re-inspection of Project Kraken

'Live' inspections as at 31 March 2023

Eight inspections begun during 2022-23 were 'live' as at 31 March 2023:

- A re-inspection of the initial processing of migrants arriving via small boats, including at Western Jet Foil and Manston
- An inspection of the Home Office's operations to effect the removal of foreign national offenders
- An inspection of Border Force assurance measures against insider threat
- An inspection of the Home Office's Afghan resettlement activity
- A re-inspection of ePassport gates
- Inspection report on Home Office country of origin information, Iraq and Myanmar
- Inspection report on the treatment of statelessness in Home Office country of origin information

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

Purpose

Section 48(2)(j) of the UK Borders Act 2007 states that the Independent Chief Inspector shall consider and make recommendations about “the content of information and conditions in countries outside the United Kingdom which the Home Secretary compiles and makes available, for purposes connected with immigration and asylum, to immigration and other officials”.

The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was established in 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector, with the purpose of advising him about the content and quality of country of origin information (COI) and guidance notes produced by the Home Office and relied upon by decision makers.

How IAGCI works

The IAGCI follows the following process when carrying out reviews of Home Office COI:

- **Stage 1:** Taking account of the volume of asylum claims in relation to particular countries and of when particular COI products were last reviewed, the Chair of IAGCI proposes to the Independent Chief Inspector which countries/products should next be reviewed by the Group.
- **Stage 2:** Independent reviewers, typically academics with relevant knowledge and expertise, are commissioned to review the products and to recommend amendments (additions, deletions, clarifications), citing their evidence. (The inspectorate manages the tendering process and funds the reviews, and the Independent Chief Inspector has to sign off on IAGCI’s recommended reviewer from those replying to the tender.)
- **Stage 3:** IAGCI quality assures the submitted reviews and sends them to the Home Office unit responsible for producing COI material (the Country Policy and Information Team (CPIT)) for it to consider and respond to the reviewer’s recommendations.
- **Stage 4:** IAGCI (with the Independent Chief Inspector) holds a meeting with CPIT and the reviewers to go through the reviews and to consider, in particular, any points of disagreement.
- **Stage 5:** Where the meeting identifies that these are required, IAGCI commissions any further inputs from the reviewer, before signing off the reviews as complete.
- **Stage 6:** The Independent Chief Inspector produces a covering report with his recommendations, and sends this, with the IAGCI reviews and the CPIT responses, to the Home Secretary to be laid in Parliament in the normal way.

Membership

Membership of the IAGCI is by invitation of the Independent Chief Inspector. It is voluntary and unpaid. Members are respected academics and representatives of organisations with a working interest in country information and how it is used by the Home Office. I am grateful to the members of the Group for their commitment and for the valuable contributions they make to its work. I would like to express particular appreciation to Professor Mike Collyer, who continued in the role of IAGCI Chair in 2022-23.

List of members, 2022-23

- Prof Mike Collyer, University of Sussex (Chair)
- Dr Ceri Oeppen, University of Sussex
- Prof Nando Sigona, University of Birmingham
- Dr Julie Vullnetari, University of Southampton
- Prof Giorgia Dona, University of East London
- Judge Susan Pitt, Upper Tribunal, Immigration and Asylum Chamber
- Katinka Ridderbos, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Geneva)
- Larry Bottinick, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UK)
- Harriet Short, Immigration Law Practitioners' Association
- Zoe Bantleman, Immigration Law Practitioners' Association

Meetings

IAGCI aims to meet two or three times a year, and I engage regularly with the Chair between meetings. During 2022-23, the Group met in January 2023 to discuss reviews of COI on Iraq and Myanmar, and in February 2023 to discuss a thematic review of the coverage of statelessness in Home Office country information.

A planned meeting to discuss an IAGCI-commissioned review of country information on Rwanda was postponed, as the Home Office suspended its engagement with the review process pending the resolution of legal challenges to the UK-Rwanda Migration and Economic Development Partnership. On the basis of independent legal advice, the Chief Inspector determined that resuming the review process at a later date was the most appropriate way forward.

Published reviews

During 2022-23, inspection reports were published on selected COI on Ethiopia, Iran, and Zimbabwe (report published on 12 May 2022) and on Afghanistan and China (report published on 19 October 2022). Further details on the IAGCI and past COI reports can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/the-independent-advisory-group-on-country-information-iagci>

Working with others

Stakeholders

Section 51 of the UK Borders Act 2007 requires my inspection reports and recommendations to be addressed to the Home Secretary, and they are aimed primarily at the Home Office's borders and immigration areas, in particular Border Force, Immigration Enforcement, UK Visas and Immigration, and Asylum and Protection.

However, the immigration, asylum, nationality, and customs functions performed by and on behalf of the Home Secretary involve and affect a wide range of other bodies, and have an impact on everyone living in or looking to visit or seeking protection or settlement in the UK. To inform individual inspections and my overall inspection programme, as well as engaging effectively with the Home Office, it is therefore essential that the ICIBI reaches out to these other 'stakeholders' to understand their many perspectives, interests, and concerns and to capture relevant evidence.

As with its dealings with the Home Office, the ICIBI aims to develop strong stakeholder relationships, based on trust and openness, while remaining strictly impartial and objective.

Established ICIBI stakeholder forums

The Independent Chief Inspector chairs four established stakeholder groups that meet periodically, each of which shares the same terms of reference:

- to inform and advise the Independent Chief Inspector regarding any issues of interest or concern to members or those they represent
- to propose topics for inspection and advise on their relative importance and urgency
- to assist the Independent Chief Inspector with the scoping and evidence collection for individual inspections

The Refugee and Asylum Forum was created in 2009. Its membership comprises mostly voluntary sector organisations with an interest in and knowledge of the Home Office's work with refugees and asylum seekers, and related issues. During 2022-23, the Refugee and Asylum Forum met in January 2023.

The Aviation Stakeholder Forum was created in 2011. Membership comprises UK airport and airline industry umbrella bodies. During 2022-23, the Aviation Stakeholder Forum met in December 2022.

The Maritime Stakeholder Forum was also created in 2011. Membership comprises UK seaports and shipping industry umbrella bodies. During 2022-23, the Maritime Stakeholder Forum met in December 2022.

The Adults at Risk Forum (AARF) was established in 2019 following the Home Secretary's commission to produce an annual review of the 'Adults at risk in immigration detention' policy. Membership comprises

NGOs that focus specifically on detention issues. During 2022-23, the AARF met in June 2022. The medical sub-group of the AARF met in July 2022.

The Migration Forum was established in 2021 and is divided into three sub-groups: education sector, strategic migration partnerships (local authority-led partnerships established following the introduction of a regional dispersal policy in 1999 for people seeking asylum), and business. During 2022-23, the business sub-group met in May 2022. The education sub-group met in October 2022. The strategic migration partnerships sub-group met in March 2023.

During the year, I also held a number of individual introductory meetings with forum members, as well as with other organisations, both in relation to specific inspections and to discuss general issues and priorities.

Website

ICIBI uses its website to reach out to stakeholders and to the wider public, including ‘customers’ of the Home Office’s immigration, asylum, nationality, and customs functions. One of the main ways of doing this is via ‘calls for evidence’. In 2022-23, four ‘calls for evidence’ were made via the website.

The ICIBI uses Twitter to publicise updates on an inspection commencing, to launch a ‘call for evidence’, notification of an inspection being sent to the Home Secretary, and when a report has been laid in Parliament by the Home Secretary.

Stakeholder survey

Following the success of the first ICIBI stakeholder survey on the website, which collected views from stakeholders who had previously engaged with the inspectorate by submitting evidence and participating in focus groups or forums, we conducted another survey in 2022-23, the results of which were published on the ICIBI website.²⁰

The findings showed that while stakeholders were satisfied that inspection reports provide constructive challenge to the Home Office and highlight good practice where it is identified, satisfaction with the Home Office’s responses to ICIBI recommendations had decreased. I was pleased to note that positive responses to a question on whether ICIBI inspection reports address equality and diversity issues had increased, as had satisfaction with communication with the ICIBI. Stakeholders who responded to the survey were broadly supportive of ICIBI’s new ways of working, which includes shorter length inspections, intended to enable the inspectorate to be more agile and responsive to emerging issues. Several useful suggestions were made for inspections, which I noted and formed part of my consideration when setting my inspection plan for 2023-24.

My intention is to continue to conduct the survey on an annual basis.

Engagement with other inspectorates and similar bodies

I continue to meet other inspecting and monitoring bodies such as His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons, the National Audit Office, the Government Internal Audit Agency, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the Independent Monitor Authority, and the Independent Complaints Examiner. In doing so, I am keen to remain abreast of their ongoing work to identify ways in which our work can complement, rather than duplicate, each other’s, and to share best practice. I have also had regular meetings with His Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. I am keen

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/results-of-the-annual-icibi-stakeholder-survey-2022>

to explore opportunities for further joint working with other inspectorates on overlapping areas of interest.

Other engagement

I have continued to get out on the ground to visit a number of Home Office sites, as well as meeting stakeholders from NGOs, local authorities, academic institutions, and those with lived experience of the asylum and immigration systems. I have also met several shadow MPs. These meetings have enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of some of the issues and challenges within immigration and asylum. I would like to extend my thanks to all those who have given up their time to meet me and provide valuable insight.

Resources and planning

Budget and staffing 2022-23

ICIBI's budget is determined by the Home Secretary and delegated to the Independent Chief Inspector. The budget is issued in the form of an annual delegation letter; I have received only one letter since taking up post, for the 2022-23 financial year, which was signed on 17 January 2023.

Delegation letters and other sponsorship functions come through a Senior Sponsor within the Home Office, the Director General of Migration and Borders.

The budget for 2022-2023 was £2.1 million.

'Pay Costs' (staff salaries, employer's pension, and National Insurance contributions) account for the bulk of the total. In 2022-23, £2.04 million (94%) was designated for 'Pay Costs', with £130k for 'Non-Pay'. £11,000 of the 'Non-Pay' budget was spent on 'consultancy'. This spend is allocated for the reviewers, appointed by the ICIBI Independent Advisory Group on Country Information, to report on the Home Office's Country Policy Information Notes. Some was also allocated to a team building workshop. There was no allocation for capital expenditure.

The Inspectorate recorded an overall underspend of £264k (12.2%) in 2022-23. See 'Expenditure Report for Financial Year 2022-23' at Appendix 2.

The agreed headcount remained at 30 full-time equivalents for 2022-23 including the Independent Chief Inspector. Of these, 24 (77%) are Grade 7 or Senior Executive Officer inspector posts. The remaining 6 posts consist of the Chief Inspector and his private office (3 posts), ICIBI Corporate Services (2 posts), and a Strategy and Research workstream (1 post).²¹

As of 31 March 2023, ICIBI had 28 staff in post, of which 22 were inspectors.

The staff profile was:

- 46% female, 54% male
- 74% white, 26% minority ethnic
- 5% disabled, 95% non-disabled
- 14% LGB, 86% heterosexual/straight

²¹ The Independent Chief Inspector (ICI) is a public appointment. By agreement with the ICI, all other inspectorate staff are employed as permanent or temporary Home Office civil servants. Those recruited, loaned, or seconded from elsewhere become Home Office civil servants on joining ICIBI.

- Age bands:
 - 25-29 7.1%
 - 30-34 7.1%
 - 35-39 14.3%
 - 40-44 25%
 - 45-49 14.3%
 - 50-54 21.4%
 - 55-59 10.7%
- 48% not married, 52% married
- 39% Christian, 61% other religions
- 60% with no caring responsibilities, 40% with caring responsibilities
- 65% flexible working pattern, 35% non-flexible working pattern
- 11% part time, 89% full time

Training and development

During 2022-23 ICIBI held two dedicated study/away days focused on communications and how they influence, shape, and have an impact on perceptions of the work of the inspectorate. Colleagues discussed the results of the 2022 Stakeholder Survey, developed topics for the inspection programme for 2023-24, and learnt about team building and resilience. Key speakers included Senior Civil Servants who talked about the challenges the Home Office faces and the Second Permanent Secretary who reflected on her time in post.

Several ICIBI staff undertook a Prince 2 Project Management course, and all members of staff have attended in-house training on SharePoint to support collaborative working.

As in previous years, the induction programme has been refreshed and updated. New team members are led through the induction by their managers, and colleagues run sessions on a variety of topics that cover inspection processes, familiarisation of the Home Office, introductions to corporate responsibilities, and an overview of current inspections. Feedback from colleagues who have gone through the induction process has been universally positive and I am grateful to all my staff for getting involved and creating such a welcoming and supportive environment.

Development opportunities have been offered to team members who have provided cover at a higher grade, taken on line management responsibilities, and participated in the 'Each One, Reach One' mentoring programme.

Inspectors have access to the Civil Service Learning platform and external resources providing training in a range of subjects including immigration and nationality law, the Public Sector Equality Duty, and understanding neurodiversity.

Vision Statement

ICIBI's 'Vision Statement' is intended to sit alongside its stated Purpose (see 'Role and Remit'). It remained unchanged for 2022-23:

"ICIBI will:

- be highly skilled, professional and effective, with a reputation for the highest standards of work and conduct
- operate thorough, rigorous and transparent processes to reach sound, evidence-based conclusions
- deal with others consistently and reliably
- be efficient, forward-thinking, committed to continuous improvement and focused on delivery
- enable and develop its people"

Values

ICIBI adheres to the Civil Service values:

- integrity
- honesty
- objectivity
- impartiality

Equality and diversity

In carrying out its statutory functions, as set out in the UK Borders Act 2007, ICIBI has three equality objectives:

- to monitor and report on compliance with the Equality Act 2010 by the Home Secretary, her officials, and others exercising functions relating to immigration, asylum, nationality, or customs on her behalf, including reliance on paragraph 17 of Schedule 3 of the Equality Act 2010 (exception for immigration functions)
- to ensure that its policies, processes, and practices are fair and transparent and comply with the Equality Act 2010
- to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion through its inspections and within the inspectorate

Through these objectives ICIBI seeks to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
- advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups
- foster good relations between people from different groups

ICIBI Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Statement

ICIBI is committed to promoting the letter and spirit of the Equality Act 2010 by embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in everything it does.

The immigration, asylum, nationality, and customs functions performed by and on behalf of the Home Secretary involve and affect a wide range of other bodies, and touch everyone living in or seeking to visit the UK.

To inform individual inspections and the overall inspection programme, ICIBI will reach out through its website, and directly where possible, to capture relevant evidence and to try to understand and reflect the widest range of perspectives, interests, and concerns.

Within the inspectorate, the EDI staff group helps the Independent Chief Inspector to ensure that policies, processes and practices, and inspection plans, take full account of ICIBI's Equality Objectives and EDI Statement, and that these are updated as necessary.

ICIBI's Equality Objectives and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Statement should be read in conjunction with its ['Statement of Purpose'](#), ['Vision'](#), ['Values'](#), and ['Expectations'](#).

Appendix 1: Inspection reports published in 2022-23

- Inspection report on country of origin information, Ethiopia, Iran and Zimbabwe (January 2022), published on 28 April 2022
- An inspection of contingency asylum accommodation (May – November 2021), published on 12 May 2022
- An inspection of the immigration system as it relates to the higher education sector (October 2021 – March 2022), published on 30 June 2022
- A re-inspection of Napier Barracks (March 2022), published on 30 June 2022
- An inspection of the global positioning system (GPS) electronic monitoring of foreign national offenders (March – April 2022), published on 7 July 2022
- An inspection of the initial processing of migrants arriving via small boats at Tug Haven and Western Jet Foil (December 2021 – January 2022), published on 21 July 2022
- An inspection of the Home Office’s processing of family visas (September 2021 – February 2022), published on 18 October 2022
- An inspection of juxtaposed controls (May – June 2022), published on 18 October 2022
- An inspection of the use of hotels for housing unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (March – May 2022), published on 19 October 2022
- Inspection report on country of origin information, Afghanistan and China (June 2022), published on 19 October 2022
- An inspection of the Hong Kong British National (Overseas) visa route (April – June 2022), published on 8 November 2022
- An inspection of the immigration system as it relates to the agricultural sector (May – August 2022), published on 19 December 2022
- Third annual inspection of adults at risk in immigration detention (June – September 2022), published on 12 January 2023
- A reinspection of family reunion application (September – October 2022), published on 21 February 2023

Appendix 2: Expenditure report for financial year 2022-23

Resource Pay Total	£1,749,441
Resource Non-Pay Total	£158,729
Conferences	£8,670
Catering	£4
Office supplies & services	£56,803
Travel subsistence	£75,791
Consultancy	£11,884
Estates	£1,939
IT & Comms	£1,927
Marketing ²²	(£7,481)
Other costs and services	£2,649
Pay costs – one time	£282
Special payments	£2,707
Training & recruitment	£3,553
Grand Total	£1,908,170

²² Credits received for a recruitment marketing campaign.

Appendix 3: ICIBI Inspection Plan 2022-23

Published 1 April 2022²³

a. Completed inspections – reports awaiting publication:

- An inspection report on the Home Office’s Country of Origin (COI) products relating to Ethiopia, Iran and Zimbabwe (17 January 2022)
- The use of contingency asylum accommodation (16 February 2022)
- An inspection of the initial processing of migrants arriving via small boats at Tug Haven (24 February 2022)

b. Inspections begun in 2021-22:

- An inspection into the processing of family visas
- An inspection of the immigration system as it relates to the higher education sector
- An inspection of GPS electronic monitoring of Foreign National Offenders
- A re-inspection of Napier Barracks
- An inspection into the use of hotels to accommodate unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)
- An inspection report on the Home Office’s Country of Origin (COI) products relating to Afghanistan and China

c. New inspections for 2022-23:

- An inspection of intelligence (jointly with His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services)
- An inspection of Border Force assurance measures against insider threat
- An inspection of the impact of customs processes and procedures on the flow of legitimate trade
- A (re)inspection of the Home Office response to small boat arrivals
- An inspection of Home Office operations to effect the removal of Foreign National Offenders
- Third annual inspection of ‘Adults at Risk in immigration detention’
- An inspection of the Hong Kong British National (Overseas) visa route
- An inspection of the Home Office’s Afghan resettlement activity
- An inspection of the Home Secretary’s use of the power to deprive British nationals of citizenship
- An inspection of the immigration system as it relates to the agricultural sector
- A reinspection of family reunion applications
- An inspection of the processing of EU Settlement Scheme family permits

²³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1065798/ICIBI_Inspection_Plan_2022-23.pdf

- An inspection report on thematic coverage of statelessness in the Home Office's Country of Origin (COI) products
- Reinspections or unannounced inspections to reflect in-year developments and areas of emerging interest (topics and timings to be determined)

Appendix 4: ICIBI Inspection Plan 2023-24

Published 3 April 2023²⁴

a. Completed inspections – reports awaiting publication:

- An inspection of the Border Force intelligence functions at the Humber ports (18 January 2023)
- An inspection of visit visa operations (10 February 2023)
- A re-inspection of Project Kraken (16 March 2023)

b. Inspections begun in 2022-23:

- A re-inspection of the initial processing of migrants arriving via small boats, including at Western Jet Foil and Manston
- An inspection of the Home Office's operations to effect the removal of foreign national offenders
- An inspection of Border Force assurance measures against insider threat
- An inspection of the Home Office's Afghan resettlement activity
- A re-inspection of ePassport gates
- An inspection of the use of the power to deprive British nationals of citizenship
- Inspection report on Home Office country of origin information, Iraq and Myanmar
- Inspection report on the treatment of statelessness in Home Office country of origin information

c. New inspections for 2023-24:

- An inspection of asylum casework
- An inspection of contingency asylum accommodation
- A re-inspection of the initial processing of migrants arriving by small boat
- A re-inspection of the use of hotels to house unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
- An inspection of the use of hotels to house asylum-seeking families with children in Northern Ireland
- An inspection of the Home Office's use of age assessments
- An inspection of Border Force fast parcel operations
- An inspection of Border Force practice and procedure in relation to firearms
- An inspection of 'Adults at risk in immigration detention' policy
- An inspection of the Immigration Enforcement Competent Authority
- An inspection of the Home Office's illegal working enforcement activity
- An inspection of the Health and Social Care visa route

²⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1148417/ICIBI_Inspection_Plan_2023-24.pdf

- An inspection of the High Potential Individual visa route
- An inspection of the immigration system as it relates to the fishing industry
- Inspection reports on Home Office country of origin information relating to Albania, Pakistan, and Rwanda
- Inspection report on the thematic coverage of trafficking in Home Office country of origin information
- Re-inspections or unannounced inspections to reflect in-year developments and areas of emerging interest (topics and timings to be determined)

Appendix 5: ICIBI's 'expectations' of asylum, immigration, nationality and customs functions

Background and explanatory documents are easy to understand and use (e.g. statements of intent (both ministerial and managerial), impact assessments, legislation, policies, guidance, instructions, strategies, business plans, intranet and GOV.UK pages, posters, leaflets etc.)

- They are written in plain, unambiguous English (with foreign language versions available, where appropriate)
- They are kept up to date
- They are readily accessible to anyone who needs to rely on them (with online signposting and links, wherever possible)

Processes are simple to follow and transparent

- They are IT-enabled and include input formatting to prevent users from making data entry errors
- Mandatory requirements, including the nature and extent of evidence required to support applications and claims, are clearly defined
- The potential for blockages and delays is designed out, wherever possible
- They are resourced to meet time and quality standards (including legal requirements, Service Level Agreements, published targets)

Anyone exercising an immigration, asylum, nationality or customs function on behalf of the Home Secretary is fully competent

- Individuals understand their role, responsibilities, accountabilities and powers
- Everyone receives the training they need for their current role and for their professional development, plus regular feedback on their performance
- Individuals and teams have the tools, support and leadership they need to perform efficiently, effectively and lawfully
- Everyone is making full use of their powers and capabilities, including to prevent, detect, investigate and, where appropriate, prosecute offences
- The workplace culture ensures that individuals feel able to raise concerns and issues without fear of the consequences

Decisions and actions are 'right first time'

- They are demonstrably evidence-based or, where appropriate, intelligence-led
- They are made in accordance with relevant legislation and guidance
- They are reasonable (in light of the available evidence) and consistent

- They are recorded and communicated accurately, in the required format and detail, and can be readily retrieved (with due regard to data protection requirements)

Errors are identified, acknowledged and promptly ‘put right’

- Safeguards, management oversight, and quality assurance measures are in place, are tested and are seen to be effective
- Complaints are handled efficiently, effectively and consistently
- Lessons are learned and shared, including from administrative reviews and litigation
- There is a commitment to continuous improvement, including by the prompt implementation of recommendations from reviews, inspections and audits

Each immigration, asylum, nationality or customs function has a Home Office (Borders, Immigration and Citizenship System) ‘owner’

- The BICS ‘owner’ is accountable for implementation of relevant policies and processes performance (informed by routine collection and analysis of Management Information (MI) and data, and monitoring of agreed targets/deliverables/budgets)
- Resourcing (including workforce planning and capability development, including knowledge and information management)
- Managing risks (including maintaining a Risk Register)
- Communications, collaborations and deconfliction within the Home Office, with other government departments and agencies, and other affected bodies
- Effective monitoring and management of relevant contracted out services
- Stakeholder engagement (including customers, applicants, claimants and their representatives)



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