

LONGER QUEUES AT IMMIGRATION

What this paper is about

The paper outlines:

- the formation of the new *UK Border Agency (UKBA)* which in future will manage the UK's border control points; and
- the Government's new e-Borders Programme.

Among the new arrangements are more thorough checks for EU passengers entering the UK. This has meant increased individual passenger transaction times and thus, in the absence at many airports of sufficient staff resources to carry out the new procedures, longer queues for EU passengers.

The paper suggests possible action by the Liaison Group to underline the need to keep passenger waiting times to a minimum.

Points for Discussion

Members may like to compare notes on how passenger waiting times at their Airports have been affected by the new arrangements and where delays have increased what steps have been, or might be, taken to mitigate these.

The delegates from Heathrow, Gatwick, Birmingham and Manchester may like to share their experience of the Iris Recognition scheme – para 21.

Points for Possible Action

- While members will accept that thorough and robust checks are essential to protect national security it may be that this is an issue about which the Liaison Group might like to make collective representations to Ministers? In particular the Group may wish to underline the need for the new checks to be properly resourced and to press for the setting of targets for passenger waiting times and arrangements for these to be regularly monitored and reviewed.
- In any event Consultative Committees will want to be steadfast in keeping an eye on queueing times at immigration and to press for remedial action if at any time it is shown that waiting times are unacceptable.

Introduction

1. A number of Consultative Committees have expressed concern in recent months about the impact of the Government's new policy of requiring more thorough checks for EU passengers at border control. This has meant increased individual passenger transaction times and thus, in the absence at many airports of sufficient staff resources to carry out the new procedures, much longer queues for EU passengers.

Background

2. The changes at airports need to be seen against two key strands in UK Borders policy:
 - The introduction in April 2008 of a new unified *UK Border Agency (UKBA)*. The new Agency is a development of the *Border and Immigration Agency (BIA)* which has operated as part of the Home Office since it was launched in April 2007.
 - The e-Borders Programme. This is a multi agency, technology enabled business change programme which aims to create a joined up, modernised border control and security framework for the United Kingdom – for more details see Annex A attached taken from the UK Border Agency's website.

New Border Checks

3. When the BIA was launched last year it was announced that "passengers coming through UK ports this summer will now see a more visible presence with new signage identifying the border, and greater levels of Border and Immigration Agency (BIA) staff, soon to be in uniform, concentrated at the country's busiest airports to ensure that delays are kept to a minimum. Three hundred more border control staff have come on stream this year alone helping ensure Britain's borders are secure and passengers move through border control quickly and securely".
4. At the same time new technology was introduced which gives immigration staff the "ability to scan biometric data in new e-passports, allowing them to be more confident about the identity of people entering the UK, while allowing fraud and forgery checks to be undertaken quickly and securely." Importantly these new checks would include people with UK and EU passports.
5. Unfortunately, it seems that the extra resources referred to, and their deployment to the country's busiest airports, has not always been sufficient to compensate for the extra time taken in carrying out these checks and, coupled with the growth in passenger throughput, delays for passengers have increased. All eyes are thus now on the new UKBA.

The new UKBA

6. As noted above, the UKBA came into being in April 2008 as a shadow agency of the Home Office – see press release at Annex B.
7. Shadow status is a transitional period of operation before becoming a full executive agency. The UKBA will have the freedom to operate and focus its resources within a clearly defined mandate from the Home Office. This will provide:
 - a sharper focus on delivery, better meeting the public's expectations in maintaining secure borders, finding and removing illegal immigrants and tackling those who facilitate them coming here;
 - clearer accountability, not only to the public, but also to customers, partners and ministers;
 - greater operational freedom to respond to the challenges and to manage its people and resources more effectively;
 - the ability to reinvest savings into improving business delivery;

- an opportunity to forge new ways of working and new relationships with partners; and
 - a new identity to bring staff together under a clear, single brand with unified clarity of purpose.
8. The Agency has been structured further to strengthen protection against crime and terrorism while encouraging the flows of people and trade on which the UK's future as a global hub depends.
 9. Over the next few months frontline staff will be conferred with both immigration and customs powers and staff in England and Wales will be equipped with police-like powers as set out in the UK Borders Act 2007. A full merger will follow new legislation introduced in the House of Commons in the autumn.
 10. The UKBA will work closely with the police to protect the country from illegal immigration, organised crime and terrorism. To strengthen effective police coordination at a strategic level Chief Constable Roger Baker of Essex Police has joined the Agency's board. The Home Secretary has also laid in the House of Commons a new Memorandum of Understanding with the Association of Chief Police Officers which sets out how the UKBA will work with the 1,400 Special Branch and the 1,600 uniformed police personnel deployed at ports and airports all over the UK.
 11. Mike Eland, a Commissioner of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, has also been appointed to the board and there will be a representative of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. These appointments will help to ensure the UKBA works effectively in sharing intelligence, skills and powers to the benefit of the public.
 12. In terms of resources, UKBA will marshal resources of over £2 billion. It will deploy over 25,000 staff. It will employ over 9,000 warranted officers. That makes the agency the second largest body of warranted officers in the country, the largest being the Metropolitan Police.

UKBA Business Plan - April 2008 to March 2011

13. The Agency's business plan¹ sets out its key priorities and commitments for April 2008 to March 2011.
14. Its three strategic objectives are:
 - a) To protect our border and our national interests by:
 - guarding routes to Britain with early action overseas;
 - detecting and stopping risks and threats to Britain at our border;
 - speeding the passage of legitimate goods and authorised people;
 - counting people in and out of Britain so we can take action against those who overstay.
 - b) To tackle border tax fraud, smuggling and immigration crime by:
 - holding those who break our laws to account for their actions;
 - targeting facilitators, businesses, colleges and organisations;
 - creating and managing immigration and customs anti-smuggling crime partnerships in the UK and overseas;

¹ <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsarticles/ukborderagencylaunch>

- detecting, detaining and removing those who have no right to be here, or who pose a threat to the UK, targeting the most harmful first;
 - transforming collection, dissemination and use of intelligence globally and locally;
 - issuing ID cards to foreign nationals and helping deny the privileges of Britain to those who break the rules; transforming our enforcement capability.
- c) To implement fast and fair decisions by:
- welcoming the people and trade which benefits our country;
 - implementing fast and fair decisions that are right for Britain;
 - helping refugees and newcomers who have earned the right to stay and make Britain their home;
 - developing and managing international alliances to support delivery of our business.”
15. There is a Government commitment providing UKBA with new resources and the Minister of State for Border and Immigration indicated in a speech to the new Border Agency on 3rd April that he would increase the budget for the UKBA by 10% by cutting red tape and headquarter costs.
16. Of key interest to Consultative Committees is the priority being given to the processing of passengers at the UK border. In this respect the business plan sets out:
“we will speed the passage of authorised people and legitimate goods by:
- a) Minimising queuing and waiting times at our controls with new Service Level Agreements agreed with port operators by December 2008. This will set new standards for legitimate customers’ travel time through our controls at ports and will cover queuing and customer satisfaction. Our focus will balance the need to protect the security of the UK with the facilitation of travel and trade;
- b) Minimising delays for those crossing our borders for legitimate travel and trade purposes by:
- working with the Department for Transport to deliver the Improving the Passenger Experience action plan by January 2009;
 - collaborating with port operators to draw up Service Level Agreements in relation to use of resources, improved presentation of passengers and queuing times at our border control points from June 2008;
- c) Extending the use of innovative biometric technology: testing new automated gates for EEA citizens holding biometric passports at two ports from the summer of 2008, and developing the arrangements we have in place for regular travellers who register their biometrics in advance.
17. Also, included as a key target:
“A5. Publish analysis of our performance locally by April 2009 so that the public knows how we are doing where they live”.

Iris Recognition Immigration System (IRIS)

18. This new system aims to reduce queues at immigration. Introduced at Heathrow as a pilot project during 2005, it now also operates at:
- Heathrow Terminal 1
 - Heathrow Terminal 2
 - Heathrow Terminal 3
 - Heathrow Terminal 4
 - Gatwick North Terminal

- Gatwick South Terminal
 - Manchester Terminal 1
 - Manchester Terminal 2
 - Birmingham Terminal 1
19. The scheme allows enrolled passengers holding non-EU passports to enter the UK through a special automated immigration control barrier incorporating an iris recognition camera. The barriers, located in the Immigration Arrivals Hall, form part of Immigration and Passport Control.
 20. Enrolment for the scheme is currently free and voluntary. Enrolment takes place in the airport departure lounge where Immigration Officers assess eligibility and enrol qualifying persons. Those who qualify to participate in the scheme have both their eyes photographed in order to capture their iris patterns. This data is stored securely alongside their personal details. The enrolment process takes about five to ten minutes. There is more information about the scheme on the UKBA's website².
 21. So far the Iris Recognition scheme has been used by more than one million passengers and this has had an impact in reducing queues at immigration. But there are problems of resourcing in that the enrolment process requires two immigration officers and hitherto there have not been enough people to perform this duty except at off-peak times. This limits the benefits of the scheme. There are also problems when the equipment is unserviceable and passengers have to join the queue for manual processing.

Conclusion

22. Members generally will accept that thorough and robust checks are essential to protect national security but in many places the added delays are unacceptable and there have been many complaints. A number of Consultative Committees have taken up the issue with the Government and it may be that the Annual Meeting should add its collective weight to these attempts to secure improved performance by what is now the *UK Border Agency*. At London Gatwick it has been suggested that key performance indicators relating to queuing at immigration should be agreed and published, so that all concerned are aware of the standards which UKBA are seeking to achieve and the Consultative Committee has a yardstick against which it can measure performance.

Stuart Innes
May 2008

ANNEX A **E Borders Programme**

The e-Borders programme will be delivered by the UK Border Agency, supported by its partner agencies - the police, HM Revenue & Customs and UK Visa Services. We are also working closely with the travel industry whose support is crucial to the successful delivery of the programme.

e-Borders is a key component of the Government's border transformation programme whose aim is to deliver a modernised border control which is fundamentally more effective, efficient and secure to meet the future operating needs of the border agencies.

² <http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/managingborders/technology/iris/>

Primary purpose and objectives of e-Borders

The main purpose of the e-Borders programme is to provide a service for data collation and analysis from the travel industry (air, sea and rail), on all passengers and crew intending to transit or travel to or from the United Kingdom. e-Borders will assess the risks presented by passengers entering and leaving the United Kingdom, identifying persons of interest to the authorities prior to their arrival in the United Kingdom or on an outbound journey.

This information will be passed in the form of an 'alert' to the relevant border control agency, which will determine the appropriate intervention. We have a code of practice on the management of information shared by the UK Border Agency, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and the police. This governs the sharing, use and storage of data under e-Borders and other joint working arrangements, ensuring adherence with data protection and human rights legislation. You can download this code of practice from the right side of this page.

We have already exceeded the 30 million target and captured data on 36.5 million passenger movements. This has resulted in over 16,000 alerts to border agencies leading to over 1,300 arrests for crime, including murder, rape, assault and significant counter-terrorism interventions.

The e-Borders programme has been established with three primary objectives, to enhance:

- security;
- effectiveness; and
- efficiency.

It is uniquely placed to exploit developing technologies, particularly those involving biometrics, to ensure an effective system of identity management.

Successful pilot or linked projects

The e-Borders programme has already successfully delivered:

- IRIS, the Agency's iris recognition immigration system, which is a biometric automated barrier entry system for pre-registered passengers at selected ports in the United Kingdom.
- Project semaphore, an operational prototype for the main e-Borders programme, is already handling in excess of 1 million passenger movements a month.
- The joint border operations centre (JBOC) went live in January 2005, as the operational hub of semaphore. It is informing the design and development of the e-Borders programme and is already delivering operational benefits to stakeholders.

ANNEX B
UK Border Agency – Press Release

Launch of Britain's new unified Border Agency

03 April 2008

Border, immigration, customs and visa checks will be united from today in the country's new UK Border Agency, the Home Office has announced.

The new UK Border Agency, established as a shadow agency of the Home Office, will protect our borders, control migration for the benefit of the country, prevent border tax fraud, smuggling and immigration crime and implement quick and fair decisions.

The new 25,000 strong organisation includes more than 9,000 warranted officers operating in local communities, at the border and across 135 countries worldwide, with wide ranging search, seizure and detention powers.

Over the next four months 1,000 frontline staff will be conferred with both immigration and customs powers and staff in England and Wales will be equipped with police-like powers as set out in the UK Borders Act 2007. A full merger will follow new legislation presented to the House in the autumn.

The UK Border Agency will link with the 3,000 police stationed at ports and airports following a new agreement with the Association of Chief Police Officers. Talks are continuing on closer integration.

Announcing the launch of the Agency, Home Secretary Jacqui Smith said:

"The UK Border Agency will help strengthen protection of our border. With tough customs, immigration and police-like powers UK Border Agency officers will be better equipped than ever to guard our ports and airports, protecting the country from illegal immigration, organised crime and terrorism.

"This 25,000 strong force will work both at home and abroad to tackle smuggling of people and goods into Britain using intelligence, new technology and wide-ranging powers and I am confident it will help strengthen policing at the border.

"Already taxpayers can see our investment in new technology paying off and creating a ring of security around Britain. Fingerprints are now being taken from all visa applicants to the UK, this year we will increase police, customs and immigration checks against visitors travelling through our ports, and we will see the roll-out of ID cards for foreign national from November."

Tough targets were announced for the new agency in its business plan published today. They include targets to:

- expel 5,000 foreign national prisoners from Britain this year, up from 4,200 last year;
- sustain last year's increase in the seizure of class A drugs by seizing at least 2,400 kilograms of cocaine and 550 kilograms of heroin by April 2009;
- increase by 50 per cent the number of asylum cases concluded in less than six months;
- extend the UK's visas regime to cover a larger proportion of the world's population; and
- increase detention capacity by 20 per cent over the next two years to help increase the number of immigration offenders we can remove from the country.

The Rt Hon Jane Kennedy MP, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, said:

"The new Borders Agency will provide a crucial service to the UK. It will protect tax revenues and assist international trade and the passage of essential goods at the frontier.

"Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) staff will be taking their energy, skills and enthusiasm across to this essential Government agency and I wish them every success."

The new agency will create a single border intelligence service to bring together overseas risk assessment units, airline liaison officers and customs and immigration intelligence officers based around the globe. This will work together with a new £1bn screening system for travellers to the UK. A trial of this system has already led to more than 1,000 alerts and 200 arrests.

The board of the new Agency will be chaired by Chief Executive Lin Homer, and will include Chief Constable Roger Baker of Essex Police and Customs Commissioner Mike Eland.

The shake up of the immigration service has already begun to reap results, including:

- more than 1.4 million fingerprint visas issued, checking applicants against watch lists identifying more than 1,375 identity swaps;
- more than 1 million lorries and cars searched in northern France;
- 3.5 million vehicles screened for radiological material;
- last year alone Britain's border controls in France and Belgium barred 18,000 illegal immigrants from reaching the UK;
- the pilot scheme for the Government's electronic borders system has already checked nearly 50 million passenger movements against police, customs and immigration databases before they arrive in the UK, leading to over 1,000 arrests and the seizure of thousands of smuggled cigarettes and kilos of smuggled drugs.
- in 2007 a record number of foreign national prisoners, 4,200, 80 per cent more than the previous year, and around 14,000 failed asylum seekers and almost 50,000 non-asylum cases were removed, the highest level since 2002; and
- during 06/07 detection officers seized 20 per cent more class A drugs with over 2,300 kilograms of cocaine and over 500 kilograms of heroin stopped at the border.