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OVERALL NARRATIVE

- Government takes balanced approach to migration - tackling abuse of the asylum system while welcoming migrants with the skills we need to fill recruitment gaps and boost our economy.
- We have invested in the fundamentals of the immigration and asylum system and the results are showing.

Asylum and enforcement:

- We increasingly have a grip of the asylum system. The dramatic reduction in asylum numbers reflects this.
- border controls have been significantly strengthened;
- now have an effective IT system that follows each case through the system;
- we have a proper method of registration (ARC); we have effective reporting regimes; we are pressing ahead with further legislative reforms;
- removals of failed asylum seekers and other illegal immigrants has increased
- Continuing proud tradition of helping genuine refugees with new UNHCR resettlement scheme and working internationally to help more refugees closer to regions of origin.

General casework

- We have taken the significant step of introducing charging for general casework and work permits. Service standards for general casework have improved significantly since charging introduced. Charging allows us to properly resource this area of the business and is a key step in becoming modern, competitive and effective.
- The business is now underpinned by a proper, fully-integrated IT system.
- We have introduced ceremonies for new citizens to encourage integration.
- Recognise that any system can be abused and aim to find sensible ways to manage the business, i.e. taking swift decisions and using intelligence to target the abuses.
- Delays are unfair to genuine applicants and allow others to stay in the country while the application waits for consideration. Successive administrations have grappled with backlogs and have had to take measures to deal with them. Charging is [a] key to helping us break this cycle.

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- Not complacent. Recognise that there are more substantial improvements still to be made across the system. Will make them.

MANAGED MIGRATION IS POSITIVE FOR ECONOMY + SOCIETY

- Our nationality, immigration and policy was set out clearly in the White Paper 'Secure Borders, Safe Haven'; we need rational and controlled routes for economic migration with fair, but robust, procedures for dealing with those who claim asylum. We are pursuing a flexible system of regulated, managed migration in the best interests of our economy, while ensuring, as with EU accession countries, that our system is not open to abuse.
- The Government continues to welcome the many foreign nationals who choose to study, work and live in the UK - they boost our economy and add to our thriving cosmopolitan society.
- Around 15% of UK trend economic growth depends on migration.
- UK also has the lowest ILO unemployment rate in the G7 and one of the lowest unemployment rates in the EU [4.9% compared with 9.3% in Germany and 9.5% in France].
- Migrants are substantial net contributors - studies show they paid £2.5bn more in taxes than they consumed in benefits and services, and have little or no adverse affect on the wages or employment levels of the existing population. Migrants make a disproportionate contribution to the wealth of the UK, accounting for eight per cent of the population but 10 per cent of our gross domestic product - and 20 per cent more likely to be self-employed.
- Social cohesion is vital. We want to ensure that everyone has confidence in the system. We want people to be clear about the basis on which they can come here and that we welcome them if they are genuinely in need of a safe haven or where they can contribute to our economy through working lawfully.
- [We want to facilitate people being able to see their friends and families, not throw up unnecessary barriers. It is right that people should be able to visit friends or join their families in the UK without imposing disproportionate bureaucratic barriers.]
- Must recognise that parts of the UK are keen to attract migrants. The Scottish Executive have launched 'Fresh Talent' to encourage people to settle in Scotland. This is an example of how we can all develop a more flexible, regional-focused migration policy to meet the demands of the economy. Wrong to assume as some appear to have done that everyone will head for London and the South East.

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- No modern, successful country can afford to adopt an anti-immigration policy. It is in all our interests to harness the innovation, skills and productivity that new migrants can bring.
- [The primary route for economic migration to the UK is through the work permit system. Employers must apply for a work permit for a specific vacancy and demonstrate they cannot fill the post with a domestic worker. This could be expanded to refer to wider set of schemes- please obtain line from GH. Could say something about streamlining of work permits?
- I think Lukas is ECAA not WP. For instance, Lukas, a Polish carpenter, came to the UK from Poland six years ago and now lives in East London with his wife and young son. He used to work on the black market but, tired of poor pay and of looking over his shoulder the whole time, he decided to enter the mainstream building trade and regularised his stay. He said "it was quite difficult. I had to prove I was self-employed by showing receipts, bank-statements and invoices." He doesn't believe that people like him should claim benefits- "I think it's enough if someone's willing to pay taxes and can get work here- he doesn't need to apply for any benefits does he?"

GOVERNMENT IS GETTING A GRIP OF ALL ASPECTS OF MIGRATION AGENDA

An enormous amount of real progress has been made in recent years to improve the way IND works. Asylum applications have been dramatically reduced, border controls have been significantly strengthened; removals have been increased; charging for general casework has been introduced and the standard of service has improved; new citizenship ceremonies have been introduced.

Asylum applications + enforcement

- Applications for asylum fell dramatically in 2003 as a result of the tough measures introduced by the government including legislation and border controls in France. The downward trend continued in the last three months of the year, with a 52 per cent drop compared with the same period in 2002.
- In 2003 as a whole, following a surge in applications before tougher benefits rules came into force, applications fell by 41 per cent - this is four times as much as the average across the rest of the EU.
- the prime minister's target of halving the number of asylum claimants from 8700 in October last year to around 4000 in September 2003 was met.

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- As a result of the fall in new claims, applications for state support fell by 60% in the last three months of 2003 compared with the same period in 2002.
- We have significantly improved the our processing of asylum claims and 80% of initial decisions on asylum applications are being made within two months and the number of claims awaiting a decision is at its lowest for over a decade.

Strengthened border controls

- The UK now has border controls operating in France. New technologies are being successfully deployed to minimise Immigration abuse. In Northern France extensive new detection equipment is being deployed to reduce illegal entrants. Biometrics are now being used in visas to crack down on asylum abuse.

Removals + enforcement

- We have achieved year on year increases in the number of removals of failed asylum seekers and others illegally in the UK, to record numbers: up over 20% to 16,782 last year, and removals of other illegals (eg illegal workers), up to over 11,500. We are improving our contact management of asylum seekers as announced in the 2002 White Paper, and making use of detention and are making working illegally in the UK increasingly difficult and less attractive.

General casework

- The general casework group in IND in 2002 dealt with 337,650 cases [Q: do we have more recent numbers? Does this include nationality applications? No - that is dealt with by nationality group- they can supply another set of figures] This is the majority of IND's casework. The cases relate to people who, for a variety of reasons, want stay longer the UK than their original visa allowed them to do or to change their immigration status. A common example is students who perhaps extend their course and need to extend their visa accordingly. These applications are all from people who are already living in the UK (i.e. full entry clearance checks have already been conducted). This type of casework is sometimes referred to as after-entry casework.

- There has been a significant increase in casework over recent years:

Year	Decisions taken
2002	337,650
2001	277,375

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2000	249,920
1999	178,810
1998	160,080
1997	166,580
1996	174,890
1995	167,390
1994	183,260
1993	186,820

Excludes dependants of principal applicants, asylum-related decisions, the outcome of appeals and withdrawn applications.

- A major step was taken in August last year to introduce charging for all after-entry casework. Charging means that foreign nationals living in the UK pay the costs of the immigration services they use.
- The introduction of charging has enabled IND to invest in more staffing resources for general casework, thus increasing our capacity to make casework decisions. Since August 2003 staffing levels in General Group have risen by 27% [from around 1,000 to nearly 1,300]. Service standards have improved significantly as a result [- from around 40% within target to around 70% - PAULA - is it safe to say this?]
- To take this one step further still we are proposing a power in the Immigration and Asylum Bill to allow us to introduce over-cost charging for non-asylum applications. It is only right that people who want to come and live in the UK should make a contribution in return for the benefits they receive. This is something that already happens in other countries such as America, Australia and Canada where similar costs for work permits vary from £500- £1,000. Our charges will be competitive with other countries offering similar opportunities.
- This will allow us to make further improvements in both processing and enforcement terms.
- Delays are unfair to genuine applicants and allow others to stay in the country while the application waits for consideration. Successive administrations have grappled with backlogs and have had to take measures to deal with them. *Charging is [a] key to helping us break this cycle.*
- There has always been a tension between delivering a cost-effective and speedy service to the vast majority of genuine applicants and following up and acting upon those which are suspicious or bogus. We recognise that any system can be abused and aim to find sensible ways to manage the business, i.e. assessing risk, taking swift decisions where we are confident that risk is low, and using intelligence and more detailed scrutiny to target the abuses. *[Section on backlog exercises and low risk cases]*

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- For instance, we introduced changes in the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 to counter fraudulent marriages, including a requirement for registrars to report suspicious marriages to the Home Office and empowerment of registrars to request nationality of couples intending to marry. The Nationality and Immigration Act 2002 also increased the probationary period to two years and introduced a 'no switching' provision for those seeking to stay in the UK on the basis of marriage. UKIS in London has recently piloted a new, targeted approach to tackling sham marriages, which has led to 110 people arrested at weddings in 2003/04 and over 60 marriages stopped.

Other progress (non-asylum)

- **Citizenship ceremonies:** better integrating legal migrants with ceremonies for new citizens to encourage integration, welcome them to their local communities and ensure people understand their rights and responsibilities in the UK.
- [New/extended work permit schemes, important strand of managed migration agenda -see above]

TOP LINES ON BACKLOG CLEARANCE/ACCELERATED CONSIDERATION

- As announced to the House on Friday 12 March, the wider context of guidance to immigration caseworking staff on quick consideration/backlog clearance will form part of Mr Sutton's investigation.
- Not a "new policy". Managerial guidance to staff on caseworking practice, in an effort to clear backlogs. By no means the first of such exercises, under this or preceding administrations.
- Successive administrations have grappled with the challenges of running an effective after-entry control. We have to balance the need to counter possible abuses of the system with the need to respond speedily and fairly to legitimate applicants, within the resources available
- Nothing to do with allowing people to enter the country. These are applications from people already lawfully here, for instance as students, or on the basis of marriage, the great majority of whom are entitled to extend their stay.
- Backlogs built up at a time when IND was concentrating on dealing with a surge in asylum claims. Unfair on genuine applicants. Also makes immigration control less effective if refusals are delayed.
- Delays are unfair to genuine applicants, whose lives have to be put on hold, and allow others to stay in the country while the application waits for consideration
- Never any question of just granting everything. Guidance was about deciding cases on the available papers without lengthy enquiries. Refusal was very much still an option - as the [REDACTED] case shows.
- Routine checks, including security, continued to be made. In the case of students, the college would be checked against the "List of Educational establishments" and any doubtful or bogus ones would be identified and the application refused.
- After-entry control has been exercised. Control of Immigration Statistics show that the total number of decisions made per annum has increased,