

# Review of Border and Immigration Agency Statistics on “Control of Immigration”

## Introduction

### Aim

The Border and Immigration Agency is reviewing what statistics are produced and published and the frequency of publication. This review, following up a National Statistics Quality Review (NSQR)<sup>1</sup> was signalled by the Home Secretary in the House of Commons on 9 July. The current statistical publications can be downloaded from the Home Office website<sup>2</sup>.

### Terms of reference

1. To review the current scope, level of detail and frequency of the Border and Immigration Agency’s published statistics – with a view to more balanced representation of the Agency’s operations and responsibilities, taking into account the need for clarity, focus and simplification, and for the benefit of both the public and public sector organisations.
2. To consider the relationship between the published statistics and the internal management information from which they are compiled.
3. To make any necessary recommendations for the publication of statistics in the future and for any changes to collection of data that the recommendations would entail.

### Context

In particular, the review should take account of:

- the establishment of the Agency;
- its regional organisation;
- the strategic objectives of the Agency;
- its responsibilities within wider cross-Government and international arrangements for the management of migration and the impacts of migration;
- relevant Public Service Agreements and delivery agreements;
- the NSQR and the Home Office’s response to its recommendations;
- the strand of the Home Office reform plan that deals with data quality (including its specification of a minimum quality needed for any published statistics);

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<sup>1</sup> The final report of the NSQR of “Control of Immigration: United Kingdom” publications, and the Home Office’s implementation plan, can be found on the National Statistics website.

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/quality/reviews/population.asp>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html>

- the establishment of the Migration Advisory Committee and Migration Impacts Forum.

In finalising the review full account will be taken of the developing plans for the creation of the UK Border Agency, following the Prime Minister’s announcement on 14 November.

### Issues

The review should consider, *inter alia*:

- what information needs to be made available to inform evaluation of the Agency’s performance against its objectives;
- what information needs to be made available to inform a wider debate about migration;
- specific obligations to provide data to third parties;
- stakeholder expectations of continuity of currently published data series.

The review should also take account of:

- the transformation of a number of key business processes, such as the New Asylum Model and the Points-Based System, which may need to be represented by different statistics;
- the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Task Force on International Migration Statistics;<sup>3</sup>
- developments in IT offering different approaches to publication.

### Key drivers

Seven key drivers have been identified, which need to be balanced in conducting this review.

A. *Public accountability.* There is a legitimate expectation that the Home Office will place in the public domain sufficient statistics or source data for the public and Parliament to come to a balanced and up-to-date evaluation of the Home Office’s overall performance against its objectives, and to support a coherent narrative about the Border and Immigration Agency’s work. Within this overall issue, there are two distinct drivers, which tend to push in different directions.

- (i) On the one hand, it may appear that the more information made public, the greater is the accountability.
- (ii) On the other hand, the greater the volume of data that is made available, the more difficult it can be to see the wood for the trees: the key points can get lost in the detail.

B. *Obligations to provide statistics to third parties.* This includes provision of statistics to various

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<sup>3</sup> Many of the recommendations of this Task Force are also relevant to this review. They can be found at:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/IMPS>.

agencies, some by obligation and some as reasonable cooperation. More generally, the proper positioning of the Agency's data within a wider framework will be an important issue for this review.

**C. Quality and focus of management information.**

The processes involved in publication play an important role in driving up the quality of management information for operational use by the Agency.

**D. Production resources.** The resources required to produce regular data and statistics of the required quality (over and above the resources required to produce and develop internal management information).

**E. Reputation.** The positive image of openness given by the properly managed release of good quality statistics.

**F. Business risk.** The risk that statistics released will undermine the Border and Immigration Agency's pursuit of its objectives and/or give an unbalanced representation of the whole range of its work and achievements.

**G. Benefit of being proactive.** Without a proactive publication programme, more resources would be diverted to dealing with *ad hoc* enquiries.

### **The NSQR and subsequent developments**

The NSQR made 11 recommendations including five that relate to the content and frequency of publications (recommendations 4, 5, 7, 9 and 10). The full text can be found in the NSQR report, as referenced above.

But the present review needs to go beyond the NSQR recommendations because the context has moved on significantly with, for example, the move to Agency status, regionalisation, the Migration Advisory Committee and Migration Impacts Forum, and major changes under way to structures, processes and the law.

A key point is that the statistics should give a more balanced perspective on the control of immigration, which could be represented by a wider range of "headline" statistics but possibly less detail in some areas. Current publications provide extensive detail in some areas and this could be reduced to allow more effort to go into the range of headline statistics. There will also be a need to consider the relationship between the detail/breadth of statistics and the frequency of statistical releases.

### **The ONS Task Force<sup>3</sup>**

The ONS Task Force on International Migration Statistics was established in 2006 to recommend improvements to estimation of migration and of migrant populations in the UK. ONS is taking forward a Task Force recommendation to bring

together key information collected across government to provide a consistent and coherent picture of migration, by issuing early in 2008, a consultation document on the reporting of migration statistics and improvements in the way data are provided.<sup>4</sup>

As the ONS and Home Office consultations will address linked issues, there will be close co-operation with ONS.

### **Regional vs national (UK) statistics**

The review considers not only statistics relating to the national (UK) level but also what might be required or expected at sub-national (region or local authority) level, guided by demand within the regions.

### **Invitation to comment**

Comments are invited on how the published statistics should be rebalanced along the lines described in this document. We are keen to hear views on both the content and frequency of future statistical publications.

An internal review is under way and the interim conclusions are given below, to provide more focus for those who wish to comment.

- Annual statistics should be released, giving a coherent account of BIA's performance in controlling immigration.
- The scope and frequency of sub-annual releases should be considered further.
- The current level of detail in sub-annual asylum figures can be reduced, e.g. by excluding tables giving monthly data and/or individual nationalities. These details would be available annually.
- Non-asylum removals could be included in the next quarterly publication, scheduled for February, to give a more balanced picture.

Please send any comments by 20 February 2008 to:

Jennifer Walker  
Immigration Research and Statistics  
Border and Immigration Agency  
Apollo House  
Croydon CR9 3RR  
E-mail: [jenny.walker31@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:jenny.walker31@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk)

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<sup>4</sup> To be available at:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/default.asp>