

## News story: The Chief Inspector's report on Country of Origin Information has been published

Mr Bolt said:

"The Home Office produces Country of Origin Information (COI) primarily to assist asylum decision makers in determining whether a person qualifies for protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention. COI enables them to evaluate statements made by asylum applicants and to assess their credibility. It follows that COI must be reliable and kept up-to-date.

"This inspection, which was sent to the Home Secretary on 23 October 2017, examined the efficiency and effectiveness of the Home Office functions that produce and use COI, specifically how COI products are commissioned, developed and disseminated, and how they are used within the asylum process. It did not look at the content and quality of individual products as this is the role of the [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information \(IAGCI\)](#), a panel of experts and practitioners created in 2009 to assist the Independent Chief Inspector with a rolling programme of COI reviews.

"The inspection found that the team responsible for producing COI had made efforts to engage the main users of COI, and COI products had been made shorter and topic-specific as a result. However, more needed to be done to create effective feedback loops, to understand and satisfy demand for specific COI, and to train asylum decision makers how to use COI.

"But, the inspection identified a more fundamental and urgent problem with COI. Guidance published by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and recognised in the UK's Immigration Rules requires COI to be presented in a way that permits decision makers to reach their own objective judgements and decisions on individual applications. The Home Office's COI products do not do this.

"Country Policy and Information Notes (CPINs) combine country information and "Policy". This is wrong in principle. It has the effect of directing decision makers towards a predetermined outcome, particularly where a significant body of asylum decision makers are inexperienced (as a parallel inspection of [Asylum Intake and Casework](#) found), unfamiliar with COI, have insufficient time to master every detail, and are likely to interpret "Policy" as something they are required to follow.

"My report made 7 recommendations. While the Home Office has accepted the majority, it has rejected the key recommendation regarding use of the term "policy", suggesting in its formal response that it sees this as interchangeable with "analysis", "guidance" or "country position". I do not agree. The Home Office does however recognise that the term may be misinterpreted and commits to making it clear that that part of the CPIN

“provides an analysis of the COI”. I look forward to seeing this clarification.

“In the meantime, I will continue to work with IAGCI to ensure that the information contained in particular COI products is as reliable, up-to-date and complete as possible, and will also ensure that any future inspections of asylum casework examine how decision makers are using COI.”

[An inspection of the Home Office’s production and use of Country of Origin Information](#)

[Home Office’s response to the Chief Inspector’s reports.](#)

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## **Press release: Food and Drink Sector Council meets for first time**

Leading figures from across the food and drink sector have formed a new partnership with government to boost productivity and make the industry more resilient, sustainable and competitive.

Meeting for the first time yesterday (Monday 29 January), the Food and Drink Sector Council agreed priorities for the next 12 months, including a focus on boosting skills, agricultural productivity, improving the nation’s nutrition and building on emerging proposals to establish a sector deal. The Council will set up expert working groups to develop recommendations for industry and government on each of its priorities.

The new group is made up of leading industry figures from agriculture, manufacturing, retail, logistics and hospitality sectors.

The UK’s food and drink industry is already a huge success story, with exports of quality British produce – worth £20 billion – reaching over 200 countries. The Council’s work to boost productivity will mean industry will be better placed to take advantage of emerging global opportunities to access more markets and boost exports as we leave the European Union.

Speaking following the meeting, Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

This first meeting of the Food and Drink Sector Council marks a significant step forward in supporting this vital industry, which is already worth over £110 billion to the UK economy.

This ambitious partnership between government and industry will secure the UK’s position as a global leader in sustainable,

affordable and high-quality food and drink. Increasing productivity will also benefit consumers and businesses, creating jobs and providing a real boost to our economy.

The Food and Drink Sector Council was first announced in the [Industrial Strategy white paper](#), which sets out the government's long-term plan to build a Britain fit for the future through a stronger, fairer economy.

Business Secretary Greg Clark said:

From Scotch Whisky, to award winning cheeses and premium seafood, the produce from our thriving food and drink sector is in demand and enjoyed around the world.

Through our modern Industrial Strategy and the Food and Drink Sector Council, the government is working together with industry to build on these exceptional strengths, boost its productivity and seize the future opportunities of this national success story.

Iain Ferguson, Joint Chair Food and Drink Sector Council, (Chairman Stobart Group Ltd) said:

Today has been possible due to the huge amount of work and commitment to bring the sector together. It is exciting to see everyone in the same room working together to address the opportunities and challenges we face as an industry.

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## **Press release: Sex offender's sentence extended for repeated child abuse**



Solicitor General Robert Buckland

Mohammed Waqar, who was convicted of sexually assaulting a child under the age of 13, has had his prison term increased today after Solicitor General Robert Buckland QC MP referred his original sentence to the Court of Appeal as unduly lenient.

Waqar, 33, sexually assaulted the child on a number of occasions over a sustained 10 month period; he also forced the victim to watch a sexual act after showing her pornography on his phone. He showed no remorse for his actions during the trial, insisting that he was innocent.

He was sentenced in December to 2 years in prison at Bradford Crown Court. He was also given a Sexual Harm Prevention Order for 5 years and ordered to sign the sexual offenders register. The Court of Appeal agreed that his sentence was too lenient and increased it to 4 years in prison.

Speaking after the hearing, the Solicitor General said:

“Sexual abuse is one of the most psychologically damaging things that can happen to a child. Mohammed Waqar is guilty of repeatedly and consistently abusing the victim. I’m pleased the Court of Appeal has agreed to extend his sentence.”

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## [News story: The Chief Inspector's report on the Home Office's approach to learning from immigration litigation has been published](#)

It is important that the Home Office, with support from the Government Legal Department (GLD), manages litigation claims made against decisions and actions by its Borders, Immigration and Citizenship System (BICS) business areas both efficiently and effectively.

In addition to being an opportunity to acknowledge errors and provide appropriate remedies to claimants, there are the substantial costs of processing and defending cases, and of sums paid out to settle claims, or in compensation when cases are lost. There are also risks to the Home Office's reputation and functioning from poorly handled claims and adverse judgements.

Between 2004 and 2013, the number of Judicial Reviews lodged against the Home Office increased seven-fold. In 2013, the Home Office's Legal Strategy Team (LST) produced a document entitled 'Litigation – Blueprint for a Target End

to End Process'. This 'Blueprint' recognised that learning "should be used to identify improvements and refine our processes, or suggest actions to other units to improve the handling of litigation.

In this inspection, my focus was the mechanisms the Home Office had put in place since 2013 to manage litigation claims, and to capture and use the learning from litigation in order to improve the way claims are handled and to reduce the number of future claims and associated costs through better ("right first time") decision making.

Litigation Operations manages the bulk of the Pre-Action Protocol letters, Judicial Reviews, and Private Law Claims that relate to BICS business areas. I found that since it was created in 2013, and particularly in the last two years, Litigation Operations had made various process improvements and, at the time of the inspection, was looking to build on these.

However, I identified room for further improvements in the processing of claims, and the need for clearer communication to original decision makers about litigation outcomes in order to avoid repeated claims citing the same issues.

In 2016-17, the relevant Legal and Compensation budgets were both significantly overspent, which raised concerns about the Home Office's ability to control its expenditure in this area. The overall budget is planned to reduce substantially in 2019-20, which will require an exceptional level of cost saving efficiencies. I found no evidence that would support such optimism.

Others, including potential claimants and the Courts, will affect the actual numbers and costs of future claims. However, the Home Office needs to make a more deliberate and determined organisational effort to learn lessons from litigation, and to apply these systematically to initial decision making, if it is to have greater influence over the financial and other consequences of such claims.

My report makes 7 recommendations. These include formalising, and possibly extending, the involvement of GLD; creating a closer and more structured working relationship between Litigation Operations and decision-making business areas; enhancing Litigation Operations' analytical capabilities, reviewing performance targets, and aligning responsibility for deciding which claims to settle or defend with budgets and financial authority.

The Home Office has accepted all of my recommendations fully or in part, in the latter case addressing the substance of concerns. I look forward to revisiting this area in due course to check on progress, and will also look in future inspections to test that lessons from litigation are reaching decision making business areas and improving initial decisions.

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# News story: Improving collaboration to protect public health – MHRA and Health Inspectorate Wales sign MoU

Today we have set out how we will work more effectively with HIW in a new [Memorandum of Understanding \(MoU\)](#). (PDF, 326KB, 11 pages)

HIW is the independent inspectorate and regulator of healthcare in Wales. They also monitor the use of the Mental Health Act 1983 and 2007, and the Mental Health (Wales) Measure 2010, and protect the interests of people whose rights are restricted under this legislation.

Our working relationship helps maintain an effective regulatory system for health and care in Wales, while promoting patient safety and high quality care.

The new MoU sets out the framework to support our joint working relationship. We agree on how to share information, to carry out regulatory functions and to benefit the public.

The principles of the MoU will:

- address overlaps and gaps in the regulatory framework and responsibilities
- promote open and transparent cooperation
- respect each other's independent status
- promote the use of resources and intelligence effectively and efficiently

## **Notes to Editor**

1. The Memorandum of Understanding was signed by Dr Kate Chamberlain, Chief Executive, HIW and Dr Ian Hudson, Chief Executive, MHRA.
2. MHRA is responsible for regulating all medicines and medical devices in the UK. All our work is underpinned by robust and fact-based judgments to ensure that the benefits justify any risks. MHRA is a centre of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency which also includes the [National Institute for Biological Standards and Control \(NIBSC\)](#) and the [Clinical Practice Research Datalink \(CPRD\)](#). The Agency is an executive agency of the Department of Health. [www.mhra.gov.uk](http://www.mhra.gov.uk)

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