

# News story: Chief Inspector publishes report on Home Office collaborative working with other government departments and agencies

This inspection looked at how efficiently and effectively the Home Office's Borders, Immigration and Citizenship System (BICS) directorates were working with other government departments (OGDs) to meet Home Office objectives and those of the OGD.

Collaboration between government departments is neither new nor exceptional. Done well, it should benefit not just the departments concerned in terms of their efficiency and effectiveness but also their "customers", by reducing the burden on individuals of having to re-present evidence to one department that has already been provided to and verified by another. But, the public will expect this to be properly and closely regulated, and with confidence in the Home Office damaged by the Windrush scandal the department needs now more than ever to be able to demonstrate that this is the case.

It was concerning therefore that I found no evidence of an overarching BICS strategy for collaborative working with OGDs, no single central list of current collaborations, and that the Home Office had no means of assessing, or even articulating, the overall value BICS derived from OGD collaborations, or of understanding what more value it could gain from them and how to go about this. Nor did BICS capture centrally where other departments relied on it to deliver its objectives and how the Home Office might ensure and enhance the support it provided.

I have made three recommendations which together aim to achieve better oversight, coordination and value from BICS-OGD collaborations. The Home Office has "partially accepted" two and rejected the third. It has questioned whether an overarching strategy, uniformity and centralisation are inherently useful in a decentralised system, to which my answer is possibly not. However, I would argue that the BICS system would benefit from being less decentralised, at least in terms of its knowledge and information management and how it presents itself to others.

The Home Office has also questioned whether the scope of this inspection and the examples of collaboration that were examined present a complete picture of its work with others. I agree that failure to understand the complexity of the issues and to engage with all relevant parties are risks for any inspection and that, had the Home Office raised this at the appropriate time, this inspection might have benefited from other inputs.

Nonetheless, I believe it has correctly identified a number of systemic weaknesses and it is unhelpful to look to obscure this by suggesting that there is a body of alternative evidence.