

The Independent Monitor for Entry Clearance
(Refusals without right of appeal)
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Report on my visits to Quito, Bogotá and Kingston: November 2006

In addition to preparing twice yearly Reports for the Secretary of State to present to Parliament, I also issue briefer Reports after each of my monitoring visits to visa issuing Posts. This Report covers visits to two Posts in Latin America and Kingston, a busy Caribbean Post - neither region has been visited by any of the former part-time Independent Monitors.

I append the detailed Reports for each visit, but provide here an overview which focuses on common issues for UKvisas to address.

1 Regional training

Having learnt that I planned to visit Latin America, the Deputy Director Visa Services invited me to join in, and address, a regional conference. As a delegate, I enjoyed the event immensely and I learnt a lot. As a speaker, it was good to be able to cover issues raised in my Report to the Secretary of State for 2005 directly with visa staff rather than my views being passed down through the various levels of management. I have already been invited to talk to three more regional conferences and it does seem to be a good use of my time. I welcome formal and less formal feedback on my contribution so that I can adjust accordingly for the future but the Deputy Directors of Visa Services have already confirmed that it was generally well received.

During my monitoring visit to Bogotá, which followed on from the conference, I paid special attention to the locally engaged support team to find out their views of the conference. I include their views here in the general report as they are valuable pointers for similar events in the future.

Most Posts were invited to send two delegates, Entry Clearance Officer and Entry Clearance Assistant. As the event was in Bogotá, the whole visa team was invited for the second day, and most of them for the latter part of day one. I understood exactly what the support team meant when they said that they did not feel fully part of the delegate audience. The local staff had not been invited to the pre-start reception, nor were they all at the conference from the beginning and it is very hard to join in a group that has already started to form and work together. Whilst it was sensible to try to involve as many as possible from the home ground, **I do recommend** that thought is given to these basics of group work.

[UKvisas' comment:

We are pleased to receive direct feedback on events, and have passed the comments on to the Director of Visa Services for this area]

I was surprised to hear that there has been no formal programme of Entry Clearance Assistant training. In Bogotá, **I recommended** that the support team take some responsibility for identifying their own training needs and use one of the regular meetings, perhaps in 3 months time, for a review and to follow up on the regional conference. They, and others, clearly enjoyed



and valued getting together and as I have noted, that is especially useful for smaller and more isolated Posts.

[UKvisas' comment:

Under UKvisas' commitment to the Investors in People programme (IiP) all staff should have a development and training programme which has been agreed with their line manager. UKvisas welcomes the Monitor's comments and will encourage line managers to implement this recommendation.]

2 using interpreters/translators.

We had a lively conference discussion on the difference between interpretation and translation. I support translation because it is important that the visa applicant's exact words are used, rather than a summary.

I noted specific concerns about skills - for both interpreter/translator and Entry Clearance Officer. Whilst the conference had a session on do's and don'ts, it would be better if there was a consistent thread of development for such an important part of the visa business. Translating well in an interview context requires far more than proficiency in two languages. **I recommend** that UKvisas looks into the possibility of formal translator qualifications for Entry Clearance Assistants and includes a session on using an interpreter as part of the basic Entry Clearance Officer course for those who will need to do so.

I did note particular problems when the Entry Clearance Officer is able to understand the language but still uses an interpreter: there is the temptation to respond directly rather than wait for the translation. I have also, on other visits, noted the difference between Entry Clearance Officers who clearly conduct the interview, and those where it looks as though it is the Entry Clearance Assistant driving the agenda. Entry Clearance Officers need eye contact with the applicant and to maintain a very clear pattern of question and response.

[UKvisas' comment:

Content on the use of interpreters is included on the Entry Clearance Officer course in the session on interviewing and a session on interpreting has been included on the regional Entry Clearance Assistant training courses. The guidance on the use and management of interpreters is contained in Best Practice 8.5 and we use this as the basis for the content of training. There may also be some scope for Regional Learning & Development centres to be involved in this type of training and we will look into this. We will consider the feasibility of a formal qualification for interpretation as we consider the issue of qualifications for entry clearance staff in general.]

3 Information for applicants

Quito did not have any of UKvisas' very good information leaflets on display, nor did **Kingston**. **Bogotá** had a rack in the waiting room with a complete set.

Both **Quito** and **Bogotá** shared my concern that the leaflets are only available in English. In **Quito** local staff had made up their own information sheets but these were not presented to the same high standard as the official leaflets and local variations can mean significant differences develop over time and distance. I have not researched the spread of languages worldwide, but I



suspect that translations of the key leaflets into Spanish, French and Russian would achieve a significant coverage. **I recommend** that UKvisas commissions such translations for the general, visitor, student and family visitor leaflets.

[UKvisas' comment:

UKvisas currently does not have the resources to translate the INF leaflets in a range of languages. Some posts feel there is value in translating the leaflets into local languages, which we fully endorse. Posts should have funding available for translations, or maybe able to make use of the skills of LE staff. If posts do not have necessary resources, there may be funding available from the centre. Posts can submit their bids to UKvisas Communications Section for consideration. UKvisas is currently researching whether the UKvisas website can be translated into a range of languages, which will include the translation of the INF leaflets. The findings and a proposal will be circulated shortly.]

Overview

Having grouped these three Posts together for travel reasons, I was struck by how different they each were. Although Bogotá and Kingston handle not dissimilar numbers, Kingston has a high proportion of family visits, settlements, and appeals. Quito and Bogotá have a foot in the student market and also a growing number of applicants with family who have regularised a stay in the UK and can now encourage visits. UKvisas' policies and practices have to be capable of applying no matter what the local circumstances, and to adapt readily to change. I thought that the regional conference was an excellent way to promote a common purpose, and I was pleased to see the emphasis on the Prime Minister's Initiative and on UKvisas' aim to make travel and migration work for Britain.

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