



Guide to independent reviews of progress for immigration detention staff

April 2025

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Section 1 Rationale and purpose

1.1 Since 2018, IRPs have provided prison ministers with an independent assessment of the progress made in addressing concerns resulting from particularly troubling inspections. The scope of IRPs has widened over time to include a greater focus on continuous improvement at a broad range of establishments, instead of focusing solely on the most concerning. In 2024, it was agreed with the Home Office that the IRP methodology would be extended to immigration detention and initially focus on immigration removal centres (IRCs).

1.2 The aims of IRPs are to:

- provide an independent, evidence-based assessment of progress against the concerns identified at the previous inspection
- assess the sufficiency of the leadership response to key concerns
- identify emerging difficulties or slippage in progress
- support improvement.

1.3 The table below shows the key differences between a full inspection and an IRP.

Features of a full inspection	Features of an IRP
Ten or 15 inspectors/researchers attend over seven days.	Three to five inspectors attend over 2.5 days.
All previous concerns are followed up and all HMI Prisons 'Expectation' areas are assessed.	Selected concerns are followed up.
Focuses on assessing treatment and conditions.	Focuses on improvements in treatment and conditions since the full inspection.
Use of HMI Prisons 'Expectations' to make judgements about outcomes.	Use of 'key questions' to make judgements about progress.
Healthy establishment tests are graded.	Healthy establishment tests are not graded.
All immigration detention facilities are inspected on a regular basis.	Selected immigration detention facilities are inspected, no more than one or two a year.
Key concerns are raised.	New concerns are unlikely to be raised. (Exceptionally, additional concerns are raised if a significant issue relating to the safety or well-being of detainees which is not being adequately managed is discovered.)
A detainee survey is conducted.	There is no detainee survey.

- 1.4 IRP sites are identified at the discretion of the Chief Inspector of Prisons. Particular consideration will be given to the following factors:
- one or more poor or not sufficiently good scores, especially if they are in safety, or are repeated over successive inspections
 - the vulnerability of those detained
 - confidence in the detention facility's capacity for change and improvement
 - the degree to which a follow-up review is likely to encourage sustained improvement.
- 1.5 If an IRC has at least reasonably good scores across all four tests, an IRP is unlikely but will still be considered if those outcomes are considered marginal or if there are concerns about the likelihood of sustained performance.
- 1.6 The Chief Inspector of Prisons may also consider application of IRP methodology in the wider immigration detention estate beyond IRCs where practicable and likely to help drive progress.

Section 2 Planning an IRP

- 2.1 IRPs will normally take place eight to 12 months after a full inspection. A team of three to five HMI Prisons inspectors and researchers will normally be enough to assess progress against the concerns identified at the full inspection, and they may be joined by a colleague from the Care Quality Commission. At least one member of the IRP team will have conducted the previous inspection. One of the inspectors will be identified as coordinator. The Chief Inspector or Deputy Chief Inspector of Prisons may also attend for part of the visit.

Working with partners

- 2.2 HMI Prisons will invite CQC to participate in IRPs if CQC issued notices following the previous inspection. CQC will attend whenever possible, but there may be circumstances when it is more appropriate for it to arrange a separate follow-up visit.
- 2.3 HMI Prisons may invite other stakeholders, such as the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, to accompany visits.

Announcing the visit

- 2.4 HMI Prisons will write to the centre manager and the Home Office, usually two to three months in advance of the visit, confirming the date and which concerns will be followed up. HMI Prisons will copy this letter to the Chair of the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB).

Before the visit

- 2.5 The centre manager should appoint a liaison officer who can fulfil the job description outlined in Appendix I. A coordinating inspector will contact the IRC in advance to explain the IRP process, answer any questions and make more detailed arrangements relating to logistics and documentation.
- 2.6 In advance of the IRP, HMI Prisons will:
- provide the attendance/laptop list and information about who requires keys
 - offer an opportunity for staff association representatives to meet the team leader
 - arrange to meet representatives from the IMB.
- 2.7 HMI Prisons will also ask the centre manager and liaison officer to:
- complete a pro forma to identify a manager responsible for each concern it is following up
 - provide an updated action plan for the concerns it is following up

- prepare a 30-minute presentation to be delivered at the start of the visit which should:
 - explain what staff have done to address HMI Prisons' concerns
 - reflect on what has gone well and what has been challenging
 - offer a self-assessment of how much progress has been made
- complete a bespoke data request, which HMI Prisons will supply to the centre and Home Office
- provide well-organised documentation and data to evidence the work done to respond to the concerns that are being followed up – this may include new policies and procedures, quality assurance data and minutes of meetings
- provide a copy of any relevant internal audit reports.

2.8 These documents will be requested within two weeks of the announcement and should be received by HMI Prisons no later than five working days before the start of the IRP visit.

Section 3 Structure of the visit

3.1 The visit will last 2.5 days. The following schedule is indicative only.

Day 1

- Morning: inspectors will arrive.
- 12.30pm: 30-minute presentation by the centre manager/SLT/Home Office leaders.
- Afternoon: inspectors begin collecting evidence.
- Afternoon: team leader may hold detainee groups and/or meet with senior leaders, IMB chair and staff associations. There is unlikely to be formal feedback to the centre manager on the first day.

Day 2

- Morning: inspectors continue collecting evidence.
- 12.30–2pm: inspection team meeting.
- Afternoon: inspectors continue gathering evidence and prepare short written judgements for each of the concerns being followed up.
- At the end of the day, the team leader will feed back to the centre manager/SLT/Home Office leaders.

Day 3

- The Chief or Deputy Chief Inspector may attend.
- Morning: inspectors collect final evidence and give feedback to named managers.
- Morning: team leader collates key judgements and prepares draft debrief document for discussion at deliberation meeting.
- Afternoon: deliberation meeting to finalise judgements and debrief document.
- Immediately after the deliberation meeting, usually mid- to late-afternoon: feedback to the centre manager/SLT/Home Office leaders.

Gathering evidence

3.2 Sources of evidence for an IRP will be similar to those for an inspection. Inspectors will speak with staff, detainees and relevant third parties; review documentation and data; and observe what happens within the centre. Where key concerns require examination of the Home Office's work on safeguarding, an inspector will look at a limited sample of cases to contribute to the judgements.

3.3 Inspectors will base judgements on evidence which has been 'triangulated', that is corroborated by several evidence sources. There will be no detainee survey, but HMI Prisons may organise group discussions with detainees.

- 3.4 HMI Prisons may visit any part of the establishment and will ask questions of staff and detainees, but the focus will be on the concerns being followed up (unless something else is identified which is particularly concerning).

Section 4 Assessing progress

HMI Prisons' judgements against concerns

4.1 There is no overall judgement. HMI Prisons makes judgements on progress for each individual concern that is being followed up. Progress is defined as activities that have the potential, in time, to lead to improved outcomes. HMI Prisons follows up using the following definitions:

- **No meaningful progress**
Leaders had not formulated, resourced or begun to implement a realistic improvement strategy to address this concern.
- **Insufficient progress**
Leaders had begun to implement a realistic improvement strategy (for example, with better and embedded systems and processes), but detainee outcomes were improving too slowly or had not improved at all.
- **Reasonable progress**
Leaders were implementing a realistic improvement strategy, with evidence of sustainable progress and some early improvement in outcomes for detainees.
- **Good progress**
Leaders had already implemented a realistic improvement strategy to address this concern and had delivered a clear improvement in outcomes for detainees.

Calibrating progress

4.2 The following 'key questions' framework shows what kinds of activities inspectors look for when making judgements about the extent of progress towards addressing an identified concern. Effective change is likely to happen when leaders take concerns seriously, plan effectively, act, monitor and refine procedures, and measure outcomes.

Leadership

Have leaders and managers taken HMI Prisons' concerns seriously?

- Can staff articulate these concerns?
- Do staff share these concerns?
- Do staff have an in-depth understanding of the problems faced?
- How quickly after the inspection did staff start working to address the concerns?
- Are staff motivated to address the concerns?
- Do staff feel able to effect change?
- Are staff listening to what detainees say about the concerns?

- Is there a sense of urgency and a clear sense of direction?

Planning

Is there a realistic plan for addressing HMI Prisons' concerns?

- Have leaders developed and communicated a credible plan?
- Does the plan take account of the starting point and have key measures of success?
- Does the plan have the potential to improve outcomes in a reasonable timeframe?
- Is the plan prioritised?
- Is the plan resourced?
- Are there clear milestones/timescales and specific goals?
- Have staff, detainees and relevant third parties been involved?
- Does a named member of staff have overall responsibility for addressing specific concerns?

Action

Is the plan being robustly implemented?

- Is there evidence of ongoing, focused activity to achieve change?
- Are senior leaders monitoring implementation of the plan?
- Do stakeholders communicate effectively to support progress?
- Do staff understand what they need to do to deliver improvement?
- Do senior leaders take an interest in the implementation of the plan?
- Is data accurate?
- Do leaders monitor and analyse relevant data?
- Are successes celebrated?

Is there evidence of proactive problem solving?

- Are staff encouraged to provide feedback on progress?
- Are detainees encouraged to provide feedback on progress?
- Do leaders receive support from the operational line?
- Do leaders work collaboratively with partners and politicians/government departments, where relevant, to create solutions?
- Are risks identified and managed?
- Are there clear accountability systems?
- Is enforcement action taken where necessary?
- Is disciplinary action taken where necessary?

Evaluation

Is tangible/discernible improvement taking place?

- Are data on measures of success (outputs) encouraging?
- Can staff identify changes made?

- Are leaders encouraging behavioural change?
- Is staff behaviour changing?
- Can detainees identify changes made?
- Is detainee behaviour changing?
- Are outcomes demonstrably better than during the inspection?
- How well do outcomes compare with other similar IRCs?

Debriefing

- 4.3 The team leader will meet with leaders for a formal debrief at the end of the IRP. A copy of the debrief document will be shared with the contractor and Home Office.

Section 5 After the IRP

Report writing and publication

- 5.1 The draft report will be shared for factual accuracy checking approximately two weeks after the IRP. The final report will be sent to the Home Secretary and Minister and published on HMI Prisons' website within 25 working days of the end of the IRP visit.

Follow-up

- 5.2 The judgements on progress made during an IRP will be used to inform decisions about the timings of future inspections.

Post-IRP feedback processes

- 5.3 HMI Prisons will send an email to the Centre Manager and to the Home Office Detention Engagement and Compliance teams shortly after the visit to seek feedback.

Appendix I The role of the liaison officer

Liaison officer	
Job purpose	To be the focus of communication between inspection team members, and the management and staff of the establishment.
Who should the liaison officer be?	Someone who knows the establishment well and where to go to get information. It helps if this person has the respect of their peers and is flexible and able to adapt to changes. This person will need to be reliable, motivated and available throughout the IRP period.
Preparation tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Liaise with the organising inspector about logistical requirements for the IRP, for example gate passes, keys, car parking arrangements, laptop permissions.• Organise a base room large enough for approximately six people, with an external telephone line, extension leads and staff contacts list, and access to tea, coffee and water if possible.• Provide requested information, documentation and data electronically in advance as requested (see 'Before the visit' section).• Collate any additional information in hard copy.• Arrange a venue for the presentation at 12.30pm on day one.
Tasks during the IRP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make contact with the team three times a day during the IRP visit to meet additional requests or to manage any difficulties the team may be experiencing, at times to be agreed.
Tasks after the IRP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure the material requested and used by the inspection team is destroyed or returned to the correct departments.• Respond to any further requests from the HMI Prisons team.