



Detainees under escort:
Inspection of escort and removals to

India

by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

25–26 March 2025

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Introduction

This report is on the first large-scale charter removal of detainees to India and involved 45 Indian detainees, including one woman.

Staff treated those being removed with high levels of respect and consideration, and the recording of these interactions had improved. Leaders had made efforts to encourage staff professionalism, including through a clear emphasis at staff briefings on the standards of conduct expected, and they had also introduced a new standardised uniform.

Home office staff were present throughout the removals and were available to update detainees. It was also positive that little force was used, although in the one case where it was, a waist restraint belt remained in place for too long without the detainee's compliance being tested.

Many of those being removed knew what day they were scheduled to leave the country, but were not aware of any further details, making it difficult to plan for their arrival in India. Many were anxious, and one was placed on constant supervision and support shortly before his handover.

Information sharing with escort staff on the vulnerabilities and risks relating to individual detainees had improved but was still variable. Not enough attention was given to the needs of women being transported with men, and detainees were not always allowed to use the toilets in privacy.

This report describes a well-organised operation and generally good treatment of detainees in the context of a sustained improvement in staff culture. We have identified a small number of remaining areas for improvement.

Charlie Taylor

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

June 2025

Summary of key findings

What needs to improve

During this inspection, we identified two key concerns. Leaders should make sure that all concerns identified here are addressed and that progress is tracked through a plan which sets out how and when the concerns will be resolved. The plan should be provided to HMI Prisons.

Key concerns

1. **Detainees were not allowed to use the toilets with complete privacy.** This practice was not always based on an individual risk assessment.
2. **Menstrual care products were not readily available to women detainees.**

Progress on concerns

At our last inspection of escort and removals on a charter flight, we raised some areas of concern. At this inspection we found that one of these concerns had been addressed and four had been partially addressed. No concerns had not been addressed.

Notable positive practice

Inspectors found no examples of notable positive practice during this inspection.

The removal in brief

Forty-five detainees, including one woman, boarded the aircraft at Bournemouth Airport, together with 115 escort staff, plus two paramedics and two interpreters. They had travelled from the immigration removal centres (IRCs) at Brook House, Colnbrook and Yarl's Wood. Three were returning voluntarily, who were benefiting from the facilitated return scheme (see Glossary). The destination was New Delhi, India.

The longest journey time, from boarding a coach at Yarl's Wood IRC to arriving on stand in India, was just over 15 hours.

Leadership

Leaders continued to promote a decent and respectful approach towards detainees. Staff briefings emphasised the professional standards and conduct expected of them. A new uniform dress code had been introduced, in an attempt to present a more professional image.

Leaders had responded effectively to previous concerns about the routine opening of personal medical notes without the detainee's consent. They had recently improved information sharing about detainee vulnerability and risk with

escorting staff by allocating detainees to specific staff, although this was in its infancy.

Section 1 Safety

Preparation and departure from removal centres

Expected outcomes: Detainees are escorted in safety and due regard is given to individual needs and risks. Removals are conducted in accordance with law. Security and good order are maintained through proportional operational arrangements and force is only used as a last resort.

- 1.1 In our interviews, most detainees were aware of the day on which they would be removed, but none knew when or where in India they would be going. They told us that this made it difficult for them to arrange to be met in India or to plan any onward travel needs. Some detainees said that they had no address or means of support in the country.
- 1.2 After talking to centre staff, two men held in the care and separation unit (see Glossary) at Brook House before leaving the centre freely walked to the collection point to meet escorting staff.
- 1.3 The staff briefing at the muster point was thorough. Staff were reminded of the standards of conduct expected and the need to focus on the welfare of the detainee in their care, the proper use and recording of force, and information they should share with detainees on first meeting them. Escorting staff were allocated specific detainees, to improve their understanding of individual risks and vulnerabilities. They were made aware of the individuals' backgrounds before being introduced to them at the searching stage of the collection process. This was a positive initiative, although not yet implemented consistently.
- 1.4 At the IRCs, all escort coach commanders were respectful, and introduced themselves to each detainee and addressed them by their name, but not all escorting staff introduced themselves. Detainees were given an opportunity to note contact numbers from their personal devices and were told that they could use a mobile phone on the coach to contact solicitors, family and friends. Private cash was withdrawn from accounts and returned to the detainees before they left the centre. In one case, a detainee reported having left a religious book in his room and centre staff were able to retrieve this for him so that it could be packed with the rest of his property.
- 1.5 Detainees were asked if they needed interpreting services, and interpreters were available at all the centres for the collection process, although they were not always used when needed. For example, at Yarl's Wood, a detainee clearly did not understand what staff were trying to tell them while their property was being processed. A few coaches did not have an interpreter travelling on them, and we observed staff and, in one case, a detainee being asked to translate, which in the latter case was not appropriate as it concerned personal

information in regard to the detainee being cancelled from the flight. Two interpreters were present to assist during the flight.

- 1.6 Centre health care staff were in attendance at the collection points. They administered medication where necessary and handed the remainder over to escorting paramedics, with whom they conducted a verbal handover about individual detainees' health care needs. Sealed personal medical notes were handed over to escorting staff and all were aware that these should only be opened in the event of a medical emergency.

Safeguarding adults and personal safety

Expected outcomes: Detainees are escorted in safety with due regard for their vulnerability. Security and good order are maintained through proportionate operational arrangements and force is only used as a last resort.

- 1.7 Searches at all IRCs were proportionate and respectful, but were conducted in small side rooms, which lacked privacy as doors and curtains were not closed. Staff and observers not involved in the search often stood at the entrance to the rooms.
- 1.8 Detainees were advised during the collection process that they would be filmed when boarding coaches and the aircraft.
- 1.9 One detainee on collection was subject to constant supervision as a result of his low mood and risk of self-harm. This was clearly communicated to his escorting officers, one of whom was able to speak to him in his own language, which helped to relieve some of his concerns and anxieties.
- 1.10 A waist restraint belt (see Glossary) was used for one male detainee and was justified, given that he had made a threatening comment to damage the plane. A guiding hold (see Glossary) was used to escort him to a van, which transported him separately from other detainees. He was last to board the aircraft, and the belt was not removed until after take-off, almost seven hours after it was applied. His person escort record (PER; see Glossary) suggested that he was cooperative throughout, but his compliance was not tested at any point during the transfer, to consider minimising the time he spent in the restraint. He was checked by a paramedic once his restraint had been removed.
- 1.11 Handcuffs were used to transfer nine detainees from one coach to another at a safe location, after the first coach developed a fault. Handcuffs were applied for the shortest time possible, and this was reasonable in the circumstances (see also paragraph 2.2).
- 1.12 Two detainees were presented to escorting staff in handcuffs after non-compliance and self-harm in the centre, and both were placed in a waist restraint belt, with leg restraints also used on one. In both cases, these items were removed quickly after these individuals' removals

were cancelled on the way to the airport. In two other cases, handcuffs were used for non-compliance and removed quickly, as soon as the detainee became cooperative. Records from the previous four scheduled flight removals to India indicated that some form of force had been used during all of these operations and was justified in the presenting circumstances.

- 1.13 Two women detainees shared a coach with a number of male detainees from Yarl's Wood IRC. They were boarded first, and the men clearly were aware of their presence on board the coach as they had to pass them to get to their seats, which did not protect the women's privacy. The husband of one of the women was also travelling on the same coach and they were allowed to sit in close proximity while travelling to the airport and then together on the flight, which was appropriate. The second woman had her removal cancelled during the coach journey and did not board the flight.

Legal rights

Expected outcomes: Detainees can exercise their legal rights. Removals are conducted in accordance with law.

- 1.14 Several detainees had their removal cancelled as a result of legal interventions, including one after arrival at the airport. Most detainees had access to a legal representative and spoke to them before boarding the plane.
- 1.15 All detainees had access to a mobile phone on the coach and plane, which they could use to contact legal representatives, family or friends.
- 1.16 Home Office staff were available at all the IRCs to deal with any last-minute updates relating to detainees' cases. On boarding the plane, detainees were advised that they could speak to a chief immigration officer (CIO) during the flight. The CIO's surgery was held with the two interpreters present. This was reasonably relaxed and sufficiently private.

Section 2 Respect

Physical conditions and property

Expected outcomes: Detainees are escorted in decent physical conditions and individual needs are addressed. Detainees are treated with humanity and respect.

- 2.1 Detainees' property was managed well in the centres before it was loaded onto the coaches, and each detainee was able to check that the correct property was being returned with them.
- 2.2 One coach broke down on the way to the airport and had to be replaced (see also paragraph 1.11). Another coach narrowly avoided a collision. While no detainees were injured in the latter incident, a staff member had to be taken to hospital as they had received a head injury when the coach braked sharply.
- 2.3 The longest transfer time from boarding the coach to entering the aircraft was just under eight hours for a detainee travelling from Yarl's Wood. Efforts were being made to stagger pick-up times and reduce the time that detainees spent on the coach before boarding the flight.
- 2.4 Food and water were offered regularly on the coaches, but there was a limited choice of vegetarian snacks and no vegan option. Detainees were offered hot drinks on some, but not all, of the coaches. Similarly, at the airport, hot drinks were not made available to the detainees. Suitable hot food and drinks were readily provided on the flight.
- 2.5 On the coaches and flight, we observed a mix of practices when detainees wanted to use the toilet. While many were allowed to close, but not lock, the toilet doors, some staff continued to use wedges to jam the doors slightly ajar, which was not based on individual risk assessments in some cases. For the two women travelling by coach from Yarl's Wood, the toilet door was held slightly open by staff, which on at least one occasion was not sufficiently private for the woman within.
- 2.6 All detainees were routinely offered nicotine replacement products and compression socks during the coach journey and flight. A few detainees asked to be allowed to change into fresh clothing and different footwear for their journey, and this was facilitated during the collection process.
- 2.7 On board the aircraft, pillows were not available and there was a limited stock of blankets on board, resulting in very few being issued for the overnight flight.

Respectful treatment

Expected outcomes: Detainees are treated with respect by all staff. Effective complaints procedures are in place for detainees. There is understanding of detainees' diverse cultural backgrounds. Detainees' health care needs are met.

- 2.8 Overall, the treatment of detainees during the coach transfers and flight was good. We observed escorting staff checking how detainees wished to be addressed, with many having friendly conversations on the coaches and during the flight. Many tried hard to maintain positive and respectful communications with detainees throughout their journey, despite the difficulty of some individuals not speaking, or having limited understanding of, English. Some staff could communicate with detainees in their own language when interpreters were not readily available.
- 2.9 One detainee identified that he had not received some items of property taken by immigration enforcement officers when he was detained at his home address. Staff advised him to submit a complaint, and he was issued with a complaint form in his own language, as were all the detainees. Six complaints were submitted during the flight, in relation to several concerns, all of which were forwarded to relevant parties for investigation.
- 2.10 A few detainees needed medical treatment for minor ailments or the administration of prescribed medication during their removal, all of which was attended to by paramedics. All detainees had their personal medical notes returned to them shortly before landing, but some declined to accept these and left them on the plane.
- 2.11 Female detainees were appropriately searched and escorted by female staff. Menstrual care products were not readily available to them either in the holding room at Yarl's Wood or on the coach or flight.
- 2.12 We reviewed almost half of detainees' PERs once they had disembarked. We noted that, following the introduction of an escort checklist for the completion of PERs, the consistency of information recorded in these documents was continuing to improve, with most being completed well during both the coach journey and flight, clearly recording the mood, actions and interactions of the detainees.

Section 3 Preparation for reintegration

Expected outcomes: Detainees are prepared for their arrival and early days in the destination country. Any unacceptable behaviour in destination countries is appropriately challenged.

- 3.1 Many detainees told us that they had not lived in India for some time, and a few said that they had no family or friends in the country and feared that they would be homeless on their return.
- 3.2 At the IRCs, all detainees were given a useful leaflet, in their own language, which contained details of an organisation (IRARA) which could provide a range of support on arrival in India.
- 3.3 Three detainees were removed under the facilitated return scheme (see Glossary), which would provide some financial assistance to help with their reintegration in India. These detainees were given cash cards during the flight, to reassure them that their eligibility for the scheme had been supported.
- 3.4 Disembarkation was slow but managed effectively, and there were no incidents during this process. UK Home Office staff based at the British High Commission in New Delhi were present to liaise with the Indian authorities on the airfield, before the detainees boarded a shuttle bus to the airport.

Section 4 Progress on concerns from the last inspection

Concerns raised at the last inspection

The following is a list of all the concerns raised in the report of our last inspection of an overseas escort to Albania in December 2023.

Safety

Concerns

Despite wanting to return voluntarily, many people were held in detention for several weeks before their flight.

Partially addressed

The routine opening of personal medical notes without the detainee's consent breached medical confidentiality.

Addressed

Information about vulnerability and risk was not clearly communicated to escort staff or paramedics. [Safety]

Partially addressed

Interpretation was not always used when required and the need for interpreters was poorly assessed at detention centres.

Partially addressed

Respect

Concern

Detainees were not always allowed to use toilets with complete privacy.

Partially addressed

Appendix I About our inspections and reports

All inspections carried out by HM Inspectorate of Prisons contribute to the UK's response to its international obligations under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). OPCAT requires that all places of detention are visited regularly by independent bodies – known as the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) – which monitors the treatment of and conditions for detainees. Escorts are included in this remit. HM Inspectorate of Prisons is one of several bodies making up the NPM in the UK.

All Inspectorate of Prisons reports carry a summary of the conditions and treatment of detainees, based on the tests of a healthy establishment that were first introduced in this Inspectorate's thematic review *Suicide is everyone's concern*, published in 1999. For inspections of escorts and removals the tests are:

- Safety
- Respect
- Preparation for reintegration.

Our assessments might result in identification of **areas of concern**. Concerns identify the areas where there are significant weaknesses in the treatment of and conditions for detainees. To be addressed they will require a change in practice and/or new or redirected resources. Concerns are summarised at the beginning of inspection reports and the body of the report sets out the issues in more detail.

We also provide examples of **notable positive practice** in our reports. These list innovative work or practice that leads to particularly good outcomes from which other providers may be able to learn. Inspectors look for evidence of good outcomes for detainees; original, creative or particularly effective approaches to problem-solving or achieving the desired goal; and how other providers could learn from or replicate the practice.

This report

This report outlines the priority and key concerns identified during the inspection. There then follow three sections each containing a detailed account of our findings against our *Expectations for immigration detention. Criteria for assessing the conditions for and treatment of immigration detainees* (Version 4, 2018) (available on our website at [Expectations – HM Inspectorate of Prisons \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/expectations-hm-inspectorate-of-prisons/)). Section 5 lists the concerns raised at the previous inspection and our assessment of whether they have been addressed.

Inspection team

This inspection was carried out by:

Fiona Shearlaw	Team leader
Rachel Badman	Inspector
Martin Kettle	Inspector
Harriet Leaver	Inspector
Alice Oddy	Inspector
Jessie Wilson	Inspector

Appendix II Glossary

We try to make our reports as clear as possible, and this short glossary should help to explain some of the specialist terms you may find.

Facilitated return scheme (RFS)

Early removal scheme for foreign national offenders (FNOs) to their country of origin. The FRS provides some financial support for reintegration.

Care and separation unit (CSU)

A unit for detainees removed from association with others on the main residential units, under rule 40 (removal from association) or rule 42 (temporary confinement) of the Detention Centre Rules 2001.

Constant supervision

Also known as constant watch, this takes place when the risk of suicide is deemed high, and so the detainee is directly observed by a specific officer for 24 hours a day.

Waist restraint belt (WRB)

A restraint system that allows a detainee to sit and travel comfortably but still be restrained.

Guiding hold

Where an officer takes hold of a detainee's arm, to guide them when walking. This is recorded as a use of force.

Person escort record

The key document for ensuring that information about detainees' risk and health issues is communicated to escort staff and that their mood, actions and interactions with escort staff are recorded during their removal.

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