



UK BORDER AGENCY
Professional Standards Unit
Complaints and Correspondence Standards and Performance Directorate

An investigation into the allegations made by Louise Perrett about her experiences working for the UK Border Agency

Introduction

The report summarises the investigation by the UK Border Agency Professional Standards Unit (PSU) into the allegations made by Louise Perrett about her experience working for the UK Border Agency in Cardiff. Ms Perrett's concern was that she believed staff within the UK Border Agency in Cardiff were allowed to act in certain ways and to say things that affected their decision making in asylum cases and that there are no sanctions for this. She also believed that there was a culture that allowed bad behaviour.

The report considers:

- Whether there is evidence that supports the allegations made by Ms Perrett and if so whether individuals committed any disciplinary offence
- Whether there is any organisational learning for the UK Border Agency or recommendations to improve the UK Border Agency in the future.

Summary of Investigation

The report was commissioned by Hugh Ind, Strategic Director for Protection

Investigating officers from the PSU interviewed Ms Perrett about her allegations. They also interviewed a total of 15 staff from the Asylum Teams in Cardiff as a result of the information she provided and another six provided responses in writing to one of the allegations. During the course of the investigation two other members of staff made contact with the investigation team with information. However both changed their minds and declined to participate.

The investigation gathered statistical information and details of the quality assurance processes in place to consider whether there was a culture of disbelief of asylum applicants.

Since Ms Perrett had been employed through a recruitment agency, contact was made with them to establish whether or not Ms Perrett had expressed any concerns to them about the conduct of any UK Border Agency Staff or whether any other staff they had placed in the UK Border Agency had expressed any concerns about their experiences.

Overview of Findings

The allegations Ms Perrett made were separated into two sections: potential misconduct that if proven could lead to disciplinary action and personal opinion's that Ms Perrett has expressed about her experiences working for the UK Border Agency but in which there are no staff identified as having potentially committed any misconduct offence. There were 20 allegations in total and the investigation team considered all of them closely.

Conclusions

The investigation found that all allegations are unsubstantiated except for the concerns about the toy monkey.

The investigation found no evidence to corroborate Ms Perrett's claims that there is a cultural problem within the asylum teams in Cardiff which allows bad behaviour or that staff have made the inappropriate comments as alleged. As such it was concluded that none of the staff subject to the investigation had committed any disciplinary offence.

The report makes some criticism of the Asylum Team that held the 'grant monkey'. Although it was concluded that Ms Perrett misinterpreted its significance it was accepted that her misconception of it could have been felt by others and as such it was unwelcome. The investigation established that the 'grant monkey' was not used as a badge of shame as alleged however it accepted that its subsequent removal from the office was correct. No further action needs to be taken in respect of this matter.

There was a concern that the PCS union had circulated advice to their members not to cooperate with any requests from the PSU for information from staff outside of those directly invited to interviews. It was not possible to establish if this directly affected the investigation, or whether any individuals who choose not to come forward have been affected by this advice.

There is a minor criticism in the handling of Ms Perrett's concerns about the behaviour of staff which she has attempted to raise. As an agency member of staff she felt unable to raise her concerns through any formal process. Concerns that she raised informally were not documented which the report finds disappointing.

Staff reported that they were aware of the procedures to follow should they have any concerns and were content that these would be listened to. However consideration should be given to further promotion in the Cardiff office of the procedures to follow and an environment where staff are comfortable raising concerns without fear of criticism from other staff.

Recommendations

The report makes a number of recommendations. They are that:

- There should be no disciplinary charges brought in respect of the UK Border Agency officers involved in this investigation.
- Consideration should be given to it becoming a disciplinary offence for staff to fail to challenge inappropriate behaviour. It further recommends that consideration should be given to whether there are other ways in which inappropriate behaviour can be routinely challenged by all staff.
- The UK Border Agency should consider engagement with the PCS concerning advice they gave to their members not to come forward with evidence for the investigation to encourage full cooperation from Union representatives.
- The Agency should consider whether there is a need for a mentoring process for new or temporary members of staff ensuring that they are able to address concerns formally and without fear of penalty.
- Cardiff staff should be reminded of the appropriate channels in which to raise concerns ensuring they know how to access it and provided support when doing so.
- Consideration should be given to minimum contract terms for staff undertaking roles in which a large amount of time is invested in their training.
- All staff within the Wales and South West Region should be reminded of the appropriate tests that can be used to assess the credibility of an applicant's claim.