By email

Dear Chair,

The department recently wrote to the Public Accounts Committee in response to its report on the handling of Windrush. Within that report, the Committee recommended that, 'in its design and roll out of Atlas, the department should prioritise improving the quality of its data'. Having provided our initial reply to this recommendation in the response published on 10th June 2019, we committed to providing further information specifically on data cleansing, migration of the existing case files and controls around the input of new data.

ATLAS is being rolled out across three streams that reflect the different types of casework currently performed in the in-country caseworking system, Case Information Database (CID); namely, Visas and Citizenship casework, Asylum and Complex casework and Immigration Enforcement and Borders casework. It is being rolled out incrementally, enabling a phased migration of users and transactions, due to complete by March 2020.

The remainder of this letter provides a detailed picture of: how we are using migration as an opportunity to cleanse the data we already hold; how we are ensuring that future data capture practices automatically improve data quality; and how we are improving data quality and assurance practices more generally.
Migration of historic data

The migration of historic casework data from both CID and CRS, the out-of-country casework system, to ATLAS is being performed alongside the roll-out of each of the above strands. The migration of both CID and CRS data to ATLAS is now enabling caseworkers to view a much more complete record of the immigration history of a person through a single view, which is in turn supporting the improved consideration of each case. Detailed plans for the management of migration in each case have been prepared through the appropriate design board and scrutinised through programme governance channels. The completion of the data migration itself has then been managed through data migration rehearsals in an accredited live data environment.

Consistency testing has been performed throughout the migration of both CID and CRS data. This has involved checking that all records fed in through controlled testing have been imported as expected. In addition, the import processes themselves perform lookup and consistency checks, and reject any records that fail the import process. Each data migration failure is managed through an incident system, which also tracks resolutions, ensuring the accuracy and consistency of the data migrations, and that no data is ‘lost’.

CRS data transfer was agreed between the Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office and appropriate sign-off sought as part of security accreditation, covering the encryption of the network layer and the safeguards required for the importing of the data. This has been operational since November 2015, with the main import of data being active from April 2016.

Improved Data Capture

ATLAS represents a significant improvement on CID for enhancing the accuracy of new case-work data processing. ATLAS will move away from the use of textual notes as far as is possible and instead use dedicated workflows to capture data in a consistent structured format. This includes the use of standardised reference data and other tools for ensuring consistency across and ease of communication between systems, for example country lists, nationalities, locations and decision types. ATLAS also includes new screen designs and workflows that have been designed with significant oversight from relevant policy teams. This standardises and assures the way in which caseworkers record information into the system.

Other aspects of the way CID works, which have caused data quality issues over time, have also been designed out of ATLAS. For example, the “Special Conditions” flags in CID are used to capture information about the case or person, but the volume of flags available and the way their use over time has evolved has caused problems. In ATLAS, these have been replaced with “Person Alerts”, which avoids this issue by: making Person Alerts more intuitive; restricting the use of Person
Alerts to need-to-know information, keeping the number of Person Alerts to a minimum and avoiding their mis-use; and providing the ability to maintain a lifecycle of Person Alerts. ATLAS also provides the capability to automatically generate workflow tasks where a Person Alert exists; for example, to prevent the completion of a case consideration without the acknowledgement of a Person Alert, or to require a manager approval where a Person Alert exists, depending on the category of the Person Alert.

In terms of embedding good practice more generally, as we roll-out ATLAS, we are also re-designing the role of the Information Asset Owner to ensure more accountability for data quality at the point of capture and onwards through the chain of processing. The Home Office’s Digital, Data and Technology team is also providing dedicated resources to carry out data profiling and analysis to target poor quality data. We are investing in specialist software and training for managing data governance processes. The pilot for use of this software has completed and the software will be rolled-out in line with ATLAS by the end of 2019.

Wider Data Cleansing and Quality Activity

In 2017, a team was established, dedicated to targeted data cleansing as part of wider data quality work within the Borders, Immigration and Citizenship System (BICS). The team has built up substantial capability and expertise and is able to respond quickly and efficiently to emerging data quality issues. The team has prioritised work to cleanse data, including to support the roll out of new technology. In one example, the team has addressed data quality issues linked to contact details. This had been preventing the department from communicating with and correctly managing an individual’s case. In another, the team has cleansed data relating to adults at risk within immigration detention, allowing the Home Office to provide accurate information as part of an inspection by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration.

I do hope this letter provides the Committee with the information it was seeking. We are of course happy to answer any further questions the Committee may have.
Yours sincerely,

Philip Rutnam  Shona Dunn