



Detainees under escort:
Inspection of escort and removals to

Albania

by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

22–23 February 2023

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Introduction

This removal operation to Albania went smoothly, and all detainees were compliant throughout. We have been inspecting these operations for a number of years and have noted areas of improvement, but we have also seen some persistently negative features, particularly in the disproportionate application of some security measures and in the treatment of detainees.

On this occasion, it was encouraging to see changes in some practices on which we have often commented. For example, guiding holds were not used at any stage – detainees were allowed to shut the door when using the toilet and staff very rarely talked at length to each other when they were directly supervising detainees. There were now more staff, and some had begun to make the effort to address and refer to detainees by name. The small team responsible for security appeared less intimidating than in the past. These developments were all in response to specific instructions from managers at Mitie Care and Custody, the escort contractor.

Those being removed were positive about how staff treated them, and, while we have noted some remaining concerns, there were some signs that changes in the management of the contracted service had led to better staff performance. In an uncomplicated operation such as this one, there was little to test how firmly embedded these improvements were, but it is right to acknowledge them.

Charlie Taylor

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

March 2023

Summary of key findings

What needs to improve

During this inspection we identified four 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 fully informed of the details of their removal.** Most detainees did not know what time they would be collected or when they would arrive at their destination.
2. **Detainees spent up to seven hours on coaches. This added to the stresses on the more vulnerable of them.**
3. **Although some staff referred to detainees by their names, many still used their manifest numbers only.**
4. **Interpretation was not used sufficiently.** Not all centres had interpreters on site, and they were not always used appropriately.

Progress on recommendations

At our last inspection we made some recommendations about areas of concern. At this inspection we found that one of the recommendations had been achieved, three had been partially achieved, one had not been achieved and one did not apply on this occasion.

Notable positive practice

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

The removal in brief

Twenty-six detainees boarded the aircraft at Liverpool John Lennon Airport together with 57 escort staff, including two paramedics and an interpreter. They had been brought in coaches from the immigration removal centres (IRCs) at Brook House, Colnbrook and Yarl's Wood, as well as from the residential short-term holding facility in Manchester. Twenty were returning voluntarily, 14 of whom were benefiting from the facilitated return scheme (see Glossary). The destination was Tirana, Albania.

The longest journey, from boarding a coach at Harmondsworth to landing at Tirana, was 12.5 hours. The escort contractor was Mitie Care and Custody.

Leadership

Leadership had improved. First-line managers had been given more responsibility for the performance of their staff, and there were early signs of an improvement in the working culture. Senior managers were more involved in the operation – the service delivery manager accompanied the flight and attended the muster for most of the escort removals. Overall, managers' interactions with detention custody officers (DCOs) seemed to have improved.

The strong DCO culture, which had sustained itself for many years, showed early signs of becoming more positive through changes in terms and conditions. Managers also described how they were using data more often, for example to shorten the time detainees spent at the IRC by spotting the pinch points and the stages at which delays tended to occur.

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 Detainees had arrived at three of the four immigration removal centres (IRCs) at least two nights before the flight. They had arrived at Manchester residential short-term holding facility (RSTHF) on the afternoon of 21 February, less than the expected 48 hours before the operation. All of these detainees had been brought from prison.
- 1.2 Those we interviewed before the flight were all positive about how staff in the centre treated them. Most detainees were aware of their departure date, but not of the time they would be leaving (see paragraph 3.1).
- 1.3 At Yarl's Wood IRC, detainees were all held for some hours before the removal in what was described as a dual-purpose pre-departure unit/care and separation unit. Staff said they were being held under Rule 15, a general detention centre rule about certifying detainee sleeping accommodation. We were told that when this was operating as a pre-departure unit, detainees could move freely around the unit, and access the garden, fax machines and IT equipment; although when we visited shortly before departure, the detainees were locked in their rooms. At all the other centres, detainees remained in their own room on a normal wing and could move around freely, up to the time of embarkation.
- 1.4 Escorting staff were attentive during the briefings before the operation began. They were reminded of the key issues, including detainees' potential vulnerability, the proper use of force and the need to focus on detainee welfare. Managers had correctly identified some deficiencies in records for the previous flight and staff were reminded to make full and accurate records.
- 1.5 Coach commanders introduced themselves to each detainee and we observed some respectful interactions. One of them made no attempt to address detainees by name. Detainees were told about the use of mobile phones, searching procedures and what would happen with their property.
- 1.6 Interpretation was not used enough. Two interpreters had been booked for the operation, one of whom went on the flight. There was no interpreter at Colnbrook or Harmondsworth IRCs, where the number being removed was highest. We observed situations where

interpretation should have been used but was not. At Colnbrook, the coach commander phoned the interpreter at another site to help with an interview, but this delayed matters at both centres. At Yarl's Wood, the coach commander greeted the detainee briefly, but then left the interpreter to explain what would happen, which was inappropriate even though the interpreter knew the process well.

- 1.7 Health care staff in the centre brought medication to the departure area, but apart from at Manchester RSTHF, they did not brief the paramedic in person. Medics took detainees' temperature, sometimes without providing an explanation.

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.

- 1.8 All detainees had indicated that they were willing to comply with the removal. They were searched thoroughly and respectfully before departure, with reasonable privacy.
- 1.9 No detainees had been assessed as needing support through the assessment, care in detention and teamwork (ACDT) process for those at risk of suicide or self-harm or a vulnerable adult care plan. One detainee had a history of self-harm, aggression towards staff, presenting a risk to women and children, and harassment. This was recorded on their risk assessment but not flagged on the front of the person escort record, which meant some staff might not have seen the information. Another detainee, who was unhappy about being removed, declined food and drink on the coach and did not interact with staff. Staff monitored the two men closely and offered support.
- 1.10 Guiding holds were not used while detainees were boarding the aircraft or throughout the operation. No force was used at any stage, and no waist restraint belts were applied.
- 1.11 We examined records from the previous three charter flights. Waist restraint belts had been used on six detainees for sufficiently documented reasons, apart from in one instance, which appeared to be precautionary and not based on any specific evidence of risk. The belts were usually removed shortly after take-off, but it was not always clear why they remained on for as long as they did. Staff were recorded as trying to defuse tension and anxiety, but the lack of interpretation had hindered this in some cases. There was insufficient documentation on the care and management of one person who was being supported under the ACDT process.
- 1.12 Most of the person escort records were completed well and interactions, detainees' mood and what they said were recorded in full. In a few cases the records did no more than track the main events of

the journey. In one detainee's file, there were two IS91s forms (which legally authorise formal detention), which had conflicting information relevant to their risk.

Legal rights

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

- 1.13 Most detainees said they had not needed a solicitor, having opted for a voluntary return. Those who did need legal advice, said they could easily contact their solicitor.
- 1.14 On each coach there were mobile phones that detainees could use to contact legal representatives, family or friends. On one coach, they were unable to make phone calls to numbers in Albania and staff worked hard to rectify this, so they could do so before the flight took off.
- 1.15 The chief immigration officer held a surgery on the plane, using the interpreter when needed. One detainee received help to submit a complaint, having received no response to his facilitated return scheme claim (see Glossary). He was also concerned that his ID was missing, and staff resolved this issue.
- 1.16 Home Office staff were available at one of the centres before departure, and they monitored the operation throughout.

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 Centre staff prepared detainees well for departure. They were offered warm jackets, gloves and hats for the journey. Centre staff and managers at Yarl's Wood made considerable efforts to find a sum of money, which had accompanied a detainee from prison but was not to hand in the departure area.
- 2.2 Food and drink were offered regularly on the coaches and during the flight. Every detainee received a pillow pack, which was an improvement on previous inspections.
- 2.3 Toilet doors were no longer routinely kept slightly open when detainees were using them. On this occasion, the wedge was not used at all, and staff asked detainees to shut the door but not lock it. We were told that the wedge would only be used on the basis of an individual risk assessment, which was an improvement on past practice.
- 2.4 The longest time from boarding the coach to entering the aircraft was seven hours and 15 minutes. Efforts were being made to streamline the process, but some spent up to two hours on a coach before leaving the centre.

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.

- 2.5 We observed some positive staff interactions with detainees throughout the operation. Escorting staff focused more on detainees and did not have loud conversations with each other to the extent that has often been observed previously. Conversations with detainees were constructive and officers asked about their plans on return, family ties and the country in general.
- 2.6 The security team was vigilant but inconspicuous, which was an improvement on many previous inspections. They monitored detainees during the journey but in a tactful manner. Their dress and manner were similar to that of other staff, and they appeared less intimidating than in the past.

- 2.7 Up to the point of boarding the aircraft, some detainees had not had sufficient access to interpretation (see paragraph 1.6). On the aircraft, however, the interpreter moved among them until all detainees were settled and had had their questions answered.
- 2.8 A paramedic at each site took detainees' temperature before they boarded the coach, but they did not always explain why they did this or ask about their health or well-being. Escorting staff offered those who smoked a nicotine replacement product. Two paramedics travelled on the flight.
- 2.9 Each detainee received a Home Office complaint form before leaving the centre. We observed one complaint being made during the operation (see paragraph 1.15).
- 2.10 Distraction boxes were offered on the coaches and some detainees were playing card games with their escort, while others slept.
- 2.11 Managers had directed staff to use detainees' names and not numbers, but this did not always happen during the processing stages. Nevertheless, they were never referred to loudly in their presence by a number, which was an improvement.

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 All detainees had been informed of the date they would be returning to Albania, but not everyone was aware of the departure or arrival times. This caused anxiety when detainees wanted to inform their families and friends and make plans for when they arrived at their destination. Before leaving the immigration removal centre or short-term holding facility, all detainees were given a leaflet called Returning to Albania, in Albanian.
- 3.2 Those participating in the facilitated return scheme (see Glossary) received their cash cards early on in the flight. On previous flights they had received them shortly before landing, which had led to anxiety and detainees asking questions during the flight. Any medication was returned to the detainee shortly before landing.
- 3.3 There were no incidents during disembarkation and several detainees expressed their thanks to staff as they were leaving the aircraft. Police were present as they disembarked, but they made their own way to a transit bus.

Section 4 Progress on concerns from the last inspection

Concerns from the last inspection

The following is a list of all the key concerns contained in the report of our last inspection of an overseas escort (Zimbabwe, September 2022).

Safety

Key concerns

Not all detainees were aware of the details of their removal. This included information about collection, departure and arrival times.

Not achieved

Flight manifests and person escort records (PERs) did not always provide consistent information. PERs had conflicting information and information was not always well recorded.

Partially achieved

Women and men were made to share the same coach to the airport, even when risks had been highlighted. Women were also made to board the aircraft after some men, having to walk past them.

No women were removed on this occasion

Detainees spent too long on coaches before boarding the aircraft.

Partially achieved

Respect

Key concerns

Detainees were not allowed to use the toilets with complete privacy. This practice was not based on individual risk assessment.

Achieved

Although some staff referred to detainees by their names, many used their manifest numbers only, which was impersonal.

Partially achieved

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**. Key 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. Priority concerns are those that inspectors believe are the most urgent and important and which should be attended to immediately. Key concerns and priority 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 <https://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/our-expectations/immigration-detention-expectations/>). Section 5 lists the recommendations from the previous inspection and our assessment of whether they have been achieved.

Inspection team

This inspection was carried out by:

Martin Kettle	Team leader
Deri Hughes-Roberts	Inspector
Steve Oliver-Watts	Inspector
Chelsey Pattison	Inspector
Dionne Walker	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. If you need an explanation of any other terms, please see the longer glossary, available on our website at: <http://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprison/about-our-inspections/>

Facilitated return scheme (FRS)

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

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Printed and published by:
HM Inspectorate of Prisons
3rd floor
10 South Colonnade
Canary Wharf
London
E14 4PU
England

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