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**Migration, Nationality and  
Detention**

# Interviews:

Karen Abdel-Hady and Jo Henney<sup>1</sup>

*Karen Abdel-Hady is Deputy Director, Head of Detention Operations, Returns Directorate, Enforcement and Crime Group, UKBA. Jo Henney is Centre Manager of IRC Harmondsworth, run by GEO.*

## Interview with Karen Abdel-Hady

**PSJ: What are your primary responsibilities in UKBA?**

**KAH:** My primary responsibility is the management and leadership of several discrete teams who are all part of the process to enforce the removal of those people who have no basis to remain here, and where they have refused to leave the country voluntarily. Specifically I am responsible for:

- ❑ The Detainee Escorting and Population Management Unit, who manage the population by positioning people, for example for documentation interviews with High Commissions and removal directions. This team also monitors the escorting contract.
- ❑ Teams within the Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs) and Cedars Pre-departure Accommodation who provide UKBA contact with detainees and monitor the contractor or prison service that run the IRC.
- ❑ Two small teams, one of which is involved in the family returns process and the other who provide internal audits of the IRCs to ensure compliance with the Detention Centre Rules and Detention Service Orders (DSOs).

**PSJ: How did you come to work in this area?**

**KAH:** I have worked in UKBA for over 20 years in a variety of roles, starting out as an immigration officer. In recent years I held a position in the Criminal Casework Directorate who consider the deportation of foreign national offenders and had lots of dealings with staff within detention operations and the immigration removal estate. When the opportunity arose for a role within the team I was keen to take it on and try and make a positive difference in a complex and highly important part of the removal system.

**PSJ: How do you see your job in UKBA developing over the next 5 years?**

**KAH:** A requirement to deliver an increased number of removals with a continued emphasis on dignified and safe detention and removal. Whilst increasing removals, my role will need to ensure a more efficient and effective service, providing excellent value

for money, and will continue to involve work with both the private sector and the prison service.

**PSJ: What are the things you are most proud of in your work?**

**KAH:** The staff I work with and our role in keeping the public safe by removing those who have no right to be in the UK, particularly those who have offended whilst staying here. The positive impact that my teams have in ensuring that escorting is safe and dignified and that the immigration removal estate is a safe and secure environment where voluntary returns are successfully promoted.

**PSJ: What is the most difficult aspect of your job?**

**KAH:** The role of UKBA is challenging but there are some areas that are particularly difficult, for example family returns which must be handled sensitively and in line with UKBA's safeguarding duties. Another particularly challenging area is dealing with those who have exhausted the legal process, have no right to be in the UK but who are non-compliant with the removal process.

**PSJ: What is UKBA doing particularly well at the moment?**

**KAH:** Recently there has been a significant improvement in how UKBA work with the prison service, in particular in the arrangements for handling foreign national offenders. There has also been a major improvement in UKBA's work with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office which has resulted in improved processes for obtaining documentation from foreign governments which is needed to facilitate an individual's removal from the UK.

**PSJ: What are some of the challenges it is facing?**

**KAH:** The challenges UKBA face remains fairly constant. Like all government departments resource constraints have an impact and the requirement to do more with less. In addition, ensuring that the positive work UKBA does is understood and acknowledged by the public and staff alike can be a challenge, given the potentially emotive subject of removing those who have no right to remain in the UK.

**PSJ: What particular issues are thrown up by having a range of IRC providers?**

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1. The interviewees were sent a number of questions, which were answered in writing and are reproduced here.

**KAH:** There are not as many as I thought there would be when I came into the Directorate as IRCs are required to follow the Detention Centre Rules and DSOs. However when a DSO is potentially open to interpretation, for example access to the internet, there can be some inconsistencies across the estate. Having identified these issues we are currently working with a variety of organisations and IRC providers to ensure consistency. Despite this I have found that in the main that all the IRC providers have been open to exchanging ideas on better ways of working and will share concerns and potential solutions.

**PSJ: Are there any differences between the private companies and prison service?**

**KAH:** I have not seen any real difference between private companies and the prison service, they all raise the same issues, for example the difficulty in removing those who don't want to return home and they are all working to ensure the most efficient and effective service possible.

**PSJ: If you could change overnight one thing about how IRCs are run, what would it be?**

**KAH:** Although steps have been taken to improve activities in the IRCs I would like to see more activities that reflect the IRC's population, which meet the high standards of the rehabilitation that is provided by prisons and which can provide detainees with a sound footing for their return home.

### Interview with Jo Henney

**PSJ: How did you come to work in this area?**

**JH:** My first venture into the custodial environment was at HMP Altcourse as a Prison Custody Officer, progressing to Senior Management. As my knowledge and experience grew I made the step into immigration removal centres at Yarls Wood as a Deputy Manager. I then moved to Campsfield House to take up my first role as Centre Manager and finally to my current role at Harmondsworth. I enjoy working with people, the dynamics of what motivates a person and working together to achieve a goal, this is where my passion lies.

To encourage new initiatives from those around me and see the positive effect each change can make on a person's life, gives me a sense of achievement that only this environment can provide.

**PSJ: What are the things you are most proud of in your work?**

**JH:** I would say I am most proud of the positive relationships that have been created between the staff and detainees. We aim to provide care and support to all those detained at Harmondsworth and creating open channels of communication is vital in achieving this. We facilitate workshops, with the aid of external agencies that provide advice and guidance on the best way to manage their case. In the days leading up to a detainee leaving us, we meet with them to ensure they are suitably prepared and have everything they need before they leave Harmondsworth. This preparation plays a key role in ensuring a successful removal. All of these elements play a vital role in assisting UK Border Agency.

**PSJ: What are the main needs of your staff?**

**JH:** Staffing issues.....more money and more holidays!! The staffing needs overlap with the needs of the detainees. They require the correct training, support and guidance and equipment in order to carry out what can be an extremely difficult role. They can then provide all of the practical and mental support that a detainee needs for their stay and for the eventual departure, either in the form of release or removal.

**PSJ: If you could change overnight one thing about the way that Harmondsworth is run, what would it be?**

**JH:** This is a difficult question to answer. Harmondsworth is the largest immigration centre in the country and holds the most challenging detainees, both in respect of behavioural and medical issues. As with all custodial environments, we have our day to day problems that arise, but through all this we have created a pleasant environment. So to answer your question, although there may be a few things that could do with being changed, I recognise the achievements we have made at Harmondsworth in conjunction with UK Border Agency in creating a safe and secure environment.