



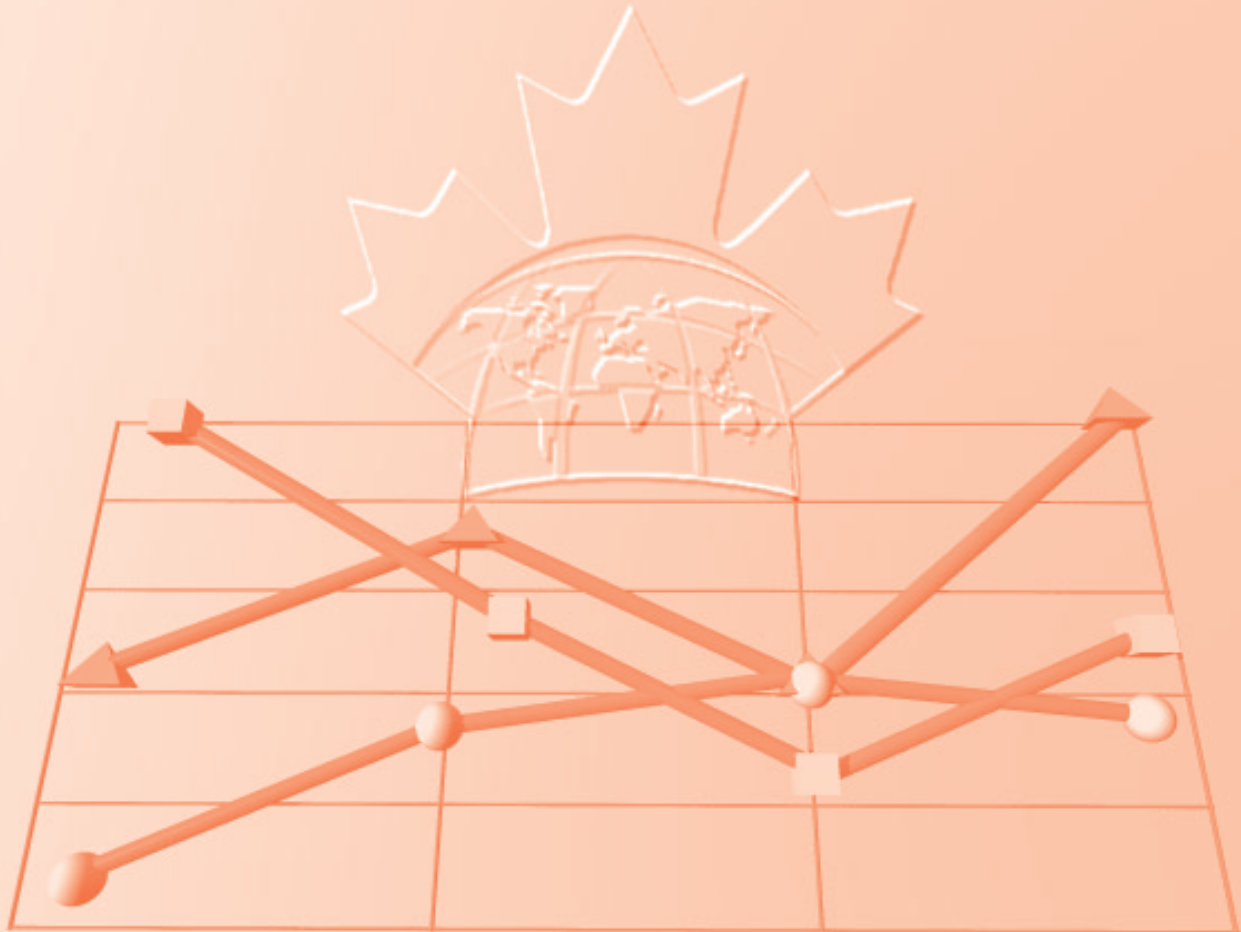
# Audits and Reviews

STRATEGIC RESEARCH RECHERCHE ET EXAMEN  
AND REVIEW STRATÉGIQUES

## - Executive Summary - Centralization of Immigration Case Processing

June 12, 2000

REVIEW UNIT UNITÉ D'EXAMEN



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For additional copies, please contact:

Communications Branch  
Citizenship and Immigration Canada  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1L1

Tel.: (613) 954-9019

Fax: (613) 954-2221

**Internet: <http://www.cic.gc.ca>**



**- Executive Summary -**

**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION CANADA**  
**Centralization of Immigration Case Processing**  
**Report**

**Prepared by**  
**Consulting and Audit Canada**  
**for**  
**Strategic Research and Review Division**  
**Strategic Policy, Planning and Research Branch**

**June 12, 2000**



## Executive Summary

This review has been commissioned by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) in order to have an independent perspective on the question of centralization of immigration case processing. It was meant to be based on a review of statistics and financial information provided by CIC as well as on field visits to one Full Service Centre (FSC), Bucharest; two Regional Program Centres (RPC), London and Buffalo; and one satellite office (SO), New York. The project was undertaken in January 2000 with the gathering and review of quantitative information pertaining to these four Posts was gathered for FY 1998-99 which was the last complete fiscal year. Field visit to the Posts listed above were conducted in February 2000.

The major observations and conclusions of the review team are the following:

### Centralization Concept

- The concept of centralization is not clearly defined. It appears to mean different things to different people and at different times. In the case of London and the US offices, it seems to refer to the Hub and Satellite concept, but the implementation has been quite different in these two cases. Centralization is currently being considered in terms of repatriating some or all immigration case processing operations to a central location in Canada, with interview work being conducted, where required, by overseas posts. Variations on this theme can be made, such as repatriating part of the process only, or processing of certain classes of applicants only. Centralization in this manner would mean an increase in offshore processing. Many concerns have been expressed regarding the potential loss of local expertise to assess documentation and interview applicants. Should the department not be able to draw on competent local expertise to conduct these activities, there is a risk that the system will be more open to abuse by some applicants.
- Offshore processing, without adequate local knowledge of an applicant's background, is inherently less efficient than local processing, since more time must be spent validating documentation and background information.
- Even though we have observed that certain aspects of centralized processing could increase the risk of poor quality decisions, it is impossible to determine whether the quality of decisions made in a centralized environment is worse than in non-centralized processing, because there is no consistent measurement or feedback of outcomes from immigrant processing.

### Centralized Organizations

- It would seem that the design intent of centralization (called Reconfiguration at the time) that was behind current arrangements in London has not been fulfilled. Some critical assumptions behind this centralization design have not proven valid: a) waiver rates have not been as high as expected; b) the satellite office has not been able to do interviews; c) there is no reporting relationship between hub and satellite; and d) there have been no improvements in IT. The London RPC is in effect operating as a FSC with a large territory. This model seems to be working satisfactorily, but a large amount of resources has to be devoted to area trips to the Gulf region. Efficiency of this operation could probably be improved if the decision to include the Gulf in the territory were to be reviewed.
- In the US, the hub and satellite offices are not operating as a network as was envisaged. Management of the satellite operations is not responsible to the management of the hub. Some informal coordination exists between the posts, but they do not comprise an integrated system. Furthermore the statistics do not indicate that the US system of hub and satellites is inherently faster than a normal RPC

or a FSC in terms of processing times; in fact according to these results the US offices as a whole took slightly longer to process the full range of cases.

- One could conclude that despite being a “satellite office” for immigration processing purposes, New York is carrying out a function quite similar to a Full Service Centre, since the local Immigration Section is fully responsible for the FD decision made, including the paper-screening / file assessment done at the Buffalo RPC.

## Processing Aspects

### *Paper-screening*

- In paper-based assessment, there is a risk of not being able to detect fraudulent documents, or exaggeration of qualifications or abilities. Without adequate local knowledge of an applicant’s background, this risk is increased. Invalid assumptions may be made e.g. about the quality of particular job categories, or employers, or other elements of file assessment. If a waiver decision is based on these assumptions, the quality of the resulting decision may be affected.

### *Processing Gap*

- When the Buffalo RPC decides that an applicant should be interviewed, and that the file should be transferred to a satellite office, they do not normally screen the file intensively, assuming that this will be done by the satellite. However the officers in the satellite assume that Buffalo has done an thorough review. The interviewing load for each officer in the satellite only allows them a brief review in the few minutes prior to the interview. This situation presents a risk of items in the application being overlooked.

### *Delegation of Effective Decision-Making*

- There is considerable delegation of effective decision-making in London and Buffalo to non-officer level (LES) personnel. Although officers have to approve these decisions, it is not always evident in the case notes that they have done so. It appears that the volume of applications is such that officers may not be able to fully review all these decisions.

## Effectiveness of Operation

- A small FSC in a low-cost environment can process immigrant applications as fast and as cost-effectively as a centralized set-up.
- This study does not show that centralization of case processing in a small number of larger centres produces better results in terms of efficiency and effectiveness.
- The cost-effectiveness of any post depends heavily on the nature of its clientele and the characteristics of its environment.
- Efficiency and effectiveness are related to the volume of applications that are directed towards a given centre and to the level of resources available to process them at any given time in the processing cycle. The specific numeric targets that are set for each Post, Officer or LES translate into a the amount of time that a given production unit can afford to use to contribute to Final Disposition decisions. Considering the limited number of resources available, there is potential for a trade-off between quality and quantity that cannot be ignored. The trade-off is between the extent of assessment that can be carried out vs. the number of final decisions that can be achieved towards meeting the set target.

## Productivity

The following conclusions are derived from the information gathered on cost-effectiveness, processing times, waiver rates, and refusal rates for the period under review, e.g., calendar years 1998 and 1999 for output figures and processing times, and FY 1998/99 for cost figures:

### *Regarding cost effectiveness*

- In terms of outputs per \$ of cost, Buffalo by itself was the most cost effective of the offices under review. However Buffalo processes waived cases only. For the whole range of cases, the Bucharest FSC was more cost effective than the RPCs.
- In terms of output per staff FTE, the US system as a whole was more productive than Bucharest FSC and London RPC.
- In terms of productivity comparison over time, e.g. between 1994/95 and 1998/99, there has only been slight variations in the RPCs.

### *Regarding processing times*

- Processing was fastest for family class cases where there was a dedicated officer; this applies to London and Bucharest.
- For all immigrants, and for skilled workers, there is no sign from these results that the US system is inherently faster than a normal RPC or FSC in terms of processing time. According to the information gathered, the US offices as a whole took slightly longer to process cases.

### *Regarding waiver rates*

- There is no standard definition of waiver rates. These rates can be calculated differently by posts and by different sections within headquarters, which leads to difficulty in interpreting the meaning of these rates. It appears important that this issue be resolved in order to be able to compare results in a meaningful manner. Calculation of waiver rates may have an impact on the perception CIC has of the effectiveness of posts or officers.
- For family class, regardless of the nature of the operation (RPC or FSC), average waiver rates in 1989 and 1999 were above 80%.
- For business class, average waiver rates were higher in London (25%) than they were in Buffalo (6%). London has a specialized unit for business cases whereas Buffalo does not. Buffalo transfers cases to New York or Seattle where interviews are conducted.
- The “quality” of applicants has an effect on waiver rates and this may vary over time for any given post depending on the nature of applications received. For example in Bucharest, the waiver rate for independents has declined over the two years from 69% to an average of 33% over the last three quarters of 1999 whereas in London, it has declined from 61% to 23%. In Buffalo, however, waiver rates have increased during the same period from 27% to around 50%. This may be in part due to experience gained with the hub and satellites operation.

### *Regarding refusal rates*

- These rates are typically low for family class in both RPCs and the FSC (less than 10%). However, they are higher for the US satellite offices, most likely because all problem cases are referred to them for interview.

- The rates for business class appear to be similar, averaging 33-35% for London RPC and the US system RPCs although cases are handled differently. However refusal rates for business cases at Buffalo rose to around 50% in the last three quarters of 1999. The reason for this is not known.
- The refusal rates for independents were lowest in Bucharest (average 13%). The average rate for London was 31% whereas for Buffalo it was 21%. However, for the US satellites where cases are referred to by the RPC, it was 36%.

No recommendations are made as it has been agreed with CIC that this review would consist of observations and conclusions.