CHAPTER 10

Immigration Department

Provision of personal documentation services and automated immigration clearance

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PROVISION OF
PERSONAL DOCUMENTATION SERVICES
AND AUTOMATED IMMIGRATION CLEARANCE

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PART 1:   INTRODUCTION

1.1   This PART describes the background to the audit of the provision of personal documentation services and automated immigration clearance by the Immigration Department (ImmD), and outlines the audit objectives and scope.

Background

1.2   The ImmD is responsible for providing birth, death and marriage registrations, issuing Hong Kong identity cards, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) passports, other travel documents and various personal documentation to Hong Kong residents as well as processing visa applications for visitors, foreign domestic helpers, businessmen and elites (Note 1).   The ImmD provides personal documentation services for the public through its Headquarters and branch offices in the territory.

1.3   The Personal Documentation Branch of the ImmD has two divisions for the provision of services as follows:

   (a)   ***Documents Division.***   It is responsible for the management and operation of:

      (i)   4 births registries, 3 deaths registries, 5 marriage registries and the Marriage Registration and Records Office for registering births, deaths and marriages in Hong Kong, and providing related services;

      (ii)   6 immigration branch offices for processing applications for HKSAR travel documents, extension of stay and visa, and the collection of Employee Retraining Levy relating to foreign domestic helpers; and

      (iii)   the Travel Documents and Nationality (Application) Section, and the Travel Documents (Issue) Section, both located at the ImmD Headquarters, for processing and issuing HKSAR passports and documents of identity for visa purposes; and

   (b)   ***Registration of Persons (ROP) Division.***   It is mainly responsible for the management and operation of:

      (i)   5 ROP offices for processing applications relating to registration and issuance of identity cards to Hong Kong residents;

Note 1:   *Elites refer to those Mainland residents who apply for employment entry permits under the Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals.*

       (ii)   9 smart identity card centres for implementing the territory-wide smart identity card replacement exercise; and

       (iii)   the Right of Abode Section for the verification of eligibility for permanent identity card. Successful applicants aged 11 and above are given appointments at the ROP offices for permanent identity card registration.

1.4   An organisation chart of the Personal Documentation Branch is shown in Appendix A. As at 31 May 2006, the establishment of the Personal Documentation Branch was 1,215 staff. In addition, 523 additional staff were deployed from the government central pool for the smart identity card replacement exercise. In 2005-06, the revenue and expenditure for the provision of personal documentation services were $316 million and $573 million respectively.

Performance pledges

1.5   Since December 1992, the ImmD has published its performance pledges annually with a view to enhancing openness and accountability, and developing a client-based culture in the public sector. The performance pledges in respect of personal documentation services set out the standard time for processing and issuing the documentation. From 2001 to 2005, the Personal Documentation Branch was able to achieve the performance targets stated in the ImmD Controlling Officer's Report.

Service delivery channels

1.6   *Personal documentation services.* Some of the personal documentation services may be arranged through the Electronic Service Delivery (ESD) Scheme and ImmD telephone appointment booking systems, which help improve the quality and efficiency of service delivery.

1.7   *The ESD Scheme.* In December 2000, the Government launched the ESD Scheme to deliver services to the public through the Internet or ESD kiosks. As at 31 May 2006, there were 15 ESD kiosks. Some of the ImmD personal documentation services are available under the ESD Scheme. These services include appointment bookings for:

    (a)   registration and replacement of identity cards at the ROP offices;

    (b)   applying for travel documents or extension of stay at the immigration branch offices;

(c)   giving of marriage notices at the marriage registries; and

(d)   replacement of identity cards at the smart identity card centres under the territory-wide smart identity card replacement exercise.

Under the ESD Scheme, the public can also apply for search and certified copy of birth, death and marriage records, notify the ImmD of the pre-mature termination of contracts of imported workers/foreign domestic helpers, browse immigration information, and request application forms.

1.8   ***Telephone appointment booking systems.***   The public can make appointments through the telephone appointment booking systems of the ImmD for personal documentation services which are also available under the ESD Scheme.

Automated immigration clearance

1.9   In January 2003, the Finance Committee approved $353 million to install e-channels for the Automated Passenger Clearance (APC) System and the Automated Vehicle Clearance (AVC) System to cope with the perennial growth in passenger and vehicular traffic at immigration control points. With biometrics recognition technology, holders of smart identity cards can use the APC e-channels at eight control points, and cross-boundary drivers can use the AVC e-channels at three control points for automated immigration clearance (Note 2).

Audit review

1.10   The Audit Commission (Audit) has conducted a review to examine the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the provision of personal documentation services and automated immigration clearance by the ImmD. The audit review has focused on the following areas:

(a)   management of branch offices (PART 2);

(b)   service delivery channels (PART 3); and

(c)   automated immigration clearance at control points (PART 4).

Note 2:   *The eight control points installed with APC e-channels are located at the Hong Kong International Airport, China Ferry Terminal, Macau Ferry Terminal, Hung Hom, Lo Wu, Lok Ma Chau, Man Kam To and Sha Tau Kok. The three control points installed with AVC e-channels are located at Lok Ma Chau, Man Kam To and Sha Tau Kok.*

1.11   In carrying out the audit review, Audit examined the records and interviewed the staff of the ImmD. Audit has found that there are areas where improvements can be made. Audit has made a number of recommendations to address the issues.

General response from the Administration

1.12   The **Director of Immigration** agrees with the audit recommendations.

1.13   The **Secretary for Security** is in general agreement with the audit recommendations.

1.14   The **Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury** welcomes the audit recommendations which aim to improve the cost-effectiveness of the ImmD in the provision of personal documentation services and automated immigration clearance.

Acknowledgement

1.15   Audit would like to acknowledge with gratitude the full cooperation of the staff of the ImmD during the course of the audit review.

PART 2: MANAGEMENT OF BRANCH OFFICES

2.1   This PART examines the management of branch offices for the provision of personal documentation services, reports the achievements and suggests measures for improvement.

Branch offices

2.2   The ImmD provides personal documentation services for the public mainly through its branch offices (i.e. the births, deaths and marriage registries, the immigration branch offices and the ROP offices). Details are shown in Appendix B. These branch offices are easily accessible and well connected by mass transit systems.

Births, deaths and marriage registries

2.3   The Documents Division operates the births, deaths and marriage registries for the provision of the following services:

  (a)   *Birth registration.*   Apart from alteration or addition of name, issue of certified copies of birth entries and search of birth records, four births registries provide birth registration services for specified districts. The Births and Deaths General Register Office also provides services for adoption registration, issue of certified copies of adoption entries and search of adoption records;

  (b)   *Death registration.*   Three deaths registries provide services for death registration, issue of certified copies of death entries, search of death records, and issue of permits for removal of dead bodies from Hong Kong; and

  (c)   *Marriage registration.*   The Marriage Registration and Records Office and five marriage registries process applications for giving of marriage notices, provide services for marriage registration, solemnisation, search of marriage records, and issue of certified copies of marriage certificates and certificates of absence of marriage records.

Immigration branch offices

2.4   The Documents Division operates six immigration branch offices for the provision of the following services:

   (a)   issue of HKSAR travel documents for Hong Kong residents, including passport, re-entry permit, document of identity for visa purposes and seaman's identity book;

   (b)   approval for extension of stay, re-entry visa and transfer of endorsement;

   (c)   approval for entry visas for foreign domestic helpers relating to the renewal of employment contracts; and

   (d)   collection of Employee Retraining Levy relating to foreign domestic helpers.

ROP offices

2.5   The ROP Division operates five ROP offices for the provision of the following services:

   (a)   registration and issue of identity cards for Hong Kong residents, new arrivals and new immigrants from the Mainland;

   (b)   registration of identity cards for persons admitted under the Supplementary Labour Scheme (Note 3);

   (c)   replacement of identity cards due to loss, defacement, damages and change of registered particulars; and

   (d)   issue of certificates of registered particulars.

Workload of personal documentation services

2.6   The ImmD Users' Committee (Note 4) monitors regularly and reviews the fulfilment of performance pledges, advises the Director of Immigration on areas where improvements may be required, and helps determine the level of resources required for achieving the targets.

Note 3:   *Only the Kwun Tong Office processes registration of identity cards for persons admitted under the Supplementary Labour Scheme.*

Note 4:   *The ImmD Users' Committee, established in September 1993, is chaired by the Director of Immigration with non-official members appointed by the Secretary for Security, and representatives from the Security Bureau and the ImmD. The Committee meets half-yearly to receive and consider review reports on the fulfilment of performance pledges prepared by the ImmD.*

2.7   For the years from 2001 to 2005, the workload of the births, deaths and marriage registries increased by 13%, and that of the immigration branch offices increased by 1%. The workload of the ROP offices decreased by 8%. Details are shown in Appendix C. Despite the increase in workload, the births, deaths and marriage registries, and the immigration branch offices still achieved the performance targets.

Reorganisation of branch offices

2.8   In response to the recommendations of Report No. 37 of the Director of Audit (Note 5), the ImmD rationalised and reorganised its branch offices on the basis of five regions (i.e. Hong Kong Island, East Kowloon, West Kowloon, East New Territories and West New Territories). As a result, 11 branch offices were closed in 2003. The remaining 20 offices were provided with additional resources to ensure that they could absorb the additional workload displaced from the closed branch offices. The performance pledges of all personal documentation services remained unchanged. The estimated annual savings as a result of the reorganisation of branch offices were $39 million (Note 6).

2.9   After the reorganisation exercise of 2003, the total handling capacities (Note 7) of all branch offices were reduced. The utilisation rates (i.e. the usage expressed as a percentage of the handling capacity) of the ROP offices decreased by 2% from 86% in 2003 to 84% in 2005. However, there was an increase in the number of applications processed by the births, deaths and marriage registries, and the immigration branch offices. The utilisation rates of these offices were as follows:

   (a)   ***Births, deaths and marriage registries.***   The utilisation rates increased by 18% from 61% in 2003 to 79% in 2005; and

   (b)   ***Immigration branch offices.***   The utilisation rates increased by 8% from 78% in 2003 to 86% in 2005.

Note 5:   *Audit conducted a review of the operation of the Births, Deaths and Marriage Registration Sub-division of the ImmD in 2001 and recommended, among others, that the ImmD should critically look into the feasibility of closing down a number of registries in view of their low utilisation rates. The registries involved were the Eastern Marriage Registry on Hong Kong Island, the Fanling District Births and Marriage Registry in the North District and the Mobile Registry serving Sai Kung and the outlying islands.*

Note 6:   *The savings were mainly achieved by redeploying the staff released from the closed branch offices to carry out other duties.*

Note 7:   *Handling capacity is the number of cases that can be processed by a branch office.*

Audit observations

Utilisation rates of the births and deaths registries

2.10   In 2005, the average utilisation rate of the births registries was only 65%, and that of the deaths registries was 152%. Audit noted that:

(a)   the births registries were underutilised in 2005. The utilisation rates of the four births registries ranged from 60% for the Births and Deaths General Register Office to 68% for the Kowloon Births Registry; and

(b)   the workload of all the deaths registries exceeded their handling capacities in 2005. The utilisation rates of the three deaths registries ranged from 118% for the Births and Deaths General Register Office to 172% for the Kowloon Deaths Registry.

2.11   According to the Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics, the number of births increased by 22% from 46,965 in 2003 to 57,124 in 2005. The number of deaths increased by 5% from 36,971 in 2003 to 38,683 in 2005. **In view of the underutilisation of the births registries, the heavy workload of the deaths registries and the efficiency gains in processing applications for these services resulting from the implementation of the smart identity card project (Note 8), Audit considers that the ImmD needs to review the maximum handling capacities of the births and deaths registries.**

Utilisation rates of the marriage registries

2.12   There were significant variations in the utilisation rates of the marriage registries. In 2005, the utilisation rates ranged from 61% for the City Hall Marriage Registry to 99% for the Tuen Mun Marriage Registry. Audit noted that:

(a)   according to the Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics, the number of marriages increased by 21% from 35,439 in 2003 to 43,019 in 2005;

(b)   to meet the increasing demand for more flexible marriage solemnisation services and make use of the private sector for providing such services, the first batch of civil celebrants was appointed in April 2006 under the Civil Celebrants of Marriages Scheme; and

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Note 8:   *In March 2001, the Finance Committee was informed that the new smart identity card computer system would enhance efficiency in processing applications through simplification of work processes and strategic use of new technology. With the conversion of microfilm identity card records into digital images, immigration officers would be able to access the records on-line within minutes, and the processing time for all applications would be shortened.*

(c)   from July 2005 to June 2006, the Marriage Registration and Records Office accepted 18,090 applications for giving of marriage notices for marriages solemnised at the City Hall Marriage Registry and the Cotton Tree Drive Marriage Registry. However, 13,375 (74%) out of these 18,090 applications required re-submission of documents because the applicants failed to submit all the required documents at the time the applications were made.

2.13   In view of the audit findings in paragraph 2.12 and the efficiency gains from the smart identity card project, Audit considers that the ImmD needs to review the maximum handling capacities of the marriage registries.

Utilisation rates of the immigration branch offices and the ROP offices

2.14   Audit analysis of the utilisation rates of the immigration branch offices and the ROP offices in 2005 revealed that:

(a)   there were significant variations in the utilisation rates of the immigration branch offices. In 2005, the utilisation rates ranged from 71% for the Hong Kong Office to 100% for the Sha Tin Office; and

(b)   the workloads of the ROP offices were more evenly distributed. In 2005, the utilisation rates ranged from 74% for the Kwun Tong Office to 87% for both the Hong Kong Office and the Kowloon Office.

2.15   The Fo Tan Office and the Yuen Long Office are joint immigration and ROP offices. To provide better services, on 24 April 2006, the ROP Kowloon Office started to accept applications for HKSAR documents of identity for visa purposes (Note 9), a service formerly provided only by the immigration branch offices. At the same time, the ImmD revised the target processing time for such applications from 15 working days to 10 working days.

2.16   In view of the audit findings in paragraphs 2.14 and 2.15 and the efficiency gains from the smart identity card project, Audit considers that the ImmD needs to:

(a)   **review the maximum handling capacities of the immigration branch offices and the ROP offices; and**

Note 9:   *These applications were submitted by One Way Permit entrants for their first registrations of Hong Kong identity cards.*

(b)   **explore the feasibility of expanding the types of services provided by the immigration branch offices and the ROP offices.**

Merging of the Sha Tin Office and the Fo Tan Office

2.17   *Original proposal.*   According to the October 2002 reorganisation plan of branch offices of the ImmD, the Sha Tin Office would, in the long run, be merged with the Fo Tan Office so that there would be only one joint immigration and ROP office in the East New Territories region (see para. 2.8).   In December 2003, in its annual office accommodation review of 2004-05, the ImmD proposed to the Government Property Agency (GPA) that the Sha Tin Office should be closed and merged with the Fo Tan Office to achieve savings and improvement in operational efficiency.   Additional accommodation of about 250 square metres would be required in the Fo Tan Office to take up the workload displaced from the Sha Tin Office.

2.18   *Revised proposal.*   In February 2004, the ImmD gave the GPA a revised proposal that the Sha Tin Office, instead of the Fo Tan Office, would be expanded as the location of the former was more convenient to the public.   The ImmD requested additional accommodation of about 426 square metres for the Sha Tin Office.   In March 2004, the GPA commented that:

(a)   there was no suitable surplus space at the Sha Tin Government Offices; and

(b)   the ImmD's original proposal of releasing 414 square metres of the Sha Tin Office, and leasing an additional 250 square metres of accommodation for the Fo Tan Office would incur additional rent and fitting-out cost.   Even if the proposal was supported, the ImmD would need to bear the recurrent rent for the new accommodation to be leased.

In the accommodation reviews of 2005-06 and 2006-07, the ImmD did not mention the merging of the two offices.

2.19   *Close proximity of the two offices.*   Both the Sha Tin Office and the Fo Tan Office are well served by the Kowloon-Canton Railway East Rail at stations which are just next to each other (Sha Tin and Fo Tan stations).   In 2005, the utilisation rates were 79% for the Fo Tan Office and 100% for the Sha Tin Office.   **In view of their close proximity and the potential savings and improvement in operational efficiency, Audit considers that the ImmD needs to expedite the merging of the two offices, or explore the feasibility of providing an alternative branch office in the East New Territories region.**

Recovery of costs of services provided

2.20   ***Policy of full cost recovery.***   It is the government policy that fees should in general be set at levels sufficient to recover the full cost of providing the services within a reasonable period. Government fees and charges are based on the "user pays" principle, especially for those items that would not affect people's livelihood or general business activities.

2.21   ***Early issue of travel documents.***   From time to time, the ImmD receives applications for early issue of HKSAR passports and documents of identity for visa purposes (Note 10). If an applicant can prove that he has a genuine and urgent need to obtain a HKSAR travel document, the ImmD will speed up the processing of the application without levying an additional fee. The numbers of urgent applications have increased significantly as follows:

(a)   ***HKSAR passports.***   The number of applications for early issue of HKSAR passports increased by 29,716 (209%) from 14,206 in 2001 to 43,922 in 2005 (see Appendix D); and

(b)   ***HKSAR documents of identity for visa purposes.***   The number of applications for early issue of HKSAR documents of identity for visa purposes increased by 654 (29%) from 2,260 in 2004 to 2,914 in 2005 (see Appendix E).

According to the ImmD, extra manpower resources are required to process such applications. However, no additional fees are levied. Audit has found that Mainland China and four other countries (i.e. Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America) impose additional fees for processing early issue of travel documents.

Note 10:   *Early issue of travel documents refers to issuing documents in a period less than the target processing period. The targets of the ImmD for processing applications are as follows:*

Application for	*Target*
First or replacement of HKSAR passport	*Within 15 working days*
HKSAR passport for children under the age of 11 not holding a Hong Kong permanent identity card	*Within 19 working days*
HKSAR document of identity for visa purposes with effect from April 2006	*Within 10 working days*

2.22   *Other services provided free of charge.*   In a review conducted in 1999, the ImmD noted that considerable amounts of resources were spent on the reprocessing of rejected visa applications.   According to the findings of an ImmD initial assessment in 2004, it was feasible to impose application fees for some visa control related applications and a new fee for the reconsideration of rejected visa applications, and detailed studies should be conducted on the proposal.   Audit has found that Mainland China and four other countries require payment of visa application processing fee at the time of submitting the application.

2.23   *Fees and charges review.*   In December 2003, the ImmD informed the Security Bureau of its intention to impose new fees for some services provided free of charge (such as early issue of HKSAR travel documents and reconsideration of rejected visa applications).   In May 2004, the Security Bureau advised the ImmD to consider the fee revision and to carry out a review of imposing new fees.   On 19 June 2006, the fees for the processing of applications for visas, permits and certain travel documents, and for ROP services were revised with a view to achieving full cost recovery within 3 to 7 years (Note 11).   Up to September 2006, there was no progress on the review of imposing fees on some services provided free of charge (Note 12).

2.24   *Full cost recovery.*   The ImmD will introduce the new biometric passports (Note 13) in 2007 to cope with international requirements.   **To comply with the full cost recovery principle, Audit considers that the ImmD needs to:**

(a)   **ascertain the extra costs of processing the early issue of HKSAR travel documents, and the costs of some services provided free of charge; and**

(b)   **explore the feasibility of imposing fees for such services with a view to achieving full cost recovery in the long run.**

Note 11:   *After the fee revision, the cost recovery rate for processing applications for HKSAR passports ranged from 41% for persons under 16 years old to 83% for persons of 16 years old or above.*

Note 12:   *At least 14 months are required for the consultation and legislative procedures for the introduction of new fees.*

Note 13:   *The biometric HKSAR passport will be embedded with a contactless data chip, the passport holder's photograph and personal particulars will be engraved onto the polycarbonate biodata page by laser technology to make unauthorised alteration more difficult.*

Audit recommendations

2.25   **Audit has *recommended* that the Director of Immigration should:**

  (a)   **review the maximum handling capacities of the births, deaths and marriage registries, the immigration branch offices and the ROP offices;**

  (b)   **assess the impact of the Civil Celebrants of Marriages Scheme on the utilisation of marriage registries and the provision of marriage registration services;**

  (c)   **review the procedures for processing applications for giving of marriage notices and, through ImmD website and pamphlets, advise the public the documents required at the time of submitting applications for giving of marriage notices;**

  (d)   **continue to explore the feasibility of expanding the types of services provided by the immigration branch offices and the ROP offices;**

  (e)   **expedite the merging of the Sha Tin Office and the Fo Tan Office, or explore the feasibility of providing an alternative branch office in the East New Territories region;**

  (f)   **ascertain the extra costs of processing the early issue of HKSAR travel documents and the costs of providing some services free of charge; and**

  (g)   **explore the feasibility of imposing fees for the services with a view to achieving full cost recovery in the long run.**

Response from the Administration

2.26   The **Director of Immigration** agrees with the audit recommendations. He has said that:

  (a)   the ImmD will review the maximum handling capacity and continue to monitor closely the utilisation rates of the births, deaths and marriage registries, the immigration branch offices and the ROP offices;

  (b)   the Civil Celebrants of Marriages Scheme was rolled out in April 2006. The ImmD will assess the impact of the Scheme on the utilisation of marriage registries and the provision of marriage registration services, and review the staffing situation;

(c)   the ImmD will review the procedures and, through information pamphlets and ImmD website, enhance the public awareness of the documents required at the time of submitting applications for giving of marriage notices;

(d)   the ImmD will continue to explore the opportunities of expanding the types of services that can be provided at the immigration branch offices and the ROP offices with a view to enhancing customer services and utilisation rates;

(e)   the GPA is ready to offer assistance in rationalising the accommodation requirements of the Sha Tin and Fo Tan Offices; and

(f)   the ImmD will explore the feasibility of imposing fees for the early issue of HKSAR travel documents and those services provided free of charge.

2.27   The **Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury** has said that full cost recovery is the current fee charging policy. He supports the audit recommendation that the ImmD should explore the feasibility of imposing fees for the early issue of HKSAR travel documents, and for some services provided free of charge, with a view to achieving full cost recovery in the long run.

2.28   The **Government Property Administrator** has said that the GPA is ready to offer assistance to the ImmD in rationalising the accommodation requirements of the Sha Tin and Fo Tan Offices.

PART 3:   SERVICE DELIVERY CHANNELS

3.1   This PART examines the channels (such as the ESD Scheme and the telephone appointment booking systems) through which personal documentation services provided by the ImmD may be obtained, reports the achievements and suggests measures for further improvement.

Quota system

3.2   Branch offices of the ImmD operate a daily quota system to provide services on a first-come-first-served basis.   The daily quota of a branch office is worked out with reference to its handling capacity.   Apart from obtaining a quota tag in person at branch offices, applicants can make appointments under the ESD Scheme or the telephone appointment booking systems of the ImmD.   Figure 1 shows the daily processing capacity of an ROP office, indicating its walk-in quota and appointment quota.   The time slots of unattended appointments are used to serve walk-in applicants.

Figure 1

Daily processing capacity of an ROP office

Source: Photograph taken by Audit

Remarks: The notice board is displayed near the enquiry counter of the ROP office.

Appointment bookings

3.3   Since 2000, appointment bookings for some of the personal documentation services have been made available under the ESD Scheme (Note 14). Under the ESD contract, with effect from May 2005, the Government has to pay a monthly subscription fee of $400,000 and a transaction fee of $5.5 for each chargeable transaction to the vendor (Note 15). In addition to the ESD Scheme, the public can also use the telephone appointment booking systems of the ImmD.

Other services provided under the ESD Scheme

3.4   In addition to appointment bookings, the ImmD makes the following personal documentation services available under the ESD Scheme:

(a)   application for search and certified copy of birth, death and marriage certificates;

(b)   notification of pre-mature termination of contracts of imported workers or foreign domestic helpers; and

(c)   request for application forms (Note 16).

The ImmD has designed electronic application forms (e.g. notification of change of particulars previously registered, notification of change of address and application for amendment of registered particulars of the Hong Kong identity card) for the public to submit through its website.

Note 14:   *The ESD Scheme, being a key initiative under the Government's "Digital 21" Information Technology Strategy, aims to deliver public services online to the community in an innovative manner round the clock to promote the development of electronic commerce in Hong Kong.*

Note 15:   *The Government is required to make payments one year after reaching the threshold of 2.3 million chargeable transactions in mid-2004. The chargeable transactions include all transactions except those of an enquiry or information search nature. Payments have to be made until the expiry of the ESD contract in January 2008.*

Note 16:   *Upon the receipt of a request under the ESD Scheme, the ImmD sends the application form (such as application form for HKSAR passport) to the applicant within two working days.*

Audit observations

Appointment bookings for services at the marriage registries

3.5   ***Giving of marriage notices.***   A marrying couple can make an appointment booking under the ESD Scheme or the telephone appointment booking system for giving of marriage notice within 14 days prior to a three-month period from the date of marriage (Note 17).   After the 14-day appointment booking period, the unused quota is released for walk-in applicants.   In 2005, the utilisation rate of appointment bookings for submitting applications at the marriage registries (Note 18) was 31%.

3.6   ***Requirement on giving of marriage notices.***   According to the Marriage Ordinance (Cap. 181), a marriage notice can be given at any time not more than 3 months or not less than 15 days before the date of marriage.   **For making an appointment booking for giving of marriage notice, the ImmD needs to consider extending the appointment booking period under the ESD Scheme and the telephone appointment booking system in order to make available to the public the full period allowed by the law prior to the date of marriage.**

Appointment bookings for services at the
immigration branch offices and the ROP offices

3.7   ***Appointment booking quota at the immigration branch offices.***   Since December 2003, 40% of the total quota of each immigration branch office has been allocated for the appointment bookings.   In 2005, the number of appointments made was only 26% of the total quota, and the number of walk-in applications was 68% of the total quota.   **Audit considers that the ImmD needs to introduce measures to encourage more people to make use of the quota for appointment bookings and, in the light of experience gained, revise the quota for walk-in applications.**

Note 17:   *For example, if the date of marriage is 30 June 2006, the period for making an appointment is from 16 to 29 March 2006.   For those applicants who miss this appointment booking period but who want to get married on 30 June 2006, they need to queue for quota tags for giving of marriage notices at the marriage registries.*

Note 18:   *The utilisation rate of the appointment bookings is the number of appointments expressed as a percentage of the quota allocated for the appointment bookings under the ESD Scheme or the telephone appointment booking system.   The appointment booking for giving of marriage notice is only applicable to those whose marriage is to take place at a marriage registry.*

3.8   *Low turn-up rates for appointments.*   In 2005, the turn-up rates for appointments made under the ESD Scheme and the telephone appointment booking systems for services were 76% for the marriage registries, 70% for the immigration branch offices and 53% for the ROP offices. Among various branch offices, the ROP offices had the lowest overall turn-up rates, ranging from 43% for the Kwun Tong Office to 66% for the Yuen Long Office. A low turn-up rate wastes ImmD resources and affects the efficiency of branch offices. **In Audit's view, the ImmD needs to explore the feasibility of enhancing the ESD Scheme and the telephone appointment booking system so that applicants are reminded (e.g. one day before) to keep or cancel their appointments.**

3.9   *Abuse of the appointment booking system.*   The ImmD conducted surveys on the low turn-up rates of appointment bookings for services at the ROP offices in November 2003, January and May 2004. The major findings of the surveys were that:

(a)   some unattended appointments were made by employment agencies for newly arrived foreign domestic helpers or skilled workers. Some agencies made a number of appointments on consecutive days with serial identification codes under the ESD Scheme and the telephone appointment booking system by just inputting a six-digit number as an identification code (Note 19); and

(b)   some applicants gave up the appointments, but without cancellation (Note 20) as they were not aware of such need or believed that the appointments would be cancelled automatically after attending the ROP offices before the appointment dates.

In October 2004, the ImmD started to examine the use of a unique password (such as the applicant's identity card number or travel document number together with his date of birth) as the identification code. Up to 30 September 2006, no improvement measures had been introduced to prevent multiple bookings by an applicant. **Audit considers that the ImmD needs to expedite the implementation of using a unique password as an identification code for making appointment bookings under the ESD Scheme and the telephone appointment booking system. This would avoid abuse of the booking system.**

Note 19:   *An identification code is a six-digit number used as a reference for making appointment.*

Note 20:   *The reasons included the applicants' choice of attending the ROP offices before the appointment dates and engagements in urgent personal matters on the appointment dates.*

Excess capacity of telephone appointment booking system

3.10   Since July 2004, the ImmD had conducted regular reviews of the use of the telephone appointment booking system for the immigration branch offices and the ROP offices. The review conducted in July 2005 found that during the peak hours of the five selected days, only 31 out of 64 telephone lines had been simultaneously engaged and 33 (52%) telephone lines had remained idle. In November 2005, the ImmD launched a publicity campaign to encourage more people to use the appointment booking system. The utilisation rate of appointment bookings for services then significantly increased from 63% in 2004 to 83% for the period from January to May 2006 for the immigration branch offices. However, there was a decrease for the ROP offices from 99% in 2004 to 84% for the period from January to May 2006. **Audit considers that the ImmD should consider launching more publicity programmes to encourage the public to use appointment bookings for services at its branch offices.**

Use of services other than the appointment bookings under the ESD Scheme

3.11   In 2005-06, the utilisation rates of the use of other services (apart from appointment bookings) under the ESD Scheme (see para. 3.4) were low. There were only 16 out of 53,350 cases for notification of pre-mature termination of contracts of imported workers or foreign domestic helpers, and 67,632 (4%) out of 1,860,420 cases for requesting application forms made through the ESD Scheme.

3.12   Audit noted that since December 2000, the ImmD had updated the information and improved the ESD Scheme to make it more user-friendly. To further improve the services, in 2007, the ImmD will place some immigration e-application service links to the one-stop access portal for handling all e-Government transactions. **In view of the low utilisation rates, Audit considers that the ImmD needs to review and identify ways of encouraging the public to use the services (other than appointment bookings) under the ESD Scheme.**

3.13   Audit noted from the ImmD website that an applicant was required to possess a digital certificate for application for search and certified copy of birth, death and marriage certificates under the ESD Scheme. However, the digital certificate requirement was removed in April 2003. **Audit considers that the ImmD needs to ensure that updated and correct information is disseminated to the public through its website.**

Request for application forms

3.14   Application forms and guidance notes for personal documentation services can be obtained in person and by post. Audit notes that most of the application forms can be downloaded from the ImmD website. Under the ESD Scheme, applicants can request the ImmD to send the application forms by post to them in two working days. From May 2005 to March 2006, the ImmD received 39,767 such requests. Under the ESD contract, the charge by the vendor is $5.5 for each transaction, excluding the postage paid by the ImmD.

3.15   Audit noted that, as at 31 May 2006, 30 out of the 33 types of application forms obtainable under the ESD Scheme could be downloaded from the ImmD website. **In view of the costs involved in sending application forms under the ESD Scheme, the ImmD needs to consider providing all 33 types of application forms on its website and encourage the public to download them.**

Monitoring of transactions under the ESD Scheme

3.16   In February 2004, before reaching the threshold of 2.3 million chargeable transactions, the Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau reminded the ImmD, as a major ESD Scheme user department, of the importance to ensure that the transactions were originated from genuine usage of its services. In reply, the ImmD said that it had kept a close watch on the utilisation rates of bookings under the ESD Scheme in order to make full use of the resources and would investigate any rapid upsurge of the utilisation.

3.17   In August 2004, after reaching the threshold of chargeable transactions, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) started to monitor the effectiveness of the ESD Scheme by obtaining quarterly reports on "no-show" transactions (i.e. user did not keep the appointment) and "non-submission" transactions (i.e. user did not submit to the ImmD the relevant documents). All these were chargeable transactions. In response to the OGCIO's request made in June 2005, the ImmD reported that 1.9 million transactions of the immigration services up to 30 June 2005 were reviewed and no irregularities were found.

3.18   Audit noted that the ImmD had not included some chargeable transactions (i.e. the changed and cancelled transactions) in its review. In conducting the review, the ImmD found it difficult to verify the genuineness of the changed and cancelled transactions as such ESD transactions were not known to the ImmD. According to the data subsequently obtained from the OGCIO, 19% (i.e. about 222,000 transactions) of the chargeable transactions for the period from May 2005 to March 2006 were changed and cancelled transactions. **In view of the significant number of changed and cancelled transactions, Audit considers that the ImmD, in consultation with the OGCIO, should strengthen the monitoring mechanism so as to ensure that all the ESD transactions are genuine.**

Repeated transactions of making appointments for giving of marriage notices

3.19   In February 2006, the vendor of the ESD Scheme observed that multiple successful transactions which had originated from the same Internet Protocol address were made within just a few seconds. From February 2005 to February 2006, 15,580 (41%) out of 38,000 transactions (including making, changing and cancelling appointments) of making appointments for giving of marriage notices were repeated transactions. These transactions were made by 1,412 pairs of applicants having the same Hong Kong identity card or travel document numbers. Details are shown in Appendix F.

3.20   It was not uncommon for applicants to make and cancel appointments more than once. Audit noted that the OGCIO and the ImmD had discussed with the vendor of the ESD Scheme regarding these repeated transactions. **Audit considers that the ImmD, in conjunction with the OGCIO, needs to closely monitor the frequency of repeated transactions and consider informing the public the cost of the changed and cancelled transactions.**

Audit recommendations

3.21   **Audit has *recommended* that the Director of Immigration should:**

Appointment bookings for services at the marriage registries

(a)   **for making an appointment booking for giving of marriage notice, consider extending the appointment booking period in order to make available to the public the full period allowed by the Marriage Ordinance prior to the date of marriage;**

Appointment bookings for services at the
immigration branch offices and the ROP offices

(b)   **introduce measures to encourage more people to make use of the quota allocated for the appointment bookings, and revise the quota allocated for walk-in applications for the provision of personal documentation services;**

(c)   **explore the feasibility of enhancing the ESD Scheme and the telephone appointment booking system so that applicants are reminded (e.g. one day before) to keep or cancel their appointments;**

(d)   **in order to prevent abuse of the booking system, expedite the implementation of using a unique password as an identification code for making appointment bookings under the ESD Scheme and the telephone appointment booking system;**

Excess capacity of telephone appointment booking system

(e)   **explore the feasibility of launching more publicity programmes to encourage the public to use appointment bookings for services at branch offices;**

Use of services other than the appointment bookings under the ESD Scheme

(f)   **review and identify ways for enhancing the use of other services (i.e. other than appointment bookings) under the ESD Scheme in order to provide a better service for the public;**

(g)   **ensure that updated and correct information is disseminated to the public through the ImmD website;**

Request for application forms

(h)   **explore the feasibility of providing all types of application forms on the ImmD website and encourage the public to download them;**

Monitoring of transactions under the ESD Scheme

(i)   **in consultation with the Government Chief Information Officer, strengthen the monitoring mechanism so as to ensure that all the ESD transactions are genuine; and**

Repeated transactions of making appointments for giving of marriage notices

(j)   **in conjunction with the Government Chief Information Officer, closely monitor the frequency of repeated transactions and consider informing the public the cost of the changed and cancelled transactions.**

Response from the Administration

3.22   The **Director of Immigration** agrees with the audit recommendations. He has said that:

Appointment bookings for services at the marriage registries

(a)   the ImmD has been actively looking into the issue of extending the appointment booking period in the coming e-services system, which is tentatively scheduled for implementation in early 2007;

Appointment bookings for services at the
immigration branch offices and the ROP offices

(b)   the ImmD will continue to explore ways and means to promote the use of the appointment booking system and revise the quota allocated to walk-in applicants. Measures already in place include displaying posters and electronic messages at public offices. The application forms also contained such information;

(c)   an enhancement was made in June 2005 whereby a reminder message was inserted to advise applicants, after the making of appointments, to change or cancel their appointments if they were unable to attend as scheduled. The ImmD will continue to explore the feasibility of enhancing the ESD Scheme and telephone appointment booking system;

(d)   the ImmD will do its best to expedite the implementation of using a unique password as identification code for making all appointment bookings.   The immigration services under the ESD Scheme will also be available under the Government's one-stop access portal by phases starting from late 2006. The use of a unique password for identification in appointment bookings has already been catered for in the design of the new e-services;

Excess capacity of telephone appointment booking system

(e)   the ImmD will continue to explore the feasibility of launching more publicity programmes to boost the use of appointment bookings for services, besides the existing information on the website and publicity through the media;

Use of services other than the appointment bookings under the ESD Scheme

(f)   the ImmD will keep on identifying ways for enhancing the use of the services under the ESD Scheme by the public;

(g)   the relevant information on the ImmD website was updated.   The ImmD will ensure that the information disseminated to the public is correct and up-to-date;

Request for application forms

(h) the ImmD is exploring the feasibility of providing all types of application forms on the website and encouraging the public to download them for use;

(i) the Application and Investigation Easy System, to be implemented by phases in late 2006, will enable the public to enjoy e-services, including obtaining application forms from the website;

Monitoring of transactions under the ESD Scheme

(j) the monitoring mechanism of the ESD Scheme will be strengthened; and

Repeated transactions of making appointments for giving of marriage notices

(k) the ImmD will continue to liaise with the OGCIO. Since February 2006, the OGCIO has taken the issue on board.

3.23 The **Government Chief Information Officer** has said that:

(a) extending the appointment booking period for services at the marriage registries is a change of business process. It is feasible to enhance the ESD Scheme and the telephone appointment booking system to remind applicants to keep their appointments, or cancel their bookings if they cannot keep their appointments. The OGCIO will assist the ImmD in the system modification, if necessary;

(b) the OGCIO will assist the ImmD if system modification of the ESD services and the use of a unique password as identification code is required;

(c) the OGCIO will assist the ImmD in the promotion of the ESD Scheme and the one-stop access portal, if required;

(d) the monitoring mechanism under the ESD Scheme will be improved after the recent review of the ESD contract administration by the OGCIO. With effect from October 2006, alerts on irregular transaction patterns will be issued to the ESD departments concerned for reference or immediate investigation; and

(e) the ESD departments and the OGCIO will review the effectiveness of data validation of the ESD applications regularly, and explore improvements where necessary and feasible to ensure that invalid data or transactions are flagged out at the time of transaction.

PART 4: AUTOMATED IMMIGRATION CLEARANCE AT CONTROL POINTS

4.1 This PART examines the provision of automated immigration clearance service at control points of entry into and exit from Hong Kong, and suggests measures for improvement.

Immigration clearance

4.2 *Objectives.* The ImmD is responsible for the control and facilitation of people moving into and out of Hong Kong. Immigration officers process immigration clearance for every person arriving at and departing from Hong Kong by air, land or sea at control points (Note 21). The objectives of immigration clearance are to:

(a) exercise control over legal immigration;

(b) prevent the entry of undesirable persons and the departure of persons wanted for criminal offences;

(c) facilitate the movement of tourists, business visitors and local residents; and

(d) process cross-boundary vehicles to and from the Mainland.

4.3 *Immigration control system.* A permanent resident holding a Hong Kong identity card can use his identity card for clearance. A visitor is required to produce his travel document to an immigration officer. During the period from September 1995 to July 2004, an Immigration Control Automation System was used at all control points. The system enabled the clearance of passengers holding the old form of identity cards, and other machine-readable travel documents.

4.4 *Processing and records system.* In July 2004, the Entry/Exit Processing and Records System (EXPRESS) replaced the Immigration Control Automation System. An optical character recognition reader attached to an EXPRESS terminal captures the number and the date of registration printed on the identity card. The captured information is checked against a list of lost identity cards. After the clearance checking, the passenger is released and a movement record is generated.

Note 21: *As at 31 May 2006, there were ten control points (i.e. Hong Kong International Airport, Hung Hom, Lok Ma Chau, Lo Wu, Man Kam To, Sha Tau Kok, China Ferry Terminal, Harbour Control, Macau Ferry Terminal and River Trade Terminal).*

Control points

4.5   Apart from the two control points handling immigration clearance for incoming and outgoing vessels (Note 22), the following eight control points handle immigration clearance for passengers arriving at and departing from Hong Kong by air, land and sea:

(a)   ***Airport control point.***   The Airport Control Point provides immigration clearance service for passengers arriving at and departing from Hong Kong by air;

(b)   ***Five land control points.***   The Hung Hom Control Point provides immigration clearance service for passengers travelling between the Mainland and Hong Kong by through-trains.   The Lo Wu Control Point provides immigration clearance service for passengers conveyed by the Kowloon-Canton Railway East Rail.   The three control points at Lok Ma Chau, Man Kam To and Sha Tau Kok process vehicles and passengers travelling to and from the Mainland by coaches or private cars; and

(c)   ***Two sea control points.***   The China Ferry Terminal Control Point provides immigration clearance service for passengers who are bound for the Mainland, Macau and open sea.   The Macau Ferry Terminal Control Point provides immigration clearance service for passengers arriving from and departing for Macau and the Mainland by ferries and helicopters.

Automated passenger and vehicle immigration clearance

4.6   ***Funding approval.***   In February 2002, the ImmD commissioned consultants to study the feasibility of introducing automated immigration clearance process at control points by using biometrics recognition technology and smart identity cards to be issued in mid-2003.   The feasibility study, completed in September 2002, concluded that it was technically viable and financially justified to implement the APC and AVC systems.   In January 2003, the Finance Committee approved $353 million for the implementation of the two systems.   In March 2004, a contract was awarded to a contractor for completion of system installation in 2006-07.

Note 22:   *The Harbour Control provides on board clearance for incoming and outgoing vessels whereas the River Trade Terminal provides immigration clearance for river trade vessels from the Mainland.*

Provision of e-channels

4.7   *APC e-channels.*   Since December 2004, the ImmD has installed APC e-channels by phases at the eight control points. As at 31 May 2006, 234 APC e-channels were installed as scheduled. Holders of smart identity cards (Note 23) can use an APC e-channel for immigration clearance (Note 24). The average clearance time for a passenger using APC e-channel is about 12 seconds. The clearance time at a traditional immigration counter ranges from 14 seconds to 39 seconds.

4.8   *AVC e-channels.*   Since April 2005, the ImmD has installed AVC e-channels by phases at the three vehicular control points (i.e. Lok Ma Chau, Man Kam To and Sha Tau Kok). As at 31 May 2006, 40 AVC e-channels were installed as scheduled. Cross-boundary drivers can perform self-service immigration clearance (Note 25). The average clearance time is about 11 seconds. The average inspection clearance time by an immigration officer is about 15 seconds.

Usage of e-channels

4.9   With more e-channels installed at the eight control points (Note 26), there has been an increase in the number of passengers and drivers using e-channels for automated immigration clearance. Details are as follows:

(a)   *APC e-channels.*   As at 31 March 2006, 180 APC e-channels were installed at the eight control points. The number of passengers using APC e-channels at the Lo Wu Control Point increased from a monthly average of 161,724 for the period from December 2004 to February 2005 (i.e. the first three months of the implementation of APC e-channels) to 3.9 million in March 2006; and

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Note 23:   *Holders of smart identity cards under the age of 11 do not have fingerprint templates and cannot use APC e-channels. With effect from January 2006, holders of HKSAR documents of identity for visa purposes can use the APC e-channels if they also hold smart identity cards.*

Note 24:   *The immigration officer overseeing the e-channels intervenes when situations warrant (e.g. providing assistance to passengers or taking enforcement actions).*

Note 25:   *In addition to the fingerprint recognition technology used in the APC system, the AVC system adopts the facial recognition technology. After entering into an AVC lane, the driver shows his face to the camera installed at the immigration kiosk. His facial images are verified against the images stored in the AVC database.*

Note 26:   *According to the rollout schedule, the number of APC e-channels increased from 3 in December 2004 to 180 in March 2006, and the number of AVC e-channels increased from 2 in April 2005 to 26 in March 2006.*

(b) *AVC e-channels*. As at 31 March 2006, 26 AVC e-channels were installed at the three vehicular control points. The number of drivers using AVC e-channels at the Lok Ma Chau Control Point increased from a monthly average of 54,263 for the period from April to June 2005 (i.e. the first three months of the implementation of AVC e-channels) to 262,407 in March 2006.

Audit observations

Performance targets for immigration clearance

4.10 According to the 2006-07 ImmD Controlling Officer's Report, the performance targets for immigration clearance at control points are to clear:

(a) 92% of passengers travelling by air within a 15-minute waiting time; and

(b) 92% of passengers travelling by land or by sea within a 30-minute waiting time.

Table 1 shows the achievements of the performance targets for immigration clearance from 2001 to 2005.

Table 1

**Achievements of performance targets
for immigration clearance at control points
(2001 — 2005)**

Year	Performance targets		
	Passengers cleared within		
	15-minute waiting time	**30-minute waiting time**	
	by air	**by land**	**by sea**
2001	98.2%	98.8%	98.7%
2002	99.3%	98.5%	99.0%
2003	99.7%	99.5%	99.7%
2004	99.9%	99.7%	99.5%
2005	99.9%	99.7%	99.9%

Source: ImmD Controlling Officer's Reports

4.11   From 2001 to 2005, the ImmD was able to achieve its performance targets for immigration clearance.   At all control points, more than 92% of the passengers were cleared within the target waiting time.   Despite a significant increase in the number of passengers arriving at and departing from Hong Kong from 149 million in 2001 to 191 million in 2005, immigration clearances of more than 98% of the passengers were completed within the target waiting time (i.e. 6% higher than its performance targets of 92%).

4.12   Audit noted that the performance targets for immigration clearance at control points had not been revised since 1999.   The ImmD achieved a higher level of performance than its targets for the five years from 2001 to 2005.   The existing two performance targets have become less meaningful.   **Audit considers that the ImmD needs to review and revise its performance targets for immigration clearance to better indicate the extent of achieving its operational objectives (e.g. reducing the waiting time).**

4.13   With the introduction of e-channels, the ImmD was able to increase the throughput of the control points and reduce the waiting time of passengers for immigration clearance.   Upon the completion of the smart identity card replacement exercise in March 2007, more passengers will be able to use the e-channels.   **In view of the different processing time of APC e-channels, AVC e-channels and traditional immigration counters, the ImmD needs to consider setting different performance targets for them so as to monitor their usage more effectively.**

Bases for determining the number of e-channels at control points

4.14   *Decrease in number of e-channels.*   In November 2002, the ImmD proposed to install 259 APC e-channels for the seven control points (other than at Lok Ma Chau).   As at 31 May 2006, the actual number of APC e-channels was 234 as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

**Traditional immigration counters
and APC e-channels at control points**

Control point	Number of traditional immigration counters		Number of e-channels		
	Provided in November 2002	Provided in May 2006	Proposed in November 2002	Provided in May 2006	Increase/ (decrease)
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e) = (d) – (c)
Airport	206	182	61	28	**(33)**
China Ferry Terminal	64	54	9	15	6
Hung Hom	48	40	10	10	0
Lo Wu	184	116	125	104	**(21)**
Lok Ma Chau	50	50	0	20	**20**
Macau Ferry Terminal	68	40	42	42	0
Man Kam To	28	22	6	9	3
Sha Tau Kok	16	11	6	6	0
Total	**664**	**515**	**259**	**234**	**(25)**

Source: ImmD records

Remarks: Three e-channels were set up to replace two traditional immigration counters.

4.15   *Changes in assumptions and evaluation factors.*   In 2002, the ImmD carried out a feasibility study to assess the mix of traditional immigration counters and e-channels at control points.   The assumptions and methodology of this study are briefly outlined in Appendix G.   Since then, reviews were carried out on the e-channel requirements.   Audit noted that, in the following cases, the methodology used differed from that of the 2002 feasibility study:

(a)   *Airport Control Point.*   In November 2005, the Airport Division of the ImmD conducted a review of the e-channel requirement based on:

(i)   the workload statistics in 2005 (Note 27). As a result, the percentages of visitors during peak periods were increased, from 59% to 81% for arrivals, and from 58% to 75% for departures;

(ii)   the assumption of "one minor to two adults", instead of "one minor to one adult" used in the 2002 feasibility study; and

(iii)   the assumption that 5% of the passengers would still use traditional immigration counters at the airport, in the light of experience of implementing the APC system at the Lo Wu Control Point;

(b)   *Lo Wu Control Point.*   In November 2005, the Border Division of the ImmD conducted a review of e-channel requirement in order to allow for greater flexibility for handling possible changes in the passenger mix before demolition of existing counters. The review was based on:

(i)   the workload statistics in 2005. However, the passenger mix during the peak periods was not used to determine the e-channel requirement; and

(ii)   two hypothetical extremities (i.e. the maximum hourly arrival and departure figures of both residents and visitors — Note 28) to assess the maximum throughput scenario, although past records indicated that the peak hours of arrival and departure for residents and visitors did not coincide.

The review suggested 104 e-channels be installed, instead of the original 125 (see Table 2), in order to allow the ImmD more flexibility in handling surges in visitor arrivals, and possible breakdown of e-channel services. The ImmD aimed to find an optimal mix of traditional immigration counters and e-channels to cope with the worst-case scenario (e.g. breakdown of the APC system); and

(c)   *Lok Ma Chau Control Point.*   In 2002, there was no provision for the installation of e-channels at the Lok Ma Chau Control Point, as there was a plan to set up a carport control point in Huanggang. In May 2003, the carport project was withheld, and the ImmD planned to convert 12 traditional immigration counters into 18 e-channels. However, with the introduction of the 24-hour

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Note 27:   *The workload statistics referred to a sample of 30 days from March to July 2005, and a sample of 12 days in August and September of 2004 and 2005.*

Note 28:   *The highest hourly passenger figures for arrival were recorded on 13 February 2005 from 5:00 p.m. to 5:59 p.m. for residents, and from 10:00 a.m. to 10:59 a.m. for visitors.   The highest hourly passenger figures for departure were recorded on 25 March 2005 from 10:00 a.m. to 10:59 a.m. for residents, and on 28 August 2005 from 6:00 p.m. to 6:59 p.m. for visitors.*

service in January 2003 and the Individual Visit Scheme (Note 29) in July 2003, the traffic at this control point increased significantly, from 16.7 million in 2002 to 44.6 million in 2005. In December 2005, the ImmD, having regard to the space available, decided to install at this control point 20 e-channels by phases, inside the newly constructed arrival and departure annexures. The 50 traditional immigration counters were retained to handle unexpected increases in passenger traffic.

4.16 ***Workload statistics and passenger mix.*** Audit noted that the ImmD had not used updated workload statistics to determine the number of e-channels required at the Lok Ma Chau Control Point. In addition, the passenger mix was not used to calculate the number of e-channels required at the Lo Wu Control Point and the Lok Ma Chau Control Point. The workload statistics and the passenger mix are significant factors in determining the number of e-channels at control points. Audit noted that the passenger mix at the Lok Ma Chau Control Point for the years from 2003 to 2005 was about 83% residents and 17% visitors. The provision of 20 e-channels and 50 traditional immigration counters might not be an optimal mix, as the provision of e-channels was determined on the basis of the space available at the annexures. **Audit considers that the ImmD needs to take into account the workload trend and the passenger mix during peak hours for determining the number of e-channels at each control point.**

4.17 ***Risk assessment on failure of e-channel service.*** The APC and AVC systems are designed with resilient back-up features to support continuous clearance operation at control points. However, it was only in the review of the Lo Wu Control Point that the ImmD used two hypothetical extremities for assessing the implications of a massive and prolonged failure of the e-channel service. **In Audit's view, the ImmD needs to conduct a risk assessment on the failure of e-channel service using different scenarios to cope with possible breakdown of the service at control points.**

4.18 ***Application of assumptions to other control points.*** Audit noted that two new assumptions (i.e. one minor to two adults, and 5% of passengers using traditional immigration counters) were adopted for determining the number of e-channels at the Airport Control Point. **Audit considers that, in determining the optimal number of e-channels at new control points, the ImmD should ensure that the new assumptions adopted for determining the number of e-channels at various control points are taken into account.**

Note 29: *In May 2006, the scheme allowed 220 million Mainland residents with permanent household registration in 44 cities to visit Hong Kong in their individual capacity.*

4.19   *Control points of smaller scale.*   The ImmD had conducted ad hoc reviews of the mix of e-channels and traditional immigration counters for the five control points at China Ferry Terminal, Hung Hom, Macau Ferry Terminal, Man Kam To and Sha Tau Kok. **Audit considers that after the installation of the planned e-channels at these five control points and the completion of the smart identity card replacement exercise in 2007, the ImmD needs to conduct an overall review of the passenger traffic and mix at these control points to assess if the mix of e-channels and traditional immigration counters is at an optimal level.**

New control points

4.20   To cope with increases in passenger and vehicular throughput, new control points will be set up in the near future. The ImmD has planned to install APC e-channels and traditional immigration counters at the new control points at the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line (Note 30), Shenzhen Western Corridor, Sky Plaza at the Hong Kong International Airport and Tuen Mun Ferry Terminal.

4.21   Audit noted that the ImmD had adopted different bases, as shown in Table 3, in planning the mix of APC e-channels and traditional immigration counters at the four new control points. For the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line, Shenzhen Western Corridor and Tuen Mun Ferry Terminal, a clearance time of 15 seconds per passenger (instead of 12 seconds per passenger — the average clearance time of APC e-channels) was used. **In Audit's view, the ImmD may need to establish a consistent basis for determining the e-channel requirement for the new control points.**

Note 30:   *The Lok Ma Chau Spur Line is being built to connect the existing Kowloon-Canton Railway East Rail Sheung Shui Station to a new boundary crossing in Lok Ma Chau to cope with the increase of cross-boundary traffic and relieve the heavy passenger traffic at the Lo Wu Control Point.*

Table 3

**Bases for determining the number of
APC e-channels to be installed at new control points**

	Lok Ma Chau Spur Line	Shenzhen Western Corridor	Sky Plaza at the Airport	Tuen Mun Ferry Terminal
Tentative date of operation	1 November 2006	1 July 2007	4th quarter of 2006	3rd quarter of 2006
Number of APC e-channels	70	29	3	6
Number of traditional immigration counters	66	38	16	8
Clearance time per passenger (Note)	15 seconds	15 seconds	12 seconds	15 seconds
Passenger mix				
(a) Hong Kong residents	75%	85%	40%	66%
(b) Visitors	25%	15%	60%	34%
Percentage of Hong Kong residents using				
(a) e-channels	73%	80%	100%	72%
(b) traditional immigration counters	27%	20%	—	28%

Source: ImmD records

Note: The average clearance time of APC e-channels is 12 seconds per passenger.

Post implementation review of e-channels at control points

4.22   The immigration clearance process of APC e-channels is more cost-effective than that of traditional immigration counters, as one immigration officer can oversee five e-channels simultaneously whereas each traditional immigration counter is manned by one officer. On the other hand, traditional immigration counters provide immigration clearance service for passengers holding different types of travel documents, whereas e-channels only allow holders of smart identity cards to go through. **To strike a balance between cost-effectiveness and operational flexibility, Audit considers that the ImmD needs to closely monitor the passenger traffic and mix at all control points so as to provide e-channels and traditional immigration counters at an optimal level.**

4.23   The installation of 234 e-channels was completed in May 2006. Audit notes that the ImmD will conduct a post implementation review (Note 31) to ascertain the extent of achievement of agreed objectives and the realisation of intended benefits. **Audit considers that the ImmD needs to review regularly the mix of e-channels and traditional immigration counters at all the existing and new control points, taking into account:**

(a)   **the usage of e-channels and traditional immigration counters, and the passenger traffic and mix at control points after the completion of the smart identity card replacement exercise in March 2007; and**

(b)   **the implications of opening of new control points on the passenger traffic and mix at the existing control points.**

Audit recommendations

4.24   **Audit has *recommended* that the Director of Immigration should:**

Performance targets for immigration clearance

(a)   **review and revise the performance targets for immigration clearance to better indicate the extent of achieving the ImmD's operational objectives;**

(b)   **consider setting different performance targets for APC e-channels, AVC e-channels and traditional immigration counters so as to monitor their usage more effectively;**

Note 31:   *User departments are required to submit to the OGCIO a Post Implementation Departmental Return after a major information technology system has been on live-run for six months.*

Bases for determining the number of e-channels at control points

(c)   **ensure that the workload trend and the passenger mix during peak hours are taken into account for determining the e-channel requirement at control points;**

(d)   **consider the need for conducting a risk assessment on the failure of e-channel service using different scenarios covering all the control points;**

(e)   **in determining the optimal number of e-channels at new control points, ensure that new assumptions adopted for determining the number of e-channels at various control points are taken into account;**

(f)   **conduct an overall review of the passenger traffic and mix at the control points at China Ferry Terminal, Hung Hom, Macau Ferry Terminal, Man Kam To and Sha Tau Kok to assess if the mix of e-channels and traditional immigration counters is at an optimal level, after the completion of the smart identity card replacement exercise in 2007;**

New control points

(g)   **consider adopting a consistent basis for determining the e-channel requirement for the new control points in the future; and**

Post implementation review of e-channels at control points

(h)   **review regularly the mix of e-channels and traditional immigration counters at each control point to ensure the provision of efficient and effective immigration clearance service, taking into account:**

    (i)   **cost-effectiveness and operational flexibility; and**

    (ii)   **the implications of opening of new control points on the passenger traffic and mix at the existing control points.**

Response from the Administration

4.25   The **Director of Immigration** agrees with the audit recommendations. He has said that:

Performance targets for immigration clearance

(a)   the ImmD will review and revise the performance targets for immigration clearance;

(b)   the ImmD will set different performance targets for APC e-channels, AVC e-channels and traditional immigration counters so as to monitor their usage more effectively.   Taking into account the public perception factor, the performance targets should remain as far as possible uncomplicated;

Bases for determining the number of e-channels at control points

(c)   the Lok Ma Chau Control Point has been operating well beyond its designed capacity of 35,000 passengers a day prior to the commissioning of e-channels in January 2006.   The ImmD decided to build one annexure on both sides of the clearance hall for accommodating e-channels for handling the overwhelming resident traffic.   This enables the allocation of as many counters inside the hall as possible for processing visitors.   The segregation minimises the discomfort on travellers due to congestion.   The ImmD will continue to take into account the workload trend and the passenger mix during peak hours at control points for determining the number of e-channels;

(d)   the ImmD will conduct a risk assessment on the failure of e-channel service at control points.   The risk assessment may enhance the ability of the ImmD to cope with critical situations and is an on-going exercise.   The ImmD will continue to keep in view of each and every situation which will affect the smooth operation of e-channels;

(e)   the ImmD has taken into account the latest assumptions when planning the number of e-channels required at new control points.   For example, for the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point, the workload trend and the possible change in passenger mix were taken into account during the design planning stage.   As each control point has its unique operation mode, constraints and environment, new assumptions adopted for determining the number of e-channels at various control points will be taken into account;

(f)   the ImmD will conduct an overall review of the passenger traffic and mix at the control points at China Ferry Terminal, Man Kam To and Sha Tau Kok to assess if the mix of e-channels and traditional immigration counters is at the optimal level after full operation of e-channels and the completion of the smart identity card replacement exercise in 2007.   The review could help the ImmD assess if the manpower and resources available then are optimally utilised;

New control points

(g)   assumptions adopted for projects planned at different time might vary.   The assumptions may be adjusted from time to time having regard to the latest operational experiences on the average clearance time and the popularity of the e-channels. The ImmD agrees that there is a need for adopting a consistent basis for determining the e-channel requirement for all the new control points in the future. A consistent basis will be worked out with due consideration given to the peculiarities of the new control points; and

Post implementation review of e-channels at control points

(h)   the ImmD will develop a mechanism to review regularly the mix of e-channels and traditional immigration counters at all control points.

4.26   The **Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury** supports the audit recommendations. He has said that:

Performance targets for immigration clearance

(a)   the ImmD should review and revise the performance targets for immigration clearance to better indicate the extent of achievement of its operational objectives, and consider setting different performance targets for APC e-channels, AVC e-channels and traditional immigration counters so as to monitor their usage more effectively. The Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau had suggested the ImmD to consider raising the performance targets for immigration clearance when the 2006-07 draft Estimates were prepared. However, the ImmD considered that it was not the time to do so given the increasing cross-boundary passenger traffic and the mounting demand on ImmD services on other critical fronts.   The Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau will urge the ImmD to take into account the audit recommendations when preparing the 2007-08 draft Estimates;

New control points

(b)   he shares the audit concern that the ImmD had adopted different bases when planning the mix of APC e-channels and traditional immigration counters at the new control points (e.g. using different clearance time per passenger for different control points). The ImmD should consider setting a consistent basis in the future; and

Post implementation review of e-channels at control points

(c)   the ImmD should review regularly the mix of e-channels and traditional immigration counters at all control points, taking into account the need to cope with the changes in passenger traffic and mix resulting from the provision of new control points.

Organisation chart of the Personal Documentation Branch
(March 2006)

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                        ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                        │  Personal Documentation Branch  │
                        └─────────────────────────────────┘
                 ┌──────────────┴──────────────────────┐
        ┌────────────────────┐              ┌────────────────────────────────┐
        │ Documents Division │              │ Registration of Persons Division│
        └────────────────────┘              └────────────────────────────────┘
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Documents Division		Registration of Persons Division	
Births, Deaths and Marriage Registration Sub-division	**Documents Sub-division**	**Registration of Persons Sub-division**	**Smart Identity Card Sub-division**
Births, Deaths and Marriage Registration (Support) Section	Travel Documents and Nationality (Application) Section (Note)	ROP (Support) Section	Smart Identity Card Section
Births, Deaths and Marriage Registration (Operations) Section	Travel Documents (Issue) Section (Note)	ROP Records Section	9 smart identity card centres
4 births registries	International Co-operation Section	Right of Abode Section	
3 deaths registries	Documents Management Section	ROP (HK) and ROP (K and NT) Sections	
5 marriage registries	6 immigration branch offices	5 ROP offices	
Marriage Registration and Records Office			

Source: ImmD records

Note: The Travel Documents and Nationality (Application) Section is responsible for the acceptance and centralised processing of applications for HKSAR passports submitted in person at the Headquarters and branch offices, by post or drop-in, and overseas applications for HKSAR passports and documents of identity for visa purposes.   The Travel Documents (Issue) Section is responsible for personalising HKSAR passports and documents of identity for visa purposes, and arranging subsequent issues through the Headquarters and branch offices.   As at 31 May 2006, the two sections had an establishment of 183 staff who were handling a daily average of about 400 in-person applications, 1,600 HKSAR passports and 180 HKSAR documents of identity for visa purposes.   The ImmD has a mechanism to redeploy staff in accordance with the workload of the two sections.

Distribution of branch offices
(March 2006)

Region	Births registries (Note 1)	Deaths registries (Note 2)	Marriage registries	Immigration branch offices	ROP offices
Hong Kong Island	1. Births and Deaths General Register Office (Admiralty)	1. Births and Deaths General Register Office (Admiralty) 2. Hong Kong Island Deaths Registry (Wan Chai)	1. City Hall Marriage Registry (Note 3) 2. Cotton Tree Drive Marriage Registry (Note 3) 3. Marriage Registration and Records Office (Admiralty — Note 4)	1. Hong Kong Island Travel Documents Issuing Office (Sheung Wan)	1. Hong Kong Office (Wan Chai)
East Kowloon				2. East Kowloon Office (Lam Tin)	2. Kwun Tong Office
West Kowloon	2. Kowloon Births Registry (Yau Ma Tei)	3. Kowloon Deaths Registry (Cheung Sha Wan)	4. Tsim Sha Tsui Marriage Registry	3. West Kowloon Office (Yau Ma Tei)	3. Kowloon Office (Cheung Sha Wan)
East New Territories	3. Sha Tin District Births Registry		5. Sha Tin Marriage Registry	4. Fo Tan Office (Note 5) 5. Sha Tin Office (Note 5)	4. Fo Tan Office (Note 5)
West New Territories	4. Tuen Mun District Births Registry		6. Tuen Mun Marriage Registry	6. Yuen Long Office (Note 5)	5. Yuen Long Office (Note 5)

Source: ImmD records

Note 1: The districts served by individual births registries are as follows:

Registry	*Districts served*
Births and Deaths General Register Office	*All districts*
Kowloon Births Registry	*Kowloon and Tsuen Wan*
Sha Tin District Births Registry	*Sha Tin, Tai Po, Fanling and Sheung Shui*
Tuen Mun District Births Registry	*Tuen Mun and Yuen Long*

Note 2: The Births and Deaths General Register Office provides services for all death registration referred to it by the Coroner. The Hong Kong Island Deaths Registry and the Kowloon Deaths Registry provide services for normal death registration for all districts.

Note 3: Two marriage registries were retained on the Hong Kong Island in view of public demand for services at these registries.

Note 4: The Marriage Registration and Records Office accepts applications for giving of marriage notices for marriages to be solemnised at the City Hall Marriage Registry and the Cotton Tree Drive Marriage Registry, and issuing of certificates of absence of marriage records and certified copies of marriage certificates.

Note 5: According to ImmD's reorganisation plan, the Sha Tin Office and the Fo Tan Office would be merged to provide both immigration and ROP services for the East New Territories region in the future. The Fo Tan Office and the Yuen Long Office are joint immigration and ROP offices.

Workload of branch offices
(2001 — 2005)

Branch offices	Number of applications received					Increase/(decrease) between 2001 and 2005	
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	(Number)	(Percentage)
Births, deaths and marriage registries							
Birth/death/marriage/ adoption registration	115,540	114,723	119,800	127,826	139,005	23,465	20%
Birth/death/marriage/ adoption certificate	98,598	94,822	86,900	92,390	103,897	5,299	5%
Total	**214,138**	**209,545**	**206,700**	**220,216**	**242,902**	**28,764**	**13%**
Immigration branch offices							
HKSAR document of identity for visa purposes	38,216	39,156	51,511	33,270	53,670	15,454	40%
HKSAR passport	120,735	124,288	116,661	144,114	136,550	15,815	13%
HKSAR re-entry permit	125,639	127,721	91,123	101,820	98,481	(27,158)	(22%)
Total	**284,590**	**291,165**	**259,295**	**279,204**	**288,701**	**4,111**	**1%**
ROP offices							
Certificate of registered particulars, and registration and replacement of identity card **Total**	**555,934**	**535,661**	**513,352**	**523,001**	**512,468**	**(43,466)**	**(8%)**

Source: ImmD records

**Applications for early issue of
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region passports
(January 2001 — May 2006)**

Year	Number of applications		
	Early issue	**Total issue**	**Percentage of early issue**
	(a)	**(b)**	$(c) = \dfrac{(a)}{(b)} \times 100\%$
2001	14,206	433,624	3%
2002	20,785	416,744	5%
2003	36,832	476,739	8%
2004	52,380	633,688	8%
2005	43,922	479,685	9%
2006 (up to May)	19,907	220,014	9%

Source: ImmD records

Applications for early issue of Hong Kong
Special Administrative Region documents of identity for visa purposes
(September 2003 — May 2006)

Year	Number of applications		
	Early issue	**Total issue**	**Percentage of early issue**
	(a)	**(b)**	$(c) = \dfrac{(a)}{(b)} \times 100\%$
2003 (September to December)	821 (Note)	11,050	7%
2004	2,260	33,270	7%
2005	2,914	53,670	5%
2006 (up to May)	969	22,110	4%

Source: ImmD records

Note: The ImmD started to keep records for the number of applications received for the early issue of HKSAR documents of identity for visa purposes when the machine-readable HKSAR document of identity for visa purposes was introduced in September 2003.

**Repeated transactions of making appointments
for giving of marriage notices under the Electronic Service Delivery Scheme
(February 2005 — February 2006)**

Number of repeated transactions per couple	Number of couples		Number of repeated transactions
	With repeated transactions	With confirmed registration	
More than 100	7	3	1,284
51 to 100	18	10	1,180
21 to 50	139	95	4,277
11 to 20	204	133	2,827
6 to 10	419	268	3,165
4 to 5	625	419	2,847
Total	**1,412**	**928**	**15,580**

Source: ImmD records

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**Bases for estimating the number of
Automated Passenger Clearance e-channels in the 2002 feasibility study**

(A)   Assumptions

1.   Traditional immigration counters would be retained for: (a) visitors not holding Hong Kong smart identity cards; (b) resident minors under the age of 11 without fingerprint templates contained in their Hong Kong smart identity cards; (c) aged persons over 65 who would prefer clearance through traditional immigration counters; and (d) accompanying adults on the assumption that each minor or aged person would be accompanied by a resident adult.

2.   Potential APC e-channel users would be permanent and temporary residents of age 11 to 64 after obtaining Hong Kong smart identity cards.

3.   Potential APC e-channel users would be extended to temporary residents, and examination and stamping would be waived upon the implementation of the APC system.

4.   After deducting the number of traditional immigration counters required for visitors, minors, the aged and accompanying adults, all the remaining traditional immigration counters would be converted into APC e-channels.

(B)   Evaluation bases

1.   Passenger mix

   (a)   Workload in 2001 was used to represent the mix of residents and visitors workload, and cater for fluctuation of visitor traffic.

   (b)   Passenger mix of residents was calculated according to categories of residents classified by minor, the aged, accompanying adult and potential e-channel user.   The ratio was used for calculating the number of traditional immigration counters to be distributed for handling respective traffic.

2.   Clearance time

   (a)   Clearance time of permanent residents holding Hong Kong smart identity cards was used for calculating clearance time of temporary residents.

   (b)   Clearance times of machine-readable documents and non-machine-readable documents of permanent residents were used as clearance time for minors and the ratio of using the machine-readable documents and non-machine-readable documents was also considered in the calculation as there was difference in clearance time between the two types of documents.

3.   Weighted workload distribution

(a)   Since clearance times for different categories of passengers were different, it could not simply apply the percentage of passenger mix to derive the number of traditional immigration counters required for handling the respective traffic.

(b)   Based on the passenger mix and clearance time, a weighted workload distribution (in relative ratio) was worked out for the distribution of traditional immigration counters among different categories of passengers. After allocating traditional immigration counters for visitors, minors, the aged and accompanying adults, the remaining traditional immigration counters for potential APC users would be demolished for the setting up of APC e-channels.

4.   Other considerations

(a)   The flow of passenger traffic and operational procedures were considered (e.g. spacious area was required for Mainland group tour clearance).

(b)   The size of existing channels and clearance booths affected the number of channels to be built.

(c)   Physical location of the clearance hall was considered (e.g. trunking and the location of computer room).

Source: ImmD records

Acronyms and abbreviations

APC   Automated Passenger Clearance

Audit   Audit Commission

AVC   Automated Vehicle Clearance

ESD   Electronic Service Delivery

EXPRESS   Entry/Exit Processing and Records System

GPA   Government Property Agency

HKSAR   Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

ImmD   Immigration Department

OGCIO   Office of the Government Chief Information Officer

ROP   Registration of Persons