



5 December 2011

020 7035 2123

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION BEFORE 00:01, WEDNESDAY 7 DECEMBER 2011**

**YARL'S WOOD IMMIGRATION REMOVAL CENTRE –  
SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS**

Yarl's Wood had improved in most areas, although there was still much more to do, said Nick Hardwick, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of an announced inspection of the removal centre in Bedfordshire.

Yarl's Wood has had a troubled history. Significant damage was caused by a disturbance and fire in 2002 and its past role in detaining children made it a focus for intense scrutiny and concern. This inspection was its first since the decision to no longer detain children.

Inspectors were pleased to find that:

- good progress had been made improving education and activities, and most detainees said there were sufficient activities to fill their time;
- the amount of work available had improved and some led to qualifications;
- residential units and rooms were clean and comfortable, and health care was generally satisfactory;
- a high proportion of detainees told us they were treated with respect by staff;

- an over-stretched but well-regarded welfare officer and support team provided practical assistance to women and helped to prepare them for release or removal; and
- there was little evidence of bullying and women at risk of suicide or self-harm were generally well cared for.

However, inspectors were concerned to find that:

- the number of female staff was too low and men were sometimes left in sole charge of units at night;
- detainees found it difficult to get advice about their cases and had insufficient contact with immigration staff based at the centre;
- the overall length of time detainees had spent in different establishments was not recorded and one was released during the inspection after spending almost three years in detention;
- rule 35 reports (requiring notification to the UKBA if a detainee's health is likely to be injuriously affected by detention, including if they may have been the victim of torture) were poorly understood by healthcare staff and badly completed;
- too many pregnant women, who should only have been held in exceptional circumstances, were detained in the centre; and
- some other vulnerable detainees, including those with disabilities, were under-identified, and there was insufficient provision for older detainees.

Nick Hardwick said:

“Yarl’s Wood is a unique facility dealing with sometimes very vulnerable women at a difficult time of their lives. Nevertheless, this inspection found evidence of some significant improvements. However, concerns remain, particularly about how the needs of vulnerable

women are met.”

ENDS

**Notes to Editors:**

1. A copy of the report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 7 December 2011 at [www.justice.gov.uk/inspectors/hmi-prisons](http://www.justice.gov.uk/inspectors/hmi-prisons)
2. HM Inspectorate of Prisons is an independent inspectorate, inspecting places of detention to report on conditions and treatment, and promote positive outcomes for those detained and the public.
3. This announced inspection was carried out from 4-8 July 2011.
4. Yarl's Wood is a purpose-built Immigration Removal Centre that can hold up to 405 adult women and a small number of their male family members. Serco Ltd took over the management, operation and maintenance of the establishment in April 2007. No children have been detained there since December 2010.
5. Please contact Jane Parsons in HMI Prisons Press Office on 0207 035 2123 or 07880 787452 if you would like more information or to request an interview with Nick Hardwick.