

Keith Wood-Smith

European Commission

Presentation: Using biometrics and large-scale IT systems to improve security and efficiency at our borders.

Profile

Keith joined the UK Immigration Service in 1990 and spent the next ten years based at Heathrow Terminal 3, one of the world's busiest international passenger terminals. During this time he gained a broad experience of immigration port work: from the interviewing and assessment of arriving passengers, to document security, carriers' liability, asylum and other casework. Whilst based at Heathrow, Keith also took on a number of secondments elsewhere, issuing visas at UK embassies overseas and working at Immigration Service Headquarters.

In the year 2000 Keith moved to UKvisas where he was responsible for a successful business case which led to the £11 million modernisation of the IT systems used to support visa staff working at British Embassies and Consulates abroad. Projects included the upgrade of the visa issuing software, the development of a central database of UK visa applications and the implementation of an on-line visa application system. In 2003, on successful completion of these projects, Keith became UKvisas' first IT Manager, setting up an IT Unit to support the new systems and to assess how they could be further enhanced. During the course of this work Keith was able to travel to a wide variety of UK visa issuing Posts, from where he was able once again to witness the challenges facing visa staff, as well as how well implemented IT can help and poorly implemented IT can hinder visa staff in busy operational environments.

In 2005 Keith began a secondment to the Unit responsible for large-scale IT systems within the European Commission's Directorate General Justice, Freedom and Security. Working to the Visa Information System (VIS) project manager, Keith has held responsibility for managing a number of deliverables supplied by the contractor; he also liaises with the national project managers of the participating Schengen countries, each of who must work to connect their Consulates and borders to the central VIS system. Keith has been the main contact point between the Commission's VIS technical and legal teams as the necessary legal instruments have been prepared and subsequently discussed in the Council and European Parliament. He is also responsible for a number of communications activities with the project's many stakeholders.