

Press Notice

THURSDAY 18 AUGUST 2005

ENSURING QUALITY CASEWORK IN THE CPS

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS PRESS RELEASE AND THE
ACCOMPANYING REPORT AND SUMMARY ARE ALL
EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 18 AUGUST 2005.**

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate has today published the report of its thematic review of the CPS Casework Quality Assurance (CQA) scheme.

The scheme is a key tool in the CPS's performance management regime. Inspectors were keen to explore the implementation of CQA, as it provides a platform from which to drive up standards of casework throughout the CPS, meeting HMCPSP's goal of promoting sustainable improvement in the criminal justice system. Used positively it is capable of identifying strengths and weaknesses in Area casework, enabling these to be addressed both with individuals and across the Areas. Furthermore, it could enable HMCPSP to target its focus on specific aspects and so reduce the burden of inspection.

The inspection team found that there had been variable compliance since the scheme was introduced on a mandatory basis in April 2003. The review also identified a number of weaknesses and errors in practice. CPS managers were reviewing files in numbers which were far lower than the suggested sample size and samples frequently were not properly representative of the case categories covered by the scheme. This meant that, in most CPS Areas, the monitoring was insufficient to provide an accurate reflection of the standard of the full range of casework.

The report makes it clear that the deficiencies identified flow from the manner in which the scheme is currently being operated, rather than from the scheme itself. Inspectors found that the scheme was capable of providing a basic indicator of casework performance at all levels – individual, unit, Area and nationally. They disagreed with only 5.2% of assessments carried out under the scheme. They also found that the scheme itself had been substantially revised in January 2005 to take account of changes in the prosecution process, under which the CPS would be assuming responsibility for the initial decision to charge – previously a matter for the police.

The emerging findings of the review have been presented to the key CPS managers responsible for the scheme. The report is therefore able to also set out the steps which have been put in hand by the CPS to improve the operation of the scheme. Areas will be required to revert to full operation of the scheme (some had partially or fully suspended it following agreement with Headquarters). Action has been planned in relation to each of the recommendations of the report, which include greater checks on compliance and greater scrutiny of the monitoring results.

Stephen Wooler, HM Chief Inspector of the Crown Prosecution Service, said in relation to the report:

“The scheme is fundamentally sound and should contribute to the development and maintenance of high standards in the CPS, provided it is properly operated. The challenge to managers will be to ensure consistency, and devote care and accuracy to the assessments. I am encouraged by the early response of the CPS to this report, and the steps they are taking to address the recommendations.”

An Executive Summary of the report is attached to this notice, also on an embargoed basis. For further information, please contact Michael Fogg, HMCPSI Communications Manager, Tel: 020 7210 1143 or 07901 856346, email: Michael.fogg@cps.gsi.gov.uk.

Notes to Editors

1. The purpose of the CQA scheme is to provide a simple means of measuring the quality of casework across the CPS at Area, unit and individual level; the results are then collated to provide a national overview. It is based upon Unit Heads/Team Leaders monitoring casework quality as a discrete task as they carry out their normal functions such as preparing and presenting cases at court and analysing failed cases. The scheme is not monitoring for its own sake, but is a major tool within a performance management regime, the purpose of which is to improve the quality of casework across the CPS.
2. Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of the Crown Prosecution Service undertook this thematic review of the CPS Casework Quality Assurance scheme.
 - to ascertain the extent and effectiveness of the implementation of the national Casework Quality Assurance scheme within CPS Areas, including how the results of monitoring are used to improve casework quality at individual, unit and Area level;
 - to assess the reliability of the judgments - and thus the data produced by Areas under the scheme - as a source of assurance for CPS managers (both local and national) as to casework performance; and

- to assess to what extent HMCPSI can also safely rely on the data in future inspection processes to inform assessment of the quality of Area casework and, particularly, whether it will allow a reduction in file examination.
3. The review took place between December 2004 - March 2005.
 4. HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate is an independent statutory body established by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000, which came into force on 1 October 2000. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.