



HMICS HM INSPECTORATE OF
CONSTABULARY FOR SCOTLAND

Thematic Inspection
A review of how the Scottish Crime
Recording Standard has developed
within the police service in Scotland
since 2005

February 2008

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THE AIM OF THE STANDARD AND A SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In February 2003, the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS) established a short life working group whose work led to the introduction, in April 2004, of the Scottish Crime Recording Standard (SCRS, or the Standard).
2. The Standard incorporates the following aim and principles:

Aim

To provide a more victim-orientated approach that serves the needs of our communities and ensures uniformity in crime recording standards throughout Scotland.

Principles

All reports of incidents, whether crime-related or not, will result in the creation of a report which is auditable.

Following initial registration, an incident will be recorded as a crime in all cases if:

- the circumstances amount to a crime or offence as defined by Scots Law, and
- there is no credible evidence to the contrary.

Once recorded, a crime will remain recorded unless there is credible evidence to disprove that a crime has occurred.

3. HMICS makes five recommendations in this report that are intended to support the above aim and principles. Forces may wish to work together through the ACPOS Crime Business Area to deliver these recommendations. We, however, will continue to review the arrangements of individual forces.



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: That forces review current processes to assist the Scottish Crime Registrars Group (SCRG) in implementing and managing change, with a view to cutting out unnecessary bureaucracy and streamlining the decision-making process.

Recommendation 2: That, in order to resolve unnecessary inconsistencies identified by force crime registrars (FCRs), the Scottish Government should undertake an urgent review into the suitability of its counting rules for crime recording, in consultation with ACPOS, the SCRG and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS).

Recommendation 3: That forces and the SCRG review the current ad hoc arrangements for SCRS training with the aim of securing, within specified timescales, a standardised, national approach from the Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA).

Recommendation 4: That, without delay, forces work together to finalise a policy to standardise the identification of crimes that do not require further or full investigation.

Recommendation 5: That, in order to achieve greater transparency and consistency within the audit regime, forces agree to co-ordinate individual force crime audits through the SCRG so that each audit is scrutinised by a crime registrar from a neighbouring force. On an annual basis HMICS will dip-sample crime audits across all forces, including British Transport Police and Ministry of Defence Police.



Introduction

4. This report is intended to stimulate improvement and contribute to the continuing debate about how the police in Scotland record crime and related matters. The inspection was carried out by Chief Inspector Malcolm MacCormick (on secondment from Strathclyde Police) and Ms Lorraine Ramsay (on secondment from Fife Constabulary), directed by the Assistant Inspector of Constabulary, Malcolm R Dickson QPM. This inspection is also one of the first of a new, more concise thematic style that allows us to focus on a wider range of issues than was previously possible. It is anticipated that the main body of this report will be of interest to all readers, while the annexes containing evidence and good practice should be of use to those responding to our findings. Interested parties are welcome to *contact us*¹ regarding any aspect of this report or to obtain further detail.

5. For many reasons, police recorded crime figures do not mirror the level of criminality in society. However, the level of crime recorded by police ought at the very least to reflect that which is reported to them. In Scotland a common standard for achieving this, known as the Scottish Crime Recording Standard (SCRS), was introduced in April 2004.

6. The basic principle behind the SCRS is that all reports of incidents, whether crime-related or not, should result in an auditable report being created. The incident should be recorded as a crime in all cases where the victim, or any other person, perceives that a crime has occurred. There is no requirement for corroborative evidence before a crime record is created. Moreover, a crime should be recorded if, on the balance of probabilities, one has occurred, assuming that there is no credible evidence to the contrary and where the circumstances amount to a crime as defined by Scots Law. By adhering to these principles it was anticipated that the Standard would be more sensitive to victims' needs and bring uniformity to crime recording across Scotland.

7. In 2005 we conducted our first inspection of the SCRS, in order to assess its impact a year after it had been introduced. At that time we found significant improvement in how police forces and individual officers recorded crime, but also noted that further work was required. Progress against the recommendations of that report is considered in Annex A.

8. Since 2005, we have carried out individual crime audits in each of the eight Scottish police forces. Considered together, these audits showed that the level of recording of so called 'low-level' crimes, such as vandalism, and minor assault, had increased significantly since 2004, as expected. However, there was still considerable room for improvement when it came to consistent application of the Standard. Having accurate crime data is important at every level of policing and contributes to:

- providing individual services to victims,
- managing investigations,
- understanding the nature of volume crime (crime incidence as intelligence),
- deploying police staff efficiently,
- working with partners to seek to reduce crime, and
- performance management.

¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Justice/Police/15403/2068>



9. As mentioned above, part of the remit of this current thematic was to review the progress made by the police service in Scotland in addressing the recommendations contained within our 2005 report. Thereafter we considered the current status of the SCRS in Scottish forces. Our methodology included consulting focus groups of operational officers, police staff and supervisors. As a result of these two elements of our inspection, we have made five recommendations aimed at reinforcing the Standard.





KEY ISSUES

The Scottish Crime Registrars Group

10. In our 2005 thematic we highlighted the pivotal role of force crime registrars in applying the Scottish Crime Recording Standard. While the registrar post-holders were instrumental in determining how the Standard was applied within force, they also played a key role nationally as members of the Scottish Crime Registrars Group (SCRG). The group consists of the eight force registrars, as well as representatives from British Transport Police, the Ministry of Defence Police and the Justice Analytical Services Division of the Scottish Government. It is chaired, in the absence of the ACPOS Lead officer, by the group secretary, with the role of group secretary rotating annually between the registrars.

11. We were pleased to note that, despite having a relatively large membership and meeting every two months, continuity in attendance rates had improved markedly over the previous year. Nevertheless, concern remained that the registrar acting as secretary to the Group was expected to perform these duties with little or no support, in addition to working full-time to implement the Standard in his or her force. The additional pressure that this undoubtedly puts on the post-holder is a matter that forces should address. Ideally ACPOS could provide a chief officer lead who is able to attend more regularly and to drive the progress that this report seeks.

“The SCRG is ineffective, not pushing things forward. We need to reinvent the Group, make it more focused, driving SCRS.” - a crime registrar

12. While the problem of meeting attendance had been resolved, force crime registrars were concerned with how the Group tackled changes in policy and strategy. In particular, many FCRs intimated that the current set-up could be overly bureaucratic, leading to duplication of effort and slowing down the decision-making process. It was suggested that a useful starting-point for tackling this situation would be to review how changes to policy and strategy are managed. For instance, there had been occasions when, having agreed a change to an existing process, the SCRG had notified the ACPOS lead who, through the ACPOS Crime Business Area, had in turn sought force opinions on the proposed amendment. The forces had then forwarded the matter on to their FCRs, requesting their comments on the very proposal they had been involved in producing. As a result, the SCRG was at times party to a convoluted bureaucratic system that added little or no value to the end product.

13. We recognise that some changes may affect other ACPOS business areas, and that consultation with forces is sometimes necessary. Nevertheless, we feel that, where there are clear-cut issues relating specifically to the Standard, the decision-making process should be more focused and more expedient. We note that the appointment of a National Crime Registrar in England and Wales has led to a more effective approach to managing change there.

Recommendation 1: HMICS recommends that forces review current processes to assist the Scottish Crime Registrars Group (SCRG) in implementing and managing change, with a view to cutting out unnecessary bureaucracy and streamlining the decision-making process.

Ownership of the Counting Rules

“The Standard is not the problem: it is the counting rules. We require counting rules that actually make sense so that the statistics and information provided is meaningful.” - a crime registrar



14. Crime recording is evidently highly dependent on existing recording practices and counting conventions. In England and Wales, the Home Office Counting Rules for Recorded Crime were re-written to take account of the introduction in 2002 of the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS). The Counting Rules were produced by the Research Development and Statistics Directorate of the Home Office, in consultation with forces, representatives of ACPO, HMIC for England and Wales, and the Crown Prosecution Service. Revised annually, they, along with the introduction of a force crime registrars' network and a sustained auditing programme, have contributed to a greatly improved standard of crime recording.

15. The situation in Scotland is more challenging. Scottish police forces have traditionally recorded crimes and offences reported to them in accordance with counting rules issued by the Scottish Government. However, during our inspection force crime registrars voiced anxiety about counting rule inconsistencies that predated the implementation of SCRS but which had not been resolved. Indeed, all the registrars we consulted expressed some apprehension about the impact of these inconsistencies, particularly those that resulted from:

- the impact of different force IT systems on how crime is counted, and
- how the counting rules are applied across the various crime groups.

16. HMICS accepts that convergence of all force IT systems is planned although this may take some years to achieve. This report and its findings underline the value of that development. There is no sense at all in different IT systems being used across the eight forces when those differences unintentionally contribute to discrepancies in crime recording.

17. In England and Wales there is a clear commitment by the Home Office to drive the development of the NCRS, through regular review of the counting rules coupled with the oversight of a National Crime Registrar. In Scotland the Analytical Services Division of the Scottish Government has recently identified that greater consistency and national oversight may also be necessary here and is considering how this might be achieved, recognising that it may not be easy to reconcile all stakeholders' views and needs.

18. On the other hand the advent of and improved adherence to the SCRS has certainly enabled the police service in Scotland to capture much more of the criminal behaviour which concerns people in every community. This is a real positive change and will ultimately result in better understanding within the service and its partners of the nature and extent of reported crime in Scotland. But it does mean that our picture of recorded crime now more than ever differs slightly from the charges presented to courts. This is because police recorded crime properly accepts the victim's perspective while what is presented to the court must take a wider perspective and also concentrate on what has the greatest chance of being proved. Procurators fiscal (PF) must always have the freedom to prefer whatever charges they believe are most appropriate in the individual circumstances reported to them by police. Occasionally this can differ from the way that the crime(s) or offences(s) in question have been recorded by the police in accordance with counting rules, but that in itself need not be problematic. Open and regular dialogue across force and PF boundaries in a national forum would help to minimise any unnecessary confusion.



19. This inspection found that force crime registrars unanimously believe that a review of the counting rules by all the key stakeholders, including the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), is long overdue. HMICS concurs with this view and commends all stakeholders to work towards agreeing solutions which best suit each of their purposes and at least seek to standardise common interpretations of crimes and offences across the country and between police forces and procurators fiscal, where this is possible.

Recommendation 2: HMICS recommends that, in order to resolve unnecessary inconsistencies identified by force crime registrars, the Scottish Government should undertake an urgent review into the suitability of its counting rules for crime recording, in consultation with ACPOS, the SCRG and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS).

Training

“If you don’t train people properly, you don’t get the service” - shift sergeant

20. In 2004, initial staff training for SCRS consisted in the main of an adapted generic national training package. In our 2005 thematic we observed that only limited evaluation of the training had been carried out. The results indicated that not all staff had been trained, and that for some their only exposure to the principles of SCRS had been by word of mouth. In particular the report raised concerns about the following:

- the absence of follow-up training,
- the lack of consistency in police staff training,
- the paucity of input to probationers, and
- the lack of training for force crime registrars and other specialist roles connected with the SCRS process.

21. On the basis of these shortcomings, our *Meeting the Standard*² report recommended (recommendation 2) that ACPOS work with the Scottish Police College to develop a standardised approach to SCRS training. However, evidence from both our fieldwork and focus groups in this inspection would suggest that the national picture has changed little in the last two years. Indeed, for some aspects it could be argued that the situation has deteriorated, given the length of time since initial SCRS training and the lack of progress in addressing the points highlighted above. The following considers each of the points raised in our 2005 report in turn:

- Only in Grampian Police was there evidence of a force-wide refresher training programme. Nationally, most officers spoken with could not recall the content of their initial SCRS training input, and relied instead on advice from colleagues, supervisors and staff whose work regularly brought them into contact with the Standard. Moreover, it was established that, with the exception of Central Scotland Police, forces did not train supervisors in the principles of SCRS or in their role in ensuring compliance with the Standard. This is of particular concern in the case of newly promoted sergeants.
- Alarmingly, we found that some police staff who were dealing with victims of crime, including those with call management or front desk responsibilities, had never received SCRS training. Conversely some forces, such as Lothian and Borders Police, had made sure that Force Communications Centre (FCC) staff had been on an SCRS training course.

² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/10/13160918/09185>



- Perhaps most disappointing of all, we noted that the SCRS was not on the probationary training curriculum at the Scottish Police College (nor was the Standard taught at any other level there). Only one force, Fife Constabulary, trained probationary constables in the principles of SCRS. That said, some other forces intimated that they intended to review their in-house probationer course with a view to incorporating training on the Standard.
- Finally, we noted both the continued absence of specialist training for force crime registrars and their deputies, and the views of registrars on the unsuitability of the Home Office training course.

22. Force crime registrars were greatly concerned that these major shortcomings in the SCRS training regime had led to a lack of understanding of the Standard, at all levels. For many, this lack of knowledge was judged to have undermined the very foundations of the Standard and had unintended consequences on officer discretion and crime investigation (considered later in this report). We believe that a national review of SCRS training is urgently needed. While a training DVD had been commissioned some years ago, production problems meant that the project had taken over two years to near completion and, indeed, had still not been concluded at the time of our inspection.

Recommendation 3: HMICS recommends that forces and the SCRG review the current ad hoc arrangements for SCRS training with the aim of securing, within specified timescales, a standardised, national approach from the Scottish Police Services Authority.

Investigation of Crime

“We are tasked to death in crime file completion” - a constable on core shifts

23. The victim-orientated approach of the SCRS essentially removes any idea that the victim must provide conclusive evidence that a crime has been committed before it can be recorded. Furthermore, by introducing greater uniformity to the process, the Standard aims to enhance public confidence in the police service and its response to matters of crime. Achieving this has entailed a necessary and proper diminution in the discretion of individual officers when initially recording a crime. It should not, however, affect the same officer or others exercising discretion in any action taken thereafter. Unfortunately however, our inspection found that organisational and individual misunderstanding appeared to be doing just this.

24. For the last three years some members of the Scottish service have been reportedly uneasy about the potentially inhibiting influence of the SCRS on the latitude for discretion in recording crime. This has since been overshadowed by disquiet about the level of discretion actually, or perceived to be, allowed when deciding on the level of investigation to apply to even the most trivial of crimes. We believe that these issues are inextricably linked and have indeed become confused. For a more detailed commentary on discretion in recording, see Annex B.

25. For many in our focus groups, the main impact of SCRS was not necessarily that it made the process of initially recording a crime more efficient. Rather, mismanagement of the Standard appears to have perpetuated the belief that certain actions should always be taken before any crime file/report could be closed. This was what created greater inefficiency. For many officers, the volume of crime to be investigated and the depth of investigation apparently required, irrespective of the severity of the crime, adversely affected both the service they could provide and their morale. This was especially true of forces where centralised crime enquiry units had not yet been developed to deal with certain high volume crimes.



26. It is clear that the police service has a professional and an ethical duty to record crime accurately. As part of this responsibility, Scottish forces have been striving to provide a more victim-orientated approach. Nevertheless, just as in 2005, the Standard was being compromised by the misperception that all crime must be equally and fully investigated. For instance, some forces still investigated crime irrespective of the contrary wishes of the complainer. We take this opportunity to remind the Service and interested parties that, with the level of recorded crime being faced today, it is impossible for forces to apply the same level of investigation to all crime - indeed it would be dishonest to suggest that this is being achieved and inefficient to try to do so.

“It’s the trivia that ties cops up, every single incident that hits crime file has got to be investigated to the nth degree” - a community policing constable

27. To avoid any doubt, we offer the following advice to the public and stakeholders, as much as to the police service itself: crimes should always be recorded, but need not always be fully investigated. For some crime types, for instance where the circumstances amount to a domestic or racist incident, or where there are threats of or actual harm to individuals, to public safety or to the community interest, an investigation must take place. In instances where there are no such considerations, there are other criteria that need to be taken into account: the wishes of the complainer; the likelihood of detecting the offender or recovering property; the prevalence of that particular crime in the neighbourhood, and so on.

28. Some forces had introduced systems which allowed investigatory work and resources to be targeted on priority areas only. All forces should now have crime management systems that can select specific actions from a menu of options so that, where further investigation is called for, the response is tailored to suit the crime.

29. Although the investigations sub-committee of ACPOS was considering a ‘non-investigation’ policy at the time of our inspection, we were disappointed that it had taken over two years to respond to what was one of the key recommendations of our *Meeting the Standard*³ report (recommendation 13). This delay has had an impact on the public and the Service, undermining public confidence and resulting in inefficient and ineffective use of police time. It is therefore recommended that this recommendation be addressed as a matter of priority and that an alternative label to the misleading term of ‘non-investigation’ be found. (HMICS accepts that this usage was included in its own 2005 report, but now considers it an unhelpful term since some investigation is at least and inevitably conducted at the time an initial report of a crime is recorded, if only in the questioning which elicits that report.)

30. This single development has the potential to free up much unnecessary use of police time so that it can be diverted to matters of settled priority - whether related to crime or other community problems. Further delay cannot be justified.

Recommendation 4: HMICS recommends that, without delay, forces work together to finalise a policy to standardise the identification of crimes that do not require further or full investigation.

³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/10/13160918/09185>



The Future of Audit in Scotland

31. Force crime registrars were unanimous in their belief that HMICS has a crucial role in ensuring SCRS compliance. Indeed, in several forces they reiterated the view that the Inspectorate is vital to the future development of the Standard. Registrars also pointed to the situation in England and Wales, where the Home Office has suspended regular audits much to the regret of a number of their counterparts south of the Border.

32. As we move to an inspection process based primarily on self-assessment, and given the consistently high standard of force crime audits, it has been suggested that the role of HMICS change to that of an oversight body ensuring compliance by dip-sampling force crime audits. As part of this change, force crime registrars accepted that they too have a role in the process, and were universally supportive of a proposal to conduct peer audits in neighbouring forces. We believe that such an audit programme would improve scrutiny and enhance transparency. We therefore intend to dip-sample crime audits on an annual basis across all forces, including (with their permission) British Transport Police and the Ministry of Defence Police.

Recommendation 5: HMICS recommends that, in order to achieve greater transparency and consistency within the audit regime, forces agree to co-ordinate individual force crime audits through the SCRG, so that each audit is scrutinised by a crime registrar from a neighbouring force. On an annual basis HMICS will dip-sample crime audits across all forces, including British Transport Police and Ministry of Defence Police.

33. Finally, we are keen that all forces conduct regular and systematic audits of specialist departments, where they are not already doing so. We will also examine these as part of our annual crime audits.

Conclusion

34. We believe that forces' compliance with the SCRS has improved steadily over the last two years, albeit inconsistently across Scotland. This has been in no small way due to the successful implementation of most of the recommendations of our 2005 report. Probably of more importance though, has been the hard work, commitment and approach of the registrars in implementing the Standard.

35. The introduction of the SCRS occurred at a time of great change in the wider criminal justice arena in Scotland. It is our opinion that the Standard is a key element of the ongoing criminal justice reform programme and should justifiably remain so. However, the SCRS cannot be viewed in isolation. The police service in Scotland must ensure that staff are fully aware that SCRS is not just an 'add-on' but an integral and interconnected component of the wider Criminal Justice system, as well as being necessary for the proper execution of policing.

36. We see the Standard as a catalyst, driving our police forces towards:

- more ethical crime recording,
 - a more accurate picture of crime,
 - better understanding of the crime problems affecting Scotland,
-



- better management of volume crime, and
- better partnership working to reduce crime.

37. While undoubtedly much has been achieved, there is still room for improvement. Four recommendations from *Meeting the Standard*⁴ are still to be discharged, two of which are linked to recommendations contained within this report. Probably the biggest single improvement that we recommend in this report is that all forces urgently adopt policies and practices that allow their processes, structures and individual officers to apply proportionate and systematically considered discretion to investigating crime.

38. There is no doubt that the SCRS is still a work in progress, and will remain so as long as crime is recorded. Just as crime is continually evolving, so too must the Standard if it is to be able to meet future changes. This is the challenge facing SCRS practitioners and stakeholders alike, across the country.

⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/10/13160918/09185>



Annex A

PROGRESS AGAINST THE 2005 RECOMMENDATIONS

*Meeting the Standard*⁵ contained 14 recommendations aimed at enhancing the development of the Scottish Crime Recording Standard. We are pleased that progress has been made across Scotland in some areas, but note that more work requires to be done in others. In this section, each recommendation is reviewed in turn. Where a recommendation is considered discharged this is stated.

1. *That force lead officers use this report to reaffirm their commitment to the SCRS and stress its importance to all staff in a manner which seeks to sustain its impact.*

All forces clearly considered adherence to the Standard a routine aspect of their day-to-day business, and all ensured that development updates were broadcast to staff. The Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS) also maintained an interest in the Standard, having designated an Assistant Chief Constable as lead officer for SCRS, reporting to the Crime Business Area. We believe that the SCRS is now an accepted part of the Scottish policing landscape and are satisfied that this recommendation can be discharged.

2. *That ACPOS, drawing on the experience of the Scottish Crime Registrars Group, engage with the Scottish Police College with a view to introducing a standardised approach to training, recognising the different needs of operational officers and support staff, probationers, first line managers, force crime registrars and their deputies.*

We are concerned that this recommendation has not been satisfactorily concluded and therefore cannot be discharged. This issue is considered further in paragraphs 20-22 of the report.

3. *That ACPOS consider the requirements of the SCRS in the light of prioritisation of IT development within the SPIS programme.*

At the time of our inspection, IT development in the police service in Scotland was in a transitional phase. The Scottish Police Information Strategy had been subsumed within the Information Services function of the Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA). At the same time, four key national projects were coming to fruition: the development of a common command and control (incident recording) system; the introduction of personal digital assistants (PDAs); a common performance management platform; and a national information management project. All of these projects will be SCRS-compliant and we are therefore satisfied that this recommendation can be discharged.

4. *That the responsibilities of the force crime registrar (FCR) be clearly separated from those relating to detections or managing volume crime.*

All forces stated that they were compliant with this recommendation, although we noted that in one the FCR still provided occasional cover for crime management. Given that this force had procedures in place to avoid conflicts of interest, we believe that this recommendation can be considered as discharged.

⁵ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/10/13160918/09185>



5. That forces appoint a deputy crime registrar with sufficient authority to act in the absence of the FCR. The deputy should be trained to the same standard as the FCR and be able to make decisions on behalf of the force.

All forces had appointed a deputy crime registrar, though it appeared in some cases that the role was performed only in exceptional circumstances. While we are willing to discharge this recommendation we return to the issue of resilience and training in greater depth in the main body of this report.

6. That each force undertake to ensure that its FCR or deputy registrar attend every meeting of the Scottish Crime Registrars Group to achieve uniformity in the application of the SCRS at this critical time in its implementation.

We are satisfied that this recommendation can be discharged.

7. That forces carry out at a local level a dip-sample of incidents initially coded as a crime, but disposed of as non-crime, to confirm correct application of the Standard by way of a telephone-based customer survey.

To date, no force has initiated a customer survey, and only one force indicated that such a scheme would take place during this financial year. We cannot therefore discharge this recommendation.

8. That the Scottish Crime Registrars Group (SCRG) formalise a standard auditing procedure and ensure its use in all Scottish forces in both a central and local audit. Sufficient training must be conducted for those carrying out the audit to ensure a Scotland-wide consistency in its application.

Standard auditing procedures were developed and published in the 2006 ACPOS document 'Audit Methodology for Reviewing the Quality of Crime Data Recorded by Scottish Police Forces'. Following criticisms by the SCRG of some aspects of the methodology, a comprehensive review was underway at the time of our inspection. We are prepared to discharge this recommendation, given the standardisation of auditing process achieved across the Scottish forces, but we return to the subject of transparency and consistency in audit in our current recommendations.

9. That forces identify a centrally-based supervisor at area command level to have responsibility for all 'no crime' decisions in the area. The 'no crime' decisions should be overseen by the FCR, who should maintain an overview of all decisions taken and act as final arbiter in areas of dispute.

While there were differences between forces in terms of the role of the supervisor making an initial 'no crime' decision, all had adopted the principle of the FCR or her/his deputy overseeing the process and being the final arbiter in areas of dispute. This recommendation has therefore been fully discharged.

10. That forces examine a sample of lost property reports at regular intervals to check that crimes are not being incorrectly recorded as lost property.

This area of audit was included in the 2006 ACPOS audit methodology and a number of forces regularly audit such records. However, in addition to difficulties with the auditing process itself, there were problems with the standard of the final reports in those forces that still used paper-based systems. It is nevertheless anticipated that the national information management project will provide a fully developed and fully auditable lost property function in due course. For this reason, we are content to discharge this particular recommendation.



11. That ACPOS engage with the Scottish Executive to assess the suitability of publishing a subcategory of unco-operative complainers in statistical returns in relation to Group 1 and 2 crimes.

Due to current differences in IT arrangements across the Scottish forces, this information could not be provided at the time of our inspection. We believe that collaborative national IT developments might eventually offer a solution to this problem. However, as this may be some time away, we are unable to discharge this recommendation at this time.

12. That ACPOS engage with the Scottish Executive and Crown Office in pursuing a clearer definition of serious assault to standardise the classification and recording of this crime within Scottish forces.

We are pleased to note that this recommendation has been fully discharged.

13. That ACPOS consider the introduction of a policy that makes provision for the non-investigation of crime based on the wishes of the complainer, balanced with public safety and public interest issues.

The weight of opinion of those we interviewed during our fieldwork was very much that a non-investigation policy that took account of the wishes of the complainer should be developed. The ACPOS lead for the SCRS had forwarded the matter to the ACPOS sub-committee that deals with investigation policy. In the absence of visible progress, we are unwilling to discharge this recommendation at this time and discuss the issue at greater length at paragraphs 23-30, in the report, also making comment there about the unsuitability of the term 'non-investigation', albeit used by HMICS in 2005.

14. That ACPOS pursue with ACPO the introduction of a standard policy for recording and investigating airport crime with a view to extending such a policy across European states and beyond.

Though a standard national policy has been developed, attempts to extend it to the international arena have had little success. Given this situation, and the difficulties inherent in extending the policy across the EU member states and beyond, we are content to consider this recommendation discharged.

Therefore, of the fourteen recommendations in our 2005 thematic report, ten have been discharged. Of the remaining four, three recommendations, numbers 2, 7, and 13, are discussed at greater length in this report.



Annex B

GENERAL FINDINGS AND COMMENTS ON GOOD PRACTICE

Force Crime Registrars

B1. In our 2005 thematic we pointed out that force crime registrars (FCRs) had a pivotal, strategic role in applying the Scottish Crime Recording Standard. Nor had the situation changed by the time of our 2007 inspection, with the eight registrars still considered to be the driving force behind the Standard in Scotland. Five of the posts were filled by police staff, the remaining three by police officers (a sergeant, a detective chief inspector and a superintendent), and five of the eight posts were full-time positions. All the registrars were found to be extremely knowledgeable about the SCRS and voiced common concerns about the difficulties they faced. All in all, we were impressed by their commitment and passion for their role.

B2. In terms of additional support, every force had appointed a deputy crime registrar: with the exception of two, all were police officers. For the majority of these individuals, deputising in the absence of the registrar was the limit of their involvement with the SCRS. That said, two deputies had previously taken on the role of FCR. The level of support available to registrars also varied when it came to audit and scrutiny. Two force crime registrars, both police staff, carried out all such work unaided, whereas in other forces the FCR was assisted in the audit process by specialist staff. It is our view that for force crime registrars to perform their role effectively and efficiently they should be afforded an appropriate level of assistance, particularly if they are also acting as chair and/or secretary to the Scottish Crime Registrars Group.

National Co-ordinator

B3. We believe that good practice is evident in the success of the National Crime Registrar role in England and Wales. It is clear that this role has provided a focal point for development as well as invaluable support and assistance to crime registrars. There is a strong argument for developing a similar post in Scotland.

Providing local information

B4. We were disappointed to hear complaints from staff throughout the country about the difficulty of retrieving material from local force intranets. Two common criticisms were that: sites were so cluttered that it was hard to find things such as SCRS reference material; and the search engines were of poor quality. Forces and the SPSA may wish to consider these matters, not just in relation to making SCRS documentation more accessible, but more generally in the wider sphere of information management.

Call Management

B5. A recent Audit Scotland report on call management in the police service in Scotland highlighted that, with more calls than ever being answered by the police, forces had developed their own local call management structures, strategies and policies. Although these differences made direct comparison difficult at times, it was clear that one of the key elements of call management across all forces was the crucial role played by the initial call-taker or handler. Amongst frontline officers and their supervisors nationally, there was a strong belief that one of the most important aspects of the SCRS process was how a call is recorded on the police command and control system at the first point of contact. Most focus groups highlighted the concerns of frontline officers, particularly junior officers who had received no formal SCRS training, about writing-off calls that the call-taker had initially recorded as a crime.





B6. In his recent interim report on the review of policing in England and Wales, Sir Ronnie Flannigan spoke about this culture of ‘risk aversion’, commenting, as did our focus groups, on how officers would rather avoid potential criticism than question the nature of a call. A better understanding of this dynamic is needed in order to put the role of call-takers, and the equally important role of their supervisors, in perspective. It is important that callers are questioned carefully about the nature of their call and that the incident recorded on the force command and control system reflects as accurately as possible why the person has contacted the police. In too many forces, officers commented that some incidents recorded on force command and control systems reflected not the facts or perceived facts, but the opinions or interpretations, however well-intentioned, of the call-taker.

B7. We acknowledge the difficulties and pressures associated with taking calls from the public and understand that the sometimes poor communication skills of callers can make that job harder. However, given frontline staff concerns, we urge forces to ensure that within call management they have in place a supervisory process that safeguards the need for objectivity and accuracy, particularly in relation to the input of data.

Discretion in Recording

“I was told from day one we don’t have discretion” - a constable on core shifts

B8. The majority of police-public contacts leading to a crime being recorded are initiated by a telephone call. Our findings revealed widespread belief among officers across the country that, once a call is recorded as crime-related on the relevant command and control system, there is little room for discretion or professional judgement in how then to deal with it, irrespective of the wishes of the member of the public instigating the contact. Here again Sir Ronnie Flannigan’s comments about risk aversion are relevant. So too is the perception of frontline officers, that officers prefer to avoid situations that would put them under scrutiny because of the blame culture they perceive to exist. In terms of the SCRS, the message coming out of our focus groups was the same that had emerged in 2005: crime reports were being recorded without question, even where there may have been reasonable cause to doubt that a crime had occurred. Many examples were given to this effect, such as where local housing regulations required that a crime report be raised before any repairs could be sanctioned.

“As a CP officer I would rather spend half an hour resolving a situation than charge someone and a few days later come back to charge the neighbour” - a community policing constable

B9. The SCRS national training programme and the SCRS policy document clearly state that officers can still exercise discretion, particularly when dealing with minor acts of disorder. However, here too officers seemed sceptical that this was the case. Indeed in some forces it appeared that officers were expected to record all such incidents where a successful detection was possible, whether by submitting a formal police report to the relevant procurator fiscal, issuing a fixed penalty notice, or giving a formal police warning.



B10. It appeared that in some Scottish forces an unintended consequence of the drive for improved performance management has been a culture that misinterprets this aim and erodes the fundamentally necessary discretion of individually empowered police officers. Furthermore, it seemed that in order primarily to demonstrate what was considered improved performance, officers now felt it necessary to detect offences where in the past an informal (discretionary) police warning would have sufficed. We have been one of the driving forces behind the introduction of the *Scottish Policing Performance Framework*⁶ and are only too aware of the need for a healthy performance management culture throughout the Service. As such, we strongly believe that detections that are initiated only for the sake of statistics undermine the credibility of the police service in Scotland and can adversely affect police-public relations. We therefore urge forces to review the way in which frontline staff are being directed in the use of discretion when tackling disorder.

“Discretion is still there but it is not being used” - a detective constable

B11. While many officers who took part in our focus groups blamed the Standard for eroding discretionary power, these officers were on the whole poorly trained in the principles of SCRS and thus appear to have been basing their views on a faulty understanding of the Standard. We believe that there has indeed been an erosion of discretion over the past decade. However, we feel that this has probably had as much to do with the necessary growth of police management and the move to develop national approaches to national policing problems, such as the ‘Safer Scotland’ initiatives and the development of force contact centres, as the introduction of SCRS *per se*. Staff in all forces acknowledged that where contact was initiated on a one-to-one basis, either in the street, at a front desk, or by telephone call to a local police office, they could and would use discretion on occasion. Interestingly, confidence in using discretionary powers in these circumstances varied not only from force to force, but also from area to area within forces. In some extreme cases, officers mentioned their ‘fear’ of being disciplined if they were caught failing to record a crime, thus exacerbating the risk aversion culture.

“They have taken away discretion through fear” - an inspector

B12. Our *Meeting the Standard*⁷ report was quite clear that there remained a place for discretion, particularly when dealing with acts of minor disorder. We still believe this to be the case. However, the use of discretion must be seen in context. Given the importance of gathering accurate information on matters affecting local communities, and the way such intelligence is used to inform the tasking and coordinating process that directs how police respond to these, it is important that forces accurately record all crimes reported to them. This includes so-called ‘minor crimes’ such as vandalism. It does not mean, however, that all crime has then to be investigated (see paragraphs 23-30 of the main report). The police service in Scotland must therefore acknowledge that this more victim-orientated, ethical crime recording policy need not undermine the use of discretion in day-to-day policing.

B13. With the imminent introduction of a national command and control (incident recording and management) system for the police service in Scotland, discretionary warnings for instances of minor disorder will be easily recorded and audited. The information will then be readily available for the tasking process. We therefore encourage forces and the SPSA to review existing training and direction on the use of discretion when dealing with instances of anti-social behaviour and minor road traffic violations.

6 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/1101/0047863.pdf>

7 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/10/13160918/09185>



Where necessary this should highlight the importance of discretion, giving clear guidance for its use as well as any limitations, particularly in the context of the Service's ethical crime recording policy.

De-briefing Staff

B14. In all but one force, we found no consistent approach to de-briefing staff at the end of their shift. In 2000, Strathclyde Police adopted a new force-wide shift pattern that permitted an effective de-brief at the end of each shift, allowing supervisors to review incidents attended by officers and to ensure, amongst other things, that all necessary crime reports had been submitted. No other force had adopted a similarly systematic approach, although Grampian Police had just started a formal de-briefing process. We believe that the other Scottish forces should examine, if they have not already done so, the benefits that might be derived from formalising their de-briefings, such as greater accuracy in recording information.

Data Quality, Force and HMICS Compliance Audits

"It's really not a standard if everyone is doing it differently" - a crime registrar

B15. The inspection found that all police forces operating in Scotland, including the Ministry of Defence Police and British Transport Police, regularly conducted compliance audits using the 2006 ACPOS methodology. Force crime registrars were clearly aware of the importance of this programme of internal force audits, and we were pleased to see that auditing was a standing agenda item at meetings of the Scottish Crime Registrars Group. Regular updates by FCRs ensured the continued dissemination of good practice in relation to the auditing process amongst this Group, and maintained the profile of this crucial aspect of FCR duties.

B16. As a consequence of the SCRG's work, forces carried out a national compliance audit in late 2006 which, amongst other things, tested the suitability of the audit methodology. The results suggested that some elements of the process should be reviewed, and so a separate audit methodology review group was set up. This group had since prepared a number of amendments that, at the time of inspection, the SCRG was shortly to consider. We are pleased that the SCRG has taken the initiative in this key area and await the final recommendations of the review group.

B17. Little appetite was apparent in forces for conducting telephone surveys of customers, as outlined in recommendation 7 of our 2005 report. We believe that forces ignore this to the detriment of the quality of crime recording and the SCRS, and urge that steps are taken to address this un-discharged recommendation as soon as possible, perhaps by all forces joining to commission work by another body, such as the SPSA or a completely independent organisation.

B18. Up until March 2007, HMICS conducted force crime audits as part of our inspection programme. In 2006 we completed audits in Grampian and Dumfries and Galloway, and in 2007 Lothian and Borders. Under our new inspection regime, it was likely that the other forces would not be audited for at least another 18 months. Rather than leave such a lengthy period between visits, we audited the remaining five between June and July 2007.

B19. In line with the results of force crime registrars' own internal audits, our findings suggested that forces were generally complying with the SCRS. What was lacking, however, was any national consistency in how forces used their command and control systems.





B20. We recognise the substantial improvements that some forces have made over the last two years. We are also confident that the introduction of STORM MA as a common Scottish command and control system will alleviate many of the problems encountered to date. This assumes that there will be national consistency in the approach to incident handling and closure, as discussed below.

B21. Recording information accurately is essential if Scottish forces are to be able to assess, not just how compliant they are with the SCRS, but how well they are performing against the Scottish Policing Performance Framework. In a previous thematic report, *Managing Improvement*,⁸ we recommended that data be readily accessible and drawn from common IT systems. This may soon become a reality with the current rollout of the national command and control project, to be followed by three other key projects:

- The PDA project - an electronic notebook project being piloted in two forces in Scotland.
- The Platform Project - which will introduce a national data warehouse, allowing forces to retrieve an unprecedented level of management information.
- The Information Management Project - which, when it comes on line, will standardise amongst other things, crime recording across Scotland.

B22. We believe that, taken together, all four projects present the police service in Scotland with a unique opportunity to create and access standardised data of the highest accuracy and quality. This will undoubtedly help to make the Service more efficient and effective across the range of its activities, including SCRS compliance.

B23. There are, however, challenges in meeting these aspirations. For instance, across forces we found a lack of consistency in the application of the new opening and closing codes for the STORM MA (command and control) project. Properly used, these codes could yield much valuable information on efficiency and effectiveness and provide force crime registrars with a powerful tool to check compliance against the Standard. However, because of a lack of national direction in this specific area, the two forces that have to date implemented the agreed opening and closing codes have begun to apply their own interpretation to the codes, thus removing at a stroke one of the benefits of having a national system.

B24. Moreover, we found that training for operators was not being run to a national standard, nor was there a life-time management plan for the project. These concerns, raised by us at the time of inspection, highlight potential problems that could arise from a lack of consistency in data quality and accuracy. This may be especially pertinent when recording incidents that historically have not been recorded with any degree of standardisation, such as those involving anti-social behaviour. Given that individual force command and control systems have evolved separately, the situation is perhaps understandable. Moreover, the systems are primarily used to record and manage incidents - activities that are not prescribed by statute or any other pressing national need. HMICS appreciates that the way forces and sub-units of forces record incidents can vary considerably for a variety of reasons, not least the different uses made of command and control systems in rural and urban areas and in parts of Scotland where there is insufficient recording capacity in other systems. However, the opportunity now exists to use minimum standards to gain a more complete and accurate picture of policing demand, need and reaction across the country. We therefore encourage ACPOS to finalise

⁸ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/09/27134643/46436>



national minimum standards for incident recording as soon as possible and devise a means of monitoring compliance.

B25. While we believe that a more settled approach to implementing national projects such as STORM MA and monitoring compliance would be welcome, we also recognise the need to co-ordinate this with a drive for national standards. It may be that this is one of the areas where national leadership has not been at fault but where the lack of agreed ground rules on implementation of national systems has struggled with the fact that there are eight different police forces in Scotland and no failsafe system for agreeing absolute, irrevocable standards.

B26. It follows that, on a more general note, we also strongly suggest that the SPSA and ACPOS engage in an effort to address the need for a process, where justified, whereby minimum standards for the use of information and communications technology can be agreed in advance of implementation, and thereafter cannot be unilaterally revoked or disregarded.



METHODOLOGY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. HMICS' thematic reports are prepared after careful but focused inspection of the subject matter. Our broad methodology is explained on our website.
 2. The project initiation document (PID) was adapted from our standard inspection format, based on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model and circulated to forces. Following an initial consultation exercise and desktop research, we visited all eight police forces in Scotland, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), West Midlands Police and the Home Office. We also liaised with the Scottish Crime Registrars Group (SCRG); British Transport Police and the Ministry of Defence Police, as well as the Analytical Services Division of the Scottish Government.
 3. Liaison was established with the following: representatives of ACPOS; the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents (ASPS); the Scottish Police Federation; Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS); the SCDEA; the national Platform Project; the Information Management Project; and the national Command and Control Project.
 4. Analysis of the responses provided a wealth of detailed information, permitting the inspection team to focus on the most relevant issues during the fieldwork visits. Fieldwork consisted of interviews with police officers and police staff, and we are grateful for the valuable assistance of all those involved in the fieldwork, including that of the nominated force liaison officers.
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