Scientific Support Services in the Police Service of Northern Ireland

A follow-up review of the inspection recommendations

August 2007

Criminal Justice Inspection
Northern Ireland
a better justice system for all

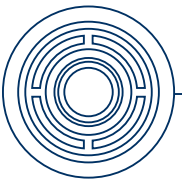# Scientific Support Services in the Police Service of Northern Ireland

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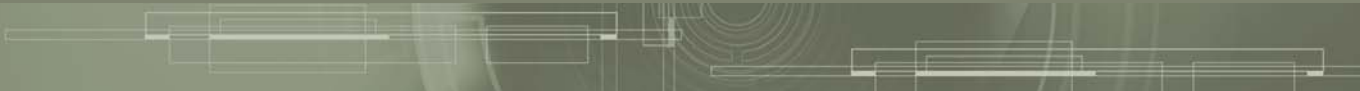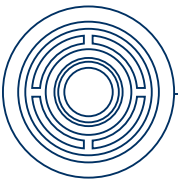Northern Ireland
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Contents

List of abbreviations

ACC	Assistant Chief Constable
ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers
CJ	Criminal Justice
CJI	Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
CORE	Project for the re-structuring of the PSNI
CRFP	Council for the Registration of Forensic Practitioners
CSI	Crime Scene Investigator
DCU	District Command Unit
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
FSNI	Forensic Science Northern Ireland
FSSG	Forensic Science Steering Group
GMP	Greater Manchester Police
HMIC	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
ICIS	Integrated Criminal Information System
ISO	International Organisation for Standardisation
IT	Information Technology
LINKS	Project integrating – police staff terms/conditions
MAB	Ministerial Advisory Board
MSF	Most Similar Force
NCPE	National Centre for Policing Excellence (formerly Centrex)
Niche RMS	Records Management System
NICtS	Northern Ireland Courts Service
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
PNC	Police National Computer
POLinCA	Prolific Offender Linked Crime Analysis
PPS	Public Prosecution Service
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
RPA	Review of Public Administration
SCUG	Serious Crime Users' Group
SICAR	IT database for footwear impressions
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SOCRATES	Forensic science IT management database
SPD	State Pathologist's Department
SSM	Scientific Support Manager
UK	United Kingdom

Chief Inspectors' Foreword

In December 2005, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) and Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI) (the Inspectors) published their joint report '*A Review of Scientific Support Services in the Police Service of Northern Ireland*'.

The report made 25 recommendations, which were designed to improve the performance of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in terms of how its Scientific Support function was supporting crime investigation and detection across Northern Ireland. The PSNI accepted all but one of the Inspectors' recommendations. The document contained an action plan, supplied by the Police Service, which set out the means by which the recommendations would be implemented.

As part of the inspection process, the Chief Constable agreed that the Inspectors would independently monitor progress against the implementation plan at regular intervals, until such time that all recommendations were 'signed off', by them, as being implemented.

The aims of the review were to:
- Conduct a staged review of the implementation of the recommendations contained within the report '*A Review of Scientific Support Services in the Police Service of Northern Ireland*'; and
- Provide regular update reports for the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland.
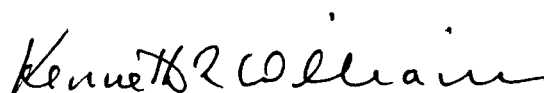
The Inspectors are greatly encouraged by the progress made towards full implementation of the recommendations from the report. This revisit inspection activity has confirmed the unequivocal commitment of the PSNI to improve its performance within this critically important area of business.

They will continue to monitor all outstanding recommendations until full implementation has been achieved or are satisfied it is appropriate for those issues to be addressed via the CJI or HMIC mainstream inspection regimes.

Kit Chivers
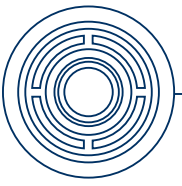Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice
in Northern Ireland

Ken Williams CVO, CBE, QPM
HM Inspector of Constabulary

Criminal Justice Inspection
Northern Ireland
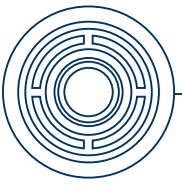*a better justice system for all*

HMIC

**Section** **1**

Follow-Up Review

Introduction

This report sets out the findings of the Inspector's first revisit since implementation of the recommendations commenced. It uses a traffic light grading system, as follows, to assess progress against each of the recommendations made in the original report.

Criteria for traffic light grading – PSNI implementation plan

Colour	Status	Future Action
GREEN	*Recommendation implemented in full and 'signed off.'*	*No further inspection by the Inspectors. In-Service monitoring required.*
AMBER	*Evidence of progress towards implementation apparent. Further development required.*	*Medium priority for inspection. Continued in-Service development required.*
RED	*Limited or no evidence of progress towards implementation.*	*High priority for inspection. Significant in-Service development required.*

The use of scientific evidence to support crime investigation and detection can be broken down fairly simplistically into a three-stage process:

- evidence recovery from the crime scene;
- development and turn round using specialist processes e.g. fingerprint and DNA identification of suspects; and
- conversion of suspect identification into detected or cleared crime.
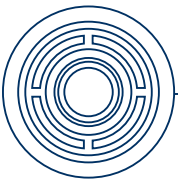
The first two stages of this process are the direct responsibility of the Scientific Support branch working either independently or with 'key' partners such as Forensic Science Northern Ireland (FSNI) and the State Pathologist's Department (SPD). From the outset, the Inspectors wish to acknowledge the progress that has been made by these 'key' players, but in particular the Scientific Support branch of the Police Service, in terms of improving performance since the original inspection activity was undertaken.

A 'snapshot' of performance covering the period October to December 2006 shows how the performance of the PSNI compares against its Most Similar Force (MSF) group[1] (see Appendix 1).

The returns reveal that in terms of both the percentage of fingerprints and DNA taken at the scene, the Service is 1st out of 6 and its performance at identification stage matches the MSF average. It is at Stage 3 of the process where the Service currently lags well behind the peer group. There are some critical reasons why this is the case and these will be developed further later in this report.

Forensic comparison to MSF group
October - December 2006

	Fingerprints			DNA		
	% Fingerprint taken at scene	% Identifications	% Conversions to detections	% DNA taken at scene	% Identifications	% Conversions to detections
Nottinghamshire	33	21	57	14	37	66
GMP	22	38	58	13	35	79
Northumbria	23	33	33	7	28	64
West Yorkshire	23	29	39	11	57	47
West Midlands	17	31	45	10	21	53
PSNI	37	30	22	15	33	30
Average	*26*	*30*	*42*	*12*	*33*	*57*

The methodology followed to undertake the review is set out at Appendix 2.

1 During 2006, the Police Standards Unit developed a Most Similar Force group to compare the performance of the PSNI against peer forces in England and Wales. The comparator forces are Nottinghamshire, West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester (GMP), Northumbria and West Midlands.

Progress on Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The chief officer team of PSNI should review the portfolios around crime to ensure that there are clear lines of accountability and a clear 'champion' for volume crime.

Status: GREEN

The ACC (Criminal Justice) is the volume crime champion. He has plans to drive the role forward and is adopting the Centrex/NCPE volume crime model.

Views were expressed questioning whether vesting the responsibility of the volume crime champion with the ACC (CJ) was appropriate, given that he has no direct 'operational' responsibility for improving volume crime performance and accountability. Responsibility for volume crime 'operational' delivery rests with the two regional ACCs and ACC (Crime Operations) holds the portfolio for serious crime investigation.

Apart from the concern regarding the ACC (CJ), the Inspectors acknowledge that the recommendation has been fulfilled and can be 'signed off' as implemented.

Recommendation 2

The chief officer team of PSNI should conduct regular and formalised strategic planning with senior management in FSNI which then feeds into a more co-ordinated delivery of the forensic science service and to an SLA which has mechanisms to ensure that it is adhered to by both organisations.

Status: GREEN

Confirmation was received that a forensic strategy group has been established and is intending to meet on a biannual basis. It was agreed to hold three meetings in 2007 – the first was held in January. These meetings include senior management from the FSNI, PSNI and NIO. They are chaired by the PSNI Deputy Chief Constable.

Two meetings were scheduled for May 2007 to progress strategic issues affecting both the organisations.

A comprehensive SLA between the PSNI/FSNI covering the period April 2006 – March 2009 has been published and adopted.

The Inspectors conclude that the requirements of this recommendation have been implemented.

Recommendation 3

PSNI should set up a properly resourced unit for fatal and serious vehicle crashes and collisions, to reflect the service that currently exists in Great Britain i.e. a dedicated crash and collision investigation unit ….a sufficient number of roads policing staff should be adequately trained in collision investigation, commensurate with training provided in England and Wales and which follows the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) manual of road death investigation.

Status: RED

Whilst this recommendation was not accepted, it is clear to the Inspectors that this is an area of ongoing concern.

A joint CJI/HMIC inspection of strategic Roads Policing is scheduled for autumn 2007 when this issue will be revisited.

Recommendation 4

A much better resourced submissions unit should be put in place, which operates to a robust SLA and has a priority system which recognises the growing importance of volume crime.

Status: GREEN

The submissions unit has been relocated to Scientific Support HQ at Knocknagoney police station, where it is in very close proximity to senior branch managers.

A comprehensive SLA between the PSNI/FSNI covering the period April 2006 - March 2009 has been published and adopted.

Evidence was provided that confirms the importance of volume crime in terms of the work of the Scientific Support branch.

The Inspectors conclude that the requirements of this recommendation have been implemented.

Recommendation 5

PSNI in co-operation with FSNI, should develop and deliver a bespoke forensic science training package. Comprehensive training for all operational staff should be improved as a matter of priority.

Status: AMBER

There was a consistent message from all focus groups and unannounced visits that many frontline operational officers lacked forensic awareness and that any training delivered particularly to these staff had, so far, not resulted in significantly improved outcomes.

The PSNI is in the process of purchasing a training package from the Forensic Science Service in England and Wales, but is encountering some difficulty with the licence required to operate the programme. Once obtained, it will be adapted for use within Northern Ireland.

A five-day scientific evidence module is now 'in place' as part of the Student Officer initial training programme at the PSNI college, however, supervisory officers interviewed during the revisit maintain that 'new' Student Officers on reaching their DCU require re-training in the basics, i.e. packaging exhibits, writing statements to support the continuity of exhibits and scene management.

Evidence was obtained that the FSNI is participating in joint forensics training and these arrangements are to be formalised in the next SLA between the two agencies.

It is clear that whilst some improvements have been made, much work remains to be done. This recommendation has not progressed sufficiently and cannot be 'signed off'.

Recommendation 6

An urgent review should be carried out of all critical policies. This should result in the production of a suite of comprehensive <u>corporate</u> policies readily available via the Service intranet site, which ensures that procedures are up to date and staff are fully aware of what is expected of them and mechanisms are in place to ensure compliance. The areas in need of immediate attention are:

6.1 Greater awareness of and compliance with existing policies on the management and co-ordination of crime scenes including who has primacy for forensic science, attendance and roles of attending specialists.

6.2 Fatal and serious vehicle crashes and collision investigation.

6.3 Role and authority of the Submissions Unit including clear guidance on submissions priorities.

6.4 Forensic science training and awareness for all operational staff.

6.5 Storage, retention and management of all property (including vehicles).

6.6 Weeding and destruction of property.

Status: AMBER

Confirmation was received that the 'critical' policies within the control of the Scientific Support branch have been reviewed and are available globally across the Police Service.

A strategic review of Roads Policing is 'ongoing'.
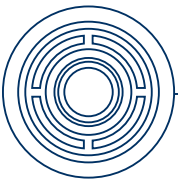
Despite the progress made, Inspectors remain concerned at the lack of corporate application of policy, as exemplified by visits to various operational stations and feedback received from focus groups.

They acknowledge the impact which the 'new' DCU structure should bring to this area and concluded that at this time, this recommendation should be considered as 'work in progress'.

Recommendation 7

The proposed introduction of hard charging for all products and services by FSNI provides an opportunity for PSNI to identify and develop policies and processes to achieve greater accountability in terms of submissions control and finances.

Status: AMBER

Whilst 'hard charging' for its services was not progressed by the FSNI, evidence was obtained that with the impending introduction of the SOCRATES Scientific Support management system, the PSNI will have a means of assessing/controlling expenditure via invoices generated. However, this is entirely dependent on the FSNI putting an appropriate financial governance model 'in place'.

Inspectors were told that FSNI is seeking to be able to quantify its product prices from 2008.

Whilst Inspectors recognise and acknowledge progress against this recommendation sits outside the control of the PSNI, they conclude that it remains a 'live' matter and cannot be 'signed off'.

Recommendation 8

The pilot sites for devolved forensic science budgets should be fully evaluated in light of the need to improve accountability for spend. It is also essential that the now-established Serious and Volume Crimes User Groups fully embrace their monitoring roles to ensure that non-performance issues under the SLA are actioned.

Status: AMBER

Inspectors are aware that the pilot activity did take place however this recommendation has been overtaken by the outcome of the RPA and the restructuring of the PSNI from 29 DCUs to eight.

Feedback confirmed that once the 'new' DCUs are in place, a significant proportion of the forensics budget will be delegated for local management at District level.

The SSM confirms that non-conformance is being challenged via the Serious Crime Users' Group (SCUG).

The Inspectors consider that this recommendation can be 'signed off' when the anticipated delegation of forensics budget takes place.

Recommendation 9

Scientific Support staff should be actively involved in raising the standard of accommodation to ensure that their needs are met in the long term.

Status: AMBER

Whilst improvements have been made in particular at Mahon Road, Portadown, to the accommodation of crime scene investigators (CSIs), the branch recognises that there is still progress to be made in this area. For example, Gough Barracks and the fingerprints bureau at Police Service HQ, are notable locations where existing accommodation could be described as less than 'fit for purpose'.

The 'corporate' model being pursued follows the arrangements in place at Maydown, however, Inspectors also recognise the direct linkages to the ongoing CORE project (Police Service restructuring).

Preferences expressed, to the Inspectors, by Scientific Support practitioners and investigators, are that they should be co-located wherever this is achievable within the 'new' DCU structure.

Whilst acknowledging that progress has been made, Inspectors conclude that this recommendation remains as work in progress and should be graded 'Amber'.

Recommendation 10

Matters concerning Scientific Support staff need to be acknowledged and resolved as a matter of priority either directly with the SSM, through a CSI working group, or alternatively via the Serious and Volume Crime User Groups.

Status: AMBER

A CSI working group has been established under the chairmanship of the SSM, however a recent staff survey has confirmed that significant issues remain in terms of levels of pay and remuneration and wider terms and conditions, e.g. call out procedures and weekend cover.

Low staff morale was reported amongst CSI focus groups. Currently, staff morale is being further undermined by the LINKS project, where CSIs report little information being made available to them and a fundamental misunderstanding by some about what the project is seeking to achieve.

Productivity information provided by the SSM confirms that very significant gains have been made in terms of evidential recovery and turn round times, i.e. the time taken between submission and identification of suspects, particularly in terms of fingerprints and DNA. Performance outturns outstrip or equal those of peer forces within the Service's MSF group. The Inspectors acknowledge the progress made and compliment all the staff involved in this achievement.
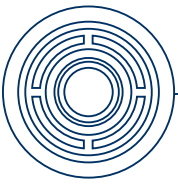
However, the returns also confirm that the Police Service lags way behind its peers in terms of converting identifications to crime detections/clearances. They were informed that all 'new' DCUs will have dedicated converter teams and will therefore reassess performance at the time of their next revisit.

Issues where CSIs had been the first or only attenders at crime scenes were raised by principal CSIs. This has implications for personal safety as well as wider scene management.

Inappropriate/unnecessary court attendance is an issue affecting the level of resources. Scientific Support staff consider they attend court too often, in particular when their evidence is not challenged. This issue needs to be addressed via the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) and the Northern Ireland Courts Service (NICtS).

Recommendation 11

PSNI needs to ensure that there is a 'return on investment' on initiatives such as fingerprint training, with performance outputs being monitored.

Status: AMBER

Confirmation was provided that PSNI no longer trains limited numbers of frontline operational staff in fingerprint recovery techniques.

Many CSIs have attended Lancashire Constabulary for training in footwear recovery/identification. This was reported on very positively.

Encouragement is given for staff to join professional organisations, e.g. the Council for Registration of Forensic Practitioners and the British Institute of Professional Photographers.

Much new equipment (e.g. Return to Scene) has recently been purchased. A development programme now needs to be formulated to ensure the Service maximises the potential that this sophisticated product can deliver. The recommendation can be signed off when evidence of this programme is provided.

Recommendation 12

PSNI should work with key stakeholders, particularly FSNI, to determine what databases are required, where they should be located and how access can be managed.

Status: AMBER

New databases are in place, e.g. SICAR. Implementation of the SOCRATES system went 'live' on 2 April 2007. CSIs and other staff were aware of the establishment of the POLinCA unit.

Feedback suggested that some areas of work presently carried out by FSNI could be adequately delivered in-house, by mapping/photography staff and CSIs.

There needs to be a continuous review of these processes and the relationship with FSNI as circumstances change, e.g. the implementation of new systems such as NICHE Record Management System.

The Inspectors also have concerns about the linkages between Police National Computer (PNC) and the PSNI IT database ICIS, specifically in respect of fingerprint data. They understand this issue has been identified and is in the process of being resolved, at which point the recommendation can be 'signed off'.

The Inspectors do however acknowledge that IT support and databases are continuously being developed and the critical issue is that when FSNI or PSNI develop or enhance forensic databases recognition is taken of the potential impact this might have on 'key' partners.
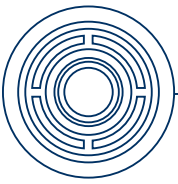
Recommendation 13

Regular joint planning should be conducted with the leadership of FSNI, which should focus on:
- **developing an improved SLA with a mechanism to ensure compliance;**
- **clarifying policy and practices in relation to the role and attendance of FSNI scientists at crime scenes;**
- **improving the submissions processes for forensic science property including continuity of evidence and introduction of hard charging by FSNI;**
- **providing an improved service in relation to fatal and serious road traffic crashes and collisions;**
- **improving the co-ordination and delivery of the fingerprints service;**
- **managing responsibility and access to existing and new forensic science databases; and**
- **realising the benefits of IT enhancements in FSNI including the introduction of a single point of contact in FSNI.**

Status: GREEN

Inspectors consider that given the enhancements evidenced in respect of the relationships between PSNI and FSNI (links to Recommendation 2) that this recommendation can be considered 'signed off'.

Recommendation 14

A formal protocol should be agreed between the State Pathologist's Department and PSNI.

Status: AMBER

Consultation has been undertaken with the SPD via a best practice forum. A draft memorandum of understanding is in place and awaiting signature. It will be 'signed-off' at the time of joint signature.

Once again, the Inspectors acknowledge that progressing this recommendation to the point of 'sign off' does not rest entirely within the control of the PSNI.

Recommendation 15

PSNI should participate in a pathology forum.

Status: GREEN

A Best Practice forum has been established between PSNI and the SPD.

Recommendation 16

A proposed training strategy should include provision for Scientific Support staff to be registered by the Council for the Registration of Forensic Practitioners.

Status: GREEN

Existing staff are being encouraged to register with the CRFP and new staff, i.e. those joining from April 2005, are required to register.

Staff members are given financial assistance in signing up for the CRFP.

Recommendation 17

A review of the out-of-hours service and geographical coverage should be conducted. The review should include remuneration and terms and conditions of employment for Scientific Support staff.

Status: AMBER

These vitally important areas are being considered as a priority by the LINKS team, which has now reached the point in its review where it will be engaging directly with Scientific Support staff.

No date has been set for the project to report in this specific respect however, the Inspectors are satisfied that the critical nature of the work being delivered by scientific support staff has been recognised.

The Inspectors acknowledge the lack of flexibility the current NI Civil Service pay scale and staffing structures impose on the PSNI. They conclude that support from the NIO to introduce changes that enable PSNI to remunerate its police staff at national market rates, (as opposed to being tied to Civil Service pay, remuneration rates and staffing structures,) are essential if staff wastage is to be minimised and return on investment, in terms of staff training, is to be maximised.

Feedback suggests it costs £10,000 initially to train a newly recruited CSI, however the overall cost including fire investigation training, the time taken to achieve competence and registration with CRFP etc is in the region of £60-70,000 per CSI.

Recommendation 18

Improved communication should be established between the SSM and scientific support staff including more effective line management arrangements.
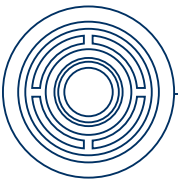
Status: AMBER

A communications policy has been developed for the branch which sets out the means by which information will be communicated to staff.

There have been articles in '*Callsign*' – the PSNI magazine – and a quarterly newsletter is circulated to all staff highlighting branch issues and achievements.

There are regular meetings with the SSM at which issues such as inappropriate taskings, lack of officers' forensic awareness, etc can be raised. There are frustrations around the lack of outcomes from raising these issues and/or lack of communication as to the reasons such issues cannot be resolved.

Despite progress, feedback from CSIs confirms that communication, particularly with senior managers in the branch, continues to be an issue of concern. The Inspectors understand that under the 'new' DCU management structures, CSIs may be more directly aligned to local managers. They therefore consider that until these arrangements have been put in place, this recommendation cannot be 'signed off'.

Recommendation 19

Senior branch managers should reassess the physical location of some CSI bases, in consultation with the relevant DCU commanders, via the Volume Crime User Group, to deliver more effective and efficient CSI working across the Police Service as a whole.

Status: AMBER

The Inspectors acknowledge that this recommendation now links directly to the implementation of the RPA and the move to the eight 'new' DCUs.

This recommendation therefore links to Recommendation 9 and currently is 'work in progress'.

Recommendation 20

Continued monitoring and action on quality control and continuity of evidence issues is necessary to ensure that trends and patterns within the Police Service are identified and actioned.

Status: AMBER

It is clear to the Inspectors that considerable effort has been taken by the Police Service to tighten its procedures within the area. All DCUs now have a nominated exhibits officer who exercises management control over exhibits.

These staff members also perform a 'courier service' in terms of the transport of exhibits to/from the FSNI laboratory. Positive feedback was received from frontline staff about these arrangements.

Visits to exhibit stores generally, but not entirely, showed that the exhibits officers have brought discipline and control for the management of exhibits. However, Inspectors note that the IT systems used to manage exhibits are currently **not** corporate although they understand this is being addressed through NICHE Record Management System introduction.

CSI focus groups and Detective focus groups mentioned universally the lack of understanding of low copy number DNA, how to manage a scene and protection measures to facilitate effective evidential recovery of most frontline operational officers (links directly to recommendations regarding staff training).
There is a strong ethos of quality control within the fingerprint bureau, i.e. dip sampling and ISO accreditation.

Inspectors conclude that whilst some progress has been achieved, considerable additional work is needed before this recommendation can be 'signed off'.

Recommendation 21

When the single point of contact is introduced in FSNI, it is important that this information and the anticipated benefit is circulated within the Police Service.

Status: AMBER

This has not yet been introduced by the FSNI, however, it is being considered as part of the laboratory's development plan.

Again, Inspectors acknowledge that progressing this recommendation to the point of 'sign off' rests outside the control of the PSNI.

Recommendation 22

There remains a need for the Service to develop process-mapping capability and to become much more proactive in this area.

Status: GREEN

As the lead into the SOCRATES system has progressed there has been extensive process-mapping undertaken across processes operated within this area of business.

Recommendation 23

Exhibits and samples should be correctly packaged and labelled as any errors will result in delays.

Status: AMBER

This recommendation links to recommendations regarding exhibit handling and staff training.

The Chief Executive of FSNI confirmed that though numbers are decreasing, the laboratory still receives exhibits from PSNI that are not packaged and labelled correctly. Each station visited had its own separate spreadsheet for tracking exhibits. Whilst examples of good practice were observed at the local level, e.g. Antrim DCU, Inspectors anticipate the introduction of NICHE Record Management System together with enhanced staff training should impact corporately within this area.
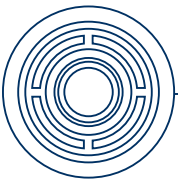
Recommendation 24

A common numbering and identification system, in barcode format and easily scanned, should be agreed and introduced by both PSNI and FSNI.

Status: AMBER

This recommendation has not been implemented but is being considered as part of developments within the FSNI. Once decisions are made within the laboratory, a joint approach to implementation can be developed.

Recommendation 25

The SLA between the Scientific Support branch and DCUs needs to be improved.

Status: GREEN

Confirmation was received that an SLA has been prepared and in existence since April 2006.

A 'new' draft SLA, for adoption from April 2007 and valid until March 2008, had been prepared and was being consulted upon.

The Inspectors conclude the requirements of this recommendation have been met and it can therefore be 'signed off'.

CHAPTER 3:

Conclusion

The Inspectors are greatly encouraged by the progress made by the PSNI towards full implementation of the recommendations from the report. This revisit inspection activity has confirmed the unequivocal commitment of the Police Service to improving its performance within this critically important area of business.

The Inspectors recognise the impact that the restructuring of the Police Service, from 29 to eight DCUs, together with the very important work of the LINKS team, are having on the pace of progress, but are satisfied that the critical areas are being considered and the commitment to implement all 24 of the accepted recommendations is readily apparent.
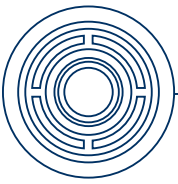
They will continue to monitor all outstanding recommendations until full implementation has been achieved or are satisfied it is appropriate for those issues to be addressed via the CJI or HMIC main stream inspection regimes.
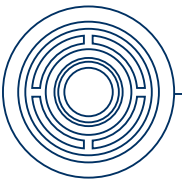
Section **2**

Appendices

Appendix 1 Most Similar Force Group

During 2006, the Police Standards Unit developed a most similar force group to compare the operational performance of the PSNI against 'similar' police forces in England. The MSF group comprises:

- Nottinghamshire Police
- West Yorkshire Police
- Greater Manchester Police
- Northumbria Police
- West Midlands Police

Appendix 2 Methodology

This revisit was conducted by four members of staff representing the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland (CJI) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), between 20–23 March 2007. Verbal feedback was provided to the Assistant Chief Constable (ACC Crime Operations) on 2 April 2007.

The methodology used comprised the following key stages:

Stage 1 – Understand the context
A desktop review of key PSNI papers relating to the implementation of the recommendations was conducted.

Stage 2 – Brief the Service
The ACC (Crime Operations) was briefed concerning the scope and focus of the inspection.

Stage 3 – Carry out reality checks
The report's findings are drawn from examination of documentation and extensive interviews with staff from different specialisms within the Scientific Support branch, regional and headquarters staff within the PSNI, together with additional interviews with 'key' external stakeholders.

During the course of their fieldwork, the representatives of the Inspectors undertook interviews, discussions, meetings and visits to gather evidence to support findings within the inspection.

Stage 4 – Publish a report
The Inspectors will prepare a draft report and provide the Chief Constable with the opportunity to comment further on matters of factual accuracy and content. This report, once the contents have been agreed by the Chief Constable, will be published electronically on the website of Criminal Justice Inspection.

Stage 5 – Monitor Progress
Though progress has been achieved in terms of the implementation of recommendations, the Inspectors will continue to monitor developments by means of reality checks at regular intervals for the foreseeable future.