



KEY FACTS

AN INSPECTION OF
**THE USE OF SPECIAL
MEASURES IN NORTHERN
IRELAND'S CRIMINAL
JUSTICE SYSTEM**

MARCH 2026



KEY FACTS

WHAT ARE SPECIAL MEASURES?

Special measures are changes made during police investigations and in Court to help vulnerable or intimidated victims and witnesses give their best evidence and participate in hearings when they need to.

These can include giving evidence by live video link, using screens to shield witnesses from the accused, having a communication specialist (Registered Intermediary), or giving evidence in private.

Special measures help victims and witnesses participate fully and support the prosecution of cases so offenders can be brought to justice. Some victims and witnesses have a statutory right of access to apply to a Judge for special measures in Court. It is important that the need for special measures is identified early so victims and witnesses know that if they need to give evidence the required supports will be available for them.

If witnesses aren't well supported, they can withdraw their evidence, cases can be delayed, prosecutions may not go ahead and convictions may not be achieved.



Police Service
of Northern Ireland



**Public
Prosecution
Service**

Independent
Fair
Effective



Northern Ireland
**Courts and
Tribunals Service**
www.justice-ni.gov.uk/courts-and-tribunals

WHO DID WE INSPECT?

This inspection looked at how the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS), and the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) identify, deliver and monitor special measures.

It also considered Department of Justice (DoJ) strategies for and oversight of special measures across the criminal justice system and how Victim Charter and Witness Charter entitlements to special measures were being met. We also spoke to victim and witness support organisations.



KEY FACTS

WHAT DID WE LOOK AT?

- How victims and witnesses who needed special measures were identified by the PSNI and PPS and how needs were assessed.
- How the DoJ and criminal justice organisations captured and evaluated data to determine whether special measures were being used effectively.
- How criminal justice organisations worked together to support victims and witnesses.
- The experience of victims and witnesses who had special measures through evidence from victim and witness support organisations.

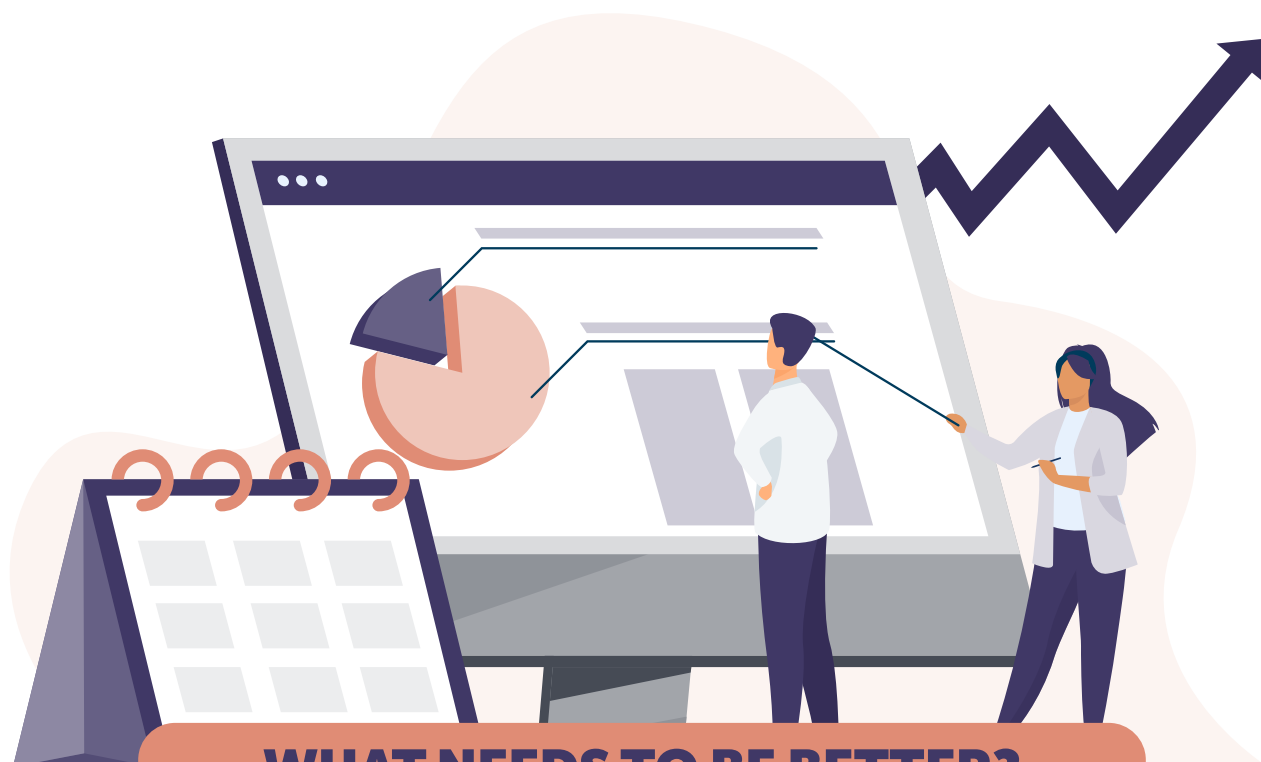


WHAT DID INSPECTORS FIND?

- The DoJ-led initiatives for Remote Evidence Centres and the Registered Intermediary scheme delivered positive outcomes, with high conviction rates and strong satisfaction among those who had used these special measures.
- The DoJ in collaboration with criminal justice partners had not implemented a Victim and Witness Needs Assessment Service within the Victim Witness Care Unit to the detriment of victims and witnesses.
- Inspectors reviewed some PSNI and PPS case files and found the PSNI had identified eligibility to apply for special measures in just 36% (10 cases) and only told the PPS about six of these. The PPS were asking victims and witnesses to complete a needs assessment who had automatic eligibility to apply for them. Inspectors found the PPS had identified a need and considered special measures applications in less than half the cases the PSNI had flagged to it.
- The PSNI lacked strategic oversight and cohesion in its approach to special measures; training was fragmented across the PSNI and there was a lack of quality assurance. Inspectors were very concerned that the quality of Achieving Best Evidence interviews, used to obtain evidence from vulnerable witnesses, especially children and victims of sexual offences, were not checked and problems like sound quality were causing delays in Court or victims had to give evidence from Remote Evidence Centres instead.
- The DoJ were not monitoring the criminal justice system to assess how effectively special measures were being utilised to support victims and witnesses and meet Charter obligations; this resulted in unknown outcomes.



KEY FACTS



WHAT NEEDS TO BE BETTER?

Inspectors made six recommendations to improve the use of special measures and outcomes for victims and witnesses:

At a Strategic (leadership) level:

- The DoJ in partnership with the PPS and the PSNI must implement an enhanced Needs Assessment Service within the Victim Witness Care Unit as a priority. Inspectors were very disappointed that this was an accepted recommendation six years ago and still hadn't been implemented.
- The DoJ, in partnership with the PPS and the NICTS, needs to develop data metrics to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of special measures.
- The PSNI should improve its strategic approach to special measures, develop and deliver better training, review its operational guidance and develop effective quality assurance measures.
- The PPS and PSNI, through the Working Together Programme Board, need to review their projects and service improvement initiatives to ensure they are more victim and witness focused.
- The PPS should develop a needs assessment strategy to ensure early identification of victim and witnesses needs, timely applications for special measures and an initial needs assessment process that is fit for purpose.

At an Operational (on the ground) level:

- The PSNI should develop effective quality assurance mechanisms for Achieving Best Evidence interviews.



KEY FACTS



WHAT NEXT?

Inspectors want to see action from the DoJ, PSNI, PPS, and the NICTS to implement these recommendations as soon as possible. The goal is to make sure all victims and witnesses have access to their Charter entitlements, get the support they need, when they need it, so they can give their best evidence when it is needed to help Prosecutors achieve convictions on behalf of the public and bring offenders to justice.

If you would like to know anything more about us or this inspection please get in touch with:

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland

Block 1, Knockview Buildings
Belfast BT4 3SJ



www.cjini.org



info@cjini.org



028 90 765764