

Inspection of the Organised Crime Division of the Crown Prosecution Service

Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPsi) has today published its report on the inspection of the Organised Crime Division (OCD) of Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) Headquarters. OCD was formed specifically to deal with cases from the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA). The division also deals with the recovery of criminal assets and civil jurisdiction matters through its Central Confiscation Unit and manages several lawyers (known as liaison magistrates or liaison prosecutors) who have expertise in foreign jurisdiction issues in their respective host countries.

The key findings of the inspection:

- The quality of decision-making is very good. Cases are prepared for court and managed to a high standard and well presented in court by experienced in-house principal crown advocates or external counsel.
- OCD is highly regarded by its criminal justice partners and stakeholders, both nationally and internationally.
- The Revenue and Customs Prosecutions Office, which also undertakes casework from SOCA, is in the process of merging with the CPS so that all SOCA work will in future be dealt with by one organisation. This provides an opportunity to combine best practice with value for money identified by each organisation across the range of casework, systems and processes.

Other findings include:

- OCD lawyers are involved in cases at the early stages and liaise closely with investigators to determine potential courses of action and evidence gathering. The records of review decisions were often excellent in the bigger and more complex cases although this was not universally the case.
- Staff have a high degree of specialist expertise and display strong commitment and a professional approach to their cases.
- Case preparation and management is generally good and a high level of successful outcomes (convictions) is achieved. The early preparation by principal crown advocates of high quality case summaries that clarify the basis of the prosecution case assist in case management and can generate early guilty pleas.
- The use of electronically presented evidence helps explain issues in the trial to the court and jury and saves court time.
- Cases are often large and complex albeit overall numbers are relatively small. Senior managers are informed of the progress in individual cases on a monthly basis. Joint reviews are held by the prosecution team from OCD and SOCA at the conclusion of the case to evaluate strengths and aspects for improvement highlighted by it.
- The disclosure of unused material is handled well and a disclosure policy document in the individual case is prepared to ensure these decisions are open and transparent.

- The electronic case management system does not fully meet the division's requirements and its use for recording casework information is limited.
- The Central Confiscation Unit is active in securing restraint orders and obtaining confiscation orders of criminal assets. The preparation and presentation of its cases is to an excellent standard.
- OCD senior managers have developed effective partnerships with SOCA, other criminal justice partners and stakeholders.

Inspectors identified four strengths in the division's performance and four examples of good practice. Seven recommendations were made and 11 aspects for improvement highlighted in order to strengthen performance.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector of the CPS, said:

"The consistently high standard of casework achieved in relation to the important and difficult cases generated by the Serious Organised Crime Agency is reassuring. It reflects the considerable commitment of staff and managers within the division alike."

This press release should be read in conjunction with the report itself and the executive summary which is integral to it and also available separately.

Notes to editors

HMCPSI was established as an independent statutory body on 1 October 2000 by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.

This inspection included detailed scrutiny of finalised case files and some current cases were observed at court.

OCD was set up in 2005 as one of three separate divisions (along with Special Crime and Counter Terrorism) within Central Casework, which replaced the Casework Directorate in CPS Headquarters. There is a head of division for each of the three who report to the Director of Public Prosecutions. The divisions provide centres of excellence and deal with those complex, serious and sensitive cases that for operational or resource reasons are better dealt with by Headquarters rather than by individual areas.

The main remit of OCD is to handle casework generated by SOCA which principally focuses upon drug offences; human trafficking; immigration; counterfeiting; non-fiscal fraud; money laundering; and asset recovery.

OCD also provides advice and assistance to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre.

There are five liaison magistrates located in the United States, France, Spain, Italy and Pakistan. They are representatives of the UK's law enforcement agencies in their host country and their work includes facilitating specific case related enquiries and promoting international assistance in the criminal justice sphere generally.

SOCA refers most of its cases to OCD at a very early stage, well before any question of charging arises. Thereafter investigators and prosecutors work together closely.

For further information please contact Anisha Visram on 020 7210 1187 or 07901 856 348.

Email: anisha.visram@hmcpsi.gsi.gov.uk.