

CPS Response to HMCPSI Thematic Inspection of Individual Quality Assessments (IQA)

13/03/2018



HMCPSI has today [13 March 2018] published a report into its inspection of the operation of Individual Quality Assessments (IQA) in the CPS.

IQA is the mechanism by which the CPS assesses compliance with CPS Casework Quality Standards (CQS). HMCPSI is broadly positive about IQA and finds that, with some changes, it has the potential to drive up the quality of casework, although more needs to be done to ensure that it is consistently applied across the country.

HMCPSI commends the leadership shown by the Director of Legal Services and Operations Directorate in recently refreshing the IQA process by establishing clear governance and providing Areas with the tools needed to undertake assessments. HMCPSI recommends that because of these developments, as well as significant changes at management levels within the CPS since IQA was launched, a national IQA training package be developed and delivered within Areas.

In CPS Areas, HMCPSI found performance around IQA to be variable with differences in the number of IQA being completed, the robustness with which they were completed, and the extent to which the findings of assessments are being used to identify action to improve performance. As a result, HMCPSI have recommended that further changes are made to the number and type of questions that are asked in the IQA process and that additional guidance should be provided to assist staff in how best to answer these questions.

A number of examples of good practice were identified, such as focussing IQA on particular types of case (such as domestic abuse) or aspects of casework (such as disclosure).

Although managers have a good understanding of how IQA can improve the casework quality of their teams, the report states that more needs to be done to improve the engagement of wider staff in the CPS. This can be achieved by ensuring that feedback from assessments is given promptly and constructively, and that key messages as to the importance of IQA are communicated effectively so as to be more widely understood.

Inspectorate's Issues to Address for CPS

1. A national training package should be developed and delivered to designated leads or trainers from each Area, which the leads or trainers should then deliver locally in their Areas to all relevant staff. This includes those who are assessed.

CPS Response: CPS Operations Directorate and Learning & Development will develop a structured programme of learning for legal managers who will be conducting IQA, and for those being assessed, for delivery by and within Areas. This will include induction for newly appointed legal managers and recruited prosecutors.

2. CPS Headquarters should include in the guidance the number of IQA it expects to be generated during a half day's assessment and should ensure that the proxy target set for each Area reflects that expectation.

CPS Response: Recommendation accepted in part. Operations Directorate will update its IQA Guidance to emphasise that the proxy target sets the minimum number of IQA to be completed, but that assessing half a day's work may require that a greater number of cases be assessed depending on the type of casework being assessed.

3. CPS Headquarters should ascertain what tools are being used in Areas to analyse Individual Quality Assessment data from the Area Performance Managers' reporting tool, and use these to inform the development of the new reporting tools in the 'Outsystems' iteration of the app in order to meet Areas' needs.

CPS Response: Operations Directorate is seeking input from Area Performance Managers in the development of the new IQA Application, to ensure Area reporting requirements are met.

4. CPS Headquarters needs to address the security concerns around Individual Quality Assessments data to ensure access for all relevant Area staff where there is a clear business need.

CPS Response: Operations Directorate will ensure that the new IQA Application is capable of providing high level anonymised data to all relevant Area staff to ensure that lessons can be learned from it. Non anonymised data will be provided to those within an individual's line management chain and to the Area Performance Manager and Head of Business Centre to the extent necessary to enable them to identify whether IQA are being completed and individual casework quality issues addressed.

5. Areas and CPS Headquarters need to ensure Individual Quality Assessments are robust, and accurately identify casework standards, with accurate comments and actions to take forward improvement activity.

CPS Response: The national programme of learning being developed by Operations Directorate will include standard setting and case studies that will help to ensure a national standard of quality of assessments. In addition, at an Area level, Legal Managers should meet regularly to set robust standards for the assessment and recording of IQA by jointly reassessing completed IQA, where appropriate. Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutors will dip sample the results of IQA to ensure their quality and accuracy. Operations Directorate will encourage and facilitate regular peer reviews by other Areas to maintain standards across the organisation. The results of IQA will be a standing item at local Casework Quality Committees to ensure that future learning is identified and action on improvement is taken. CPS Operations Directorate will facilitate this by creating a platform where best practice can be shared.

6. Areas should ensure that 10% of all Individual Quality Assessments that are carried out in each activity are dip-sampled, and that each dip sample has comments recording the standard of the IQA by the District Crown Prosecutor and of the work done on the case by the prosecutor.

CPS Response: Operations Directorate will mandate that 10% of IQA undertaken on each of the four casework activities are dip sampled by senior managers and that the updated reporting tool makes provision for the results of each dip sample to be recorded on the case.

7. CPS HQ needs to review the guidance and ensure that CPS Areas understand, from the guidance or otherwise, that questions 1 and 2 apply only to requests for EIA not requests for a charging decision.

CPS Response: Operations Directorate will update IQA Guidance to clarify that Questions 1 and 2 should only be answered when assessing cases submitted for Early Investigative Advice (EIA).

8. CPS Headquarters introduces a bespoke set of questions for disclosure, which District Crown Prosecutors can complete where necessary, to record in much greater detail the issues with all aspects of the police and CPS handling of unused material.

CPS Response: There are IQA questions that require District Crown Prosecutors to assess the quality of disclosure handling on files. Operations Directorate will strengthen the question set by ensuring that there is a separate question on disclosure in each of the four categories of casework assessed. It will also create a separate optional list of disclosure questions to be used in individual cases that contain complex or technical disclosure issues, or where a thematic IQA exercise focused on disclosure is proposed.

9. CPS HQ and Areas ensure that corporate messages regarding Individual Quality Assessments reach all relevant staff, including those whose work is being assessed, and that communication builds greater understanding of and engagement with IQA.

CPS Response: Operations Directorate will publicise the updating of the reporting tool and revision of the Guidance with targeted communications to different members of staff, which highlight the importance of IQA delivering improved performance. Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutors will be required to ensure that the importance of IQA and any developments and changes to the process are highlighted at team meetings and in local communications.