

Criminal Justice Inspection, Northern Ireland

This Inspectorate read the consultation paper with great interest. It is an impressive piece of work, and we wish you success in taking it forward. This is not a response to the consultation as such but a few comments which you may find helpful as you proceed to the next stage.

CJI would be glad to accept a remit on the lines of Key Proposal 2, but we would invite you to think a little more about the ordering of Key Proposals 2, 3 and 4. We shall be doing more work on the management of sex offenders this summer, which will in effect discharge the first half of Key Proposal 4: the second half is, of course, for the NIO.

We believe that the work we have done on Victims and Witnesses, as well as on MASRAM, has already provided findings which are relevant to Key Proposal 3. As regards Key Proposal 2, it would be helpful if you could clarify when it would be most helpful for us to do this further work. We would see it possibly fitting in to our programme for 2008-09, but it is really a question of whether you would like us to survey the handling of these cases as it is now or wait to see the effect of the improvements which are currently planned.

It is worth noting that the figures quoted in Tables 9, 10, 11 and 12 give too rosy a picture. There is indeed a reasonably high proportion of convictions of those prosecuted, but convictions as a percentage of rapes reported are extremely low (because juries will not convict for offences they do not regard as 'real rapes' and prosecutors know that they won't get convictions, so fail to proceed); and the clearance rates by the police are an unsatisfactory measure for a similar reason, since a lot of cases are nominally 'cleared' but not proceeded with. The police are now beginning to focus on what they call 'sanction clearances', which will be a much better indicator of whether anything has happened as a result of a reported crime.

Finally, forgive me for saying that I have some misgivings about your using the term 'sexual violence' to brand this initiative. You are including (rightly) a number of offences which are not violent offences in the normal sense of the word. It is difficult to find the right term, because 'sexual offending' is slightly too broad: maybe 'sexual transgression'?

There are in CJI a number of Inspectors who have relevant expertise, and if you would like to discuss at any time please do not hesitate to get in touch.