



HM Inspectorate of Probation

THEMATIC INSPECTION REPORT

Using Information
and Technology to
Improve Probation
Service Performance

2000

Foreword

I have been aware for some time of the growing concern about the problems probation services have experienced in the implementation of the National Probation Service Information Systems Strategy and, in particular, the Case Record Administration and Management System. I decided in early 1999 that HM Inspectorate of Probation would conduct a thematic inspection on the National Probation Service Information Systems Strategy.

The planning for this thematic inspection began in the autumn of 1999. In early 2000 the National Audit Office indicated that they intended to review the Home Office's management of the National Probation Service Information Systems Strategy project and whether the objectives of the strategy had been realised. We agreed to work together and this has been a very valuable feature of this inspection. The experience of the National Audit Office has been of immense value to HM Inspectorate of Probation and I hope that it will be possible to work collaboratively in the future.

It is positive that the national computer infrastructure for the probation service is nearly complete. However, the findings of this inspection are disturbing:

- the Case Record Administration and Management System has not provided an effective case management system to support operational practice;
- What Works is in danger of being undermined by the absence of timely and accurate information.

This inspection incorporated three separate studies on the use of information in relation to

- compliance with national standards
- the deployment of resources
- the probation service's contribution to the crime and disorder audits following the implementation of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

The studies were published as separate documents and in advance of the thematic report so that our findings could be used to inform current plans and developments.

Inspectors found that most managers were working without adequate information on workload or costs. They were also not using the information that was available sufficiently.

Most main grade staff were coping as best they could with either an inadequate case management system or no computerised system even though they might have a computer on their desk. This report makes a number of recommendations to the Home Office and local probation services which, if implemented, will significantly improve the situation.

SIR GRAHAM SMITH CBE
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

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Following the main fieldwork, the chief probation officers of Cambridgeshire and Hereford & Worcester organised visits for HM Inspectorate of Probation and the National Audit Office to see their case management systems in action. They also read the final draft of this report and provided valuable feedback.

The final responsibility for the judgements reached and overall quality of the work produced rests with HM Inspectorate of Probation.

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October 2000

1. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Context

- 1.1 This chapter summaries the key findings from the inspection and contains the recommendations.
- 1.2 The inspection took place at an early stage in the transition to the modernised probation service. The transition will involve important challenges in relation to information issues at both a local and a national level:
- Locally - a number of services with different information systems (IS) will be amalgamated. There will also be a shift of emphasis from 54 autonomous probation committees to 42 new bodies working to a more closely prescribed national agenda;
 - Nationally - the new national directorate will require accurate and consistent information to inform the Home Secretary, Parliament and the public about the effectiveness of the service's work. This will require much clearer leadership than had been apparent since the launch of the National Probation Service Information Systems Strategy (NPSISS).

Key findings

The availability and use of information

Core information needs

- 1.3 There were six inspection standards related to core information needs and the main conclusions in relation to them were:
- the Home Office needed to provide leadership and urgent guidance for services on the implications of the 1998 Data Protection Act;
 - the systems for providing probation committees with comprehensive and timely information on the performance, workload, outcomes and costs of the service were generally unsatisfactory. The data provided on outcomes and costs was a matter of particular concern;

- information was not available to staff at all levels of the service to improve individual and corporate performance. However, the Integrated Case Management System (ICMS) areas were able to access data on levels of compliance with national standards achieved by individual members of staff;
- effective systems did not exist in most areas to provide operational information, although some services had taken local initiatives that were valuable. Despite the Home Office investment in technology, there was no national computer system to assist in the management of dangerous offenders. Services were generally having to rely on paper files, card indexes and registers to retain and access information on offenders presenting a risk of harm to the public;
- services varied considerably in their reliability in providing regular statistical information to the Home Office. No work had been conducted nationally or locally on the cost of collating and submitting the data;
- the provision of information to stakeholders and other interested parties posed major difficulties to services. Evidence from the crime and disorder audits indicated that services made considerable efforts to meet the requirements on them for information. However, the absence of an effective reporting tool meant that the process was time-consuming and inefficient.

Compliance with national standards

1.4 There were four inspection standards relating to achieving compliance with national standards and the main conclusions in relation to the use of information were:

- there was no effective national computerised system to monitor national standards and this reduced the capacity of probation committees and managers to ensure that national standards were applied appropriately;
- in most services senior probation officers (SPOs) read case records to examine levels of compliance with national standards and some had devised their own "ad hoc" systems to obtain further information. There was also evidence that senior managers did not always use "hard information" when supervising middle managers;

- the Case Record Administration and Management System (CRAMS) was not "user-friendly" and could not provide a clear overview of an individual case in relation to the requirements of national standards.

Deployment of resources

1.5 There were three inspection standards relating to the deployment of resources and the main conclusions in relation to the use of information were the:

- use of the Resource Management Information System (RMIS) was very limited and there was little confidence in the information generated;
- ability of services to deploy resources effectively was limited by the absence of accurate information on unit costs.

Crime and disorder audits

1.6 There were two inspection standards relating to the crime and disorder audits and the main conclusions in relation to the use of information were:

- all the services inspected had contributed to the crime and disorder partnerships, but other agencies would have welcomed more information about the causes of offending and a greater use of geo-coded data (i.e. the use of postcodes);
- in all the services visited in the study, the partnerships were only just beginning to consider the monitoring process. The problems of geographical boundaries and the use of different "time periods" when collecting data needed resolution.

Race and ethnic monitoring

1.7 The findings of HM Inspectorate of Probation's (HMIP's) thematic inspection *Towards Race Equality*¹ revealed further evidence that the quality of information provided by services to the Home Office was inadequate and that collated data was not used to improve practice.

National Probation Service Information Systems Strategy

¹ HM Inspectorate of Probation *Towards Race Equality* Report of a Thematic Inspection (2000).

- 1.8 Although NPSISS was described as national, it was of necessity designed for 55² individual services that were independent and autonomous. This created difficulties throughout the project, particularly as the Home Office held the main contract on the infrastructure. The Home Office lacked control over local developments and in 2000 a number of services were developing their own case management systems.
- 1.9 The national infrastructure covered 47 out of the 54 probation services. Although no timetable had been agreed for its completion, this still represented a major achievement even if its coverage was inconsistent within and between areas.
- 1.10 The absence of a single body with clear authority to manage the overall project had created problems and this was reflected in the difficulties with the Trade Unions. It was also apparent in the absence of accountability by probation areas to the Home Office for the investment made in NPSISS. Only 50% of local services submitted the required business case, the "stewardship" reports that were submitted by probation areas were never reviewed and the requirement for their submission was never formally withdrawn.
- 1.11 The identification of business needs was inadequate in probation services and within the Home Office probation unit and there seemed to be no adequate arrangements for ensuring that these were examined with sufficient rigour.
- 1.12 The probation unit had failed to link the changing requirements of the probation service in relation to risk assessment with NPSISS and it had been left to individual probation areas to seek local solutions to the need for a computerised system for the registration and management of high-risk offenders. As a result, the needs of Ministers for accurate information and assurance that sound IS were in place to support services in their supervision of high-risk offenders were not being met sufficiently. Service managers and staff were working hard to overcome the difficulties presented by the lack of IT support in order to ensure that information was available and offenders were supervised effectively. This is a matter of very serious concern and can be resolved only if there is greater integration of policy and information developments within the Home Office.

² The number of probation services was reduced from 55 to 54 in 1996 with the amalgamation of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire areas.

- 1.13 The original business case submitted to the Treasury had not been subjected to a detailed review until the National Audit Office (NAO) began their investigation in late 1999.
- 1.14 The focus of NPSISS shifted from the improved use of information to further the work of the probation service to a concentration on the installation of hardware/software applications. Whilst this was understandable in the context of the problems experienced in the overall management of the NPSISS project, it meant that the original business objectives were obscured.
- 1.15 There had been insufficient direction and coordination on key aspects of NPSISS including:
- issues related to the key role of probation information in the wider criminal justice system;
 - the potential to use Lotus Notes to further the changing business needs of the service such as the management of risk.
- 1.16 A number of services had reduced the size of their information units. The national business case had encouraged this because services believed that NPSISS reduced the need for such staff and they were under pressure to reduce costs.
- 1.17 NPSISS had been unable to provide the full range of information that was needed to demonstrate value for money (vfm).
- 1.18 CRAMS had not provided a case management system of acceptable quality to probation services and this had been a major weakness. Only 16 services were using CRAMS substantially. Four out of five offenders were supervised by services not using the case management system envisaged in NPSISS. At the time of the inspection, there were at least 10 case management systems in operation or development in local services and this must be a matter of concern as steps are taken to create a national probation service.
- 1.19 The inspection found that the reporting tool, initially known as GQL and subsequently BIQ, had not provided the rapid and effective solution for interrogating data held in CRAMS that had been promised by the Home Office and anticipated by probation services. Those services that had used it effectively had spent considerable local resources in the process.
- 1.20 EASI had been developed by the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) on behalf of the

Home Office to provide probation staff with information on facilities for use by offenders. Its installation on NPSISS had been successful but no detailed scrutiny had taken place on its use or cost-effectiveness.

- 1.21 For services that had installed CRAMS, there had been serious problems with the technical interface with RMIS that had resulted in serious delays in the provision to the Home Office of information on KPI 7 on unit costs.
- 1.22 Lotus Notes had been of great value as an email system but there had been insufficient coordination of the development of specific applications and this had meant that local services had unnecessarily duplicated work.
- 1.23 There had been no thorough evaluation of the impact of new technology on the business of the service. HMIP found little evidence of the anticipated improvements in productivity.
- 1.24 There was evidence that there had been insufficient strategic appreciation within the Home Office probation unit of the importance of ensuring the integration of operational and information technology (IT) developments within the framework of the original NPSISS vision. During the inspection, it seemed that this shortcoming was being addressed, for example, with the completion in the summer of 2000 of the Information Strategy Review. It will be vital that the national directorate ensures this improved approach is sustained.

Information and knowledge management

- 1.25 The inspection identified shortcomings in the management of information and knowledge not just within probation services but also in the Home Office probation unit. It was positive that probation services and very senior staff within the Home Office acknowledged this issue.
- 1.26 No probation service information strategy had been issued at the time of the inspection. NPSISS had represented an IS strategy and the probation unit had produced a document in late 1999 *A Developing Probation Service National Information Strategy* which made a significant number of recommendations about the steps required for a strategic approach. NPSISS was not reviewed until late 1999. Considerable work had then taken place to develop the basis of a new strategy and the new Information Systems Programme Board accepted this in September 2000. It provided a sound basis for future decisions.

- 1.27 There were significant but limited examples of local probation services promoting the sharing of knowledge and information through NPSISS. There was a clear demand amongst many probation staff at all grades for a national probation intranet to share information and assist in the development of good practice.
- 1.28 No probation service inspected had examined the business benefits/costs of email or undertaken any review of its use. Nor had there been a systematic audit of the skills and experience of staff as a way of capturing and managing the knowledge that this represented.
- 1.29 The "Modernising Government" agenda had made only a limited impact on probation services, although there was willingness by a number of services to engage with new technology very positively.

Conclusions and recommendations

- 1.30 This inspection acknowledged the wider context in which the probation service operates. It is essential that the national probation service plays a full part as a key player in the Integrated Business and Information Systems (IBIS)³ initiative, given the importance to probation business of information from other criminal justice organisations, and vice versa. However, a considerable challenge is posed by the "Modernising Government" agenda. A key section in e-government: A Strategic Framework for Public Services in the Information Age states:

"Implementing this strategy (modernising government) will place significant demands on public servants to work in new ways and to acquire knowledge about new technology. They will need to understand how the evolving technology creates new possibilities for the way they can do business, and they will need increased skills in the application and use of information."

- 1.31 The document identified four principal areas for action:
- leadership and policy making - the need to develop at all levels an understanding of the implications of new

³ IBIS was established in July 1998 as a result of a cross-departmental review of the criminal justice system to ensure a better integration of information and business systems. The IBIS board reports to the Ministerial group for the criminal justice system.

technology for policy making, service delivery, management and organisational culture;

- change and project management - needed to be managed with business discipline;
- intelligent customer - the need to be able to procure, finance, negotiate and manage relationships and suppliers intelligently;
- end-user skills - the need to train all staff so that they can use new tools to improve service and for more effective working.

1.32 It is particularly important that the new national directorate ensures that it is able to fill the role of the intelligent customer because of the importance of future negotiations regarding computer systems. To address the issues identified in this report, a number of recommendations are made. It is recommended that:

1. *The Home Office should urgently issue guidance to probation committees and future boards on the legal and policy requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 and, when appropriate, on the implications of the forthcoming Freedom of Information Bill.*
2. *The Home Office should, after consultation with HMIP, the Central Probation Council (CPC) and the Association of Chief Officers of Probation (ACOP), issue a probation circular setting out a minimum standard for the provision of information to probation committees/boards, the national directorate and HMIP. It should cover the content, frequency and format of such reports.*
3. *The Home Office should, within the framework of the Information Strategy Review, give priority to:*
 - (a) *the establishment of a national risk of harm register to be available on the NPSISS infrastructure;*
 - (b) *ensuring that the specification for new IS includes projected revenue costs for probation services so that local areas can deploy appropriate resources to supply the required data to the Home Office;*
 - (c) *ensuring that appropriate arrangements to maintain the probation index are agreed before the termination of the existing system.*

4. The Home Office should develop an effective case management system which:
 - (a) supports staff in complying with national standards and in working to What Works principles;
 - (b) provides management information on compliance with national standards and other aspects of service performance;
 - (c) is integrated into the development of the systems to support the Offender Assessment System (OASys) and accredited programmes;
 - (d) provides and receives from others information key to the work of probation staff.
5. The Home Office should, in future IT development within the probation service, make appropriate organisational arrangements to ensure that policy, operational and information requirements are integrated and that IT developments are determined by policy and business needs.
6. The Home Office should:
 - (a) ensure that NPSISS includes all local probation services, the national directorate, HMIP and the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate;
 - (b) examine the potential to establish a national probation intranet to share information and assist in the development of good practice.
7. Chief probation officers (CPOs) should:
 - (a) review the impact of new technology, particularly the use of email and the storage of electronic documents on their local business systems;
 - (b) audit the skills and experience of their staff to harness both the formal and informal knowledge within the organisation.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE INSPECTION

Aims and objectives of the inspection

2.1 HM Chief Inspector of Probation wrote to chief probation officers (CPOs) and secretaries to probation committees in December 1999 announcing HMIP's intention to undertake an inspection with the following terms of reference.

Aims and objectives

AIMS:

- *To examine how probation services make informed decisions in order to reduce crime and protect the public.*
- *To examine the adequacy of systems developed nationally to support the use of information.*
- *To highlight and promote good practice in the management of knowledge and use of information.*

OBJECTIVES:

- *To review the progress made in the implementation of the NPSISS vision that:
"Relevant, accurate and timely information should be accessible to all staff, where appropriate, at any location from a single source as an integral part of their working environment".*
- *To review the extent to which systems are meeting the core information needs of the service, the Home Office and other stakeholders.*
- *To examine, assess and report on the use of information in relation to:
(a) the deployment of resources;
(b) achieving compliance with national standards;
(c) contributing to crime and disorder partnerships.*
- *To identify aspects of good practice in the collection, collation and sharing of information within probation services.*

Inspection process

- 2.2 The thematic inspection incorporated three separate studies on the use of information in relation to achieving compliance with national standards, the deployment of resources, and the probation service's contribution to the crime and disorder audits following implementation of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.⁴ The studies were published as separate documents and in advance of the full thematic inspection report.
- 2.3 An advisory group was established in December 1999 and met regularly to assist inspectors and review the work on the full thematic inspection and the individual studies. Membership comprised individuals from the Home Office, probation services and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) who had knowledge and expertise in the subject matters.
- 2.4 Ten services were selected for the fieldwork that took place in January, February and March 2000:

Hampshire, Middlesex, North Wales, Northumbria, Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire, Somerset, South West London, Surrey, West Yorkshire and Wiltshire.

- 2.5 The fieldwork was undertaken in three phases:

Phase One:

- All 10 services were visited for one day and a sample of case records was read.
- All 54 services in England and Wales completed a short questionnaire providing details of their use of information.

Phase Two:

- Specific and detailed documentation was requested from each of the 10 services due to be visited.
- All 10 services were visited for two days and a programme was devised which enabled inspectors to examine and compare how well the services used information and IS.
- During the visits groups of staff and managers, members of the probation committee and representatives

⁴ Part 1: Making National Standards Work: A study by HMIP of enforcement practice in community penalties; Part 2: The Deployment of Resources: A study by HMIP; Part 3: Probation Services' Contribution to Crime and Disorder Partnerships.

of local agencies were interviewed. Inspectors used a standard interview schedule to enable comparative information to be collected across all 10 services.

- On each visit part of the programme focused on one or two aspects of the three studies, as follows:
 - **compliance with national standards** - Middlesex, North Wales, Northumbria and Wiltshire;
 - **the deployment of resources** - Middlesex, Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire, Somerset and Surrey;
 - **Crime and disorder audits** - Hampshire, South West London, Surrey and West Yorkshire.

Phase Three:

A further phase of fieldwork took place in April and May 2000 and involved meetings with:

- staff in the Home Office probation unit;
- representatives of the Central Council of Probation Committees;
- members of the National Probation Research and Information Exchange (NPRIE);
- members of the ACOP management services committee;
- staff and probation committee members from the Cambridgeshire and Hereford & Worcester Probation Services.

2.6 The report has also drawn on the results of the work of HMIP's thematic inspection and the Performance Inspection Programme (PIP) in the first four regions:

- **West Midlands** - Hereford & Worcester; Shropshire; Staffordshire; Warwickshire and West Midlands;
- **North East** - Durham; Northumbria and Teesside;
- **Eastern** - Bedfordshire; Cambridgeshire; Essex; Hertfordshire; Norfolk; Northamptonshire and Suffolk;
- **North West** - Cheshire; Cumbria; Greater Manchester; Lancashire and Merseyside.

2.7 Early in 2000 it became clear that the NAO was intending to conduct a study into NPSISS. There was significant overlap between the NAO study and this inspection. It was agreed that two organisations would work together and arrangements were therefore made for:

- five of the fieldwork visits (Middlesex, Northumbria, Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire, Somerset and Surrey) to be conducted on a joint basis;
- all the inspection events in Phase Three to be joint events;
- the NAO to attend one of the advisory group's meetings;
- HMIP's attendance at some of the events organised by the NAO (e.g. meetings with ACOP and the Home Office's Director of Sentencing and Correctional Policy);
- regular meetings between the auditors and inspectors to exchange information and discuss emerging findings.

Inspection standards

2.8 Prior to the fieldwork, a set of standards by which the work being inspected would be judged was devised. These were:

Core information needs

- Services meet the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1984.
- Effective systems exist, and are used, to provide the probation committee with comprehensive and timely information on the performance, workload, outcomes and costs of the service in the context of local and national circumstances.
- Staff, at all levels of the service, receive appropriate information that is used to improve both individual and corporate performance.
- Effective systems exist to provide operational information including that required to manage the risk of harm presented by offenders, and that it is used appropriately.
- Effective systems are in place to enable the service to respond fully, accurately and promptly to the Home Office's regular requests for information and statistical returns, and the service responds accordingly.
- The service is able to respond appropriately to requests from stakeholders and other interested parties for information.

Achieving compliance with national standards

- Effective systems are in place, and are used, to monitor regularly the performance of the service against national standards.
- Effective procedures exist to ensure that managers examine the performance of staff in relation to compliance with national standards.
- Effective mechanisms exist to enable staff to know whether individual cases are meeting the requirements of national standards.
- Services are able to use the local guidelines relating to the fair, vigorous and effective enforcement of community orders and licences.

The deployment of resources

- Information that is required on the deployment of resources to achieve the service's objectives is available.
- Effective systems are in place to provide information on the cost of service activities, including staff time, and its relationship to the outcomes of the work.
- Decisions on the creation and implementation of policy are made on the basis of consideration of different costed options.

Crime and disorder

- Services are contributing to the statutory crime and disorder partnerships, in accordance with the requirements of the Home Office guidance manual.
- Effective IS exist that demonstrate how the probation service contributes to the process of developing and implementing strategies for reducing crime and disorder.

NPSISS

- Relevant, accurate and timely information should be accessible to all staff, where appropriate, at any location from a single source as an integral part of their working environment.

2.9 The inspection findings against each of these standards are set out in Chapters 4 and 5.

3. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Structure of the probation service

- 3.1 At the time of the inspection the probation service in England and Wales was organised into 54 separate areas. These were autonomous local organisations accountable to a local probation committee composed of magistrates, members of the local community, a judge (appointed by the Lord Chancellor) and one or more representatives of the funding local authority (or authorities). The funding of the services was split between the Home Office (80%) and local authorities (20%). The responsibility for the governance of each probation service rested with the local probation committee.
- 3.2 The 2000 Criminal Justice and Court Services Bill was being considered by Parliament at the time of the publication of this report. This envisaged the creation of the National Probation Service for England and Wales that would be directly accountable to the Home Secretary through a national directorate. The legislation contained significant proposals for change, including the:
- creation of 42 local probation areas with boundaries that were coterminous with the police authorities and the CPS;
 - the establishment of new probation boards with paid chairs and representatives of the local community appointed by the Home Secretary;
 - power for the Home Secretary to appoint CPOs and to provide direction to local services on how they fulfilled their statutory responsibilities.
- 3.3 It was anticipated that the date for implementation of the changes would be April 2001.

The managerial context

- 3.4 The context in which information had been used in the management of the probation service had changed considerably since the middle of the 1980s. The most significant developments had been the:

- Home Office's Statement of National Objectives and Priorities (SNOP) 1984;
- HMIP "Efficiency and Effectiveness" area inspection programme (1989/94);
- reports by the NAO and the Audit Commission in 1989;⁵
- introduction of National Standards for the Supervision of Offenders in 1992 which were revised and reissued in 1995 and in March 2000;
- use of the cash limit formula since 1992, with the clear expectation that individual probation areas would not exceed the limit set by the Home Office;
- introduction in 1992 of RMIS to provide information on resource usage and the unit costs of probation service activities;
- introduction of key performance indicators (KPIs) in 1992;
- publication by the Home Office of three year plans between 1993 and 1998 when they were replaced with one year plans;
- HMIP "Quality and Effectiveness" area inspection programme (1994/98);
- use of data in HMIP thematic inspections since 1995 to compare performance in areas;
- launch of HMIP's PIP in 1999. Over a three year period all probation areas would be inspected on a regional basis to enable comparisons in performance to be made.

3.5 These developments should be viewed in the wider context of the budget of the probation service. In 1998 the Home Office probation unit identified that by comparing real terms spending with workload in 1997/98, probation services had absorbed efficiencies of 22% since 1994/95. There had been significant cuts in the budget of probation services in the mid-1990s, which were mitigated in the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) settlement when an extra £127m grant was provided for the period 1999/00 to 2001/02. New responsibilities under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and increases in projected workload accompanied this increase.

3.6 In the period 1994 to 1998 the number of probation officers (all grades) fell from 7,776 to 7,191 and the total number

⁵ National Audit Office *Home Office: Control and Management of Probation Services in England and Wales* HM Stationery Office (1989) and Audit Commission *The Probation Service: Promoting Value of Money* HM Stationery Office (1989).

of staff fell from 16,405 to 14,613. This should be seen in the context that, in the period 1994/95 to 1999/00 (projected), the total probation caseload had increased by 25% and the number of reports increased by 17%.

- 3.7 In 1998 the probation unit recognised the importance of information and agreed to work with HMIP, ACOP and CPC towards a common information strategy. This resulted in the report *A Developing Probation Service National Information Strategy* in 1999 although, as the title stated, this was not a completed piece of work. During 2000 further work was undertaken to develop an Information Systems Strategy for the national probation service.

Computerisation in the probation service prior to the launch of the National Probation Service Information Systems Strategy

- 3.8 In the late 1970s the Home Office introduced the probation index, a national database of offenders for whom local probation services had statutory supervisory responsibility.⁶ Data concerning the offenders supervised by services was collected in paper form and was subsequently loaded by Home Office staff onto a mainframe computer. This information formed the basis of the annual *Probation Statistics, England and Wales* as well as some statistics for local areas on workload.⁷
- 3.9 In 1983 the Home Office developed the Probation Information System (PROBIS) a system that allowed local information staff to input the data on workload and reports directly into a local computer. The data was then transferred onto "floppy disc" and sent to the Home Office. Local managers were able to obtain data from their local system, although PROBIS acquired a reputation amongst probation services for unreliability and a lack of user-friendliness.
- 3.10 The growing use of personal computers (PCs) in both the public and private sector in the 1980s and early 1990s was reflected in probation services. A number committed themselves to ambitious IT strategies sometimes in collaboration with other probation areas. An example of such an initiative is contained in figure 1.

⁶ The database also contained some information on "voluntary supervision" and family court welfare.

⁷ Published by Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, Home Office.

Figure 1: Case example of computerisation in a local probation service

- in 1978 the Hereford & Worcester Probation Service began to establish a wide area network (WAN) case information system. The original system comprised a database of offender details, including reports and previous convictions and was used as the basis of performance monitoring.
- In 1990/91 the system was redesigned, renamed the Integrated Operational Support System (IOSS) and transferred onto a more powerful database supported by an email package and a full suite of office software including a diary system, word processing and an electronic filing system. It also incorporated a risk of harm classification.
- The service introduced a WAN sharing computer and telephone lines. These were subsequently removed from all offices when the service installed the NPSISS infrastructure.
- In 1992 the system was adopted by the Shropshire Probation Service. It was managed on a joint basis through the establishment of the Three Shires Information System Board, which included a representative from each probation committee.
- IOSS had not been extensively developed because Hereford & Worcester Probation Service supported the decision to establish a single national case management system even though they regretted the failure to choose IOSS for this role.
- IOSS had fully met its original specification and had adapted to changing business needs. For instance, it was capable of recording information from the local Assessment, Case Recording and Evaluation System (ACE) ⁸ and its use of postcoding enabled the provision of data to community safety initiatives.

3.11 These developments included the establishment of local area networks (LANs) and WANs that connected individual PCs through telephone lines and allowed the electronic transmission of information through email. It also provided services with the infrastructure to develop case management systems which allowed a central archive of records to be established that was accessible to computers on WAN. However, most of the PCs installed in probation services in this period were used mainly for word processing documents.

3.12 In 1990 HMIP published an inspection report *Information and Computerisation Strategies*⁹ which revealed wide differences in approach to probation service computerisation:

"Variants ranged from planned and steady introduction of computer systems following an appraisal of the need, to ad hoc purchases of hardware to do particular jobs and separate, it seemed, from any strategic thinking in relation to information systems."

⁸ Developed jointly by Robers, the Oxford University Probation Studies Unit and the Warwickshire Probation Service.

⁹ HM Inspectorate of Probation *Information and Computerisation Strategies* Report of an Efficiency & Effectiveness Development Inspection in the Probation Service (December 1990).

- 3.13 In November 1993 a Home Office working party comprising representatives of probation services, the Home Office, HMIP, and the government's Central Computer & Telecommunications Agency (CCTA), ACOP and CPC produced an information strategy report. Its main findings and recommendations formed the basis for NPSISS.
- 3.14 In 1994 the Home Office submitted a business case to HM Treasury for the implementation of NPSISS. The concept was of a common infrastructure but with a degree of autonomy in the development of software. The business case projected costs of £97m over 10 years and efficiency savings of 7% based on the fact that the information strategy report had estimated potential savings, through productivity increases, of at least 10%.
- 3.15 In order to develop a common case management system as part of NPSISS, the Home Office and representatives from probation services evaluated three existing case management systems for adoption as a national standard tool. These were the:
- Northumbria Probation Information Management System (NPIMS) - used in Northumbria Probation Service;
 - IOSS - used in the Shropshire and Hereford & Worcester Probation Services;
 - ICMS - that was being developed by a consortium of services in East Anglia.

NPIMS was selected as the basis of the new case management system that became known as CRAMS.

National standards and What Works

- 3.16 Following the implementation of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, the Home Office issued the first set of national standards for the supervision of offenders in the community which were subsequently revised and reissued in 1995 and 2000. National Standards 2000 require probation services to:
- monitor regularly their performance both against these standards and against the outcomes of their work and to take action, when necessary, to improve performance;
 - respond fully and promptly to the Home Office's requests for information and statistical returns;
 - keep full and accurate records (on computer where available);

- have local guidelines that cover the sharing of information with other criminal justice agencies;
- have a strategy to inform sentencers and the general public about their work and the services they provide.

3.17 During the mid 1980s there was developing evidence about What Works in supervising offenders effectively. The first What Works conference was sponsored by the Hereford & Worcester and Greater Manchester Probation Services in 1989. HMIP undertook the first part of its What Works project, published *Strategies for Effective Offender Supervision* in early 1998 and later that year the *Effective Practice Guide*. These developments were subsequently incorporated into the What Works initiative announced in Probation Circular 38/98. Home Office Ministers, ACOP and HMIP agreed that probation services should aim to ensure that every offender was supervised in accordance with those principles which had been shown to reduce the rates of reoffending. From April 1999 additional funding for the What Works strategy was provided from the government's crime reduction programme. Ministers set targets for accredited programme completions of 10,000 in 2001/02 rising to 60,000 in 2003/04. The strategy will demand accurate information about the number of offenders completing programmes, the quality of delivery and their impact on offending.

3.18 Research indicates that the critical factors in reducing reoffending include the need to assess the risk offenders pose and the factors which are known to be associated with offending. In recent years probation services had made increasing use of one or more tools to assist the assessment process, including the:

- Offender Group Reconviction Scale (OGRS) provided by the Home Office;
- Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R);¹⁰
- ACE.

3.19 However, these existing assessment tools were known not to meet fully the current business needs and in 1999 the Home Office decided to develop a single risk/needs assessment system - OASys - for use in both prisons and probation services. OASys was piloted in 1999 and 2000 and full implementation was planned from early 2001. The project had

¹⁰ LSI-R is a needs assessment tool that was primarily developed in North America and has been used in a number of probation services in England and Wales.

identified benefits from the data being processed electronically. At the time of this inspection arrangements had not been finalised for its availability on NPSISS and significant obstacles needed to be overcome. A joint prisons/probation business case was in preparation to assist the decision making process.

The wider context

3.20 Probation services do not operate in isolation and make a major contribution to the operation of the criminal justice system. The "Modernising Government" White Paper - www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/moderngov/index.htm - set a challenging agenda for reform and renewal of public services and Ministers have set overarching aims and objectives for the criminal justice system which includes a vision of a "joined up criminal justice system" - a system which plans and works as a whole.

3.21 The IBIS initiative was established as part of this new way of working. In October 1999 IBIS published a medium-term strategic plan for IS in the criminal justice system. It envisaged criminal justice agencies having ready access to accurate up-to-date information wherever it was held. The various agencies within the IBIS initiative needed to ensure that:

- IT developments in each agency were compatible, and business processes were designed to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by technology;
- common definitions of data and technical standards were used;
- protocols for the exchange of information and security policies were agreed, consistent with the demands of the Data Protection Act 1998 and, when implemented, the Freedom of Information Act.

At the time of preparation of this report, IBIS itself was undergoing a review.

NPSISS

3.22 The information strategy that formed the basis of NPSISS made a clear statement about the underlying management philosophy:

"The overall management philosophy of the Home Office and probation services is one of devolution of accountability and responsibility for resources to the lowest appropriate organisational level, i.e. 55 probation areas and locally the teams within areas."

- 3.23 In December 1994 Bull Information Systems Limited was awarded a contract - the NPSISS Enabling Agreement - for a seven year period. The installation of the national IT infrastructure began in March 1995 and was due to be completed by March 1999.¹¹ The installation timetable was devised in conjunction with probation services, which were able to bid for a particular year in the schedule.
- 3.24 At the start of the project a central steering group - the Information Strategy Steering Committee (ISSC) - was responsible for the management and development of NPSISS, including the allocation of capital funding. It included four members of ACOP and three from CPC to represent service and probation committee interests respectively. The ISSC was chaired by the head of the Home Office probation unit. In 1996 the Information Systems Strategy Board (ISSB) was established with representatives from ACOP and CPC, with the Home Office attending only as observers. This became the body responsible for the overall strategic management of the project. There were plans in the period 1995/97 to establish an independent company NPSISS Ltd to have overall control of the software "owned" by the project but the proposal never reached fruition mainly because of the complexity of the legal situation.
- 3.25 CRAMS began to be used in a number of areas in 1996. There were a variety of versions in use. In March 1997 28 areas had a complete "roll-out" of the NPSISS infrastructure as it was then configured and 12 probation services had a version of CRAMS that was working to some degree.
- 3.26 In March 1998 Bull completed an audit of all the systems provided to services under the terms of the NPSISS Enabling Agreement to see if they were Year 2000 compliant. This revealed that there were Year 2000 problems with a range of products including 5,000 individual PCs. After consultation the Home Office decided to use the opportunity afforded by the need to deal with the Year 2000 issue to introduce new technology, which would also resolve a number of other problems. The cost of these changes was approximately £17m. This expenditure undoubtedly improved the NPSISS

¹¹ The timetable was extended into 2000 because of the Year 2000 problems.

infrastructure because it enabled older PCs to be retained as terminals, whilst the installation of new central computing units (servers) made maintenance of systems easier. The capacity of the system improved markedly and new software was installed across the system, both for word processing and email which provided greater functionality.

3.27 However, the installation of the Year 2000 compliant version of CRAMS by Bull did not adhere to the original timetable. During the summer of 1999 HMIP, which acted as the independent assessors on behalf of the National Infrastructure Forum, identified the risk that the Home Office probation unit and probation services would not meet the requirements of the Cabinet Office in relation to Year 2000 compliance. The compliant version of CRAMS was accepted by the Home Office probation unit only in September 1999.

3.28 In addition to delays in relation to Year 2000 there were also concerns emerging about the design of CRAMS. In February 1999 the University of London completed an ergonomic assessment of CRAMS and found that there were serious problems in relation to the design of the interface. A later report by independent consultants, Amey Vectra for the Merseyside and Lancashire Probation Services, in March 2000 confirmed these criticisms. There had already been a history of discussion with the Trade Unions on the ergonomic problems of CRAMS and, in particular, dissatisfaction with its suitability for visually impaired staff. On occasions the Trade Unions had indicated that they would ballot their members for industrial action to boycott the use of CRAMS.

3.29 In September 1999 a probation circular confirmed that it had been decided that CRAMS would be redeveloped because:

- *"the probation service needed the most modern information systems to support the new modernised service;*
- *parts of the CRAMS technical environment were not well suited to the development of systems to support new practice initiatives;*
- *CRAMS had been superseded by newer technologies, which provided better integration with work processes and more user-friendly interfaces."*

The circular stressed that *"CRAMS is not being scrapped: it is being redeveloped"* but added *"CRAMS would be in use for at least another year before it is completely superseded"*.

3.30 The new system was named Copernicus but in March 2000 it was decided to delay this development because there were too many other major changes in 2001 including the:

- establishment of the unified probation service;
- negotiation of new infrastructure contract.

It was agreed to explore the potential of using existing case management systems as possibilities for more widespread adoption in the short-term as a common national system; the project was due to report in July 2000. A number of probation services had begun to develop their own case management systems largely because of their dissatisfaction with CRAMS and because of their lack of confidence in the Home Office probation unit to produce an improved system. This lack of confidence, derived from the poor implementation of CRAMS and the lack of support to services using pre-NPSISS legacy systems, will need to be overcome for the future successful implementation by the Home Office of probation IT.

4. THE AVAILABILITY AND USE OF INFORMATION

4.1 The purpose of this chapter is to review the extent to which information is available and used by probation services.

4.2 The main findings are set out in this chapter in relation to the key inspection standards:

- core information needs;
- achieving compliance with national standards;
- the deployment of resources;
- crime and disorder.

A section on the use of information in relation to race, based on the recent thematic inspection *Towards Race Equality* published in June 2000, is also included.

Core information needs

Services meet the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1984

4.3 All the services visited in the fieldwork stated that they met the requirements of the Data Protection Act. However, the Data Protection Commissioner's (DPC's) internet web site listed only 15 probation services and the Home Office itself as registered on 1 March 2000. The list, which is reproduced in figure 2, contained only two of the probation services visited in this inspection - Somerset and Surrey. The DPC confirmed that other probation services might be registered under different listings and indicated that she had written to the Home Office seeking clarification on who should be regarded as the legal entity for the purposes of data protection - the CPO, the probation committee or the Home Office. At the time this report was being drafted, the probation unit was in correspondence with the DPC in order to resolve the matter and provide guidance for the new probation boards.

Figure 2: The services listed on the DPC's web site as registered under the Data Protection Act as at 1 March 2000

• Bedfordshire	• Gloucestershire	• Powys
• Derbyshire	• Hereford & Worcester	• Somerset
• Dorset	• Inner London	• South East London
• Dyfed	• Mid Glamorgan	• Suffolk
• Essex	• Nottinghamshire	• Surrey

4.4 The Data Protection Act 1998 repealed the Data Protection Act 1984 and came into force on 1 March 2000. The key changes included:

- enhanced rights for individuals to gain access to information held about them;
- extension of the responsibilities of the DPC, formerly the Data Protection Registrar, not only in terms of scope but also functions and enforcement.

The DPC had published guidance on the Act entitled *The Data Protection Act 1998 - An Introduction* which can be found at www.dataprotection.gov.uk

4.5 Probation services would also need to be aware of the implications of the Freedom of Information legislation that was before Parliament in early 2000 which would place a duty on every public authority to establish arrangements for the publication of information and strengthened the access to information provided by the 1998 Data Protection Act. Subject to certain conditions and exceptions, any applicant, whether an individual, company or other body, had a right to be told whether information was held by the authority in question and, if so, have it communicated to them.

4.6 The Home Office had issued no guidance to probation services about the implications of the 1998 Data Protection Act. ACOP had established a working group and was intending to issue guidance during 2000. The Department of Health had circulated helpful advice to local social services *Data Protection Act 1998 - Guidance to Social Services* in March 2000 which can be found at www.doh.gov.uk/scg/datap.htm. Given the importance of the issues, the absence of leadership and clear guidance from the Home Office is a matter of concern.

Effective systems exist, and are used, to provide the probation committee with comprehensive and timely information on the performance, workload, outcomes and

costs of the service in the context of local and national circumstances

- 4.7 In the 10 services visited in the inspection, there was considerable variation in the extent to which this inspection standard was met.
- 4.8 Table 1 provides information on the findings, which included the following key issues:
- in seven services the probation committee had reviewed its information needs and in six, detailed schedules had been agreed for the provision of regular performance reports;
 - the frequency of performance reports to probation committees ranged from monthly to periodic. The content of these reports varied considerably;
 - six services had experienced problems with the RMIS/CRAMS interface. Only three services used the data generated and then in only a limited way. Probation committee members and senior managers expressed severe doubts about RMIS's accuracy, reliability and its value as a tool to compare cost within and between probation services;
 - local services had poor information on the outcomes of their work, often being totally reliant on the historical and inadequate data for KPI 1 on reconviction of offenders who completed their community supervision more than two years previously. Access to reliable information about previous convictions was inconsistent and in most services the data was poor.

Table 1: Core information needs - Evidence from services visited

Service	Probation committee defined its information needs	Schedule for its provision	Information collected on cost	Performance reports (KPIs; compliance with national standards; workload).
Hampshire	Yes. A well-integrated planning cycle included reviews on performance to the probation committee and a quality forum.	Yes	RMIS collected but problems with the CRAMS interface. Managers lacked confidence in the data that they considered was "elderly".	Six monthly, also consideration was being given to quarterly reports to the full committee. The quality forum met four times a year and its considerations were based on performance data. The committee was able to and had made "ad hoc" requests for further information.
Middlesex	Yes. The committee had determined its needs and the format for its presentation after discussion.	Yes	RMIS was not being collected because of problems over the CRAMS interface. Almost no confidence in its relevance.	Quarterly performance reports to the probation committee, with a clear understanding that members could request additional information as required.
North Wales	Yes. It was considered as part of wider information strategy in 1999.	Yes	RMIS used but little confidence about its value and accuracy.	Monthly and quarterly reports on compliance with national standards produced. Problems with CRAMS /BIQ meant that information had to be obtained manually and through sampling.
Northumbria	The probation committee and CPO had recently reviewed its information needs.	Not explicitly	Problems over the CRAMS/RMIS interface. RMIS data used but doubts about its reliability and accuracy. Some use of local systems/data on cost especially community service (CS).	Quarterly reports to the committee covering KPIs, compliance with national standards and workload. Although there was no explicit schedule for the provision of this data, the CPO and committee had made their expectations very clear.
Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire	The format and content of the quarterly reports had been designed with the probation committee who were very positive about the process.	Yes	RMIS collected but not used extensively because of its unreliability.	Quarterly performance reports included data broken down by locality and team.
Somerset	The performance reports had been adapted after discussion with the probation committee.	Yes	RMIS data was collected and used, although both managers and the committee expressed some doubts about its accuracy.	Quarterly performance reports included data on KPIs, compliance with national standards and cost. There was a clear understanding that the committee could and had requested additional information.
South West London	The committee had not defined its needs; no training had been provided	No	RMIS was collected, although there had been difficulties with the CRAMS interface. The data had been used to compare CS with other areas, although problems over the comparability of data.	Information not produced systematically, attributed to difficulties with CRAMS/BIQ and the loss of the previous information manager in 1997. Information was broken down to team level. The committee received information on the budget but not on cost.

Surrey	There was no schedule for the provision of information to the committee. The subject had been discussed and some probation committee members had been frustrated at the absence of key information.	No	Problems with the CRAMS/RMIS interface.	The service had experienced major problems in obtaining information out of CRAMS in spite of being the pilot area for BIQ. No manual monitoring of compliance with national standards was taking place at the time of the inspection. The only data available was obtained through BIQ reports that required considerable effort. Other data on KPIs, workload, etc. was submitted to the probation committee.
Wiltshire	The committee had discussed this in 1998 and the quarterly reports were based on it.	Yes	Problems with the CRAMS/RMIS interface. The data was considered by the service to be inaccurate and inefficient.	Quarterly reports to the probation committee on KPIs, compliance with national standards and workload.
West Yorkshire	The committee had not formally reviewed its needs. However, it had made "ad hoc" requests for information	No	The service did not use RMIS internally preferring its own system that had already been established. No confidence in the standardisation or quality of RMIS reports.	Information provided regularly on KPIs, compliance with national standards, etc. but no precise timetable.

4.9 The involvement of probation committees in determining their information needs was valuable in the seven services. The quarterly performance report produced by the Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Probation Service (described in figure 3) was an impressive example of good practice.

Figure 3: A good practice example of a quarterly information report to a probation committee

- The Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Probation Committee had reviewed its information needs following the amalgamation of the two former services. The format of the quarterly performance report had evolved through discussion between members of the committee and the senior management.
- The report was very detailed but imaginative use was made of bar charts to supplement conventional tables.
- Data was provided on KPIs; cost, workload and staffing including ethnicity, compliance with national standards, hostel occupancy rates and family court data.
- The report was accompanied by a helpful explanation of the information.
- The service collated most of this data manually because, at the time of the inspection, the case index was still maintained on PROBIS and there was no computerised case management system.

4.10 The inspection also examined evidence from the PIP of HMIP that began in 1999. Twenty performance inspection reports had been published by HMIP by July 2000 and the overall use of information needed significant improvement, for example:

- in 13 out of the 20 services HMIP recommended that annual plans should contain specific and measurable objectives;
- 14 out of the 20 reports included a recommendation that related specifically to information issues.

Key themes that emerged from these recommendations were:

- the importance of information that was easily understood, accurate, sufficient, timely and relevant;
- committees and CPOs should define their information needs and there should be a clear schedule for its provision;
- information should be available so that performance could be assessed.

4.11 The significant findings in relation to the availability of information to probation committees were:

- only three probation services had plans at an area and divisional/team level that contained objectives which were all measurable. Even if a service collected appropriate information, a framework was needed for its use to enable the probation committee to assess, monitor and evaluate performance;
- the frequency of reports to probation committees and within the service varied considerably. In seven services reports were submitted twice a year, in 11 quarterly and in two there was no regularity to the provision;
- all but one probation service provided KPI data but two, had done so only partially;
- most probation services provided routine data on compliance with national standards. However, one probation service had not made any data on compliance with national standards available in the period immediately prior to the PIP inspection. Two other probation services had provided data only on CS, whilst a third had not undertaken any routine monitoring of compliance with national standards;
- 13 services had provided data on workload, although the extent varied. For example, one submitted detailed information on the use of group work programmes in contrast to other services that did not collect such data;

- three services, all using ICMS, were able to provide data on compliance with national standards on a team/individual officer basis;
- two services provided extensive data on broader community safety issues.

Staff at all levels of the service receive appropriate information that is used to improve both individual and corporate performance

- 4.12 Four of the services (North Wales, Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire, Northumbria and Somerset) routinely circulated performance reports to middle managers for discussion at team level. In Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire, it was possible for the information unit to provide data on the performance of individual officers if a special request was submitted. In Wiltshire, data was circulated to managers some of whom passed it onto team members. In the other five services, either no routine performance information was produced at a team/individual level or it was not provided systematically.
- 4.13 Ideally staff should receive or be able to access information that enables them to take responsibility for their own performance. In none of the services inspected was sufficient information available to enable staff to do this. During Phase Three of the inspection, an additional visit was made to Cambridgeshire where inspectors were able to observe ICMS in operation and were impressed with the:
- range of reports available to managers to monitor performance against national standards at an area, division, team and individual level;
 - facility to allow managers easy access to case records to identify good practice and pursue poor performance;
 - scope for main grade staff to use the system to monitor their own performance in a self-regulatory way.
- 4.14 In the study, Part 1 of this thematic *Making National Standards Work*, HMIP recommended that the Home Office should give priority to the development of an effective national computerised system that could provide accurate information on levels of compliance with national standards. In the interim, the potential of ICMS and other comparable systems should be investigated.

Effective systems exist to provide operational information including that required to manage the risk of harm presented by offenders, and that it is used appropriately.¹²

- 4.15 Effective systems did not exist in most areas to provide operational information, although some services had taken local initiatives that were valuable.
- 4.16 The Home Office had developed CRAMS as the case management system within NPSISS. Evidence from the fieldwork, PIP and a questionnaire sent to all 54 services showed that there was justifiable dissatisfaction with CRAMS as an operational case management system to support practice.
- 4.17 A number of probation services had either developed their own systems or were in the process of doing so. It was not possible in this inspection to judge the relative merits of each of these local arrangements. It must though be a matter of serious concern that so many local systems had been or were being developed in parallel with significant national investment. These developments had occurred because local services believed the products provided by the Home Office were unsatisfactory and they perceived an absence nationally of decisive and timely action to rectify the situation.
- 4.18 CRAMS contained a number of registers related to risk. These included:
- child protection;
 - suicide/self-harm;
 - public protection;
 - Schedule 1;¹³
 - violence to staff.
- 4.19 Since 1993 probation services had undertaken considerable work on the risk presented by offenders. In particular, there had been a distinction between the risk of reoffending and the risk of causing harm to others but this had not been reflected in the structure of CRAMS. The registers within CRAMS simply identified that an offender had been placed in a certain category and did not provide a tool to assist in the

¹² Although the inspection standard included the phrase "and that it is used appropriately" HMIP were not able in the fieldwork for this thematic report to make a judgement on this aspect of the practice of the services visited.

¹³ Schedule 1 refers to offenders convicted of an offence related to a sexual and violent crime against a child.

management of cases. NPSISS had not responded to the changing operational demands of probation services working with dangerous offenders.

- 4.20 Three of the services visited in the fieldwork had developed computerised risk of harm registers.¹⁴ In London a system had been developed collaboratively between the five probation services using Lotus Notes software. This good practice example is illustrated in figure 4.

Figure 4: The Greater London probation risk register

- The public protection register was initially developed in the Inner London Probation Service in 1997 and deployed throughout that service by the end of the year.
- It was extended to Middlesex in 1998 and subsequently reviewed and refined before extension to all the London services in 1999. In 1999/00 the five London services developed a common risk assessment and management policy and procedure. This was fully implemented in early 2000 and enabled a common approach to be followed across London.
- The policy was supported by a database in Lotus Notes.
- The risk register was accessible to all probation sites in Greater London linked to NPSISS network and:
 - provided information on the date of registration; details of the reasons and background information;
 - contained the dates of management reviews and a record of the comments made;
 - listed dates of future reviews and highlighted those that were late by service/division/team/officer;
 - was supported by email links with the Metropolitan Police.

- 4.21 Hampshire had also developed a risk register in Lotus Notes but, at the time of the inspection, staff training was being undertaken so the paper based system was still in operation.

- 4.22 In the other seven services arrangements were not sufficiently satisfactory:

- they were all using paper-based systems to some degree;
- Surrey did not use the facility within CRAMS to "flag" high-risk cases and no real explanation was provided for this decision;
- Wiltshire was developing their own case record system that would "flag" high-risk cases but it would not

¹⁴ There is some variation between probation services about the terminology used to define risk. HMIP distinguishes between risk of harm and the risk of reoffending that may or may not include causing physical or emotional damage. The majority of probation services had established inter-agency arrangements to manage the risk of harm presented by dangerous offenders and these included registers of such offenders. In this report these are described as risk of harm registers.

provide any aggregated information or operate as a mechanism to assist in the management of reviews;

- in West Yorkshire an "elderly" legacy system held information but access to it was restricted. It was planned to use the features within CRAMS when that was "rolled-out" to all divisions, although no timetable had been set or was likely for this development;
- Somerset and Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire used paper-based systems. Somerset was considering whether to develop its own risk register in Lotus Notes, whilst Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire stated that they could not adopt the London system because their public protection systems were different.

4.23 The structure of NPSISS/CRAMS meant that probation services had no direct access to operational data held by other areas, except from systems developed in Lotus Notes. CRAMS had not provided a national database of dangerous offenders. No initiative had been taken within the framework of NPSISS to develop either a simple national database of dangerous offenders or a system to manage such offenders along the lines of those developed by local probation services. Whilst there may be difficulties in developing a single national system because of differences in local public protection procedures, this should be explored and will need to take account of the recommendations of the forthcoming Policing and Reduction of Crime Unit report *Risk Assessment and Management of Sexual and Dangerous Offenders*.

4.24 In view of the high priority given by Ministers and the public to managing risk and public protection, particularly in relation to sex offenders, the piecemeal nature of these developments was a matter of concern. There was evidence of considerable inconsistency in the IS which supported the service's public protection work, although there were also examples of good practice in several probation services.

Effective systems are in place to enable the service to respond fully, accurately and promptly to the Home Office's regular requests for information and statistical returns and the service responds accordingly

4.25 The fieldwork and evidence from within the Home Office showed that services varied considerably in their reliability in the provision of regular statistical information.

4.26 Seven of the services inspected had experienced difficulties in providing RMIS data to the Home Office. Concern had been expressed about the ability of CRAMS to work with RMIS. During the preparation of this report the Home Office decided to discontinue the use of RMIS.

4.27 Services were expected to supply other data on a routine basis:

- on commencement and termination of cases, the number of pre-sentence reports (PSRs) and specific sentence reports (SSRs) and other activities, such as court duty;
- race and ethnic monitoring data on both offenders and staff;
- KPI and Supporting Management Information Needs (SMINs)¹⁵ data.

This data was used for a variety of purposes including:

- the national statistics on probation service workload;
- identifying the cash limit budget for each probation service;
- reporting to Ministers, Parliament and the public on the performance of probation services (KPI and SMINs data);
- the race and ethnic monitoring data was essential in implementing the government's wider policy on race following the Macpherson report on the Stephen Lawrence case in 1999.¹⁶

4.28 The services visited stated that they were either up to date in the provision of this statistical data or they attributed problems to CRAMS and its associated reporting tool BIQ.

4.29 Whilst it is true that there had been major difficulties associated with CRAMS and BIQ, some services had shown that they could supply the data even when using this software. All services had a responsibility to ensure that the required data was supplied on a routine and timely basis. However, no work had been undertaken by the Home Office or local services on the cost of obtaining this data and it is suggested that, in determining future IS, the Home Office should do so.

¹⁵ These were a range of measures determined by the Home Office to supplement KPIs.

¹⁶ Home Office *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry* Report of an Inquiry By Sir William Macpherson of Cluny (1999).

- 4.30 Some services had a reputation nationally for always being late with or providing incomplete returns to the Home Office but there had been no routine monitoring or feedback to areas about their performance. In future HMIP will include a review of individual services performance in providing data to the Home Office in its area inspection programme.
- 4.31 During the inspection it emerged that there were significant problems relating to the maintenance of the national probation index, which aggregated the information for the national probation statistics. The system was elderly and the existing contract was due to expire in the autumn of 2001. No replacement system had been identified and no contingency plans were in place at the time of the drafting of this report. The lack of progress was a matter of significant concern and needed to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

The service is able to respond appropriately to requests from stakeholders and other interested parties for information

- 4.32 Services experienced difficulty in providing information at the request of key stakeholders, including Ministers, the Home Office itself, local sentencers and other local agencies. For example, one service indicated that since it had implemented CRAMS, it had been unable to respond to specific requests for data from the Home Office.
- 4.33 All of the services visited stated that it had required considerable effort to provide the information for the local crime and disorder audits required by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Providing any useful information had involved manual extraction from either paper records or computerised case management systems. This is not satisfactory and for the future it is essential that probation service IS can provide information to stakeholders and other interested parties.
- 4.34 Probation services collected data on offenders that could be made available both for wider community safety initiatives and inter-agency work on common problems such as social exclusion, young offenders, drug misuse. Data should also be accessible for research on work with offenders and in particular the What Works initiative. This can happen only if the data can be interrogated and collated. Some probation services had invested in software that identified the postcode of offenders and this could be of considerable value. However, an effective reporting tool to interrogate databases is essential and must be given priority in the development of information systems in the probation service.

Achieving compliance with national standards

Effective systems are in place, and are used, to monitor regularly the performance of the service against national standards

- 4.35 There was no effective national computerised system to monitor and report on national standards performance, which reduced the capacity of probation committees and managers to ensure that national standards were being applied appropriately.
- 4.36 In the four services where enforcement practice was examined in detail, sampling of cases to monitor compliance with national standards occurred on a regular basis. SPOs did this sampling in three areas and in the other service main grade staff completed a form on their own cases which was then validated by administrative staff. The results were collated by the information unit and formed the basis of quarterly reports to the probation committees. There was evidence that probation committees used these documents to hold senior staff to account, e.g. in one service deterioration in the performance of one division had led to a special report at the instigation of a member of the committee.
- 4.37 The questionnaire sent to all services showed considerable variation in the way in which services monitored national standards. The majority of probation services sampled cases manually to obtain basic monitoring data. The methodology used was satisfactory in most services although a number relied on self-reporting arrangements where probation officers (POs) completed their own returns and there was no validating mechanism. All services needed to have in place methods of auditing cases, which were conducted independently of the supervising officer.
- 4.38 The two ACOP audits on enforcement in 1999 and 2000 were conducted largely because of the absence of appropriately generated information at a national and local level. HMIP inspection events had become for Ministers and some services the main source of information on performance in relation to compliance with national standards. This in itself is a matter of serious concern because inspection events take place only periodically and should be able to make use of and validate local monitoring not have to undertake the basic monitoring.

Effective procedures exist to ensure that managers examine the performance of staff in relation to compliance with national standards

- 4.39 In all the services visited SPOs read case records to examine levels of compliance with national standards and discussed the results with officers. They used a mixture of data including knowledge from sampling exercises, the summary sheets in files which listed contacts with offenders and, in some cases, local systems they had developed themselves.
- 4.40 Routine information on levels of compliance with national standards by individual members of staff was not available and in some areas middle managers had resorted to obtaining data by using "ad hoc" systems that were time-consuming and reduced their availability for other duties. However, senior managers did not always use the hard information which was available to hold middle managers effectively to account for the performance of their teams.

Effective systems are in place to enable staff to know whether individual cases are meeting the requirements of national standards

- 4.41 CRAMS was not "user-friendly" and could not provide a clear overview of an individual case in relation to the requirements of national standards.
- 4.42 There was particular concern about the "clumsy" structure of the system that made it difficult to use the case log both to enter and review data. This was a complaint made by staff at all grades and managers, in particular, stated that it was hard to review a case quickly.
- 4.43 Only one of the four services inspected in the enforcement study was using CRAMS fully. Three of the four services used a paper-based system to provide a simple mechanism to monitor contact levels with offenders. Whilst this was effective it involved staff in additional paper work that should not have been necessary, bearing in mind the high level of computerisation that existed in all the services.

Services are able to use the local guidelines relating to the fair, vigorous and effective enforcement of community orders and licences

- 4.44 The study *Making National Standards Work*, published as Part I of this thematic, examined and reported in detail on the

findings on this standard and provided additional guidance for use in local services.

The deployment of resources

Effective systems are in place to provide information on the cost of service activities, including staff time, and its relationship to the outcomes of the work

- 4.45 The use of RMIS by the services visited was very limited and there was little confidence in the information generated. HMIP found that in local services there was little useful management information obtained from RMIS. The system used average timings for particular categories such as probation orders and this limited the value of comparisons within and between areas. One service used it to compare costs over a period of time so that patterns of expenditure could be identified, whilst another examined the data for anomalies in expenditure.
- 4.46 The Home Office probation unit organised sampling exercises in 1997 and 1998. The data was used in RMIS for KPI purposes and to assess resource requirements at a national level. The exercises had been of some value, although the sample periods used were too small to provide reliable data at individual service level. The methodology was also based on self-reporting by staff and there was no external validation of the times reported. (This is discussed in more detail in the study on the deployment of resources published as Part 2 of this inspection.)
- 4.47 The analysis of the replies to the HMIP questionnaire revealed that senior managers used the RMIS information in only six services. Probation unit staff had also been aware for some time of the severe limitations and limited use of RMIS. A survey conducted in March 2000 as part of the Home Office's strategy development project to establish priorities for investment in IS and infrastructure facilities, revealed a strong demand from local services for software to measure unit costs.
- 4.48 HMIP area inspections had shown that there had been a significant number of services that had been so dissatisfied with RMIS that they had worked collaboratively to develop alternative ways of measuring unit costs.
- 4.49 Three of the four services visited in the study had participated in benchmarking exercises with other probation

services to assess the comparative cost of service activity. These had included CS, the costs of staff sickness and the management of absence, the comparative cost of hostel bed spaces and some work on KPIs. All these initiatives were commendable and some had tried to link cost with outcomes.

4.50 In 1999 HMIP undertook a joint study with the other five Criminal Justice Inspectorates on *Casework Information Needs within the Criminal Justice System* which was published in April 2000. This highlighted the importance of agencies working together to identify problems in the exchange of information. The implementation of the recommendations of the Narey report to "speed up" justice - one of the Home Secretary's priorities - depended on closer inter-agency working. Probation services will not be able to make their full contribution to these processes if they do not have accurate information on costs.

4.51 All the services visited had well-established systems to control expenditure and ensure financial probity and they regularly reviewed their annual plans during the year. However, these processes did not seem to incorporate a rigorous examination of whether outcomes, successful and unsuccessful,¹⁷ represented vfm.

Information that is required on the deployment of resources to achieve the service's objectives is available

4.52 The ability of services to deploy resources effectively was limited by the absence of accurate information on unit cost but there was scope for them to use the information at their disposal more systematically to link operational and financial planning, for example:

- the preparation of annual plans seemed to be a separate process from the production of the annual budget. Although new projects tended in most services to be accompanied by projected costs, there was almost no analysis of the cost of the main activities of the service;
- two of the services inspected had established mechanisms to allocate staff in relation to workload but these had fallen into disuse because of the shortage of qualified POs. The other two services -

¹⁷ Unsuccessful outcomes require careful management as well as those that are subsequently successful. For instance, approximately 20% of CS orders are not terminated successfully but they still require management.

Somerset and Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire - consciously attempted to link information on costs with decisions on resource deployment but they were hindered by the lack of an appropriate management information tool;

- the budgets for CS seemed to be based generally on historical precedent with an adjustment for inflation. This meant that although individual schemes might achieve good outcomes in terms of hours worked, the services were unable to demonstrate that this was being achieved efficiently or cost-effectively.

4.53 Although senior managers expressed understandable concern about RMIS, the inspection revealed that both senior and middle managers were not using information which was available on cost sufficiently in making operational decisions. This was not always possible because in some services financial planning and monitoring were not linked to operational management.

Crime and disorder

Services are contributing to the statutory crime and disorder partnerships, in accordance with the requirements of the Home Office guidance manual

4.54 All 54 probation services contributed to their local audits. The inspection showed that the probation services involved had fully contributed to the process.

4.55 The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 required that each local authority develop a joint crime and disorder reduction strategy, shaped by a crime and disorder audit. It indicated that the audit should include:

- an analysis of recorded crime and police incident data;
- an analysis of data provided by other agencies such as local authority departments, health and the probation services;
- the views of a wide cross-section of the local community;
- a review of current community safety activity in the area.

The guidance stated that:

"Probation services hold much information about offenders and their offending behaviour and related factors; this information enriches more conventional crime pattern analysis and crime prevention planning".

- 4.56 The study that was conducted as Part 3 of this inspection found that a wide range of information was used, including:
- an internal annual census of offenders' needs plus regular national standards monitoring;
 - partnership data, annual reports and findings from audits of case files;
 - PSR monitoring data taken from a central information system and CS records.

Three of the services used CRAMS as a case management system and all commented that, as a system, it had not been able to provide the required data.

- 4.57 Members of crime and disorder partnerships visited as part of the fieldwork indicated that the probation services had made a significant contribution. However, some disappointment was expressed about the quality of the information provided:
- the partnerships wanted detailed analysis on why offences were committed but probation services were generally only able to provide statistical data;
 - there was a need for geo-coding information (i.e. analysis of data by postcode) to assist the partnership in identifying and developing a deeper understanding of crime "hot spots" in local communities. Only Northumbria and Somerset of the services inspected were able to supply this information.

- 4.58 A common theme from the meetings with the crime and disorder partnership members was that there had been general difficulties in collecting data from the different partnership organisations, not just probation, in a useful format because:
- data was collected for areas with different geographical boundaries;
 - information was aggregated over different time periods which did not assist benchmarking, comparisons or trend analysis;
 - there was an inability to search existing IS for relevant information even in cases where the information existed.

4.59 Partnership members believed that these problems could only be overcome through the development of information and IT systems that were compatible locally and based on the same geographical areas. The modernisation of the probation service will assist in this process through the establishment of common boundaries with the Police, CPS and the magistrates' courts, although major differences with local authorities/health will remain.

Effective information systems exist that demonstrate how the probation service contributes to the process of developing and implementing strategies for reducing crime and disorder

4.60 In all the services visited in the study, the partnerships were only just beginning to consider the monitoring process. The problems of geographical boundaries and the use of different "time periods" when collecting data needed resolution.

4.61 There was no requirement in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 on agencies to share information and disclosure remained at the discretion of the agency holding the data. The guidance stated:

"Probation services' work with victims of crime provides valuable information and perspectives which contribute to risk assessment and management, reparation, and fear of crime strategies."

The guidance went on to provide advice on information sharing including a checklist for establishing information sharing arrangements and recommended the negotiation of an information sharing protocol.

4.62 All four services visited in the study had information sharing protocols in operation, devised either by themselves or by the police. The probation services involved indicated that the arrangements generally worked well because of long-established working relationships between the agencies. The sharing of information had assisted in the development of initiatives to target prolific offenders.

4.63 Each partnership was required to develop a three year local community safety strategy to include:

- objectives for the police and local authorities;
- objectives for the cooperating bodies or other contracted agencies including the probation service;

- long-term and short-term performance targets against which to measure success.

4.64 In all the services visited, the partnerships were only just beginning to consider the monitoring process and therefore the information that would be required from each agency including the probation service. This would require IS that could monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the inter-agency work. It would also be essential to resolve the difficulties caused by geographical boundaries and the different "time periods" when collecting data. Any arrangements for information sharing across agencies would also need to be based on protocols which protect the confidentiality of sensitive information about individual victims and offenders.

Race and ethnic monitoring

4.65 HMIP's recent thematic inspection *Towards Race Equality* examined monitoring issues and the use of information. Serious weaknesses in the collection and use of data on race and ethnic origin were identified.

4.66 A national system of race and ethnic monitoring of probation committee members, probation service staff and persons subject to the supervision of the probation service had been introduced from 1 October 1992 and extended to include offenders on whom PSRs had been prepared in 1993. Despite the apparent commitment of services to the principle of race and ethnic monitoring, the proportion of ethnic data missing had risen substantially from the mid-1990s. In 1998/99, information on 13% of probation orders and 17% of CS orders was not available. The probation service's figures were consequently omitted from the 1999 publication of criminal justice figures as required by Section 95 of the 1991 Criminal Justice Act.

4.67 The fieldwork for the thematic inspection on Race Equality showed that only two services had instigated any form of training or issued any guidance to staff on the completion of the race and ethnic monitoring forms. Few of the services inspected made any significant use of the information collated, either at team level to inform practice or at a strategic level in discussions with the probation committee or at senior management level. Two had attempted to monitor the number of racially motivated offenders. However, the majority of the services inspected did not have:

- systems in place to monitor the likely number of racially motivated offenders on the caseload;
- information to assist decision making on the supervision of these cases.

4.68 Only three of the services inspected monitored aspects of organisational practice, such as sickness absence, turnover of staff and discipline and grievance procedures, by race and ethnic origin.

4.69 The thematic inspection made three recommendations on monitoring and the use of information.

Summary

4.70 There were six inspection standards related to core information needs and the main conclusion in relation to them were:

- the Home Office needed to provide leadership and urgent guidance for services on the implications of the 1998 Data Protection Act;
- the systems for providing probation committees with comprehensive and timely information on the performance, workload, outcomes and costs of the service were generally unsatisfactory. The data provided on outcomes and costs was a matter of particular concern;
- information was not available to staff at all levels of the service to improve individual and corporate performance. However, the ICMS areas were able to access data on levels of compliance with national standards achieved by individual members of staff;
- effective systems did not exist in most areas to provide operational information, although some services had taken local initiatives that were valuable. Despite the Home Office investment in technology, there was no national computer system to assist in the management of dangerous offenders. Services were generally having to rely on paper files, card indexes and registers to retain and access information on offenders presenting a risk of harm to the public;
- services varied considerably in their reliability in providing regular statistical information to the Home Office. No work had been conducted nationally or

locally on the cost of collating and submitting the data;

- the provision of information to stakeholders and other interested parties posed major difficulties to services. Evidence from the crime and disorder audits indicated that services made considerable efforts to meet the requirements on them for information. However, the absence of an effective reporting tool meant that the process was time-consuming and inefficient.

4.71 There were four inspection standards relating to achieving compliance with national standards and the main conclusions in relation to the use of information were:

- there was no effective national computerised system to monitor national standards and this reduced the capacity of probation committees and managers to ensure that national standards were applied appropriately;
- in most services SPOs read case records to examine levels of compliance with national standards and some had devised their own "ad hoc" systems to obtain further information. There was also evidence that senior managers did not always use "hard information" when supervising middle managers;
- CRAMS was not "user-friendly" and could not provide a clear overview of an individual case in relation to the requirements of national standards.

4.72 There were three inspection standards relating to the deployment of resources and the main conclusions in relation to the use of information were the:

- use of RMIS was very limited and there was little confidence in the information generated;
- ability of services to deploy resources effectively was limited by the absence of accurate information on unit costs.

4.73 There were two inspection standards relating to the crime and disorder audits and the main conclusions in relation to the use of information were:

- all the services inspected had contributed to the crime and disorder partnerships, but other agencies would have welcomed more information about the causes of offending and a greater use of geo-coded data (i.e. the use of postcodes);

- in all the services visited in the study, the partnerships were only just beginning to consider the monitoring process. The problems of geographical boundaries and the use of different "time periods" when collecting data needed resolution.

4.74 The findings of HMIP's thematic inspection *Towards Race Equality* revealed further evidence that the quality of information provided by services to the Home Office was inadequate and that collated data was not used to improve practice.

Recommendations

The Home Office should urgently issue guidance to probation committees and future boards on the legal and policy requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 and, when appropriate, on the implications of the forthcoming Freedom of Information Bill.

The Home Office should, after consultation with HMIP, CPC and ACOP, issue a probation circular setting out a minimum standard for the provision of information to probation committees/boards, the national directorate and HMIP. It should cover the content, frequency and format of such reports.

The Home Office should, within the framework of the Information Strategy Review, give priority to:

- (a) the establishment of a national risk of harm register to be available on the NPSISS infrastructure;*
- (b) ensuring that the specification for new IS includes projected revenue costs for probation services so that local areas can deploy appropriate resources to supply the required data to the Home Office;*
- (c) ensuring that appropriate arrangements to maintain the probation index are agreed before the termination of the existing system.*

5. NATIONAL PROBATION SERVICE INFORMATION SYSTEMS STRATEGY

5.1 The purpose of this chapter is to review the extent to which the original vision for NPSISS had been realised. The NAO study, to be published after this report, will focus on the Home Office's management of the project and whether the objectives of the strategy had been realised.

Inspection findings

5.2 The inspection standard which related to NPSISS was:

"Relevant, accurate and timely information should be accessible to all staff, where appropriate, at any location from a single source as an integral part of their working environment."

This was also the original Information Strategy Vision Statement agreed in 1993.

5.3 In April 1994 the Home Office issued Probation Circular 38/1994 *National Information Systems Strategy for the Probation Service (NPSISS): Implementation Guidance - Promotion*. This included a leaflet for probation services to use to explain and promote NPSISS. The leaflet provided a useful framework to assess progress. It was broken into sub-sections:

1. What is NPSISS?
2. Why is NPSISS important?
3. What impact will NPSISS have on the probation service?
4. Why will the probation service be better through investment in IS/IT?
5. The Information Needs of the Probation Service - Catalogue of Applications;
6. How will this IS Vision be achieved?
7. What happens next?

This chapter examines the extent to which the NPSISS vision set out in detail in the leaflet had been realised at the time of the inspection. It focuses on the first four key questions posed by the leaflet.

"What is NPSISS?"

5.4 The leaflet stated:

"NPSISS provides a national framework of policies and programmes within which areas can develop their own IS/IT strategies and plans. NPSISS sets the direction for the use and management of information systems and the supporting technology for the probation service nationally for the next five years."

National framework?

5.5 As Chapter 3 explains, during the early stages of NPSISS implementation, probation services had a higher degree of autonomy from the Home Office than is anticipated in future. Although the strategy was described as "national" it was never going to be easy to implement because it was designed for 55 independent and autonomous probation services which meant that individual probation committees had the responsibility to approve decisions on IS/IT in a local context. The situation was complicated by the national agreements made between the Home Office and the supplier of the computer infrastructure - Bull Information Systems Limited - and that the main finance for the development came from and continued to be held by the Home Office probation unit.

5.6 The issue of local "governance" created tension between some probation services and the Home Office. A number of CPOs were critical, not of the overall strategy but its implementation and in particular the shortcomings of CRAMS, as a result of which there was a tendency for some areas to pursue their own solutions. Although CRAMS was only one of a number of applications, its development was central to the business of the service and integral to NPSISS and its failure to deliver was therefore significant. It is important to emphasise that ACOP, CPC and most CPOs repeatedly emphasised their commitment to one national IS strategy, incorporating an effective case management system.

5.7 In 1997 a probation circular was issued that attempted to limit expenditure by local services on computer developments unless the Home Office had approved them. The circular, however, did not provide the Home Office with control over local developments. In 2000 at the time of this inspection, HMIP identified a number of services that were developing their own case management systems without the prior agreement of either the Home Office or their own probation committees. The managers of these services justified this on the basis that CRAMS was inadequate as a case management system and indicated that committee approval was not necessary as no

additional resources were being used to develop local systems as the work was being undertaken by existing staff. Such initiatives had been frequent since the launch of NPSISS in 1993 and indicated that it had not provided an effective national framework.

- 5.8 NPSISS envisaged the creation of a national computer infrastructure (personal computers, servers and communications systems) on which to run applications identified as essential to the effectiveness and efficiency of the probation service management and service delivery. At the time of this inspection, the national infrastructure incorporated 47 of the 54 services but no timetable had been agreed to complete the national network. However, this had still been a major achievement and probation services had attained a high degree of computerisation.
- 5.9 The development of national policies and programmes had been uneven and it was a matter of concern that seven years after the launch of the strategy there were no national policies on data protection, the disclosure of information or security. There had also been an absence of leadership on some key aspects of policy that were crucial to the successful implementation of the strategy, including:
- no common approach to the inputting of data by POs;
 - no effective consultative/negotiating structure with the Trade Unions nationally on the implementation of new technology;
 - no definitive advice had been provided by the Home Office on the ergonomics issues raised by CRAMS.
- 5.10 The absence of a single body with clear authority to manage the overall project had created problems and this was reflected in the difficulties with the Trade Unions. Discussions on these subjects took place in the relevant national and local negotiating structures and in the ISSB. However, the Home Office was frequently only present as an official observer and this undoubtedly contributed to the absence of leadership on these crucial issues.
- 5.11 In December 1994 a probation circular provided advice to services on the drafting of information and IT strategies. There had been no follow-up to this circular and none of the services inspected had an IS strategy that was fully relevant to the current situation. Some of the strategies in place had been agreed at the time of the launch of NPSISS in 1993 and had not been reviewed since.
- 5.12 The identification of business needs was not sufficiently responsive to changing demands. Consultation arrangements

with users of nationally developed software had existed for a number of years but the unpopularity of CRAMS would suggest that these had been of limited value. There seemed to be no adequate arrangements for ensuring that probation services' business requirements and the Home Office probation unit's needs were examined with sufficient rigour. The modernisation programme included the establishment of an IS board which had the potential to provide an appropriate forum but there needed to be a clear commitment to make consultation meaningful.

5.13 The needs of Ministers for accurate information and assurance that high-risk offenders were being supervised adequately with sound IS in place were not being met sufficiently. This is a matter of very serious concern and can only be resolved if there is a closer integration of policy and information developments.

5.14 The original NPSISS required probation services to prepare a business case and submit it to the Home Office. Only 50% of probation services fulfilled this requirement and the Home Office probation unit did not pursue those services which did not submit one. The NPSISS statement placed responsibility for monitoring IS/IT plans at a local level but required CPOs to provide a brief "stewardship report" annually of IS/IT developments. The Home Office probation unit was unable to inform HMIP during this inspection whether:

- any such reports had been submitted;
- any review of them was undertaken;
- the requirement to submit them had ever been removed.

5.15 The original Home Office business case to the Treasury for the investment of £97m in NPSISS had not been maintained to assess its continuing viability and had not been subjected to a detailed review until the NAO began their investigation in late 1999.

National direction?

5.16 The original NPSISS design envisaged the use of two main word processing packages, Microsoft Word and Word Perfect for Windows, which meant that probation services had not always found it easy to exchange documents. The decision to upgrade the NPSISS infrastructure to meet the Year 2000 problem was accompanied by the provision of Word 97 to all services involved. RMIS was a national application but it was not part of the NPSISS infrastructure and virtually no service was using it fully or with any confidence at the time of this

inspection. There were no other national applications in full use.

- 5.17 The decision in 1996 to purchase Lotus Notes had resulted in the provision to probation services of a very effective email system, although its potential had not been fully realised because seven services were not on the national infrastructure. The wider use of Lotus Notes including the "diary/organiser" and the various database applications had not been promoted and coordinated sufficiently by the Home Office. This had meant that probation services had developed local applications in a piecemeal way, although some had been very valuable.
- 5.18 In the early stages of the NPSISS project, training had been provided to senior management groups on the strategic aspects of the project. Further strategic training did not follow these events and, in particular, no lead was provided by the Home Office on the use and management of information to improve the performance of probation services.
- 5.19 Specific aspects of probation practice were not promoted in a systematic way through NPSISS including:
- HMIP's thematic inspection on dangerousness¹⁸ published in 1995 identified the importance of probation services developing risk registers - the potential to do this on a national basis was never pursued through NPSISS;
 - the development of assessment tools such as ACE and LSI-R by services was not incorporated into NPSISS so that they could be made available more generally in a systematic way.

Whilst it would clearly have involved high costs to automate two assessment systems, the lack of integration of ACE or LSI-R into NPSISS had been a disadvantage for probation managers and practitioners. It was, however, an advantage that OGRS was networked through NPSISS.

"Why is NPSISS important?"

- 5.20 The 1994 leaflet stated that NPSISS was important because it would:

¹⁸ HM Inspectorate of Probation *Dealing with Dangerous People: The Probation Service and Public Protection* Report of a Thematic Inspection (1995).

- exploit information which was the service's second most important resource (next to staff);
- improve the quality of the work with other criminal justice agencies, offenders and others;
- enable the service to demonstrate effectiveness and vfm;
- assist in the assessment and management of the risk posed by serious offenders.

Information as an important resource?

5.21 A significant number of services reduced the size of information units in the late 1990s because the national business case encouraged them to do so and as a response to reductions in budgets - some felt NIPSISS reduced their need for research and information staff. The HMIP report *Strategies for Effective Offender Supervision* (1998) criticised the lack of evaluation and monitoring arrangements for offender programmes. It emphasised the importance of evaluation and monitoring within an overall strategy for effective offender supervision.

Quality of service to other agencies and individuals

5.22 The probation service had an important role in the provision of information to other agencies in the criminal justice system. The *Joint Study on Casework Information Needs within the Criminal Justice System* published by the six Criminal Justice Inspectorates in April 2000 identified major shortcomings in the provision of information between all the agencies. Figure 5 summarises the main findings in relation to the contribution of the probation service.

Figure 5: The main conclusions of the Joint Study on Casework Information Needs within the Criminal Justice System on the contribution made by probation services

- After sentencing prison staff required access to the information contained in the PSR in order to allocate the prisoner to a suitable prison and begin sentence planning. Inspectors found no consistency in whether a prison received PSRs with the warrant or not, and noted that PSRs and any attached medical information were not sent as a matter of course.
- Evidence collected during this study suggested that gaps in the provision of information to the prison service were compromising its ability to deliver effective throughcare. Inspectors noted the potential for improvement of the planned development of a shared casework information database between prison and probation services ... however, there were already sources of potentially useful information which were not being tapped including probation PSRs.
- Post-release, the current sentence planning system required the

supervising PO to return a feedback form to the prison from which the prisoner had been released. This form indicates how well the sentence planning targets had been met, and whether there had been any breaches of supervision or Home Detention Curfew, or further criminal charges. Inspectors were told that these forms were rarely returned. More often there was complete discontinuity between the custodial and community supervision parts of the sentence.

5.23 The joint study also identified serious shortcomings in the provision of information to probation staff especially in relation to:

- the provision of court lists;
- the receipt of accurate data from the CPS on previous convictions – this was rarely available electronically – and the package that provided information on the offence and the witness statements.

5.24 Figure 6 provides an example of an aspect of practice of major operational importance – the enforcement of community orders – which illustrates some of the shortcomings of NPSISS in relation to operational practice.

Figure 6: An example of the importance of national leadership in the development of IS to support operational priorities such as enforcement

- The joint study on casework information needs and the work on enforcement, conducted as part of this inspection, identified problems surrounding enforcement.
- The five London probation services had cooperated to develop a breach tracking system in Lotus Notes to improve the management of the work relating to such warrants.
- Other services, such as Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, had negotiated inter-agency protocols to improve practice in enforcing community penalties. These initiatives required accurate information to support their implementation and the services involved had recognised this by developing appropriate local systems.
- It was unfortunate that a business need had not been identified until September 1999 and not yet developed within NPSISS to improve enforcement.

5.25 These problems were serious and NPSISS had not significantly improved the situation; inadequacies were apparent in the:

- problems that services had experienced in using CRAMS and other software to obtain information for the local crime and disorder audits (as indicated in more detail in Chapter 4);
- failure of the Home Office probation unit to provide clear policies or advice to probation services on data protection which meant that the exchange of data on individuals at a local level between agencies was still problematic.

Demonstrating effectiveness and value for money

- 5.26 NPSISS was not able to provide the full range of information that was needed to demonstrate effectiveness and vfm. Since 1994 and the introduction of cash limited budgets a major focus of government policy had been an expectation that services would operate more efficiently. The inspection identified that:
- probation services had no effective tool to measure unit cost;
 - information on compliance with national standards was not collated using a single standard national computer system, thus making national comparisons impossible.
- 5.27 NPSISS was not able to provide effective data even for those KPIs which it could be expected to hold. It had been intended to use BIQ to extract the data on KPIs 2, 3 and 4 from CRAMS but this had not happened nationally as demonstrated later in this chapter. A very small number of services had invested local time and effort in order to obtain such data. Table 2 provides detailed comment against each KPI.
- 5.28 Data on outcomes, and in particular reconviction levels, was not accessible from NPSISS/CRAMS although the Home Office was hoping that a link to the national police computer could be established in 2000. This project had begun in 1999 under the government's "Invest to Save" initiative but the timetable had not been met and, at the time of this inspection, it was possible that the project would not be completed. This would be a major failure because it was designed to provide individual data on reconvictions which was essential to offender assessment and overall monitoring/evaluation systems and would have serious implications for the What Works initiative.

Table 2: The relevance of NPSISS to KPIs

KPI	Target 2000/01	Comment
KPI1: the actual reconviction rates for persons subject to community orders by type of order compared with the predicted rates	Lower actual rates for all types, and achieve rates lower than predicted	Calculated by the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate using the offender index and police data. NPSISS not used
KPI 2: the proportion of supervision cases where the first contact with the offender is arranged to take place within national standards time limits.	90% for probation orders, CS orders and licence	The Home Office probation unit defined a methodology for the manual extraction of data from records. Services were told that information from electronic sources would be accepted subject to agreement. No formal requests had been made to do this but some services have adopted this approach. NPSISS not used in general.
KPI 3: (a) the proportion of relevant supervision cases in which breach action is taken in accordance with national standards requirements (b) the proportion of automatic conditional release (ACR) cases in which breach action is taken	90% for probation, CS and licence 95%	The same comments apply as for KPI2. The same comments apply as for KPI2. NPSISS not used in general.
KPI 4: (a) the proportion of PSRs completed within national standards time limit of 15 working days (b) the proportion of reports to the courts (i.e. the total of PSRs and SSRs combined) that are SSRs	90% 20%	A probation circular was issued in 1995 defining the information required and services were expected to determine their own arrangements. NPSISS used in some services but not all. NPSISS used in some services but not all.
KPI 5: the proportion of welfare reports completed within 10 weeks of receipt of papers by the service	95%	Not collected in CRAMS. NPSISS not used.
KPI 6: The proportion of magistrates and judges satisfied with the work of the service against a number of criteria	90%	Collected by HMIP using a questionnaire to magistrates and judges. NPSISS not used.
KPI 7: the unit costs of particular pieces of work	Varying	All of these costs were collected through the standalone RMIS. NPSISS not used.
KPI 8: the proportion of bed spaces in approved hostels	90%	Collected through a separate manual system.

which are occupied		NPSISS not used.
KPI 9: the proportion of prosecutors who are satisfied with bail information, against a number of criteria	80 or 90%	All this information was collected by questionnaire. NPSISS not used.

Assessing risk

- 5.29 The probation unit had failed to link the changing requirements of the probation service in relation to risk assessment with NPSISS and it had been left to individual probation areas to seek local solutions to the increasing need to have a computerised system for the registration and management of high-risk offenders.
- 5.30 It had been commendable that the original NPSISS vision emphasised the importance of information to assess and manage the risk posed by serious offenders to staff and to the public. However, as demonstrated in the previous chapter the mechanisms within CRAMS only provided for registers and not a tool to assist in the review and management of high-risk offenders.

"What impact will NPSISS have on the probation service?"

- 5.31 The leaflet indicated that NPSISS would provide:
- relevant, accurate, timely information;
 - information accessible to all staff at any location from a single source as an integral part of their working environment.

Relevant, accurate and timely information

- 5.32 It was intended that NPSISS and its software applications would meet the requirements for relevant, accurate and timely information. These applications included:
- (a) CRAMS;
 - (b) GQL/BIQ;
 - (c) EASI;
 - (d) RMIS;
 - (e) Lotus Notes.

The inspection findings on the effectiveness of their implementation and usage are set out below.

CRAMS

5.33 The leaflet stated:

"The achievement of the IS vision is dependent on the planned development and integration of all applications over the next five years. The first to be implemented nationally as a system is CRAMS, i.e. the case management application."

This inspection found that CRAMS had not provided a case management system of acceptable quality to probation services and this was a major weakness of NPSISS.

5.34 CRAMS was designed to provide:

- a case index;
- a contact log for community supervision and pre/post-release licences;
- a CS module;
- a hostel log;
- a family court work module;
- a mechanism for passing referrals to middle managers to allocate cases and PSRs;
- reports on commencements and terminations and other key features of workload at an individual officer/team/division and service level;
- statistical information to the Home Office.

5.35 At the beginning of the inspection no systematic information was available from the probation unit on the usage of CRAMS. As part of the inspection HMIP was able to estimate the extent to which CRAMS had been implemented, based on:

- information provided by probation services in response to the HMIP questionnaire;
- data collected by NPRIE for a meeting with HMIP as part of this inspection;
- a survey conducted by Bull Information Systems Limited on behalf of the Home Office probation unit.

5.36 Table 3 provides full information on the services using CRAMS, plus whether their use includes the contact log for supervision and/or the CS module.

5.37 To enable an appreciation of the real extent of usage, the 2000/01 cash limited budget is included. On the basis of this data the following significant conclusions can be drawn:

- 39 services had CRAMS installed, representing services with aggregated budgets of £295m or 64% of the total budget for the probation service in 2000/01;
- only 15 services were using CRAMS fully in the sense that the contact log was used for supervision cases and the CS module was utilised. These services had an aggregated expenditure of £76m or 16.5% of the total budget for the probation service in 2000/01;
- a further eight services were using the contact log but not the CS module;
- of the remaining services, there were four on CRAMS that used the CS module but not the contact log;
- no metropolitan probation service used CRAMS fully in the sense outlined above;
- the three largest probation services - Inner London, Greater Manchester and West Midlands that represented 22% of national expenditure on the probation service - did not use CRAMS either fully or partially;¹⁹
- five services used a completely separate system - ICMS - and one other service used the CS module within ICMS;
- five services used established systems - Inner London (CLIO); West Midlands (Promise); Hereford & Worcester and Shropshire (IOSS) and Cornwall (locally designed);

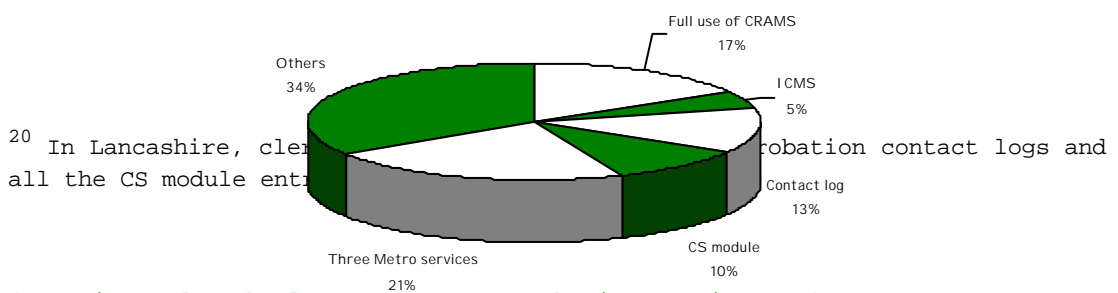
Table 3: The extent of the coverage of CRAMS as at 31 March 2000

Service	Budget	CRAMS used	Contact log-supervision	CS module
Avon	7.6	Limited	No	No
Bedfordshire	4.3	No - ICMS	No	No
Berkshire	6.2	No	No	No
Cambridgeshire	4.7	No - ICMS	No	No
Cheshire	7.3	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cornwall	3.0	No	No	No
Cumbria	4.6	Yes	Yes	Yes
Derbyshire	7.2	Yes	Yes	Yes
Devon	8.1	Limited	No	No
Dorset	4.8	Limited	No	No
Durham	5.2	Limited	No	No
Essex	10.5	Limited	Part	Part
Gloucestershire	4 4.6	Limited	Yes	No
Hampshire	11.8	Limited	No	Yes
Hereford & Worcester	4.9	No - IOSS	No	No
Hertfordshire	6.5	Limited	Yes	No
Humberside	7.4	Yes	Yes	Yes

¹⁹ Greater Manchester used a system called Data Migration Platform (DMP) that was based on the data within CRAMS but did not have the same interface.

Kent	11.9	No	No	No
Lancashire	12.3	Yes ²⁰	Yes	No
Leicestershire & Rutland	6.9	Limited	Yes	No
Lincolnshire	4.6	Limited	Yes	No
Inner London	43.1	No - CLIO	No	No
North East London	10.5	Limited	Part	Part
South East London	7.0	Limited	Yes	No
South West London	5.2	Yes	Yes	Yes
Middlesex	18.7	Limited	No	No
Greater Manchester	28.9	No	No	No
Merseyside	17.4	Limited	Part	Part
Norfolk	5.1	No - ICMS	No	No
Northamptonshire	4.0	Yes	Yes	Yes
Northumbria	14.2	Limited	No	Yes
Nottinghamshire	10.0	Limited	No	No
Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire	8.6	No	No	No
Shropshire	2.9	No - IOSS	No	No
Somerset	4.1	No	No	No - ICMS
Staffordshire	8.4	Limited	Yes	No
Suffolk	4.2	No - ICMS	No	No
Surrey	6.2	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sussex - East	5.0	No - ICMS	No	No
Sussex - West	3.9	Limited	Yes	No
Teesside	6.4	Limited	No	No
Warwickshire	3.7	Yes	Yes	Yes
West Midlands	29.1	No	No	No
Wiltshire	3.9	Limited	No	Yes
Yorkshire - North	4.6	Yes	Yes	Yes
Yorkshire - South	13.8	Limited	No	Yes
Yorkshire - West	22.5	Limited	Part	Part
Dyfed	2.6	Yes	Yes	Yes
Glamorgan - Mid	3.9	Limited	Yes	No
Glamorgan - South	4.6	Yes	Yes	Yes
Glamorgan - West	3.7	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gwent	4.7	Yes	Yes	Yes
North Wales	4.9	Yes	Yes	Yes
Powys	1.0	Yes	Yes	Yes

- a small number of services like Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire still used PROBIS supported by word processing within Word 97;
- at least four services visited either in the fieldwork or the PIP in 2000 were in the process of developing their own case management systems within Lotus Notes;
- HMIP estimated that there were at least 10 case management systems in operation or development at the



²⁰ In Lancashire, clerks used PROBIS supported by word processing within Word 97 and all the CS module entered into the system.

time of this inspection.

5.38 The relatively low use of CRAMS reflected a poor return on the investment made in the software by the Home Office and local services. The Home Office informed the NAO that it estimated that the total expenditure on CRAMS, including the development of GQL/BIQ, up to the end of the contract with Bull in December 2001 would be almost £11m. This included only the central expenditure by the Home Office on the development of the software, and work to make the system Year 2000 compliant and did not include local costs such as training. The contract negotiated in 2000 for the support and maintenance of CRAMS was £2m per year and for NPSISS was almost £6 million over the two years from 2000 to 2002. The outcome had been a system used substantially in only 16 services, representing less than 20% of the probation service total budget. Four out of five offenders (approximately) were supervised by probation services not fully using CRAMS.

5.39 The other two case management systems that were evaluated when CRAMS was selected in 1993 had remained in operation:

- **IOSS** had not been developed significantly in recent years because the two probation services using it had been anxious to support the development of a single national case management system;
- **ICMS** had continued to be developed and operated in a full "windows environment" which meant that the interface allowed greater flexibility than CRAMS which was not a "windows" based system.

5.40 The ICMS consortium estimated that the total costs of ICMS to the five probation services involved had been about £350,000 and ongoing costs amounted to approximately £30,000 per year. The CPO of Hereford & Worcester estimated that IOSS had cost less than £20,000 in total.

Table 4: The experience of CRAMS in the services inspected

Service	Case management system	Experience
Hampshire	CRAMS for CS but not contact log	CRAMS was described by the probation committee as "terrible, a disaster, a nightmare".
Middlesex	CRAMS as a case index only. They were developing their own case management system	They had piloted CRAMS in one division but had abandoned it because of its inherent problems especially the word processing interface. The probation committee said that expectations had been high but experience of CRAMS had been negative - it had taken time/resources and had impacted badly on morale within the service.
North Wales	Fully on CRAMS	It was valuable that there was

		area-wide access to data. However, the administration system within it was difficult, the support from Bull was "abysmal, lot of delays in the implementation, unrealised expectations especially over the provision of management information". The probation committee commented "we bought into CRAMS and suffered because of it" - they considered that it had been expensive in terms of staff time and training.
Northumbria	CRAMS used as a case index - paper records retained	The information staff described feelings of "helplessness" as NIPSISS was imposed at great cost. The service was reluctant to use CRAMS, which it regarded as "cumbersome".
Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire	Word processed records but no case management system used	The service had decided not to proceed with CRAMS in September 1999 after the announcement that a new case management system was to be developed.
Somerset	No case management system apart from CS where ICMS was used very successfully in the opinion of the service	Somerset had wanted to use ICMS totally as a case management tool but had not proceeded pending permission from the Home Office. They were anxious to support a single case management system but CRAMS was seen as problematic with staff because of the ergonomic issues and poor feedback from other areas. The probation committee was pleased that they had been at the end of the CRAMS installation programme because of the problems that had been caused elsewhere.
Surrey	Fully on CRAMS	The service had been the pilot service for CRAMS and it was stated that it had achieved "some good things including area-wide access". The probation committee was aware of the serious problems that existed especially in relation to the extraction of management information.
South West London	Fully on CRAMS	The information unit felt that it was "not as bad as sometimes suggested but it was unpopular with users". Its disadvantages were the difficulty of extracting information, the contact logs were clumsy to access and use and administrative arrangements were complex. Some staff were clear it was preferable to paper systems.
Wiltshire	CRAMS used as case index - records kept through word processing and the service was developing its own case recording system	CRAMS described as "useless, a disaster" and the probation committee stated they had supported the decision not to implement CRAMS and to develop alternative interim measures.
West Yorkshire	CRAMS had been installed fully in two divisions out of five. The service was developing a new case record in Word	The implementation of CRAMS had been halted because of poor performance. CRAMS was unable to deliver service's current priorities. The probation committee stated that it felt "severely let down" by CRAMS and that the "Home Office had been

		<i>incompetent and misled services about the costs and benefits of CRAMS while failing to address widely known problems".</i>
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5.41 As already indicated in this report, some probation services had chosen to develop other case management systems with the result that case records were held in a number of formats. This created problems in relation to:

- the transfer of cases between services;
- difficulties for prison staff who might have offenders from over 20 probation services in any one prison;
- training issues for staff moving between probation services.

5.42 The 10 services visited for this inspection were using a variety of case management systems. The experience of the services as quoted to inspectors in relation to these systems and CRAMS, is summarised in table 4.

5.43 It was clear that there were major difficulties in relation to the implementation and operation of CRAMS and that these had been widely experienced during 1998 and 1999. Although some of these related to the implementation phase, significant problems remained in relation to:

- the design of the system that was widely regarded by staff to be clumsy and difficult to operate. This made case management difficult and middle managers found the system unwieldy for staff supervision;
- the health and safety implications of the system. In 1998 the ISSB commissioned a report on the ergonomic issue. Its overall findings are summarised in figure 7.

Figure 7: The findings of the independent study on the ergonomic aspects of CRAMS conducted by University College, London

- The CRAMS user interface contains defects which compromise the ability of users to perform their work, which make excessive demands on using and on learning to use the system, and which make the system unacceptable to users in its current form.
- Many of these defects are explained by the lack of conformance of the user interface with guidelines contained in the European standard. CRAMS also does not provide adequate access to users with special needs. The developers appear to have invested little effort in the design of the user interface. The defects in the user interface have a disproportionately large effect on the value and acceptability of the system to its users.
- We recommend that a comprehensive redesign of the user interface is needed to produce a system which is usable, learnable and acceptable ... although the report contains specific recommendations for design changes,

it should be emphasised that the report should not be used as a simple list of detail changes. It is also recommended that the design of the CRAMS user interface be entrusted to user interface design specialists and conducted with the active participation of users.

5.44 In March 2000 an independent risk assessment of CRAMS was carried out for the Merseyside and Lancashire Probation Services.²¹ Its main conclusions are summarised in figure 8.

Figure 8: Conclusions of the Amey Vectra study of the Health and Safety Features of CRAMS in the Merseyside and Lancashire Probation Services (March 2000)

- *"Although the level of stress is likely to vary between individuals, the study suggests that there is currently a high risk of stress to CRAMS users ... a comprehensive suite of measures is required to reduce the risk of stress to staff. This should include an agreed philosophy of the interim use of CRAMS, improvements to system reliability and measures to address organisational and cultural aspects of operation such as workload."*
- *"If there is inadequate time or resources to address the recommendations presented in this report, then the probation service should consider not using CRAMS."*

5.45 It was extremely positive that these two services had taken this initiative and were using the findings to take action to attempt to enable CRAMS to continue to be used. Merseyside Probation Service had drawn up a comprehensive action plan to tackle the issues identified in the report. These included:

- an audit of the data held on CRAMS;
- the production of simple guidance to staff on using parts of CRAMS;
- revision of the training/support strategy to encourage more "site-based" coaching/learning;
- identification of those aspects of CRAMS of most benefit to staff.

The service was liaising closely with Amey Vectra to ensure that these developments were consistent with the advice in their report. Lancashire probation service had decided to restrict the direct inputting of data into CRAMS by POs using the skill and expertise of administrative and clerical staff to enter data from either material written in longhand or dictated onto tape.

5.46 ACOP had conducted a survey in early 2000 on the use of CRAMS and policies in relation to inputting practice. The

²¹ Amey Vectra Ltd. *CRAMS: Health and Safety Risk Assessment* (March 2000).

information on those services that used CRAMS to some degree is included in table 5. It is significant that:

- the majority of services used administrative staff to input most of the data;
- the number of services in which POs inputted most of the data totalled nine, representing 9% of the total budget of the probation service in 2000/01.

Table 5: Data on the grade of staff responsible for the inputting of data into CRAMS

Type of inputting used	Services	Total number of services
Only administrative/probation services officer (PSO) staff	Devon, Dorset , Essex, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Middlesex, Staffordshire, Teesside, Wiltshire	10
Primarily administrative/PSO staff with minimal input from POs	Dyfed, Lancashire, Leicestershire & Rutland, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire (although PO input was increasing), Merseyside, North East London, South East London, South West London, South Yorkshire, Warwickshire and West Yorkshire	12
Primarily POs with minimal input from administrative staff	Derbyshire, Powys, South Glamorgan, West Glamorgan (about 60% of staff in this category)	4
Direct inputting by those staff receiving the information or involved in the transaction	Cheshire, Cumbria and Humberside	3
Initially to administrative staff (case allocation stage) and then to PO	Durham and North Wales	2

GQL/BIQ

5.47 NIPSISS was designed to provide operational, tactical and strategic information. Probation Circular 38/1994 stated on management needs:

"The overall benefit to managers comes from the provision of information which will enable them to assess effectiveness and quality of the services provided by their teams and to manage those resources in a way which meets set objectives; examples of the information which will be available include unit costs, performance, tracking of cases, monitoring of outcomes and offender problems and the ability of areas to access and compare with best practices in other areas."

It was intended that CRAMS would provide routine reports on PO workloads such as commencements, terminations, ethnicity

and gender. However, not all these reports were available in a format that was easy to use by operational staff.

5.48 In 1998 the Home Office purchased a reporting tool, initially known as GQL and renamed BIQ, to be used primarily with CRAMS. However, inspectors found that BIQ had not provided the rapid and effective solution for interrogating data held in CRAMS that had been promised by the Home Office and anticipated by probation services.

5.49 BIQ had considerable potential to obtain a range of information about the work of the service including:

- levels of compliance with national standards;
- data on commencements and terminations;
- KPI and SMINS data;
- other locally generated information needs associated, for instance with requests from stakeholders, etc;
- equal opportunities data.

5.50 Unfortunately, there were significant problems in implementing the BIQ programme in probation services. These included:

- delays in the roll-out of the servers and software;
- the decision to provide all services irrespective of size with the same number of licences for the new software;
- difficulties in using the reports with CRAMS because of technical problems associated with the structure of data in CRAMS;
- the complex demands of BIQ as a system meant that only a small number of services were able to use it because they had high levels of local expertise;
- difficulties within the Home Office probation unit in defining what reports would be produced through BIQ.

5.51 A very small number of services were using BIQ in a significant way and they had done so by utilising the skills of local staff and investing money from their own revenue budgets to make the software work satisfactorily. Most of the services that used CRAMS in a significant way were unable to obtain monitoring data, particularly on national standards, through BIQ and had to extract the information manually from the electronic database and then enter it into another piece of software. This was not satisfactory either in terms of the time required or effectiveness. The Home Office plans for BIQ

were based on a high level of usage of CRAMS but only about 16 services were using CRAMS in a way that would have provided sufficient data for the reporting tool to be of value.

EASI

5.52 EASI was an information database that the Home Office commissioned from NACRO in 1996, designed to provide probation staff with information on the NPSISS network on facilities available for offenders in the voluntary sector such as accommodation, employment schemes, drug projects, etc. Installation of the databases began in 1997 and was funded totally by the Home Office. The budget for the project in 2000/01 was agreed at over £100,000 and over the five years from 1996/97 the total expenditure was approximately £450,000. NACRO convened an EASI user group forum twice a year for staff who used the system regularly. The Home Office had also established a steering group but this had not met since May 1999.

5.53 NACRO compiled information about local projects available in and to local probation areas and entered them on the database. At the end of February 2000 information was available on EASI for 52 out of the 54 probation areas, although the number of projects entries seemed disproportionate to their size. For example, Derbyshire had 330 entries compared with 97 in Somerset and 420 in Middlesex. Despite spending money on EASI, the probation unit had no information on its usage or effectiveness. HMIP's questionnaire returns revealed inconsistent use of the database and it was hardly mentioned by probation staff during the fieldwork. No independent evaluation of the level of use of the project by probation staff had been undertaken. EASI as a project was entirely consistent with the original NPSISS vision but before further investment in it there should be a detailed scrutiny of its operational usage and effectiveness.

The Resource Management Information System

5.54 RMIS was introduced in 1992 and was therefore not designed to run on the NPSISS infrastructure which did not at that time exist. Its purpose was to provide information on resource usage and the unit costs of probation service activities. Services used the software on separate standalone computers.

5.55 For the services that had installed CRAMS, there had been serious problems with the technical interface between the two systems due to difficulties in CRAMS. This had meant that some services were not able to supply the Home Office with the required data on KPI 7 covering unit costs easily or on time. In relation to NPSISS, RMIS never met the criteria of being able to provide relevant, accurate and timely information. At the time of this inspection the inadequacies had been recognised and a replacement system was being considered.

Lotus Notes

5.56 In 1996 the Home Office decided to use Lotus Notes - a well-established commercial software package that provided high quality email and database functions. The use of this email facility was regarded by all the services inspected as an overwhelming success, both for its operational value and as a means of enabling staff generally to become computer literate. It is hard to overstate the value of this achievement. There are implications related to the overall management of information and knowledge within agencies that are discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

5.57 Lotus Notes provided other extremely valuable functions particularly in the use of databases. These had been developed extensively by some services and included:

- a number of databases developed collaboratively by the five London probation services covering PSR tracking, public protection, victims, breach;
- a risk database in Greater Manchester, along with a court diary system;
- Northamptonshire's hostel and public protection databases;
- victims databases in Gloucestershire, West Sussex and Surrey;
- a group work database in Wiltshire;
- hostel logs in South Yorkshire;
- a risk management database in Berkshire and a database on serious harm in Hampshire.

5.58 These are only some examples of a number of valuable initiatives developed by probation services as a response to operational needs. It was noticeable that although there had been some informal sharing of ideas through NPRIE and ACOP,

the Home Office probation unit had not provided any clear direction on the use of such databases. This had meant that local services had often duplicated work and there had been inconsistent dissemination of good practice. It will be essential in future that there is a more systematic and coordinated approach to the development of computer applications.

Information accessible to all staff at any location, from a single source as an integral part of their working environment

5.59 At the time of the inspection there were seven services not on the NPSISS infrastructure including the five services in the ICMS consortium - Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and East Sussex - plus Cornwall and Kent. The Home Office estimated that at the end of 1999 the NPSISS infrastructure covered 90% of the probation service with over 900 sites and 12,000 staff connected not just in probation offices but in prisons and even some at home. However, coverage was not consistent and there were some significant omissions including:

- not all prisons and probation hostels were connected;
- probation staff based in court were not always included and links with courts varied considerably;
- the Home Office probation unit had only one standalone terminal for contact with probation services through the NPSISS infrastructure;
- HMIP had no access to the NPSISS infrastructure. It was able to email the ICMS services on the internet and those other services that had "standalone" internet connections.

CPC and ACOP had been linked to the NPSISS infrastructure and this was a positive development.

5.60 Despite being incomplete the NPSISS infrastructure was regarded widely in the probation service as a major achievement. An independent consultant confirmed in early 2000 that it met industry standards and was a sound basis for future development. The completion of the NPSISS network should be accorded high priority. A thorough review of the sites linked was required so that all services were able to ensure that staff working in prisons, hostels and courts had access to information at any location as envisaged in the original, and as yet unrealised vision.

5.61 The creation of WANs within individual services had been a success. They had facilitated the exchange of data and information within services. However, there was no capacity at the time of the inspection for services to access data, as opposed to email, directly from neighbouring services apart from the collaborative arrangements in London developed in Lotus Notes. The creation of national databases, such as a case index or a national risk register, would facilitate effective practice across area boundaries. The failure of CRAMS to provide a national case management system and the existence of many different local arrangements made the transfer of cases across service boundaries more problematic than had been envisaged in the original NPSISS vision.

5.62 NPSISS had envisaged that information would be available from a single source and a key feature had been that CRAMS would facilitate the single entry of basic data on an offender. This was a principle of great importance. Developments within the Home Office probation unit created the likelihood that staff would be expected to enter the same basic data on several occasions, at least in the short to medium-term, because of the design of different software systems. These central developments included the:

- **What Works initiative** - a probation circular issued in May 2000 included information on an Interim Accredited Programme Software (IAPS) specification and its "roll-out". The software to support the development of accredited programmes had been developed by the What Works team and piloted in Teesside and Devon in May and June 2000. The circular stated that its use was mandatory and that it would run on the NPSISS infrastructure. However, it was a significant weakness that this had been developed without the effective involvement of the NPSISS project team. The software would mean that staff would have to "double enter" data on these offenders until appropriate links could be made to the main database in CRAMS or other case management systems;
- **Joint Prison/Probation OASys** - Probation Circular 38/2000 was issued in June 2000 that advised probation services of arrangements to pilot a paper-based version of this assessment tool. It informed services of the work that had taken place in piloting an IT version which would be potentially the "*first IT-based system to operate across both prison and probation services*". However, because of the lack of common IT between the prison and probation services and the difficulties in arranging for OASys to be available on

NPSISS, the likelihood was that OASys would require duplication of data entry.

5.63 These two examples suggested that there had been poor overall strategic leadership and inadequate links within the Home Office probation unit between the policy and IT developments. However there was evidence during the inspection that these shortcomings were now being recognised.

“Why will the probation service be better through investment in IS/IT?”

5.64 NPSISS had been designed to provide the infrastructure on which a number of different software applications could run. The potential for information to enhance the work of staff supervising offenders had been hindered by:

- the absence in all the services inspected of any thorough evaluation of the impact of new technology on the business of the probation service. Probation services were aware that some fundamental changes were occurring but no systematic analysis of their impact had taken place in any of the services inspected. A number of services told PIP teams that substantial changes had been made to the workforce but did not have hard evidence on how resources had been saved or reused;
- the continuation of systems and processes that preceded the introduction of NPSISS. The Home Office probation unit had promoted the use of procedural change reviews as part of the process of introducing CRAMS. The elaborate nature of the reviews proposed and the delays in the roll-out of CRAMS discredited the process for some services. However, it is essential that redundant processes, (such as the one illustrated in figure 9) are discontinued.

Figure 9: An example of a redundant procedure

A probation service visited in the area inspection programme after the implementation of NPSISS had five different procedures for recording the basic case information relating to an offender appearing in court who had been referred for a PSR. These were:

- the PROBIS system dating back to the 1980s;
- a locally designed computer system to record PSR requests;
- CRAMS;
- a PSR request ledger;
- and lastly, a card index system that dated back virtually to the

beginning of that probation service.

No one had ever examined the system and asked what could be discontinued so the clerical staff just kept the previous arrangements running alongside the new systems.

5.65 It was positive that the probation circular on What Works issued in May 2000 stated:

"services should review all business processes as part of the implementation plan to ensure viable structures are in place to ensure programme delivery and the associated data collection requirements using the IAPS."

However, it is vital that this is not viewed as an isolated event but within the context of all the work of an individual probation service. It will be important that future development takes account of these business process reviews.

5.66 There was a general absence of measures to determine whether services were better as a result of NPSISS and the successful use of new technology. There were some notable exceptions, such as:

- Middlesex had used their network administrators to monitor the use of the NPSISS infrastructure and provide feedback to managers;
- Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire had used a very sensitive approach to assessing the level of IT skills that staff had acquired.

5.67 Suitable indicators can be valuable not just as measures but as catalysts to promote good practice. The Home Office and services needed to consider the use of simple performance indicators on the use and impact of NPSISS, for example:

- the level of usage of the system by staff;
- the percentage of PSRs sent electronically to probation court staff and received at least 24 hours in advance (this would promote both the use of the network and good practice);
- the percentage of PSRs sent electronically to prison probation staff within 48 hours of a custodial sentence (this would encourage both the development and use of the network in prisons whilst meeting an important national standard);
- the percentage of referrals sent to programmes electronically (this would encourage the use of the NPSISS network);

- the percentage reductions achieved in postage and telephone budgets by the increased and effective use of email.

5.68 The original leaflet on NPSISS envisaged a number of areas where the strategy would improve the work of the service and these are considered in turn in this report:

- quality of service;
- improved productivity;
- management support systems.

Quality of service

5.69 The evidence from the PIP, thematic inspections and serious incident reports²² had been that staff could make more effective use of information. Examples include:

- PSRs had often been written without CPS information on the offence and up to date previous convictions but poor analysis of the offence occurred even when this information was available;
- the developmental thematic inspection on supervision plans in 1998²³ highlighted the failure of many staff to use data systematically to assess offenders;
- a feature of a number of serious incident reports examined by HMIP was the failure to use all the information available to make a thorough risk of harm assessment.

5.70 The availability of information did not always ensure that practice was satisfactory. A valuable feature of ICMS is the capacity to monitor performance of individual staff in relation to levels of compliance with national standards. However, limited information from the second ACOP audit on *Improving Enforcement*²⁴ showed that whilst three of the ICMS areas exceeded the national average on breach action taken

²² These are required by the Home Office under Probation Circular 41/95 *Incident Reporting* and have to be provided by probation services where a person under statutory supervision has killed or maimed, committed arson with intent, serious sexual offences, all sexual offences against a child, or held others hostage.

²³ HM Inspectorate of Probation *Offender Assessment and Supervision Planning: Helping to achieve effective intervention with offenders* Report of a Developmental Thematic Inspection undertaken in collaboration with 46 Probation Services (1999).

²⁴ ACOP conducted two audits on compliance with national standards with a particular focus on enforcement practice. The report on the second audit was published by the Criminal Policy Research Unit of the South Bank University in March 2000 and is available at www.sbu.ac.uk/cpru.

after three unacceptable absences, the performance of the other two areas was below average.

- 5.71 The use of information varied considerably between the probation services inspected in the first four regions of the PIP and there did not seem to be any significant relationship between performance, the use of information and the systems of case management deployed in the service. The PIP placed probation services in three categories based on their performance against key standards, indicators and targets. Set out below are the services in their PIP categories indicating which case management system was in use locally:

Category 1 areas generally performing satisfactorily - Cumbria (CRAMS - full); Durham (CRAMS - limited); Hereford & Worcester (IOSS); Teesside (CRAMS - limited) Warwickshire (CRAMS - full);²⁵

Category 2 areas, which were not performing satisfactorily in all respects, but where there were features that contained good practice - Bedfordshire (ICMS); Cambridgeshire (ICMS); Greater Manchester (DMP); Hertfordshire (CRAMS - limited); Lancashire (CRAMS - limited); Merseyside (CRAMS - limited); Staffordshire (CRAMS - limited); Norfolk (ICMS);

Category 3 areas that were underachieving - Cheshire (CRAMS - full); Essex (CRAMS - limited); Northamptonshire (CRAMS - full); Northumbria (CRAMS - limited); Suffolk (ICMS); Shropshire (IOSS); West Midlands (No system for case management, local case index).

- 5.72 As can be seen, some services which were performing very satisfactorily were using CRAMS fully, whereas one service using ICMS was underachieving. Equally, one service using IOSS was performing very satisfactorily, whilst the neighbouring service using the same system was underachieving. The type of system in use appeared to be no determinant of quality of delivery. The availability of an effective information system needed to be supported by other factors, including staff with specialist skills and a culture that reinforced the importance of information in good practice and performance.

Improved productivity

- 5.73 There was no evidence from the inspection that the number of forms used by probation staff had reduced as a result of NPSISS. If anything, the impression was that they had

²⁵ At the time of the PIP inspection, Warwickshire had not fully installed CRAMS.

increased. In the preparation of a PSR in a typical service nine forms might be completed including:

- the court referral;
- a PSR monitoring form;
- a race and ethnic monitoring form;
- a quality assurance form;
- a risk assessment;
- a CS referral;
- a partnership referral;
- a first appointment form;
- a referral to a group work programme.

If an order was made there would also be:

- the initial assessment;
- a needs analysis such as ACE or LSI-R and in future OASys;
- a national standards monitoring form.

5.74 It was anticipated that the implementation of OASys would reduce the need for this kind of information to be collected and recorded separately.

5.75 HMIP has identified in this, and area inspections little evidence that staff time searching for files had been saved. The introduction of new technology and the cuts on probation services' budgets imposed in the mid-1990s had led to the reduction of support staff in most services. This had meant that in some areas POs and PSOs did a considerable amount of typing and filing.

Management support systems

5.76 The original NPSISS leaflet made some statements about the development of a catalogue of computer applications to support the management of local services. The Home Office had taken an important national initiative in relation to support services through its work in developing a *Probation Service Property Management System Database*. Launched in 1997, it was a Lotus Notes software application which had been designed to run on NPSISS. Unfortunately, only a minority of probation services adopted this system.

5.77 The questionnaire sent to probation services as part of this inspection provided information on the existence and use of support systems. This was supplemented most helpfully by a

further survey of IS requirements of probation services conducted for the strategy development project by AMTEC Consulting, working on behalf of the Home Office probation unit. HMIP liased closely with AMTEC in this exercise and has been able to use the information in this report.

5.78 The survey received responses from 46 of the 54 probation services. It used a convention to collate qualitative opinions related to satisfaction levels with either current systems or the importance of future systems or facilities. For measuring these opinions, the scale was from 0 (very low satisfaction/importance) to 5 (very high satisfaction/very high importance). The analysis examined the five main probation service business processes.

5.79 The survey showed that a substantial proportion of IS/IT investment had been made in systems that supported the main functions of probation services' businesses, such as finance and personnel, as opposed to front line probation activity. Satisfaction levels with current systems varied and there was considerable demand for new systems to support business management. These included:

- financial management - most services had financial management systems and the average satisfaction level was 3.69. A significant proportion of these systems had been developed and supported by county councils, reflecting the strong links that still existed in many county probation services. In eight probation services an average rating of 4.25 was given to the importance of new financial systems;
- unit costs - the survey showed 12 services using the system but the satisfaction rating was low at 1.2. Ten probation services rated this an important requirement for the future with an average score of 4.7;
- payroll - payroll systems had been developed by 23 probation services with an average satisfaction rating of 3.4. A substantial proportion of the remaining services had continued to use well-established local authority arrangements;
- personnel management - the majority of probation services who replied (38) had a personnel system with an average satisfaction rating of 3.35. There was little commonality of approach in terms of the software applications used and again links with local authority systems were common. Fifteen services expressed a strong demand (4.47 importance rating) for

a new personnel system that should include staff training, skills records and ethnic monitoring;

- property management - 10 services stated they were operating a system but satisfaction levels were very low and were not expressed in a way that gave a measurable response.

5.80 The survey confirmed the fieldwork and questionnaire evidence from this inspection. There was no consistent approach to the provision of management support services and the potential of IT had not been realised. The original vision that it would be incorporated within NPSISS had not been sustained and the Home Office property database was not in widespread use. HMIP visited some probation services where finance staff had two computer terminals on their desks linked to two independent networks. Operational managers were also often unable to access computerised financial systems that were considered to be the province of administrative and support staff.

Summary

5.81 Although NPSISS was described as national, it was of necessity designed for 55 individual services that were independent and autonomous. This created difficulties throughout the project, particularly as the Home Office held the main contract on the infrastructure. The Home Office lacked control over local developments and in 2000 a number of services were developing their own case management systems.

5.82 The national infrastructure covered 47 out of the 54 probation services. Although no timetable had been agreed for its completion, this still represented a major achievement even if its coverage was inconsistent within and between areas.

5.83 The absence of a single body with clear authority to manage the overall project had created problems and this was reflected in the difficulties with the Trade Unions. It was also apparent in the absence of accountability by probation areas to the Home Office for the investment made in NPSISS. Only 50% of local services submitted the required business case, the "stewardship" reports that were submitted by probation areas were never reviewed and the requirement for their submission was never formally withdrawn.

5.84 The identification of business needs was inadequate in probation services and within the Home Office probation unit

and there seemed to be no adequate arrangements for ensuring that these were examined with sufficient rigour.

- 5.85 The probation unit had failed to link the changing requirements of the probation service in relation to risk assessment with NPSISS and it had been left to individual probation areas to seek local solutions to the need for a computerised system for the registration and management of high-risk offenders. As a result, the needs of Ministers for accurate information and assurance that sound IS were in place to support services in their supervision of high-risk offenders were not being met sufficiently. Service managers and staff were working hard to overcome the difficulties presented by the lack of IT support in order to ensure that information was available and offenders were supervised effectively. This is a matter of very serious concern and can be resolved only if there is greater integration of policy and information developments within the Home Office.
- 5.86 The original business case submitted to the Treasury had not been subjected to a detailed review until the NAO began their investigation in late 1999.
- 5.87 The focus of NPSISS shifted from the improved use of information to further the work of the probation service to a concentration on the installation of hardware/software applications. Whilst this was understandable in the context of the problems experienced in the overall management of the NPSISS project, it meant that the original business objectives were obscured.
- 5.88 There had been insufficient direction and coordination on key aspects of NPSISS including:
- issues related to the key role of probation information in the wider criminal justice system;
 - the potential to use Lotus Notes to further the changing business needs of the service such as the management of risk.
- 5.89 A number of services had reduced the size of their information units. The national business case had encouraged this because services believed that NPSISS reduced the need for such staff and they were under pressure to reduce costs.
- 5.90 NPSISS had been unable to provide the full range of information that was needed to demonstrate vfm.
- 5.91 CRAMS had not provided a case management system of acceptable quality to probation services and this had been a major

weakness. Only 16 services were using CRAMS substantially. Four out of five offenders were supervised by services not using the case management system envisaged in NPSISS. At the time of the inspection, there were at least 10 case management systems in operation or development in local services and this must be a matter of concern as steps are taken to create a national probation service.

- 5.92 The inspection found that the reporting tool, initially known as GQL and subsequently BIQ, had not provided the rapid and effective solution for interrogating data held in CRAMS that had been promised by the Home Office and anticipated by probation services. Those services that had used it effectively had spent considerable local resources in the process.
- 5.93 EASI had been developed by NACRO on behalf of the Home Office to provide probation staff with information on facilities for use by offenders. Its installation on NPSISS had been successful but no detailed scrutiny had taken place on its use or cost-effectiveness.
- 5.94 For services that had installed CRAMS, there had been serious problems with the technical interface with RMIS that had resulted in serious delays in the provision to the Home Office of information on KPI 7 on unit costs.
- 5.95 Lotus Notes had been of great value as an email system but there had been insufficient coordination of the development of specific applications and this had meant that local services had unnecessarily duplicated work.
- 5.96 There had been no thorough evaluation of the impact of new technology on the business of the service. HMIP found little evidence of the anticipated improvements in productivity.
- 5.97 There was evidence that there had been insufficient strategic appreciation within the Home Office probation unit of the importance of ensuring the integration of operational and IT developments within the framework of the original NPSISS vision. During the inspection, it seemed that this shortcoming was being addressed, for example, with the completion in the summer of 2000 of the Information Strategy Review. It will be vital that the national directorate ensures this improved approach is sustained.

Recommendations

The Home Office should develop an effective case management system which:

- (a) supports staff in complying with national standards and in working to What Works principles;*
- (b) provides management information on compliance with national standards and other aspects of service performance;*
- (c) is integrated into the development of the systems to support OASys and accredited programmes;*
- (d) provides and receives from others information key to the work of probation staff.*

The Home Office should, in future IT development within the probation service, make appropriate organisational arrangements to ensure that policy, operational and information requirements are integrated and that IT developments are determined by policy and business needs.

6. INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

6.1 This purpose of this chapter is to consider how information and knowledge is managed in the probation service.

Background

6.2 In April 2000 the government published *e-government - A Strategic Framework for Public Services in the Information Age* that identified a common framework and direction for change across the public sector. It included an important statement on "managing information":

"The government's knowledge and information are valuable resources. At the heart of this programme is the need for the public sector to make the best use of them. Implementing the strategy requires organisations to adopt coherent and compatible information policies in support of better policy making, better service delivery and more efficient working."

6.3 The "Modernising Government" White Paper set a target that by 2008 all public services should be available electronically. The Prime Minister announced in March 2000 that this date should be advanced to 2005. The e-government strategy acknowledged that:

"public services will still be delivered by teachers, social workers, doctors, but much of the organisation of services and initial public contact could be handled electronically. So processes which currently depend largely on the exchange of physical documents or attendance at a specific place will be widely augmented and in many cases replaced by new technology."

6.4 The HMIP report *Strategies for Effective Offender Supervision* (1998) emphasised the importance of an organisational culture that supported effective practice and included a commitment to:

- evidence-based practice - emphasising clarity and specificity in methods used; it rejected the model of the autonomous practitioner;
- evaluate and research - essential to sustain the long-term commitment required to achieve useful results;

- leaning and practice development - recognised the need for continuing development of the knowledge base.

6.5 HMIP's subsequent guide to effective practice *Evidence Based Practice* (1998) included advice on monitoring and evaluation arrangements. It clearly distinguished between routine monitoring of inputs, processes and outputs and non-routine evaluation.

6.6 As indicated in Chapter 3, in 1999 the Home Office probation unit published *A Developing Probation Service National Information Strategy* which contained a section entitled "Defining an Information Strategy", part of which is reproduced in figure 10.

Figure 10: Defining an Information Strategy - extract from the Home office document *Developing a Probation Service National Information Strategy* - August 1999

- "An information strategy identifies **What** information is needed to support the business processes designed to deliver the business strategy at operational, strategic and corporate or national levels.
- An information systems strategy identifies **How** the required information is generated and distributed in support of the business strategies and purpose.
- An IT strategy identifies **what** technology is necessary now and what future potential is available and can be developed and managed in order to achieve the business objectives.
- The development of new information systems and technology strategies are planned to follow the publication of this Information Strategy."

6.7 As previously indicated, NPSISS was an IS strategy developed in late 1993 but not reviewed until late 1999. However, following the production of the document *A Developing Probation Service National Information Strategy* considerable work had been undertaken to develop the basis of a new strategy and a report had been produced. In September 2000, the newly created Information Systems Programme Board accepted the report as providing a sound basis for future decisions.

6.8 Knowledge management ²⁶ is hard to define in simple and precise terms. It is, in effect, the next step up from information management in as much as information is merely a collection of data that has been translated into a form that conveys a message. It is the raw material from which

²⁶ This section is based on *Breaking the knowledge barriers to better information age government - why knowledge management is critical to fulfilling the modernising government agenda* published by Kable Ltd. (September 1999) www.kable.co.uk.

knowledge is formed but without the human input of skill, judgement and experience. There are two types of knowledge:

- explicit knowledge, i.e. information and skills that are easily communicated and documented such as processes, numerical data, job descriptions, competences;
- tacit knowledge, i.e. information and skills that are not easily communicated such as expertise, experience, wisdom.

6.9 Figure 11 provides an example from the private sector of an organisation that had placed a high priority on the systematic use of information and knowledge.

Figure 11: Case example on the value of knowledge management

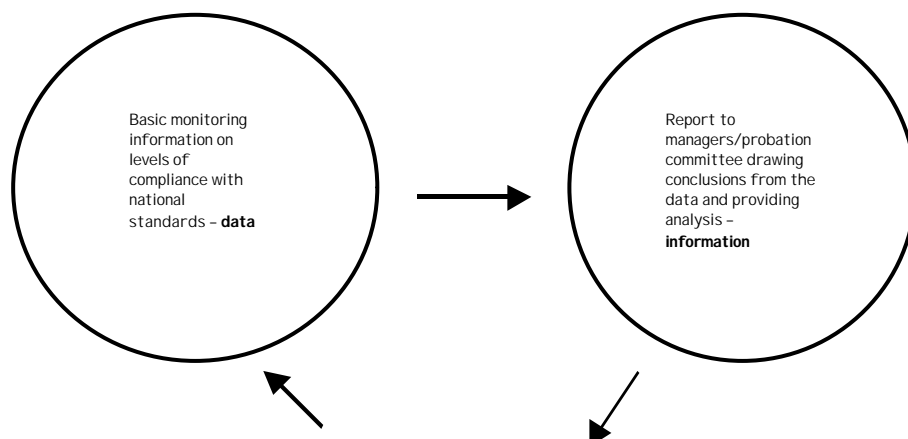
Bechtel, an engineering and construction firm founded in 1898, has worked on some 15,000 projects across 140 countries. The company realised that it could deliver higher value and cut costs if it could capitalise on its accumulated knowledge. Consequently, it set up a "Knowledge Bank" a one-stop shop for knowledge and created new organisational roles specifically tasked to tackle this subject. It learned two important lessons from this exercise:

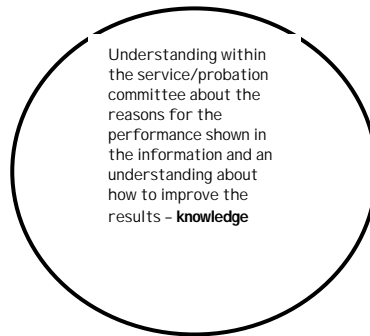
1. Project managers have a tendency to believe that the problems they are tackling and the clients they are serving at any one time are unique. Communicating to managers that their work is less than one-off has been vital to the success of the Bank.
2. Staff whose personal "marketability" depends on their knowledge and production are reluctant to take time-out from a busy day to make their knowledge more widely available.

Bechtel has evolved its Knowledge Bank to include quick access to knowledge and information from both internal and external sources, thus reducing the time it takes for staff to assemble information from multiple sources.

The company still has a long way to go in the process. However, it now has a better notion of what knowledge it needs to manage and a greater appreciation of how people, processes and technology elements must be integrated.

6.10 Knowledge management is a framework or system that allows organisations to collect, analyse, apply and reuse both of these types of knowledge to make faster and smarter decisions. The diagram below illustrates this in relation to levels of compliance with national standards.





A knowledge cycle using a probation service example

The knowledge is then reused in the organisation to improve performance and this should be reflected in data showing improved levels of compliance with national standards.

Inspection findings

- 6.11 The inspection identified shortcomings in the management of information and knowledge not just within probation services but also the Home Office probation unit. It was positive that probation services and very senior staff within the Home Office acknowledged that more needed to be done.
- 6.12 Most of the services inspected believed that they were moving towards an "information culture" and some considered that significant progress had been achieved as indicated in table 6.

Table 6: To illustrate the opinions of services on whether they had an information culture

Service	Comments
Hampshire	Strong belief that it existed and was "top" driven and linked to performance management. Greater use of information in CS.
Middlesex	General feeling that there was an increasing information culture, evidence was available through the monitoring of the use of their local management information system. The Chief Officer (Quality) was seen as a strong advocate of information and this had promoted its importance and use.
North Wales	Developing information usage across management and operational staff, with some variation amongst staff.
Northumbria	Staff had long experience of computers and increasingly recognised the importance of acquiring and using data.
Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire	The use of information was improving, with evidence of performance reports being discussed at team level.
Somerset	Growing information culture especially amongst

	managers.
Surrey	Strong use of CRAMS/EASI but absence of BIQ reports was a major obstacle in promoting an information culture.
South West London	Managers were increasingly aware of the importance of information. The limitations of CRAMS had hindered the enthusiasm for information amongst practitioners but the success of the London Lotus Notes initiatives had begun to compensate for this.
Wiltshire	The main focus for information was managers and the appreciation at that level was strong. The small size of the service created particular difficulties in generating local information reports.
West Yorkshire	The culture was improving but was strongest amongst managers.

6.13 The experience of these services was encouraging. Inspectors were particularly impressed with the practice that had existed in the Somerset Probation Service of placing POs on short secondments in their information unit. This had improved the level of understanding and skills in these officers, several of whom were now senior managers.

6.14 However, probation managers acknowledged that they had a long way to go:

- *"lots of decisions are made on an historic basis ... little use of 'what if' scenarios and middle managers are not able to play with information ... there is very little data anyway for middle managers";*
- *"little information is sent directly to POs - forwarded to SPOs and up to them to decide what to share ... for many operational staff it is a matter of getting on with the job";*
- *"information needs and use are not a major feature of management decisions, for example delays and gaps in the ACE monitoring system are caused by a failure to resource information systems adequately."*

6.15 All these comments indicated the early stage of a developing recognition of the importance of managing the use of information by staff at all levels of the organisation. The enforcement audit had demonstrated that staff were more likely to achieve satisfactory levels of compliance with national standards if they owned the issue and had access to data to judge both their own performance and that of immediate colleagues.

6.16 It was positive that all the CPOs in the services inspected emphasised the importance of information, although the use of "hard data" in supervision by managers varied. HMIP was

impressed by the comment made by one deputy chief probation officer (DCPO) that modelling good practice was essential, i.e. senior managers had to take the lead by demonstrating the importance of using information and cascading this through the service.

6.17 During the inspection inspectors met representatives from CPC who acknowledged the impact of HMIP's inspections and, in particular, PIP on the work of probation committees and indicated that it had focused the attention of probation services on performance and evidence. The evidence from the PIP had been that many probation services were not monitoring effective practice, especially group work, on a systematic basis. This was confirmed by staff in the Home Office effective practice team who told HMIP that most of the bids made by probation services for Pathfinder status in 1999 had not been accompanied by detailed evidence. The developments being funded by the crime reduction programme require independent academic evaluation. It will be important that local services and the Home Office ensure that the lessons from research are fed back into practice.

6.18 HMIP interviewed a range of staff in the Home Office probation unit including the NPSISS team and those responsible for policy. It was apparent that there were shortcomings in the management of information and knowledge. The failure to fully integrate policy and information developments was still apparent as shown by:

- the development of IAPS for the What Works initiative;
- the work to develop BIQ as a reporting tool to extract information from CRAMS on levels of compliance with national standards had not been sufficiently informed by those responsible for policy within the probation unit;
- the failure to undertake a rigorous review of the level of usage by probation staff of the EASI database;
- no advice issued to probation services about the implications of the Data Protection Act 1998;
- the failure to follow-up the earlier work to complete an information strategy for the probation service.

These examples demonstrated that information management was not just an issue for local probation services but also for the Home Office probation unit. However, it was a positive indicator that this was acknowledged as a problem by very

senior staff within the Home Office who indicated that it would be a priority in the modernisation process.

6.19 Within probation services some small initiatives had been taken to promote knowledge management. These included:

- the use of the NPSISS infrastructure by the CPOs in Middlesex and Northumbria to share information directly and quickly with staff;
- the development of electronic staff handbooks using Lotus Notes as in Inner London and Gloucestershire.

6.20 All the probation services inspected were positive about email and enthusiastic about its use. However, no probation service inspected had either examined the business benefits that had accrued or identified the cost. It was possible that the widespread use of email had encouraged faster, more immediate and less thoughtful communication. The copying of emails to multiple recipients - some with only a marginal interest in the subject - has been shown in other organisations to reduce the productivity and morale of staff.

6.21 There was also a danger that other important aspects of business practice were being given insufficient attention, including:

- the skills of paper record keeping were disappearing but no electronic equivalent had emerged. Most probation services restricted new technology training to using software applications and did not look at new technology practice. Although a number of probation services had electronic case management systems supported by email, the use of paper documents was still dominant;
- the widespread use of email for general management, business and policy development meant that large tracts of information were "lost" because they were never properly categorised or filed. The use of standardised approaches to the naming of computer files was rare;
- the lack of any auditing of the skills and experience of staff in order to capture both the formal and informal knowledge that existed within the organisation.

6.22 The "Modernising Government" strategy envisaged that public services would be accessible by multiple technologies, including web sites on personal computers, mobile phones and digital TV, and call and contact centres. The Surrey

Probation Service had installed kiosks in its waiting areas to encourage offenders to access information on local services and employment opportunities. The inspection identified a willingness and enthusiasm within probation services to use such technology.

Summary

- 6.23 The inspection identified shortcomings in the management of information and knowledge not just within probation services but also in the Home Office probation unit. It was positive that probation services and very senior staff within the Home Office acknowledged this issue.
- 6.24 No probation service information strategy had been issued at the time of the inspection. NPSISS had represented an IS strategy and the probation unit had produced a document in late 1999 *A Developing Probation Service National Information Strategy* which made a significant number of recommendations about the steps required for a strategic approach. NPSISS was not reviewed until late 1999. Considerable work had then taken place to develop the basis of a new strategy and the new Information Systems Programme Board accepted this in September 2000. It provided a sound basis for future decisions.
- 6.25 There were significant but limited examples of local probation services promoting the sharing of knowledge and information through NPSISS. There was a clear demand amongst many probation staff at all grades for a national probation intranet to share information and assist in the development of good practice.
- 6.26 No probation service visited had examined the business benefits/costs of email or undertaken any review of its use. Nor had there been a systematic audit of the skills and experience of staff as a way of capturing and managing the knowledge that this represented.
- 6.27 The "Modernising Government" agenda had made only a limited impact on probation services, although there was willingness by a number of services to engage with new technology very positively.

Recommendations

The Home Office should:

- (a) ensure that NPSISS includes all local probation services, the national directorate, HMIP and the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate;
- (b) examine the potential to establish a national probation intranet to share information and assist in the development of good practice.

CPOs should:

- (a) review the impact of new technology, particularly the use of email and the storage of electronic documents on their local business systems;
- (b) audit the skills and experience of their staff to harness both the formal and informal knowledge within the organisation.

Glossary of abbreviations

ACE	Assessment, Case Recording and Evaluation System
ACOP	Association of Chief Officers of Probation
CPC	Central Probation Council
CPO	Chief probation officer
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
CRAMS	Case Record Administration and Management System
CS	Community service
DMP	Data Migration Platform
DPC	Data Protection Commissioner
HMIP	HM Inspectorate of Probation
IAPS	Interim Accredited Programme Software
IBIS	Integrated Business and Information Systems
ICMS	Integrated Case Management System
IOSS	Integrated Operational Support System
IS	Information system(s)
ISSB	Information Systems Strategy Board
ISSC	Information Strategy Steering Committee
IT	Information technology
KPI	Key performance Indicator
LSI-R	Level of Service Inventory-Revised
NACRO	National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
NAO	National Audit Office
NPIMS	Northumbria Probation Information Management System
NPRIE	National Probation Research and Information Exchange
NPSISS	National Probation Service Information Systems Strategy
OASys	Offender Assessment System
OGRS	Offender Group Reconviction Scale
PC	Personal computer
PIP	Performance Inspection Programme
PO	Probation officer
PSO	Probation services officer
PSR	Pre-sentence report
RMIS	Resource Management Information System
SMINS	Supporting Management Information Needs
SPO	Senior probation officer
SSR	Specific sentence report
WAN	Wide Area Network

vfm Value for money