FOCUS

Practical guidance on handling complaints, conduct matters, and death or serious injury matters within the Police Reform Act 2002

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Learning and recommendations

The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 changed parts of the Police Reform Act 2002 to make sure that the IPCC would receive a response to its organisational learning recommendations.

In 2013-2014 the IPCC explored how police forces record, circulate and audit the recommendations and learning they find, both internally and from external bodies such as the IPCC and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC).

We asked open questions to 39[1] professional standards departments (PSDs) about the processes they had in place. From the 33 responses received, we drew some conclusions and found other areas that could be looked at further.

This issue of *Focus* summarises our findings and the questions they raise in four areas, as well as the impact they might have on your responses to the IPCC's organisational learning recommendations:

- Mixed messages
- Range of auditing systems
- Robust auditing
- Pro-active monitoring

Mixed messages

The IPCC's *Learning the Lessons* bulletin and individual complaint/conduct case learning were dealt with by the PSD.

Only one force processed learning from incident debriefs through their PSD. One force said that learning from major crime reviews went directly to the department without the involvement of the PSD.

1   Some police forces share a PSD.

One PSD only processed learning in relation to anti-corruption and integrity – everything else was handled by the Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) who had the lead in the relevant area.

In the majority of forces, recommendations from HMIC were dealt with separately. These recommendations were often dealt with directly by an HMIC single point of contact (SPOC), and were sent directly to relevant departments without the involvement of the PSD.

In most forces, department[2] -specific learning was shared by specific people within the department. In most cases this was the head of department. Some forces had PSD representatives within departments who delivered relevant learning. Only one force said that departmental learning was delivered directly by the PSD.

Many forces said that trainers or experts were sometimes asked to deliver learning; this was where the learning covered a particular issue or was technical and challenging. Two forces described specific learning departments delivering departmental learning with no involvement from the PSD.

Force intranet, newsletters and weekly orders are used regularly by forces to spread force-wide learning. Many forces said that both the PSD and force newsletters were used, with issue frequency varying from quarterly to weekly.

A pop-up 'message of the day' was used by one force to spread force-wide learning, and another force used social media and blogs to communicate learning.

Questions you may wish to consider:

- How does your PSD make sure that recommendations communicated to departments/force-wide are consistent with recommendations being received from HMIC SPOCs?

- What communication is there between the various handlers of learning and recommendations in your force? Where learning is spread through more than one route, are there rules on who has the lead?

- Is your PSD fully aware of HMIC recommendations? Is it possible that learning recommendations are made that are based on an out-of-date understanding of a department's way of working because the PSD is not aware of changes arising from HMIC recommendations?

Range of auditing systems

All except one PSD said that they were responsible for auditing the delivery of individual officer learning when it was generated from PSD work. The remaining PSD said that they had no system in place to show that individual learning had been delivered.

The Centurion system was favoured by PSDs to keep track of individual officer learning that was generated from PSD work. This is because it has a dedicated field for tracking officer learning, but other database and spreadsheet systems were also used. Access to Centurion is limited.

One force followed up learning in officer appraisals, and another force recorded officer learning with the officer's HR record.

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2   A general term for departments, territorial groups, BCUs, divisions, specialist groups etc.

Questions you may wish to consider:

- Centurion information is not accessible by line managers; how do forces make sure that new line managers are fully aware of an officer's previous learning outcomes?

- How many systems do your heads of department have to update? Can they be made simpler?

- How easy is it to make a list of learning that has previously occurred in a department or force-wide?

- How easy is it to review previous learning to make sure that the recommendation about to be made is appropriate?

Robust auditing

There seemed to be two main issues in this area; firstly, whether the distribution of the learning was audited at all, and secondly, if so, how robustly. Most of the ways of spreading force-wide learning were passive. Information was sent out in communications, but the audience was not required to confirm they had read it, or most importantly, understood it. In other circumstances, although there was an auditing system, it depended on an individual remembering to use it.

The majority of forces used a spreadsheet system to audit departmental learning. Some forces used Centurion or similar case management systems, but this was not suitable for all learning. For example, Centurion is appropriate to capture case specific learning, but is not suitable for auditing learning from other sources.

Ways of auditing departmental learning ranged from force to force. Most forces said that the PSD was responsible for auditing that departmental learning had been communicated. One force reported back to their chief officer as well. Another force appeared to only audit HMIC learning. One force had a robust system where personal visits took place if email replies were not received, and another force formally reported to an overseeing committee. The force that had three different ways to spread learning within a department had four different auditing methods.

Auditing methods for force-wide learning included risk registers, spreadsheets and action plans. One force mentioned environment scanning, and three forces said that they reviewed closed learning.

The strength of these auditing systems varied between forces also. Some systems generated automated chasers and would not allow the system to move on unless actions were completed. Other systems, however, relied solely upon the individual. One system concentrated solely on timeliness of delivery – it did not seem to evaluate effectiveness.

Questions you may wish to consider:

- How robust are the systems in place to confirm that learning has been shared with the appropriate individuals?

- How robust are the systems in place to confirm that the learning has been understood/acted upon?

- If the person responsible for auditing learning and recommendations is not there, whose responsibility is it to maintain the system?

- If the auditing system lapses, how do you find out?

- What does the auditing system concentrate on; timeliness only or effectiveness of the learning?

Pro-active monitoring

Groups[3] were used by a number of forces to continually review and audit force-wide learning. Membership of that group varied significantly however, and it was not possible to find any common ground. There was also an even distribution of the frequency that these groups met; bi-monthly, monthly or quarterly. In the main, the groups were chaired by officers of Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) rank.

Two forces said that they had no overarching monitoring system in place for force-wide learning.

Forces should consider having a strong system of pro-active monitoring that involves reviewing closed recommendations, both at departmental level and force-wide. Consideration should also be given to the membership of those monitoring groups and the seniority of the chair.

Questions you may wish to consider:

Forces may want to consider that a number of the police and crime commissioners' (PCCs) responsibilities speak directly to this:

- Making sure their force has a system for monitoring and recording learning
- Regular monitoring of whether that system is being used appropriately
- Monitoring the implementation of recommendations
- Awareness of the quality control processes

We are aware that since this piece of research, a number of PCCs have set up groups for this very purpose.

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3   In this context 'groups' refers to committees, working groups, forums, meetings, boards, panels etc.

Questions you may wish to consider:

- Do you have a strong system of pro-active monitoring that involves reviewing closed recommendations, both at departmental level and force-wide?

- Are the right people members of your monitoring group?

- Is your PCC involved in any overarching monitoring groups on departmental and force-wide learning?

Impact on IPCC recommendations

Questions you may wish to consider:

- Are you confident that you can offer full, timely and accurate responses to IPCC recommendations, having consulted everyone you need to internally, and then monitor implementation of those recommendations you have accepted?

Get in touch

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