



**Crown Prosecution Service:**  
**Response to HMCPSI Report on Communicating with Victims**

*13 January 2016*

## RESPONSE TO HMCPSI REPORT ON COMMUNICATING WITH VICTIMS

1. HMCPSI has today published a report on CPS's communications with victims. The report acknowledges the good work the CPS has done over the past few years to improve our communications with victims and acknowledges that the Victim Liaison Units are a sound model for delivery of key communications such as VCL letters, complaints and local handling of VRR. The report also offers some useful feedback on areas where we can improve further, such as doing more to ensure empathy in our communications.
2. The final report contains three recommendations:
  - *The CPS and the police should agree their respective roles in communicating the outcome of cases to victims and witnesses, to avoid duplication of correspondence and to reduce the risk of communicating inaccurate or inconsistent information*
  - *The CPS should ensure that the quality assurance checks specific to the VLU are effective in ensuring greater consistency in the quality and timeliness of letters sent to victims.*
  - *The CPS should implement an effective process which ensures that VLU staff are alerted promptly of any case where the charge against a defendant has been substantially altered, thereby triggering a requirement for a VCL letter.*
3. We will act on each of the recommendations. On recommendation a), we are already conducting a review of overall support to victims and witnesses with the police and agreeing our respective roles in communication will form part of this. On recommendation b) we will ensure that the QA checks are improved through guidance and training. On recommendation c) we will seek to improve both the flagging of substantial alterations in appropriate cases and the systems for notification of the VLU using a range of interventions.
4. The report expresses concern about both the timeliness and quality of the communications within the sample of 160 cases examined. However, the findings are not borne out by a more comprehensive survey of 7,700 victims and witnesses conducted by the CPS last year, or by some of our national performance measures. For example:
  - In a survey of over 7,700 victims and witnesses last year, more than two thirds of victims and three quarters of witnesses reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the service they received from the CPS.
  - In the same survey, over 80% of victims said that they were satisfied with the clarity of VCL communications, the bulk of the communications handled by VLUs.
  - CPS national performance measures show that VCL letters were sent in 80% of those cases where required within 1 day and 89% of those cases where required within 5 days. This is significantly better than in the small sample examined by the inspectors – a fact they acknowledge in the report.
5. The report also says that further progress on improving communications with victims may be hampered by scarce resources. Following our SR settlement we do not believe this to be the case. We have the resources we need to continue to improve but need to make sure they continue to be deployed effectively so that we can build on the foundations we have laid. We are continuing to work hard to improve the service. So for example:
  - The CPS is currently putting more staff in Crown Courts, to make sure victims and witnesses are properly supported and that prosecutors are available to speak to victims and witnesses at court. When rollout is complete around 350 paralegal staff and managers will be based at Crown Courts across England and Wales.
  - At the same time, we are working with courts, police and Citizens' Advice Court Based Witness Service partners to improve the overall support given to victims and witnesses on the day at court.
  - We are also reviewing the resourcing of Victim Liaison Units to ensure that sufficient staff are in place to manage the workload.

The CPS remains committed to supporting victims and witnesses throughout their case and will continue to monitor its progress and performance in doing so.