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Child Abuse: Training Investigating Officers

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Policing and Reducing Crime Unit: Police Research Series

The Policing and Reducing Crime Unit (PRC Unit) was formed in 1998 as a result of the merger of the Police Research Group (PRG) and the Research and Statistics Directorate. The PRC Unit is now one part of the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate of the Home Office. The PRC Unit carries out and commissions research in the social and management sciences on policing and crime reduction, broadening out the role that PRG played.

The PRC Unit has now combined PRG's two main series into the Police Research Series, continuing PRG's earlier work. This will present research material on crime prevention and detection as well as police management and organisation issues.

Research commissioned by PRG will appear as a PRC Unit publication. Throughout the text there may be references to PRG and these now need to be understood as relating to the PRC Unit.

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Foreword

In recent years there has been increasing media and public attention surrounding cases of child abuse. Amongst the areas of concern is the way in which such victims are dealt with by the criminal justice system. Efforts to address this issue have led to developments such as the joint investigation of child abuse by police officers and social workers, as well as the videotaping of investigative interviews with children. These changes have led to increasing police effort in the investigation and prosecution of child abuse and as a consequence, the need for greater training in this area.

This report examines the training provision in 12 forces and outlines the diversity of courses that exist within this area of policing. It also explores officers' thoughts on the strengths and weaknesses of training, the construction of a national curriculum for training courses, and the introduction of accreditation aimed at securing and maintaining standards in interviewing children. The study highlights areas of concern to officers, as well as examples of good practice currently occurring in forces. It indicates that officers support the concept of a national curriculum and provides an outline curriculum which incorporates many of the comments, ideas and suggestions generated through this research.

S W BOYS SMITH

Director of Police Policy

Home Office

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Executive summary

The 1991 *Criminal Justice Act* established that police officers and social workers should have joint responsibility for conducting investigative interviews with child complainants of sexual abuse. These interviews were to be governed by the guidelines prescribed by the *Memorandum of Good Practice* (Home Office/Department of Health, 1992) and were to be videotaped for use in any court proceedings. This report examines the training needs of officers involved in this specialised work. Specifically, the project involved:

- establishing the content and coverage of training in investigative interviewing in 12 representative forces;
- conducting focus group discussions with officers from these forces on the *strengths and weaknesses* of existing training; and,
- exploring the feasibility of a *national curriculum* encompassing the practical and theoretical knowledge necessary for the job and of some form of *national accreditation* for officers who reach and maintain the requisite standard.

Senior officers involved in child protection in the 12 forces agreed to be interviewed and to provide copies of their training materials. This confirmed that there were widespread *differences* in the *length, structure and content* of training between different forces. In addition, there were also major differences in the *organisation of teams, tenure rules and policy on CID status*

Themes derived from these interviews provided the topic guide for a series of *focus groups* run for managers, trainers and serving officers respectively, drawn from the participating forces. Analysis of these discussions suggested that while there remained general support for joint investigation and the principles of the Memorandum, there were considerable concerns over the content and structure of existing training.

As regard *content*, more attention needed to be paid to:

- relevant aspects of child development;
- interviewing suspects; and,
- tactics and behaviour of sex offenders.

As regard the *structure* of courses, there were calls for:

- trainers to have operational experience;
- a greater emphasis on interviewing practice; and,
- more opportunities to learn from viewing actual interviews.

Information derived from interviews, focus groups and existing training materials was combined with current research findings on interviewing to construct an

outline *national curriculum* This envisaged a two part course spaced over three working weeks, the bulk of which was thought appropriate for both police officer and social worker trainees. This was presented to a specially convened *National Consultative Conference* attended by representatives of 38 of the 43 police forces in England and Wales.

The conference strongly endorsed the concept of a *national curriculum* which was seen as *likely to improve quality and consistency of training* in investigative interviewing. It would also *facilitate transfer of staff* between forces and could *enhance the status* of trained officers among colleagues and in the witness box. However, there was a strong feeling that any move toward a national curriculum should only be made with *full consultation with social services*. There was less consensus on the concept of *national accreditation*. Most delegates favoured the *accreditation of courses* rather than *individual accreditation* which was thought might lead to invidious comparisons being drawn between accredited and non-accredited officers in the courts and within units. More generally, officers favoured a *more proactive stance* in relation to child abuse investigations and a *greater emphasis on evidence gathering*. In this connection, there were calls for the *wider availability of detective training* and a *more settled policy on unit tenure*.

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1. Introduction

This report examines the training needs of police officers involved in the investigative interviewing of children. Since the publication of 'Working Together' (Department of Health et al., 1991), police officers and social workers have been jointly tasked with conducting child abuse investigations. As a consequence, most training in child protection is jointly conducted by the police and local authority social services personnel. The focus of the current research is on the efficacy of existing training from a police perspective and whether there is a need for a more uniform training curriculum. It is acknowledged that any move toward a national curriculum can only go ahead with the active support of both professions involved in child abuse investigations.

The techniques employed are derived, in part, from clinical audit which has been used successfully within the Health Service to develop and monitor good practice and secure change in practitioner behaviour (Buttery, Walshe, Coles and Bennett, 1994). The main advantage of the audit approach is that change, rather than being imposed from above, is mediated and driven by the professionals themselves.

Existing research on the training needs of police officers and social workers involved in child witness interviewing has identified an unfulfilled demand for higher and more uniform levels of training. This emerges consistently from all studies that have been conducted, ever since joint investigations into child protection became the norm in the late 1980s.

The emergence of joint investigations

One of the major conclusions of the Cleveland Enquiry (Butler-Sloss, 1988) was that professionals involved in interviewing young children needed to receive special training. The report noted that interviewers needed to be trained in non-suggestive questioning procedures. The report also drew attention to the need for police officers and social workers to work more closely together in child abuse enquiries and called for the setting up of integrated Specialist Assessment Teams. The idea was incorporated in the successful 'Bexley Experiment' (Metropolitan Police and London Borough of Bexley, 1987) where police and social workers in one London borough worked together in child abuse investigations. Within a few years, joint investigation of sexual abuse allegations became standard throughout England and Wales (Sanders, Jackson and Thomas, 1996).

Allied to changes in investigative procedures were changes in the management of abuse investigations. Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs) brought together representatives from the social work, health and education sectors together with police representatives to manage inter-agency co-ordination of abuse

investigations. Spurred on by the recommendation of 'Working Together' (1991), police forces began to set up specialised units devoted to child protection. By 1996, all but one of the police forces in England and Wales had such specialist units. These had a variety of titles (Child Protection Team; Family Unit; Family Service Unit) and a range of remits (Parker, Gallagher and Hughes, 1996).

The Pigot Report

Meanwhile legislation governing the gathering of evidence in child abuse investigations was developing apace. In 1988, the Home Office had set up a committee under His Honour Judge Thomas Pigot, QC. This explored the possibility of videotaping investigative interviews with children with a view to incorporating such interviews as evidence in prosecutions for sexual abuse. Following the positive recommendations of the Pigot Committee Report (1989), the 1991 Criminal Justice Act incorporated proposals for police and social workers to conduct joint investigative interviews with child complainants of abuse. Such interviews were to be videotaped and could be substituted for the child's live examination in chief at court. Children would still, however, have to attend court to be cross-examined live in the courtroom or via a closed-circuit television link (Davies and Noon, 1991).

The Pigot Committee had noted that these video interviews were simultaneously investigative and evidential. They would need to be conducted in accord with the Rules of Evidence if they were to play any part in court proceedings. Accordingly, the Home Office in conjunction with the Department of Health developed 'The Memorandum of Good Practice on Video Recorded Interviews with Child Witnesses for Criminal Proceedings' (1992: hereafter the Memorandum).

The Memorandum of Good Practice

The core of the Memorandum concerns the importance of correct interviewing style and largely resulted from a survey of research and best practice commissioned from a psychologist and a lawyer (Bull, 1995). The philosophy of the Memorandum was that, as far as possible, children should tell their own story, assisted by prompts and questions of gradually increasing explicitness known as the 'phased interview'. The Memorandum was published in August 1992 to coincide with the implementation of the Act. It also contains a technical appendix on recording interviews and legal guidance on issues surrounding the styles of questioning to be employed with children.

The requirements of the Memorandum had training implications for both the police and social services. A number of 'trickle down' training sessions were

arranged for police officers and social workers at Hendon Police College. Groups of key staff received training on the Memorandum in anticipation that they in turn would pass on their knowledge at a local level. These sessions threw up sharply discrepant interpretations of some aspects of the Memorandum recommendations and pointed to the need for clear guidance on key issues (Davies and Wilson, 1997). The Open University had been commissioned by the Department of Health to prepare a training package primarily directed at social workers, although this was not available until February 1993. The Open University pack continues to be used as part of training by two thirds of local authorities (Holton and Bonnerjea, 1994; Westcott and Davies, 1996) and by some police forces. Although Hughes, Parker and Gallagher (1996), reported officers' complaints that the material provided is too rudimentary for their needs. After this rather uncertain start, training initiatives rapidly picked up at a local level for both police officers and social workers. Much of this training was orchestrated through the Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs) with occasional special events laid on for the particular needs of police officers and social workers. Such events frequently drew upon the expertise of outside training consultants, but it seems as though there was little co-ordination or coherence to these individual initiatives beyond an adherence to the tenets of the Memorandum.

Concerns over training

In 1992, 19% of police officers and 32% of social workers questioned in a Home Office survey, spontaneously mentioned concerns over insufficient training and/or resources as an anticipated disadvantage of the new Act. However a second survey conducted over a year later suggested that fears over training needs had reduced considerably among those with practical experience of its effects (Davies, Wilson, Mitchell and Milsom, 1995). This survey also revealed almost unanimous support among social workers and police officers for the Memorandum and this support was sustained over time. A sample of taped interviews from police sources examined by the same researchers suggested that many interviewers were successful in translating the recommendations of the Memorandum into practice. Indeed, 73% of the sample of tapes were judged by the researchers to provide a clear account of the alleged incident and 60% of the interviews were appropriately structured. The report concluded that while the provisions of the 1991 Act appeared to have got off to a good start there was still a need for "an agreed curriculum and properly accredited national standards for trainers and training courses for interviewers" (Davies et al., 1995: iv).

Concerns over the variability of training also emerged from the Department of Health's study of the implementation of the Memorandum by social workers

(Holton and Bonnerjea, 1994). The report also noted that co-operation with the police was rated as good or very good in 90% of the local authorities responding. Joint training in both general awareness training and in more specialised courses was the norm. The report noted the variability in the length and content of training in comparable authorities and called for actual interview training to be focused on a small cadre of specialist workers.

A later survey of training needs directed at ACPCs (Westcott and Davies, 1996) highlighted continuing concerns surrounding Memorandum training. The respondents, who were overwhelmingly from a social work background, particularly instanced the need for further training in:

- the interviewing of children with special needs;
- those whose first language was not English; and,
- familiarity training for managers.

Also expressed was the need for:

- a national curriculum;
- a greater emphasis on child development; and,
- practical experience of conducting the interviews.

Police support for the idea of national training standards emerged from a study of child protection teams in 10 police forces conducted by Hughes, Parker and Gallagher (1996). This involved in-depth interviews with 33 officers from child protection teams as well as a residential conference attended by representatives of the participating forces. The researchers concluded that the officers felt ill-equipped to deal effectively with child protection work and singled out a number of priority training needs. Three main gaps in knowledge were identified:

- child development;
- perpetrators and their behaviour; and,
- complex and organised cases of abuse.

In addition, they shared the concerns of their colleagues in social work for:

- more specialised interview training; and,
- training in the interviewing of suspected perpetrators.

The police officers interviewed felt that national training standards should be established, based on a multi-disciplinary core curriculum. This should be applicable not only to the police but to all other professionals involved in child protection, including barristers and the judiciary.

Aims of the study

The fund of goodwill toward the videotape provisions of the 1991 Act held by police officers and social workers has not been dissipated by practical experience. Both groups, however, share concerns that the content and consistency of training currently available falls short of what is required. One solution to these concerns could be some form of national curriculum. The main aims of this study were, therefore:

- to identify the content and coverage of training in investigative interviewing in 12 representative forces;
- to explore with police officers involved in child protection the perceived strengths and weaknesses of existing training;
- to identify the practical and theoretical knowledge required by officers involved in investigative interviewing;
- to examine the feasibility of a national curriculum as a means of delivering this knowledge; and,
- to identify aspects of the 'Memorandum of Good Practice' that may require revision in the light of practical experience in its use by police personnel.

Methodology

The project involved four phases spread over a 14 month period.

First phase

12 forces were chosen on the basis of geographical location and urban/rural population to provide a representative sample. These were:

- Cambridgeshire Constabulary
- Cumbria Constabulary
- Dorset Police
- Gloucestershire Constabulary
- Greater Manchester Police
- Lincolnshire Police
- Metropolitan Police Service
- Northumbria Police
- North Wales Police
- Nottinghamshire Constabulary
- South Wales Police
- Thames Valley Police.

Each force received an initial visit from one or more members of the research team, who used a semi-structured interview schedule to provide a focus on training issues. This sought to establish the force history of training in interviewing children; its present policy; the content of joint investigation courses; and initial thoughts on the Memorandum. Officers were also asked to provide information on: the structure of child protection teams; the extent of inter-agency co-operation; storage of videos; and any policy concerning the production of transcripts to accompany video interviews.

Second phase

Subsequent to these preparatory interviews a series of focus group sessions were organised, incorporating personnel from the 12 participating forces:

- three sessions were held with officers who worked within child protection on a day-to-day basis and who are required to video interview children;
- one group consisted of officers with some responsibility for training within their force; dedicated trainers with a major role in planning and implementing joint investigation courses, and others who combined training duties with other operational responsibilities; and,
- one group brought together managers and officers with a role in policy making, often with an input to their ACPC.

Third phase

The third phase, curriculum development, involved the creation of an outline training package. To validate this package a process of 'triangulation' was used.

Fourth Phase

Initial proposals for the package were disseminated at a national conference for officers in July 1997. All forces throughout England and Wales were invited to this event, and 38 of the 43 forces were represented by at least one officer. In addition, all officers who had attended the training focus group were invited. A total of 47 officers attended, plus representatives from social services and the Department of Health.

This event provided the opportunity to gauge reactions to the draft training proposals, to glean further suggestions to progress the training package, and to incorporate any additional proposals into the final report.

The report

The rest of this report presents the information and ideas generated in the different stages of the research project. Section Two presents an analysis of the joint investigation course programmes provided. By collating the data from the interviews carried out in the first phase of the research with the comments from the focus groups and the Consultative Conference, the section presents the current picture with regards to existing training arrangements, including organisation of training, content of courses available and other associated issues. Section Three outlines the core principles for a national curriculum. Section Four discusses the issues associated with a national curriculum including the accreditation of courses, operational and resource implications, specialist training, input from judges and CPS staff and the role of the Memorandum in the training of child protection officers.

2. Training in child protection

The visits carried out during the first phase of research and the collation of materials provided by these forces enabled a comparative analysis of current child protection arrangements to be undertaken. This highlights the diversity of policy and practice that currently exists. In addition, the focus groups and the Consultative Conference contributed information about how officers viewed the adequacy of training, and issues such as accreditation. The three methods of data collection illustrate that forces vary with respect to:

- policies on child protection units;
- the structure, content, format and organisation of joint investigation courses; and,
- timing of training, including refresher training.

Child protection units

In 11 of the sample forces there was a specific team to deal with child protection work. In the remaining force there was a fully trained child protection officer on each division, whose major responsibility was the interviewing of children. Not all of these teams dealt solely with child protection, and this was often reflected in their titles: some were known as 'family units', 'family support units', or 'family service units'. In practice, this meant that alongside child protection work, officers could deal with, for example, domestic violence, vulnerable persons, or racial incidents.

Accreditation of officers

Although an earlier survey (Westcott and Davies, 1996), targeted at ACPCs, indicated that 62% of police officers had their performance evaluated during training, most forces we spoke to 'passed' their officers as ready for video interviewing on the basis of them having attended the appropriate course. However, although no force seemed to have secured accreditation as yet, some forces had already made moves to standardise their courses. Greater Manchester, for example, had set up its joint investigation course on a pass/defer basis. This meant that officers could not interview children if they had not reached a specified standard in practice interviews, and therefore had to return at a later stage in order to re-train. This force hoped to award a certificate for those passing the course at some point in the future. Another force had secured accreditation for their actual course, although officers themselves would not individually receive accredited status. The advantage of this is that police officers can declare in court that they have attended an accredited course. Cambridgeshire had devised a set of competency requirements for video interview training, which they were planning to implement in 1997.

In the focus groups, officers favoured accreditation, because of the standardisation it would bring to courses. Officers also felt it would ensure a certain level of quality was both attained and maintained in video interviewing. Moreover, they felt that it would give officers and social workers added credibility when in court: *'a recognised standing as an expert witness in the Crown Court'* It would also facilitate transfer between forces without the need for retraining.

Accreditation could also ensure that officers with the necessary skills were working within child protection. Most officers we spoke to agreed that child protection work is traditionally seen as being low in status, with such names attached to it as 'the dolly-mixture squad', 'the baby-sitting squad' and 'the shopping squad'. The work is often regarded as a safe option, a 'cushy number'. Some forces tried to dispel this myth by attaching officers to child protection units for varying lengths of time. One force had nine month attachments, another force had six month attachments, and others two or three month attachments. This idea, alongside a formal accreditation system for joint investigation courses, might ensure that consistently high calibre officers were recruited onto units.

However, some expressed doubts over accreditation, fearing that some forces might be able to secure accreditation earlier than others. If this was the case, it would have an effect on the perceived competency of non-accredited officers giving evidence in a Crown Court normally served by accredited officers.

CID status

Whether officers had detective status varied from force to force. In some, however, where officers were not given detective status, the force was considering seconding officers for CID training.

In others, officers were given detective status, even though they may not have been CID trained. In this situation, officers often lost this status when they came off the units. In some forces, officers would not be accepted onto units unless they had already been trained to CID level. When discussed in the focus groups, it was felt that full CID training might not be appropriate, as a whole CID course might contain less relevant material, and that it was more useful to attend a 'tailor-made' course.

Tenure

Most forces had a tenure policy for officers working within child protection, but length appeared to vary widely: a range from three years to seven years.

Training

The analysis of the training provided to child protection officers presented here covers elements included in the *joint investigation* courses but does not take into account anything offered in other courses or seminars that might be available. Secondly, this is an overview of material actually *delivered* during the courses. Other issues may be included in literature supplied to officers, but since officers may or may not read this material, it has not been included.

Organisation of training

For many forces, the main training in interviewing children was undertaken as a component of joint investigation courses. Joint training is not only an efficient way to deliver training, but also promotes effective working practices between the police officers and social workers.

Length and structure of training

For the 12 forces involved in the study, the time allocated ranged from five to 10 days. Additional information gathered at the national Consultative Conference suggested that some forces have courses lasting less than five days, whilst others trained officers for more than 10 days. The variation in length of the courses seemed dependent on both the content and the availability of other courses which might supplement it. For example, feedback from the Consultative Conference suggested that some areas ran other police-only courses on investigative methods in addition to the joint agency course.

Many of the 12 forces trained officers and social workers in one intensive session. Others chose a modular approach, where training was divided into several discrete sessions. Where this was done, work might be set for officers to be done between the phases. Others required course participants to have undertaken some preparatory reading before attending the course.

The question of the best way to structure training was posed to our management officers in the focus groups and there seemed to be advantages to both approaches. 'Blitzing' officers in one session ensured they were trained within a relatively short period of time and might have the benefit of giving officers the added confidence of knowing that they had been fully trained. However, conducting a course in stages enabled trainers to set work between modules in preparation for future phases, and meant that the practical problems of extracting officers from the workplace for more lengthy periods, were overcome. Whilst recognising cost implications, one officer argued that there may be a case

for both approaches – ‘to be blitzed at the start and then a rolling programme just to keep you going’

Refresher training

Most of the sample forces interviewed suggested they would like to provide refresher training, but few did so. Although joint investigation courses are conducted at fairly regular intervals, many of the unit level officers interviewed in the focus groups had undergone a joint investigation course ranging from between two years to over four years previously. Coupled with a lack of updating in training, this meant that some of the more experienced officers might not be aware of new developments in the field of child interviewing. As one officer put it:

I might have done an occasional day here and there but as for joint training for courses, it's 10 days training in eight years, it's not a lot really

Therefore officers were receiving a basic level of training, but were often not updated or refreshed on this training. Another officer stated that:

We have not had refresher or update or additional information regarding video – once you're trained, you're trained – go out and do it.

Both the managers and the training officers we spoke to were highly in favour of refresher courses. Many of them recognised that their force was deficient in this aspect, and indeed some were already moving towards this. A unit level officer from Cambridgeshire, described how the force was intending to provide refresher training for officers every two years in the form of a three day course where officers would be required to take along two of their videos in order for them to be critically assessed. Another force required officers to practice interviewing child actors in the video suite.

Additional seminars and workshops

In addition to the main joint investigation course, there appeared to be many other courses available to officers. These were generally shorter seminars/workshops to be attended on a voluntary rather than compulsory basis and were designed for all agencies with a role in child protection. They tended to deal with more specific areas that were of use to officers, but not essential for entry to child protection. There were also other courses run exclusively for the police which covered investigative issues in greater detail.

Who trains?

Different forces made use of different training arrangements for their joint investigation courses. Some provided training drawn equally from police and social services personnel, whilst in others one agency took primary responsibility. In other regions, there were specific ACPC trainers who organised and carried out the training of both police officers and social workers. Police trainers were either dedicated or generic, although in some forces, serving officers took on this role in addition to their operational duties. In some of the 12 forces sampled, outside speakers and consultants lectured on particular topics such as child development, the law and the legal profession, or children with special needs.

Mode of training

All of the sample forces trained through a combination of lectures, case studies and practical exercises. The opportunity to practice Memorandum style interviews was often provided through role play scenarios involving police officers and social workers. In some cases adult actors impersonated abused children in order to increase the relevance and realism of the training. Others brought in child actors, while others involved school children who could be interviewed about non-abusive incidents which they had experienced. Thames Valley, for example, asked children to watch a video of an incident such as a car chase, and then interviewed them about it.

Outside visits were deemed useful and included a visit to a video suite to familiarise officers with the available facilities, and a Crown Court visit incorporating a meeting with the witness liaison officer.

One officer was concerned that basic information and skills could be lost in situations where officers did not join a child protection unit until several months after training. In this respect, the idea of memory prompts or 'aide memoires' was useful. One force had designed a cue card for use after training:

We've got little A5 filofax size perspex miniatures of the rapport stage..... with some pointers on the other side. So if you're in an interview and you haven't done one for a long time and you want your mind jogging, it's just down by your side, you know, your different stages.

Course content

There was diversity between forces with regards to the content of the courses, and a wide range of topics were covered. These can be categorised into several broad areas; child development, interviewing, interagency working, the law, abusers, investigations and working with families.

Child development

11 of the 12 forces included some information that could be broadly termed 'child development'. Under this topic more specific subjects such as memory and recall, competence of the child, and age appropriate sexual behaviour were included. One force provided an input on the cognitive development of children and another also included information on developmental issues with regards to special needs.

Other elements in the courses included:

- rights of children;
- dynamics of child abuse;
- myths and realities; and,
- defining sexuality.

In the focus groups a common concern emerged that the courses did not contain enough input on child development. This aspect was mentioned in all five focus groups and was a concern also highlighted by Hughes et al., (1996). One officer suggested that at present officers had to rely on personal experience:

I don't think that there's sufficient input for our force in child development, which I think is something that we probably, as police officers without any training, know very little of other than personal experience.

It was suggested that gaining this knowledge would be hard for officers without children of their own, and other officers thought that an input from a child psychologist would be useful. Problems included tailoring questions to the particular age of the child:

Because we're not taught about how different ages react, especially when you're not a mum, you don't automatically know what a two year old does, you don't automatically know what a six year old understands and it's just learning, but you shouldn't be learning it, you should already know it really because it's too late when you're sat in that interview room, you need to have a good understanding and we're not trained in that at all.

There were also problems associated with children's concept of time, and with questions that have a straightforward meaning to adults, but which children interpret in a completely different way:

The classic example of the question that everybody seems to ask is how did that feel and the child says horrible and that's not the answer that we want.

To assist with this problem, North Wales had adopted an interesting practice and brought in a linguist from a local university to assess videos for their use of appropriate language.

Interviewing

Not surprisingly, all forces included information on interviewing. In particular, all of the forces included some information on the Memorandum of Good Practice, video interviewing or the phased approach to questioning children. Although the content varied from force to force, topics covered included:

- guidelines on video interviewing, including the conduct of the interview, guidelines for recording evidence and interviewing protocols for the police and social services;
- training for officers and social workers on aspects prior to interview, such as procedures, planning and preparation;
- technical aspects of video interviewing, including familiarisation and use of the video equipment; and,
- procedures following interview. This included evaluating videos, witness preparation and care, information on the security and labelling of videos and use of the video index.

In addition to the information about Memorandum style interviewing, three forces incorporated information on other types of interviewing. One included information on interviewing the suspect and cognitive interviewing, whilst another provided a history of investigative interviewing. Two forces also supplied information on the PEACE model of interviewing, although for one, this aspect was aimed more at social workers than police officers.

A relatively common concern expressed in the focus groups on the subject of interviewing was that officers and social workers were not adequately trained in the 'how' of interviewing and questioning techniques:

What we lack all the way through I think is how do you speak, what questions do you ask, actually doing the interview. I think we're quite well versed in the procedures, because that's laid out for us now, but the actual how do you speak to these people, there is very little on it.

Practising interviewing skills

All joint investigation courses incorporated the opportunity for officers and social workers to practice Memorandum style interviews. However, the type of practice offered on these courses varied, as did the number of mock interviews conducted.

In order to obtain practice, some training courses used role play only. Officers were required to rotate the parts of interviewer, observer and child. The advantage of role play included the lower costs involved compared to hiring actors.

However, where budgets permitted, there were significant advantages in bringing in actors for officers to practise their developing skills. Some courses hired adult actors to play the part of children, whereas others brought in children for these mock interviews. There seems to be both advantages and disadvantages to these methods. By using adult actors a sexual abuse scenario could be enacted and officers could practise retrieving relevant details. Although this could not be carried out with children, it was recognised that they could be used more generally to help officers practise pitching questions to the developmental level of particular ages and abilities. Thames Valley had staged events for children and then interviewed them about these events. One incident involved a mock burglary staged by the dog section of the force, whilst another involved a helicopter ride.

Although all the groups agreed that the opportunity to conduct mock interviews was an essential part of any course, the amount and number of practice interviews officers conducted varied. In some cases, officers carried out one interview, and sat in on two or three others. Other forces allowed officers to conduct between two or three interviews. It was clear that officers would like more practice in interviewing to be provided. One unit level officer suggested that a whole week of solidly practising interviews and doing role plays would be beneficial!

Viewing sample interviews

All the focus group participants agreed that viewing sample interviews was very useful and should be included in all courses as it offered the opportunity to learn from others' strengths and weaknesses and might provide alternative perspectives on various aspects of interviewing. This idea was favoured as a precursor to a training course, as part of the actual joint investigation course, and as part of a refresher course undertaken at a later date. Officers felt that evaluation of their own videos was useful in order to receive constructive criticism and feedback on them.

This method had already been introduced in some forces. Dorset allowed participants to take their videos home to assess them and Lincolnshire provided a tape transcript from which officers could identify what had gone wrong in an interview, for example, the use of leading questions.

The groups all recognised the need to gain more formal feedback on video interviews. Some forces routinely sampled the videos of completed or discontinued cases in order to view them to assess video quality and interviewer standards. The groups also expressed the need for formal feedback from the legal profession.

Inter-agency working

Information on inter-agency working included working together arrangements and joint investigations, roles and responsibilities, the work of Child Protection Unit (CPU) officers, needs and constraints, the roles of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and the county council legal section, and staff issues.

Most of the forces trained on general issues concerning joint working and joint investigations. This covered:

- working agreements;
- the promotion of working together and inter-agency partnership;
- procedures and process; and,
- the background to joint investigations.

Other areas covered by some of the forces included:

- the roles, responsibilities and needs of the police and social services;
- information on the CPS and solicitors;
- appropriate adults;
- dealing with job stress and anger, self care and the impact of child sexual abuse on professionals; and,
- one force included information and material on child protection conferences.

In the focus groups, one officer described a two day course on 'working together', where problems concerned with inter-agency co-operation were discussed, priorities of agencies explained and work pressures outlined. This course included not only the police and social services, but also the probation service and some voluntary organisations. In general, officers viewed the residential component of joint courses as most valuable in helping to eradicate barriers between staff. It was favoured at the start rather than the end of courses.

A general feeling was expressed in the focus groups that the police did not communicate as effectively as they might, both between and within forces. Many officers felt that regular 'get-togethers' would be extremely useful, whereby officers could share concerns and worries and be updated on issues, in a similar fashion to our focus groups. These fora would also be a suitable means of refreshing officers on the latest developments within the field. One training officer also felt this would help achieve some kind of consistency between areas.

Law and legal issues

A core of the training given was on the law and the legal process. Topics within this included:

- the law and police powers, including PACE;
- criminal and civil law, including the Children Act 1989;
- the criminal and civil court, including pre-trial issues;
- current issues with respect to child witnesses and the law; and,
- the evidential value of video interviews.

Abusers

Information related to abusers was included in eight forces' programmes. This typically included:

- effect on the child and non-abusing parent;
- child pornography; and,
- sex offending behaviour and offender profiling.

In the focus groups, officers expressed the desire for greater input on sex offenders within courses, a point which has also been noted by Hughes et al., (1996). They felt that this reflected the general move towards a more proactive approach to child protection.

Evidence

Seven forces in this study covered aspects related to evidence gathering. This covered:

- forensic issues;
- medical signs of abuse;
- statement taking; and,
- one force included training on investigating network abuse.

Working with children and families

This featured in two thirds of the sample forces' training. Topics varied but could include:

- communicating with children;
- the non-abusing parent/adult/carer;
- working with the family;
- family norms;
- disabled children;
- domestic violence;
- race and culture; and,
- Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy.

The majority of the sample forces felt that it was important to include training on the social and emotional impact of child sexual abuse and the effect on the child including child development, the family, and the non-offending parent or carer. One force also included input on the effect on professionals.

The Memorandum of Good Practice

In a previous study (Hughes et al., 1996), it had been suggested that the Memorandum should be rewritten. However, in this study, it seemed that officers largely supported a Memorandum style document, although they did draw attention to aspects that needed revision.

One aspect of the Memorandum supported by the officers was its physical layout. They appreciated the bold type and the highlighted sections which made it easy to read. They also welcomed the fact that the Memorandum contains guidelines rather than rigid rules. This provided the necessary flexibility when interviewing children for whom formalised procedures were inappropriate.

However, officers drew attention to the following weaknesses and ambiguities:

- the recommended length of one hour per interview. Although this is only a 'rule of thumb', officers were wary of exceeding this guideline because they felt that it might weaken a case;
- 'tests' of truth and lies. All groups felt that guidance should be given on whether this was necessary in an interview, and on what type of test was appropriate;
- the extent and detail required for the rapport stage of the phased interview. Some officers felt it was sometimes too long and could perhaps be omitted altogether if the interviewer has had previous contact with the child;
- children with special needs. The general consensus was that the Memorandum does not adequately cater for those children who have learning disabilities, physical disabilities, or who come from a different cultural background; and,
- the need to update the document to reflect the experiences of those using it.

3. Towards a national curriculum

Our survey of different police forces has revealed that there is considerable variation in policy and practice in relation to the selection and training of officers involved in child protection duties. Significant divergence emerged in relation to:

- selection and recruitment of candidates;
- length and distribution of training;
- content of material covered on courses; and,
- criteria for assessing and maintaining competence.

That there should be some variation in provision is not in itself surprising given that child protection in general, and child witness interviewing in particular, are relatively recent specialist areas of police work. Local initiative and a readiness to experiment and innovate can be a healthy influence on practice. However, too heterogeneous an approach may lead to unacceptable variation in quality of service delivery to the public, and in particular to child complainants of sexual abuse. Inconsistent standards of training in turn may lead to gross variability in the way cases are investigated and interviews conducted, with resulting discrepancies in submission rates to the CPS and consequent differences in outcome at court. Evidence for such regional variability on key indicators was evident in the ACPO survey conducted in 1993 on video interviewing practice across forces in England and Wales (Butler, 1993). The dangers of a lack of clear training standards is a fresh twist to the 'justice by geography' comment which Dame Barbara Mills, the ex-Head of the CPS, has suggested might typify the fate of child abuse investigations.

A national training standard

For these reasons, we believe there is a strong case for the establishment of national training standards in relation to child witness interviewing. The research reviewed in Section One revealed existing widespread support for such standards amongst serving officers. The results of our own survey of representatives at the Consultative Conference on training conducted as part of this research, showed overwhelming support (84%, n=31) among officers from the 38 forces represented for some form of national curriculum involved in the area.

Among the advantages adduced for a national training standard were:

- consistency of practice across police forces;
- more uniform levels of service to children alleging abuse;
- greater ease of transfer of staff between different forces;
- enhanced status for child protection, bringing it into line with other specialised areas of police work; and,
- greater credibility of officers when giving evidence in court.

Some core principles for a national curriculum

Given the rapid developments in knowledge and techniques, and the wealth of practical experience available to trainers and consultants in the area, it is essential that any move toward a national scheme should not inhibit innovation. The aim should be to establish a 'core' curriculum of specified topics to which new or additional material may be added. Likewise, in presenting such topics, it would be entirely appropriate for local courses to reflect local needs. For example, while the issues surrounding the interviewing of children from ethnic minorities should be covered in all courses, it might be the subject of more extended coverage in those areas where minorities make up a significant proportion of the population. Likewise, there may be a need to modify some parts of the courses to cater more specifically for the background and the needs of social work personnel.

Our discussions with officers as well as the existing research literature on principles of training suggest a number of key features which ought to inform courses in joint investigation interviewing. Section Two suggests that many forces embody some of these themes in their existing training but few incorporate all.

The need for 'hands-on' experience of interviewing

Many officers emphasised the need for sufficient time to be given to practice investigative interviewing as part of training. While practice without accompanying knowledge is as valueless as knowledge without practice, we believe that practice at interviewing should feature at *all* stages of training. One officer suggested that a figure of 30 to 40% of the total training time should be given over to such 'hands-on' experience. From the point of view of feedback and development these interviews should be video recorded whenever possible. If resources do not permit video recording, audio recording could be used. We believe that individual and informed feedback on performance is the key to the development of effective interviewing skills.

Training to include the interviewing of children

All of the practice interviewing techniques described earlier are valuable and have their place, but are no substitute for actual experience of interviewing an unfamiliar child. The constraints on thinking and knowledge, the misconceptions implicit in even the most apparently simple questions are best experienced by direct practice with child interviewees. Although children could in principle be interviewed about any life experience, there are significant advantages in staging a special event which can be discretely recorded, so that the accuracy of the account elicited by the interviewer can be directly assessed. There is ample scope

for local innovation and variation here, but even the most innocuous activities, such as having the child's photograph taken, can provide the raw material for profitable interviewing practice.

Opportunity should be given for trainees to view tapes of actual interviews

It has been repeatedly put to us that officers and social workers in training lack a clear idea of what is an acceptable interview. They may set unfeasibly high standards for themselves which are inevitably not fulfilled or believe that all that is required is the exercise of robust common sense. For this reason, the viewing of actual tapes of witness interviews has much to commend it. The process of exposure and critique is inevitably stressful for those who have conducted such interviews, but it is only through observing such material that trainees gain a realistic expectation of the demands of the job and the pitfalls and rewards associated with interviewing young children on the sensitive issues surrounding abuse.

The need for clear and consistent policy on entry criteria

Like many other areas of specialised police operations, not all police officers show aptitude for child protection work. It is important that those officers who possess the necessary personal skills and qualities are attracted to the work and those who do not are counselled away into other areas of police work which play to their strengths.

In selecting trainees, it is possible to draw up an intuitive list of those personal skills which officers should possess which could then be developed through training. This list might include strong interpersonal skills (empathy, rapid rapport building), good listening skills and practical experience of working with young people. Some forces ask applicants to sit an aptitude test or to undergo an interview where these personal qualities and relevant knowledge can be assessed. However, there are difficulties in such an approach and criteria have yet to be developed which can predict the successful child interviewer.

In the absence of such validated criteria, perhaps the best method of selection is through some form of on-job experience. We have noted the policy of some forces of first attaching successful recruits to Child Protection Teams for up to nine months to test their aptitude and stamina. Others ensure that all prospective members undergo a child protection training course where the candidates' qualities will become clear, both to the supervisor and the candidate themselves. Given the present state of knowledge, either of these procedures seems preferable to a complete reliance on an interview or aptitude testing. All methods of selection are preferable to no formal selection at all, which appears still to be the case in a minority of forces.

An outline of the national curriculum

While developing an effective interview style will always form the core of any national scheme, such skills need to be informed by a range of knowledge. Much of this information is new and derived from recent or ongoing research in psychology, criminology and social work. Officers also need to be aware of the legal requirements of their work and where they sit within the organisational structure which governs child protection. The intention should not be to mount an explicitly academic course for trainees, but rather, to provide them with sufficient information to perform their job effectively. Like medical GPs, they should also have enough knowledge to appreciate the limits on their skills and when to call on more experienced and/or specialised staff to deal with particularly difficult cases. Our discussions identified nine areas of which officers might reasonably expect to have a working knowledge:

i) Inter-agency workingovers such issues as the roles and responsibilities of the police, the social services and the Crown Prosecution Service in monitoring child abuse investigations, the make-up and management of area child protection teams, and the philosophy and working practice embodied in 'Working Together' and the Memorandum. Information concerning case conferences would also be included.

ii) Law and legal issues involves a grasp of the legal requirements governing the conduct of child abuse investigations and the rules of evidence as they apply to child witnesses. Other central aspects would include the rules governing the admissibility of childrens' statements and the distinctions between civil and criminal proceedings.

iii) Technical aspects of interviewing would cover how to set up and record an interview with a child in accordance with the technical appendix of the Memorandum.

iv) The Memorandum covers the core issues surrounding the conduct of interviews and would include such issues as:

- planning and preparing the interview;
- phases of the interview;
- styles of questioning;
- issues around pre-interviewing; and,
- requirements concerning childrens' understanding of truth and lies.

Other, more advanced topics could include:

- specialised interviewing procedures such as the use of anatomical dolls, drawings and models with children; and,

- the cognitive interview.

v) *Child development* refers to a range of issues surrounding the child's mental development and capacity to give testimony such as:

- memory development;
- secrets and lies;
- suggestibility;
- use of language; and,
- childrens' fears and knowledge about the legal process.

vi) *Sexual behaviour* would cover information on the normal growth of sexual behaviour in girls and boys; the most common forms of sexual abuse; what is currently known about the behaviour of abusers, tactics and grooming behaviour.

vii) *Evidence gathering and investigation* would encompass investigating sexual abuse in both domestic and non-domestic settings. It would also extend to the investigation of abuse within organisations (such as children's homes or youth groups) and could also include case studies of network abuse. Medical and forensic indicators of abuse would also be outlined.

viii) *Working with children and families* would incorporate information on communicating with children, family norms, working with the non-abusing parent or carer, along with the impact of child sexual abuse on the child and the family. Information concerning children with special needs (for example, learning disabilities, communication impairments, ethnic minorities and traumatised children) would also be included.

ix) *Job stress and coping* reflects the particular stressors associated with child abuse investigations and the risks of 'burn-out' associated with the job. Both officers and social workers need to be appraised of coping strategies, common symptoms of stress and where to seek help in the event of the pressures of work threatening the health and well-being of themselves and their families.

Clearly, the list of topics subsumed under these headings are indicative rather than complete and comprehensive, though following our Consultative Conference, we are confident that we have covered the main broad areas of expertise upon which officers currently draw in their work. We do not pretend to have uncovered vast new areas of knowledge which have been ignored by earlier training. Rather, what we have attempted to do is to bring together examples from a variety of existing training schemes in a systematic way, aided by the suggestions and feedback of the

officers involved.

'Foundation' and 'Advanced' training

That there should be some selectivity in topics covered in training is entirely understandable. The training literature makes the distinction between 'essential' and 'desirable' knowledge and this distinction applies to the training of child abuse investigators as to any other group. Within each of the nine areas identified there will be topics which are perceived by forces as central and basic and others of a more specialist nature which can be left until after the acquisition of basic skills. This is recognised in training courses which distinguish between 'foundation' and 'advanced' courses. At our Conference, the majority of officers present thought this distinction valuable and opted for a training pattern involving a two week 'foundation' course followed at a later time by a one week 'advanced' course. There was, however, no consensus over what topics should be allocated to each course. Our own ideas on the distribution of topics are provided in Appendix One for illustration and comment. It is envisaged that the 'foundation' element would be run by the local ACPC and include both police and social workers as trainers and trainees. It would include a residential element in the light of the very positive comments received on its impact on inter-agency co-operation. This would also provide the opportunity for visits to relevant facilities. The 'advanced' course was designed with the operational needs of the police more in mind and having completed both this and the previous 'foundation' course to a satisfactory level, course participants would then receive accreditation. However, if inter-agency training at all levels was the norm, then some of the more specialised material could be put into a separate police course and this course would also be suitable for both groups.

The need for trainees to reach a 'pass' standard

The mere provision of a national curriculum training however structured, will not in itself ensure that standards are uniform and high in Memorandum training. It is also necessary that trainees reach a minimum standard of competence in the interviews they conduct. Students who, for whatever reason, fail to reach that standard would be required to undergo retraining or seek transfer to another area of policing. As noted, a decision to pass or refer is already used by some ACPCs in an effort to control the quality of interviewing conducted in their area, and we believe it has much to commend it. It is, however, not entirely without some attendant difficulties. Most importantly, it requires trainers to specify what is the minimum level of competence acceptable for the work. This may well be possible by defining competence in relation to the requirements of the Memorandum, though a mere

rigid adherence to its precepts does not in itself guarantee an effective interview. There is a need for some agreed national guidelines on competency which might be drawn up with the aid of experienced officers and external training consultants, as currently occurs in at least one force area. Indeed, responses at the Consultative Conference showed a degree of support for the concept of external accreditation. Although 39% (n=14) did not support such an idea, 30% (n=11) did, and the remaining officers were unsure.

Other training needs

As we have noted, child protection and interviewing are rapidly developing areas of knowledge and there is a need for even the most experienced officers to keep up to date with developments. A few forces already recognise this through the provision of *refresher training* for serving officers in child protection teams and we believe that this form of training needs to be more widely available, particularly for those officers who stay on units for long periods.

There are a number of models for refresher training. One ACPC brings together officers and social workers on a six monthly basis to review tapes made by the staff which are then discussed and analysed. Another ACPC runs regular conferences where visiting speakers with specialised, up to date knowledge, present and discuss their findings. ACPO has sponsored a series of regular meetings for representatives of police child protection teams, where operational issues can be discussed at length. We commend all such initiatives and see them as an essential element of continuing training, not merely for the dissemination of valuable information, but for giving officers the opportunity to share common issues and concerns that they face in this line of duty.

A second need concerns *training for managers and senior ranks* on the realities of child protection work. Again, some forces have seized the initiative in running short courses for management personnel which they see as essential for the optimal operational use of the specialised skills of child protection teams. This point was raised by officers in a number of our focus groups. One example offered of a lack of awareness by senior staff were instances where child witnesses to crime were interviewed by CID staff, rather than being referred to their trained colleagues in child protection. Provision of short (one/two day) courses for senior staff, perhaps combining elements of existing Memorandum training with more specialised operational input, would do much to improve the profile and effectiveness of child protection teams.

Conclusion

Our survey of existing training provision suggests it is possible to construct a comprehensive and deliverable national curriculum from the best practice of existing courses. We have identified nine areas of knowledge with which officers should be familiar and which need to be combined with practice at the core skills of interviewing in realistic and relevant settings. Refresher training is needed to ensure continuing quality assurance and short courses should be made available to managers and senior ranks.

4. Discussion

There seems to be widespread support from within the police service and outside for some form of national curriculum for officers involved in the investigative interviewing of children. This support emerges from all previous research and was evident among officers involved in our focus groups and those who attended the Consultative Conference. However, this general support for a national training standard was not without residual concerns. In this section we tackle some of these concerns and consider the issues of individual and course accreditation and some of the ramifications of a move to a national curriculum.

Officers' concerns

Principal among officers' concerns was that any move towards national standards should go ahead only with full consultation and support of social services. It was stressed that much training in child protection is undertaken jointly with the local social work department and in many regions of the country, the latter are the lead department. Clearly, any proposals on training should be drawn up with the principles of 'Working Together' in mind and should be open to comment and modification in the light of the views of specialists from the social services. Any move to implement a national scheme could and should go ahead only after full consultation and with the support of all parties involved in child protection investigation.

Other concerns expressed by officers at our conference and elsewhere covered whether the introduction of national standards might lead to friction and misunderstanding between officers who had received the new training and those who had not. Likewise officers who had not undergone the national training might be the subject of adverse comment in the witness box, irrespective of the length of their experience.

These are real and understandable concerns, but are ones which have to be faced whenever training innovations are introduced. One answer lies in periodic refresher training which would be available to officers of all ranks, examples of which we have alluded to in Section Three. Child witness interviewing is a rapidly developing specialism in which new knowledge and procedures are emerging all the time. In our view it is imperative that officers involved in the work should have regular opportunities to update their knowledge.

Accreditation of courses or individuals?

While the Consultative Conference showed strong support for a common core curriculum and national accreditation, there was much less consensus over how accreditation could be achieved. One possibility would be to accredit individual

officers and social workers who had successfully passed the relevant course. Their names could be held on a register which would be available to the public. Registration would not be unconditional, membership could be reviewed after five years. Additionally, it would be necessary for the officers concerned to demonstrate their continuing competence, either by the production of video recordings of interviews conducted in the interim or attendance at refresher courses, or some combination of these. The main advantage of such a system is that trained personnel can be seen not only to have reached a national standard, but to be taking active steps to maintain such standards. The main disadvantage of individual accreditation was seen to lie in the bureaucracy and cost of setting up and maintaining a Register and of a mechanism for assessing and monitoring the competence of those officers on the Register. Indeed, 43% of officers (n=16) attending the Conference did not favour a Register of accredited interviewers; 19% (n=7) did and 35% (n=13) were unsure.

An alternative which was backed by the majority of those present at our Consultative Conference was to accredit courses rather than individuals. Those officers and social workers who successfully passed out of such recognised courses would be awarded a certificate. While such an arrangement does away with the need for a national Register, it is not entirely free from bureaucracy in the sense that there must be some validating body to assess individual courses. Such a system of course validation is one which is familiar to most accredited professions and involves the production of course materials, the involvement of external assessors and visits by the assessors to the course team and students. At the end of the assessment visit, a brief report is prepared and recognition given for a period typically of five years, or recognition is withheld pending specified changes to the course.

There seems no reason in principle why this model should not be applicable to child protection training. Various candidates could be suggested for validating bodies. One would be the National Crime Faculty at Bramshill but it is unlikely that such a body alone would be acceptable to local ACPCs who would wish the social work component to be acknowledged through the involvement of a professional body representing social workers. Another possibility would be to involve local colleges or universities who would have considerable validation experience. At least two forces to our knowledge are actively exploring links of this kind which could lead to child protection training being recognised as part of a Certificate or Diploma Course or even contribute to a Police Studies degree. A third possibility which has been explored by at least one force is to reframe training in terms of the National Vocational Qualification scheme, though there

may be practical difficulties in turning the skill base of Memorandum interviewing into clear NVQ criteria. Whatever form of accreditation is taken, it will be necessary for this to be adopted by all forces. If it is not this could lead to unacceptable disparity where courts are served by more than one force. Accrediting courses involves less cost and bureaucracy than accrediting individuals, but does little to ensure that officers and social workers maintain their competence over the longer term. If the regulatory mechanism of a National Register is to be avoided, then considerably more attention will need to be devoted to regular refresher training and the monitoring of performance within the team through periodic review of videotaped interviews.

Operational and resource implications

Any move toward national standards will be constrained, on the one hand, by wider operational considerations and on the other, by resources. Child protection must compete with all other specialist units for funding within a force budget. Audit precepts need to be followed in using existing funding more effectively, rather than simply demanding additional resources. We turn first to the operational issues – CID status and tenure – before considering the question of the provision of specialist training and the involvement of judges and CPS staff. Finally, we return to the Memorandum, the key document in current training.

CID status

In the current study, as in other research (Hughes et al., 1996), we have found a widespread wish among officers involved in child protection to move towards a more proactive stance. This is reflected in the inclusion of interviewing suspected perpetrators and evidence gathering as core components of the outline national curriculum. As we have noted, there are widespread differences in force policy on CID status for officers involved in child protection work. As we found from our focus groups, a policy of giving status without training was not universally popular either with the officers themselves or their colleagues in other areas of policing. A national curriculum would bring increased demands for training in the operational aspects of child abuse investigation. This could be met either by expanding existing specialist provision or by the introduction of specialist themes within existing general training courses. Any move toward greater involvement in suspect interviewing and evidence gathering by child protection units would be welcomed in the wider child care community as a means of reducing the burden on the oral evidence of the child at trial (Westcott and Jones, 1997).

Tenure

This issue again was one on which there was considerable variation between forces and a focus of concern for both managers and the front-line officers. As child protection work is increasingly recognised as a specialist area rather than a 'Cinderella' subject within policing, there will be an increasing need for a more uniform policy on tenure. If officers are trained to a national standard, then it will be wasteful of resources not to permit such officers to exercise their skills over an extended period (five years has been suggested as a minimum figure). It should also be possible for officers to progress in rank while still retaining membership of a child protection unit: in our experience, many highly skilled officers are lost from such units by the need to move to other areas of policing in order to gain promotion.

Specialist training

The outline curriculum identifies a number of relevant areas which appear in some training schemes but do not appear in others. Our discussion with forces' representatives left us in little doubt that their omission did not reflect ignorance or a dismissal of their potential value. Rather, time constraints or the absence of specialised trainers, sometimes coupled with a lack of necessary financial support to pay outside consultants, seemed to be the major considerations.

In our view, many of these constraints could be overcome if individual forces were more prepared to collaborate on a regional basis to fund and mount advanced training. Knowledge of such topics as offender behaviour and advanced interviewing techniques is at a premium even among training consultants. Bringing officers from adjacent forces together for such 'advanced' training would have considerable advantages both from the standpoint of economy and furthering inter-force co-operation. In addition, thought should be given to the development of training materials, under the supervision of recognised experts, which could form the basis of distance learning modules, supported, if necessary, by training videos.

Input from judges and CPS staff

The national curriculum recognises the importance of law and legal issues in the training of child protection staff. Given the pivotal role of CPS and the judiciary in decisions on the acceptability of videos, clear guidance on what is and is not acceptable in recorded interviews is crucial to officers and social workers involved in such work.

Both at the Consultative Conference and the focus groups, we came across evidence of considerable regional variations in the degree to which CPS staff and judges were prepared to be involved in training courses. In some parts of the country, representatives of the legal profession routinely make input to such courses. In other areas, however, such co-operation did not exist or (in the case of CPS) had been withdrawn. According to our informants, the most common ground for such a policy of non-involvement was the need to maintain impartiality between witness and accused. The result of this interpretation of the principles of the adversarial system is that in practice, officers are reduced to a form of what is literally trial and error learning: officers gradually learn what their local courts require by observing which interviews are accepted and which rejected. Such a process is operationally wasteful and exacts a heavy cost upon the child complainants whose interviews fail the test. This subject should be remitted to the joint Police/CPS Training Committee with a request that urgent work be commissioned in this vital area. Any training material produced should be made available to social services departments.

The key role of the Memorandum

It is no understatement to say that the introduction of the Memorandum of Good Practice into police and social work investigations of suspected abuse has changed the total culture of this sensitive area of work. It is a path down which other police forces, not least in the United States, are likely to venture in the light of their own experiences of interview practice by child care professionals (Warren, Woodall, Hunt and Perry, 1996; Lieb, Berliner and Toth, 1997). While the ethos induced by the Memorandum may still have its critics (Westcott and Jones, 1997), our observations suggest that there is still broad support for the principles of the Memorandum among serving police personnel.

This is not to say that the attitude of officers is one of uncritical acceptance. In particular we would endorse the calls for a significant broadening of its coverage in any further edition. This broadening would encompass not merely more extended coverage of such topics as the interviewing of vulnerable children, but also the extension of the rules on the style and phrasing of questions to those involved in the courtroom questioning of children. To many officers it seems at least bizarre to insist on the strict regulation of questioning in the investigative phase of the enquiry only to give free reign to barristers at court.

Conclusion

Our study demonstrates a clear consensus among those interviewed for a national curriculum, but only for one which is shared by social services. There appears to be little support for the concept of individual accreditation, with course accreditation being favoured. Issues of tenure and CID status are seen as linked to issues of professional development. A revision of the Memorandum has a key role in course development, but judges and CPS continue to make the final judgement on the acceptability of interviews conducted and their involvement in training is essential.

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Appendix 1: An example of how material from the outline national curriculum might be distributed across a three week training course

'Foundation' course
<p style="text-align: center;">Week 1 <i>(Introductory material aimed at those with no previous experience)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Inter-agency working <i>Role of police and social services in joint investigations</i> <i>Organisational structure</i> ● The Memorandum <i>Phases of the interview</i> <i>Styles of questioning</i> <i>Pre-interview issues</i> <i>Truth/lies</i> ● Law and legal issues ● Opportunity to observe practice interviews and participate in at least one full interview, not necessarily with a child ● Visits to courts, live link facilities and interview suites

'Foundation' course

Week 2

(Aimed at those with some limited operational experience)

● **Child development**

Memory development

Secrets and lies

Suggestibility

Use of language

Children in court

● **Technical aspects of interviewing**

● **Job stress and coping**

● **Interview practice**

Viewing sample interviews

Interview a child

'Advanced' course

Week 3

(Less emphasis on interview practice, more on reflection on performance of self and others)

- **Working with children and families**
- **Specialist techniques**
 - Cognitive interviews*
 - Use of dolls and drawings*
 - Special needs children*
- **Evidence gathering and investigation**
 - Abuse within organisations*
 - Network abuse*
 - Questioning suspects*
 - Investigation exercise*
- **Sexual behaviour**
- **Observe and critique videos produced by self and others**

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