

**Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland**

# **Thematic Report on Knowledge Bank**

**December 2013**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Key Messages and Recommendations**

A quality information knowledge base where information is relevant to users' needs, readily accessible, accurate and up-to-date with built in measures to review documents is an invaluable resource for service delivery organisations.

It is clear that the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) is committed to providing a quality information knowledge system through the provision of the Knowledge Bank which holds policy, technical guidance, manuals, case law, circulars, etc.

The Knowledge Bank has greatly improved since it was first introduced and it continues to evolve. There is a specific skill set required to create web pages and maintain and edit content. Following a COPFS communications survey in 2012 and a project designed to identify measures to improve the communication of legal guidance, changes have been made to the way that materials are structured and the format, with key facts and messages now highlighted and more links to the main guidance.

We have, however, identified that the overarching vision and strategic aims of the Knowledge Bank have not been formulated and recorded. Clarification of the strategic focus will assist in providing a clear direction for the future of the Knowledge Bank. Further, the skills that have developed in the management of the Knowledge Bank should be captured in a set of specific desk instructions for continuity purposes.

Historically, the Knowledge Bank was the repository of information for use by legal and precognition staff but it now also contains materials for use by administrative and Victim Information and Advice (VIA) staff although there appears to be a lack of awareness on the part of some administrative and VIA staff of the inclusion of relevant material for their purposes and as a whole they access it less often than their legal counterparts. Publicising the full range of materials and the relevance of those materials to administrative and VIA staff should increase their use of the Knowledge Bank.

There is scope for making more use of the Knowledge Bank facility and there is a desire for the Knowledge Bank to become a 'one stop shop' where all information relating to all aspects of COPFS work will be located including information on the specialist divisions and general information such as the Staff Handbook. Moving towards a 'one stop shop' will require additional support to the existing team to assist with improving quality assurance of the current material on the Knowledge Bank and in particular eliminating duplication and out of date guidance.

Staff operating the Knowledge Bank are dedicated to providing a quality service and committed to getting information knowledge to staff in the most user friendly format. However, there is scope to provide more information on a wider range of topics (eg specialist information) and it is acknowledged that

there are restrictions on the accessibility due to the limitations with the current software application, including the inability to provide information in different formats, for example, videos and links to e-learning modules, links to information from process maps<sup>1</sup>, etc and real-time interaction.

The consultation exercise that we undertook confirmed that staff view the Knowledge Bank as a valuable resource but it highlighted a number of issues with the current IT limitations. The constraints imposed by the current IT system have been recognised by COPFS and should be addressed with the new software platform to be introduced later this year. The proposed upgrade should, if successfully implemented, deal with the issues flagged up by staff. We look forward to reviewing the Knowledge Bank once the upgraded intranet system is up and running.

It is noted that overall satisfaction with the Knowledge Bank, especially for the current main users (legal and precognition staff) is very good and we believe that implementing the recommendations made in this report in conjunction with the improved internal website will go a long way to achieving additional satisfaction.

The following recommendations have been made:

### **Recommendation 1**

To develop and support a shared vision of the role of the Knowledge Bank, it is recommended that a clear direction and strategic focus for the Knowledge Bank is set and communicated. Further, actions and objectives on how to achieve the overarching aims are identified and recorded within the performance agreements of those responsible for delivering these aims, including the Legal Editor, with measurable outcomes that can be assessed.

### **Recommendation 2**

It is recommended that desk instructions are created for the processes and work relating to the management and maintenance of the Knowledge Bank.

### **Recommendation 3**

A reminder should be issued to all staff responsible for submitting information to the Knowledge Bank that a Communications Cover Sheet must be submitted and that the library staff are available to provide advice on format, especially where large documents are involved.

### **Recommendation 4**

To assist with improving quality assurance of the current material on the Knowledge Bank and in particular eliminating duplication and out of date

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<sup>1</sup> Process maps present a flow of how cases are processed but do not give detailed descriptions of each step to be taken

guidance and to move towards the Knowledge Bank as a single source of all information, it is recommended that consideration is given to providing additional support to the existing resource available to the Legal Editor.

#### **Recommendation 5**

It is recommended that the relevance of the content of the Knowledge Bank for **all** staff is publicised through PF Eye and team briefings with specific examples provided to demonstrate the usefulness and importance of the information contained in the Knowledge Bank.

#### **Recommendation 6**

It is recommended that the Legal Editor and Staff Information Manager take account of suggestions made by staff in our feedback survey when making future improvements to the Knowledge Bank.

# **1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:**

## **Background**

1.1 A knowledge base is a library of information organised in a logical manner to allow easy access to information support to assist staff to perform their duties efficiently and effectively. A knowledge base providing easy access to organisational guidance, policy, instructions, practices and legal case law is an invaluable asset to support service delivery.

1.2 A knowledge base can contain many different materials including policies, guidelines, manuals, circulars, case studies, DVDs, templates, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), PowerPoint presentations and synopses of lessons learned and it can provide direct links to e-learning modules. It can be accessed as a separate database or through live operational systems.

1.3 The COPFS Knowledge Bank was set up in 2008 as a 'Legal Knowledge Database' to provide legal staff with an information tool to research the law and provide guidance on how to conduct cases in court. The Knowledge Bank was based on the idea of 'Know How Banks' used by commercial law firms and was initially established and managed by a part-time temporary Legal Editor supported by a Staff Information Manager and a small team of sub editors who were identified as having specialist knowledge.

1.4 Currently, the Knowledge Bank is managed by a part-time Legal Editor, supported by a Staff Information Manager based in the library at Crown Office.

## **Aim and Objectives**

1.5 The aim of this inspection is to review the operation of COPFS Knowledge Bank and to consider the extent to which it provides complete, useful, relevant, specific, accurate, and timely information support to all staff.

1.6 The objectives of the inspection are:

- To determine whether policy and practice on the administration and management of COPFS Knowledge Bank are established, clear and implemented effectively
- To determine whether COPFS Knowledge Bank is accessible to all staff and is user friendly
- To determine whether COPFS Knowledge Bank is managed in an effective manner
- To evaluate whether the content on COPFS Knowledge Bank is helpful to users (both legal and non-legal staff) and is up to date and accurate
- To establish whether the performance of COPFS Knowledge Bank is monitored and analysed
- To evaluate whether the aims and objectives of COPFS Knowledge Bank are being met

## **Methodology:**

1.7 The scope of this inspection included:

- Examining existing policies, strategies and commitments
- Identifying good practice guides
- Consulting with COPFS management and strategic leads.
- Meeting with relevant operational staff
- Observing the processes through practical demonstrations
- Issuing questionnaires and analysing results<sup>2</sup>
- Benchmarking<sup>3</sup>

## **Acknowledgements:**

1.8 We are very grateful to all the COPFS staff who gave so generously of their time and contributed to our feedback survey during this inspection.

1.9 We are also grateful to staff at the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) who facilitated our benchmarking activities.

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<sup>2</sup> A link to a questionnaire was issued to all staff in COPFS. We received approximately a 14% return (there are approximately 1500 members of staff in COPFS and we received 204 returns).

<sup>3</sup> As a comparison exercise we met with staff from the Crown Prosecution Service involved in maintaining their information knowledge system

## **2 LEADERSHIP AND BUSINESS PLANNING**

2.1 The COPFS Strategic Plan 2012-15 states that the aim of COPFS is to:

- 'Meet the Law Officers' strategic priority of achieving operational effectiveness in all cases'

2.2 To achieve this objective, staff must have the appropriate tools and having access to up to date, accurate and relevant information knowledge is essential. In COPFS, this is provided through internally published policies, processes, manuals, circulars, case law, etc which is found on the COPFS intranet (PF Eye). The Knowledge Bank is part of PF Eye and is the repository of much of this information.

2.3 The COPFS Risk Register 2013-14 highlights the following risk as one that may impact on public confidence:

- 'Lack of compliance with best practice – our processes are not followed correctly'

2.4 A necessary step to ensuring compliance is to have accurate information on practices and processes that is easily accessible in a user friendly format. The Knowledge Bank is pivotal in the provision of information and it is therefore important to consider what controls are in place to reduce the likelihood of a lack of compliance. The risk register refers to two controls to mitigate this risk, firstly that all staff have access to PF Eye and secondly that they have access to technical guidance such as the case processing manual. It follows that the Knowledge Bank, as the repository of such information, is integral to mitigating this risk.

2.5 Risks are reviewed by the Management Board and the risk of failing to comply with guidance was discussed as recently as April 2013<sup>4</sup>.

2.6 Further to this, and following a communications survey in 2012, a project to 'Improve Legal Guidance Communications' was set up. Its objective was to improve the way that legal and precognition guidance is communicated and to ensure that such information is clear, concise, relevant and targeted. Following the recommendations of the project, a revised approach to issuing information has been implemented with key messages now highlighted in instructions and links provided to background information. All such guidance and instructions is uploaded onto the Knowledge Bank.

2.7 The Legal Editor advised that the purpose of the Knowledge Bank is to:

- 'provide an information tool that should equip staff with all their information needs'

He added that the aspiration for the future is to:

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<sup>4</sup> Minutes issued July 2013



- 'channel people to the right door for information through a 'one stop shop' set-up<sup>5</sup>,

2.8 These aims are not formally documented. We were shown documents which provided updates by the Legal Editor to his line managers on the activities of the Knowledge Bank and proposed future plans. These also described details of ongoing work, resources and collaboration with other units in COPFS. We were advised that in the main updates are provided on a more informal basis through regular discussions with the line manager.

2.9 Knowledge Bank staff are also consulted as part of the business planning process undertaken by the Corporate Services Group, headed by the Deputy Chief Executive.

2.10 While inclusion in the business planning process and regular discussion between senior management and the Knowledge Bank team demonstrates a recognition of the Knowledge Bank as an important tool to provide information knowledge to staff, formally recording the strategic aims and objectives of the Knowledge Bank and incorporating actions to achieve these aims and objectives within the performance agreements of those responsible for delivering these aims would provide greater clarity on the purpose and direction of the Knowledge Bank and on how this is to be achieved and maintained.

### **Recommendation 1**

To develop and support a shared vision of the role of the Knowledge Bank, it is recommended that a clear direction and strategic focus for the Knowledge Bank is set and communicated. Further, actions and objectives on how to achieve the overarching aims are identified and recorded within the performance agreements of those responsible for delivering these aims, including the Legal Editor, with measurable outcomes that can be assessed.

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<sup>5</sup> The provision of all material for the day to day working of the COPFS eg case processing, federation work, specialist unit instructions, e-learning, staff handbook etc

### 3 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

3.1 The Knowledge Bank is accessed from the COPFS intranet (PF Eye). PF Eye is a database management system (DMS)<sup>6</sup> based on an Oracle software application and uses HTML<sup>7</sup>. COPFS pay Oracle for licenses and it allows information to be edited, modified, indexed, published, retrieved and deleted. Access permissions are granted to nominated staff to manage content. For Knowledge Bank purposes access is granted to the Legal Editor and Library staff.

3.2 There are, however, limitations with the current software application, including the inability to provide information in different formats, for example, videos and links to e-learning modules, links to information from process maps<sup>8</sup> and real-time interaction.

3.3 At present there are also no links from operational systems such as Future Office System (FOS) and Standard Office System (SOS)<sup>9</sup> to information on the Knowledge Bank. If staff require to find information while working on cases they need to open the internal website in addition to operational systems and switch between the two. Further, there are no direct links to external sites such as Westlaw<sup>10</sup>, Linets<sup>11</sup>, etc which are frequently used by legal staff for the preparation of cases. Again, these have to be accessed separately.

3.4 Results from our feedback survey show that 54% of all respondents are of the view that direct links from operational systems to the Knowledge Bank would be helpful and 68% of all respondents indicated that direct links from the Knowledge bank to other data sites such as Linets and Westlaw would be beneficial. (See Annex A)

3.5 A further limitation is that there is no interactive facility to allow staff to provide feedback.

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<sup>6</sup> A DMS provides an interface between a database on which information is stored and users

<sup>7</sup> HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) is the main markup language for creating web pages and other information that can be displayed in a web browser. It allows images and objects to be embedded and can be used to create interactive forms. It provides a means to create structured documents by denoting structural semantics for text such as headings, paragraphs, lists, links, quotes and other items. It can embed scripts written in languages such as Javascript (computer programme language) which affect the behavior of HTML web pages (source - Wikipedia).

<sup>8</sup> Process maps present a flow of how cases are processed but do not give detailed descriptions of each step to be taken

<sup>9</sup> COPFS case management systems

<sup>10</sup> Online legal research service

<sup>11</sup> Online legal resource

## **Search Engine**

3.6 There are a number of options for searching for information on the Knowledge Bank including an A-Z menu, hot topics, recent additions/updates or through the search facility.

3.7 There are no limits on the number of search words/phrases that can be added when material is uploaded to the Knowledge Bank. Identifying search words is difficult as it involves trying to predict what terms users will search for especially if they are unable to remember the case/title, etc. To assist users, the Legal Editor may try to identify something significant or memorable about the case. One such example is a case where the defence counsel asked a witness how he could identify the accused if he was wearing a mask and the reply was 'you never forget the eyes of a killer'. The phrase 'eyes of a killer' is included as a search phrase.

3.8 If words are mis-spelt or entered incorrectly, the search facility does not suggest the correct word and it can result in multiple hits, many of which are irrelevant. For example, the phrase 'trial within a trial' without quotation marks produced 728 hits whereas using quotation marks reduced it to 19 hits. It is, therefore, extremely important that staff know how to make the best use of the facility.

3.9 To try to assist staff with the 'search' facility the Legal Editor created a list of 'top tips' on how to search for information which was publicised through a staff notice<sup>12</sup>. It provides guidance to users on how to be specific in their use of a search term when carrying out a search. So for example, if a search uses a subject heading such as 'culpable homicide' a huge amount of information will be detected but if a more specific term is used such as 'eggshell skull'<sup>13</sup> there will be fewer 'hits'.

3.10 Feedback from our survey showed that only 21% of all respondents find the search facility helpful, 44% find it helpful sometimes and 36% do not find it helpful (See Annex A). However, it is anticipated that the search facility will greatly improve as part of the proposed internal website upgrade (See paragraphs 3.14 to 3.17)

## **IT Support and Contingency Arrangements**

3.11 COPFS Information Systems Division (ISD) staff with web development skills were responsible for maintaining the PF Eye including the Knowledge Bank. However, during this inspection, the staff with specialist development skills left ISD and have not been replaced and as a result, if there are any issues which other IT staff cannot resolve then Oracle has to be called in resulting in additional cost to COPFS.

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<sup>12</sup> Staff Notice 43/2012 issued 26 October 2012

<sup>13</sup> This was a term used in court in relation to the victim's injury

3.12 A system is in place whereby all information on the Knowledge Bank is backed up each week and it is stored on tape off site. If the system fails for any reason, much of the legal guidance is saved in a separate folder and it can be issued to staff through email.

3.13 Recent system failures of the PF Eye resulted in the Knowledge Bank not being available to staff. This caused difficulties in being able to access information urgently, for example, to obtain information on points of law. If PF Eye is unavailable for some time<sup>14</sup>, emails with important attachments are sent to all staff. For example, at the end of March 2013 an email was issued with attachments to the weekly staff notice and essential business information including a new style writ under S295 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and new finance codes, etc.

### **Upgrade of Intranet**

3.14 In recognition of limitations of the current internal website a business case was prepared early in 2013 for a new intranet platform. The business case outlined various options, expected benefits, risks, cost, etc. It is planned that the new intranet will move to an open source platform<sup>15</sup> such as Joomla<sup>16</sup> and wiki technology<sup>17</sup> allowing the content manager flexibility to customise it and this should allow for more features such as the uploading of DVDs, video links, online interaction such as RSS feed<sup>18</sup> twitter and increased accessibility.

3.15 The new intranet will be supported and maintained by the IT provider at a set cost per annum, obviating the need for COPFS to employ web developers for this purpose and there are no licence costs. If a problem develops with the internal website such as a system failure or it becomes corrupt then it is the responsibility of the IT provider to fix it.

3.16 The proposed changes to the internal website were publicised in the June 2013 Bulletin<sup>19</sup> along with the intention to conduct focus groups in summer 2013 to obtain input on users requirements. The workshops have concluded and there was a further opportunity for staff to provide feedback in the Communications Survey issued in August 2013<sup>20</sup>. Similar views were identified in the focus groups and the survey and we are advised that these are being built into the requirements of the new website.

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<sup>14</sup> Over a week

<sup>15</sup> A system whereby the source code can be modified meaning more flexibility when changes are needed however modification and customisation can mean that it may be difficult to support

<sup>16</sup> A free open source content management system which includes features such as RSS feeds, blogs, search, etc

<sup>17</sup> Allows users to add and update content

<sup>18</sup> Web feed formats used for frequent updates such as blogs, news headlines, etc

<sup>19</sup> A monthly internal COPFS newsletter

<sup>20</sup> Survey closed 31 August 2013

3.17 The next stage in the process is for the Project Board to meet with the supplier to map out requirements. We note from the updated business case in July 2013 that it is expected that the project will be available for testing in November 2013 and it is anticipated that it will be up and running by the end of the calendar year<sup>21</sup>. This upgrade is clearly central to many of the improvements that have been identified in this report.

## **Benchmarking**

3.18 In comparing the COPFS Knowledge Bank with the CPS equivalent we found that the systems were very similar in that knowledge information on the CPS system provides staff with current policy, guidance, procedures, articles, case law, bulletins, etc to aid them in processing cases.

3.19 Other similarities include dedication to ensuring the site is user friendly, organised and accessible; keeping staff up to date through weekly 'Gateway' summaries, CPS Newsletters and 'Liveboards' (community forums). There are comparable issues with uploading and linking DVDs, search engine and version control.

3.20 The main differences between the two systems are that the CPS site is available to the public and therefore does not contain restricted guidance and that there are direct links to external legal resource sites and an interactive feedback button.

## **IPad Project**

3.21 There is currently a project being piloted in COPFS where iPads are used in procedural courts (Pleading and Intermediate courts)<sup>22</sup>. The iPad is loaded with cases calling in these courts thus reducing the need to take papers to court. Legal staff access cases on the iPad and update the online minute sheet at court. This is later uploaded back to the case management system by administrative staff.

3.22 As part of this project, provision exists for enabling access to the Knowledge Bank on the iPad at court via Wi-Fi connection but this cannot be progressed until there is Wi-Fi availability at courts. An alternative to using iPads that is currently being explored is downloading the Knowledge Bank on separate e-reader devices.

3.23 Feedback from our survey showed that 95% of legal respondents were of the view that it would be helpful for Deputes in court to have a direct link to the Knowledge Bank through an iPad. (See Annex A)

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<sup>21</sup> As a back up it is expected that both platforms will run in tandem for a while

<sup>22</sup> Courts where the accused indicate if they are pleading guilty or wish to proceed to trial and where the court assesses if the prosecution and defence are prepared to proceed to trial

## **Other**

3.24 Work is also being undertaken by COPFS to load, store, view and disclose CCTV electronically and in the longer term it is hoped that the development of such technology may help with loading of DVDs, etc on Knowledge Bank.

## 4 CONTENT AND ACCESSIBILITY OF THE KNOWLEDGE BANK

### Content Management

4.1 The COPFS Knowledge Bank is found on the front page of the COPFS internal website (PF Eye). Access permissions are granted to nominated staff to manage content. For Knowledge Bank purposes access is granted to the Legal Editor and Library staff.

4.2 As stated content can be in the form of documents, pictures, FAQs, articles, etc. Hyperlinks can also be added to other documents or websites where appropriate.

4.3 The Legal Editor is responsible for adding, reviewing and editing legal information and guidance, providing advice on format and identifying 'search words' and 'links' to other materials. Editing also involves categorising materials under subject headings and the appropriateness of materials such as photographs. He also considers how new policies may impact on other materials.

4.4 Depending on urgency, once documents are edited they are either passed to the Staff Information Manager for immediate upload or saved into a folder on the Library shared drive pending future upload.

Uploading involves:

- Creating a web page
- Adding 'metadata'<sup>23</sup> or 'detailed description'
- Checking text, format, display name, etc in accordance with accessible information policy
- Adding links to other materials (links should have the name of the material being referred to)
- Adding cases and links to cases
- Adding an 'expiry' date<sup>24</sup>
- Adding a 'Category' eg Bail Manual, Book of Regulations, etc
- Adding 'Perspectives' which is used for segmentation (ie target audience) eg all staff, legal staff, specialist unit, etc
- Adding 'Basic Searches' eg search words
- Adding 'Author' – who created the document

4.5 Following this process, the document is uploaded and is then available to view on the Knowledge Bank. It will also be added to 'My Interests'<sup>25</sup> on PF Eye.

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<sup>23</sup> Data such as a description

<sup>24</sup> Expiry date is automatically set at one year as default

<sup>25</sup> Information added to an individual's account on PF Eye relevant to a person's job/function/federation based on staff directory details

4.6 While, the content management system is not complex to use, uploading is time consuming especially for large documents. The metadata (description) and links, if not already prepared by the author, have to be identified and checked, search words need to be added and text requires to be examined for grammatical accuracy and accessibility. Consideration is also given as to how it will look on the screen to the user.

4.7 The re-structuring of the Knowledge Bank to introduce access to material through functional portals has been favourably received. This is especially useful now that Federations<sup>26</sup> have been restructured into specialist functions eg Summary, Sheriff and Jury, etc.

4.8 While the current team dealing with the Knowledge Bank has built up considerable expertise in adding and editing material, there are no desk instructions relating to the management and maintenance of the Knowledge Bank. Desk instructions are important in providing continuity if a member of staff is absent or leaves the post.

4.9 The National Occupational Standards (NOS) provide advice on standards of performance<sup>27</sup> to be achieved when carrying out functions in the workplace. Those that relate to providing and maintaining knowledge bases include: '*Create Content*'; '*Edit Content*' and '*Maintain Editorial Quality*'. Elements of the above standards should be taken into account in the formulation of the desk instructions.

## **Recommendation 2**

[It is recommended that desk instructions are created for the processes and work relating to the management and maintenance of the Knowledge Bank.](#)

## **Sources of Material**

4.10 The main sources of information are Policy Division, including VIA, the Appeals Unit, and Strategy and Delivery Division (SDD).

4.11 Policy Division is responsible for the development and dissemination of COPFS prosecution policy. As a result of the Legal Guidance Communications Project in 2012/13, it was concluded that information should highlight important key facts, be targeted and concise. New templates have been developed to reflect the findings and key points/changes are now detailed on 'Operational Instructions' with links to background material.

4.12 Policy Division staff received external training on 'writing concisely' and there has been positive feedback that this has improved their skills in

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<sup>26</sup> COPFS is broken down into three Operational Federations and a National Federation

<sup>27</sup> NOS are nationally recognised standards providing statements of effective performance which have been agreed by a representative sample of employers and other key stakeholders and approved by the UK NOS Panel



focussing on key points. Policy Division has also agreed to share their forthcoming work programme with Knowledge Bank staff so that the latter have an early indication of work that will come their way.

4.13 The Appeals Unit is responsible for work in relation to summary and solemn appeals and for the distribution of Opinions of the Appeal Court that are thought to be of interest/relevance to staff.

4.14 Strategy and Development Division (SDD) is responsible for delivering a programme of continuous improvement and this includes ensuring that staff are aware of and kept up to date with changes in operational manuals such as the Case Processing Manual.

4.15 Information/documents are also provided by other COPFS specialist units such as International Co-operation Unit, Civil Recovery Unit, High Court Unit, Environmental and Wildlife Unit and from other parts of COPFS such as Learning and Development Division. This tends to be information that is very specific to the work undertaken by the Unit. However, the provision of specialist information from such units is patchy and there is scope for more guidance and information to be provided by the specialist units to assist with staff rotation and for general research purposes.

4.16 Part of the Legal Editor's role is to proactively look for material that may be useful to staff from external sources such as SCS website, case law, legal Articles, and other legal sources such as Criminal Law Review, Juridical Review, Scottish Criminal Law, etc. The PF Eye online Community Forums are also a useful source of information and can often identify gaps. One example was the addition of on call guidance following a legal member of staff highlighting the absence of such material.

4.17 Our feedback survey showed that 32% of all respondents (47% of legal and 60% of VIA staff) want further materials to be added to the Knowledge Bank including draft styles, more procedural information and case law. (See Chapter 5 and Annex A for suggested materials for inclusion and survey results)

4.18 Guidance was uploaded onto the Knowledge Bank in June 2013 following the outcome of the 2012 communication survey on the steps to be taken by staff when drafting any material containing instructions and guidelines. In particular, it urges managers to identify important and relevant information that could be pulled out and accessed via a link. The guidance explains the role of library staff and offers assistance by the Staff Information Manager. The guidance is enhanced by a drafting checklist and the communications cover sheet.

4.19 The Communications Cover Sheet is a form that has to be completed when a document is to be loaded onto the PF Eye. It allows authors/owners of the information to provide a short description<sup>28</sup> and give an indication of the

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<sup>28</sup> No more than 60 words

target audience eg identified by function/division/grade/role, etc. It also allows for a headline title and for the earliest and latest date for publication.

4.20 Staff operating the Knowledge Bank advised that the Communications Cover Sheet is very helpful but it was not being used universally resulting in the Knowledge Bank staff having to provide descriptions etc. Library staff also advised that they would also encourage information providers to engage in greater consultation with them when adding large amounts of information on the database.

### **Recommendation 3**

A reminder should be issued to all staff responsible for submitting information to the Knowledge Bank that a Communications Cover Sheet must be submitted and that the library staff are available to provide advice on format, especially where large documents are involved.

### **Version Control**

4.21 All documents uploaded to the Knowledge Bank are saved in the 'Library' shared folder in a file called 'Knowledge Bank'. It is from here that the Staff Information Manager accesses and uploads them. When a document is uploaded onto the Knowledge Bank the date it was created is recorded in the system. Any updates are also recorded.

### **Accuracy of Information**

4.22 Part of the Knowledge Bank responsibilities is to review and maintain materials in collaboration with authors.

4.23 One element of uploading material is to either agree the automatic expiry date of one year or insert an alternative. Once the date expires a message is flagged up to the library staff that some action needs to be taken. Library staff will then advise the author and any changes required are undertaken. Even if no change is required the system has to be updated or the action will remain outstanding. A date at the foot of each document shows when it was last updated giving users an indication of the age of the information.

4.24 It was suggested that it would be more efficient if the system could automatically advise the author of the material that it has expired but it is acknowledged that due to staff moves it would be difficult to manage. It is considered, therefore, that the current system is preferable.

4.25 Major legal reforms can have significant resource implications for information bases as case law or legislative changes can have an impact on a substantial body of existing guidance and law and such changes can result in an extensive review process of a great deal of information on the Knowledge

Bank. The policy implications flowing from the case of HMA v Cadder<sup>29</sup> is such an example and there are still materials that require to be reviewed following that decision.

4.26 It is important that staff can confidently rely on the information on the Knowledge Bank and it is acknowledged by members of senior management who are regular contributors and the Knowledge Bank team that out of date versions of material are not always removed although this is less likely in high risk areas such as the case marking instructions. Examples of materials that currently do not reflect current processes and policies include the Precognosers Handbook<sup>30</sup> and the case processing manual. In addition, there is duplication of some information with, for example, documents being available on the PF Eye separately from Knowledge Bank. Some documents contain differing and conflicting information, one example being information relating to Victim Information and Advice<sup>31</sup>. Out of date information may also have been saved by staff in their 'My Documents' in Word or in 'shared drives/common folders' or printed hardcopy which has since been updated online.

4.27 This can result in staff referring to obsolete information in their preparation of cases or impact on time taken for staff to carry out further research. At the very least it allows inconsistent practices to take place which runs contrary to the strategic aim of embedding the "COPFS" way.

4.28 Results from our feedback survey showed that overall 44% of all respondents felt that information was up to date while 48% felt it was only sometimes up to date. 62% felt information was accurate while 35% felt it was sometimes accurate. 57% felt it was consistent with other materials while 37% it was consistent sometimes. 60% felt they could confidently rely on information while 30% felt they sometimes could. In the main the figures were similar for each of the four areas of work (legal, precognition, administration and VIA) although some variation was noted between the main users (legal and precognition) and administration and VIA (See Annex A for results of the survey).

4.29 To prevent out of date materials and duplication of information, the Knowledge Bank staff are keen for a 'one stop shop' set up to be established removing the possibility of duplication and inconsistent practices. However, despite the recent addition of a new member of staff appointed as a web content manager<sup>32</sup> freeing up time to allow the Staff Information Manager to focus more on the Knowledge Bank, there is currently deemed to be

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<sup>29</sup> Cadder (Peter) v HMA [2010] UKSC 43 - dealing with the right of a suspect to seek legal advice prior to an interview in a police station

<sup>30</sup> Despite dates on documents indicating when they were last updated, it may be that at the last update no change was made

<sup>31</sup> VIA staff may still refer to old material on their common folder which differs from up to date material on the Knowledge Bank

<sup>32</sup> This post deals with aspects of library responsibilities such as content management for PF Eye, working with web development team re COPFS website, library administration, liaising with partners, etc

insufficient capacity to progress the aspiration of a one stop shop given the day to day demands.

4.30 Historically, assistance in editing and updating material was provided by a team of sub editors. The team of sub editors researched areas of law identified by the Legal Editor and due to their expertise and experience the relevant information could be retrieved quickly and then uploaded onto the Knowledge Bank. Examples include information relating to deaths, firearms, sexual offences, etc. However, this assistance was provided on an ad hoc basis and ceased over time due to other business demands.

4.31 The increasing move towards greater specialisation and the restructuring into Federations and functional working may provide an opportunity to reinvigorate the concept of having a wider group of contributors and provide more focused input to the Knowledge Bank. The operational delivery boards and the associated forums contain the relevant expertise in their areas and are well placed to undertake a review of existing guidance relevant to their particular areas of work.

4.32 For specialist units, a regular return to the library on a monthly basis could highlight any new guidance or cases etc that should be added to their web page.

#### **Recommendation 4**

To assist with improving quality assurance of the current material on the Knowledge Bank and in particular eliminating duplication and out of date guidance and to move towards the Knowledge Bank as a single source of all information, it is recommended that consideration is given to providing additional support to the existing resource available to the Legal Editor.

#### **Accessibility**

4.33 Under the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 disabled people should not be treated less favourably than other people when accessing services.

4.34 In relation to web sites they should be designed so that users of all abilities and disabilities<sup>33</sup> can access them. They should be properly organised with clear navigation links and relevant illustrations. Information should be written clearly and be available in easy to read fonts.

4.35 In recognition of these requirements the COPFS 'Accessible Information Policy' aims to ensure that '*information, documents and publications are available to all people*'. Information on the Knowledge Bank is compliant with this policy. For example, it is uploaded using Verdana font size 11 and is left indented. Key words are highlighted and links are shown in a different colour. Font sizes can be changed. Where other support is

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<sup>33</sup> People with visual, hearing, motor and cognitive impairments

required such as screen reader software, keyboard overlays, etc, Health and Safety has the lead responsibility.

4.36 The Knowledge Bank is solely for internal use and all information uploaded to the Knowledge Bank is in English language.

4.37 An equality impact assessment has been undertaken as part of this inspection and no equality issues have been identified.

4.38 To gain access to the COPFS Knowledge Bank, users firstly click on the 'Knowledge Bank' tab on front page of the intranet (PF Eye) and secondly on one of:

- Hot topics
- Recent updates
- A-Z menu
- Search

4.39 Results from our feedback survey showed that staff did come across problems preventing them accessing the Knowledge Bank, however, these were not related to any particular deficiency of the Knowledge Bank. They mainly referred to internal website system failure, lack of time, lack of IT, etc. (See paragraph 5.11)

## **Communication**

4.40 Methods of keeping staff up to date with what has been uploaded to the Knowledge Bank include:

- 'Knowledge Bank Current Awareness' – this can be found on the Knowledge Bank page and is designed to highlight new legal news, interesting appeal cases, publications and articles
- 'Staff Notices' – these are issued every week and include highlights on 'Knowledge Bank News' providing a brief description of articles issued during the week
- 'Recent Knowledge Bank Additions/Updates' – a list of latest additions and updates on the first page of the Knowledge Bank
- 'Bulletins' – issued every month to provide staff with information on corporate initiatives including improving legal guidance communications, linking reading with Continuing Professional Development (CPD), etc
- 'My Interests' – information added to individual accounts on PF Eye relevant to a person's job/function/federation<sup>34</sup>
- 'Must Read' – information considered to be of interest to all staff
- 'Personalised Weekly email' – reminders about information considered relevant to a person's job based on their job/function/federation
- 'Library Link' – library newsletter detailing current library news

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<sup>34</sup> Obtained from staff directory details

4.41 Information relevant to the Knowledge Bank can be added in all of the above to advise staff of latest additions and updates. This can result in duplication in what is added to 'Must Read' and 'My Interests'. This has been identified by management and is being reviewed. We consider that there are adequate methods of advising staff about Knowledge Bank additions and updates.

### **Involvement in Training**

4.42 A knowledge base gives support to organisational learning through sharing information knowledge<sup>35</sup> with all staff. Having such a system in place should assist an organisation in its endeavour towards continuous improvement.

4.43 The Legal Editor is involved with legal trainee induction, Advocate Depute induction and attends SDD meetings. These involve giving presentations about the Knowledge Bank facility and how it works.

4.44 A DVD providing visual practical guidance on how to search for documents is planned. However, on the current system DVDs cannot be uploaded but this will be reviewed when the new intranet is introduced.

4.45 It has been acknowledged that people learn as a result of reading. In this regard, COPFS has reached agreement with the Law Society of Scotland regarding accreditation of certain materials in the Knowledge Bank for the purposes of CPD in respect of COPFS legal staff.

4.46 A selection of legal documents uploaded to the Knowledge Bank has been linked to questionnaires. Questionnaires are created on Survey Monkey which can provide management information on who and how many people have completed it. The questions are designed to assess the level of understanding before and after reading the material. The first of these to be accredited for legal staff CPD was Operational Instruction 6 of 2013 relating to the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012. Learning and Development Division (LDD) are responsible for monitoring this and once completed an agreed period of CPD is credited to legal staff involved.

4.47 During our benchmarking exercise we found that the CPS has a good practice whereby they issue a 'Law and Policy Digest' every two months. This is a summary of articles and 'must reads' from which staff can use hyper links to main documents, if they so wish. Once these documents have been read there is an automatic link to a questionnaire and on successful completion legal staff are credited with the relevant time period for CPD.

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<sup>35</sup> Information can be explicit (information that can be easily provided) such as policy, manuals, quick guides, etc or implicit (information that is more difficult to convey) such as a method of doing something that a person subconsciously does without thinking about it

4.48 We were advised that LDD and Knowledge Bank staff are keen that other mediums of sharing information knowledge such as e-learning packages, DVDs, etc are made available on the Knowledge Bank. The intention is that as part of the upgrade of the internal website that hyperlinks will be added from relevant guidance to DVDs containing practical training. This should provide immediate training and financial benefits through reducing the need to travel to the Prosecution College.

## 5 MONITORING AND FEEDBACK

### Monitoring Use of Knowledge Bank

5.1 The Staff Information Manager uses Google Analytics<sup>36</sup> to check use of the Knowledge Bank. These reports are printed weekly but can be done more often if required. They show results of the most visited Knowledge Bank sites (usually chapters of Case Marking Guidelines); 'Search Words' used; time spent on each search; which pages are looked at, etc.

5.2 Reports can also be produced for 'groups' of staff who are targeted to receive information according to their role. This illustrates whether staff are reading 'must read' materials that are emailed to them. Reports can also be used to show the amount of usage of external sites such as Linets and Westlaw.

5.3 The reports are analysed and action may be taken where appropriate, for example, analysis of search words used prompted the creation of 'top tips'. Results are also reported to management and have recently been fed into the Improving Legal Guidance Communications project.

### Feedback

5.4 The Legal Editor proactively encourages all feedback both positive and negative. Comment boxes have been added at the bottom of some documents on the Knowledge Bank asking staff to contact the Legal Editor if they cannot find what they are looking for, to suggest key search words or to advise if there is any material that they know will help others.

5.5 We were shown comments and results from a feedback survey conducted in 2012 by the Legal Editor and Staff Information Manager. Although the response rate was relatively low the Legal Editor advised that the comments were very useful. Overall the feedback showed that the Knowledge Bank is valued, deemed to be a great resource and that changes that had been made were moving in the right direction although there was criticism relating to the poor search facility. The following results were particularly encouraging:

- 89% respondents said it helped them do their job more effectively
- 86% used the Knowledge Bank monthly or more often (61% weekly or more often)
- 93% agreed or strongly agreed that it is a useful resource

5.6 The Knowledge Bank staff would prefer an interactive tool such as a 'blog' where questions/suggestions can be posted and answers provided real-time as a better mechanism for obtaining feedback. This is supported by the comments in the feedback survey which indicated that staff would find an interactive feedback facility useful.

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<sup>36</sup> Website administration tool which provides statistics on website traffic

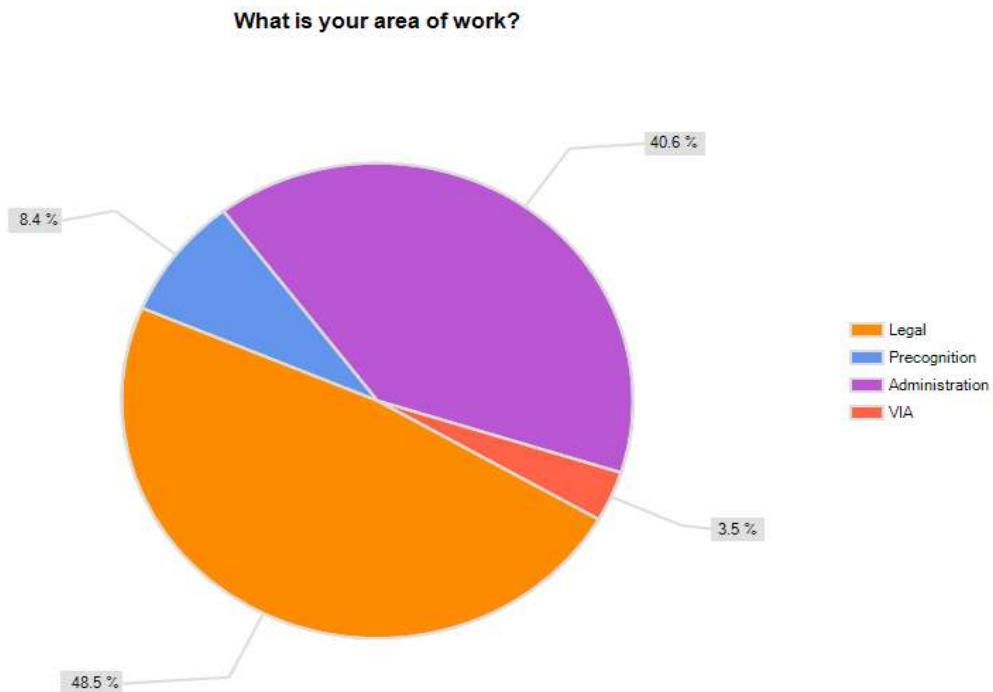


5.7 The proposed new software platform should allow for more features and better interaction and there is a proposed feedback facility.

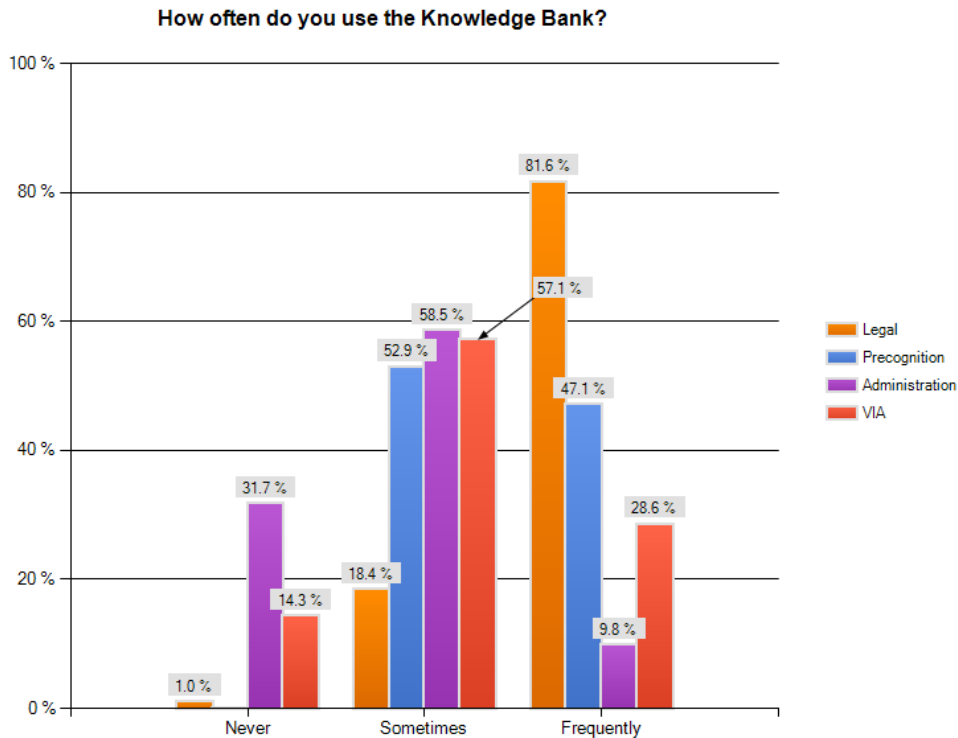
### Focus of the Knowledge Bank

5.8 The Knowledge Bank was initially set up as a legal and precognition resource but it has evolved and expanded and now also includes guidelines and processes to assist non-legal and VIA staff.

5.9 However, there are clear differences in the use of the Knowledge Bank by different groups. Our feed back survey supports this finding. The results can be split by area of work ie Legal, Precognition, Administration and VIA. The main contributors to the survey were legal and administrative staff:



5.10 Results of our survey show differences in use of the Knowledge Bank between legal and precognition staff compared with administration and VIA staff with 82% of legal and 47% of precognition respondents advising that they use the Knowledge Bank frequently while only 10% of administration and 29% of VIA do so. 32% of administration respondents indicated that they never use it.



## Recommendation 5

It is recommended that the relevance of the content of the Knowledge Bank for all staff is publicised through PF Eye and team briefings with specific examples provided to demonstrate the usefulness and importance of the information contained in the Knowledge Bank.

5.11 Many of the respondents to the survey advised that they have experienced problems gaining access to information on the Knowledge Bank. Common constraints encountered include:

- Poor search facility
- Intranet system crashes
- Lack of time
- Takes too long to find the information eg how it is categorised/filed
- No access to computers at court
- Lack of IT availability

5.12 Other constraints include the design of the Knowledge Bank in that it is 'very busy', information is not up to date or there is an absence of information.

5.13 Findings suggest that respondents feel the layout (ie how it is organised) of information on the Knowledge Bank is not always helpful and that content could be more up to date, more accurate and more consistent with other materials.

5.14 As the main users of the Knowledge Bank 69% of legal and 63% of precognition staff say they can confidently rely on the information on the Knowledge Bank with a further 28% and 31% stating that they can sometimes rely on it. (See Annex A)

5.15 Two thirds of all respondents with a large proportion of legal respondents (88%) find that the Knowledge Bank allows them to be more efficient and effective in their work. The main users (legal and precognition) also tend to find information on the Knowledge Bank to be relevant to their needs, however, many respondents believe that the Knowledge Bank does not contain all the information they need to perform their duties.

5.16 Some of the suggested materials and links for inclusion on the Knowledge Bank include:

- Case reports/case law by subject matter
- Further procedural information eg COPLINK
- Guides on how to prosecute certain offence types guides
- Court based scenarios eg leading evidence in court
- Draft written submissions
- Further style draft charges
- Specialist information eg Health & Safety
- Further VIA information
- Index of Crown Office Circulars under subject matter
- Further information on how to find documents
- More information on offences including dangerous dogs

5.17 Staff indicated that in addition to the Knowledge Bank they may refer to other information sources such as external sites, for example, Linets, Westlaw, Renton & Brown, the Scottish Government website or speak to colleagues/library staff or refer to text books, statutes, case reports or shared files on their computer. Direct links to such sites would be useful.

5.18 There were indications that staff find the Knowledge Bank to be helpful with some saying it is an 'important tool' which has 'vastly improved' and is an 'excellent resource' with 'very good material on it'. Many do however feel it 'could be improved' especially in terms of the search function, organisation/indexing of material and accurate and up to date manuals.

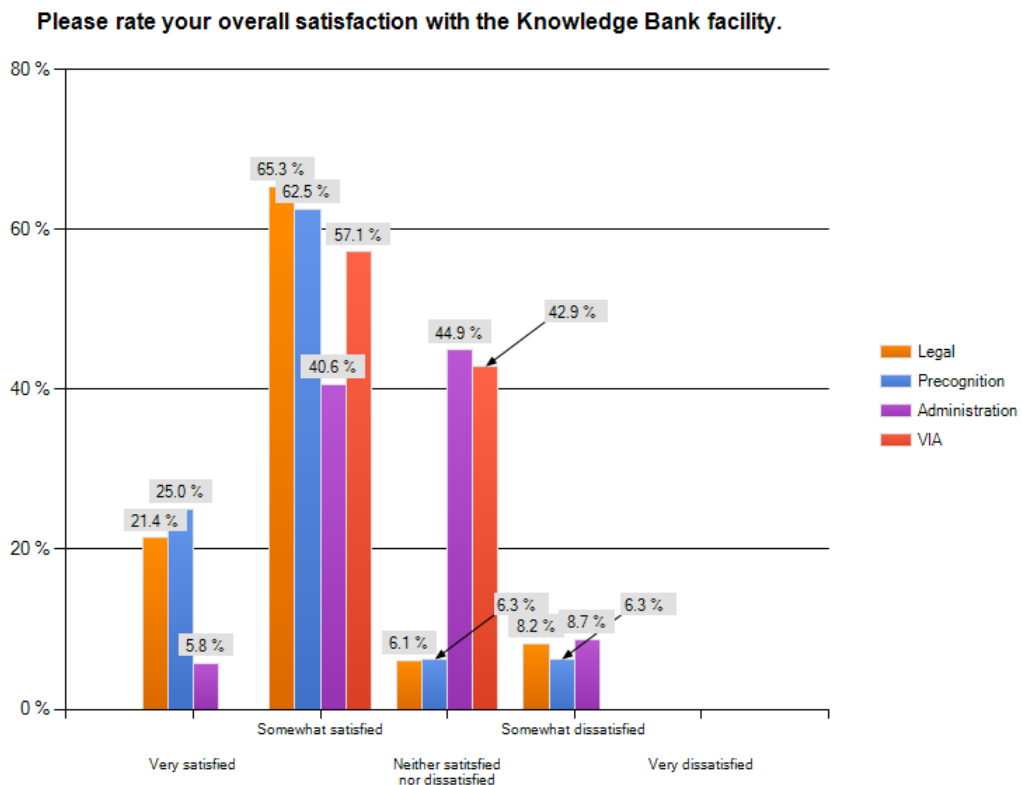
5.19 Suggestions by staff for improvement of the Knowledge Bank include:

- Better search facility
- Accurate manuals eg Case Processing Manual/Precognosers Manual/Disclosure Manual
- Interactive feedback button
- User guide/cases indexed by case variety/type
- Need to 'declutter'
- More cohesive organisation of information
- Have knowledge managed through one specific point eg one stop shop
- Style documents/charges

- Build a bank of research notes
- Links to external sites such as Renton & Brown and Linets
- Better links to Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995
- Links to training
- Format of documents eg Word rather than scanned in documents

5.20 As described earlier in the report a project is underway to improve the internal website and this should address many of the limitations described and this will hopefully incorporate feedback from staff as described above.

5.21 We noted an overall high satisfaction rate from the main users of the Knowledge Bank facility with 86% of legal staff and 87% of precognition staff being somewhat or very satisfied. However there was a lower satisfaction rate from administrative staff at 47% and VIA at 57%:



## Recommendation 6

It is recommended that the Legal Editor and Staff Information Manager take account of suggestions made by staff in our feedback survey when making future improvements to the Knowledge Bank.

## IPS Knowledge Bank Feedback Survey – Summary of Results

### Awareness and Use of Knowledge Bank:

- 97% of all respondents are aware of the Knowledge Bank facility
- 84% of all respondents think the Knowledge Bank applies to them and their work (all legal and precognition staff consider it applies to them)
- 82% of legal and 47% of precognition respondents use the Knowledge Bank frequently while only 10% of administration and 29% of VIA respondents use it frequently
- 53% of precognition, 59% of administration, 57% of VIA and 18% of legal respondents use it sometimes
- 32% of administration and 14% of VIA respondents never use it

### Access:

- 80% of all respondents consider it easy to access the Knowledge Bank (19% of legal, 12% of precognition and 28% of administration respondents do not find it easy)
- 42% of all respondents have experienced constraints affecting access to the Knowledge Bank
- 71% of all respondents consider that it would be helpful for Deputes in court to have a direct link to the Knowledge Bank eg through use of the iPad (95% of legal staff would find it helpful)
- 54% of all respondents indicated they would find it helpful to have access to the Knowledge Bank directly via a link from operational sites such as FOS/SOS

### Search Facility:

- 36% of all respondents do not find the search function helpful, 44% find it sometimes helpful with only 21% finding it helpful
- 38% of all respondents can find what they are looking for while 55% only sometimes find what they are looking for

### Layout & Links:

- 38% of all respondents feel the layout is helpful while 49% feel it is sometimes helpful
- 74% of all respondents find the quick links helpful
- 19% of all respondents never use the quick links (administration staff are least likely to use them at 33% )
- 65% of all respondents feel there are sufficient links (legal staff registered the lowest at 54%)
- 60% of all respondents have had difficulty opening links (all categories of work found this to be the case)

### **Content:**

- 49% of all respondents find information to be clear and concise while 46% sometimes find it not so
- 44% of all respondents find information to be up to date while 48% find it up to date only sometimes (similar figures were reflected in legal, precognition, and administration while 50% of VIA staff do not find VIA information up to date)
- 62% of all respondents find information to be accurate while 35% find it sometimes accurate (74% of legal staff find it to be accurate while 25% find it sometimes accurate)
- 57% of all respondents find information to be consistent with other information on the system while 37% sometimes do (64% of legal and 75% of precognition staff find it consistent)
- 46% of all respondents find information to be sufficiently detailed while 49% sometimes find it so
- 57% of all respondents consider information to be available in a timely manner while 34% sometimes do (40% of VIA staff consider it not to be)
- 60% of all respondents feel they can confidently rely on information while 30% find they can sometimes rely on it (69% and 28% for legal staff and 63% and 31% for precognition)
- 63% of all respondents find information to be relevant to their needs while 32% sometimes do (81% of legal staff find it relevant)
- 24% of all respondents consider the Knowledge Bank contains all the information they need to perform their duties, 43% consider it does sometimes while 34% consider it doesn't contain enough information
- 32% of all respondents feel that they would like to see further materials on the Knowledge Bank (47% of legal staff and 60% of VIA staff would like to see more information)

### **Effectiveness:**

- 66% of all respondents feel that the Knowledge Bank allows them to be more efficient and effective in their work (88% of legal, 71% of precognition, 35% of administration and 57% of VIA respondents find this so)

### **Other Sources:**

- 56% of all respondents seek further information from other sources in preference to the Knowledge Bank
- 68% of all respondents would like direct links from the Knowledge Bank to other data sites (eg Linets, Westlaw, Renton & Brown, etc)



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