



Corporate Plan 2018 to 2021

CRIMINAL CASES REVIEW COMMISSION

CORPORATE PLAN 2018/21

Introduction

In 2017, the CCRC marked its 20th anniversary. As before, we have taken the opportunity to consider the views of a wide range of stakeholders in developing this corporate plan. This plan's development has coincided with a stakeholder conference and a Tailored Review, both of which have provided an opportunity to reflect on our role, our contribution to the criminal justice system and how we need to adapt to remain effective in the coming years.

Over the 20 years of the CCRC's work, the criminal justice system has evolved significantly and the nature of wrongful convictions has therefore, in part at least, changed over time. For example, where in the past the miscarriages of justice we identified often arose from systemic misconduct by investigative authorities, or systemic problems with expert evidence, or from a particular issue, the causes of potential miscarriage now appear to be more diffuse and less easy to identify. Even where the broad cause is the same, such as the failure to disclose material helpful to the defence, its manifestation, and how and where it happens, is very different. Other different, more individual risk factors relevant to wrongful convictions have also emerged. We also anticipate new developments in forensic science and other scientific evidence relied on in court. In addition, the current programme of reform in the criminal justice system and courts is one of huge scale. This will present challenges for courts, practitioners and jurors. The criminal justice system is operated by human beings and occasionally mistakes will be made.

The pressures on the criminal justice system remain as intense as ever. Investigative techniques and procedures change and, as they do so, they bring new challenges and opportunities to a criminal justice system that needs to retain the confidence of the public.

We are a maturing organisation and our ways of working and influence need to reflect our development over 20 years. The body of knowledge now encapsulated in the CCRC is extensive. We have become better at raising our profile and made improvements to handling our caseload. The CCRC continues to play a vital role in providing assurance within the criminal justice system. We welcome the conclusion of the Tailored Review that the CCRC should continue in its present form as an independent Arms Length Body.

Our Purpose and Values	
Our Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We investigate and identify potential miscarriages of justice and, in doing so, promote public confidence in the criminal justice system
We Accomplish this by:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigating and reviewing cases effectively and efficiently ensuring, as far as is possible, we do not miss potential miscarriages of justice • Referring appropriate cases to the appellate courts • Demonstrating independence and impartiality in all we do • Being thorough, proportionate and conscientious • Using our unique knowledge and experience • Working constructively with stakeholders • Maintaining awareness of and adapting to change in the wider criminal justice system.
Our Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrity – Objective, Impartial, without self interest • Motivation – Being driven to “go the extra mile” • Proactivity – Looking ahead and acting early • Accountability – Doing nothing that could bring the CCRC into disrepute • Courtesy, respect – Adjusting our behaviours, listening, understanding • Timeliness – Delivering at an appropriate pace

Strategic objectives

The CCRC’s publication of an “Easy-Read” application form was even more successful than we expected. We have consistently received on average 1500 applications per year since its introduction, an increase of approximately 50%. Our corporate plan for 2015-2018 was therefore heavily focussed on adjusting how we work to handle the increased caseload at a time when resources were also shrinking in real terms. As we begin this corporate plan period the CCRC is confident that it has largely overcome the challenge of the resulting accumulation of cases and can re-apply its energies more broadly again. The core purpose of the CCRC is to investigate potential miscarriages of justice and where appropriate to refer them to the Court for appeal; dealing with our casework, both referrals and non-referrals remains our number one priority. It has to be done thoroughly and proportionately, the responsibility of being the last port of call for applicants weighing heavy in the psyche of the organisation.

The Tailored Review (whose outcome is awaited) is expected to make recommendations with respect to the Governance, Effectiveness and Efficiency of the CCRC. We will be looking closely at those recommendations particularly during the first business year of this plan.

The Commission's strategic objectives

We will deliver our responsibilities by:

Timely case reviews whilst maintaining quality: All applicants can expect a decision within a reasonable timescale proportionate to the complexity of their case. The Commission recognises that justice delayed is justice denied and that timeliness is an important component of quality for the benefit of the wider criminal justice system.

Ensuring the most effective use of public money: The Commission will seek further efficiencies in performing its role and function. We shall continually challenge ourselves to use resources more effectively across the whole organisation.

Keeping abreast of developments in the criminal justice system: We are alert to changing causes of miscarriages. Factors such as unrepresented defendants, inadequate disclosure, the analysis and presentation of forensic and digital evidence all affect the Commission's plans and approach to its case investigations and reviews.

Influencing the CJS: The Commission will ensure an appropriate public profile of miscarriages of justice by proactive engagement with stakeholders and the media, feeding back into the CJS from our experience.

Increasing awareness of our role and function: We will continue to increase our profile by working with other criminal justice organisations and raise awareness of our purpose.

Transforming our service: The Commission will evaluate the opportunities afforded by developments in Information Technology to improve applicants' access to the Commission's services, the way the Commission obtains the information it needs to perform its reviews and how staff can work most efficiently.

Measuring our progress

Our experience informs us that to accomplish our purpose, we must effectively balance timeliness with proportionality.

We will set ambitious targets:

- At least 80% of applicants will receive a decision on their case within 12 months of applying to the Commission.
- It will be by exception, and therefore for only a very small minority, that any applicant will wait longer than 2 years for a final decision.
- We will continue to increase the awareness of the CCRC amongst particularly vulnerable groups so that applications to the Commission reflect as far as possible those vulnerable groups proportionately.
- We will introduce IT solutions to improve:

- Access to our services by applicants and their representatives.
- Remote and mobile working for our people working at the CCRC.
- We shall maintain our high levels of staff engagement (above 75%) as we undergo change.
- We will more than double our social media following and significantly increase our “on-line” presence to improve the awareness of our purpose and work.

Risks

Factors beyond our control

Further increase in application rates: although our intake appears relatively stable at the time of preparing this plan, we do not know whether it might rise again. There are a various criminal justice issues which may result in an increased intake; examples include the high and increasing proportion of sexual offences being tried (which are more often appealed), the lack of legal representation at trial, or appeal, and inadequate disclosure.

Sudden loss of staff or Commissioners: whilst staff and Commissioner turnover is normally low and something which is reflected in our high staff engagement scores, were we unexpectedly to lose staff or Commissioners, this would impact on our ability to deliver. The problem is particularly acute in respect of Commissioners because the appointments process can take up to a year to complete.

A budget cut during the plan period: this would have a significant impact on our ability to deliver.

Further Information

Further information about the CCRC can be obtained from our website and we are happy to receive comments about this plan or any other aspect of our work.