

---

## 13.0 EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION

### 13.1 Client Relationships

The principal clients of Forensic Sciences are QPS, DPP and the State Coroner. Services are also provided to other clients, such as the Department of Corrective Services and the Environmental Protection Agency, on a fee-for-service basis.

The principal client of Public Health Sciences is Public Health Services within QH. Public Health Sciences undertakes scientific analysis, investigations and research of relevance to public health, including testing water quality (e.g. for blue-green algae), environmental contaminants (e.g. air quality), food quality and safety, and chemical analysis (e.g. 'white powder' incidents). Public Health Sciences also has a large number of fee-for-service clients, both in the private and public sector.

QHSS has sound relationships with local universities although the relationships are stronger for Public Health Sciences than for Forensic Sciences (refer Section 15).

The Taskforce notes that the QHPSS Policy on "Customer Satisfaction" (*Quality Program Policy Manual*) states that:

"QHPSS should have in place effective and efficient processes for collecting, analysing, and using customer-related information for improving the performance of the organisation. Customer-related information may be available from a number of internal and external sources, and may be written or verbal, active or passive.

The measurement and evaluation process should be planned and should consider matters such as conformity to requirements, meeting customer needs and expectations, price and delivery of products and services, and assessment of future needs."

The General Manager advised that QHSS has not undertaken client surveys for a number of years. The Taskforce was unable to locate any QHSS-wide client surveys, although surveys have been undertaken for particular work areas (e.g. Virology, Library).

QHPSS holds an Annual General Meeting (AGM) each year with its senior executives. The theme of the 2004 AGM was 'Client Focus'. A range of potential initiatives to improve client services were identified. As a result of the AGM, a draft Feasibility Report on a QHPSS Client Survey/Feedback Framework was developed (June 2004). The draft document noted that QHPSS does not have a co-ordinated approach to client surveys/feedback and that there is no direct link with strategic planning priorities and initiatives. The draft Framework recommends:

- Guidelines be developed for conducting client surveys/feedback;
- A register be established of all client survey / feedback processes;
- A schedule be developed for obtaining client feedback to coincide with organisational events, such as the AGM and the review of the strategic plan;
- A framework be established for approving, implementing and evaluating actions taken as a result of client surveys/feedback; and
- A 'toolkit' is developed for undertaking client survey / feedback processes.

The Feasibility Report's recommendations are yet to be endorsed within QHPSS.

QHSS has indicated that it has the following SLA's / MOU's in place:

- SLA with the Office of State Coroner (2 February 2005). The SLA deals with issues such as the quality of autopsies, information exchange, availability of forensic pathologists, coronial

---

counselling and turnaround times. The Agreement expires on 31 December 2005;

- MOU with QPS in relation to the testing of person samples which is done on a fee-for-service basis. The Taskforce notes that it has expired but the service continues;
- MOU with QPS in relation to the possession and disposal of dangerous drugs under the authority of the *Drugs Misuse Act 1986*; and
- MOU with DJAG to allow electronic access to the QWIC system which provides read only access to Court listings.

QHSS also advise that work is underway to develop a comprehensive MOU with QPS on all DNA and crime scene samples provided to QHSS. It is considered this document should be expanded to include all services provided to QPS which includes those for pathology, toxicology and chemistry.

Public Health Sciences advise that they approach strategic client relationships with Public Health Services (QH) through personal contact and formal meetings. The formal meetings include the Public Health Collaborative Forum, which meets at least once a year at which all public health clients attend; and the Food Safety Advisory Committee, which meets once or twice a year where services are analysed and planned.

The Inter-Departmental Standing Committee for Forensic Sciences (IDSCFS) was established in 1996 in response to concerns raised by Forensic Sciences for greater inter-agency collaboration in dealing with common issues such as increasing workloads, the impact of new technology, inefficiencies in the (then) coronial system and poor inter-agency communication. The IDSCFS comprises representatives of QH (Chair), DJAG, the DPP, QPS, the State Coroner and LAQ. The IDSCFS meets approximately quarterly.

Overall, the Taskforce believes there are positive client relationships with the key clients of QPS, the DPP, the State Coroner and Public Health Services in QH. Although QHSS would benefit from a more formalised approach to client surveys/feedback (as proposed by the Draft Framework referred to above), the mechanisms in place appear to be having a beneficial impact on client relations.

The Taskforce notes that, in relation to Forensic Sciences, there is a general view from clients and stakeholders that the issues now facing QHSS in relation to backlogs and service demand/supply need to be addressed on a Whole-of-Government basis, and are not merely seen as a failure of QHSS to provide a client service. The Taskforce believes that this collaborative approach to the issues is a tangible benefit from the establishment of the IDSCFS. However, it should have played a much stronger leadership role in addressing the issues facing forensic services across government. The role of the IDSCFS will be superseded by the proposed Council for the Institute (see Section 4.3).

***Recommendation 39:***

*It is recommended that the Chief Executive Officer of the Institute develops a single Memorandum of Understanding with Queensland Police Service which incorporates all services provided by the Institute by 31 January 2006.*

***Recommendation 40:***

*It is recommended that the Director-General of Queensland Health abolishes the Inter-Departmental Standing Committee for Forensic Sciences immediately.*

## **13.2 Information Systems**

### **13.2.1 Integrated Justice Information Strategy**

To support the delivery of forensic sciences to the criminal justice system there is a need for information sharing across a number of agencies including QPS, QH and DJAG. Those information systems which are integral to the process are depicted in Appendix 13.

Sharing of information across agencies associated with the criminal justice system has been recognised as a priority. The Integrated Justice Information Strategy (IJIS) was initiated in 2002 by the Law and Justice CEO's Committee which is responsible for developing policies that coordinate

---

the operations of the criminal justice system. That Committee comprises representative from DJAG (Chair), QPS, Department of Corrective Services, Department of Communities, DPC and Queensland Treasury. There is an IJIS Steering Committee chaired by DJAG that reports to the CEO's Committee. The IJIS program is a Whole-of-Government initiative charged with planning and implementing integrated justice solutions to deliver improved inter-agency information integration and sharing. Implementation is planned over a number of phases until 2007/08. The Taskforce has been advised that QH's forensic scientific function is not currently within scope of IJIS, but that this matter will be considered later this year.

The Taskforce believes that QH's forensic sciences function needs to be within the scope of IJIS and that QH should be represented on the Steering Committee in view of the information sharing required with forensic sciences.

### **13.2.2 AusLab**

The primary laboratory information system supporting QHSS is AusLab. This is a State-wide laboratory information management system that was initially developed in the hospital pathology environment and has in recent times been implemented into the Forensic Science and Public Health Science environments. There has been widespread concern expressed by QHSS staff with the way in which AusLab was implemented, including a lack of consultation surrounding the introduction of the system.

There are varying degrees of acceptance and use of AusLab across the Forensic Science and Public Health Science areas. There is widespread concern that practitioners have lost functionality that they had in a previously developed in-house system. It is clear this system has not been developed for a forensic purpose. Those reluctant to embrace it claim that the system is not user friendly and that there are deficiencies or "bugs" leading to loss of data, inadequate audit trails, questionable evidence continuity, additional time demands and lack of financial controls. QHSS scientists have stated that when requests have been made to QHPSS to have the system altered to meet their needs, these requests have been given a low priority.

In addition the Taskforce has repeatedly sought statistical data from AusLab only to receive differing results on each occasion. Consequently, the Taskforce is unable to place any reliance on the data extracted. This could be a result of definitions or the manner in which data is captured. In either case, a validation process needs to occur to ensure reliable and meaningful data is always available. Concerns regarding the reliability and/or ambiguity of data have already been raised in Sections 6.4.2 and 7.6 above.

However, it is important to note that many personnel in Forensic Sciences are using the system for case management. AusLab is also used extensively by FSLU for communication and property receipt. Some areas of Public Health Sciences have not yet received access to the system.

AusLab has also been successfully interfaced with the QPS Polaris and Forensic Register systems to facilitate information exchange and results management, and to facilitate standard barcoding of evidence from the crime scene to the laboratory. The NIFS *Forensic Biology Automation and Future Developments* paper highlights the importance of an integrated laboratory information management system and acknowledges the Queensland model.

QH has made a significant investment in the AusLab system and staff concerns need to be examined to determine if AusLab is suitable for use in a Forensic and Public Health environment. If those concerns are valid, then they need to be addressed. If they are not valid then its continued development and roll-out should be supported.

Consequently, an independent review of the AusLab system needs to be undertaken to determine its suitability to a forensic and public health science environment. The estimated cost of this exercise would be \$100,000.

In relation to the AusLab system, an AusLab Support Unit is located within the Office of the Executive Director, QHPSS and located at Kessels Road campus. As this system is a corporate solution and rolled out across QHPSS and all Health Service Districts, consideration should be given to managing it through the Information Directorate of QH. This re-alignment would be consistent with the role of the Information Directorate to deliver corporate solutions.

---

### 13.2.3 Notification of Court Dates

An essential piece of information for prioritising analysis of exhibits is the associated court date relevant to that exhibit. FSLU has the responsibility of accessing the DJAG QWIC system to identify those dates. The system does not provide an automatic notification of any changes which results in a time consuming task of searching each case on QWIC or telephoning QPS Investigating Officers/Prosecutors. It would be more efficient if the system could be enhanced to automatically report any changes to existing court dates for cases dependent on forensic analysis.

One way to achieve this would be for the QHSS staff (FSLU) to indicate in a dedicated field on QWIC at the time of receiving exhibits that court date advice is required. There are also some other enhancements which are desirable such as searching QWIC via the QPS CRISP number. It is estimated these enhancements could cost up to \$50,000. To date, discussions with DJAG staff have not been able to finally resolve these matters and further discussions need to occur in order to reach agreement on the way forward.

FSLU presently consists of nine staff but only five have access to QWIC. The four staff without access are reliant on others in the team to obtain information from QWIC for their cases, which is disruptive to work flow. The FSLU Co-ordinator has also requested their QWIC access be extended to the field of *File Summary (Bail/Custody option)*. This extension will enable a more informed decision when prioritising cases for analysis.

The Taskforce supports these requests in the interest of improved efficiency for prioritisation of cases.

#### **Recommendation 41:**

*It is recommended that the Director-General, Justice and Attorney-General:*

- (i) *Ensures the Institute's Forensic Sciences is within scope of the Integrated Justice Information Strategy Project by 31 October 2005;*
- (ii) *Ensures the Institute is represented on the Integrated Justice Information Strategy Steering Committee by 31 October 2005; and*
- (iii) *Provides Queensland-Wide Interlinked Courts System (QWIC) access to all staff members of the Forensic Sciences Liaison Unit excluding Central Property Officers by 31 October 2005.*

#### **Recommendation 42:**

*It is recommended that the Chief Executive Officer of the Institute:*

- (x) *Commissions an independent review of the AusLab system to determine its suitability to a forensic/public health sciences environment by 31 January 2006; and*
- (ii) *Negotiates with Department of Justice and Attorney-General appropriate enhancements to the Queensland-Wide Interlinked Courts System (QWIC) which will enable timely access to relevant information for prioritisation of forensic analysis by 31 January 2006.*

*(Estimated non-recurrent cost: \$150,000)*

#### **Recommendation 43:**

*It is recommended that the Director-General, Queensland Health gives consideration to realigning the management and ongoing responsibility of the AusLab System and Support Unit to the Information Directorate by 31 January 2006.*

### 13.3 Communication Protocol

There have been a number of important recent initiatives within the Forensic Sciences area aimed at improving communications. Of most significance have been the establishment of FSLU in late 2003 and the opening of the Central Property Point in July 2004. As indicated previously, FSLU's role is to provide the liaison link with QPS Investigating Officers thus minimising the need for scientific staff to be distracted from their primary role of laboratory analysis. Its role includes establishing:

- 
- The likelihood of further exhibits being received;
  - Details and circumstances of the case;
  - Custody status of the defendant;
  - Scheduled court date; and
  - Priority for analysis.

Forensic Sciences also advise that an Open Forum was held for clients in July 2004 and client training sessions were held in non-metropolitan locations in order to market the role of FSLU. Despite this effort to promote the role of FSLU, regional visits by the Taskforce confirm there is limited understanding of the existence and role of FSLU among QPS staff. It is considered further strategies need to be pursued to promote the role of FSLU among QPS staff.

The co-location of the QPS DNA & Forensic Sample Management Unit at QHSS is also seen as a major step in improving communication between QHSS and the QPS. As indicated previously, this Unit is primarily involved in the administration of person samples, the prioritisation of major crime scene cases for analysis and authorisation arrangements for eventual destruction of crime scene exhibits. There is a risk that the role of this Unit may overlap with that of FSLU. Consequently, it is imperative that protocols be established to clarify the role of each unit. This matter has been discussed in Section 6.4.4.

***Recommendation 44:***

*It is recommended that the Chief Executive Officer of the Institute in consultation with the Superintendent, Forensic Services Branch, Queensland Police Service ensures that communication protocols are developed between Queensland Police Service and the Institute by 31 January 2006.*

### **13.4 Strategic Communication – Queensland Police Service**

The process of collecting crime scene exhibits for DNA analysis commences with the QPS Investigating Officer and/or Forensic Officer. These exhibits are dispatched to Forensic Sciences for analysis. During the Taskforce's regional visits to QPS centres, comments were received about the lack of feedback on the quality of sampling and/or exhibits collected in addition to the probability of results expected from various categories of exhibits. There was also an expressed desire for feedback on emerging scientific techniques which may benefit crime scene evidence collection.

It is considered regular feedback needs to be provided from QHSS scientists to QPS personnel on relevant forensic trends and techniques. This could be via email, newsletters and attendance at half yearly forums/workshops. These workshops could also be used as partnering forums to discuss SLA's, performance management issues, staff exchange and development opportunities between agencies.

***Recommendation 45:***

*It is recommended that the Chief Executive Officer of the Institute in consultation with the Superintendent of Forensic Services Branch, Queensland Police Service establishes:*

- Information sharing/feedback processes relevant to forensic sciences and the collection of crime scene evidence by 30 April 2006;*
- Staff exchange and development opportunities by 30 April 2006; and*
- Partnering forums by 30 April 2006.*

### **13.5 Strategic Communication – Director of Public Prosecutions**

The Office of the DPP suggested that communication would be improved if there was dedicated administrative support in the office to liaise with QHSS about court matters including listing of trial and sentence dates. Improved communication, including matters which the defence had indicated would be pleas of guilty, could be expected to reduce the amount of unnecessary testing carried out. DPP indicated to the Taskforce that given the relatively small size of DPP, such a position could

---

only be established if additional funding was provided. In addition, the position would only be able to liaise with QHSS on Brisbane and Ipswich court matters.

The Taskforce supports this approach and proposes a 12 month trial of the position be undertaken to validate the effectiveness of this role.

**Recommendation 46:**

*It is recommended that the Director of Public Prosecutions:*

- (i) *Establishes a court liaison function for the Brisbane and Ipswich courts to liaise with the Institute on court matters including listings of trial and sentence dates for a 12 month trial by 31 January 2006; and*
- (ii) *Subject to the outcome of the trial, continue the court liaison function as an ongoing role by 31 January 2007.*

*(Estimated recurrent cost: \$60,000 – recurrent funding subject to outcome of trial)*

### **13.6 Use of Video Conferencing and Teleconferencing in the Courts**

Forensic scientists, as expert witnesses, are often required to attend court to give testimony in their scientific field. This can involve spending time travelling to and from the court locality, including regional courts, as well as the time actually spent giving evidence. Over the past 3 years, on average, 112 witnesses from QHSS gave evidence in court each year with 68 (60%) giving evidence in person and 44 (40%) giving evidence by video/telephone. It is also evident that there is an increased use of video conferencing or teleconferencing in recent years.

DJAG has included audio visual technology in court buildings constructed within the last few years. The Taskforce was advised by DJAG that it is planned to gradually increase the availability of video conferencing and teleconferencing facilities in Queensland courts as budgetary pressures permit. As at the end of the 2004/05 financial year, DJAG had 23 video conferencing facilities at 15 sites either completed or under construction.

The provisions of the *Evidence Act 1977* allow forensic scientists to give their evidence using suitable facilities at the Kessels Road campus and without the need to attend the court in person. The use of such video conferencing or teleconferencing facilities will minimise the disruption to the forensic scientist's normal working day. There may also be savings in travelling and accommodation costs met by QPS.

For these provisions to apply, an application must be made by a party to the proceeding, including the prosecution. The Taskforce notes that the Court (Judge or Magistrate) has discretion whether to allow the application or not. The Taskforce was advised that in some instances the Court will not allow the application unless both parties agree even though the legislation does not require this. The Taskforce was also advised that there can be difficulties in giving evidence by telephone, including poor lines, making it difficult to hear the questions being asked. There may also be occasions where it is preferable for expert witnesses to give evidence in person because of the need to convey difficult concepts to a jury.

The Taskforce considers that the giving of evidence by visual or audio link should be encouraged wherever possible. The CEO should monitor and evaluate the way in which evidence is given to the courts to ensure that staff time is utilised efficiently.

In addition, the judiciary could be encouraged to make maximum use of audio and visual links. The legislation could be amended, if necessary, to make it clear that, although the submission of the parties should be considered in deciding if evidence should be given by audio or visual means, it is not necessary for the parties to agree.

The Taskforce was advised that QHSS currently has a mobile set of video-conferencing equipment which is able to be used in nine separate locations on campus. The Taskforce is of the view this equipment is adequate for current demand although a fit-for-purpose location would improve the presentation of evidence. The adequacy of this equipment should be monitored as the demand is expected to increase.

---

**Recommendation 47:**

*It is recommended that the Director-General, Department of Justice and Attorney-General explore ways, including legislative amendment if necessary, to ensure that forensic evidence is only given in person if it is in the interests of justice by **31 January 2006**.*

**Recommendation 48:**

*It is recommended that the Chief Executive Officer of the Institute monitor and evaluate the demand on Institute staff to provide evidence to the Courts and the means by which it is provided by **31 July 2006**.*