

Interoperability in the Criminal Justice Chain

Or

Joining-up the Criminal Justice Systems in England and Wales

Summary of a presentation to the 15th Colloquy on Information Technology and Law in Europe, given by Francis Galliano, Director, Criminal Justice Integration Programme.

Joining up the various IT systems throughout the Criminal Justice System for England and Wales (CJS) is essential to support the British Government's commitment to modernise by increasing its efficiency, reducing delays in processing offenders and creating transparency of activity in line with "more open" Government initiatives.

Previous attempts to create a more joined up system have not progressed as swiftly as was hoped. Circumstances have now changed and technology has evolved to create a climate where success is assured in a way that it was not before.

The CJS comprises a number of separate government agencies: police, prosecution service, courts, prisons, probation service, plus additional agencies who deal with tax evasion, serious fraud, customs & excise and young offenders. These agencies are divided into regional areas, not all with corresponding boundaries. Each developed its own operational processes and IT systems. Offenders, victims and witnesses experience pathways through the criminal justice system which are not always effective.

Integrating the systems and processes has now become a Ministerial priority. There is considerable potential for technology to improve collaboration and integration, but only if it supports business change.

Expertise has been brought in from outside government. A completely new tripartite governance structure has been set up to drive and support the changes. A business case has been established and is being evolved. User needs are being harnessed. Various technical architectures are being considered, and a preferred option has been identified. The development path proposed has these key steps:

- Secure e-mail
- Central Data Exchange
- “Virtually” Unified Case File

Pilot schemes and case studies have already identified how areas of inefficiency can be reduced and some of the difficulties resolved.

Analysis has highlighted the varying degrees to which individual parts of the CJS might benefit and the potential financial impact.

A high level plan has been drawn up showing systems to be in place at various stages over the next three years, subject to funding. Its success will depend on the evolution of new models for co-operation by the partners in the scheme.