



case study



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The Scottish Intelligence Database – helping to prevent crime, making communities safer and bringing more criminals to justice

The chess piece corporate logo for the Scottish Intelligence Database (SID) and its supporting strap line – knowledge to action – captures the essence of one of the most significant contributions in recent years to the ‘intelligence-led’ approach to 21st century policing and law enforcement.

Achieving true cross-border policing

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The Scottish Police Service compares the countering of crime and criminals to the game of chess, where the objective is to defeat the enemy or force them to surrender on the basic strategy, tactical moves, rules, captured pieces and effective use of resources. Success most often comes as the result of hard work, concentration and anticipation, with the ability to remain several moves ahead of the opposition – core element to this work are the resources that can now more readily collect, assess and disseminate information and intelligence on the activities of criminals and their organisations who threaten the safety of citizens and their communities. In addition, the wider Criminal Justice Community has access to the system and is seeing associated benefits across their areas of responsibility.

The SID Project Team worked closely with ABM to develop SID, which utilises the Intelligence module within ABM’s Information Management System (IMS) – a wider application suite encompassing Incident, Crime and Property Management. SID now plays a key role in supporting Scottish and other UK police forces and agencies in the ongoing battle to curtail crime and lessen its impact on society.

Facilitating real crime reduction

Statistics are hard to come by but an independent review in 2005 – just one year after the system went live – identified a 500% increase in intelligence log submissions; a 470% increase in seizure of assets; and a 400% increase in seizure of Class A drugs. Convictions for violent crime were up by 15%. The review also reported an 18% increase in identification of Level 2 criminals, together with improved analysis and identification of organised crime structures.

“SID is much more than an IT-enabled tool – it is an engine that helps drive our approach to policing. The intelligence that we are able to gather and share with Scottish Forces and Agencies such as the Scottish Crime and Drugs Enforcement Agency (SCDEA) and the Serious and Organised Crime Agency (SOCA), has transformed our ability to protect the public and detect crime,” says Patrick Shearer, Chief Constable of Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary.

Mr Shearer has been closely involved with the Scottish Government funded project to bring SID to fruition as a single intelligence database since its inception and was appointed as Chair of the SID Programme Board in 2004 – the year that it went live and became available to 17,250 police officers and over 12,000 support staff at Scotland’s eight police forces, and the SCDEA.

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*Patrick Shearer
Chief Constable
Dumfries and Galloway
Constabulary*

“The system is now so very well accepted that few people remember how difficult it was before SID, especially from the perspective of cross-border policing. There was no way to share intelligence automatically. It was done over the telephone or through paper documents, often limited to the boundaries of their own forces. Making the connection between fairly obvious, as well as disparate, items of information was impossible,” adds Mr Shearer.

There are now 15 participating forces and agencies linked to the system. Spread across the UK, these include the British Transport Police (BTP) and the Ministry of Defence Police (MDP), all of whom have a one-stop shop through which authorised users can input, access, manage and disseminate information and intelligence material. For example, a serious assault was carried out in one region and the suspected assailant was known only by a nickname. A search through SID made a connection with the nickname in another region and brought up full details of the person who was subsequently arrested.

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“This is a connection that would never have been made – or would have taken an awful lot longer – to help clear that crime,” says Mr Shearer. “Intelligence cells are the first cells to be established at the start of any major enquiry or incident and they are so much easier to set up, than would have been possible five or six years ago, providing very quick updates and background to support the processes. Importantly, they can be very confident of the information returned, sure that everything is being covered, assisting the police to provide stronger evidence based cases to the Crown Office and Crown Prosecution Service. This can result in fast tracking of cases through increased guilty pleas, saving court time and expense.

“The strategic benefits of SID and the way that intelligence is now approached and processed are so significant that we have moved far beyond our expectations. The wisdom of those who saw the huge potential of operating one system throughout the country, and the many people who worked on the design and delivery of SID have to be praised.”

Using the same intelligence system and processes means that police officers have the power to share intelligence between forces and across geographies to help maintain a unified approach to policing. Achieving this common standard across Scotland ensures that the value of intelligence is consistent, no matter which police force has entered it into the system. Every police officer has access to relevant intelligence, giving them an advantage over criminals by enabling them to do their jobs more effectively and safely.

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Chief Inspector
Cumbria Constabulary CID*

SID beyond Scotland

The value of SID is also being recognised by forces outside of Scotland, most recently by Cumbria Constabulary. Cumbria experiences cross border traffic with criminals moving from Scotland to England through the county. Linking with the database and being able to securely and more easily access information from Scotland will enable the constabulary to more accurately assess the level of risk in relation to criminal activity.

Chief Inspector Lee Johnson from Cumbria Constabulary CID says: “This link with the Scottish Intelligence Database will enable us to improve the speed of access to intelligence on the trafficking of drugs and the movement of the proceeds of crime to and from Scotland. The system will also provide us with a wider intelligence picture that increases our ability and opportunity to track and attack organised crime and will save time and increase efficiencies by removing some paper based processes. It will also search automatically for information without the need to send requests and await a response.”

Sharing information across Police Forces was a recommendation of the Bichard Inquiry in to the tragic events in Soham and more recently this recommendation was reinforced by the report of Sir Ian Magee on ‘The Review of Criminality Information’.

Targeting drug crime

Dealing more effectively with drug-related crime is another major benefit of SID. In the past, the SCDEA, which has a national remit in Scotland, would have to visit or contact each force in order to seek out intelligence, which was incredibly time consuming and frequently unsuccessful in delivering results. The enhanced capabilities following the introduction of SID enable SCDEA officers to quickly and easily identify links between pieces of information, even down to particular clothing or jewellery, gaining a fuller and higher level picture on anyone they are investigating. Having this improved picture allows the agency to target those individuals and organisations that are operating across borders locally, nationally and internationally.

The scope and capability of SID continues to be enhanced with recent links, for example, with Crimestoppers, the Violent and Sex Offenders Register (ViSOR), the National Gazetteer, the national Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system and Disclosure Scotland, while introducing new ways of inputting and receiving intelligence through mobile devices has tremendous potential.

“Mobile technology will make access and interaction very much easier for officers in the field to retrieve and send intelligence data. They will be able to do this whether in the station or on the spot at the scene of an incident. The more information we have in SID, the better the intelligence and the more opportunities there will be to fight crime,” adds Mr Shearer.

An important aspect about intelligence is recognising the connection between items of information and incorporating that into the knowledge of the officers who are actually dealing with an incident. The more background and information they have, the more likely it is that those seemingly random connections will be made, improving public and officer safety.

Maintaining security of information

Mr Shearer stresses however, that it is vital to allay some of the concerns that the public may have about how much information is really necessary – there are around 1 million entries on the system – and how it is secured and protected.

“SID and the data it contains are governed by very strict rules to ensure that information is managed properly, in line with legislative requirements and best practice. This is very important also to protect people providing information and to make sure that there are no issues with such considerations as human rights legislation,” he says.

SID - An international trail-blazer

Interestingly, the value of SID in the fight against crime is increasingly being recognised by law enforcement agencies in the UK and overseas. Criminals don't respect borders. Mr Shearer commented that during discussions with some colleagues from the Netherlands, he explained how SID facilitated the sharing of information and intelligence and they were impressed by what the system had been able to deliver.

SID and intelligence sharing is also highly relevant in the fight against terrorism. If the police and law enforcement agencies have an accurate picture of what is happening, not just from one county to another, but also within different countries – and the connections between global organised and serious crime as well as with terrorism – they will be better placed to respond and to prevent or disrupt this type of criminal activity.

In essence, SID is helping police officers to prevent crime, make communities safer and to bring more offenders to justice. The cornerstone of the future Information Sharing strategy has been laid.

