



# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear CJM,

Pat Haysey's article 'The 24 Hour Response' (Criminal Justice Matters, Autumn 1995) provides a useful summary of the recent influences underlying the development of the Police Service's response to people with serious mental health problems.

However, it was with some surprise that I read her assertion that 'there has been no overall strategy for developing mental health awareness training'.

In December 1994 the Metropolitan Police Service, mindful of the fact that 'more training' is only part of the answer, set in place a range of policy initiatives to support its staff in this exacting area of work. This has been achieved in the face of many other pressing and competing demands on limited police resources. These initiatives include:

- the appointment of an officer with specific responsibility for mental health issues in each local police area, to facilitate communication between police officers and local mental health professionals.
- the negotiation of formal written agreements between police and local health and social services governing the use of Section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983.
- measures to improve access to specialist advice in certain cases prior to the police decision to initiate a prosecution.
- the provision of detailed written guidance readily available to all operational staff.
- the provision of training for some 22,000 police officers throughout London during 1995, often on a

multi-agency basis, supported by a series of workshops for police trainers.

Details of all these initiatives were presented to the Association of Chief Police Officers (Personnel and Training) Committee. The National Director of Police Training has since distributed a comprehensive training package to all police forces in England and Wales.

The Metropolitan Police shared details of these developments with the NSF and I find it difficult to understand how the considerable investment by the Police in this sphere of work can be described as 'piecemeal'.

Yours sincerely,  
Paul Etheridge (Sergeant)  
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Metropolitan Police Service  
New Scotland Yard.

*Letters to the Editor about any of the articles or debates featured in CJM are welcomed. See page 27 for submission details.*

## INTERPRETERS IN THE LEGAL SYSTEM

The quality of the decisions of the courts depends in large part upon the quality of the information upon which they are based. Where defendants or witnesses speak inadequate or no English, and have little understanding of the English legal system they find themselves involved in, the quality of those decisions is at risk.

In the last few years, considerable work has been done on developing training and assessment for interpreters to work in the legal system. A growing number of centres throughout the UK offer training courses leading to the Institute of Linguists Diploma in Public Service Interpreting (legal option).

Qualified interpreters may apply to join the National Register of Public Service Interpreters, which was set up in December 1994 with support from the Home Office. This is available on subscription from the Institute of Linguists (0171 359 7445).

*Non-English Speakers and the English Legal System (ISBN 0 901382 15 9) a handbook by Ann Corsellis, is available from the Institute of Criminology, 7 West Rd, Cambridge CB3 9DQ for £9 plus £1.50 p&p.*

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