

The agencies involved set up new machinery for close co-operation between them, in order to track the progress of cases, and to signal the need for attention to those whose targets risked being exceeded.

The scheme was steered by a Working Group. Individual cases were tracked by a Progress and Tracking Group, chaired by the DPP's office, with representatives at a senior level attending from police, courts, state pathology and forensic science. A Monitoring Group, also under the DPP's office chairmanship was responsible for statistical analysis of the operation of the scheme. If a particular case appeared likely to breach the administrative time limit a notional application for an extension of the time limit was made. This was assessed by a senior member of the DPP's office in conjunction, where necessary, with experienced prosecuting Counsel, against criteria presented by statute and England case law, taking into account any particular Northern Ireland factors which would be likely to be relevant in adjudication on such applications.

The scheme reported to Ministers after its first year of operation. The report indicated that significant improvement had been made in the progress of cases. Following the report on the scheme's first year of operation, Ministers agreed that the overall limit should be reduced to 11 months and that it was decided to extend the scheme to include non-scheduled custody cases. Additionally it was agreed by Ministers that it be extended until at least 30 June 1994.

In 1994 the scheme was further extended and was operative at the time of the Robert Hamill murder investigation.

I have examined Archive records maintained by the PPS which relate to the relevant period. From those records, which can be provided if necessary to the Inquiry, I see that the Progress and Tracking Group meeting discussed the case of Hobson and others at its meetings on 21 August, 18 September and 16 October 1997. It was noted that the post mortem report and forensic report were still outstanding. I observe further that at the meeting of 21 August the forensic scientist representative at the time Mr ██████████ had been unable to attend. Mr ██████████ did attend at the meetings of 18 September and 16 October 1997. The outstanding post-mortem reports and forensic report were raised at the meetings and updates on the progress of finalising the reports were provided by the relevant representatives of the agency involved. Mr ██████████ was in a position to seek prioritization of the report within the Forensic Science Agency.