

Trouble in the ranks

Why doesn't anyone want to be a detective anymore? Syreeta Lund reports

If you had a leather jacket with lapels wide enough to merit planning permission, a penchant for drinking and the kind of gut instinct that led to the capture of slippery criminals – you would be an ideal candidate for the detective role. Back in the 1970s that is.

But the role has changed dramatically and the lack of benefits and appeal as a career choice are creating 'meltdown' in the detective ranks.

The number of detectives across the country is dwindling, with an estimated gap of around 2,000 CID officers; the service is in crisis and the lack of resilience in the department could end with dire consequences for investigations of serious crimes.

Initial results from a Police Federation survey in relation to CID makes grim reading, with the majority of around 20 forces reporting problems in recruiting detectives and retaining experience.

Brian Stockham, chairman of the Police Federation's National Detective Forum warned this month: "We are in a crisis situation. In 20 years time we don't know whether we would have the investigation skills for something like the 7/7 attack."

The main role of a detective is to investigate serious crime and act upon intelligence that can lead to an arrest.

Howard Casey, secretary of the detective forum, says the reason for the dip in CID numbers is partly due to the terms and conditions for detective officers being eroded. Plain clothes allowance has been taken away, some of the detectives' expenses have also been cut back.





Photography: Premier PR

Icon status: where have all the detectives gone?

“We are in a crisis situation. In 20 years time we don’t know whether we would have the investigation skills for something like the 7/7 attack.”

“You might buy an informant a packet of fags or a cup of coffee, which is old-fashioned policing but now they have to take the money from their own pocket. We are only talking about £12 to £15.”

He says some officers are working a 60-hour week and the long hours are not so appealing to those in uniform. “You are working long hours and sometimes with no payment. If there is a rape case or we are dealing with a paedophile, we are not going to say ‘I’ll go home now’. We want to serve the public and put these people in jail.”

There is also a lack of accreditation for the rank, even though Centrex’s Professionalising Investigation Programme (PIP) was set up and running by the end of 2004.

Mr Casey said in his own force, South Wales Police, in September last year, 70 detectives in post were not accredited either through the Professionalising the Investigation Process (PIP) or the Initial Crime Investigators’ Development Programme.

Where the detective rank used to be seen as an appealing and glamorous option - not unlike the stereotypical image of the leather-clad characters from the BBC series, *Life on Mars*, knocking down doors and pursuing the serious criminal – this is no longer the case.

A detective constable and a federation representative for around 1,000 CID officers in Greater Manchester Police, said that essentially the role is not as appealing.



Photography: Shutterstock Inc



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DCI Hunt (Philip Glenister) and DI Sam Tyler (John Simm) from BBC's 'Life on Mars' series

Within Greater Manchester Police detectives are being pulled from CID units to bolster, for example, a major incident team and terrorist unit and CID tends to be seen as a department that 'cleans up the mess' other departments can not deal with.

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He said: “I think it is to do with the fact that CID is no longer seen as a glamorous job. People do not see it as a career move anymore. Going into CID used to be the way to get onto a squad, but that’s not the case anymore.

“When I went into CID it was seen as glamorous, investigating serious matters, you would have mundane crimes but you would also get to go to more glamorous jobs, you don’t get that now. You used to be

more of a master of your own destiny and worked to your own capability. I would look for the interesting jobs and there was pleasure in investigating a crime which ultimately meant you would be locking up a serious criminal.”

He added: “*Life on Mars* was really the CID I joined, a bit more rough and ready. You would go to pubs and speak to people and get information, you were more in control. You might hear that a robbery had taken place and you would go and do surveillance, now you would probably have to go and get authorisation first, do risk assessments.”

He says that CID officers are also facing increasing pressure over sanction detections. One example involved a big case of internet fraud, where a fake auction site had been set up and people had paid thousands of pounds for items that never turned up. The case needed some lengthy investigation work but internet crime did not fit into force priorities.

Mr Stockham says: “If we are not dealing with investigations to a professional standard, we are failing on a massive scale.”