

This month, the Inspectors' Central Committee is launching a national survey of all inspectors. Tina Orr Munro reports on what they are aiming to achieve.

Inspectors across the service are being asked to spend just 15 minutes of their time to complete a survey that could greatly improve their working conditions.

The call has come from the Inspectors' Central Committee (ICC) at the Police Federation which is launching a survey of all inspecting ranks in England and Wales this month. The aim is to determine the working conditions currently experienced by inspectors and chief inspectors.

The survey will build on the 2003 Inspectors' Membership Census which covered issues such as working hours, illness, stress, roles and responsibilities. The information was used to help negotiate better conditions for their inspectors.

However, Chris Green, a member of the ICC and one of the leads on the survey, says that information is now out of date and it is vital to establish the true picture of life in the inspecting ranks as it is in 2007.

"All data has a shelf life. When the ICC is in discussion with HMIC or the Home Office or ACPO, it is difficult to make the argument if the information is no longer current. That's why we will be asking inspectors to help us with this latest survey."

The survey is completely anonymous and will not be seen by any member of the service other than the individual who fills it in. The information will go directly to Robertson Cooper which is carrying out the research. The company has undertaken research for 14 forces in England and Wales and its senior director, Professor Cary Cooper, a leading expert on stress, will act as advisor on the project.

The survey's questions cover a range of subjects including bullying, motivation, sense of purpose, job perceptions and health in a bid to 'nail down' precisely the nature of an inspector's role and the impact the job has on them.

Mr Green says: "We are trying to get the whole picture. The problems could be role specific or they could be geographical issues. That is what we need to find out."

"It is more complicated than just saying they work long hours. They are under pressure over Home Office targets. They don't have the resources to do the job...they just don't feel supported."

Although the outcome of the survey will not be known for some time, the Inspectors Central Committee is aware that, anecdotally, some members of the inspecting ranks are becoming increasingly disillusioned with their role.

Mr Green adds: "Some chief inspectors do see their role as just a stepping stone to the superintendent's rank. With inspectors, some of the roles are high pressure roles, especially in relation to sector inspectors. Their attitude seems to be that if they spend any more than 18 months in the role they will suffer burn out."

While the 2003 survey did make life better for some, some forces continue to ignore the working time directive and other best practice.



Illustration: Russ Tudor

"There is certainly evidence that forces are not sticking to the working time directive," says Mr Green.

Forces are also meant to carry out risk assessments on their personnel in terms of their stress which are then

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measured against the Health and Safety Executive's Management Standards which are seen as the benchmark. But less than half of all forces are doing this, says Mr Green. This lack of adherence to agreed

practices has meant inspectors are coming under increasing pressure. "It is more complicated than just saying they work long hours. They are under pressure over Home Office targets. They don't have the resources

to do the job. In many cases, they don't mind doing the extra hours if they have the tools to do the job. They just don't feel supported."

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Mr Green says there's no point having a survey unless the results are acted upon. When all the information is collected and analysed, it will be published at next year's annual Federation conference. In addition to this, each force will receive an individual report allowing the Inspectors' Branch Boards to use the data to discuss working conditions with their chief officer groups. Encouraging all inspectors to take part Mr Green says: "This is a really important survey and we would encourage all inspectors to take part so we have the information that could really make a difference."

"We don't have on call, which is definitely a positive, but I know of forces that do and inspectors are literally on call for six months at a time."



Case Study:

Paul, a detective inspector with 29 years service, says he works 50 hours a week in a normal week, but this can increase significantly if there is a major investigation. He says his role involves a 'mixture' of pressures.

"Even on my days off, I get called in the middle of the night by people who are just making me aware of things they don't really need to tell me about, but it means they have covered themselves if they can say they have called the detective inspector.

"We don't have on call, which is definitely a positive, but I know of forces that do and inspectors are literally on call for six months at a time.

"Performance targets cause a lot of problems in CID. A lot of pressure is placed on putting resources into tackling minor crime investigations. We don't have anyone to pass it on to, so we have to deal with it. Tackling minor crime is fine, but what about the more serious crimes and criminals?

It is very impactful in terms of the quality of service we are giving the public."

Case Study:

John has 29 years service. For the past 12 years he has been a

"I work an eight hour day, but that is a conscious decision. I was working long hours and it was a contributing factor in the breakdown of my first marriage, so it is a case of once bitten, twice shy."

chief inspector. He admits to neglecting aspects of his job because he refuses to be drawn into the long hours' culture.

"I work an eight hour day, but that is a conscious decision. I was working long hours and it was a contributing factor in the breakdown of my first marriage, so it is a case of once bitten, twice shy. I don't intend to let that happen again. But there is a cost to this. I fly by the seat of my pants because I'm not as prepared as I should be. The biggest issue that has been sacrificed is the long term development of my staff. I feel I am neglecting a big part of my work. I have always thought that I would be a success if I left this ship in better shape than when I found it. I can't honestly say I'm doing anything to contribute to that. No-one aspires to become a chief inspector when they join because of the unreasonable pressure you are expected to soak up. The result is ill-health and a real vulnerability among chief inspectors. We are storing up huge problems for the future."

(Names have been altered to protect identities)