

The Right Hon. David Blunkett MP
Home Secretary
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South Beach Road
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21 May 2003

Dear Home Secretary,

FINGERPRINTING IN CRISIS

I refer to correspondence with the Home Office during 2001 in connection with fingerprint cases involving my daughter Shirley McKie in Scotland and Alan McNamara in England and specifically to my letter of 27 September 2001 and your reply of 17 October, 2001. (copies attached)

The only thing that has changed over the past two years is that the situation has become significantly worse. Issues have not been addressed and every person entering our courts seeking justice where fingerprint evidence is involved is threatened.

These matters have also been the subject of much international concern and the UK fingerprinting system is subject to a great deal of criticism from experts across the world. (see internet sites www.clpex.com and www.onin.com for a general review)

My interest in these matters began when my daughter, a serving police officer, was falsely accused of perjury after her fingerprint was wrongly identified at the scene of a murder in 1997. She was cleared after trial and in 2002 David Asbury, who was jailed for life for the murder, had his conviction quashed after the High Court in Scotland ruled the fingerprint evidence unreliable.

Mr Alan McNamara was sentenced to 30 months in jail at Manchester Crown Court in July 2000 purely on fingerprint evidence. Investigations into this case revealed a disturbing numbers of similarities to the Scottish case.

In addition to the McNamara appeal that is pending I am aware of another fingerprint appeal hearing in England where fingerprint evidence is likely to be successfully challenged. These decisions are going to further underline there is a crisis in fingerprinting in the UK and that a potential threat to justice exists every time a fingerprint expert steps into the witness box.

One of the many themes linking the Scottish and English cases is the negative effect of having the police service in direct control of the fingerprinting services. As I told the Forensic Science Society in Oxford earlier this year the culture and role of the police and experts is not the same. As long as their close association is maintained the doubt will linger that the temptation remains for scientific objectivity to take second place to police and public pressure for a conviction.

The role of the scientist is not the fight against crime but the dispassionate and objective analysis of evidence. Fingerprint experts are being compromised because of their close allegiance to and control by the Police

In underlining the concerns expressed in my previous correspondence I would suggest a solution for England and Wales that would be relatively inexpensive to implement and one that would bring fingerprinting into line with the other forensic services.

It is my sincere belief that many of the problems could be resolved by devolving responsibility for fingerprinting away from the Police to the **Forensic Science Service**.

As you will be aware the **Forensic Science Service** is an executive agency of the Home Office and is the largest supplier of forensic services in the UK.

As well as supplying services to the 43 police forces in England and Wales, other police forces such as the Ministry of Defence Police and British Transport Police and to the Crown Prosecution Service and HM Customs and Excise the Forensic Science Service has developed commercially offering services to the private and public sector.

Importantly it is a leader in forensic science technology and has a reputation for the integrity, impartiality and accuracy of its findings.

At a time when forensic evidence is of increasing importance in the detection of serious crime and when more and more question marks are being pointed at 'experts' a government initiative is long overdue.

I would urge you to take an independent line in evaluating my proposals and resist the opposition of the police and other vested interests. It is time for the Home Office to be proactive in these matters rather than reacting when further injustices occur.

While I am prepared to provide further information I do not intend to enter into a prolonged correspondence. I am however willing to be interviewed should you decide to evaluate my proposals.

Yours sincerely,

Iain A J McKie

Encls:

**Copy: Alex Salmond MP
David Crausby MP
Rt. Hon. Oliver Letwin MP
Simon Hughes MP**