

Leaders

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Lessons to be learned by SCRO

THE four officials of the Scottish Criminal Record Office (SCRO) originally involved in the Shirley McKie fingerprint case yesterday told the Holyrood justice 1 committee that they still believed a print found at a murder scene in 1997 was hers. However, the courts have long since rejected their identification after contrary views emerged from independent fingerprint experts brought in both by Ms McKie and by the Crown itself.

The best construction that can be put on the intransigent position of the SCRO officials is that they honestly disagree with everyone else. However, that would suggest that the standard of identification and the procedures used by the SCRO are open to doubt, which is worrying indeed. This is compounded by the fact that the SCRO officials are refusing to accept that they have anything to learn - something that would not be tolerated in any other profession where major disputes emerged or where the courts found that errors had been made.

It lends some credence to the report by James McKay, the then deputy chief constable of Tayside police, who was asked to investigate how the Shirley McKie print was misidentified. He noted that the SCRO operated in a very hierarchical and deferential manner that discouraged internal criticism or rigorous quality control. If so, it is a culture that must be reformed.