



# New recruits have nose for crime

By Adelle O'Donnell,  
Media and Public Affairs Branch

Drug detection has become a whole lot easier with the Queensland Police Service (QPS) Drug Detection Unit (DDU) now operating at full strength.

The unit, based at the Brisbane Dog Squad, has recently been bolstered from four handler/dog teams to nine – meaning more teams can now be requested to assist in all regions across Queensland.

The increase in staff members comes after five labrador dogs successfully completed an intensive training course at the Australian Customs Service Detector Dog Training Centre based in Canberra.

QPS senior drug detection dog handler Sergeant Nikki Bignell said the nine dogs had the ability to detect the odour of drugs in either an active or passive capacity.

"The drug detection dogs use their heightened sense of smell to detect the odour of drugs such as cocaine, heroin, amphetamines, ice and ecstasy.

"With the active response dogs they react to the drug odour by pawing or scratching at the site of the odour. With the passive response dogs, they simply sit

in front of where the odour is strongest – whether this is a person, object or location," she said.

Sergeant Bignell said the drug detection dogs had been trained using a reward process whereby the dog retrieved toys containing the target drug odour.

"The dogs relate this odour as fun and therefore eagerly search for it," she said.

"We then adapt this process into the operational environment when the dog hunts for drugs in an effort to receive a reward for their hard work such as a game or a toy."

Sergeant Bignell said the age the dogs started training differed from dog to dog due to each dog maturing at different ages.

"Generally we like a dog to be at least 12 months old before starting a course," she said.

"However, if a dog is very immature then it will start training a little later."

The basic training course for the drug detection dogs and their handlers is 14 weeks which tests their high retrieve drive and their possessiveness for their toy.

"Once the handler/dog team graduates from the course they are

then placed with an experienced handler/dog team and undergo a three-month operational training period on the road," Sergeant Bignell said.

The latest recruits to join the DDU are Senior Constable Xavier Chang and Police Dog Gecko, who graduated in November 2006, Senior Constable Craig Moss and Police Dog Toby, and Senior Constable Paul McConachy and Police Dog Shylo. *(pictured)*

Sergeant Bignell said dogs stayed at home with their handlers when they were off duty to ensure a close bond and to also enable officers to be available on call for call-outs at short notice.

"Once the dogs have completed their training course they generally continue to work as a drug detection dog until they start to slow down and their willingness to find drugs subsides.

"Once the dogs have retired they generally retire into the handler's care and remain a house dog," Sergeant Bignell said.

In an effort to keep the DDU fully staffed an additional two handlers and dogs will start their basic training course this year. ■