

Blowing the whistle on corruption



The Internal Witness Support Unit (IWSU), within the Ethical Standards Command, was established in 1998 as part of the Queensland Police Service's (QPS) ongoing commitment towards a corruption resistant organisation.

The IWSU has provided support and advice to numerous staff members and officers who have come forward to report misconduct or corrupt activities.

Acting Inspector Mark Stewart, Officer-in-Charge of the IWSU, said he assisted more than 100 police officers and staff members a year, and understood exactly how they felt about misconduct within the Service.

"I speak to people who simply can't believe that a work colleague would put them in a position which inevitably results in them disgracing themselves, their family, their work colleagues and the police service," Acting Inspector Stewart said.

"In the most serious of cases, a moment of stupidity could result in their dismissal from the Service and possibly a term of imprisonment."

Acting Inspector Stewart said he believed the reason officers were coming forward was because

they were asking the 'how' question.

"Not 'how did their colleagues think they could get away with it?', but 'how could their colleagues do that to their mates, their family and the Service?'"

One officer who entered the Internal Witness Support program said it was the ethics training he had received as a recruit—the *Meeting the Challenge* course—that was instrumental in his decision to come forward to report unethical conduct. When he came across a situation of unethical behaviour he said he knew it was the 'right thing' to report it because of the shame it would bring not only upon his work unit but the entire Service.

The QPS has progressively increased training in both the areas of corruption prevention and ethical practices and behaviour over recent years. The QPS Corruption Prevention Plan is the foundation document for training and is based on a framework of 'four pillars'.

These four pillars are:

- a corporate governance framework, whereby corruption prevention is embedded into the

beliefs or 'culture' of the organisation

- a strategic framework, where ensuring a corruption resistant organisation is written into the Service's core business priorities
- provision of training to ensure each individual is committed to maintaining the highest levels of ethical behaviour and integrity across the Service
- individual commitment to use the S E L F test, a quick reference guide to ethical decision making.

The SELF test is an acronym that is continuously reinforced to Service members, and appears on screen savers, posters and whenever any police radio is switched on. It is used as a guide to help QPS members determine if their conduct is ethical and reminds them to apply the following principles to all decision making:

S—Scrutiny. Would your decision withstand scrutiny by the community or the Service?

E—Ensure compliance with your Oath of Service, Code of Conduct and Service policy?

L—Lawful. Does your decision comply with all laws, regulations and rules?

F—Fair. Is your decision fair to the community, your family, and colleagues?

The Ethical Standards Command's Training Unit is responsible for providing ethics-based training courses to both incoming police recruits and existing Service members.

Corruption prevention training, which includes information on the Internal Witness Support program, is managed through the IWSU.

Because of the ongoing training commitment in both corruption prevention and ethics, more and more officers are not only



aware of their obligation to report misconduct and breaches of discipline, but are acutely aware of the expectation that when they do report corruption, they will be supported.

The IWSU's cornerstones of operation are confidentiality and support to any member of the QPS who wishes to come forward. The unit operates in accordance with the provisions of the *Whistleblowers Protection Act 1994* and works with other oversight bodies including the Crime and Misconduct Commission to ensure transparency and accountability.

The services offered to those members reporting unethical behaviour include not only peer and management support, but access to qualified professional help for officers who may find the process stressful. The IWSU can also offer advice in setting up peer and mentor support networks for members who come forward.

Acting Inspector Stewart said that while corruption could never be completely eradicated, the Service was well placed to ensure it could not gain a foothold.

"No organisation can ever be totally corruption-free. There will always be someone who does something corrupt, whether it is for reasons of stupidity or greed," Acting Inspector Stewart said.

"But for every person who would choose to act in this manner, there are many more who are prepared to speak up.

"The IWSU will provide confidential assistance and the best support services available to those Service members who understand their obligations and have the resolve and fortitude to report unethical behaviour.

"They should not expect anything less."

