

The leadership and staff of the Military Court Service (MCS) can take quiet satisfaction in their inspection report by HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI).

The inspection was undertaken by HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate at the voluntary invitation of the Military Court Service (MCS), and its overall conclusion is strikingly positive: the MCS is described as “effective, well-led and highly regarded”.

According to the report, in 2025/26 96% of plea and trial preparation hearings were listed within the 42-day target and 95% were effective. Inspectors found proactive case management, including checking legal aid and representation beforehand and chasing compliance with directions. Perhaps even more tellingly, a defence practitioner contrasted the MCS favourably with the civilian criminal courts, describing a culture in which defence representatives were treated with dignity and respect.

Technology

The technology gets strong praise. The courtroom and deployable court arrangements are described as an “exemplar that the civilian justice system should aspire to”. Inspectors watched the MCS turn a disused military facility at Aldergrove into a functioning court for a week-long trial. Victim and witness arrangements – separation, privacy, special measures and practical support – were also regarded as a clear strength.

There are criticisms, which make the praise rather more credible. Behind the impressive courtroom technology, listing and case progression were said to still depend too much on spreadsheets, manual checking and the knowledge of experienced individuals. HMCPSI therefore wants a single secure digital listing/case-progression system.

The Chief Inspector characterised the recommendations as being not about fixing failure, but about protecting and improving what already works.

Sexual offence trial listing targets not met

There has been criticism elsewhere of the fact that, according to date mentioned in the inspection report, the timeliness target for listing sexual offence trials was not met in 2024, 2025 or the year to date in 2026.

However, the report also says that data on trial listing efficiency needed careful interpretation, and that missed targets are often linked to factors outside the MCS's direct control, including counsel availability and case complexity or sensitivity. The MCS's routes into other parts of Service Justice System governance were therefore important.

Those interviewed by the HMCPSI inspectors included a prosecution victim and witness liaison unit manager, a sexual offence liaison officer, and representatives from consultants who provide victim support

Strong operational grip

Military Court Service wins praise from independent inspectors

The Military Court System naturally benefits from lower case numbers than in the civilian criminal courts, but high standards don't just happen. A key strength was that "Senior leaders maintain strong operational grip through close oversight of live court business, regular meetings, practical controls and active use of performance information to identify and respond to emerging risks."

Rather than over-rely on senior leadership oversight, the report recommends that

By the end of February 2027, the Military Court Service should develop and implement a proportionate assurance framework that strengthens the way audit activity, feedback and learning are consistently recorded, analysed and used...

Last year BAFF shared a "useful short video on what to expect to see on arrival at the **Bulford** Military Court Centre, whether as a witness, a party to proceedings, a board member or a member of the public wishing to attend proceedings."

The [video, produced by MOD and available on YouTube](#), appear to exemplify the importance of providing the right systems and environment for everybody who finds themselves having a role in court martial proceedings.

The HMCPSI voluntary inspection report on the Military Court Service can be read here: [An inspection by invitation of the effectiveness and efficiency of the Military Court Service.](#)

The Military Court Service was also mentioned in our recent blog post: ITV News investigation: [Are Women in the Armed Forces Safe?](#)