

## Courtroom Technology: The Bichard Inquiry

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The Bichard Inquiry was set up as an independent body whose purpose was to “urgently enquire into child protection procedures in Humberside Police and Cambridgeshire Constabulary in the light of the recent trial and conviction of Ian Huntley for the murder of Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells.”

Courtroom technologies have developed significantly since their emergence in 1993. Although they are only becoming apparent via public inquiries such as the Bloody Sunday and Shipman, evidentiary-based presentation services are increasing in popularity for the following reasons:

- A substantial reduction in the amount of court time – the ability to display evidence in a digital fashion on a network of computer screens be they flat, touch or plasma in the courtroom, has been accepted as saving as much as 40% of anticipated court time. Paragraphs, sentences, hand-written notes and various other sub-sections can be highlighted on screen within seconds. This can be seen by all those reviewing the document for the benefit of those making the argument.
- Instant access to evidence – electronic or scanned and coded paper documents can be recalled from a database within seconds, for use in or out of court. For example in the Bichard Inquiry, rather than waiting for a member of the secretariat to find and distribute copies by hand to each of the parties, these were located by a member of the Inquiry team, placed on electronic media such as a CD or printed off if necessary, and given to the media.
- Review by multiple parties in multiple locations – the functionality also now exists which allows those controlling proceedings to limit the review of specific information to certain people or areas, to ensure potential legal issues are taken into consideration. Due to the public nature of the Bichard Inquiry, the evidence was shown in the Inquiry room, Secretariat team area and media centre simultaneously via 8 flat and 6 plasma screens.
- Secure document collection repositories – databases of paper-based and electronic evidence can be securely maintained until such a time when they are required for review. The Inquiry team for Bichard utilised this facility to allow counsel to review sensitive information prior to the commencement of the public hearing.
- Reduction in space required – by electronically storing information on a hosted online repository, the storage area required and the security implications of having the evidence on-site were eliminated.
- Public perception – as with most public inquiries, it was foreseen that the Bichard investigation would attract a lot of media attention due to the reasoning behind its formation. In public investigations the perception of the sensitive handling of the subject matter, as well as the efficiency with which it is run is always heavily scrutinised. By placing an electronic evidence infrastructure in place, the Bichard Inquiry team were able to operate quickly and effectively in the watchful eyes of the public.
- Resource Savings – the time and resources spent collecting, copying, reviewing and distributing evidence can be reduced by producing the evidence document collection electronically. This was not only proven by Bichard, but the Bloody Sunday, Bristol Royal Infirmary and Shipman Inquiries.

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