

Information Technology and the Police

From tiny snippets of information the Police force can, by cross-referencing databases, identify possible suspects. For example, from a taped phone call they identified a nickname "Tiger", they were able to find out his car, his home, his phone number, see videos on him and hear his voice and were able to confirm they had the right person, so just a tiny snippet of information can be really useful.

The Police have the Police National Computer at Hendon. This is a system of mainframe computers. They carry several relational databases. Examples of databases include one on stolen vehicles and one on criminal convictions.

The stolen vehicle databases includes the following fields

- Registration Number
- Make
- Colour
- Chassis
- Engine Number
- Distinguishing features

The criminal conviction database includes the following fields

- Name (the one the criminal is known by)
- Real name
- Height
- Approx. weight
- Colour of eyes
- Colour of hair
- Glasses
- Tattoos
- Scars
- Warning signals e.g. do they usually carry firearms
- Previous convictions
- Method of crime



One of the computer systems used by Scotland Yard is HOLMES. This holds information about Murder inquiries.

Scotland Yard has access to the following information

- Name
- Known by "Nickname"
- Address
- Habits
- Personality
- Social Contacts
- Student Records
- Travel Details
- Marital History
- Mental Health
- Life Style
- Sexual Life
- Political Opinions
- Party membership
- Support for Pressure Groups

The Metropolitan Police have a brilliant web site. They tell you about their OTIS project, Operations Technology Information Systems. It will enable 40,000 users at 200 locations to use over 4000 workstations. They too are using MS Word, Excel and PowerPoint and ICL Team office. They are very keen on electronic mail.

They also have CRIS, Crime Report Information System reporting crimes and BumbleBee Imageing which stores pictures of household goods, mainly antiques so stolen goods can be identified. They actually make this available on the Internet so that if you spot a wanted item you can report it to them.

The Metropolitan Police can use 100 different databases to find information about an individual. These include databases held by:

- ◆ Traders in Personal Data
- ◆ All Government Departments
- ◆ Social Workers
- ◆ Employers
- ◆ Education Departments
- ◆ Housing Departments
- ◆ Doctors
- ◆ Nurses
- ◆ Banks
- ◆ Trade Unions
- ◆ Security Services
- ◆ Private Detectives

All Police forces have incident handling computers; often these are mini computers. All 999 calls are logged onto these. In the Operations room, the controllers must know where each police car is. Computers track all police vehicles. Each vehicle has an encoder mounted on the dashboard. The encoder is a microprocessor. It has a number of buttons on it. The police will press these buttons to show



- ◆ What they are doing.
- ◆ Where they are.

When a 999 call is received the controller can search for all police cars in the area excluding ones involved in certain duties. The best car can then be chosen and instructions are sent by radio control to that car. The controller then keys into the computer who s/he has sent and what the incident is. When the police car reaches the scene they have direct radio contact to operations control. The operator can query the Police National Computer at Hendon and the DVLA computer at Swansea to establish any details needed about the incident, such as details of a missing person or of a stolen car.

The Main uses the Police make of computers are for

- ◆ **Administration**
Pay roll,
Personal records
Word Processing Letters etc
- ◆ **Storage and retrieval of information**
Databases on
 - o missing persons
 - o wanted persons
 - o stolen cars
 - o convicted criminals
- ◆ **Operational control**
Allocation of police resources
Officers on the beat
Cars etc

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Concern about the individual's privacy

There are many people who feel that the Police and Security Forces have too much freedom of access to personal information. Alan Lodge's, a photographer, Police Record indicates he is a drug dealer which apparently is not true. Mr Lodge is suing the Police. Other people feel the more the police know the safer the world is. This is definitely an area where there are valid arguments for and against, the availability of such an enormous amount of data to the Police Force.

Question Time

Police forces make use of computer systems

a) Name **four** different types of data that is stored by the police and explain how they would be used to fight crime.

i) Data _____

Use _____

ii) Data _____

Use _____

iii) Data _____

Use _____

iv) Data _____

Use _____

b) Members of the general public have expressed concern over the increasing use of computer systems by the police

Briefly outline some of those concerns

Answers

Police forces make use of computer systems

a) Name **four** different types of data that are stored by the police and explain how they would be used to fight crime

- i) Data **Registration numbers**
Use **To check if a car has been stolen**
- ii) Data **Tattoos**
Use **To identify a suspect**
- iii) Data **Photo of an antique**
Use **To identify a stolen good. (BumbleBee Imaging)**
- iv) Data **Location of car**
Use **To decide which police car to send to scene of crime. (Operations room control)**

b) Members of the general public have expressed concern over the ever-increasing use of computer systems by the police.

Briefly outline some of those concerns.

Invasion of privacy All aspects of a person's private life are now becoming traceable by use of computers. Many people, even good honest citizens, don't like the feeling of being constantly monitored.

Hacking Hackers could access information that should be confidential and read it. They might also change the data.

Loss of data If any of the computer systems crashed the information could be lost.

Information could be incorrect. There could be two John Jones living in the same street and the wrong John Jones could have been inputted into the computer as a suspect.

Circumstantial evidence may not be accurate. A person attending a protest rally may have gone out of sheer curiosity, rather than a real interest in the purpose of the rally and yet be labelled as a threat to society.

The police go to great lengths to protect their data. Loss of data and hacking are highly unlikely