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# Editorial

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## Serious Fraud Office

When a general election is called part-way through a parliamentary session the Government very often finds itself having to throw overboard some of the more controversial parts of its legislative programme in order to salvage what it can of the rest. This was the case in May last year, when most of the Criminal Justice Bill (a large and contentious measure as originally drafted including, among other things, hotly contested proposals for the abolition of the defence's right of peremptory challenge of jurors) was sacrificed in the pre-election scramble. What remained was a Criminal Justice Act of just 18 sections and two schedules, giving effect, in watered-down form, to the Roskill Committee's proposals for the establishment of a Serious Fraud Office armed with new powers of investigation and prosecution in respect of particularly serious and complex fraud cases.

The SFO went live at the beginning of April, under the directorship of Mr John Wood, the former Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions, and the first controller of the DPP's Fraud Investigation Group. The latter will

remain in being to tackle less serious frauds. The SFO begins life with a modest budget of £6m per annum, and a staff of more than 80, including 26 lawyers and 19 accountants.

Its working relationships with the police will be crucial to its success. Officers will be seconded from their respective forces to the Office to work on particular cases; the SFO will work in particularly close co-operation with the City of London fraud squad, of whom some 15 to 20 officers will work alongside SFO staff in the same building. But it is in this delicate area that the main, and most worrying, departure from the Roskill Report has occurred. Police officers will not, as Roskill recommended, be members of the staff of SFO, answerable to the Director, but will continue to work under the command of their own senior officers. The perpetuation of this kind of division is a recipe for inefficiency, and an arrangement along these lines will do little to help reinforce the training of specialised fraud squad officers, a matter to which the Roskill Report attached particular importance.

The SFO is potentially a valuable antidote to organisational fragmentation in a particularly important and difficult

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area of law enforcement, though demarcation problems will not disappear overnight. It is a great pity, however, that the conservatism and territorial jealousy of some senior police officers has been allowed to stand in the way of full-blooded implementation of a key part of the Roskill package.