

FCN quarterly report

Q3 – 2024/25

Updates this quarter

Thanks for reading the FCN's quarter 3 report, covering October-December 2024. Please contact us with any questions or comments.

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Quality & Compliance

The FCN continues to provide compliance support to Policing and the NPCC – the focus during this quarter was helping Policing prepare for the eagerly awaited second version of the Forensic Science Regulator's (FSR) Code.

On behalf of Policing and the NPCC, we continued to support the FSR's Incident Examination Specialist Group (IESG) in developing and understanding the proposed changes and potential impact of Code v2.

A previously drafted 'validation decision tree' has been further developed with input from a variety of stakeholders within the community and is now referred to as an 'Assurance decision Model'. The model is provoking lots of thoughts and discussions around the value of validation and other forms of assurance, which is positive.

Our Anti-Contamination Project is now well established, and

community engagement sessions have been held. The national Training & Competency Framework for INC 100 has also now been drafted, utilising material shared by the CSI Technical Forum and the wider community. Further review of the framework is expected in Q4 prior to publication in readiness for Code v2.

Site visits

The FCN's Compliance Support Teams visited several Police Forces during this quarter to assist them in increasing their compliance with the FSR Code. The support largely focussed on Digital Forensic Units, which sees a shift from CSI, demonstrating the adaptability of the service.

Gap analysis

Publication of an FSR Code v2 Gap Analysis which was due in Q3 is on hold while we await parliamentary approval and final publication of the Code. The

team is poised to deliver this for Police Forces as soon as possible following the publication of Code V2.

Following a request from the FPQSSG to understand and advise on options for closing any gaps identified in Code compliance, the FCN undertook a survey and gap analysis of Police Forces' accreditation for friction ridge detail comparison (FSA-MTP 101). The completed information is now being considered by FPSG to agree how best to support forces meet Code v2 requirements.

SARC support

See page 2.

Quality & Compliance – SARC support

The FCN has produced draft plans for the layout of 'Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) Mobile Units', the purpose of these units being for use as a contingency for existing SARCs and at major events such as festivals with the aim of increasing disclosures. These plans have been made available to stakeholders.

A SARC Competency Assessment Toolkit, utilising a newly developed approach involving ultraviolet gels, has also been completed, published and utilised nationally.

We have also helped resolve numerous issues related to consumables, including issues regarding supply, quality, and specification changes. The escalation pathway document for consumables has been refreshed and circulated to all Quality Managers.

An examination strategy Collaborative Learning Exercise (CLE) has been developed by FCN's SARC Specialist Board. This has been successfully piloted at 5 SARCs in December 2024 and is planned to be rolled out to all SARCs in February 2025.

The FCN initiated a pilot study in November 2024 with 3 participating SARCs to collate

and review case work data to evaluate the SARC processes and develop a mechanism to allow continuous feedback between Police, FHPs and the SARCs, also providing an additional competency assessment for Forensic Healthcare Practitioners. This pilot will continue throughout 2025.



Pictured: The FCN's Guylaine Hanford & Michelle Gaskell

Research & Innovation

FCN continues to work closely with UKRI to refine investment in forensic research and provide subject matter expertise on projects like SCANDi.

We coordinated the Government spending review submission for forensics in the police science and technology submission.

We collaborated with Home Office to ensure the statements of user needs to support the

funding for DSTL to conduct research and development for forensics ensures greatest benefit to policing.

We continue to drive investment and benefits to policing through forensic science research.

Areas of research interest (ARIs) for forensics have been updated and published on the FCN website. We have engaged with the OPCS to ensure the

problem book reflects current forensic challenges and aligns to the ARIs.

The FCN R&I Strategy was reviewed and modified towards a strategic plan.

Cell-Site Exercise

A second cell-site analysis collaborative learning exercise (CLE) run by the FCN will have 32 organisations participating, including private-sector providers for the first time. Read more below.



Performance

The FCN oversees and manages a performance framework for forensics on behalf of the NPCC.

During Q3, the forensic data returns for CSI have been received, collated, analysed and published.

Our digital forensic KPI data collection exercises have been completed, with all data returned collated, analysed and developed into a full report. This will be published in Q4 (see more below in 'Digital Forensics').

A draft performance framework for Streamlined Forensic Reporting (SFR) has been developed and is being socialised with the community. This includes high-level qualitative measures for all disciplines, and quantitative data on demand and cost avoidance to policing, specifically for road traffic toxicology (RTTOX) and drugs.

Digital Forensics

In the world of digital forensics, the FCN supports delivery of future developments, accreditation requirements and response to challenges – on behalf of the NPCC, and working with police forces and the Home Office.

DF suppliers

In the digital forensic marketplace this quarter, the FCN continued work to identify suppliers for tool validation at source. We also engaged with the Association of Digital Forensic Service Providers (ADFSP) regarding validation templates.

DF performance

We completed the Digital Forensics Performance Framework report and issued it to the NPCC's DF Portfolio Lead for review.

The report summarises performance data from 42 policing organisations including 41 forces. The results from the performance framework will be presented at the DF Strategy Board on 4th February.

Validation

A central validation exercise of Magnet Axiom has now been completed. The report is to be finalised in January and shared with all police forces, with the findings also being shared via the NPCC DF Validation Working Group.

Cell-site exercise

During Q3, the deadline passed for participation in the second FCN Cell-site Analysis Collaborative Learning Exercise.

The exercise is designed to assist forces with achieving and maintaining compliance with the FSR Codes.

In total 32 organisations have participated in the exercise including 26 forces and 6 forensic service providers – this is the first time private-sector companies have been involved in the exercise.

Artificial intelligence

The FCN's joint research project to explore the use of AI and natural language processing (NLP) to support digital forensic investigations has evolved to include two new models. One area is focused on tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG), and another for drugs offenses.

Currently the models are in the testing and training environment at Warwick University. During Q4, testing of the model will be conducted in a policing environment and further evaluated for policing value.

Forensic Workforce

The FCN helps police forces enhance their forensic workforce, from staff recruitment and retention, to training, career development and wellbeing.

Guidance

The FCN's Partnership Toolkit – which helps police forces and academic institutions partner effectively – has been updated with new case examples and republished.

We've also published updated Mentor Guidance.

Wellbeing

In wellbeing, the FCN has begun work on research with the University of Birmingham and international law enforcement.

Apprenticeships

The FCN's expression of interest for a physical forensic practitioner Level 4 apprenticeship has been approved by the UK's apprenticeship body IfATE. A trailblazer group has been established and an occupational standard will be created in Q4.

The Level 7 digital forensic apprenticeship opens for expressions of interest, and a webinar was held with Cranfield University.

The FCN website has also been updated with apprenticeship opportunities which are available.



Image: L7 DF apprenticeship provider Cranfield University

Forensic Marketplace

Risks & issues

On behalf of NPCC, the FCN commenced a lessons learnt exercise with the community on recent marketplace crisis. Outputs will inform a refresh of the National Forensic Marketplace Contingency Plan (NFMCP).

Operational oversight

A market share refresh has been completed across physical and digital forensics, and shared with the Forensic Marketplace Operations Group (FMOG) and other stakeholders.

We have gathered and shared intelligence with forces regarding working operationally with

suppliers in relation to DF activities to help mitigate risks.

There is a working group forming for data collection and collaboration, working with BlueLight Commercial, and we're also supporting them with a procurement strategy for digital forensic software.

Synthetic opioids

We continued supporting the Home Office synthetic opioids taskforce with data and intelligence from internal and external drug laboratories.

Vetting

We hold regular engagement with

police vetting regarding issues in the marketplace, as well as working with forces to encourage a consistent approach.

Standardisation & efficiencies

We met with the NPCC's Forensic Marketplace Strategic Plan (FMSP) Project S&E lead Kirsty Potter to begin developing an implementation plan in Q4.

CAID

We brought together forensic service providers to share a supplier's view of CAID with the Home Office team leading on the CAID review, as well as the NPCC DF Strategy Board and CAID team.

Streamlined Forensic Reporting

A third and final SFR training video has now been published on the FCN website (see more on SFR below).



FCN Internal Activities

The FCN received agreement from our host, Dorset OPCC, to charge for services under terms of the NPCC grant and following the NPCC guidance. Our first income generation activity will be made in Q4 with the attendance of FCN staff at a Science Futures event at University South Wales, for which FCN will recover costs of time and travel expenses.

During Q3, we also conducted an internal skills audit of all FCN staff, identifying opportunities to better use and share our people's skills, and any organisational skills gaps to fill.

NPCC Support

SFR

The national Streamlined Forensic Reporting board continues on a quarterly basis.

Two new disciplines have been approved – fibres and speed estimation from CCTV in collision investigation cases.

A third and final SFR training video, aimed at CPS and other end-users, has been published on the FCN website.

Y-STR

Our joint sampling programme continues with Home Office FINDS to develop a UK Y-STR reference collection. In Q3, events were held at Nottingham Trent University, Thermofisher Scientific and Home Office.

Work has commenced with King's College London to process c.3,000 extra samples.

Research has been commissioned with Dundee University to support statistical research of the Y-STR profiles generated by the project.

We continue to explore the functionality of a Y-STR intelligence database working with FINDS, Home Office Biometrics, suppliers and academia.

National Guidance

We began helping develop new national guidance for DNA elimination databases.

We've finalised guidance documents as part of a piece of work commissioned by the FINDS Strategy Board on DNA subject samples.

We're supporting Home Office FINDS and the Forensic Science Regulator (FSR) with guidance and reporting caveats to mitigate the risk of misleading

information entering the criminal justice system for historic crime stains, mainly focused on body fluid attribution.

Detailed planning is now underway for the collaborative learning exercise for DNA match reporting (commissioned by DNA Operations Group).

Q2 recap

July-Sept (Q2 - 2024/25)

Digital Forensics

Data collection for the DF performance framework took place with 44 policing organisations submitting KPI data. We began analysing the 3,500 resulting data points.

We engaged with the Home Office's senior policy advisors for online child sexual abuse policing on deepfakes. We presented on AI and neural networks for DSTL/NPCC.

The FCN's report on the cell-site CLE was shared and phase two initiated with 43 EOIs received.

Workforce

The first cohort of Level 4 Digital Forensic apprentices began in July 2024, with 18 apprentices from four organisations. Development of the Level 7 DF apprenticeship continued, due to begin in Q4. The development of a Level 4 Physical Forensic Apprenticeship is on track.

Wellbeing Toolkit case studies were updated. The results of the Leicestershire Police wearables project were published.

Quality & Compliance

Updated FSR Declaration Guidance was reviewed and the FCN's Declaration FAQs refreshed accordingly. We also began to help survey policing to understand the current accreditation gaps in Police Forces Friction Ridge Detail.

Validation

Supported the NPCC Quality Portfolio, DF Portfolio and new

Op Yanborough Validation Sub-Group. A National Validation Tracker was published. A Validation Decision Model was drafted for review ahead of Code v2 being published.

Anti-contamination

An anti-contamination project was scoped, focused on risk management of contamination at a scene, to identify most efficient use of resource based on risk.

SARCs

Three SARC train-the-trainer events took place, enabling a new competency assessment toolkit. A collaborative learning exercise (CLE) was developed for SARC examination strategy. SARC-specific declaration guidance was drafted and readied for consultation.

Compliance support

All force requests for compliance support were completed, and the first full on-site SARC visit was completed.

Performance

We collated performance metrics from police forces relating to CSIs and burglary attendance, to present back to the community via a workshop.

NPCC support

Forensic Threat & Risk

We published the Risk and Threat status assessments for Q1/Q2 and agreed a further Q3/Q4 assessment.

Y-STR database

Our sampling programme for the UK reference collection reached 4,222 of 10,000. Planning began for YSTR intelligence functionality in the NDNAD.

Streamlined Forensic Reporting

Two of three training videos were published. A data collection framework for toxicology and drugs was developed via the board.

Horizon scanning & research

We provided forensic engagement in the ACE deepfake projects. AI advice was provided to College of Policing and forces. The NPCC forensic R&I strategy was reviewed.

Guidance

Guidance was shared for the cell-site exercise, ForSTRA, R&I Strategy, updated SFR guidance, and Lawful Match Guidance.

Marketplace

FCN undertook a market-share refresh across physical and digital forensics. Continued engagement with vetting. We shared operational lessons learnt for the NGP with forces. And technical specifications for DNA subject sampling kits were developed.

We updated the DF Technology Partnership forum, DF Operational Services Group, and engaged with ADFSP on CAID.

For the full Q2 report, visit the [FCN library](#).