

# FCN quarterly report

Q1 – 2025/26

## Updates this quarter

Thanks for reading the FCN's quarter 1 report, covering April–June 2025. Please contact us with any questions or comments.

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## Quality & Compliance

The FCN's Quality Team was focussed this quarter on the publication of the FSR's Code of Practice Version 2 and providing support to Policing on the changes to requirements introduced in this new version. We published a comprehensive Code Comparison, comparing the two versions of the Code, highlighting changes and providing comments and suggestions of how to address these changes within Policing. This was a significant piece of work drawing on the capacity of most within the team and will save Policing considerable time and effort compared to Forces individually undertaking this work. We've had several Forces feedback positively, demonstrating the value of this work to Policing.

**"An epic piece of work which has made my job so much easier."**

Force Quality Manager

**"Easy to use and saved us a considerable amount of time and effort."**

Force Quality Manager

## Key highlights

To support the changes required around the delivery of Incident Scene Examination activity laid out in Code V2, we are particularly proud to have completed and published two key pieces of work this quarter.

### Training & Competency

A Training & Competency Framework to support Policing to implement a corporate-wide training and competence assessment of Crime Scene Investigators. The FCN was asked to produce national guidance that all Forces could utilise, particularly given the drive within the CSI community to have a more efficient and consistent approach to Code compliance. Together with support from the community we have delivered this with excellent feedback so far.

### National CSI Anticontamination Report

A National CSI Anticontamination Report, which provides pragmatic guidance on the risks associated with Incident Scene Examination. This report should hopefully be the catalyst for Policing to change their ways of working so again they are more efficient and consistent. We understand this change will be challenging for many but with the OFSR, Chair of IESG, Chair of Heads of CSI, Chair of CAWG and Chair of CSI Tech Forum all in agreement that these are fantastic pieces of work, this is a challenge that no doubt Policing will be able to rise to adopt.



Pictured: national CSI anticontamination activity took place in-force leading to the publication of the report (see page 1)

## Quality & Compliance (continued)

### Business as usual activities

The team continued to support Policing through several of its business-as-usual activities and services. We continue to organise and chair the National Quality Manager's meeting. In this quarter we had a face-to-face meeting in Derbyshire (thank you Derbyshire for hosting!) with over 50 Quality Managers attending, which is a remarkable turnout and demonstrates the value of that meeting to that group. Lots of information was shared and some rich discussions to help shape the future of Quality Management in Police Forensic teams.

We are heavily supporting the NPCC Quality Board – Validation Sub-Group, there are now several workstreams

that sit within the Validation Sub-Group, all of which have FCN representation and a couple of which are chaired by FCN. The workstreams have now all had their first meetings, providing lots of information to help inform a more collaborative approach to validation in the future. The group is also considering short term opportunities for collaborative approaches to validation, which are being collated through the FCN's Validation Tracker. If you would like to see a copy of the FCN's Validation Tracker or even better would like to add your Force's latest information on validation to the tracker then please do [email](#) us.

Our Compliance Support Team Service (CST) now focuses more on providing

remote support to Forensic Teams, the CST teams have been supporting several Forces this quarter, predominantly supporting those who are implementing the Collaborative Glove Cleaning project – if you want further information relating to the Collaborative Glove Cleaning Project or our CST service, again please [email](#) us.

Finally, the team continues to issue Quality Matters fortnightly providing lots of useful information and support to Policing, and the team continues to field a wide range of queries from the community, providing answers or networking individuals together so you have the support you need.

## NPCC Support

### Streamlined Forensic Reporting (SFR)

The FCN continues to oversee the SFR process; the Q1 multi-stakeholder National SFR Board was held on the 23rd April.

The performance framework for SFR is beginning to take shape, with agreement being reached over the design of a standardised data template. Individual discipline Expert Network leads are now taking this forward within their groups, working collaboratively across policing and the private sector, where appropriate, to create a national dataset.

The Board also signed off another two new disciplines to use the SFR process as their primary reporting mechanism — cell site analysis for geolocation and ignitable liquids. We'd like to thank DS Jon Heathcote of Staffordshire Police (for cell site) and Louissa Marsh of Eurofins (for ignitable liquids) for all their hard work in bringing this to fruition. We've also supported the Home Office

Biometrics Programme as they introduced SFR for their international biometric exchange processes for Prüm fingerprint searches.

Risk mitigation activity continues for Road Traffic Toxicology, where we see the highest conversion rate from SFR Stage 1 to Stage 2, meaning that the evidence is not agreed. We are working closely with providers and the CPS to publish refreshed guidance for prosecutors and police officers specifically on these defence challenges in drug drive cases. We are also working collectively, as a Board, to understand the implications of v2 of the FSR Code, to ensure our templates remain compliant with all declaration requirements and, for clarity, we have agreed to transition SFR documentation towards FSAs rather than forensic disciplines.

### FORSTRA

FCN manages and oversees the NPCC's forensic strategic threat and risk assessment (FORSTRA).

A risk assessment status summary report has been completed and circulated in Q1, and next steps have been agreed on developing version 2 of the FORSTRA. Engagement plans are in progress to monitoring any emerging or changes in levels of risk.

### Y-STR database

The FCN continues to work jointly with Home Office FINDS to produce a UK Y-STR reference database. This will assist in the development of a new statistical model for the evaluation of Y-STR profiles, ensuring that use of this powerful forensic tool is maximised during the investigation and prosecution of rape and sexual offences.

The Swab Out Crime campaign has now collected almost 5,000 samples from men, with the introduction of a £10 voucher as an incentive, boosting volunteer numbers, especially for the postal system. More details can be found [here](#).

## Workforce

### Apprenticeships

In Q1, we continued on the development and management of apprenticeships.

Apprentices on the Level 7 Advanced Digital Forensic Practitioner apprenticeship have started and received their first week of face-to-face input including guest speakers from across the profession.

The Level 4 Digital Forensic technician apprenticeship continues to progress successfully, with apprentices meeting their milestones and progressing well in the workplace.

Work on the Level 4 Physical Forensic apprenticeship is currently on hold due to the transition from the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) to Skills England. The trailblazer group, led by the FCN, are ready to commence work as soon as we get the go ahead.

For extra reading, visit [Skills England's 2025-26 priorities](#), [sector evidence](#), and [digital and tech needs assessments](#).

### Wellbeing

The FCN recently shared a survey with the forensic community in relation to the wellbeing of

forensic practitioners. The results of this will be shared in the next quarter and will be used to inform an updated version of the wellbeing toolkit.

The FCN attended an Operation Cyclopes meeting, organised by the Home Office and the Polish Platform for Homeland Security, in relation to the wellbeing of digital forensic practitioners across Europe. We presented on the work that the FCN and the forensic community have undertaken in England and Wales and shared good practice with police forces across Europe.



## Research

The FCN is responsible for research and innovation activities to maximise the latest forensic science opportunities, identifying emerging threats, and coordinate the submission of funding bids, on behalf of the NPCC.

### R&I Strategic Plan

In Q1, we published the NPCC Research & Innovation Strategic Plan (pictured) on schedule with the delivery plan.

The plan sets out to establish a business rhythm for the development of horizon scanning for forensics. Draft proposals for some of this work was shared at the ICDDF conference.

Through the plan, we also aim to ensure research points of contact for forensics in forces is agreed, enabling us to establish a forensic network and links to the local research and innovation managers.

Through the National Science and Innovation Board (NSIB), this will encourage more innovation ideas coming through the research and innovation development pipeline.

### Research and Innovation Strategic Plan



### Natural Language Processing project

On behalf of NPCC, the FCN seeks opportunities and partners to progress new technologies for adoption into operational policing.

Building upon the success of the initial research phase of our Natural Language Processing (NLP) project in 2024/25, we're prioritising the development of the model into other investigative areas.

In Q1, we continued to develop and refine this 'safe search' NLP model for digital forensics. This was done using live case data testing within a controlled environment, and has continued with successful results. Police user testing is planned for Q2 with Staffordshire Police.

## Marketplace

### Synthetic opioids

To address the challenges and risks posed by Synthetic Opioids, the marketplace team have collated reference data from the community. Working collaboratively with BLC, the FSR's Office, Dean Ames of MPS and universities, together we are developing specifications for reference materials and an intelligence service. This work has been shared with Ministers and will continue to be progressed to build a future service to enable policing to respond to high-harm, high-risk drugs.

### Physical forensics

Working in close collaboration with BLC, Home Office and the forensic community, the FCN has been providing support for dynamic

purchasing system convergence for EMSOU and the WSCC forces through code conversion and demand profiling for those forces. We have also refreshed quality requirements to ensure current and future code compliance and are poised to support the tender evaluation process later this year. Additionally, we have worked alongside BLC for the evaluation of tenders for surge contracts and the Border Force contract.

### Digital forensics

As part of the BLC software tooling procurement work, the FCN's digital team continues to work with forces to better understand the DF software landscape, including what policing buys and associated costs. The team are very grateful to forces for the excellent information provided which will inform

requirements, and we are now working in partnership with forces to develop a specification.

### NPCC support & partnerships

We have continued to build a strong and positive working relationship with BLC, and to ensure that we have a joined-up and coordinated approach to meeting the needs of our community, we have now established a Joint Working Group, which will have a key focus on delivery, recognising that together we are greater than the sum of our individual parts.

The FCN is also providing support to Kirsty Potter of Northumbria Police who is leading on the next phase of work of the FMSP Standardisation and Efficiencies Work Package. Further information in due course.

## Digital forensics

### Cell Site Analysis

At the start of Q1 the FCN delivered a feedback and collaborative learning workshop following on from the completion of our second cell site analysis collaborative learning exercise.

Supported by the Radio Frequency Development User Group (RFDUG), the exercise is conducted in a similar way to a proficiency test and aims to assist forces in achieving compliance with the requirements set out in the FSR Code of Practice. Thirty-two organisations participated in the exercise including a small number of commercial service providers who provide cell site analysis services to law enforcement.

We have also started an exploratory piece of work with RFDUG to look at the possibilities of developing a framework for cell site analysis for geolocation which could serve as an alternative to ISO/IEC 17025:2017 accreditation for demonstrating compliance with the FSR Code. Framework would look at national standard policies and procedures for conducting RF activities within a quality management system.

### Performance

In preparation for the second cycle of the NPCC Digital Forensics Performance Framework we several feedback and improvement opportunity information gathering exercises.

This process identified a number of change recommendations which aim to provide a greater understanding of the impact of different operating models on performance and efficiency whilst trying to keep the burden of data collection efforts on forces to a minimum. The recommendations were taken to the NPCC Digital Forensics Strategy Board for approval in July.

### Validation

The FCN recently completed a validation exercise for processing and analysis of Windows 11 using Magnet Forensics AXIOM. The validation plan, report, statement of completion and GTD index, and additional supporting documentation can be found on the FCN Knowledge Hub for download.

If your force uses AXIOM and this has yet to be added to your UKAS schedule of

accreditation, or your force already holds accreditation for AXIOM but validation has not been recently updated, this material could be used to help reduce the time and effort required to validate/verify your method.

### Deepfakes

We are currently supporting the Home Office and the Accelerated Capability Environment in several workstream looking into the risks and impact from deepfake false evidence on digital forensics and the wider criminal justice system.

This work assesses the digital evidence lifecycle and aims to identify potential deepfake impact points and possible mitigations or opportunities at each stage to give confidence that digital evidence is real or fake.

*Thank you for reading FCN's quarterly reports. These are intended to provide highlights of our key deliverables, linked to our annual delivery plan which is reviewed and agreed by the NPCC. If you have any feedback on the report, think anything is missing, or have questions about our delivery, please don't hesitate to contact us.*