

FCN quarterly report

Q2 – 2025/26

Updates this quarter

Thanks for reading the FCN's quarter 2 report, covering July–Sept 2025. Please contact us with any questions or comments.

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Quality & Compliance

In the FCN, our quality and compliance focus this quarter remained on the FSR's Code V2 and preparing for the effective date in October.

Declarations

As October approached the team were extremely busy responding to queries from policing relating to a broad range of Forensic Science Activities (FSAs) and topics such as how to accurately declare your compliance with the FSR's Code. The latter culminated in the FCN publishing a briefing note in response to the FSR's Notification 03-2025 to clarify expectations around declaring compliance or non-compliance with the Code.

Incident scene examination

We continue to enable Incident Scene Examination via the NPCC's CSI Technical Forum. This quarter saw an updated terms of reference and the first meeting of the revamped Facilities and Consumables Workstream, facilitated and driven by the FCN, which works tirelessly to ensure forensic consumables remain

suitable and available. A new Risk-Informed Decision Making Workstream also formed this quarter, which the FCN's quality team will aid. The first meeting is scheduled for Q3.

SARCs

The FCN has also continued to assist SARCs over this period. We have contributed to the Office of the Forensic Science Regulator's (OFSR) review and update of '*Guidance: DNA contamination controls – Forensic medical examination*' and '*Forensic medical examination of sexual offence complainants*'.

We completed a compliance landscape survey for FSA BIO 100 covering various aspects of compliance, which has been shared with the OFSR and can be used to monitor compliance progression and potential risks in the SARC landscape.

In August, we also issued the reports for the collaborative learning exercise, involving the development of sample strategies based on different case scenarios, and marked directly against the best practice recommendations

published by the Faculty of Forensic and Legal Medicine (FFLM).

We have issued our own declaration guidance, specifically aimed at assisting SARC practitioners to accurately declare their compliance or non-compliance with the Code. To help embed the guidance document, the team also hosted a dedicated webinar, which was very successful.

Knowledge and support

Fortnightly issues of *Quality Matters* have continued providing our community with invaluable information and updates. Several document reviews have also taken place as part of the FCN's Compliance Support Team service and we have provided a law enforcement agency with onsite support over two days during this period. This service continues to provide invaluable support to Policing to achieve compliance with the FSR Code.

NPCC Support

Standardisation & Efficiencies Work package; Submissions Guidance

In the NPCC standardisation and efficiencies workstream led by Kirsty Potter (Northumbria) and driven by FCN, a National Forensic Decision Model has been produced and finalised.

A draft structure of new Good Practice Forensic Submissions Guidance has been developed, as part of a wider review of Good Practice Guidance 2012 including alignment with the Code of practice.

The document has been split into four work packages and assigned to FCN leads. Community engagement took place via the Forensic Community Reference Group (FCRG), Digital Forensics Advisory Capability Group (DFACG), Forensic Marketplace Operations Group (FMOG), *Quality Matters*, *FCN News*, and community surveys.

An introductory session was planned with volunteers for mid-September, outlining each work package and expectations of stakeholders.

Initial workshops are also planned for 23rd-24th September, led by four FCN leads with expected attendance by approx. 60 force representatives, followed by fortnightly workshops to develop the guidance.

NPCC Validation Subgroup

The FCN continues to underpin the NPCC's Validation Subgroup led by Kay Hannam (Thames Valley Police), which reports into the NPCC Quality Board. We are leading various workstreams and helping drive forward the community's plans for collaborative validation.

Consumables

In collaboration with BlueLight Commercial, Scenesafe and the policing and medical community, the FCN has been designing new 'one size fits all' RTA blood and urine kits, bringing them up-to-date with the latest legislation and regulation, and delivering cost savings by replacing the 16 different kits currently in use.

The project is in its final stages of NPCC Portfolio engagement, with sign-off expected in Q3 for implementation during Q4.

National GSR Kit review

The FCN has helped review the various GSR kits provided by SceneSafe to UK policing, to agree a standardised specification that meets national requirements. The aim is for all forensic units to transition to this kit, providing national consistency and opportunities for collaborative validation.

The review established which GSR kits were most widely used, removed items no longer required to reduce wastage, and reviewed guidance documentation which supports the end-user.

Streamlined Forensic Reporting (SFR)

The FCN continues to oversee the SFR process, with a Q2 multi-stakeholder National SFR Board held in-person in July.

As SFR continues to expand to include new disciplines, clear and consistent messaging becomes a priority, so a communications framework has been developed to ensure maximum reach of accurate information in the most efficient way. We expect to finalise and publish this in Q3.

The performance framework

also continues to evolve, with all the Board's discipline expert network leads keen to see the benefits of SFR demonstrated through a set of clearly defined performance measures.

To avoid risk, the FCN's SFR Template MG22 and Annex forms have been removed from the SFR webpage while we await v3 of the FSR's Declaration Guidance and ensure the templates accurately reflect the requirements of Code v2. This delayed publication will likely put the updated National SFR Guidance document into Q4.

Retention guidance

The FCN has published a new NPCC guidance document entitled '*Forensic Materials - Retention, Storage and Destruction*' followed up with an impact assessment table, to highlight changes compared to the previous publication '*NPCC Storage and Destruction of Materials and Records Relating to Forensic Examination (v1.0, 2021)*'.

The purpose of the new document is to provide a clear differentiation between 'forensic materials' and 'other policing evidence'. Forensic providers have been reassured there are no substantial changes to the previous advice. In Q3, the FCN will further review the guidance to ensure compliance with Code V2.

FORSTRA

After its initial publication in 2023, the second iteration of the NPCC Forensic Strategic Threat & Risk Assessment (FORSTRA) is being developed in consultation with the forensic community and is on track to be published in Q4.

Swab Out Crime

In our Swab Out Crime campaign the FCN looks set to achieve the target of 10,000 profiles by the end of Q3, through a comprehensive sample collection programme and seeking out opportunities to use existing UK YSTR profile datasets.

An advertisement campaign organised

through *BBC Science Focus* magazine will be our final push for samples via an at-home postal system. Working with our partners Eurofins and King's College London, we are on track for all samples to be analysed by the end of Q4.

The FCN and FINDS have commissioned Dr Roberto Puch-Solis at Dundee

University (a world-leader in forensic DNA statistics) to develop a new interpretation method for Y-STR profiles, using the UK reference collection to build a statistical model taking into account the UK's population and specific Y-chromosome diversity.

Research and innovation

New NPCC Forensic R&I Board

In Q2, the FCN helped launch a new board to help steer forensic research in policing: the NPCC National Forensic Portfolio Research and Innovation Board.

The board is co-chaired by the Met's Alan Tribe and FCN's R&I lead Shelley Wilson, bringing together stakeholders from across the police and research communities.

Police STAR funding bids

With the police STAR research funding deadline in October, the FCN spent Q2 engaging with

many forces to prepare their bids for submission, maximise their chance for success, and connect them with research partners through our contacts.

"Your input and encouragement have been really helpful in shaping the direction of the bid"

—ROCU bid lead

The FCN also led on two bids: one to develop DNA modelling, and a second to help prioritise DF submissions based on technical 'solvability and value' requirements.

Support for P-ACEs

In May, the NPCC announced the launch of nine Police Academic Centres of Excellence (P-ACEs) to "ensure that policing is shaped by the latest and best scientific expertise". With five P-ACEs that have a forensic service line, the FCN's R&I lead Shelley Wilson has been closely involved as a 'forensic SPOC' to help guide research and funding decisions.

The FCN also helped steer content for the Police CSA's publication *Policing Tomorrow* which has an edition focused on forensics later in 2025.



Image credit: NPCC news website

Marketplace

Digital forensics

Software & tooling

FCN supported BlueLight Commercial (BLC) on the national software and tooling tender by leading on the technical specification of requirement for this procurement.

This required significant force and supplier engagement to ensure requirements were correctly captured nationally.

The tender process will be published in November with the intention to have available in March for forces to access all tooling and software requirements.

FCN will support the evaluation and award process in early 2026.

DF services market-share project

The FCN is currently re-evaluating the digital forensics outsourcing (services) marketplace to determine its value and size. This will be based on financial year 24/25.

This work updates the previous 2023 review of DF market-share. It will support the current review of the DF DPS by BLC and provide valuable insight into force outsourcing trends to help manage the wider DF marketplace. Having this updated data will complement the software / tooling market-share data that FCN collected last year providing a holistic market-share view for digital forensics.

Outsourcing case study

When a force had its accreditation suspended we assisted in providing outsourcing options in the

marketplace in order to ensure effective service delivery, we were thanked for our assistance.

Physical forensics

Developing the SSQ for the convergence of physical procurements

A new standard selection questionnaire (SSQ) was developed, by the FCN, to incorporate the forensic science activities (FSAs). Suppliers are now required to complete which FSAs they undertake and what they hold for each product within each LOT. Where FSAs or accreditation were not held, forensic service providers (FSPs) were required to complete mitigation to state what they do to ensure reliable examinations.

New SSQs were submitted ahead of the West & South Coast Consortium (WSCC) and East Midlands Special Operations Unit (EMSOU) tender and reviewed, with some queries raised which are being addressed with FSPs as part of the tender process.

Tender evaluations

The FCN evaluated several questions for the WSCC and EMSOU tender and participated in the moderation exercise.

Marketplace impact assessment

A marketplace impact assessment tool has been built which will show the change in market share following award of new contract and the change in allocation of work. Analysis can then be performed to understand what the impact of change in market share may be. This has been delayed due to identification of some incorrect financial data from an FSP which resulted in them needing to re-run their data.

Firearms Silver Group

The FCN's national coordination of complex firearms submissions started at the end of July 2025. Due to the unexpected early retirement of senior staff members at Eurofins coupled with a high work-in-progress it was determined that complex firearms submissions needed to be coordinated in order to match the demand with available capacity across all three firearms providers.

A form was designed for forces to submit details of their cases on a weekly basis, and cases are given a priority code relating to the seriousness of the offence. Cases are allocated in priority order. New submissions have been fairly low (5-10 per week). This has progressed well and after the first month most cases were able to be authorised within the week. BLC assisted with the introduction of emergency contracts to allow all forces access to all suppliers.

Additional activity

The FCN supported Operation Kettledrum with coordination of the process for identifying cases and establishing SPOCs for each force.

We also assisted HM Prison & Probation Service with an upcoming tender for drugs analysis in prisons.

We also met with Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to discuss forensic procurement opportunities for overseas territories.

Digital forensics

National digital forensics performance framework

We completed the consultation for the second cycle of the national digital forensics performance framework in Q2. This focused on identifying additional KPIs that help to give a greater understanding of the effectiveness of different digital DFU operating models. The proposed amendments were taken to the NPCC Digital Forensics Strategy Board for approval. To help everyone understand and shape the changes, we ran a series of workshops and one-to-one sessions, giving colleagues a chance to ask questions and share their views.

AI, deepfakes, and emerging risks and opportunities

We've been providing advice and support across policing around the growing risks of deepfakes and AI-enabled

crime. This has included contributing to research on deepfake false evidence in the justice system, the results of which will be published and shared in the coming months.

We continue our research into the opportunities provided by AI to address the challenges in digital forensics through a research relationship with the universities of Warwick and Leeds looking at the use of large language models to classify text-based communication relating to VAWG and drugs offences. We have also been building relationships and sharing this research with KAIST (a leading science and technology university in South Korea, who have also been undertaking work in this area).

Validation

We drafted and plan to publish a Forensic Science Regulator's

Code compliant validation plan and report template for the screening of data from digital media, further expanding our library of validation documents. In addition, we supported a regional collaboration in developing an efficient approach to multi-site validation.

Cell site analysis collaborative learning exercise

The third round of the cell site analysis Collaborative Learning Exercise (CLE) was developed this quarter. After two well-received CLEs funded by the FCN, this year's exercise is being funded by Forensic Science Regulator's Office. This exercise is designed to support LEAs and forensic service providers in gaining and maintaining compliance with the FSR Code. The expression of interest process for the CLE opens in October 2025 (Q3).

Workforce

Apprenticeships

During the quarter, the FCN worked with the Welsh government on a Level 4 digital forensic apprenticeship for Welsh forces, which hasn't been previously available through the English apprenticeship levy.

Unfortunately, due to the withdrawal of levy funding, the Level 7 DF apprenticeship has been suspended (see more on the [FCN apprenticeship webpage](#)). The L7 cohort who began in March 2025 will complete their course.

We continue running the mentoring group, which meets every 6-8 weeks for mentors of DF apprentices to share knowledge and ideas. The trailblazer group also continues to keep on top of changes to apprenticeships.

Wellbeing

The FCN's workforce lead Jo Morrissey attended a second CYCLOPES event this year, in Berlin, to present on the preliminary findings of the DF wellbeing survey. Findings on the survey will be shared soon.

The [wellbeing toolkit](#) continues to be refreshed and updated with new initiatives and good practice.



Image credit: CYCLOPES