

National Forensic Strategic Threat & Risk Assessment

(ForSTRA) 2026



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Foreword

Forensic Science remains a vital part of the investigative process, supporting policing by providing evidence needed to ensure a fair and transparent justice system.

The challenges we face in policing, of marrying established forensic techniques with new emerging science and technologies, continues to be ever more complex, where the boundaries between forensic practice and police investigations becomes ever more blurred.

However, we recognise that the role forensic science has to play in helping to detect crime needs to be unwavering and something we need to nurture and support.

Therefore, if we are to work collectively to find solutions to the challenges being faced, it is crucial we understand where our greatest threats and risks lie, so that together we are able to evolve forensic science to ensure it meets policing's future need.

This has never been more important, given the HO Forensic Reform Programme of work, with the Vision to build **'A trusted, adaptable and high-quality national forensic service, supporting justice and delivering for the public with integrity'**.

The ForSTRA process of sustained monitoring of the threats and risk, better enables consolidated decision making across the forensic sector, through collaborative thinking and problem solving, and can act to

inform the HO programme of work, by signposting those priority areas that we need to urgently address.

Therefore, building upon the success of the first ever **Forensic Threat and Risk Assessment** (ForSTRA) in 2023, which started us on the path of establishing an evidence-based approach to risk and strategic decision making, driven by our forensic experts, I am now pleased to provide this refreshed publication.

With thanks to the Forensic Capability Network (FCN) and the help of our Forensic Community this work provides assurance that UK policing is robustly sighted on the true risks and threats that we are facing.

**Chief Constable Paul Gibson,
NPCC Forensic Lead**



What we know

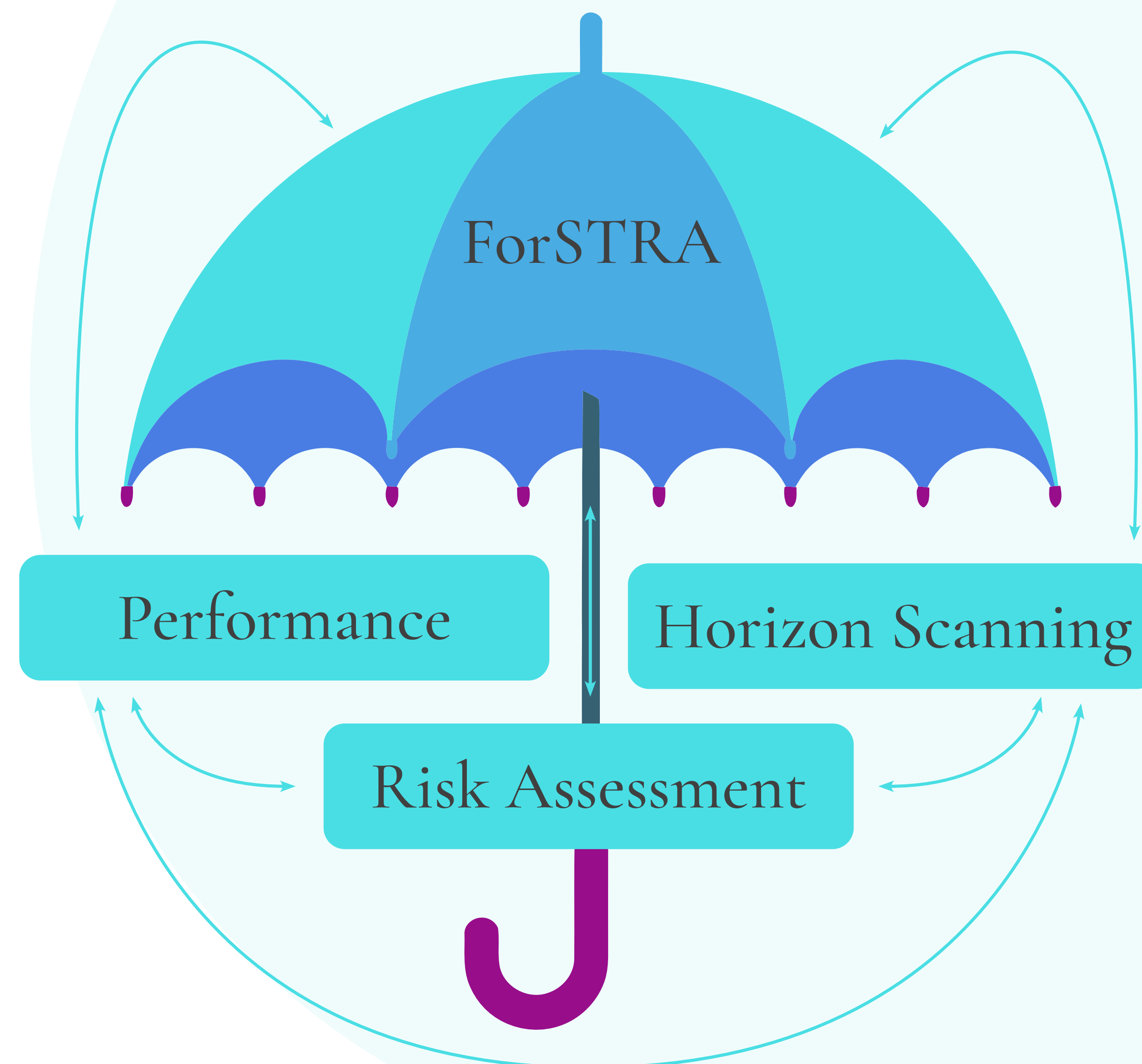
Forensic science in the UK is widely recognised as progressive, with integrity embedded at its core.

While the Forensic Science Threat and Risk Assessment (ForSTRA) outlines the current threat profile facing police forensics, it also acknowledges the UK's strong global reputation as a leader in this field. This standing is underpinned by a robust regulatory framework and a well-established network of recognised experts and academic institutions that actively support innovation. Collectively, these strengths create opportunities to mitigate threats, manage risks, and drive continuous improvement for our communities.

The ForSTRA has now established itself as an overarching framework, an 'umbrella'—that connects and aligns risks across the NPCC Forensics Portfolio and the wider policing sector, as illustrated in **Diagram 1**.

This diagram shows the ForSTRA positioned as the central 'umbrella', with key interconnected activities such as **Performance**, **Risk Assessment**, and **Horizon Scanning** linked through directional relationships. The arrows between these elements illustrate the continuous and dynamic flow of information and influence across the system, reinforcing that risks and mitigations are interdependent rather than isolated.

Diagram 1.



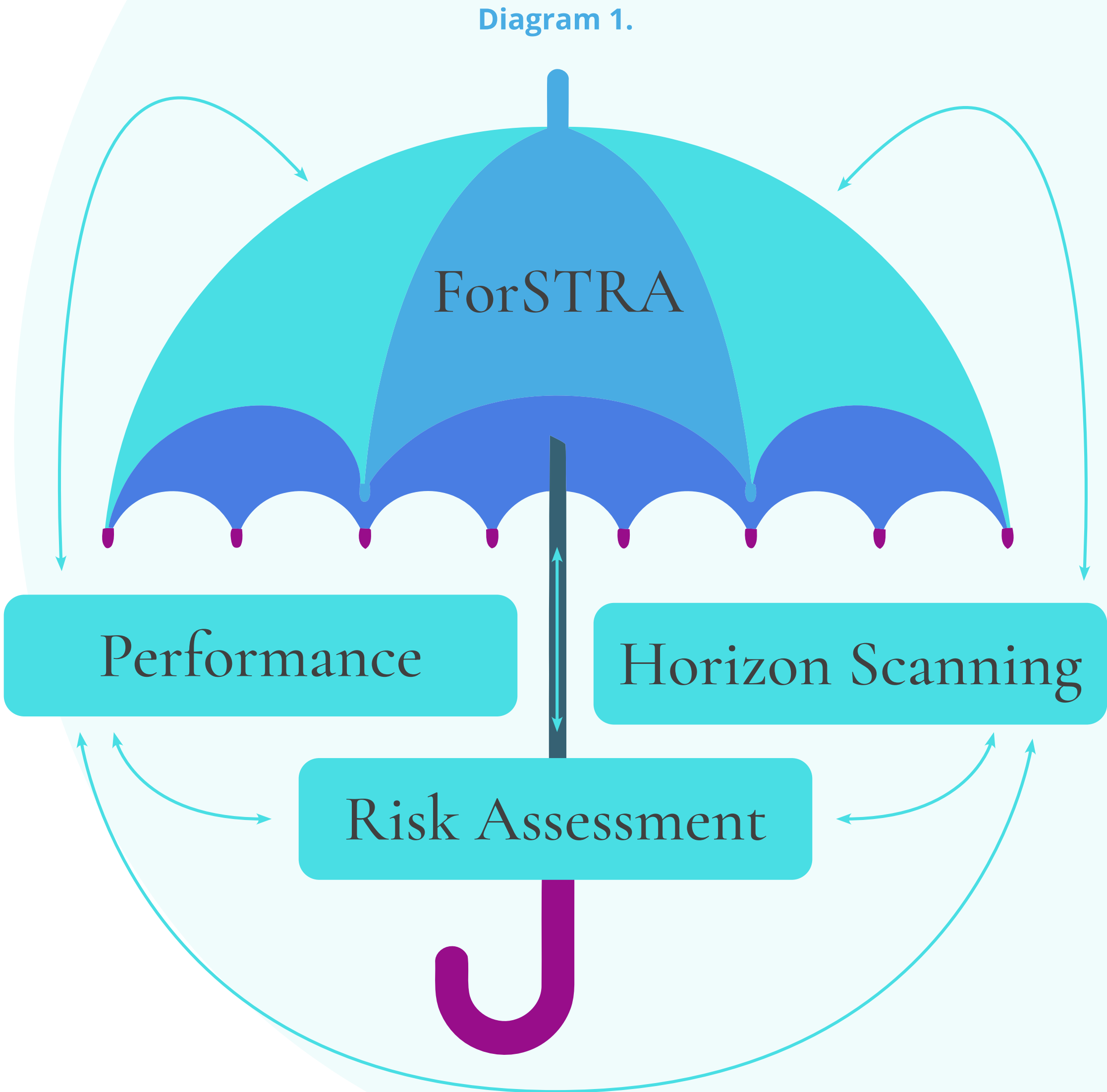
What we know

Through this approach, the ForSTRA supports a collective understanding of the forensic threat landscape, enabling national prioritisation of activity to address identified risks.

Developed through the consolidation of insights from across the forensic community, the ForSTRA identifies core cross-system threat themes. These themes are systemic in nature, interdependent, and not confined to individual forensic disciplines.

Although forensic science is often categorised into physical and digital forensics, the ForSTRA adopts an agnostic, system-wide perspective. This enables a more holistic understanding of the forensic landscape.

As a result, the ForSTRA provides a strong evidence-based foundation for understanding threats and informing future planning for forensic service delivery. In doing so, it has the potential to directly reduce risks to forensic science within policing across England and Wales.



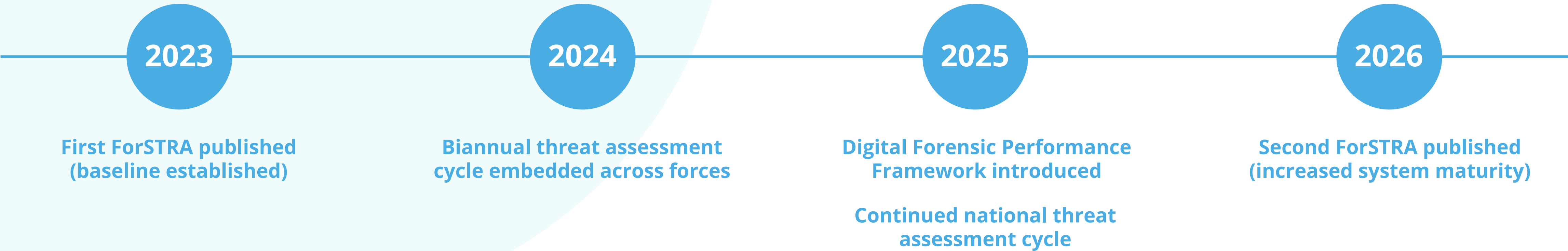
Steps to success

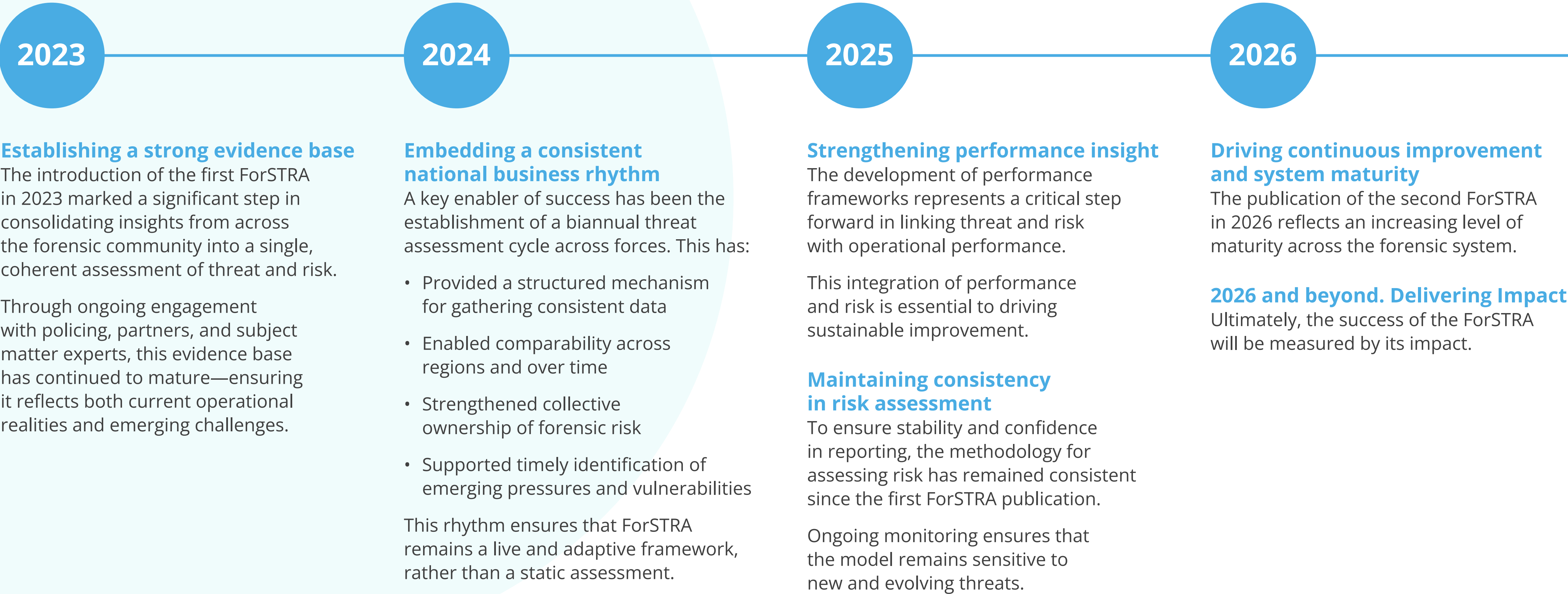


Steps to success

The ForSTRA’s collective monitoring and assessment process has established a strong evidence base to understand the coordinated mitigations required to drive meaningful, system-wide change across forensic services.

However, success is not defined solely by understanding risk. It is achieved through translating insight into coordinated action, supported by a sustained, structured, and transparent delivery approach.





Risk visualisation

Risk within the ForSTRA is understood as a dynamic interaction between threat, vulnerability, likelihood, and impact. This reinforces the principle that risks are interconnected, evolving, and require coordinated mitigation across the system.

Minimal Risk

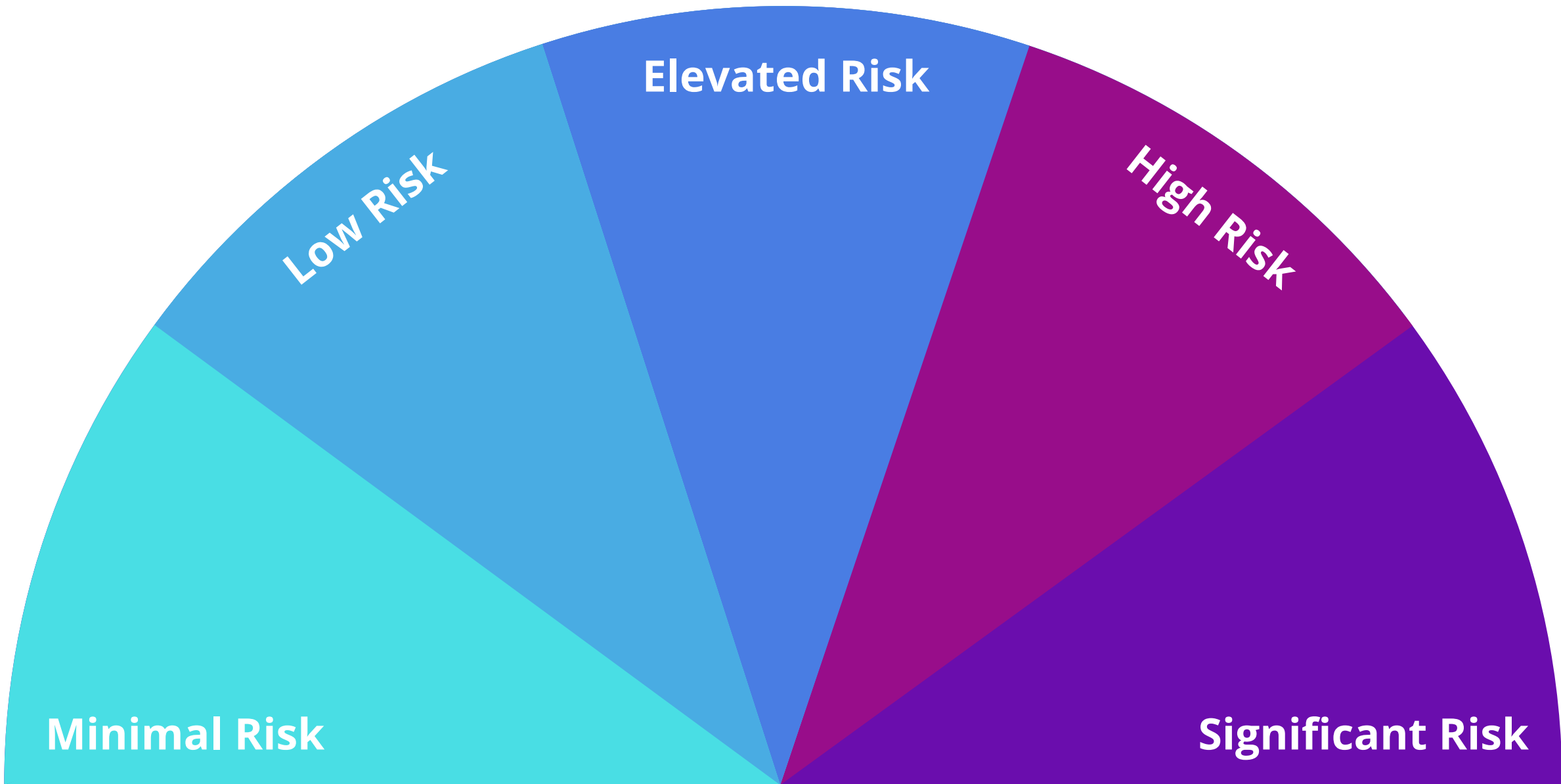
Nationally Forensic Services has a very good and consistent approach to understanding current and/or future demand or capability and capacity.

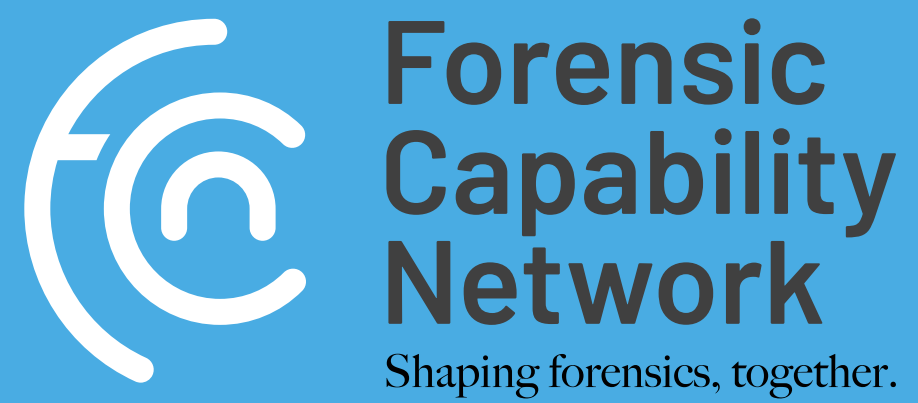
There are no gaps in meeting current demand and substantive plans are in place to deal with future demand.

Significant Risk

Nationally Forensic Services has a deficient understanding of current and/or future demand or capability and capacity.

The force is unable to meet current demand and has no suitable plans to address them. No consideration has been given to dealing with future demand.





Forensic science



Forensic science

‘How can we ensure that Physical Forensics remains robust and current, when set against a backdrop of increasing demands from Digital Forensics?’

Forensic science in England and Wales plays a critical role in criminal investigations and the effective functioning of the Criminal Justice System (CJS). However, the forensic community increasingly recognises that the sector is facing a growing and complex set of challenges.

These challenges arise from the cumulative impact of economic pressures, the rapid expansion of digital forensics, workforce constraints, and ongoing instability within the forensic marketplace. Importantly, many of these

challenges cannot be resolved at an individual organisational level and require coordinated, system-wide responses.

These concerns are not limited to practitioners within the forensic community. They are reinforced by wider independent scrutiny, including the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee report “Rebuilding forensic science for criminal justice: an urgent need” (2026). This report highlights several systemic issues that align closely with the threats identified through the Forensic Science Threat and Risk Assessment (ForSTRA).

The Committee warns of what has been described as a “creeping neglect” of forensic science. There is concern that the prioritisation of digital forensic capabilities risks creating an imbalance, where traditional physical forensic sciences may fall behind. This is significant given that physical forensic techniques—such as fingerprint analysis—have been foundational to criminal investigations for over a century and remain essential today.

By contrast, digital forensics has developed more recently in response to the exponential growth of digital devices and data. While both physical and digital

forensic disciplines are vital, they differ considerably in their methodologies, operating models, and resource requirements. As a result, achieving effective integration, standardisation, and convergence across these areas remains a complex challenge.

Over the past decade, national investment programmes have focused heavily on digital forensic capability. This has enabled forces to adopt new technologies, including mobile device extraction tools and automation solutions. While these investments were necessary, they have not yet delivered the full benefits anticipated.

Forensic science

For example, rather than decreasing, waiting times for digital forensic examinations have increased by 32% (NPCC Digital Forensics Performance Framework, 2025), indicating that demand continues to outpace capacity.

At the same time, comparatively limited investment has been made in physical forensic science. This creates a risk of stagnation in these disciplines, which can only be addressed through sustained commitment to research and innovation. As highlighted by the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, ongoing scientific development is essential to maintaining quality, improving capability, and ensuring forensic science continues to support the delivery of justice.

There is also a broader risk that the fundamental scientific principles underpinning forensic science may

become overshadowed in an environment where technological solutions are prioritised. Technology should be seen as an enabler of forensic science—not a replacement for the scientific rigour on which the discipline depends.

To address these challenges, a more integrated and system-wide approach to forensic service delivery is required. This must encompass both physical and digital forensic capabilities, ensuring that improvements are coordinated across the entire sector rather than within isolated areas.

A key priority is improving transparency, consistency, and standardisation in forensic service delivery. Variations in capability and capacity across different regions—sometimes described as a “postcode lottery”—risk undermining public confidence and the equitable administration of justice.

There is widespread agreement across the forensic community that stronger national coordination is needed to enable more effective collaboration, drive continuous improvement, and ensure that forensic evidence remains robust, reliable, and accessible to both policing and the wider Criminal Justice System.

In this context, wider policing reform provides an important opportunity. The UK Government’s proposals for a National Police Service recognises forensic science as a critical specialist capability, reinforcing its importance in modern policing. The proposed establishment of a National Forensic Service aims to standardise delivery, reduce backlogs, and improve the management of forensic evidence.

At the same time, it is recognised that centralisation alone will not be sufficient. Reform must balance

efficiency with the need to maintain effective local service delivery and uphold the core principles of policing.

Finally, the forensic sector continues to face significant economic and market pressures. These challenges are influenced by both national and global factors, creating risks to the stability and resilience of supply chains. The scope of what constitutes forensic science activity is also expanding, increasing complexity and regulatory demand.

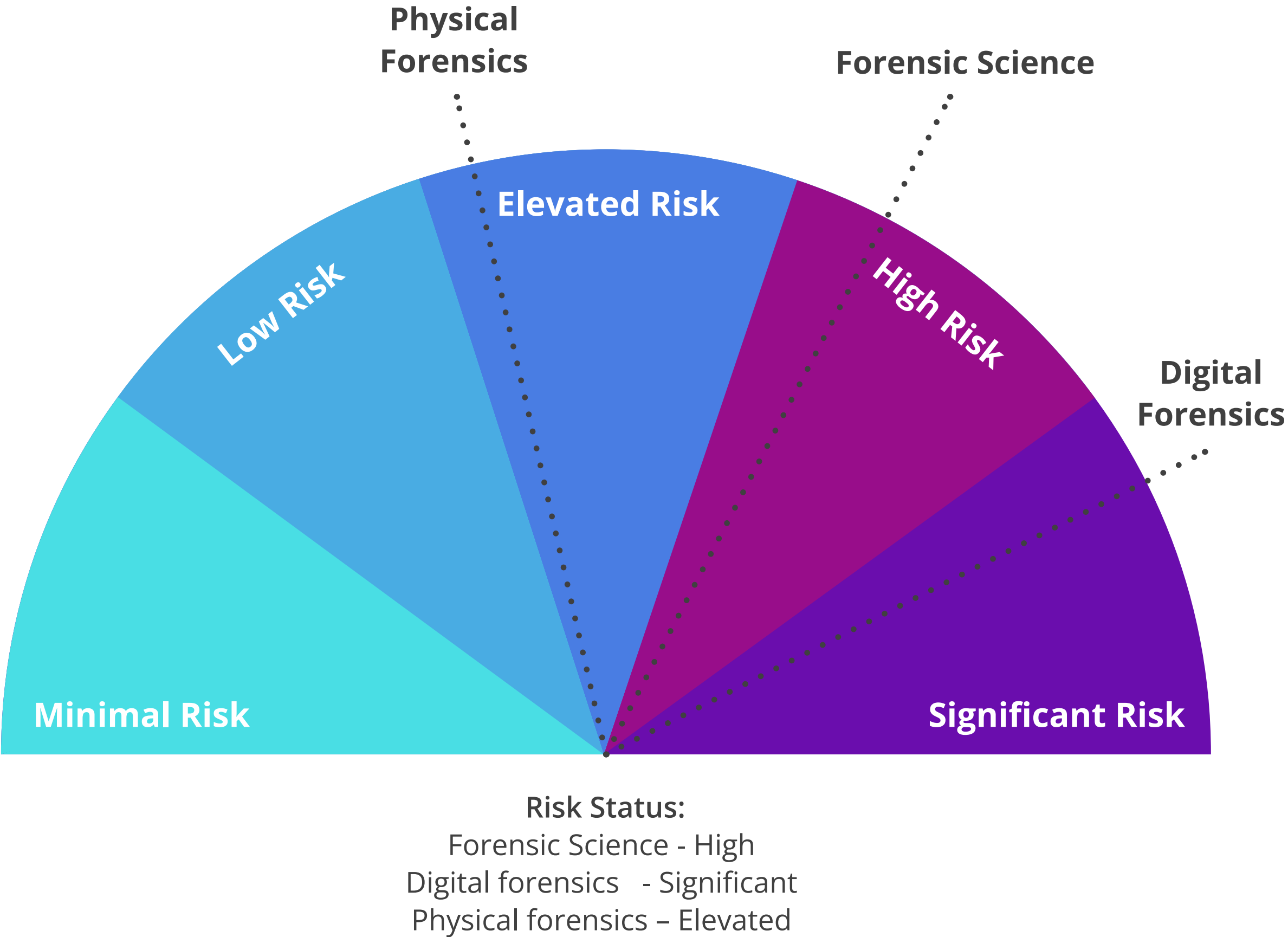
While some organisations have benefited from targeted investment and are better positioned to respond to demand, the overall system is under strain. Rising costs, budget disparities, and variations in contractual arrangements further exacerbate these challenges across the forensic landscape.

Forensic science

Forensic Science is and shall remain multifaceted, crucially weaving through the investigative process and to be successful requires a broad agency approach, across not only the forensic marketplace but also in partnership with academia and industry. Consequently, this ForSTRA highlights the importance of a whole system approach to risk mitigation.

Since the last ForSTRA:
Overall risk has remained high. There is considerable disparity in threat across forces with an entire system change still needed to ensure a sustained impact.

What can be done:
Ensure a nationally coordinated response to mitigate the risks providing longer term planning, investment, and resilience for the sector.



Threat themes

- Economic
- Technology and data
- Quality and compliance
- Our people
- Public trust and confidence **NEW**



Economic

How can a resilient forensic science system be sustained within the context of wider economic pressures and competing public sector demands?

Growing economic pressures present a significant risk to the continued effective delivery of forensic science across England and Wales. Within the forensic community, this is widely recognised as the single overarching threat currently facing policing forensics.

The delivery of forensic services is heavily reliant on a stable and sustainable external marketplace. However, increasing financial pressures across policing—combined with constrained investment in research

and development—are impacting the ability to maintain this stability.

The fragility of the forensic marketplace is a key concern. Its instability is driven by multiple interrelated factors and cannot be resolved through a single intervention. A core issue is the direct relationship between internal policing budgets and the commissioning of external forensic services. Reductions in internal budgets limit forces’ ability to commission procured services, which in turn affects the financial viability of Forensic Service Providers (FSPs).

In addition, the unpredictability of forensic demand presents further challenges. FSPs must balance resourcing and capability against fluctuating requirements, often without clear forward visibility. This is particularly acute for specialist or low-volume (“niche”) services, which, while critical to the investigation of serious and complex crimes, are at increasing risk of becoming unsustainable or disappearing altogether.

FSPs are also subject to the same national and global economic pressures affecting policing. Rising operational costs and market volatility are impacting profitability, with some service lines

operating at or below break-even levels. This creates ongoing risks to the resilience and continuity of external provision.

The external marketplace remains essential to policing, providing access to specialist capabilities, additional capacity during periods of high demand, and expertise not available internally. However, workforce instability within the sector is increasing, with some critical services reliant on a limited number of specialists, reducing overall resilience and responsiveness.

Economic

This combination of financial uncertainty and workforce fragility limits the ability of providers to invest in capacity, innovation, or contingency planning. As a result, there is a growing risk to the accessibility and timeliness of forensic services, which could directly impact investigative outcomes.

There is also evidence that the cost of outsourcing certain forensic services is becoming prohibitive. Some digital forensic leaders have reported that, for the first time, budget constraints are preventing continued use of external providers. In response, forces are increasingly considering bringing services in-house.

While this may offer short-term mitigation, it has the potential to further destabilise the external marketplace by reducing demand, thereby exacerbating financial pressures on FSPs and increasing systemic risk.

A critical factor in building a more stable and sustainable marketplace is improving the ability to forecast current and future demand. Greater clarity would enable FSPs to better align capacity, manage costs, and invest appropriately in their services.

Finally, broader economic pressures, including cost-of-living increases, are affecting both policing organisations and forensic providers. The rising cost of consumables, specialist equipment, and accredited materials—essential to quality-assured forensic practice—further constrains available budgets. As a result, there is limited opportunity for investment in innovation, technology, and service transformation, all of which are necessary to drive long-term efficiency and improvement.

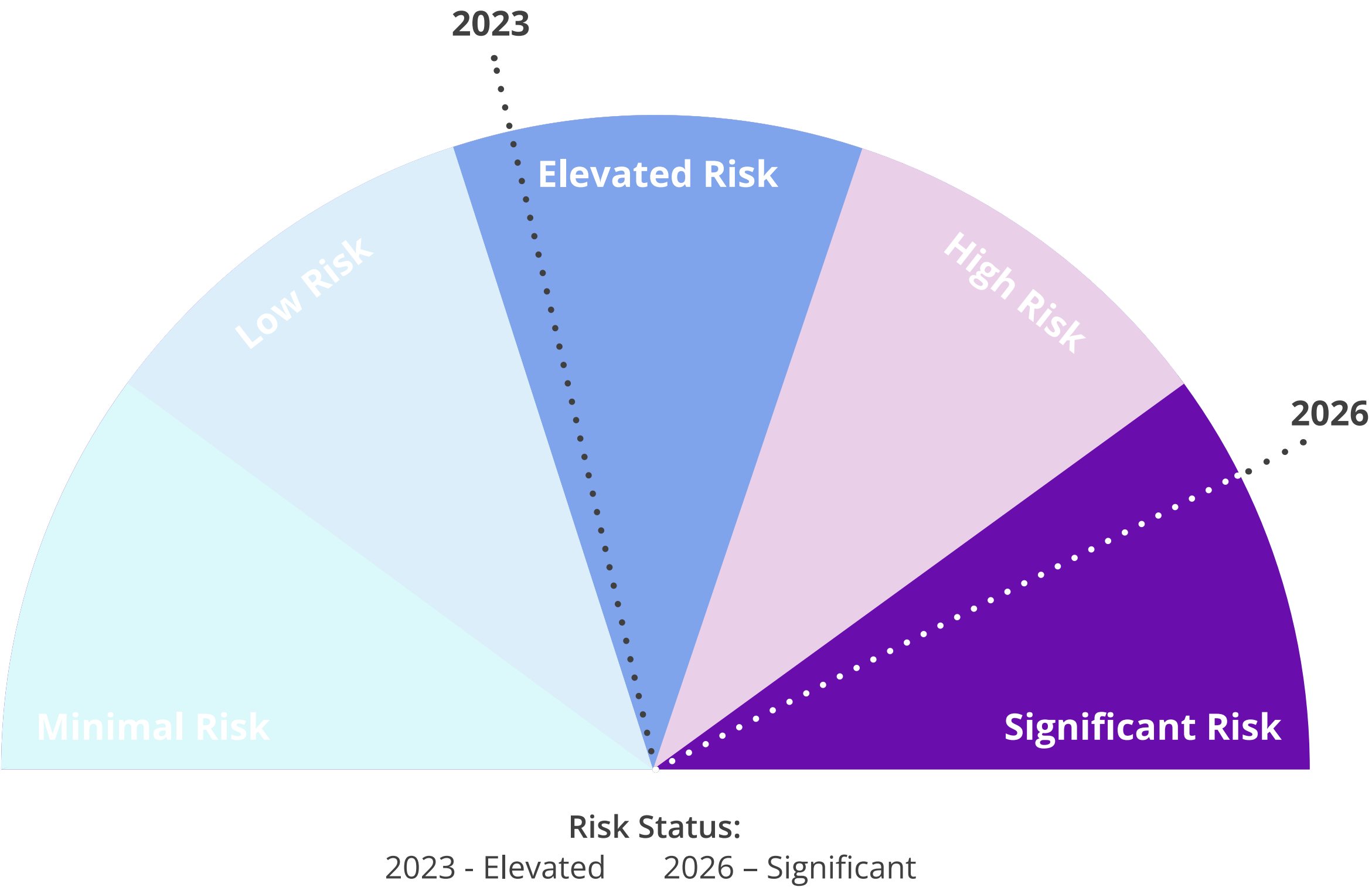


Economic

The economic challenges being experienced by our Community has been described as the ‘single biggest problem’ facing forensics and is winding its way through all of the ForSTRA themes.

Since the last ForSTRA:
Rapid increase. This change has been driven by broader factors, but forensic delivery is trying to adapt to respond to this.

What can be done:
For Police Reform to create stability across funding and budgets in line with growing inflations.



Technology and data

‘How do we unlock the full value of technology in forensics despite fragmented systems and growing demand?’

Forensic science must increasingly be enabled through technology-driven systems that support and enhance the evolution of the discipline. However, the forensic community reports that it is currently under-equipped to fully exploit technological and innovative opportunities, largely due to the pressures of meeting day-to-day operational demand.

A key challenge lies in the lack of standardisation in data management and technology integration across policing systems. This limits the

ability to efficiently share, aggregate, and archive forensic material, creating inefficiencies and restricting collaboration across organisational and geographical boundaries.

Historically, forensic practitioners within policing have demonstrated strong adaptability, often adopting and repurposing technologies designed for other sectors to meet their needs. While this localised innovation has delivered benefits, the increasing pace and scale of technological change has made this approach more difficult and costly to sustain. As a result, the system has evolved in a fragmented way, with

inconsistent operating models that are difficult to scale or integrate nationally.

This fragmentation is particularly evident in the management of forensic data and materials. There is currently no nationally agreed approach to the storage of legacy forensic material, resulting in disjointed and inconsistent practices. This creates increased risks relating to the loss, degradation, or inaccessibility of evidence, with potential consequences for ongoing and future investigations. A more coordinated, compliant, and sustainable approach to managing legacy data and materials is therefore essential.

The complexity of the forensic data landscape continues to grow. Increasing volumes of digital devices, more sophisticated encryption, and the expansion of cloud-based environments are all contributing to a more challenging operating context. At the same time, the pace of technological change requires forensic practices to evolve rapidly in order to remain aligned with increasingly complex forms of criminal activity.

Technology has significant potential to enhance forensic science, particularly in modernising existing methods and improving efficiency.

Technology and data

Emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and machine learning, offer opportunities to transform forensic processes, improve accuracy, and increase transparency. These technologies could also support the development of more consistent national standards and strengthen system resilience.

However, realising these benefits will require coordinated national investment, alongside a shared commitment across policing and partners to adopt and embed new approaches. Without this, there is a risk that opportunities for transformation will not be fully realised.

The forensic community also recognises the importance of ethical considerations in the use of technology and data. As

digital capabilities expand, there is a need to ensure that robust ethical frameworks underpin all activity. This includes improving foresight and preparedness to responsibly adopt emerging technologies, ensuring that good practice is embedded as processes evolve.

Looking ahead, demand for digital forensic services is forecast to continue growing at an exponential rate, driven by both technological advancement and changing patterns of crime. Without improvements in capability, capacity, and strategic planning, there is a real risk that forensic services will be overwhelmed, limiting their ability to respond effectively and to support the evolving needs of the Criminal Justice System

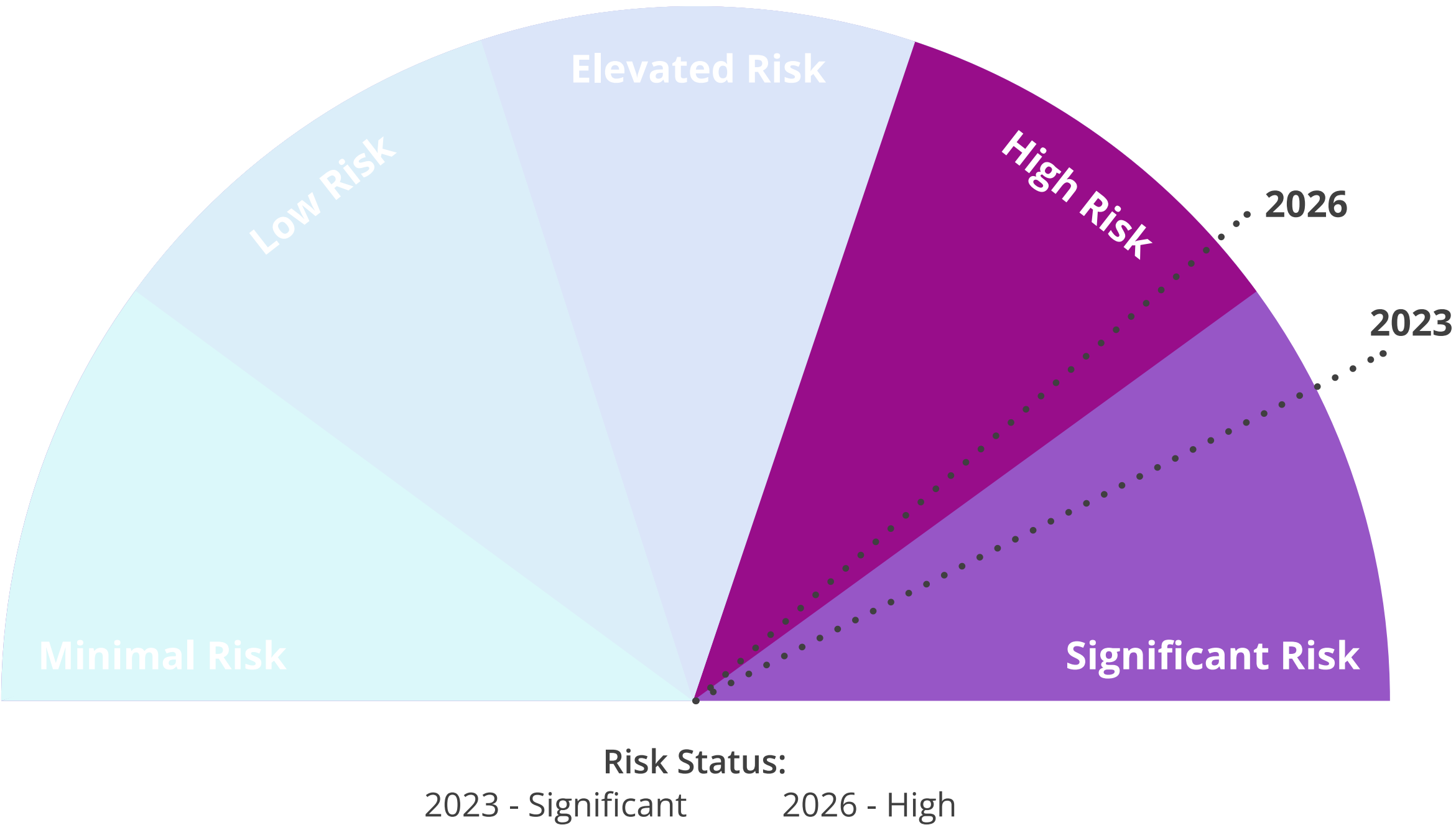


Technology and data

‘Over 90% of crimes are now estimated to involve a digital element (NPCC National Policing Digital Strategy 2020-2030) and approximately 26,000 devices currently awaiting forensic analysis’ (NPCC Digital Forensics Performance Framework 2025)

Since the last ForSTRA:
Marginal decrease influenced by sporadic investment in police forensic service departments increasing cloud capabilities.

What can be done:
Have stronger foresight to understand and implement technological change and advancements embedding scientific principles in any innovative technology.



Quality and compliance

‘How can a consistent approach to Regulatory Compliance be established that reduces cost and impact while enabling innovation and agility across forces?’

Since 2023 forces have matured in their understanding and experience of working in a regulated environment, with communities providing reassurance that there is a good understanding of what is required to achieve compliance. However, there remains concerns regarding insufficient capacity to achieve and maintain compliance and accreditation.

While confidence in meeting Code compliance requirements is encouraging, the ability for individual

forces to achieve this independently continues to present challenges.

Previous levels of concern regarding the potential for forensic evidence integrity to be challenged due to differing compliance levels have largely subsided. However, in the absence of strong national oversight, compliance has developed inconsistently across forces. Furthermore, enforcement by UKAS has not always been applied uniformly, often due to differing local practice, which then further compounds a lack of standardisation.

This fragmented approach continues to drive varying operating models,

each at different levels of maturity and understanding, with systems designed locally, prioritised to meet individual force requirements rather than aligned to a unified national approach.

The scope of activities classified as forensic science activity within the Code has broadened significantly, and is expected to grow further, extending its impact beyond traditional forensic services. Expanding requirements without adopting a whole system approach, has introduced further inefficiencies in practice, limited the ability to coordinate national oversight effectively, and notably, fostered a reluctance among

practitioners to make autonomous, local decisions. Consequently, innovation and professional discretion have, in some parts, been constrained.

The importance of compliance with the Regulator’s Code is universally recognised. Forces agree that ensuring forensic science activities meet established standards is critical to maintaining service credibility. However, ambiguity remains around what constitutes forensic science practice and where its boundaries lie within the broader criminal justice process.

Quality and compliance

The additional requirements necessary to demonstrate compliance with the Code and associated standards have driven changes in practice. This has introduced additional process steps that slow incident response and forensic activity, ultimately impacting investigations. While the latest iteration of the Code provides opportunities for forces to adapt and streamline processes, changes have not yet been widely adopted, highlighting missed opportunities and continued pressures on service delivery.

Although forensic specialists value the assurance provided by standard operating procedures, there is a risk this has a stifling effect on creativity, innovation, and the exploration of new approaches, largely due to the perceived burden of additional compliance requirements. Yet, effective forensic practice relies on critical thinking and adaptability to support complex investigations.

There is a clear need to ensure that compliant management systems support, rather than hinder, innovation. Forensic science must remain dynamic and responsive, and continued sharing of best practice through nationally aligned which could significantly enhance local service delivery.

Maintaining assurance is resource intensive. Conservative estimates suggest that nationally digital forensics units alone spend approximately 4,500 days annually on validation activity, at an estimated cost to policing of over £1.4 million. Consequently, the recent Digital Forensics Performance Framework recommends a review of the current validation model to ensure it is proportionate, sustainable, and responsive to technological change.

In the physical forensic science environment, validation is also challenging. Where forces are needed to invest in extra resources, consumables and analytical testing at

considerable expense. A more efficient approach involving collaborative validation exercises enables more comprehensive outcomes with improved confidence, at reduced overall costs.

Finally, expanding regulation and compliance requirements remain challenging particularly in a rapidly evolving environment, such as digital forensics. Meeting the demanding requirements set out by the Forensic Science Regulator requires ongoing commitment, adaptation and resilience from forces operating within this landscape.

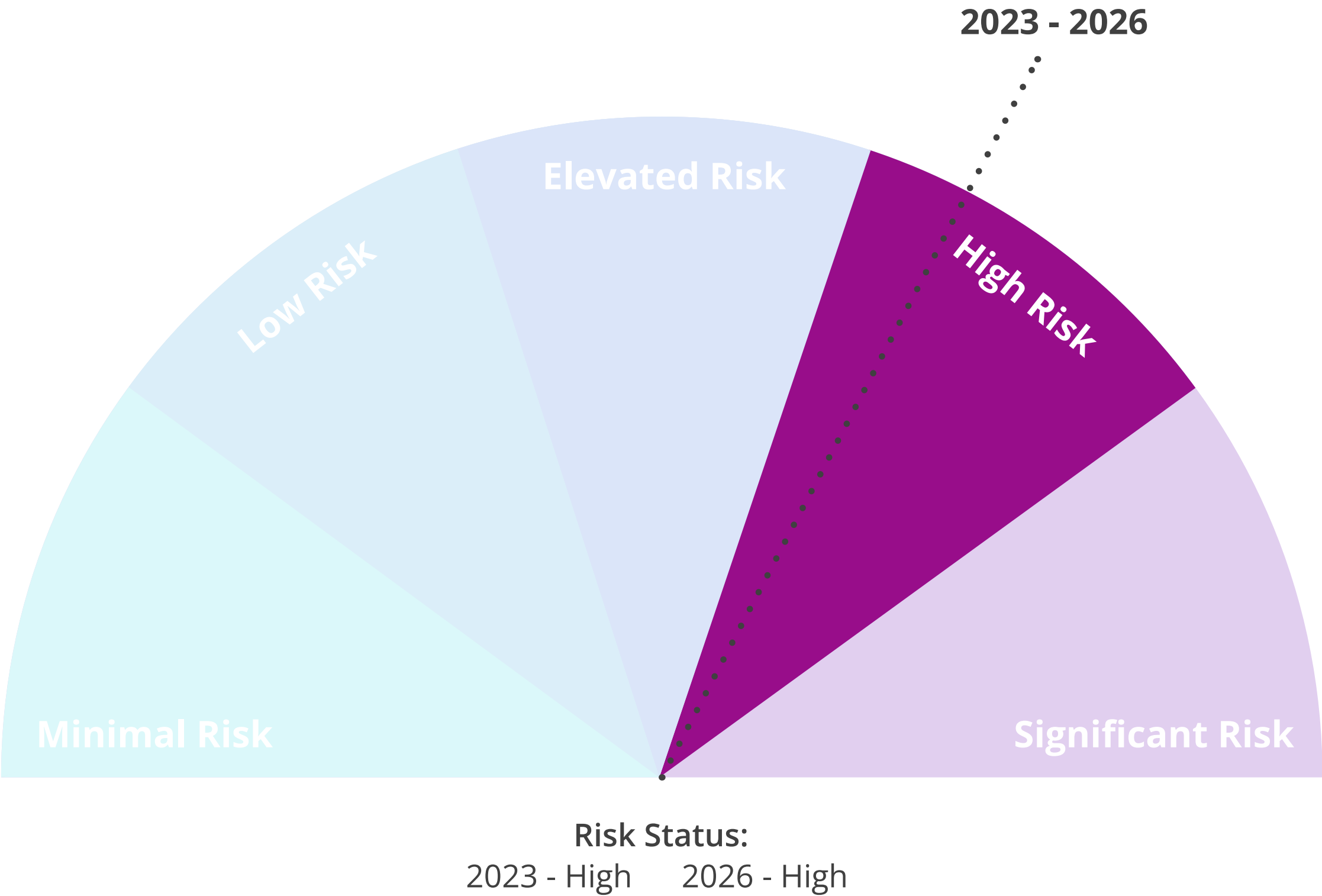


Quality and compliance

‘As with any scientific field, forensic science needs to develop. Research and new discoveries are essential to improve quality and enhance ability of the field to help deliver justice.’ (2026, House of Lords Publication 256)

Since the last ForSTRA:
Assessment has remained the same as some of the proposed whole system changes for forces are yet to provide direct benefits.

What can be done:
Work in partnership to develop agreed good practice for all, improve validation efficiency, and grow compliance, minimising the impact on delivery.



Our people

‘Is our Workforce losing ambition and enthusiasm for a career in forensics?’

The forensic workforce remains at the heart of forensic service delivery. The effectiveness of forensic science is fundamentally dependent on the skills, expertise, and professionalism of the people who deliver it, ensuring that high-quality evidence supports the Criminal Justice System.

However, the forensic community recognises that there are significant and growing workforce challenges that threaten long-term sustainability.

Across several disciplines, an ageing workforce is creating risks to future capability, while other areas are

experiencing difficulties in recruiting and retaining skilled staff. These challenges are compounded by wider economic pressures, increasing workloads, and emerging skills and capability gaps, particularly in specialist and technical roles.

To address these pressures, there is a clear need for long-term, strategic workforce planning. This must support sustainable talent pipelines, enable the development of new skills, and provide clear and attractive career pathways that allow individuals to grow and progress within the profession.

In a rapidly evolving digital landscape, there is also an opportunity to benefit from greater cross-sector learning and collaboration, particularly with industries that are more advanced in digital capabilities. Without this, there is a risk that forensic professionals may become siloed and disconnected, limiting the ability to innovate and adapt.

The nature of forensic work also introduces significant wellbeing challenges. Forensic practitioners are routinely exposed to distressing material. It is reported that over half of computer examinations and a quarter of mobile device examinations are likely to involve graphic or disturbing

content. As demand continues to grow, exposure to such material is increasing, placing additional strain on individuals.

Evidence suggests that workforce practices have not evolved at the same pace as these demands, increasing the risk of adverse impacts on mental health and wellbeing. Findings from the FCN wellbeing survey indicate that a significant proportion of staff across crime scene investigation, digital forensics, and laboratory roles report experiencing work-related mental ill health, driven by workload pressures, limited career progression, and challenges associated with technology.

Our people

Workforce sustainability is further impacted by high vacancy rates, particularly in digital forensics, where vacancies are reported at approximately 40%, compared to an industry benchmark of around 1.9%. Contributing factors include variation in pay, terms and conditions, role definitions, and a perceived lack of career progression. As a result, many skilled individuals leave policing to pursue opportunities in external sectors, taking valuable expertise with them.

Training provision also remains inconsistent. Some practitioners report that existing training does not fully align with the requirements of their roles, contributing to persistent skills gaps within the workforce. In response to recruitment challenges, some organisations have relied on redeploying police officers into specialist roles, adding further complexity to the development of coherent and effective skills frameworks.

There is widespread recognition that the cumulative demands placed on the forensic workforce could have a direct and lasting impact on wellbeing. It is therefore essential that robust support mechanisms are in place to protect the health, resilience, and performance of staff.

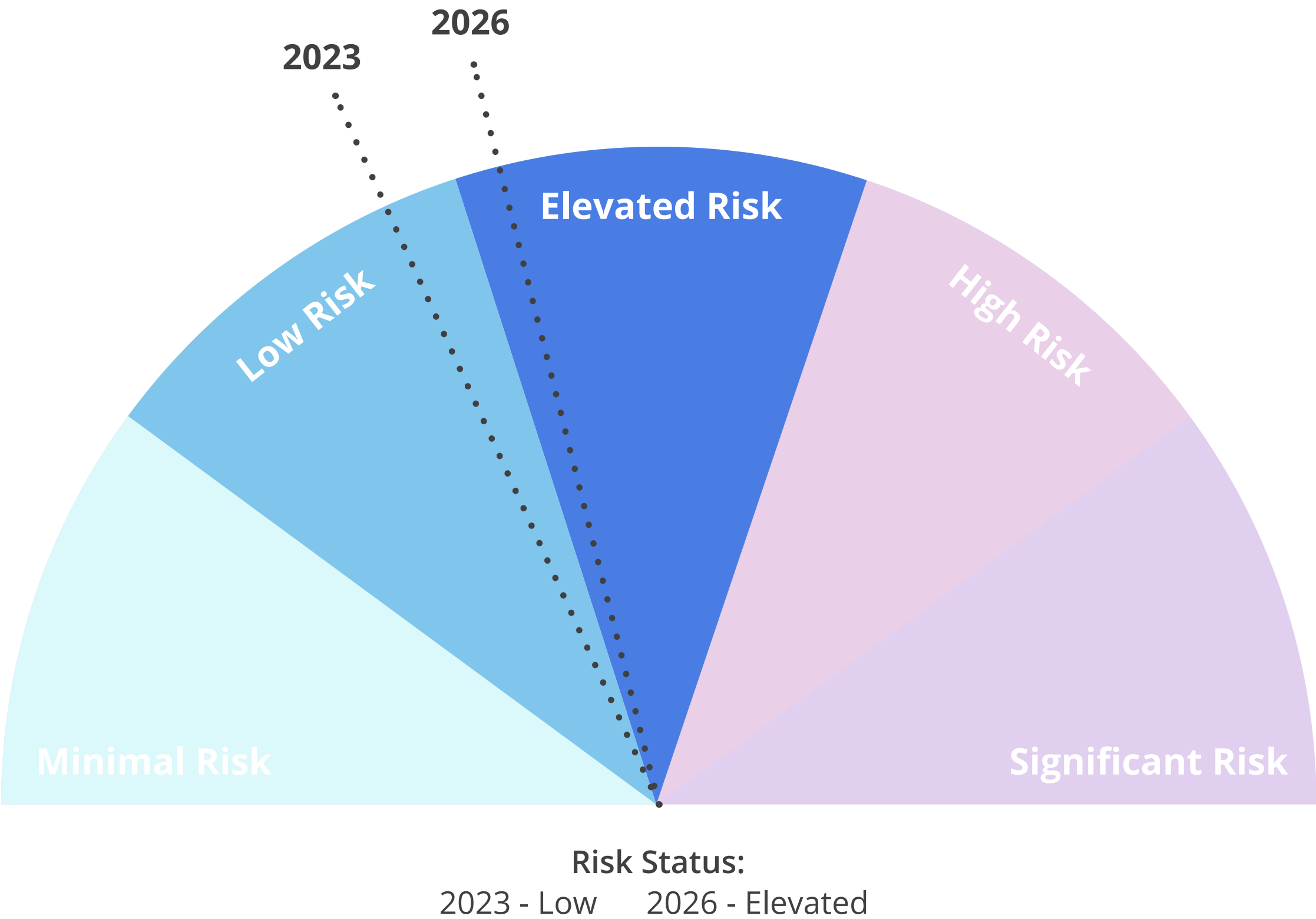
Looking ahead, strengthening forensic science as a recognised profession will be critical. Establishing clear professional standards, defined competencies, and structured career pathways will help to attract and retain talent. Enhanced engagement with academic institutions and the wider Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) community will also play an important role in building future capability, supporting research, and driving innovation through sustained investment and collaboration.

Our people

Ultimately, a skilled, supported, and sustainable workforce is essential to ensuring that forensic science can continue to meet the evolving demands of policing and the Criminal Justice System.

Since the last ForSTRA:
There has been a marginal increase in the risk status due to sustained issues with recruitment, retention, and wellbeing across the separate roles.

What can be done:
Establish standards for the core training and competency of forensic capabilities.



Public trust and confidence NEW

‘Is a decline in public trust and confidence in policing, a new and emerging threat to forensics?’

In recent years, several high-profile miscarriages of justice in the UK have brought renewed scrutiny to the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and particularly the role of forensic science. Public discourse—particularly across media and digital platforms—has increasingly highlighted concerns relating to flawed forensic evidence, investigative practices, and systemic failures.

Cases such as those of Peter Sullivan, who spent 38 years in prison following a wrongful conviction,

and Andrew Malkinson, whose conviction was quashed in 2023 after 17 years, have underscored the critical importance of forensic evidence in securing just outcomes. In both instances, DNA evidence played a central role in overturning convictions, reinforcing the power of forensic science, but also exposing vulnerabilities when processes fail.

At the same time, policing is operating within a challenging environment. While Government and policing maintain a strong focus on tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG),

approximately 71,000 rape offences are reported annually, with charges brought in only around 2.7% of cases. Although the underlying reasons for this are complex, such outcomes can appear inconsistent and difficult to justify from a public perspective, contributing to declining confidence in both policing and the wider justice system.

This erosion of trust has potential implications for forensic science. While practitioners understand the safeguards and scientific rigour underpinning forensic processes, public perception may not differentiate

between policing, forensic science, and wider justice outcomes. As a result, declining confidence in one part of the system may extend to others, including forensic services and professionals.

Emerging technologies present both opportunity and additional risk in this context. The increasing visibility of Artificial Intelligence (AI), alongside growing awareness of deepfake technologies, is shaping public perceptions of evidence integrity. Although there is currently limited evidence to suggest widespread use of falsified forensic evidence in

Public trust and confidence NEW

practice, public understanding of these technologies is often limited. This creates a potential risk that concerns about digital manipulation may undermine confidence in forensic evidence more broadly.

There is also a question as to whether forensic science is sufficiently understood by the public. Operational forensic staff are often visible representatives of policing, and their work is closely associated with investigative outcomes. However, there is limited evidence to confirm whether the public distinguishes between forensic science as an independent scientific discipline and its role within policing structures.

This raises a broader question: Does declining public trust in policing and the CJS directly translate into reduced confidence in forensic science?

If so, this could represent a significant and previously under-recognised threat to the legitimacy and effectiveness of forensic practice.

Policy and reform discussions further reinforce these concerns. The Government's Police Reform White Paper highlights that the current policing model may no longer be fit for purpose, with forensic science identified as an area requiring improvement. Inconsistencies in delivery and a lack of transparency in practice may contribute to public confusion about how forensic science supports investigations and convictions.

Similarly, the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee (2026) has suggested that greater independence between forensic science services and policing may help to strengthen public confidence. While structural independence may offer benefits, it is unlikely to address the issue in isolation.

Building and maintaining public trust will require a broader and more holistic approach. This includes:

- Improving transparency and communication about how forensic science is used and governed
- Reinforcing the integrity and independence of forensic processes
- Ensuring consistency and standardisation in service delivery
- Proactively addressing emerging technology risks and perceptions
- Promoting greater public understanding of forensic science and its role in justice

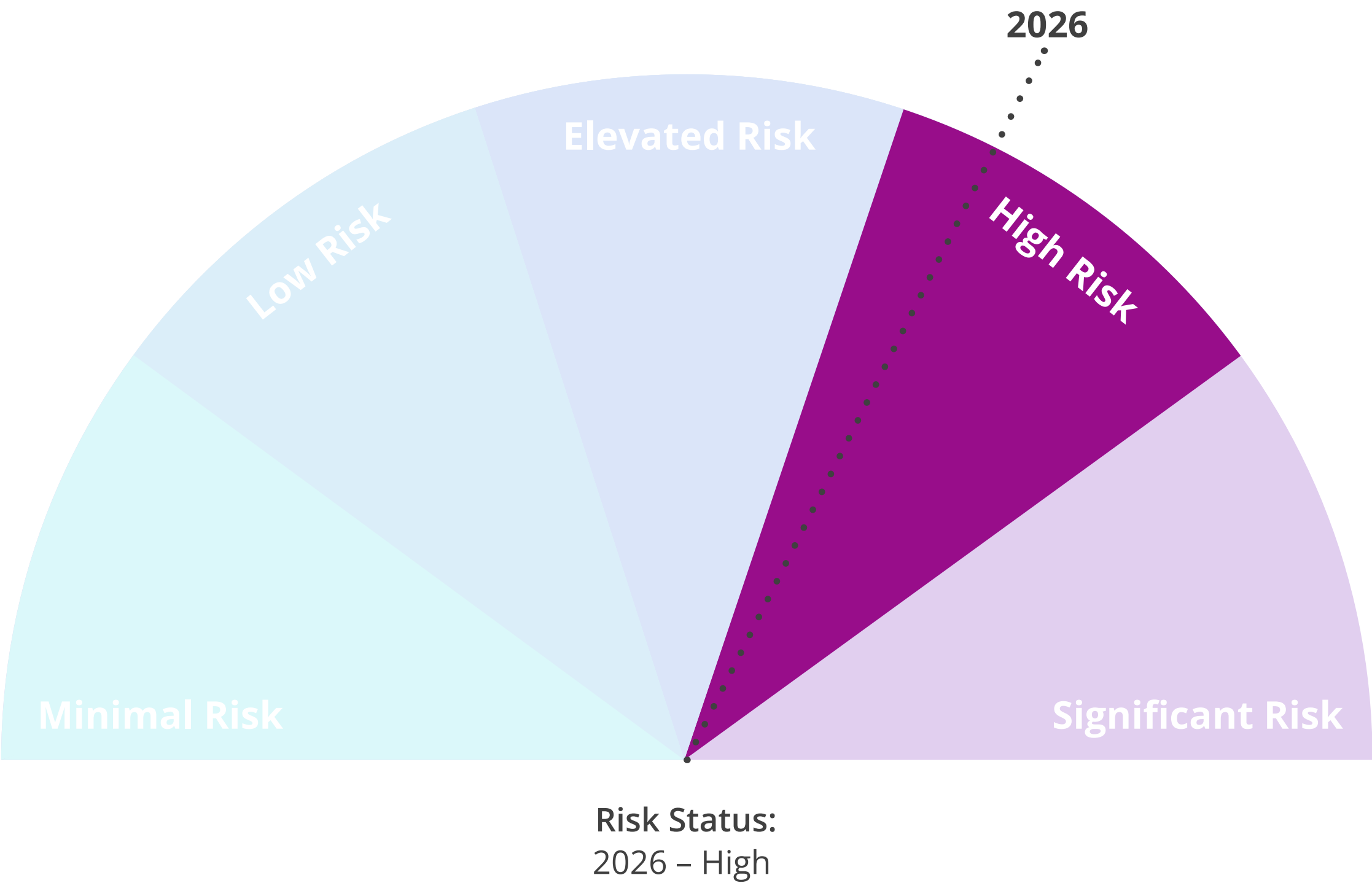
Ultimately, strengthening trust and confidence will depend not only on the robustness of forensic science itself, but also on the ability of the system to demonstrate its reliability, fairness, and value to the public it serves.



Public trust and confidence NEW

Given this is a new area of concern and yet to be founded in an evidence base, should our Community undertake activity to substantiate any perceived or real threat and risk associated with Public Trust and Confidence in Forensic Science and the services we deliver?

What can be done:
Focusing on a more transparent, performance driven business model will allow investigation to be more value led.



Risk horizon to 2030 and beyond



Risk horizon to 2030 and beyond

With a well-established understanding of the current forensic risk landscape and its influencing factors, there is now a strong foundation from which to project how key risk themes are likely to evolve over time.

The ability to look ahead is critical. It enables a shift from reactive management of risk to a more proactive and strategic approach, allowing policing and partners to anticipate challenges and prepare accordingly.

Diagram 2 illustrates the current position of identified risks and projects how these risks are expected to change through to 2030 and beyond. The trajectories shown reflect both known pressures and anticipated influences, including economic conditions, technological change, workforce dynamics, and system reform.

The horizontal axis represents the time horizon, while the vertical positioning of each line reflects the relative level of risk (from low to high).

Each trajectory illustrates a different risk theme, showing how it is projected to change based on current trends, pressures, and mitigating activity.

Several risks are shown to increase over time, particularly where demand, complexity, or external pressures (such as economic or technological change) are expected to intensify. Others show signs of stabilisation or gradual reduction, reflecting the potential impact of ongoing programmes, investment, or improved coordination.

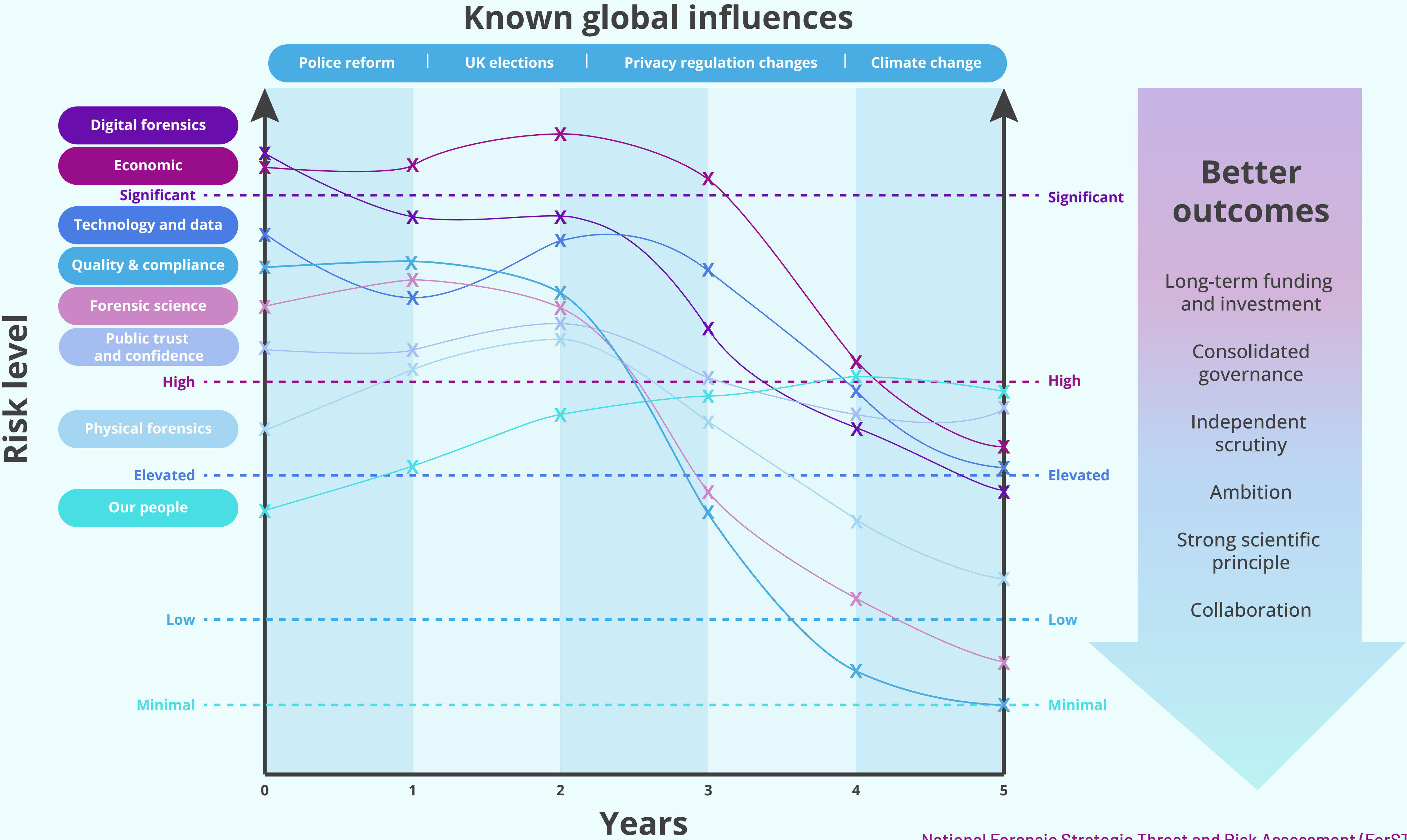
Overall, the diagram reinforces that the forensic risk landscape is dynamic rather than static, and that without coordinated, system-wide intervention, some risks are likely to escalate. Equally, it demonstrates that targeted and collective mitigation activity has the potential to alter these trajectories and drive risk down over time.

This forward-looking view provides valuable insight into:

- Which risks are likely to increase in severity if left unaddressed
- Where current mitigation activity is expected to stabilise or reduce risk
- How interdependencies between risk themes may shape the overall landscape

By understanding these trajectories, there is a clearer opportunity to prioritise action, target investment, and shape policy decisions to achieve the greatest impact.

Diagram 2.



Driving positive change

While the outlook highlights areas of increasing pressure, it also demonstrates that coordinated, system-wide intervention has the potential to significantly improve “better outcomes.”

A collective national approach to risk mitigation could further drive meaningful and sustained improvements across all forensic disciplines.

Key enablers for success include:

- Long-term funding and investment to support capability, capacity, and innovation
- Stronger governance and national coordination, enabling consistency and oversight
- Independent scrutiny, reinforcing transparency and public confidence
- Commitment to strong scientific principles, ensuring integrity and quality
- Clear ambition and strategic direction, aligned across the system
- Enhanced collaboration across policing, academia, and industry partners

A collective responsibility

Reducing risk across the forensic landscape cannot be achieved through isolated efforts. It requires a coordinated and sustained commitment from all stakeholders, supported by shared priorities and aligned delivery.

Through collective focus on risk mitigation activities, capability development, and system reform, there is a clear opportunity to not only stabilise the current risk profile, but to drive it downward over time.

Ultimately, this approach will strengthen the resilience, effectiveness, and credibility of forensic science, ensuring it continues to support policing and the Criminal Justice System both now and into the future.

Conclusion & summary



Conclusion & summary

Despite the significant challenges and evolving threats facing the forensic science community, practitioners continue to demonstrate a strong and unwavering commitment to delivering high-quality services that support policing and the wider Criminal Justice System.

However, the scale, complexity, and interdependency of the current threat landscape mean that, without coordinated national effort and sustained investment, the ability to effectively mitigate risks and achieve long-term resilience will remain constrained.

As recognised:

“The vital role of forensic science must be evaluated in the context of the challenges facing modern policing. An accurate appraisal of its value should drive increased government investment and encourage providers to invest in infrastructure, capabilities, and—most critically—people.”
House of Lords Science and Technology Committee report 2026

A clear and shared understanding of the role forensic science plays across investigations—and its contribution to justice outcomes—is essential. Strengthening this understanding will enable more proactive risk mitigation, better-informed decision making, and the continued evolution of services to meet future demands.

In this context, strengthened national oversight reinforces the importance of the ForSTRA, there is a clear opportunity to enhance stakeholder engagement, improve the quality and consistency of data, and further develop robust, evidence-based capabilities.

While progress has been made in aligning activity across forces, delivery remains inconsistent and insufficient to achieve the level of transformational change required. A more unified vision, underpinned by shared ambition and collective accountability, will be critical to driving meaningful and sustained improvement.

Priority actions

To translate insight into impact, the following priorities require collective national focus:

Looking ahead, the priority must be to leverage the ForSTRA to build on existing strengths—what we know, what we have, and where we perform well—while addressing systemic challenges through coordinated, whole-system action.

Establish sustained and coordinated investment to stabilise the forensic marketplace and support long-term capability

Strengthen national governance and oversight, enabling consistency, standardisation, and shared accountability

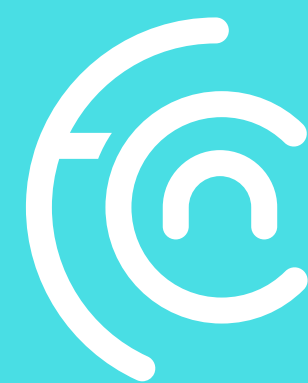
Modernise technology and data infrastructure, addressing fragmentation and enabling better decision making

Develop a sustainable and skilled workforce, with clear career pathways, consistent standards, and improved wellbeing support

Ensure quality and compliance frameworks are proportionate and enabling, supporting both assurance and innovation

Enhance transparency and public confidence, reinforcing the integrity and value of forensic science within the justice system

By doing so, policing can create a more resilient, sustainable, and future-ready forensic science capability — one that continues to uphold scientific integrity, supports investigative effectiveness, and maintains public trust and confidence in the justice system.



Forensic Capability Network

Shaping forensics, together.

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