Produced by

NPCC National Police Chiefs' Council

Forensic Capability Network

NATIONAL FORENSIC STRATEGIC THREAT AND RISK ASSESSMENT (FORSTRA) 2023

CONTENTS

1. FOREWORD

It is recognised that the strategic policing themes continue to have a focus on 7 critical areas.

Violence Against Women and Girls, Terrorism, Serious and Organised Crime, National Cyber Event, Child Sexual Abuse, Public Disorder, Civil Emergencies

This is where the greatest threats and challenges to policing and our community continue to persist.

Without exception, forensic services are intrinsically linked to operational policing, playing a critical role within the investigation and detection of crime and elimination of the innocent.

Therefore, it has never been more important that as a Forensic Science Community, we also understand where our greatest threats and risks are to ensure we are meeting the needs of policing and the wider CJS.

However, as described by the **Home Office Forensic Reform Program;** **'Nationally the ownership of forensic science is covered by multiple organisations and complex areas of business, fragmented across agencies. This can lead to differing decision making, models and outcomes. Accountability is at times difficult to drive and monitor.'**

This introduces inherent risk within forensic service delivery.

Consequently, this FORSTRA is intended to identify those key themes and provide the start of a framework and process to inform policing in England and Wales of the current and future challenges imposed by strategic threats and risks affecting forensics service provision nationally.

This FORSTRA has been developed in conjunction with the forensic science community, on behalf of NPCC, with the Forensic Capability Network (FCN) acting as an extension of police forensic teams, operating holistically to gain national oversight of this service provision.

In doing so, this FORSTRA has sought to capture, through broad community engagement, not only information communicated in strategic reports, but also what is known to the community, enabling policing to collectively draw on national knowledge and insights.

Consolidating this national understanding into a FORSTRA provides an opportunity to provide an overview of current and future threats and risks to forensic science, which may impact on victims of crime, policing demand, and our ability to respond to government priorities.

Therefore, this FORSTRA supports the approach that knowing that forensic science is the golden thread running through operational policing informing future frontline working practises through quality standards and best evidential practise.

Chief Constable Nick Dean
NPCC Forensic Lead

2. WHAT WE KNOW

Trends in police recorded crime levels have been affected by COVID-19 restrictions with a reduction in acquisitive crime numbers.

> **'Sexual offences have increased by 32% in the year ending March 22 compared to the previous year'**
>
> (HomeOffice, 21 July 2022)

This is a pattern replicated across other violent crime types, which is a concern raised through force engagement with forensic community leaders.

In March 2022, overall recorded criminal offences had increased by 16% on the previous year. Shifting demands and increasing numbers of recorded criminal offences across different crime types has a direct impact on the delivery requirements for forensic services.

Forensic science is an integral part of the investigative process with a variety of disciplines involved, depending upon the case, to obtain best evidence needed to eliminate the innocent and secure a conviction and in doing so provide a quality and timely service to victims.

Physical (traditional) forensics is well established whilst digital forensics is less mature but evolving at an exponential rate.

The forensic community leaders articulated key concerns about entire system threats and issues across the policing and science sector.

The ability to balance demand, capacity, and capability remains at the heart of the risks illustrating how each of the critical issues outlined in this document; economic, social, legislative, and technological are all intrinsically linked.

No one risk or threat sits in isolation of any other, one compounds another, and the mitigation is complex highlighting the need for a realistic manageable and choreographed plan.

The Digital Policing Vision 2020-2030 (NPCC, 2020)[1] indicates that transformative change is needed across the system whilst keeping public service at the heart of science and suggests a national approach to delivery, driven through coordinated organisational activity and shared learning, which is currently a gap across policing.

3. THE LAUNCH PAD

During the latter part of 2022 and early 2023 extensive engagement was undertaken across the forensic science community so that a launch pad for a future approach to the identification and management of Threat and Risk could be built.

This FORSTRA highlights the Threats and Risks identified across the sector, however, there remains a need to understand demand trends that forensic science and the Criminal Justice System (CJS) expect to face in the near future, to include (but not exclusive to):

- An **overview** of current national performance, condition, composition, capacity, capability, wellbeing of forensic services in policing.
- An **overview** of the serviceability and security of supply of the forensic workforce and other assets.
- **Changes** to workforce demand and function and the effect that this may have, including any residual risk of service failure.
- The need for **data analytics** to inform the extent to which current forensic services are prepared to meet expected future Policing needs.
- An understanding of the impact that **budget changes** could have on the delivery of forensic services nationally.

This information can be considered by policing to inform planning and decision-making including improve efficiency and effectiveness, and mitigating against emerging risks, whilst supporting national directives for forensic science.

It is recommended that this should be developed and delivered through a National Control Strategy to ensure development of effective mitigation strategies.
To note: This will require an assessment of current and anticipated national demand and capability across disciplines and services and potential impact on performance.

Throughout this FORSTRA an assessment of risk, as determined by the forensic community, has been used to benchmark challenges and issues across forensic science. Each evaluation will include the range of the threat to gain an insight into the severity of risk and what the future may hold.

4. ASSESSMENT OF RISK

MINIMAL RISK

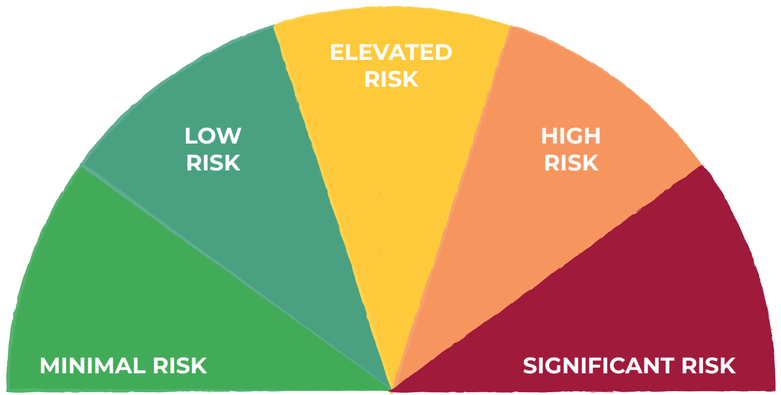
Nationally Forensic Services has a very good and consistent approach to understanding current and/or future demand or capability and capacity.

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.



5. OVERVIEW OF FORENSIC SERVICES IN ENGLAND AND WALES

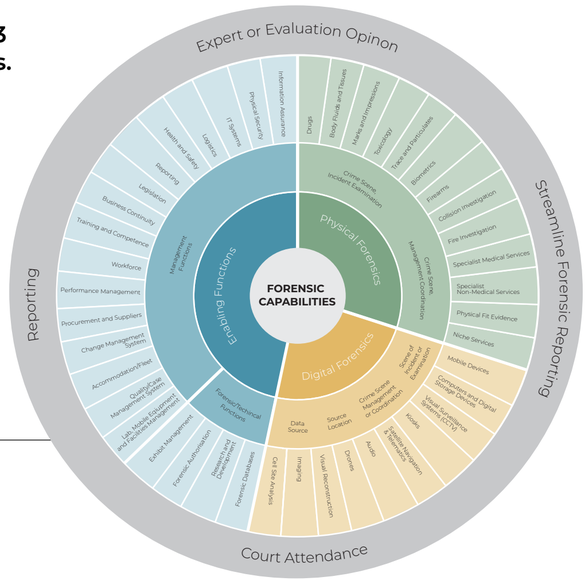
Policing in England and Wales is made up of 43 police forces, and other specialist organisations.

Including the National Crime Agency (NCA) and British Transport Police (BTP) all of which provide their own forensic service in support of criminal investigations and the justice process.

All forensic science provisions in policing cover standard core disciplines in physical and digital forensics.

This diagram gives an overview of the breadth of the scope of UK forensic capability accepting that the business model for the delivery of these services varies from force to force depending upon.

- Local policing priorities
- Funding
- Specialist Capabilities
- Demand



FCN diagram providing an overview of current UK forensic science capabilities.

KEY

- Physical Forensics Recovery at Scene/Incident
- Digital Forensics Recovery at Scene/Incident
- Enabling Function Category
- Physical Forensics Examination, Analysis, Identification and Interpretation (As defined by the FSR)
- Digital Forensics Examination, Analysis, Identification and Interpretation (As defined by the FSR)
- Enabling Function
- Forensic Output

During FCN Community engagement, Forensic Leaders were asked to give their opinion on the greatest risks and threats facing forensic services and the consistent themes identified were:

Maintaining pace with **technological** changes and **data** challenges

Quality matters including the compliance with the Forensic Science Regulators (FSR) code of practise

Workforce recruitment and retention

Economic pressures

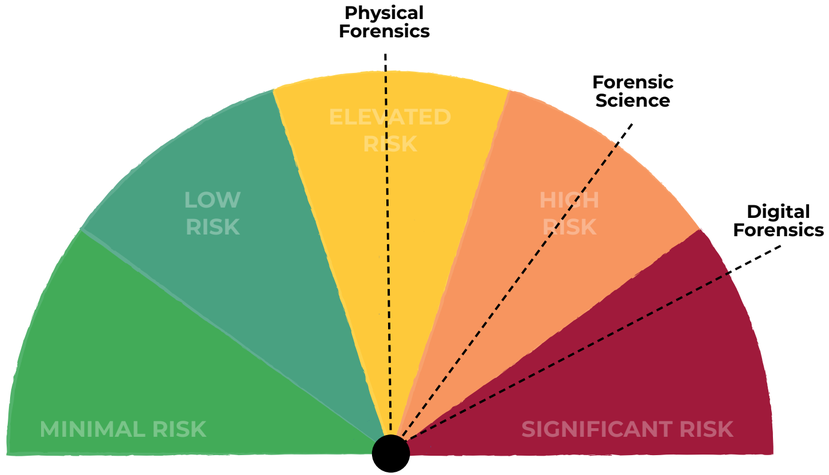
Whilst this engagement has confirmed the common local issues for forensics across the policing sector in England and Wales, the ability to develop this level of scrutiny for global strategic threats and risks remains challenging.

Overall, a risk assessment completed by Forensic Leaders for Forensic Science Services expressed universal concerns across the service with force leaders firefighting current operational challenges.

When this was broken down further into an assessment of Physical and Digital Forensic Science there was a clear distinction between the two with Digital Forensics being a significant risk for forces areas whilst physical forensics seems less of a concern but was still considered an elevated risk.

“We are already swamped with demand, technology changes, quality pressures, and loosing skilled staff that is sometimes preventing us from doing the job to the best of our ability.

I think future demand and capacity changes will see these pressures increase and unless we collectively address the shared pain then forces may sink into digital forensic failure. ”



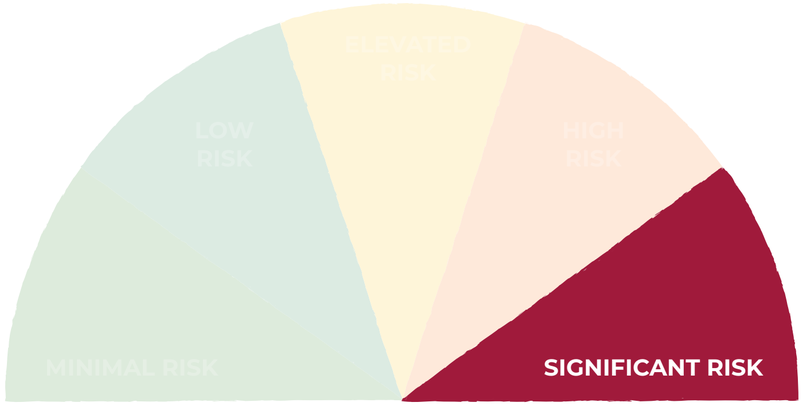
Risk Assessment Status.

Overall Forensic Science - Elevated to High
Digital Forensics - Significant
Physical Forensics - Elevated

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Develop and embed a national control strategy in response to this FORSTRA
- Establish a National forensic performance framework that will enable baselining of forensic service provision and establish and share what ‘good’ looks like

6. TECHNOLOGICAL AND DATA CHALLENGES



Risk Assessment Status
Significant

All forensics leaders reported this being at least elevated risk with several finding this a significant area of concern.

The impact of forensic science services current lack of ability to technically evolve and respond at pace to criminality changes could be significant.

Digital forensics was historically a capability utilised by frontline policing but serviced by specialist capabilities. Rightly, technology has allowed this capability to become integrated across policing and throughout the investigative process, with only the more complex digital forensics activity needing to be serviced by specialist units. Although progressive, this change for investigators has been rapid, which has inherently introduced an element of risk.

The **HMICFRS Thematic report into Digital Forensics (HMICFRS, 2022)** describes that:

"Some police officers simply do not understand the potential of digital forensics in investigations. Nor do they understand what systems and processes are required to get the most from effective examinations of digital devices."

There is a lack of consideration of the scientific requirements of digital forensics from not:

Understanding the capabilities and limitations of the technology

Knowing how to interpret complex forensics data results

Appreciating what is required to meet the requirements of accreditation

There is increasing complexity of digital material requiring capture, preservation, analysis, and reporting within criminal investigations particularly seen by the specialist digital forensics units.

Currently effectively understanding and interpreting digital resulting is complex and if completed manually by less experienced investigators could lead to forensic opportunities being missed or misinterpreted.

There is a risk to investigations of not providing investigators with the tools, and training to interpret the results correctly and efficiently.

Technology continues to evolve at a rapid rate, which provides criminals with new opportunities and vectors to undertake criminal activity and evade detection. Adding to the complexity of the technological challenges, this same technology, also offers significant opportunities to policing for efficient detections and investigations of crime. To truly maximise the benefits and opportunities of current and emerging technology policing needs to become more agile in responding to change.

Digital forensics in policing is predominantly considered to just include mobile and computer devices. Despite the broadening opportunities available to investigate crime, based on a holistic 'digital footprint', policing remains narrow in our approach and capability investigating data laterally, in isolation and often based on device type rather than digital forensic opportunity.

A key policing priority **'Violence Against Women and Girls' (VAWG)[2]** has put emphasis of the examination of mobile devices knowing that this forensic activity can impact the 'victim' experience. There needs to be greater recognition of the victim's experience and the importance of appropriate governance and ethics for the use of technology to solve crimes.

'Digital Strip Searches: The police's data investigations of victims'[3] Privacy International July 2019 talks about a less intrusive approach to digital examinations and the importance of this to building victim and public confidence in digital forensics through the protection of data, and privacy rights.

This sector has been described as needing 'one voice' and strategic national influence to drive change and forensic security, which is key to tackling emerging technological and data challenges.

It is well known that 'Data' demands are increasing exponentially, and forces ICT infrastructures are described by forensic leads as being unable to cope with the change needed to provide an effective response.

The lack of consistency of approach and standardised ways of working across policing, makes digital collaboration challenging. Technology and data improvement programs are inherently expensive.

The **HMICFRS Thematic Report (HMICFRS, 2022)** states:

"It would be a mistake to continue investing more resources in an uncoordinated way hoping this will solve the demands of the future."

For policing to be in a position where they could be at the forefront of digital change, the scope for forensics to have the ability to innovate and adapt as required is vital.

The **Information Commissioners Office Investigation Report on Mobile Phone data extraction by police forces in England and Wales[4]** states that:

"There has been extensive media coverage highlighting concerns where the management of data extracted from mobile phones has undermined the progression of cases through the criminal justice process."

Whilst forensic investigations are being challenged by criminal activity becoming ever more sophisticated in the digital space, policing are also on occasions being reported negatively through the media. This is linked to delays in the examination of digital data affecting public trust, and the perceived connection with this and low conviction rates for victims of rape and serious sexual offenses.

Strategically, there is an inability for case and crime data to be fully exploited to articulate benefits and value of forensics science and/or therefore, understand the challenges and requirements for an evidence based effective forensic science service delivery.

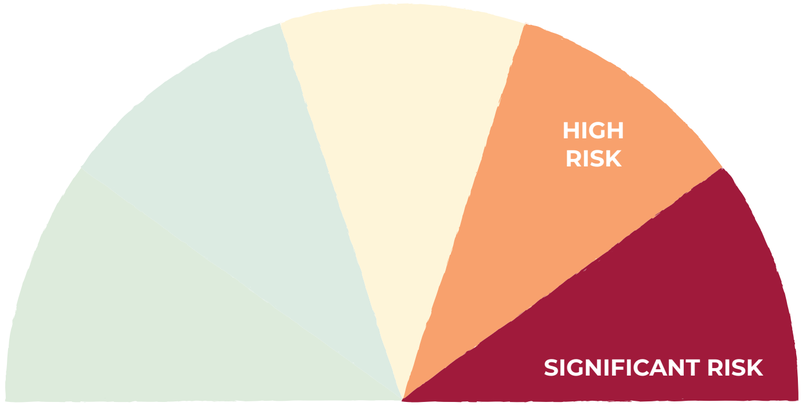
The current structure to support digital demand in forensic services creates a 'firefighting' approach to service delivery, which in turn influences all system risks.

Policing should not fear the technological change needed to effectively support digital forensics. They should already have been provided with the tools, capabilities, and advancements to ensure they are prepared and can adapt appropriately.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Ensure a coordinated and community informed response to the recommendation within the HMICFRS Thematic Report which identifies the need for a new operating model for Digital Forensics.
- Establish a nationally coordinated approach to how technology is structured, implemented, resourced, funded, and interpreted.
- Ensure collective collegiate working across all stakeholder organisations

7. QUALITY STANDARDS



Risk Assessment Status
High to Significant

Forensic Leaders raised concerns of this risk being an escalating threat area.

Quality standards plays a crucial part in providing assurance of the integrity of forensic science evidence and compliance to regulation stipulated by the Forensic Science Regulator (FSR).

There is an expectation for all forensics services to comply to quality requirements including ISO standards and the FSR Code of Practice and Conduct.

Forensic Services will need to focus on establishing and broadening their scope of accreditation if they are to meet the requirements of the FSR within prescribed deadlines which will vary across the forensic science activities.

Police forensics predominately have services accredited to ISO/IEC 17020 for scene examinations and ISO/IEC 17025 for forensic laboratory activities.

However, nationally we are some way off ensuring that all forensic services are accredited across all disciplines.

The accreditation landscape across policing in respect of physical forensics, shows that for CSI (Crime Scene Investigator) activity only 15.63% of forces are currently accredited to perform aspects and not whole service.

Whilst Forces have been making steady progress to meet their physical forensics accreditation requirements, in doing so there has been an impact on service delivery through:

The **abstraction** of operational forensic staff to develop and embed quality procedures.

A **reduction** in the number of CSI's available to attend crime scenes, due to time taken to operate within accredited procedures and new ways of working.

A **budgetary impact** in relation to Police Officers remaining on scene longer awaiting a forensic response.

Public service impact with fewer scenes being attended or delays in attendance.

The *FSR Statutory Code of practice for forensic science activities v1* was approved by parliament and published in March 2023, the Code shall come into effect on October 2nd 2023.

Subsequently, the FSR will have powers of enforcement and assessment of compliance based upon risk to the Criminal Justice System for Forensic Science Activities (FSA's) that are subject to the Code.

At the point that the Code becomes effective, there will be a requirement for forensic service providers to complete a declaration of compliance status for all providers of Forensic Science Activities (be that internally within policing or the external forensic marketplace) across digital and physical forensic activities.

This uplift of compliance requirement for forensic activities to meet the code of practise has been reported by Forensic Leads to be 'particularly challenging' putting additional pressure on the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) to meet the assessment needs of policing.

Consequently, the associated whole system potential threats associated with quality standards are:

Policing not being compliant within the prescribed time limits

Non-accredited evidence being inadmissible in court

Escalating costs of accreditation and the redirection of funding from other areas of forensic budgets

Recruiting to quality and technical accessor roles to enable compliance (identified as a challenge due to lack of suitably qualified people)

Level of Validation work required to demonstrate robustness of process and methods, which is time consuming and requires redirection of resources from operational business as usual activity (BAU)

Necessity to Embed and conduct competency assessments of staff, Lack of support from Chief Officers at organisational level, Interpretation of the code to meet either ISO 17020 or ISO17025 being inconsistently applied.

Ongoing lack of clarity and challenge regarding 'infrequently used methods' needing to be validated. Known 'niche' forensic service provision at risk of extinction across the marketplace.

Digital forensics is a specific area of concern in respect of quality accreditation. Whilst several forces are accredited for primary core activity, the pressure to maintain and sustain these standards is significant due to the rate of digital change.

We know that the appetite for broadening accredited scope of accreditation in Digital Forensics remains static and the range of unaccredited activities being performed increases as technology evolves.

Forces currently have limited ability and resources to broaden their scope of accredited activities, even if specified to do so in the FSR codes of practice, due to the time commitment and activity needed to do so. Currently over 50% of forces performing Digital Forensics mobile device and computer examination are unaccredited which inherently builds an element of organisational risk.

Of mobile device examinations performed 10% are primarily niche activities which continue to be uncontrolled an increasing figure based on the growth of technology.

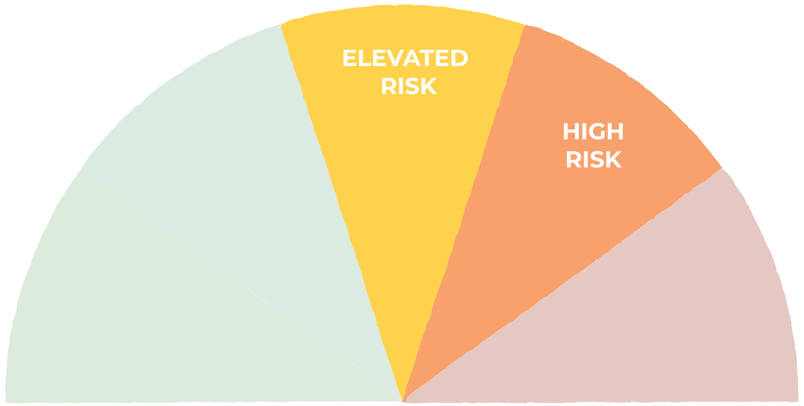
Forensic leaders are committed to improving quality standards but are confronted with risks and threats including (but not exclusive to) financial constraints and workforce pressures, which have an impact on their ability to achieve this and maintain expected standards of service delivery.

> **'Significant' risk rating across quality standards – this one is easy, it's everything we all said about UKAS/FSR yesterday and things going too far, killing the love of the job, impacting recruitment and retention, suffocating change and innovation, I believe it's significant risk.**

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Enable policing to strategically influence future requirements set out by the Forensic Science Regulator
- Successfully deliver a robust approach to central validation services to remove duplication of effort and drive consistency

8. ECONOMIC



Risk Assessment Status
Elevated to High

Forensic Leaders saw this as an elevated to high area of risk as it underpinned all known risks and threat.

Forensic leaders have highlighted the impact of current and future economic challenges on all areas of forensic delivery. A strong indication of the depth of economic concerns was highlighted when 68% of respondents gave it as the primary threat that they believe will negatively impact ongoing and future service delivery.

National consumer forecasting supports this risk, that this is a growing threat which will increasingly affect operational delivery, workforce, and resource issues in the next budget year.

Reduced policing budgets has a cascaded effect on forensic services with the expectation of increasing pressure to deliver more for (and with) less.

The consumer price index (CPI) inflation rates up to July 2022 shows a surge in inflation nationally, which will impact costs for consumables and technology, stretching forensic budgets further.

This will be compounded further, having an impact on supply chains, through material unavailability and disruption to transport links, suggesting the forensic community need robust delivery and Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery (BCDR) Plans.

The need for forensic consumables remains high with budgets due to be squeezed further over the coming years.

This develops into a greater threat:

"Marketplace consortium purchasing pricing has increased by 20%, but simultaneously in force forensic budgets have only been increased by 7% to support this"
(Forensic Leader engagement, November 2022)

The challenge of ensuring that consumables used are sustainable and meet the requirements of accreditation also introduces a further dimension to costs.

Policing faces difficult financial choices, which will impact the ability to adapt to fluctuating demands or the ability to continue to support all forensic disciplines as routine, this could force a narrowing of work undertaken internally or commissioned with the external marketplace.

This is a particular risk for niche services where ongoing research and development is limited and services expensive and could result in extinction events for some, which are relied upon for our most serious investigations.

For our people the national economic situation, rising inflation and cost of living is causing escalating financial challenges and distress and recognised as an increasing risk during the coming year and beyond.

Forensic practitioners are already raising issues in relation to their inability to pay bills and provide for their families and attendance at food banks.

This is a challenge that needs to be recognised and acknowledged nationally with the appropriate levels of support embedded to safeguard the wellbeing of our workforce.

Forensics services is built upon the scientific knowledge and experience of our people working in this specialist field and therefore, the role they play in the service we are able to provide, should not be underestimated.

Continued financial commitment and investment into digital forensics remains a particular challenge and/or a threat to forensic science service delivery due to the fast paced growth in technology and increasing demand in this discipline.

The recent HMICFRS thematic report 'Digital Forensics: An inspection into how well the police and other agencies use digital forensics in their investigations '

(HMICFRS, 2022) highlights some police forces who are

'Overwhelmed and ineffective when it comes to digital forensics'

'During this inspection we found that, nationally, there were over 25,000 devices waiting for a digital forensic examination'
(HMICFRS, 2022)

However, knowing the number of devices waiting to be examined does not directly equate to specific turnaround times or tell us individual force capability or capacity of digital forensics services. This is due to the lack of standardised approach to service delivery, data and operating model.

Forces voluntarily provide data on devices waiting times which supports this conservative estimate of demand. Significantly mobile devices and computers make up of sizeable proportion of the devices awaiting examination.

With technology evolving exponentially and digital crime on the increase, it is considered that this demand will only increase without investment and changes to current 'ways of working.'

Digital examinations need to get smarter, and digital forensics more efficient and accessible to the whole of policing, understanding 'what policing want', if we are to meet the data challenges.

It was generally agreed that, currently, the struggle is meeting the technology challenges of today, without resources or capacity to 'get ahead of the curve' and proactively identify and develop solutions for the future before they become issues of the day.

To really understand where improvements should be made a more detailed and robust national performance framework is needed.

Collaboration is a key strategy to addressing the present and future challenges for the forensic delivery especially when economic pressures are so critical.

Partnership working between policing and government organisations, academic researchers, institutions, and companies in industry has been identified by the **Science & Technology Strategy (2022)**[5] as being critical to meet the needs of policing challenges now and in the future.

- There is currently little coordinated thinking in relation to research activities and there is limited cross fertilisation of learning across forensic organisations.
- The lack of coordination of innovation in relation to operational demand is a risk. Within policing there is no capacity to initiate and maintain or to then coordinate the research challenges faced.

The key themes highlighted in national publications that limit the coordination and development of Forensic Science R&D include:

A lack of standardised data sets across the different forensic capabilities, and then an inability to share this across organisations.

A lack of partnership and cooperation with the academic sector.

Continued difficulties with obtaining funding for this specialism.

Where funding is achieved the lack of foresight to effectively cost the implementation, training, and validation costs.

To align and adapt timelines around operational and academic delivery requirements.

Operational policing demand inhibiting innovation. E.g., Backlogs in Digital forensics increasing the need for innovation but reducing capability for forces to focus to achieve it.

There are many key issues that are placing pressure on forensic services, however, a coordinated approach to research and innovation could result in an improved operational response.

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)[6], where sexual offences recorded by the police were at the highest level recorded within a 12-month period (196,889 offences) in the year ending June 2022, **(Crime Survey for England and Wales, 2022)**[7] is one such area which is critical within the CJS and would build public trust and confidence.

In doing this consideration must be given to:

- deployment
- rapid response
- incorporation of forensic standards
- value for money
- technology
- people, and processes by default,
- which can be trusted across the whole of the CJS

By considering the needs of forensics as a priority, alongside other needs, policing would be able to exploit research and innovation opportunities and learning from other industry sectors whilst innovatively embedding an agile, collaborative, quality culture, which will preserve the integrity of forensic evidence from crime scene to court – *forensics by design.*

'From an economic perspective I believe that there has been a significant erosion over the years, and this continues on an annual basis. Units are staffed to minimum levels and as such there is little if any headspace. As a result soon as staff leave force, there is an imbalance in resource 'v' demand for significant periods of time due to recruitment lead times and lengthy training / mentoring periods.

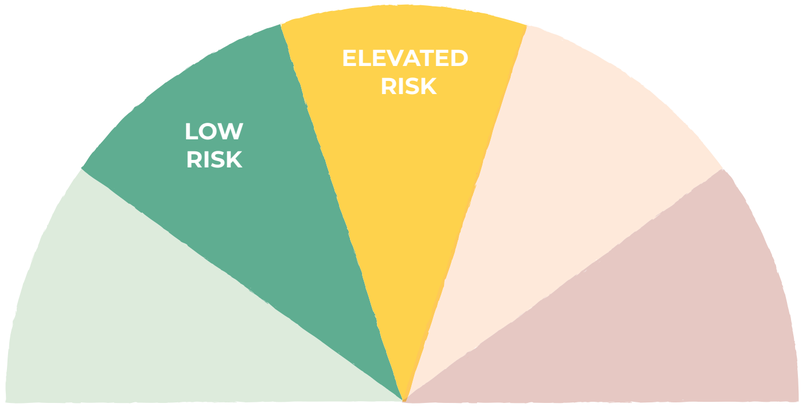
With the exception of the physical audit costs, the true cost of accreditation is not recognised by Chief Officers. The costs have simply been absorbed by forensic units over the years. In order to absorb these costs, the volumes of work processed has had to reduce which has had a knock on effect in terms of the impact of forensics.

In the past 12 months inflation has risen by 13% but in our force 23/24 non pay budgets have remained static, as they did the previous year as well'.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Get policing to act as the intelligent customer when going to market, acting with a single voice enhancing buying power through aggregation of demand to obtain best pricing for goods and services
- Take a coordinated and agreed prioritisation approach when seeking to commission R&I and access funding
- Embed a national control strategy for Forensic Science Services

9. OUR PEOPLE



Risk Assessment Status

Low to Elevated

For some Forensic Leaders an elevated risk which is increasing. For those that saw this less of a current risk their economic status was less of a challenge.

A robust, capable, and sufficiently resourced team is the key to successful forensic service delivery.

As communicated by our Forensic Leaders, during engagement, there are recognised issues in relation to the recruitment and retention of our workforce.

- Losing individuals to the private sector or other neighbouring forces
- Delays in recruitment due to vetting
- Pay disparity for a comparable role in neighbouring force areas.
- Limited access to training

The NPCC (National Police Chiefs' Council) Workforce coordination committee Strategic Assessment of the Workforce (2022) identified five areas that involved specialist workforce skills across policing and which should be prioritised to provide a positive impact on delivering against current and future policing demands.

Unsurprisingly one of these areas is digital forensics, acknowledging that the education, training, and competence of the Digital Forensics workforce is a challenge and in addition that recruiting and retaining of Digital Forensics staff in policing is problematic.

It is acknowledged that our people are impacted by economic, technological, and operational delivery challenges with the National Police Wellbeing Survey (NPWS) highlighting several issues in relation to the wellbeing of the forensic workforce that would impact performance and retention which have also been articulated by forensics leaders.

These include:

Higher frequencies of **challenge**

Hindrance **stressors** (such as workload and time pressures, bureaucratic barriers, and poorly designed work practices)

Low scores for emotional energy and fatigue.

There are several critical areas where recruitment and retention are a challenge, causing a skills gap and an inability to meet current and future demand.

Instability in 'our people' is impacting delivery of an efficient and effective forensic service that meets not only policing investigative needs but also the needs of victims and the wider CJS, specifically in the areas of Casework Toxicology and Digital Forensics.

It has been highlighted that there is an impending challenge in relation to an ageing workforce particularly in the area of fingerprint experts with a sizeable proportion of this workforce approaching retirement age.

Some forces are already reporting that they currently have issues recruiting to fingerprint roles and this will be exacerbated by attrition.

Another challenging area for police forensic services is that of diversity and inclusion.

Black and Minority Ethnic representation is 6.7% across Investigative Support with 4.6% for fingerprints, and 5.5% for Crime Scene Investigators, compared with 8.1% in policing in general[8]

It is increasingly important that we inspire trust across our communities and can only achieve this if our workforce is reflective of our population, with proportionate representation from our whole community and development of a truly diverse workforce.

'The success of Op Rattan has put us in a very healthy position across our physical forensic service.

This baseline project has established a team approach to continuous improvement across physical forensics which has empowered our knowledgeable, and experienced staff to drive positive change.

Through our people engagement we have established a broad understanding of process challenges, how this impacts forensic service delivery, and explored potential solutions and benefits.

Through the life of this project, we have seen our Fingerprint Bureau's outstanding casework reduce from 15 months to a figure currently under 10 days.

Whilst increasing the number of identifications sent to police colleagues.

This 'system thinking approach' to change putting our forensics science expertise at the heart of changes has allowed us to declutter, make service improvements, integrate new technology and build a continuous improvement programme with a 'simply do' approach.

To date, we have identified efficiency savings of £340k which is likely to increase as the changes continue'.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Implement a long-term workforce plan that includes the development of learning programs that attract and retain the right people to forensic science roles.

- Develop holistic partnerships working between police forensic services, academia, and industry to develop collaborative, innovative and efficient forensic science.

10. **KEY FINDINGS/CONCLUSION**

Forensic Science across policing in England and Wales are facing wide-ranging multi-faceted challenge with no known risk sitting in isolation of another.

Of the key themes;

- Data and Technology
- Quality Standards
- Economic
- Our People

The known threats associated with technological changes and embedding quality standards are acknowledged to be pressing current risks.

Global challenges also being influential include:

- The current global economic state
- The pressures on government spending
- The increasing demand for digital data interrogation, storage, and archiving
- The continually evolving technologies across the sector
- The introduction of regulation

All have and will continue to place increasing pressures on our forensic service delivery and subsequently the level and scope forensic science is able to be delivered at.

Aspects of service delivery affected include:

- Current and predicted financial constraints
- Reduced investment and resources.
- Staff recruitment and retention
- Staff Health and Wellbeing and associated levels of sickness
- Pace of technology change, and workforce digital skills gap
- Change in crime profile, impact on skills and workforce planning
- Quality standards implementation
- Insufficient workforce planning.
- Availability and cost of approved and recognised training

Consequently, the increase in reported serious and complex crime in conjunction with shrinking budgets poses a significant threat to forensic service delivery.

The unremitting workload coupled with the nature of crimes colleagues are witness to, applies increasing impact on the wellbeing of ourselves and that of our teams.

11. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Establish a National Control Strategy for Forensic Science that should consider (but not exclusive to):

A **collaborative** data assessment and assurance process (National Performance Framework)

A **standard** operating model for Forensic Science with particular focus to Digital Forensics

For Forensic supply chain to be recognised as part of **critical National Infrastructure** by the Cabinet Office

For Forensic Science to be built on **trust** to ensure an understanding and belief system across policing on the benefits and value of the service

To build a **collaborative** approach in line with the Home Office Forensics Service Reform Programme

12. **REFERENCES**

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