

ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23



INTRODUCTIONS

I am delighted to present the first FCN annual report, looking back on 2022/23 and forward through this current year, outlining our agreed delivery plans.

Set against the backdrop of a formal NPCC strategic review and the subsequent restructuring to align with the new FCN remit and focus, which took up much of 2021-22, FCN moves into 2023/24 in a positive position.

The restructure of FCN was successfully completed in late 2022, and we are now operating under new leadership and a new structure streamlined to deliver exactly what policing needs most from us, focussed on the key priorities, risks and challenges.

Sadly, this did mean some capabilities and staff moving out of FCN, namely in the worlds of Operations and Commercial services, but these capabilities have moved into more suitable places elsewhere in policing.

Taking over the leadership of FCN as Interim Managing Director in September 2022, I remain committed to ensuring that what FCN does meets policing's requirements, adds value, and genuinely helps forces meet their challenges and mitigate their risks.

On that topic, in developing our 2023/24 delivery plan, we have taken a much more collaborative and open approach, which has resulted in a plan supported by the community of forensic leaders and agreed at Forensic Portfolio board in April of this year.

I will ensure that we continue to operate in exactly the same way all through the year, with a flexible approach to delivery that can change as or when needed, remaining laser-focussed on the priorities.

In the same vein, we're publishing this as FCN's first annual report in order to show that we're here to meet your needs, with transparency and openness over how we're doing that. We intend to publish a report annually going forwards around the turn of the financial year, so that the policing and forensic communities have visibility and influence over what we're doing.

Considering all the challenges that FCN, and its host force Dorset Police, faced during the restructuring, I hope readers of this report appreciate the team's quite incredible achievements and delivery in the past year. The achievements highlighted in this report show why a national capability is so important, and what we can achieve by all working together. Many of FCN's activities are conducted in partnership with people across the community, and we'd like to thank every person who gave their time and knowledge - whether you were part of a working group or volunteered your expertise.

FCN is blessed with a group of staff that are highly knowledgeable and skilled in what they do, dedicated and fully committed to provide the highest possible service and help to policing, and I'm extremely proud to lead and support them in what they do.

Going forwards, if anyone is in doubt as to what FCN is here to do, I merely say, "we're here to help". You would have heard me say that a number of times since September and I absolutely mean it - and if we're not doing that, you need to let me know.

Where it makes sense for policing to do something once, nationally instead of 43 times for everyone's benefit, then FCN will facilitate and/or deliver it for you. Where that doesn't make sense and it's better for local solutions, then FCN will not interfere in that but will of course happily help if asked.

FCN is now set up to deliver what policing needs and wants, but that's only the beginning and working together we can deliver great things in forensics.

Towards the back of this report, we also look to the future. FCN has a delivery plan for 2023/24 which has been approved after extensive consultation with the forensic and policing community. Beyond this year we'll continue to evolve, with a particular focus on establishing new funding and hosting arrangements from 2024 onwards.

John Armstrong
FCN Managing Director (interim)



Sometimes forensics gets overlooked in favour of other areas in policing. But the reality is that if something doesn't go right in the forensic world then that impacts the whole criminal justice system.

We could see incidents where serious cases fail in court and the potential for miscarriages of justice to occur.



Forensics is absolutely vital for achieving justice for victims of crime, and I believe a national forensic capability in the form of FCN is vital for policing and the public.

It's clear from this report how far and wide FCN's contribution is. I particularly applaud the team's efforts in strengthening the forensic marketplace, tackling the digital forensic challenge, and helping on the journey towards accreditation. It would be even better to see closer links and collaborative working taking place across the sector, with police forces, BlueLight Commercial, the Police Digital Service, and forensic services providers all working towards improved forensic services, keeping our communities safe.

PCC Darryl Preston
APCC Forensic Lead

In my 18 months as NPCC Forensic Lead, my focus has been on strengthening and decluttering our forensic governance across the portfolio, as a way of providing clarity on the forensic landscape and the critical areas that need to be tackled.

The portfolio has now re-set its direction and rebuilt important relationships with key stakeholders, however with all the complexity surrounding forensics we need an engine to deliver the work and a control room to coordinate it.

Although I've been involved on the side-lines of forensics for a while, I hadn't realised how integral the work of FCN is to the wider forensic portfolio.

In the past year alone FCN has coordinated several national operational issues, acted as a hub for data and knowledge, published new national guidance, helped forces prepare for accreditation, enabled research projects, hosted learning events—many of which wouldn't have happened otherwise, or would have fallen to forces locally or regionally to arrange.

Now, when a forensic issue or a question crops up, we know who to turn to in order to assist. A lot of this work goes on behind the scenes and often this is not recognised. I'm pleased that FCN has its new remit and structure agreed by the forensic community, and we can now progress with certainty, the requirements that we all need from a nationally enabled capability.

I would like to personally recognise everyone who works within the FCN and those who support this national forensic capability.

Chief Constable Nick Dean
NPCC Forensic Lead



FACTS & FIGURES

FCN was established as part of the NPCC Transforming Forensics programme, being the first major deliverable during 2019/20. It was launched as a live capability in April 2020 and has since then evolved into what is in place today.

Significant changes to the remit and focus were made as a result of the NPCC strategic review from 2021, together with staffing structures to align with the new focus.

Key to the current structure is that FCN now has just two directorates (Quality & Performance and Science Development),

together with an interim Managing Director and support functions. The new structure fully aligns with the new remit, allowing a more focussed but agile delivery approach towards the strategic priorities in forensics.

There are now **35 staff** in FCN, all of whom are permanent members of police staff employed by Dorset Police, as the FCN host, dropping from 50 at its height, with a similar reduction in operating budgets::

DATE	FCN HEADCOUNT	FCN OPERATING BUDGET
April 2020	45	£5.5m
April 2021	50	£5.5m
April 2022	43	£4.3m
April 2023	35	£3.2m

In addition to being the employer of FCN staff, Dorset Police also provides the broader corporate support functions such as HR, Finance and ICT on policing's behalf. This position is currently under review, along with the longer-term funding arrangements for FCN, but until an alternative position is reached, Dorset remains the host.

Since FCN was launched, it has been funded by way of Home Office grant, issued to Dorset Police. That remains the position for 2023/24 but, for future years, work is underway to develop an alternative approach to funding, not reliant on Home Office funding and more sustainable for the longer term.

Further details about FCN's organisational structure, finances and budgets can be found in Section 4.



DELIVERY

HELPING POLICE FORCES PREPARE FOR ACCREDITATION

WHAT WE DO

FCN's quality team, which includes former UKAS assessors, travels the country providing forces with a range of services including method witness assessments, document and procedural reviews and other advice. We also share updates and advice through a frequent Quality Matters publication.

Our team's collective experience and knowledge enables us to support police forces to gain accreditation and comply with regulatory requirements.

FCN's accreditation support team has helped 23 police forces - more than half of those in England and Wales - prepare for UKAS assessment ahead of looming deadlines set by the Forensic Science Regulator, with 12 successfully accredited so far.

Any organisation providing forensic services to the criminal justice system are required to meet the requirements of the Forensic Science Regulator's Codes and quality standards such as ISO/IEC 17020 and 17025.

The Forensic Science Regulator's Code comes into effect in October 2023, affecting volume crime scene investigation (CSI), digital forensics and other disciplines

To date, FCN has helped 22 police forces prepare for CSI accreditation and four for digital forensics.

Of these forces which commissioned FCN's support, 11 forces have been successful at CSI assessment so far, including Hampshire, Staffordshire, South Wales, Thames Valley, West Midlands and 5 forces in the East Midlands Special Operations Unit (EMSOU).

FCN also provided support to City of London, Cumbria, Dyfed Powys, Merseyside, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and 4 forces in South West Forensics as they prepare for assessments. National organisations such as British Transport Police, Police Service Northern Ireland and the Scottish Police Authority have also been advised.

"I really want to thank you and your team for all the assistance you have given us. The fact you had flagged up issues to us meant that there were no big surprises and we were able to provide answers to any difficult questions."

South Wales and Gwent Joint Scientific Investigation Unit, Detective Superintendent **Mathew Lewis, Head of JSIU.**

"You really helped to reassure the team and having the practice run through with yourselves made a huge difference to the confidence of the two CSIs."

Thames Valley Police's Acting Technical Manager, **Clair Whatman**

In digital forensics, FCN has provided accreditation support to City of London Police, Humberside Police, Staffordshire Police and West Midlands Police. Of these four, Humberside is the only one to have had its UKAS assessment and was recommended for accreditation in June 2022.

"We have nothing but positive comments to make regarding your guidance and support throughout our accreditation journey. These meetings and visits from you in our opinion significantly contributed to our success. As the head of the DFU I wanted to personally send you my thanks and appreciation for your commitment and professional approach provided to our unit which contributed to this achievement."

Humberside's Head of DFU and Chief Inspector.

The activity is led by FCN's Lee Major, James Kendall-Milnes, Dianne Toyne and Jane D'Arcy.



SUPPORTING SEXUAL ASSAULT REFERRAL CENTRES

WHAT WE DO

For two years, FCN has been working with policing, SARC service providers, charities and the NHS to help them meet quality standards and regulations, and achieve accreditation. Our focus is on completing pieces of work once on behalf of every SARC in England and Wales, rather than each SARC working independently to overcome these challenges.

This effective approach ensures every SARC gets it right first time whilst significantly reducing time, resource and cost.

**AROUND
£5.9M IN COST
AVOIDANCE
SAVINGS
HAVE BEEN
DELIVERED
NATIONALLY
FOR SARCS**

REASSURING VICTIMS WITH CONSUMABLES VALIDATION

The FCN SARC National Consumable Validation project reassures victims of rape and other sexual offences that the consumables used at SARCs are reliable, and has saved over £500,000 nationally for SARCs.

Every SARC in England & Wales participated in the project, 55 SARCs in total, this validation was conducted in collaboration with forensic service provider Cellmark Forensic Services and consumables supplier SceneSafe.

Consumables, such as cotton swabs, are a key part of evidence recovery as they are used to gather DNA material from complainants and suspects. SARCs typically use forensic DNA-grade items for these processes, but to gain ISO15189 accreditation they need to demonstrate the consumables are DNA-free up to the point of use.

In response, FCN provided SARCs with guidance on the right consumable items, procedures and training, to support SARCs to meet the ISO15189 quality standard and Forensic Science Regulator requirements. A total of 261 forensic DNA-grade consumables were tested, with 19 different types of consumable manufactured up to two years ago. Every item passed the testing.

In 2022/23, FCN received £176,000 of funding additional to staff costs to carry out 7 SARC projects. It is estimated by FCN that this one project alone has saved £500,000 by pooling resources from 55 SARCs into one national exercise rather than SARCs validating separately.

“The opportunity the FCN gave us to be involved in this project was greatly appreciated and will be invaluable in assisting all our SARC teams in their journey to become UKAS accredited.”

Joanna Hollinghurst,
Head of SARC Services at G4S



INFLUENCING REGULATIONS ON ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING

FCN Environmental Monitoring Study Phase 1 & 2

The FCN conducted a Study to influence change to the Environmental Monitoring standards required in a SARC, which at that time were in line with the requirements set for a DNA laboratory. SARCs and custodies across England and Wales participated in this study which explored the risks of DNA contamination from the forensic medical examination room to the forensic samples.

The outcomes from this study have ensured that SARCs are not held to the same DNA cleanliness standards as a DNA laboratory. The FSR guidance will be updated with a new criteria for acceptable levels of DNA in SARCs ensuring that the SARC would not need to close as a result of DNA found on a surface in the room.



FCN Environmental Monitoring Study Phase 3

Before FCN's SARC Environmental Monitoring study, regulatory requirements stated that SARCs must have an airflow of more than 20 'whole room' replacement per hour within their forensic medical examination rooms.

This was a risk for SARCs nationwide due to the high installation costs for airflow systems – up to £1m per site for some – with some SARCs unable to gain planning permission for the systems.

FCN's SARC environmental monitoring study showed that no detectable levels of DNA had been identified on air samples and control swabs in SARCs which didn't have an airflow replacement system. Based on these findings, the Forensic Science Regulator accepted FCN's proposal to change the FSR SARC Guidance from a >20 whole room replacement airflow requirement to a >10 recommendation.

“Without the work of the FCN in providing the knowledge base and support, and importantly resolving issues like legal status, it is difficult to see how this area of forensic science could achieve the compliance required with the statutory Code.”

Mr Gary Pugh OBE,
Forensic Science Regulator



FCN NATIONAL FORENSIC CLEANING VALIDATION

This year the FCN National Cleaning Validation Project kicked off.

Which involves six of the most commonly used cleaning products in SARC's (Chemgene, Virkon, Selgiene, Precept, Virusolve & Microsol), on four of the most common surfaces found in a SARC (Vinyl, Plastic Formica, Stainless Steel & Equipment) assessing the effectiveness of the removal of blood, semen and saliva stains.

The experimental work including DNA analysis are being conducted by Cellmark Forensic Services. Following the outcomes from this centralised validation SARC's will be provided with recommendations for best practice forensic cleaning processes and a validation report justifying their cleaning process and product is fit for purpose.

SARC ON-SITE ACCREDITATION ASSISTANCE

Michelle Gaskell, FCN's SARC Quality Specialist, has visited almost half of the SARC's across England and Wales over the last year to complete a facility gap analysis against the FSR requirements and provide advice and guidance to the SARC's to support their work towards achieving accreditation.

PROVING THAT THE SARC PROCESSES ARE FIT FOR PURPOSE

FCN has worked with SARC's over the past year to develop an end-to-end verification exercise to verify that all of the individual SARC processes are fit for purpose.

These plans have involved a number of different experiments including the recovery of body fluids on human skin, pig skin and a grained vinyl surface, using anatomical dummies to demonstrate the recovery of semen and saliva from intimate swabbing.

This exercise has been piloted at three SARC's with the plan of rolling this out to all of the SARC's over the next year.

SAVING TIME AND MONEY WITH NATIONAL GROUND TRUTH DATA

A one-off project completed in the 2022/23 year, FCN created a ground truth dataset (GTD) and distributed computer GTD devices and supporting material to 64 police forces and law enforcement agencies across the UK.

This enabled every force to complete a comprehensive validation of computer digital forensic methods.

The kits comprised six physical disks, 20 GTD items, and over 212 GB of data which supported digital forensic units (DFUs) in the validation of their most common methods and to meet the requirements of the Forensic Science Regulator.

The project delivered £490,000 worth of benefits to policing, based on the time it would have taken for each organisation to recreate the GTD packages themselves. It demonstrates the value of tackling difficult forensics challenges with central support, reducing duplication by doing things once for the benefit of many.

FCN's GTD project received an £45,000 investment additional to staff costs from a Home Office fund. The project was delivered by FCN's Simon Cullen, Paul Fenwick, Shelley Wilson, Hema Kotecha and Kelly Forrester.

“Initiatives like this are absolutely essential to ensure we get a consistent approach to meet our digital validation objectives”

Paul Powles,
Gwent Police Quality Manager

“It's going to save a huge amount of staff time within our DFU. I'd like to thank the team at FCN for pulling this together.”

Mark Randall,
Digital Media Investigation
Team Manager,
Hertfordshire Constabulary.



NATIONAL COORDINATION FOR FIRE INVESTIGATION

WHAT WE DO

FCN has been working on behalf of policing and fire and rescue services to help organisations embed quality processes and prepare for accreditation. Rather than every fire service embarking on their quality journey separately, FCN has helped by running a four-stage competency assessment for investigators in each participating service – saving resources, money and time.

Fire services and police forces providing fire investigation evidence to the criminal justice system will in future need to be accredited to ISO 17020 to meet the Forensic Science Regulator’s requirements.

This will ensure confidence in investigators at fire-related crime scenes when they are collecting forensic evidence.

FCN’s national approach involves forces and services working together and sharing knowledge instead of validating and verifying processes separately. It increases efficiency, reduces duplication, and improves focus and momentum.

This is a complex area: the statutory obligation for investigating criminal fires sits with policing, but the expertise of understanding fire scenes sits with fire services. Accreditation is challenging and costly, and no fire service has ever achieved ISO accreditation before.

VALIDATION EXERCISES

FCN conducted four validation exercises involving controlled burn scenes.

Burns are costly and restricted for environmental reasons – carrying them out centrally both provides a national indicator of the method being fit-for-purpose and saves significant costs and impact.

The validation exercises have involved more than 50 fire investigators from 30 different fire services as well as more than 25 CSIs from five different police forces.

To help with standardisation, FCN has published six standard operating procedures and procedure guidance notes with another four in progress.



COMPETENCY ASSESSMENTS

FCN has also developed national competency assessments using virtual reality headsets, alongside questions and answers to assess technical ability and decision making.

A total of 165 fire investigators across England & Wales have completed these competency assessments so far across 36 different fire services.

Arranging and conducting central competency testing and validation was estimated to have saved at least £2million in 2021/22. In 2022/23, FCN received £293,000 of funding additional to staff costs, of which £150,000 was invested by policing and £143,000 from fire and rescue services.

“Your engagement has been nothing but positive. Without you and the strong support you have given from the outset, our project would be extremely difficult. For minimal cost you are saving both police and fire services a great deal of time and money and bringing expertise and understanding to really support us in developing our models.”

Justin Fletcher,
Head of Policing Strategy Unit
at Thames Valley Police

NATIONAL ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

WHAT WE DO

With our nationwide reach, FCN publishes national guidance on a range of forensic science topics working closely with the whole forensic community. During 2023, we published updated and new guidance on data protection and DNA handling, as well as the examples below.

STREAMLINED FORENSIC REPORTING

FCN manages and oversees SFR guidance on behalf of policing and the criminal justice system.

SFR is a set of guidance and templates which enable investigators, scientists and prosecutors to comply with criminal procedure rules.

SFR templates focus on key conclusions from forensic evidence that are simple for juries to understand, rather than providing lengthy reports. They also allow defence to swiftly accept or challenge evidence, speeding up cases and enabling faster justice.

More than 1,500 people accessed the documentation via FCN's website during 2022/23.

SFR guidance is led by FCN's Vickie Burgin and Debbie Sharp.

EDIT GOOD PRACTICE GUIDANCE

FCN has renewed guidance on good practice in evidential drug identification testing (EDIT) for the first time since 2016, having taken responsibility of the guidance from the College of Policing (formerly the NPIA).

EDIT uses Home Office-approved drug testing kits and devices along with a Streamlined Forensic Reporting (SFR) process. Where there is suspected possession of a controlled drug for personal use it enables officers to make rapid disposal decisions instead of bailing the person pending further forensic analysis. It can be used regardless of whether the suspect admits possession.

This simplifies and speeds up the criminal justice process, assists timely treatment interventions and makes significant savings in police time and forensic submission costs, without harming the integrity of individual cases.

The revised guidance was compiled by FCN with support from an EDIT working group of current practitioners. Particular thanks to Avon & Somerset Constabulary which provided images used in the guide. The work was led by FCN's James Kendall-Milnes among others.

PARTNERSHIP TOOLKIT

FCN published new, practical guidance to help forensic experts working in police forces and academia establish effective partnerships.

The 30-page partnership toolkit offers advice on establishing a partnership, a governance model, a memorandum of understanding, and various activities that can be undertaken.

Establishing a formal partnership can bring many benefits from financial efficiencies to shared knowledge and resources. Police forces can benefit from a boost in forensic recruitment by offering local students first-hand experience, as well as bringing research and innovation into their forensic services. Universities often benefit from an enhanced student experience and better access to conducting practice-based research.

The guidance was produced by FCN's Jo Morrissey who is currently completing her Professional Doctorate in this area.



SUPPORTING UKRAINE WITH £20,000 OF FORENSIC SUPPLIES



FCN facilitated the donation and delivering of £20,000 in forensic supplies from the UK forensic community to Ukraine. Kharkiv National University of Internal Affairs.

The supplies and equipment donated by forces and private providers included SLR cameras, copy stands, multi-spectral forensic lamps, electronic scales, heat sealers, laboratory utensils, kits for removing various types of traces from the crime scene and other supplies.

Some of the kit will be used at the university for training, with the remainder being transferred to the national police service and experts in the Ministry of Internal Affairs for use in criminal investigations.

“The ongoing state of war is putting our resources under intense demand, so we are very grateful to our British colleagues for their assistance and support.”

Dr Alexey Serdyuk,
Head of Research Lab for Psychological Support of Law Enforcement at Kharkiv National University of Internal Affairs

Donors included five forces from the East Midlands Special Operations Unit, four forces from South West Forensics, Dyfed Powys Police, and the NPCC Transforming Forensics programme.

FCN's Jo Morrissey and Paul Roberts co-ordinated the project with the National Police Coordination Centre (NPoCC) and Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO).

NATIONAL CRISIS COORDINATION

WHAT WE DO

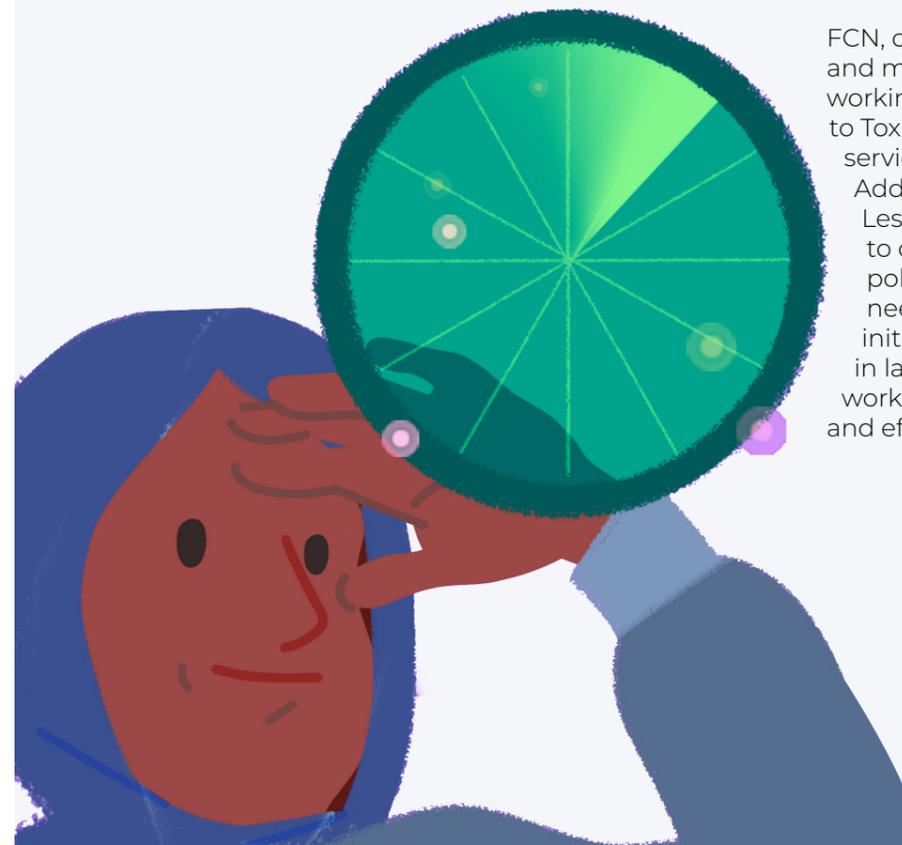
FCN helps policing tackle the most challenging crises in forensics. As the only nationwide policing body for forensics, we collate and analyse data from forces and suppliers on behalf of NPCC gold and silver groups. At times of crisis our national coordination activity ensures that the whole of policing has fair and equitable access to services. In doing so we work with forces to meet the needs of victims and the criminal justice system and protect the reputation of UK policing.

On behalf of NPCC's Operation Kettledrum lead, DCC Paul Gibson, we were commissioned to undertake future co-ordination of the remaining programme of retesting of Radox samples on behalf of policing.

Through the NPCC Quality Board led by the Met's Chris Porter, we supported policing's national response to quality issues in drug driving samples from Synlab as part of Operation Sanshin.

We continue to provide vital resources and expertise to NPCC's forensic marketplace portfolio led by DCC Paul Gibson, helping mitigate many risks in a fragile marketplace.

FCN, on behalf of DCC Gibson, also lead and manage the Toxicology Silver Group, working collegiately to enable access to Toxicology Casework Analysis, which services our most serious offences. Additionally, as part of Operation Lester, through this group we continue to coordinate data nationally from police forces on drink spiking and needle injection crimes, having been initially commissioned to support in late 2021 and now supporting work to understand the robustness and efficacy of Field Test kits.



SPEARHEADING RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

This year FCN hit the milestone of securing more than £1m in additional funding for forensic research projects on behalf of policing.

By operating at a national level and coordinating various research activities, FCN has helped secure investment for nine projects which may not have been available for local police forces otherwise. Most funding has been provided through the Home Office's Science, Technology, Analysis and Research (STAR) scheme.

The research activities are focused on some of the highest priority issues for policing and the public, include tackling violence against women and girls, county lines, biometrics and wellbeing.

Our research community has been leading forensic collaboration through continued cross community engagement to harnessing opportunities; the value of the Visual Technologies Research Group was published in Science Direct with the paper highlighting collaborative benefits and breadth of engagement across the sector.

Research activities are led jointly by FCN's Shelley Wilson and Jo Morrissey.



CREATING A NEW DIGITAL FORENSIC APPRENTICESHIP

In 2022/23, FCN led on the development of the UK's first digital forensic apprenticeship which is now accepting its first applicants this year.

The new digital forensic apprenticeship is based on the draft professional profile of a digital forensic technician set out by the College of Policing. Anyone aged 18 and over could be eligible for the apprenticeship.

Through the course, apprentices will learn how to support major crimes, incidents, operations or any investigation that require specialist digital forensic investigative assistance. This could involve digital forensics capture and processing of digital evidence at the crime scene.

The level 4 Digital Forensic Technician Apprenticeship Standard was developed by the Trailblazer Group and approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical in March 2023.

Police forces are under increasing pressure to meet digital forensic demands, with a backlog of 21,000 devices waiting to be analysed.

To tackle the challenge of recruitment and retention, NPCC's digital forensic science strategy called for "measures [which] will build a 'skills pipeline' to reinforce the workforce on a continuing basis" such as apprenticeships.

The work was led by FCN's Paula Mulroy and Jo Morrissey. We worked with a 'trailblazer' group represented by police forces, private-sector companies, universities and several professional bodies. FCN's group has submitted a proposal to develop a Level 7 Advanced Digital Forensic Apprenticeship for experienced practitioners.



BRINGING FORENSIC EXPERTISE TO NATIONAL PROJECTS AND PARTNERS



PROCURING NEW TECH TO INVESTIGATE SEXUAL OFFENCES

FCN has provided forensic expertise throughout 2022/23 to help NPCC's digital forensic programme delivered by the Police Digital Services.

Following the success of an earlier roll-out of new technology to help forces better investigate rape and other sexual offences, FCN was commissioned to deliver procurement for phase two of the Rape Review Response Project – or RRRP2.

Specially designed equipment is being delivered to forces, including ruggedised laptops which enable officers to quickly and sensitively examine mobile phones in the field, and kiosks which are fixed-site computers enabling officers to examine mobile phones with targeted and specific searches to speed up processes and limit intrusion.

FCN's role was to procure the new kit and ensure it met quality requirements and was centrally validated.

“We're delighted to be able to bring FCN into phase 2. This is an important project that will help even more forces to improve the way they tackle these offences. Working collaboratively, we will ensure the best possible outcome for all our stakeholders

Dave Edwards,
PDS Head of Commercial

FACILITATING PROCUREMENT OF FORENSIC SERVICES

FCN provided significant support throughout 2022/23 to policing's national commercial body BlueLight Commercial, delivering wide-ranging changes to how policing procures forensic services.

In 2022, FCN collaborated with BlueLight Commercial to develop and launch the 'next generation' Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) for physical forensic services.

A DPS is a flexible method of procurement which can benefit forces and suppliers. Forces can design their requirements to meet the needs of their business, and suppliers receive a consistent approach from policing.

A total of 16 forces across the Eastern 7, South West and West Midlands as well as the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) initially ran competitions through the DPS.

Throughout this year the FCN also continued the management of a DPS for digital forensic services which we launched in 2021. A total of nine competitions, totalling nine law enforcement agencies with a total estimated contract value of £7,551,433 (including extension options) was awarded through the DPS up to the end March 2023. A supplier day was held for the DPS where valuable feedback was exchanged which will help with enhancing relationships.

FCN transferred various frameworks and DPS to BlueLight Commercial in April 2023. BLC now takes strategic responsibility for all national forensic contracting and procurement activity, with FCN responsible for operational services.

In addition to the next generation procurement DPS for physical forensics, the five frameworks which transferred to BlueLight Commercial are:

- The digital forensic services DPS
- Mobile Preliminary Roads Drugs Testing Devices (MPRDTD) DPS
- National Scenes of Crime Consumables (NSoCC) frameworks
- The PACE DNA Sampling Kit Framework
- Any future national framework for the provision of medical SFR services

FINANCES

PREVIOUS YEAR

The financial position at the end of the 2022/23 year is shown below:

2022/23 FCN BUDGET GROUPINGS	FUNDING	BUDGET
HO Grant	4,333,000	£5.5m
STAFFING COSTS:		
Science Directorate		1,180,000
Quality Directorate		815,000
Operations Directorate		265,000
Commercial Directorate		350,000
Support Team, CEO, Dorset Finance role		500,000
SUB TOTAL		3,110,000
Ancillary costs (staff training, travel, expenses, legal, licenses, website, events etc)		388,000
FCN-SARC/Fire/Awareness training projects costs		255,000
TF-SARC Accreditation/Fire/ Next Generation Procurement project costs		326,000
TOTAL	4,333,000	4,079,000
UNDERSPEND		254,000

As can be seen, the budget came in at approximately £250k underspent, not as a result of non-delivery but more as a direct result of being less costly than projected. That underspend has been approved for carry-over into 2023/24 year.

CURRENT YEAR

At the time of drafting, the anticipated FCN funding and operating budget breakdown for 2023/24 is shown below.

As can be seen, the total available funding is expected to be £3,375,000 for the year.

In previous years, the Home Office grant agreement did not allow FCN to generate any of its own income or recover costs associated with services delivered to external organisations, such as UKAS. It is hoped that for this year that can be changed and opportunities for income generation and cost-recovery explored.

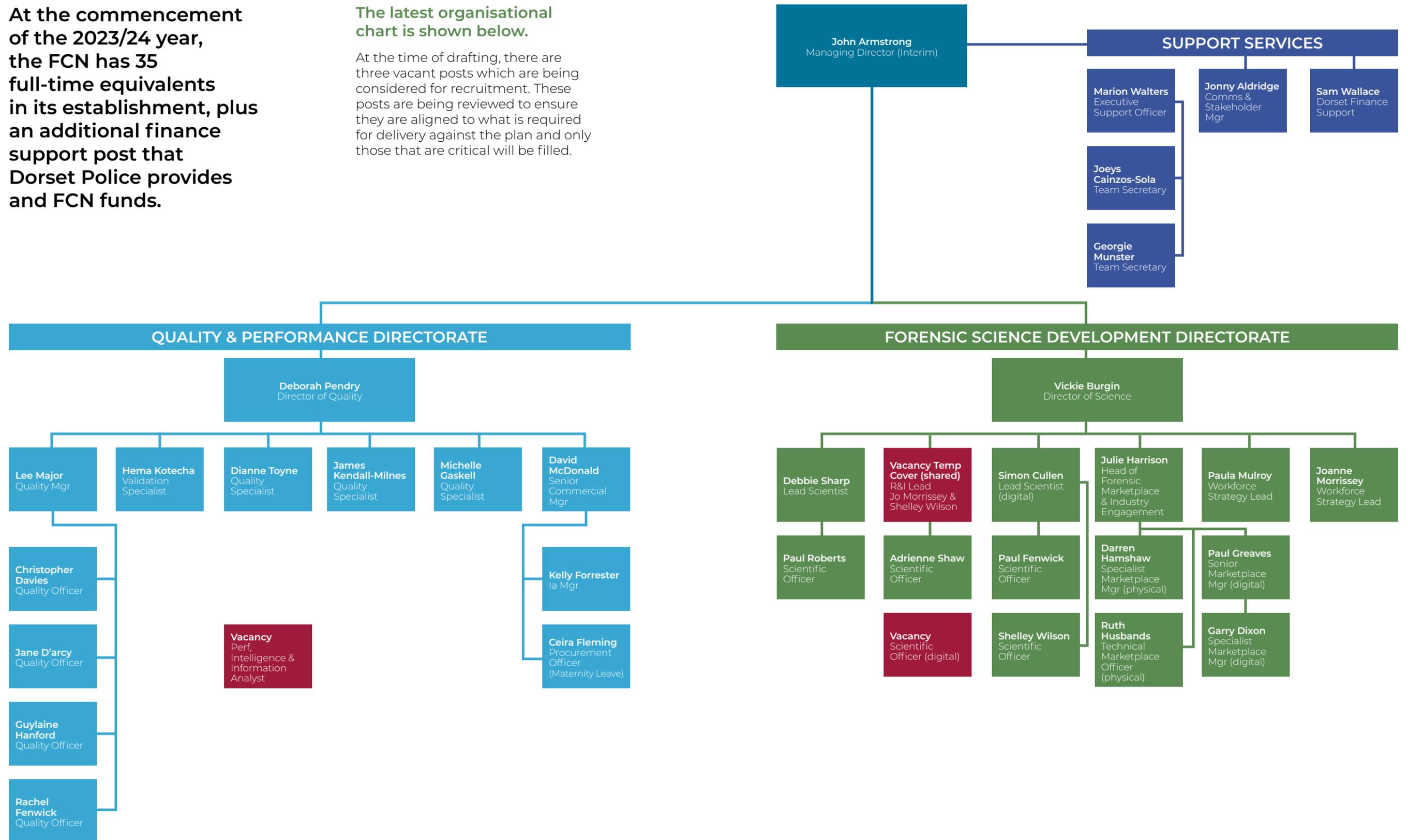
2022/23 FCN BUDGET GROUPINGS	FUNDING	BUDGET
HO Grant	3,125,000	
2022/23 Underspend carry forward	250,000	
Forensic Science Development Directorate		1,300,000
Quality & Performance Directorate		940,000
Support Team, MD, Dorset Finance role		460,000
SUB TOTAL		2,700,000
Ancillary costs (staff training, travel, expenses, legal, licenses, website, events etc)		270,000
SARC Accreditation project		215,000
Fire Investigation project		190,000
TOTAL	3,375,000	3,375,000

RESOURCES

At the commencement of the 2023/24 year, the FCN has 35 full-time equivalents in its establishment, plus an additional finance support post that Dorset Police provides and FCN funds.

The latest organisational chart is shown below.

At the time of drafting, there are three vacant posts which are being considered for recruitment. These posts are being reviewed to ensure they are aligned to what is required for delivery against the plan and only those that are critical will be filled.



FUTURE DELIVERY

The NPCC priorities for forensics for the year include:

- Digital forensics
- Marketplace stability and reform
- Quality, accreditation and compliance with the FSR Codes

FCN's delivery plan has been developed with these priorities very much at the forefront and is supported by the senior forensic leaders in policing.

For example, the proportion of FCN resources and time that will be directed towards marketplace matters is in excess of 25%, and for Quality, nearly 30%. This reflects our commitment to ensuring that the work of the FCN is focussed on helping with the most pressing challenges and risks that forensic leaders in policing are faced with.

In accordance with FCN governance, the delivery plan was discussed at length and approved by the Forensic Portfolio board held in April 2023.

To request a full detailed version of FCN's 2023/24 delivery plan, please contact fcn@dorset.pnn.police.uk

PRIORITY AREAS		ACTIVITY & DELIVERABLE DESCRIPTION
1	Quality of Forensic Science & Accreditation Compliance approx 29%	Provision of accreditation support & guidance to policing, Increasing the knowledge, understanding and awareness of quality and accreditation matters.
		Lead national projects to enable compliance, establish appropriate validation, influence requirements, improve standardisation, reduce duplication and deliver efficiencies.
		Development of a Performance Framework for forensics
		As directed by the NPCC FINDS portfolio, development and delivery of UK YSTR Frequency database
2	Digital Forensics Approx 16%	Provision of central validation and/or GTD support for Digital Forensics, covering new or emerging methods being developed/tested
		Support policing's response to the HMICFRS Inspection of digital forensics
		Support the delivery of the Digital Forensics Programme within PDS
		Increasing the understanding and implications of Artificial Intelligence

PRIORITY AREAS		ACTIVITY & DELIVERABLE DESCRIPTION
3	Whole Supply Chain and Marketplace Reform Approx 26%	Ensuring a stable marketplace, with prevention & management of crisis/incidents and exploring opportunities for future reform
		Facilitate sustainability in the workforce (publication of Workforce Strategic Plan)
		Support the operational management of market supply (in partnership with BLC)
		Undertake Horizon Scanning and Research & Innovation to maximise access to latest forensic science opportunities (publication of the R & I Strategy)
4	NPCC Support Approx 16%	Custodian of the NPCC Forensic Strategic Threat and Risk Assessment (ForSTRA)
		Supporting NPCC Forensic Portfolio Boards
		NPCC strategic centralised coordination & support/advice/guidance to function
5	Criminal Justice partnerships Approx 4%	Build stronger partnership working across the forensic portfolio with CJS partners and establish stronger links to CJ outcomes from forensic activities
6	FCN Internal Operations Approx 9%	Internal FCN Business Operations, Management, Comms, Commissioning, Assurance reporting and sustainability planning

