



**Forensic
Capability
Network**
Shaping forensics, together.

FCN

Annual Report

2025/26

Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I can present the 2025/26 annual report for the FCN, outlining some of the activities undertaken during the year, the way we have helped Forces and other organisations and the benefits that work has contributed to, along with information on our finances.

I continue to be very proud of all the hard work that the people in the FCN do every day, the level of commitment and enthusiasm shown and just how much work has been done towards the year's delivery.

I know that many of our stakeholders who we try to support and help, agree with me judging by the regular feedback we get. I hope that other readers of this report will also recognise these efforts.

As I have mentioned before, I remain determined to ensure that whatever the FCN focusses its activities on, is what the forensic policing community wants us to focus on and where we can help the most in meeting the current challenges and mitigating the key risks in police forensics. I would invite anyone to get in touch if they think that is not that case so that we can be flexible and adjust if needed, to keep us true to that overall aim.

Looking forward to next year, Forensics Reform will no doubt feature strongly in all our minds and activities. The FCN is well positioned to help policing with its work on reform and with a growing sense that this is where the FCN could help the most, you may see an increasing level of activity that directly supports policing and the Home Office in support of forensic reform.

Looking at our initial 2026/27 delivery plan; the main NPCC forensic priority areas which the FCN will help support, remain as for last year; Digital Forensics, Market, Quality & Regulatory compliance, along with other key areas of activity aimed at Research & Innovation, Workforce and Strategic threat assessments. There is a level of flexibility built into this as we start the new delivery year in order to adjust what is undertaken to best help with forensic reform where needed.

As with all other policing organisations, funding remains a challenge, and it has been unavoidable to reduce our overall establishment and headcount as well as scrutinising spend in other areas. Despite this, I am confident that the FCN will still deliver to our plan and continue to provide help to policing in meeting its priority challenges.

I hope you find the report of interest and enjoy the read.

John Armstrong
FCN Managing Director

Digital Forensics

In digital forensics, the FCN supports delivery of future developments, compliance requirements and response to challenges – on behalf of the NPCC and working with police forces and the Home Office.

Strengthening National Performance Insight and Decision-Making

This year, we have continued to strengthen the National Digital Forensics Performance Framework, providing policing with a more robust and actionable understanding of digital forensic performance at both local and national levels. Through consultation with forces, we refined the framework to better reflect operational realities while minimising data collection burden. With 40 organisations contributing over 3,000 data points, the framework now delivers a mature and credible evidence base to support strategic and operational decision-making.

This insight is enabling forces to better understand demand, backlogs, and performance drivers, supporting more effective allocation of resources and improved service delivery. It has also demonstrated national value, informing high-profile activity such as the Online Child Sexual Abuse review.

Research and Innovation Delivering Operational Benefit

Our research and innovation activity has focused on delivering practical solutions to some of the most significant challenges facing digital forensics, particularly increasing demand and the growing volume of digital material.

We have contributed to national work assessing the risks of deepfake evidence, ensuring policing is better prepared to respond to emerging threats within the criminal justice system. Alongside this, we have developed and tested an AI/NLP capability designed to improve the efficiency of reviewing text-based communications relating to drug offences

and violent threatening behaviour towards women and girls.

Early in-force testing indicates strong potential to significantly reduce manual review time, enabling investigators to focus effort where it adds the most value. In one case the solution classified approximately 6,400 messages in 90 seconds, rapidly identifying material most likely to be relevant to an investigation.

This work demonstrates how targeted application of emerging technology can improve productivity and outcomes without requiring significant increases in resource, supporting a more sustainable response to rising demand.

Looking Ahead: Improving Efficiency Through Smarter Prioritisation

Building on this approach, we have secured £86k of Police STAR Fund funding to develop a data science-driven approach to digital forensic prioritisation. With national backlogs and evidence indicating that a significant proportion of examinations do not contribute to investigative outcomes, this project will explore how better-informed decision-making can reduce unnecessary work and focus resources on submissions most likely to deliver evidential or safeguarding value.

By improving the quality and consistency of prioritisation decisions, this work has the potential to reduce delays, improve outcomes, and deliver efficiency gains without substantial additional investment. It also supports a more consistent national approach, addressing known variation in service delivery across forces.

Driving Quality, Compliance and National Consistency

We have continued to support forces in meeting the requirements of the Forensic Science Regulator's Code of Practice, with a focus on reducing duplication, improving consistency, and lowering the cost of compliance.

The Cell Site Analysis Collaborative Learning Exercise (CLE) programme has expanded to include up to 40 organisations, providing a cost-effective, nationally coordinated approach to Code compliance. By enabling organisations to test processes in a controlled environment, the CLE supports early identification of issues, reducing the risk of failure in live casework and improving overall quality.

In parallel, our validation work, including Windows 11 validation for Magnet AXIOM, Code-compliant validation templates, has helped forces avoid repeating effort and accelerating progress towards accreditation. This collective approach aims to reduce inefficiencies across the system and supporting a more consistent national approach to accreditation and Code compliance.

The Chairs of the Radio Frequency Digital User Group (RFDUG) explained:

“From a community perspective the FCN's work has been imperative to our ongoing journey towards code compliant working practices and UKAS accreditation. The amount of work and resource which the FCN has provided to the community, particularly with the collaborative learning exercise and the work around ground truth data and SOP development has been crucial.

“Put simply, these are things the community would not have been able to develop and implement without direct FCN involvement. The participation rates for the exercises in particular are an impressive reflection of the amount of value the FCN has been to the community. We are truly grateful for all the work that has been completed.”

Pictured: FCN's Paul Fenwick presents on the cell site analysis project at ICDDF 2026



NPCC Forensic Portfolio Support

The FCN is fully funded and governed by the NPCC, supporting across a range of national forensic priorities, from monitoring strategic threats to research and innovation.

Streamlined Forensic Reporting - SFR

SFR aims to deliver a more efficient and consistent way to report forensic outcomes, meeting the needs of all parties, at every stage in the criminal justice system from early intelligence to support investigations, through to expert evidence for trial. The FCN continues to oversee this process through the running of a multi-stakeholder SFR Board and the provision of national guidance and compliant MG22 templates.

In 2025/26, SFR has continued to expand to include new disciplines, namely ignitable liquids / fire accelerants and cell site analysis for geolocation. We've also supported the Home Office Biometrics Programme this year as they introduced SFR for their international biometric exchange processes for Prüm fingerprint searches.

The SFR performance framework has continued to evolve as part of the development of a balanced scorecard for SFR, with all the Board's discipline expert network leads keen to see the benefits of SFR demonstrated through a set of clearly defined performance measures. A standardised approach to data collection has been agreed and whilst we still have a considerable way to go to create a complete national dataset, the data collected so far, from only a small proportion of disciplines / organisations, is demonstrating over £13 million in cost avoidance to policing per annum, and an efficiency saving in reporting time of over 50%.

Risk mitigation activity for Road Traffic Toxicology cases has been ongoing; this is where we see the highest conversion rate from SFR Stage 1 to Stage 2, meaning that the evidence is not agreed. We have been working with stakeholders in the private

sector and the CPS to refresh the 2017 guidance for prosecutors and police officers specifically on these defence challenges in drug drive cases. This now awaits formal NPCC approval prior to publishing in Q1 2026/27.

£11m

approximately saved in annual cost avoidance for policing by using SFR for road traffic toxicology and drugs

We have also been working collectively, as a Board, to understand the implications of v2 of the FSR Code, v3 of the FSR's Declaration Guidance, and new Criminal Practice Directions (Nov 2025) to ensure our templates remain compliant with all requirements and, for clarity, we have agreed to transition SFR documentation towards FSAs rather than forensic disciplines, as we look towards publication of v6 of the National SFR Guidance document in Q1 2026/27.

A new Communications Framework has been finalised and published this year to ensure timely, clear and consistent messaging as SFR evolves to include additional stakeholders and organisations.

Research and Innovation

Our vision is to establish forensic science robustly within the research and innovation environment to ensure a positive impact and delivery of direct benefits for forensics, policing and our communities.

The publication of the Research and Innovation Strategic plan at the start of the year provided the momentum and support needed to strengthen the governance and coordination of research and innovation activity for forensics, maximising opportunities, establishing stronger partnership working, and providing governance to the 'science system' that stretches into the Office of the Police Scientific Advisor and the Home Office Science, Innovation and Technology Delivery.

The introduction of the National Forensic Portfolio Research and Innovation Board has also provided the platform needed to consolidate, share, and coordinate research activity growing the forensic network across the NPCC.

Establishing a strong research and innovation pathway for forensics has already seen an increase in successful Research and Innovation funding for forensic topics, a reduced duplication of effort and ensured targeted activity that relates to our areas of research interest.

This year the FCN has facilitated two Special Interest Group Events which have showcased research on 'Building Trusted Forensic Science' and 'Environmental challenges and the future impact on forensics practise in policing'.

Horizon scanning emerging technology and how it could impact forensics has meant continued support for the development and use of AI, with the FCN working with Police AI. We also participated in Inside X this year, providing an opportunity for digital forensics practitioners to explore broader analytical tools and possible applications, and enabled us to consider how this could influence the future operating model and practise for forensics.

We have continued to provide subject matter expertise and support for different commissioned research with partners including the Accelerated Capability Environment (ACE) and DSTL, for instance, in supporting research into the challenges facing forensics in relation to deepfakes.

Standardisation & Efficiencies work package

The FCN has continued to drive forward the S&E Project on behalf of Kirsty Potter. Extensive community engagement has taken place this year via the Forensic Community Reference Group (FCRG), Digital Forensics Advisory Capability Group (DFACG), Forensic Marketplace Operations Group (FMOG), Quality Matters, FCN News, and community surveys.

The core FCN Project team comprised of Physical and Digital, Quality and Marketplace specialists, have had a huge response from our forensic community to support this work, with membership across 4 workstreams from 33 forces as well as NCA and several other key stakeholders including scientific and commercial experts.

The Guidance is now subject to an internal line-by-line review in advance of sharing more widely, for comment with forensic service providers, the CPS and criminal justice partners. Our anticipation is that the guidance will be published by Summer 2026.

Forensic Consumables

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

We have created a new consumables webpage to host accessible kit guidance for practitioners and independent testing advice for defendants. We now await the formal NPCC portfolio engagement and sign-off for the kit specification.

Y-STR database

The FCN has worked jointly with Home Office FINDS to produce a UK Y-STR reference database. Our Swab Out Crime campaign has collected more than 4,500 samples from men.

The FCN has been working jointly with Home Office FINDS to produce a UK Y-STR reference collection of anonymous male profiles. This will assist in the development of a new statistical model for the evaluation of Y-STR matches, ensuring that use of this powerful forensic tool is maximised during the investigation and prosecution of rape and sexual offence cases, where it is most useful in pin-pointing male DNA amongst large amounts of female DNA.

Our Swab Out Crime campaign team has been working hard throughout 2025/26 to ensure the project remains on track to meet its target of 10,000 profiles, through a comprehensive sample collection programme and seeking out opportunities to use existing UK Y-STR profile datasets from YHRD, King's College London and other academic institutions. Sample collection has now been completed, and we are working through the final stages of sample analysis in order to create the UK's first reference collection in early 2026/27.

Biometric Sampling opportunities

The FCN, on behalf of the NPCC FIND Strategy Board Lead ACC Simon Wilson, has successfully applied to the ACRO Police Information Access Panel, to obtain indicative data from PNC that would start to inform the feasibility and benefits of conducting a 4th National Operation to obtain outstanding biometric samples from persons convicted of serious offences. The scale of this operation is expected to be significant, with tens of thousands of missing samples anticipated, including those recognised through the introduction of the Voluntary Attendee process in 2012. If approved, the FCN is set to support this operation throughout 2026/27 and beyond.

The FCN and FINDS have commissioned Dr Roberto Puch-Solis at Dundee University (a world-leader in forensic DNA statistics) to develop a new interpretation method for Y-STR profiles, using the UK reference collection to build a statistical model taking into account the UK's population and specific Y-chromosome diversity.

Following the announcement by the Home Office of a multi-million pound investment over the next 3 years, as part of the Safer Streets Mission, to develop Y-STR matching capability within NDNAD2, the FCN and FINDS have commenced initial planning to consider the technical requirements and the impact on policing and providers; this activity will continue to build throughout 2026/27 and beyond.

Quality, Compliance and Accreditation

The FCN continues to work closely with Policing and wider stakeholders to increase knowledge and awareness of quality and compliance with the FSR's Code. Together we're improving standardisation, reducing duplication, and increasing efficiency.

Compliance & Accreditation Support

The FCN Quality Team has continued to deliver a broad and impactful programme of work across the forensic community over the past year. There is a clear and measurable shift compared to previous years, with significantly increased levels of collaborative working across policing. The FCN Quality Team plays a central role in enabling this collaboration, providing structure, coordination, and delivery across many of these initiatives.

Incident Scene Examination

A major area of focus this year has been incident scene examination. Team members contributed to the Forensic Science Regulator's Incident Examination Specialist Group (IESG), contributing to the development of a 'minimum scope' and a 'Milestone Approach' for INC 100 – Incident Scene Examination. The team also participated in a national 'dry run' exercise alongside key stakeholders from the Office of the Forensic Science Regulator (OFSR) and UKAS.

In parallel, the team has played a leading role in the CSI Technical Forum and its workstreams, driving progress toward compliance with Version 2 of the Forensic Science Regulator's Code of Practice, including the introduction of new Specific Requirements for this area of forensic activity. The FCN was asked to produce national guidance in the form of a Training & Competency Framework for Forces to use for corporate-wide training and competence assessment of Crime Scene Investigators. This is particularly relevant given the drive within the CSI community to have a more efficient and consistent approach to Code compliance.

Together with support from the community we have delivered this with excellent feedback so far.

Early in the year, we also produced a National CSI Anti-Contamination Report, which was the culmination of a wide-ranging review of data related to DNA contamination risks and mitigation measures. The project included submission of 250+ documents from forces as well as undertaking experimental risk evaluation of CSI anti-contamination measures. The report output is a culmination of the outputs and provides pragmatic guidance on the risks associated with Incident Scene Examination. We hoped the report would be the catalyst for Policing to change their ways of working so again they are more efficient and consistent. Positively, Policing has recognised the significant cost avoidance saving this Anti-Contamination Report has enabled, demonstrating how working collaborative, with FCN support, can help forces reduce local costs whilst still meeting Code requirements.

Forensic Consumables

The assurance of forensic consumables used across policing remains a critical and high-value area of work. The team maintains oversight of the National Scenes of Crime Consumables Contract and plays a key role in contract management arrangements with the sole supplier. This includes leading the Facilities and Consumables workstream within the CSI Technical Forum, ensuring both continuity of supply and the quality and integrity of consumables, as well as coordinating the investigation of consumable-related issues where they arise.

£550,000+

Cost avoidance via production of documents once on behalf of all, e.g. Code v1 to v2 comparison

£3.6m

Annual national cost avoidance from removal of the need to batch test all forensic DNA grade consumables – adopted in FSR Code V2

As part of this programme, the team conducted its annual supplier assurance visit, reviewing previous actions and agreeing further improvements to strengthen service delivery and product quality. In addition, a national webinar on ISO 18385 was delivered, providing the forensic community with clear and practical guidance on the standard governing 'forensic DNA grade' consumables, including the ethylene oxide treatment process applied to these products.

Friction Ridge Detail

Version 2 of the Code also introduced additional requirements for MTP 101 – Friction Ridge Detail: Comparison. In response, the team developed ground truth datasets to enable forces to undertake any additional validation required under the updated framework. A national webinar was delivered in collaboration with key stakeholders, including the Forensic Science Regulator and UKAS, to ensure consistent understanding of the new requirements. This was complemented by a comprehensive landscaping exercise, offering all police forces the opportunity to engage directly with the FCN to review their progress and readiness for transition to the updated Code.

Validation

Validation has remained a key strategic priority for FCN, particularly through engagement with the National Validation Group (formerly the NPCC Quality Board – Validation Sub-Group).

We established a new Teams Channel open to all members of the National Validation Group to enable improved collaborative working, and we continue to share force validation outputs via Knowledge Hub.

A significant achievement this year has been the introduction of a new national Validation Tracker. The initial release focuses on INC 100 and provides clear visibility of validation activity across forces,

enabling improved awareness, identifying gaps, and creating greater opportunities for collaborative working and shared learning.

Forensic Medical Examination (SARC)

The deadline of compliance with the FSR Code for the forensic medical examination of a complainant of sexual assault passed on 2nd October 2025. With this significant change to SARCs, the FCN developed an FSR compliance survey to understand the landscape, progression, challenges and risks on a national scale. This quarterly survey allows any compliance issues to be understood and if necessary, escalated to the appropriate organisations as well as track and trend achievements across the SARC community.

The FSR Code requires a mechanism for quality assessment against other forensic units or SARCs across England and Wales. Recognising this to be a significant challenge, the FCN created a collaborative learning exercise to compare sample strategies formulated by practitioners based on scenario cases. 47 SARCs participated, representing 90% of SARCs across England and Wales. 91 FHPs completed examination strategies, in total 233 forensic medical examination strategies were completed. The report and detail from this exercise informed national recommendations issued by the Faculty of Forensic and Legal Medicine (FFLM) and instigated improvement actions locally within SARCs as learning opportunities and best practices were identified. The CLE is currently out for its 2nd round and will be reported in summer 2026.

This sample strategy CLE will contribute to the further development of the FINDS SARC proficiency testing scheme which FCN continues to support.

Comms & Engagement

The team has continued to convene the National Quality Managers meeting on a quarterly basis, maintaining a consistent forum for communication, alignment, and shared problem-solving. This year also saw the introduction of the National Quality Managers Action Group. Although still in its early stages, the group is already establishing itself as a focused and effective mechanism for progressing national workstreams and strengthening collaboration across the network.

The SARC Network News continues to share lessons learned and articles specific to the forensic SARC community including 'The Compliance Compass', a section designed to highlight the intentions and expectations of selected requirements to promote standardised approaches.

Finally, the Quality Matters publication has continued to be issued on a fortnightly basis throughout the year, providing timely updates, guidance, and alerts to the forensic community, and reinforcing consistent standards and awareness across policing.

Case study: SceneSafe supplier assurance visit

In March 2026 FCN Quality Team attend the SceneSafe premises to complete the annual Supplier Assurance visit. On this occasion the FCN team were joined by two members of the CSI Technical Forums, Facilities and Consumables workstream, the workstream have been working closely with SceneSafe to identify and resolve any consumables issues, whilst supporting any project work/ end user testing to accelerate improvement, specifically with regards to sustainability, cost efficiency, standardisation and best practice. SceneSafe remain committed to supplying high-quality forensic consumables to Policing, confirmed through this visit. Some actions and recommendations have been raised as part of this visit, these should mostly be considered as continuous improvement. The FCN continue to

offer support and guidance to SceneSafe in how to effectively action any recommendations raised.

"The SceneSafe visit was beneficial to see the quality management and processes in place while dealing with consumables provided to the community. The level of compliance and positive interactions throughout provided assurance in SceneSafe and their products, giving an insight to the start of a consumable's journey prior to its use in evidence recovery. I am also positive that SceneSafe will implement any recommendations made by the FCN from the visit to further develop and enhance their processes." Chair of the CSI Technical Forums-Facilities and Consumables workstream, Lorraine Tyler, CSIU Operations Manager, Forensic Services.



Case study: friction ridge detail GTD

To support forces in the transition of Friction Ridge Detail: comparison (forensic science activity MTP 101) to version 2 of the Code, the FCN was tasked with producing a small Ground Truth Data Set that plugged the gaps that had been identified in existing force GTDs and specifically around Phalange and Plantar. FCN Staff, supported by West Midlands Police, the MPS Fingerprint Unit and Avon and Somerset Police, made the data set available to all of policing.

"We were able to access the GTD with no issues encountered. I must admit it looks really impressive and will be of great assistance to our plantar validation – no need for us to get our socks off now! Please pass on my thanks to all involved at the FCN for facilitating this fantastic piece of work."

Jonny Scott, Forensic Lead for Fingerprint Examination for the Scottish Police Authority



Supply Chain and Marketplace

FCN supports across the whole of the sector in relation to the forensic marketplace, specifications, standardisation, regulatory and legal requirements.

Digital Forensic Marketplace

National DF Software & Tooling Project

During the year, FCN supported on the procurement of a National Software & Tooling framework, responsible for the technical delivery (including specification of requirement) and leading the Technical Workstream.

Considerable engagement with forces and suppliers took place during the reporting year, helping shape the requirement and ultimately develop the procurement approach.

Going forwards, the tender submissions were received in early April 2026 with evaluation and award to take place in May-June for a go-live framework in July. Forces will be able to utilise this as a singular way to procure all software and tooling needs in a standardised way.

Force Support

The DF team have worked closely with forces this year in support of their DF delivery. This included assisting in devising and developing business cases to ensure adequate funding by providing data around force performance in a national context whilst also sharing marketplace performance capacity and availability data.

The DF team continue to collect and collate national backlog data and provide regular updates to the DFMOG working group as well as DF / Marketplace boards.

DF market share

The FCN DF team collated a market share position for all software and tooling suppliers as part of our support to the national software and tooling framework. This helped illustrate issues with the current marketplace highlighting vendor dominance and reliance whilst also identifying the vast number of suppliers in this marketplace.

To complement this the FCN have undertaken a refresh of the DF services outsourcing market share which will be completed by end of May 2026.

Data collection proved much more challenging this year with some suppliers hesitant or unwilling to share data meaning we had to seek alternative methods to complete this piece of work.

This data collection will also support the review and refresh of the existing DF DPS where the FCN will again support the procurement from a technical perspective.

Additional highlights

Supported HO Reform team with provision of significant data around DF marketplace activity including both DF Services and Tooling & Software data.

Case study: IntaForensics

We have been working closely with the FCN since around 2023, and the relationship has been pivotal in supporting IntaForensics to rebuild and strengthen our digital forensic service provision to policing nationally.

Prior to this, engagement was more limited and largely at a senior level, with less visibility and interaction at an operational supplier level. Since 2023, our working relationship with Paul and Garry has enabled us to better understand the digital forensics marketplace, including its challenges and pressures. This has allowed us to adapt our processes and collaborate more effectively, helping to reduce pain points across the system while

ensuring our services remain aligned with both supplier and policing needs. This collaboration has directly supported improvements in our workload management, capacity planning, and overall service delivery, ultimately benefiting not just our business but also policing and the wider public sector.

Having the FCN as a partner to sense-check ideas, support innovation, and ensure mutual benefit has been invaluable, and we see this continuing to play an important role in driving progress across the sector. We've found the engagement to be highly positive and constructive, and we look forward to continuing this relationship in the years ahead.

Physical Forensic Marketplace

National Silver Firearms Coordination

The NPCC Firearms Silver Group was set up in July 2025 under the direction of the then NPCC Marketplace Lead Chief Constable Paul Gibson, to ensure effective national coordination for the submission of Complex Firearms Cases.

We have co-ordinated and directed demand to available capacity (accredited and Code Compliant as applicable/available), across all Forensic Providers, through the adoption of a national prioritisation decision making matrix. In doing so, we continue to work to mitigate risk to policing and the wider Criminal Justice System by adopting this consistent approach.

Weekly meetings are held with FSPs to allocate complex demand to available capacity cognisant of criminal justice requirements. Forces are then informed of their 'Authorised submission' to send to the appropriate FSP. Monthly meetings are held with all force SPOCs and FSPs.

As a summary, WIP is reducing, comprehensive training from routine to complex cases is also being undertaken after recent recruitment. Note that it takes approximately 5 years to gain full experience and competence in all areas of complex firearms including scene attendance. This small pool of

experts are working tirelessly to ensure cases meet all court timescales.

West & South Coast Consortium and EMSOU DPS Convergence

On 1st April 2026 the 15 forces of the West and South Coast Consortium (WSCC) and the 5 East Midlands Forces (EMSOU) started their new contract as part of the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS).

The convergence of these forces onto the DPS brings the total number of forces now on the same contract platform to 42. Prior to the introduction of the DPS there were 5 different contract platforms being used for the 42 forces. The introduction of the DPS means that these forces are all operating with the same product specifications and service delivery requirements which provides a more efficient delivery for Forensic Science Providers.

A single contract management framework also streamlines governance and performance oversight and allows for greater comparison between forces in the service provision they are receiving and allows easier identification of any best practice that can be shared.

The FCN have also helped integrate the WSCC and EMSOU forces onto the DPS and provided support including identifying the product demand, evaluating tender responses, allocation of work to providers, training the forces in the new products and delivery and updating guidance documents.

Operation Kettledrum

Under the direction of the NPCC Forensic Marketplace Portfolio lead, Phase 4 of this work is underway which relates to the destruction and/or retention of those 'Closed/Withdrawn/Cancelled' cases that were dealt with prior to end of 2019.

We are waiting for the DPIA to be agreed with Dorset before sharing the initial phase of this work with Forces (Authorisation of destruction of RT Samples still held). It is envisaged that this and other phases of work will continue over the next two years. Updates are sent via Forensic Marketplace Operations Group (FMOG) which is held bi-monthly and via the full force/LEA SPOC list as applicable.

Forensic Supplier Calls

Regular monthly governance meetings were held with Forensic Science Providers (FSPs) to monitor

operational performance, manage emerging risks, and support continuous improvement across forensic service delivery. These meetings provide a structured forum to review outstanding actions, assess provider performance against agreed standards, and monitor progress against rectification and improvement plans where required.

Performance discussions focus on key service indicators including quality, turnaround times (TRT), capacity, and demand management. Providers present updates on current workloads, resourcing challenges, and mitigation measures to ensure service continuity and maintain delivery standards. Risks and issues impacting operational performance are routinely identified, discussed, and escalated where appropriate, enabling proactive management and improved visibility across stakeholders.

The meetings also support wider business and strategic updates, including accreditation status, technical developments, process improvements, and opportunities for operational efficiencies. This collaborative approach ensures that agreed actions are clearly recorded and communicated to relevant stakeholders. The ongoing engagement has contributed to improved oversight, greater transparency, and enhanced partnership working across forensic service provision.

Workforce

In 2025-26 the FCN continued to work with the community to enhance the forensic workforce including recruitment and retention, education and training and wellbeing.

Apprenticeships

16 apprentices are now approaching the end of the programme and are preparing for their end-point assessments. The FCN has continued to support the apprenticeship forces through the mentor group and has worked with the End Point Assessment organisation to ensure that assessors are appropriately training and available.

Work has also continued on the creation of a level 4 digital forensic apprenticeship in Wales. This is in the development stages and as requested by all forces should be available for delivery in September 2027.

Training and education

As well as apprenticeships the FCN are working on alternative routes for training and development of new and existing staff in the workforce.

This year the FCN has visited and spoken with two of the police forces providing College of Policing licenced training programmes and will continue to work with the community into the next year to review this and the APP for Forensics to support the College of Policing with required updates. In the

next year we will begin to work with learning providers on other continual professional development.

Wellbeing

The work of the FCN has been recognised internationally this year with involvement in both the European Union funded Cyclopes project and the Australia and New Zealand Forensic Science Society conference. Our work was presented and feedback obtained from across a wide range of countries and disciplines.

This collaboration has supported the update of the Forensic Science Wellbeing Toolkit. Version 2 of this document will be published in April 2026.

This partnership across the forensic community worldwide has also informed a research report that will be published shortly about the wellbeing of the forensic workforce. This work will be expanded and developed over the next year with focus groups across disciplines to progress work to support and improve practitioner wellbeing.

The FCN also continue to work with and support the NPCC Recruitment, Retention and Wellbeing of Investigators group with relevant workstreams.

FCN finances

The financial position at the end of the 2024/25 year is shown below:

Spend category	NPCC Grant Allocation	In-year Spend
	£2,757,000	
Staff Costs (salaries & all on-costs)		£2,702,706
Dorset police host force contribution		£22,145
Staff training		£3,000
Travel & Expenses		£43,572
Web site, licences, Comms		£36,941
Events, Room hire etc		£5,177
Misc		£2,145
Income		-£12,873
Total		£2,802,813

Thank you

We would like to thank all of the FCN's stakeholders for your continued engagement and support.