

FCN quarterly report: Q2 2024/25

July – September 2024

FCN's quarterly reports keep our stakeholders updated on progress against our annual delivery plan. You'll find highlights of key activities we've completed in the previous quarter, but not an exhaustive list. Please share the document with your colleagues, send questions to fcn@dorset.pnn.police.uk — and thank you for reading.

Q1 recap

April – June 2024

QI recap

April-June 2024

Featuring:

- Quality & Compliance (pictured)
- Performance
- Digital Forensics
- Supply Chain & Marketplace
- Workforce
- Threat & Risk



Quality & Compliance

The FCN's quality team has had a busy start to the 2024/25 year.

The team conducted a Supplier Assurance Visit with a representative from BlueLight Commercial at SceneSafe.

SceneSafe is the national provider of policing's forensic consumables, and this recent visit was extremely beneficial with the FCN and SceneSafe agreeing to work together on several projects to further increase confidence in the forensic consumables they supply.

We hosted the first in-person **National Quality Manager's meeting** since the pandemic with approximately 25 Quality Managers meeting at the College of Policing in Ryton. This

meeting, held quarterly, promotes the sharing of information and solutions across policing and provides a vital escalation point for Quality Managers.

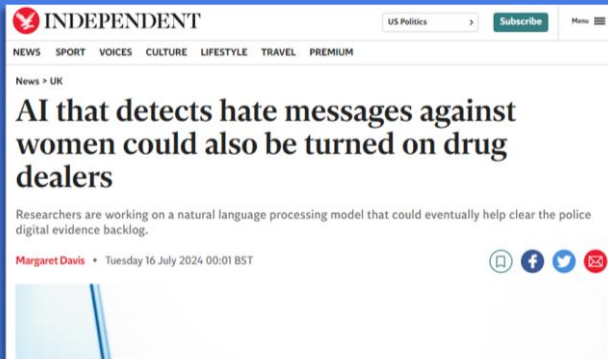
The team has been working hard to identify further **opportunities to meet regulatory compliance** in a more efficient way, including the ongoing challenge of validating forensic processes locally. Those central collaborative validation exercises already underway across policing have now been collated to help support their progress and uptake. The next step will be to publish the roadmap and develop further opportunities to demonstrate how these challenges can be met in a more effective way,

including supporting policing to meet the proposed regulatory changes in Incident Examination. We have also published a guidance document on validating IDENT 1 to support forces working to improve their compliance with the FSR Code.

We continue to proudly publish **Quality Matters** fortnightly and support police forensic units through our **Compliance Support Teams**; this period was no different as the teams travelled the country undertaking eight separate on-site visits.

In the media

In Q1, we concluded a 12-month research project with Warwick University into the ability of natural language processing to help speed up VAWG investigations (*below*).



Performance

FCN is the custodian of a forensics performance framework, including data collection, baselining, analysis and reporting.

In Q1, we shared CSI benchmarking reports with all forces which submitted data during 2023/24. We finalised a new forensic data collection set for residential burglary, which was sent to all forces.

We were formally tasked with establishing a performance framework for digital forensics on behalf of the NPCC DF Portfolio, to assist with several recommendations from the HMICFRS report into DF.

Digital Forensics

AI & Deepfakes

Working with the Generative AI Deepfake Detection Group on behalf of NPCC Digital Forensics Portfolio, we continued to monitor risk to digital forensics posed by deepfakes.

We are also working with a wide range of partners to develop solutions to mitigate any emerging threats.

Supporting DF Validation

We refreshed computer ground truth data (GTD) which was distributed at the end of July 2024, with validation document updates due soon after.

Following plans for a 'proof of concept' tool developer validation, we received 3 expressions of interest to participate via the vendor working group.

The DF validation groups continue to operate very effectively, now attracting over 60 participants nationally.

Supporting Cell-site Analysis

The cell-site analysis collaborative learning exercise (CLE) has been completed and a report has been issued to participants and stakeholders including the Forensic Science Regulator's Office.

A second CLE is scheduled to go-live in November having received 43 expressions of interest in participation.

Threat & Risk

In Q1, an updated status assessment was circulated to forces as part of the national forensic strategic threat and risk assessment (ForSTRA).

Y-STR Database

Our sampling programme continued through the **Swab Out Crime** campaign (*below left*), with an extended reach through a new option for men to order a free home sampling kit via post.

SFR

In Q1, FCN's quarterly SFR board meeting took place, and we launched a new learning video (*below right*).



Supply Chain & Marketplace

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

In Q1, we continued with forensic marketplace contingency planning on behalf of the NPCC Forensic Marketplace Portfolio, with master documentation to be updated in due course.

Findings from the Forensic Marketplace Strategic Plan (FMSP) developed throughout 2023/24 have now been reported into various key groups. We continued to refresh physical and digital forensic data across the supply chain, providing it as required to NPCC, forces, partners and Home Office to aid decision making and risk management.

Engagements and visits with suppliers and customers

continued taking place, as well as with vetting in Warwickshire regarding the potential to access overseas resources in the instance of any UK shortages. We co-ordinated the NPCC Vendor Group in June 2024 which received very good feedback, and also collaborated further with the Association of Digital Forensic Service Providers (ADFSP) to discuss enhanced ways of working.

Q2 report

July – September 2024

Q2 report

July-Sept 2024

Featuring:

- NPCC Support
- Performance
- Quality & Compliance
- SARC training (pictured)
- Digital Forensics
- Supply Chain & Marketplace
- Workforce



NPCC Support

Forensic Threat & Risk (ForSTRA)

We published the Risk and Threat status assessments for Q1/Q2, and agreed a further Q3/Q4 assessment. This threat status assessment enables policing to monitor changes to threat and risk levels alongside the usefulness assessment.

Y-STR database

Our sampling programme for the UK reference collection continues throughout 2024/25, including face-to-face collection events with forces, providers, industry & academia, as well as the postal system. Current total is 4,222 of the 10,000 target. We are working with King's College London to secure ethics and fund analysis of their academic sample bank.

A specification has been written for the statistical research, and contract

documentation is being finalised for partnership with Dundee University.

The FINDS Strategy Board has granted approval for the creation of a YSTR intelligence functionality within the NDNAD, and detailed planning has now commenced.

Streamlined Forensic Reporting

The quarterly national board continues, with CPS guidelines on prosecuting RT Tox cases now revised, and two of three training and awareness videos now published on the FCN website.

Horizon Scanning, Research & Innovation

We have continued to support ongoing forensic research, including with the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL), Chief Scientific Advisor for Policing and MET Police Technology, Research

and Innovation team (TRI).

We have actively provided forensic engagement in the Accelerated Capability Environment (ACE) deepfake projects, including attending the Deepfake Challenge Showcase event, participating in workshops, and subject matter support for project teams.

AI and Natural Language Processing advice has been provided to College of Policing and forces as requested.

We have refreshed the terms of reference for our community research groups, called 'Special Interest Groups' going forward and focused on strategic themes and priorities for research.

The NPCC forensic R&I strategy has been reviewed and wider publication is planned in Q3.

A further STAR bid will be submitted for Y-STR statistical research, on phase 2 modelling.

NPCC Support

NPCC portfolio support continued as part of BaU activities, including an NPCC Forensic portfolio event organised and hosted.

Guidance and additional information shared for cell-site exercise, ForSTRA, R&I Strategy, updated SFR guidance, and Lawful Match Guidance.

Ongoing review of Guidance for Storage, Retention & Destruction of Forensic Materials.



Pictured: NPCC Forensic Lead Nick Dean (left) and FCN MD John Armstrong at the NPCC Forensics Day.

Performance

FCN is the custodian of a forensics performance framework, including data collection, baselining, analysis and reporting.

Physical Forensics

On behalf of the NPCC, we have collated performance metrics from police forces relating to CSIs and burglary attendance. Reports are being

developed ready to present back to the community via a workshop planned for Q3.

Digital Forensics

Data collection for the DF performance framework took place in Q2 with 44 policing organisations submitting KPI data. We are analysing the 3,500 resulting data points, with reporting due in Q3.

Accreditation

Information on force compliance attainment continues to be monitored alongside external costs to policing in achieving and maintaining accreditation.

SFR

A data collection framework for RT-toxicology and drugs is being developed via the SFR board.

Quality & Compliance

The FCN continues to provide quality and compliance support and guidance to policing and the NPCC.

This includes increasing the knowledge, understanding and awareness of quality, compliance and accreditation matters across policing and wider stakeholders, as well as improving standardisation, reducing duplication and increasing efficiency.

Topic	Q2 Activity
<p>Accreditation & Declaration Guidance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated FSR Declaration Guidance reviewed and the FCN's Declaration FAQs refreshed accordingly. SFR templates/annexes now also fully compliant with FSR Declaration requirements. The FCN is helping survey policing to understand the current accreditation gaps in Police Forces Friction Ridge Detail. Once understood, the FCN will provide options and support solutions with Policing to transition to the new accreditation model.
<p>Validation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close support continues to be provided to the NPCC Quality Portfolio, the DF Portfolio and the new Op Yanborough Validation Sub-Group. A National Validation Tracker has been published and further requests sent out to help identify opportunities where central or collaborative validation approach can be adopted. There are already examples underway in policing, including a cleaning validation project led by the CSI Technical Forum. A Validation Decision Model has been drafted for review ahead of Code v2 being published, its aim being to help the community identify when full validation is required and when other assurance measures may be better suited.
<p>Anti-contamination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An anti-contamination project has been scoped, focused on risk management of contamination at a scene to identify most efficient use of resource based on risk. The CSI Tech Forum has documented a series of competences relevant to INC-100, with the FCN building on that to produce a competence framework in Q3.
<p>SARCs See more overleaf</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three SARC train-the-trainer events have taken place, enabling the roll-out of national training supported with a new competency assessment toolkit. A collaborative learning exercise (CLE) has been developed for SARC examination strategy - all SARCs in the UK will be invited to participate. SARC-specific declaration guidance has been drafted jointly with the FSR's Office and is due for consultation with the SARC community in Q3.
<p>Compliance Support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Compliance Support Team's activity remains a mainstay of the Delivery Plan, with all force requests have been completed. The first full on-site compliance support visit of a SARC facility was also completed with positive feedback.
<p>Knowledge Sharing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality Matters continues to be published fortnightly sharing knowledge and key updates, and the team continues to respond to frequent queries.

SARC Training Events

Three training events were held in Q2 for Sexual Assault Referral Centres (pictured) alongside the national roll-out of intimate and non-intimate training, supported by a new competency assessment training toolkit.



SARC Learning Exercise

A collaborative learning exercise (CLE) has been developed for SARC Examination Strategy, with practitioners from SARCs across the UK invited to participate, and learnings from the CLE being used to develop proficiency testing.



Workforce

DF apprenticeships

The first cohort of Level Digital Forensic apprentices began in July 2024, with 18 apprentices from four organisations.

The mentor group is now well-established, with the second meeting held in September. We're now working with an End Point Assessment organisation and forces to fully understand the requirement for assessors.

Development of the Level 7 DF apprenticeship continues and is on track. Cranfield University have confirmed they wish to be a provider. The Level 7 apprenticeship is due to begin in Q4.

Physical Forensic apprenticeships

The development of a Level 4 Physical Forensic Apprenticeship continues and is on track.

An expression of interest has been submitted to the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education and we are awaiting approval.

The first meeting of trailblazer group will then follow.

Wellbeing

The Wellbeing Toolkit case studies have been updated and work is planned with universities, Thames Valley Police and Cranfield University on the development of partnerships.

The results of the wearables project with Leicestershire Police were reported at a STAR event in July 2024 and the report has now been published.

Digital Forensics

Deepfakes & AI

We have engaged with the Home Office's senior policy advisors for online child sexual abuse policing, as well as the NCA, GCHQ, CAID, and forces looking at the identification and testing requirements for deepfake detections tools for law enforcement. Support has been provided on the threat assessment, DF processes, and FSR codes requirements.

The FCN presented on AI and neural networks at the joint Dstl and NPCC inside-x event on AI in digital forensics. We provided an update to College of Police on generative AI threats and opportunities, and advice to ACE on AI and CSAM investigations.

The FCN also updated the DF deepfake threat assessment and presented to forensics leads and

Office of the Police Chief Scientific Adviser.

Cell-site collaborative learning exercise

The FCN's report on this exercise has been shared with participant forces, Radio Frequency Development User Group (RFDUG) members, and the Forensics Science Regulator's Office.

The initial project is now complete and the project for the second round of the cell-site CLE has been initiated. Requests for expressions of interest were sent in mid-September to forces and some commercial services providers, with 43 EOIs received to date.

A cell-site analysis accreditation workshop originally due for Q2 was held early in Q1.

Ground Truth Data (GTD) for Computers

After successful completion of the computer GTD project which delivered computer GTD to 55 law enforcement agencies, the computer forensics tool validation project has started.

This has been supported by Staffordshire's DFU which provided facilities and the DF software to keep costs to a minimum. The work is on track for completion in Q3.

DF Validation Working Group

This group met in September and the DF validation documentation has been updated to add additional end-user requirements aligned with the computer GTD package and shared with all forces.

Supply Chain & Marketplace

Monitoring and reporting

FCN has undertaken a market-share refresh across both physical and digital forensics. Physical BI activity has been shared with forces on FMOG and Forensic Forum for feedback.

Relevant information on digital market share was provided as required to NPCC, Forces, partners and HO to aid decision making and risk management.

Vetting

Regular engagement with

Warwickshire vetting continues regarding escalating issues within the marketplace, and working with forces to establish a consistent approach to standards.

Operational support

We shared operational lessons learnt for the NGP with forces.

Technical specifications for DNA subject sampling kits have been developed for incorporation into BLC's National Crime Scene Consumables contract. The specification is informed by the joint FCN and FINDS project on

risks in the DNA supply chain. The kit specification is now being finalised with SceneSafe including new sampling guidance and DNA cards, due to go live in Q4.

FCN will also be supporting updated Forensic Submissions Guidance for physical forensics.

Stakeholder engagement

We updated the DF Technology Partnership forum and DF Operational Services Group, and also engaged with the ADFSP to explore supplier requirements for CAID interaction.

Shaping forensics, together

At the FCN, we believe by bringing together the forensic and policing communities with key stakeholders, we can help shape forensics and deliver better outcomes for the public and victims of crime.

We deliver

We have a well-earned reputation for delivering effective and efficient activities which support forensics, on time and on budget.

We're here to help

People in forensics rely on us to help solve their problems and capitalise on their opportunities, so everything we do stems from our stakeholders' needs.

We bring people together

We share knowledge across boundaries and run inclusive national groups to bridge the gaps in forensics.

We're a single point of contact for forensics in policing

We're a national forensic body funded and governed by the NPCC, so our stakeholders know who to turn to.

We take a national view

We lead on national forensic activities which save time and money for policing by doing things once instead of many times, where it makes sense to do so.