



HOUSE OF LORDS

Science and Technology Committee

3rd Report of Session 2024–26

Rebuilding forensic science for criminal justice: an urgent need

Ordered to be printed 27 January 2026 and published 17 February 2026

Published by the Authority of the House of Lords

Science and Technology Committee

The Science and Technology Select Committee is appointed by the House of Lords in each session “to consider science and technology”.

Membership

The Members of the Science and Technology Committee are:

Lord Berkeley	Baroness Northover
Lord Borwick	Lord Ranger of Northwood
Lord Burnett of Maldon (co-opted)	Viscount Stansgate
Lord Drayson	Lord Stern of Brentford
Lord Lucas	Baroness Walmsley
Lord Mair (Chair)	Baroness Willis of Summertown
Baroness Neuberger	Baroness Young of Old Scone
Baroness Neville-Jones	

Declaration of interests

See Appendix 1.

A full list of Members' interests can be found in the Register of Lords' Interests:

<https://members.parliament.uk/members/lords/interests/register-of-lords-interests>

Publications

All publications of the Committee are available at:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/193/science-and-technology-committee-lords/publications/>

Parliament Live

Live coverage of debates and public sessions of the Committee's meetings are available at:

<http://www.parliamentlive.tv>

Further information

Further information about the House of Lords and its Committees, including guidance to witnesses, details of current inquiries and forthcoming meetings is available at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/lords>

Committee staff

The Committee staff are John Turner (Clerk), Daisy Robins (Second Clerk), Thomas Hornigold (Policy Analyst), Siddhant Gurung (Committee Operations Officer).

Contact details

All correspondence should be addressed to the Science and Technology Committee, Committee Office, House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW. Telephone 020 7219 5750.

Email: h1science@parliament.uk.

Social Media

You can follow the Committee on X (formerly Twitter): [@LordsSTCom](#).

Copyright and privilege

This report was published by Order of the House of Lords and is subject to Parliamentary Privilege. Content may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament Licence, which is published at <https://www.parliament.uk/copyright>. © Parliamentary Copyright House of Lords 2026.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Summary	3
Chapter 1: Introduction and background	9
Background	9
Figure 1: Analysis of cases where misleading evidence led to unsafe rulings	11
Our inquiry	11
Chapter 2: Responsibility for the forensic science system	13
Responsibility for the forensic science system	13
Chapter 3: Provision of forensic science services	18
Forensic science market	18
Reasons for the constricted market	19
Future market structure	21
In-house provision of forensic science	23
Equality of arms and forensic science in the courtroom	29
Streamlined forensic reporting	33
Risks to ‘non-commercial’ specialisms	34
Evidence storage and handling	38
Chapter 4: Forensic science fit for the future	42
Research and development in forensic science	42
Research funding	42
Oversight and coordination	44
Digital forensics and AI	45
Digital forensics	45
Data storage	49
AI and machine learning for evidence handling	50
Training and retention of forensic scientists	52
Chapter 5: Oversight, responsibility and structural issues	55
Forensic science regulation and accreditation	55
The evolving role of the Forensic Science Regulator	55
Accreditation costs	62
A National Institute for Forensic Science	64
Summary of conclusions and recommendations	68
Appendix 1: List of Members and declarations of interest	76
Appendix 2: List of witnesses	78

Evidence is published online at <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/9424/forensic-science-followup/>

Q in footnotes refers to a question in oral evidence.

SUMMARY

Forensic science is not working for anyone. It is not working for the police. It is not working for forensic scientists. It is not working for lawyers. Ultimately, it is not working for the public and the criminal justice system. Eminent forensic scientist Professor Angela Gallop told us this; our inquiry has found little to contradict it.

Criminal cases are collapsing, often due to missing or damaged evidence. The market meant to provide many forensic services has collapsed. Police provision is patchy, inconsistent, and lacking in oversight. Digital forensics is increasingly important, but a backlog of over 20,000 digital devices to be analysed has not shrunk in years. Ministers admit that the system needs reform.

The Government should act now, not wait for something to emerge from the long and uncertain process of police reform. They should establish a National Institute for Forensic Science to oversee best practice, to drive forward research and development, to preserve key skills and to help ensure the independence of forensic evidence.

As the system continues to atrophy despite repeated warnings, putting justice at risk, creeping neglect begins to resemble a shocking abdication of responsibility: a national scandal in the making. If this is allowed to persist, miscarriages of justice seem inevitable. Long overdue reforms must now fix a critical, but increasingly dysfunctional, pillar of criminal justice in England and Wales.

The Policing Reform White Paper suggests that a National Police Service that “delivers forensics on a national basis,” combined with mergers of police forces to take place over the next decade, will provide the answer.

We welcome the direction of travel in providing a national forensic science service and rationalising the complex patchwork of police forces. Yet the details on how forensic science will operate in this system, and critically how its independence will be safeguarded, remain extremely vague. So do the timelines for change.

The Home Office Minister described this reform as a “once in a generation opportunity for change”. The Government should seize it and establish a national forensics system that is properly funded, fit for the future, and serves the interests of the whole criminal justice system, not just the police.

The White Paper is an opportunity, but it also poses a risk: that the much-needed rebuilding of forensic science in England and Wales gets kicked into the long grass while we await uncertain, long-term structural reforms. We must urgently address the issues our inquiry has identified with the forensic system now, as well as part of these wider reforms.

We need to trust as a society that the collection, analysis, and interpretation of forensic evidence is as rigorous, unbiased, and independent as possible.

To correct longstanding miscarriages of justice, and to avoid storing up costly mistakes for the future, we need a forensic science system that provides equality of arms between the prosecution and the defence. We do not have this currently.

To ensure criminals can be prosecuted, the forensic science system needs to be able to make use of the full range of techniques and technologies available, from fingerprints, DNA and fibres to digital forensics and AI.

The forensic science system in England and Wales is simply not satisfying these requirements.

This report is not the first to come to this conclusion. It follows up on this Committee's 2019 report, *Forensic science and the criminal justice system: a blueprint for change*. Many of the issues with the system our report identifies are painfully familiar from seven years ago.

Following the closure of the Forensic Science Service (FSS) in 2012, the Home Office no longer centrally provided forensic science capacity. The responsibility now falls to a shrinking external marketplace of for-profit forensic science providers, commissioned by the police, as well as varying in-house provision by the 43 police forces.

While there are examples of excellent practice throughout the system, all too often there is inconsistency in provision across the 43 police forces in England and Wales. The techniques accessible both to police forces when they provide forensic science in-house, and to external forensic service providers, often depend on what is affordable to deliver.

Our 2019 report warned that the forensic science market was at risk of becoming dysfunctional. This has now happened. The external market is a now near-monopoly, with more than 80% of external forensic science provided by a single large company, Eurofins, and an increasing amount of in-house provision by the police.

Downward pressure on prices due to cuts to police budgets means that forensic science companies have often been loss-making or barely in profit, unable to invest in R&D or even in some cases to retain their workforce in the face of competition from police insourcing. Barriers to entry for new businesses that wish to provide forensic services are also extremely high. Accreditation costs have been raised as a particular issue.

This situation is unlikely to correct itself, and no one has taken overall responsibility for this market. The Home Office Minister has acknowledged that these arrangements have failed, yet the proposed policing reform does not set out how the Government will support a robust, dynamic commercial market in forensic services, or indeed what role the commercial market will play in a system where forensics are “delivered nationally”.

Police spending on in-house forensics is estimated at £550m of which only around £100m is with commercial providers. But in-house provision raises its own issues, with duplication, consistency of provision, and with the independence of forensic analysis. Ministers admitted they had little visibility over spending and capacity across the forces. This oversight must be improved by the proposed policing reforms and National Police Service. The Government is correct to identify the opportunity to make the system more efficient and effective, reducing duplication, and should reinvest its savings into forensic science where budgets have been squeezed.

Forensic investigation needs to be independent and to be seen to be independent. But while under the influence of the police, there is always a risk of unconscious bias skewing results. The Scottish model, where forensic science is provided to the police by a separate body with a “sterile corridor” between them, provides one framework for securing independence.

The Home Office Minister rejected this when we spoke to her, but it remains our view that it is essential that any new national forensic service, as proposed in the white paper, must be independent of the police, and that the Scottish system shows that this works well in practice. Some witnesses told us accreditation and professional standards would be sufficient to ensure independence, but this will require a step change in oversight. Much falls on the Forensic Science Regulator, whose new statutory powers were a rare recommendation from our previous report that was implemented. But regulating a dysfunctional market and a slew of variable in-house provision is far from easy: the Regulator has not yet issued any compliance notices, and we are concerned it may feel unable to pursue enforcement action that might disrupt a delicate system.

The Policing Reform White Paper says that it will expect its new national forensics service to adhere to the Regulator's Code of Practice: the Regulator must be able to have meaningful oversight as it is being set up.

Forensic science can exonerate as well as convict: it should be available to the defence as well as the prosecution. Defence experts play an important role as a check and balance on the forensic system relied upon by the prosecution. But we were told that there is no such thing as "equality of arms" when it comes to forensic science in England and Wales.

The defence must rely on a dwindling community of experts. They are often dedicated and skilled, but also severely fragmented and underpaid (by Legal Aid) compared to the prosecution. Often operating solo or in small businesses, they face substantial costs for accreditation.

Nowhere is the apparent lack of overall responsibility for the system clearer than in the defence expert sector. It falls between the cracks of a Home Office focused on prosecutions and an underfunded Ministry of Justice that has historically paid less attention to forensic science. The responsibility taken by the Ministry of Justice in this area has gone backwards since the two Departments promised closer working in responding to our last report. The role of the Ministry of Justice and wider justice system considerations in oversight of forensics delivered by the proposed National Police Service needs to be clarified.

A brittle and cost-constrained system is losing vital expertise and unable to respond to new technologies. We heard that forensic science specialisms such as mark and trace analysis are dying out due to being "non-commercial" for forensic science providers; risking miscarriages of justice in cases that require this evidence. This has long been a risk, but no one has taken responsibility or set out a plan to preserve these specialisms. Any nationally provided forensic science service should do so.

Substantial experience will be lost as the existing workforce retires, but no one takes overall responsibility for workforce planning and training remains patchy. The rise of digital forensics and AI pose new challenges and new opportunities in adapting to and making best use of novel technologies, but no one in the fragmented system coordinates research and development priorities or invests adequately in the future. The digital backlogs identified by our report seven years ago are just as large now. We welcome the announcement of £115m to invest in new digital technologies but await to see how these are deployed in practice in a reforming system.

Perhaps no issue better illustrates the problems with the fragmented and uncoordinated approach to forensic science than the long-term storage of forensic evidence. The FSS maintained a forensic archive. When the FSS was closed, the responsibility for storing new evidence fell to the 43 police forces, who were apparently not funded or resourced to undertake it properly and had no expertise in doing so.

Some rose to the challenge. But the overall picture is that national guidance was not consistently followed, and as we discuss in the report, many criminal cases are collapsing, often due to lost and damaged evidence, and police forces are struggling to keep up. This clearly illustrates the need to build up national forensic science capacity.

It is welcome that the Ministers seemed open to the obvious solution—expanding the national forensic archive, already used for historic evidence and in extremis when forensic science providers have collapsed. We can only hope that we have not stored up too many costly miscarriages of justice.

Our report makes a wide range of recommendations to rebuild forensic science for the criminal justice system. These include:

- The Government's new proposed national forensic service should operate independently from the police. Its establishment should be a priority amidst longer-term reforms. Savings from eliminating duplication should be reinvested into providing better forensic services.
- The Government should address long-standing issues around equality of access to forensic science and the preservation of specialist disciplines with immediate actions and in its long-term reforms.
- The Government should set out a plan for the stabilisation of the commercial forensics market and clarify its role under the new system; it should assess the risks of market concentration and use procurement and regulatory powers, including a reassessment of UKAS's accreditation fees, to encourage greater competition from SMEs.
- Long-term evidence storage and handling should be centralised in an expanded forensic archive without waiting for longer-term consolidation of police forces.

The Policing Reform White Paper mentions forensics, but not forensic science. Our report recommends the establishment of a National Institute for Forensic Science to address needs including assessing national forensic science capacity, prioritising and conducting research and development, providing best practice, training, and expertise to the wider criminal justice system and maintaining expertise in non-commercial specialisms. This need not await the establishment of a National Police Service or central forensics capacity: it could and should be done this year.

Deeper-rooted issues of structural underfunding, market failure, inequality of arms between prosecution and defence, and independence—capacity, resilience, quality, and fairness—must be addressed and cannot wait for the end of a lengthy reform process.

The Government recognises the system is in crisis, but argues in its White Paper that a crisis can also be an opportunity for bold reforms. It must urgently seize this moment to grip these problems. Otherwise, the next time this committee reports on this issue, it will no longer be a diagnosis but a post-mortem.

Rebuilding forensic science for criminal justice: an urgent need

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Background

1. Forensic science applies scientific methods to the recovery, analysis and interpretation of relevant physical materials and data in criminal investigations and court proceedings. Ideally, it should be seen as an end-to-end, holistic process of investigation and evidence gathering, scientific analysis, interpretation and presentation of the results—from crime scene to courtroom. As such, forensic science, and policy that governs it, brings together expertise from science, law, criminal justice, and criminal investigation.
2. Scrutiny of forensic science in England and Wales is certainly not new.¹ This inquiry is explicitly following up on the 2019 report published by this Committee, *Forensic science and the criminal justice system: a blueprint for change*.² At that time, the Committee found “clear, deep-rooted challenges that have been identified but not addressed”—and noted that “in the last 10 years there have been nine reports” into various aspects of forensic science.³ This report will make reference to a range of recommendations that were made in the previous report.
3. Prior to 2012, England and Wales had a Forensic Science Service, which operated at arms-length from the Home Office from 1991. It provided scene-of-crime and forensic investigation services to police forces and other investigatory bodies in England and Wales, with an approximately 60% market share of the external work commissioned by the police.⁴ In December 2010, the Government announced the closure of the Forensic Science Service, citing losses averaging £2 million per month. It eventually closed in March 2012. This move was criticised by the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee at the time.⁵ Since the closure, forensic science has been provided by a mix of private companies and in-house provision by the police, which has become increasingly important: we will discuss these areas in Chapter 3.
4. Despite a sustained period of scrutiny, problems in the system persist. Professor Angela Gallop, a renowned forensic scientist, told the Committee:

1 Forensic science is partially devolved, with separate systems operating in Scotland and Northern Ireland. While some of the challenges identified by our inquiry may be UK-wide, it has predominantly focused on forensic science in England and Wales. This report will discuss the Scottish system in particular in more detail later on.

2 Science and Technology Committee, *Forensic science and the criminal justice system: a blueprint for change* (3rd Report, Session 2017–19, HL Paper 333)

3 *Ibid.*

4 Science and Technology Committee, *Forensic science and the criminal justice system: a blueprint for change* (3rd Report, Session 2017–19, HL Paper 333), paras 41–42. The remainder was carried out by private companies.

5 House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, *The Forensic Science Service* (7th Report, Session 2010–12, HC Paper 855), paras 241–244

“forensic science is not working for anybody. It is not working for the police. It is not working for forensic scientists. It is not working for lawyers. Ultimately, it is not working for the general public when they read about miscarriages [of justice] in the press.”⁶

5. She said that “most of the recommendations [of our 2019 report] have not been acted upon, much to our dismay. There were broken promises of a royal commission on criminal justice.”⁷ Professor Gallop described how “since 2017, the Home Office has intervened in at least six major market and quality failures.”⁸ Responding to these continued concerns and lack of reform, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Miscarriages of Justice set up the Westminster Commission on Forensic Science, which produced a substantial report, *Forensic Science in England and Wales: Pulling out of the Graveyard Spiral* in June 2025.⁹ We will refer to its findings and conclusions in our report.
6. Some areas have got measurably worse: for example, in 2019, we warned of market consolidation because there were three major forensic science companies. Since then, one of those three has been taken over by another and the third has been in and out of administration, leaving over 80% of the commercial market controlled by one provider.
7. This is important. Failures in forensic science lead to miscarriages of justice. A systematic analysis of misleading evidence in unsafe rulings in England and Wales analysed 218 unsafe rulings by the Court of Appeal (out of 996 involving criminal evidence) in a seven year period (Jan 2010–Dec 2016), containing 235 cases of misleading evidence: see Figure 1. It found:

“The majority (76%) of successful appeals were based upon the same materials available in the original trial, rather than the presentation of new relevant information. Witness (39%), forensic (32%), and character evidence (19%) were the most commonly observed evidence types, with the validity of witnesses (26%), probative value of forensic evidence (12%), and relevance of character evidence (10%) being the most prevalent combinations of identified issues.”¹⁰

8. In other words, misleading forensic evidence was around a third of the misleading evidence in rulings that were deemed unsafe. In most cases, this was down to the relevance, probative value or validity of the forensic evidence as presented in the case. In a smaller subset of cases, it was down to the direction of the judge on the probative value, standard of proof, relevance or validity of the evidence.

6 [Q 1](#) (Prof Angela Gallop)

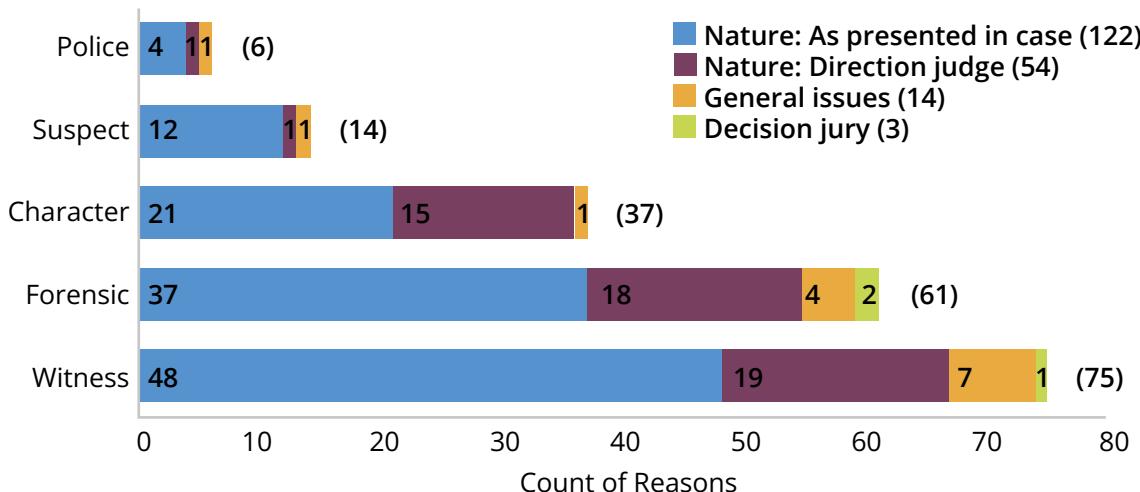
7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*

9 All Party Parliamentary Group on Miscarriages of Justice, [*Westminster Commission on Forensic Science – All Party Parliamentary Group on Miscarriages of Justice*](#); The Westminster Commission on Forensic Science, [*Forensic Science in England and Wales: Pulling Out of the Graveyard Spiral*](#), June 2025

10 Smit, Morgan and Lagnado, ‘A systematic analysis of misleading evidence in unsafe rulings in England and Wales’, *Science and Justice*, vol 58, Issue 2, (2018): <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1355030617301144>

Figure 1: Analysis of cases where misleading evidence led to unsafe rulings



Source: Smit, Morgan and Lagnado, 'A systematic analysis of misleading evidence in unsafe rulings in England and Wales,' 2018

Our inquiry

9. Given the wide range of inquiries and reports into forensic science in England and Wales in recent years, our inquiry was scoped explicitly as a short follow-up inquiry on our 2019 report. Many of the issues identified by that report are still problematic and it remains highly relevant today. We hope that this report can build on, and be read in the context of, previous excellent work done in this area. We hope to focus on possible solutions to these long-standing problems, and bring a renewed focus and urgency to policy in this area under a new Government and with major policing reform underway. We launched our inquiry on 7 November 2025 and took our final oral evidence on 13 January 2026.
10. The Policing Reform White Paper was published on 26 January shortly before this report was finalised. Our inquiry was conducted in anticipation of its publication and many of our conclusions and recommendations relate to proposals, such as the merger of police forces and establishment of a national forensics capacity, subsequently included in the White Paper. Our conclusions in those areas represent the Committee's initial response to the White Paper, based on the evidence received during the course of this inquiry; however, we were not able to take further evidence after the White Paper's release.
11. Chapter 2 sets out concerns with the overall Government responsibility for the forensic science system. Chapter 3 discusses the provision of forensic science services by the police and commercial providers, including concerns around capacity, resilience, quality, and fairness. Chapter 4 discusses areas that relate to the future of forensic science including research and development, technology and digital forensics, and the training and retention of forensic scientists. Chapter 5 relates to the regulation of forensic science and the need for a National Institute of Forensic Science.
12. We held 10 oral evidence sessions with 23 witnesses, including forensic scientists, external forensic science companies, international comparisons,

representatives of defence barristers and of the police, experts in digital forensics, current and former Forensic Science Regulators and accreditors, and Ministers and civil servants from the Home Office and Ministry of Justice. We have also published a small number of pieces of written evidence and correspondence that were sent to us over the course of the inquiry. We are grateful to all those who provided their views over the course of the inquiry; a full list of all those who contributed is contained in Appendix 2. We would also like to thank Baroness Black of Strome for a private briefing on issues pertinent to this inquiry.

CHAPTER 2: RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE FORENSIC SCIENCE SYSTEM

Responsibility for the forensic science system

13. The Home Office, via its oversight of the police and the Forensic Science Regulator,¹¹ would seem to have the most direct line of responsibility for forensic science as a whole in England and Wales. However, Professor Angela Gallop told us that she was: “concerned about the apparent complacency of the Home Office in all of this. When [the Westminster Commission] spoke to them they did not seem to be aware, or maybe they were just not concerned, about what was going on; it seemed like they thought we were making a fuss about nothing.”¹²
14. Professor Carole McCartney, Professor of Law and Criminal Justice, University of Leicester, and a member of the Westminster Commission, highlighted issues with finding any individual in the Ministry of Justice who took responsibility for forensic science:

“There is a problem with the Home Office but, to be perfectly honest, the Ministry of Justice is even worse. [The Westminster Commission] kept approaching them for a meeting and they were literally telling us, ‘There is nobody here to talk to’. There had been one member of staff involved in forensic science, but he had left a year previously and nobody replaced him. So when we were saying, ‘We are doing this commission. Can we talk to somebody?’ they were saying, ‘No, there is nobody to talk to, because you need to talk to the Legal Aid Agency, the CPS or the Criminal Bar Association. They are not us.’”¹³

15. Professor McCartney further highlighted the lack of an individual minister with responsibility for the forensic science system as a whole.¹⁴ She questioned what would happen at the end of this inquiry and queried, of this report: “Whose desk is it landing on and whose responsibility is it? It is nobody’s. We do not have a Minister that has forensic science in their remit, so there is nowhere for the buck to stop.”¹⁵
16. She emphasised the need for better collaboration across government, especially between the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office: “At the moment, it just falls through the gaps between them and we are not getting traction. Forensic science is just caught up with the Home Office but we do not think it should be piloting this alone.”¹⁶ This was supported by Gary Pugh, the former Forensic Science Regulator, who said that it “took some persuading” of ministers to include in his agreement that the Forensic

11 A public appointee sponsored by, but operating independently of the Home Office, on behalf of the criminal justice system as a whole, the Forensic Science Regulator is an individual with a small staff team that “ensures that the provision of forensic science services across the criminal justice system is subject to an appropriate regime of scientific quality standards.” We discuss their role further in Chapter 5. Forensic Science Regulator, [About us](#)

12 [Q.1](#) (Prof Angela Gallop)

13 [Q.7](#) (Prof Carole McCartney)

14 Our committee was able to speak to the Minister for Policing in the Home Office, Sarah Jones MP, and the Minister for Courts, Sarah Sackman KC MP, but neither of them has responsibility for forensic science explicitly within their published remit.

15 [Q.7](#) (Prof Carole McCartney)

16 *Ibid.*

Science Regulator should have a reporting line to the Secretary of State for Justice. He concluded:

“The way this is seen is that certainly my role was under the Policing Minister. Forensic science is the Home Office’s problem, not the MoJ’s problem. That is the firm impression I get. Having said that, I have worked closely with people in the MoJ. They need to be more of a party to this, in terms of what the future holds for forensic science.”¹⁷

17. Professor Ruth Morgan, Professor of Crime and Forensic Science, UCL, proposed the creation of a “forensic science board” which “could be an arm’s-length group answerable to the Ministers for the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice.”¹⁸ This echoes the recommendation made in our 2019 report that “the Home Office and Ministry of Justice [were] not working closely enough together to address the absence of high level leadership in forensic science” and our recommendation to create a forensic science board to oversee reforms.¹⁹ The Government’s response to our previous report in 2019 implied that our ministerial evidence session for that inquiry had resulted in closer working between the departments:

“The Government agrees that there needs to be a joined-up approach to forensics policy between the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice. Following the appearance of ministers from the two Departments before their Lordships, there has been much closer cooperation. The Ministry of Justice now co-chairs the Forensics Policy Steering Group with the Home Office, and the Home Office presented to the Criminal Justice Board in early July on the state of forensics provision.”²⁰

18. However, the Forensics Policy Steering Group was dissolved in 2019 and replaced by the Criminal Justice Board Forensics Sub-Group shortly after the inquiry, and the current status of this group is unclear.²¹ Gary Pugh, the former Forensic Science Regulator, said that:

“the prospect of transformational change was mooted ten years ago resulting in a Government strategy for forensic science … [however] it is clear that much needed transformational change has been frustrated by the structural barriers (including the independence of police forces), commercialisation that lacks a clear purpose, an inability to mandate change and the lack of a governance board as recommended by the [2019] House of Lords inquiry.”²²

19. Substantial policing reforms, including the proposed establishment of a National Centre of Policing, were first announced in November 2024. It was said that this would include “specialist and supportive functions like forensics, aviation and IT, which have become fragmented and underpowered over the last decade”.²³ This has been superseded by the January 2026 White Paper, discussed below.

17 [Q 105](#) (Gary Pugh)

18 [Q 26](#) (Prof Ruth Morgan). Prof Morgan acted as specialist adviser to that inquiry.

19 Science and Technology Committee, *Forensic science and the criminal justice system: a blueprint for change* (3rd Report, Session 2017–19, HL Paper 333), paras 36–39

20 HM Government, *Government response to the Lords Science and Technology Select Committee Report: Forensic Science and the Criminal Justice System: A Blueprint for Change*, July 2019

21 HC Written answer, [71129](#), Session 2019–2021

22 Written evidence from Gary Pugh ([FSC0006](#))

23 Home Office, *News story: Home Secretary announces major policing reforms*, 19 November 2024

20. A new role of Director of Forensic Services has been created in the Home Office: Amanda-Jane Balfour was appointed in September 2025,²⁴ with the remit of providing leadership on the design and delivery of forensics, and writing a renewed forensic science strategy.²⁵

21. The Home Office Minister, Sarah Jones MP, said:

“The Home Office has the ultimate responsibility for forensics, including the priorities and the provision of them to ensure that the policing and the prosecution systems function as they should. Obviously the MoJ has a very important role as well, but the Home Office is the ultimate lead and I am the Home Office Minister with responsibility—so the buck stops with us and with me.”²⁶

22. She acknowledged that the Home Office had not always exercised this responsibility, saying that:

“the pushing away from the Home Office of responsibility for policing that happened in 2010–12—both down to police and crime commissioners and, in the forensic space, by closing the Forensic Science Service—has not worked as a model. It meant that the Home Office just washed its hands, almost, of responsibility for a lot of policing decisions. It is probably fair to say there was one man and his dog in the Home Office looking at forensics for quite a period of time. That has improved ... there is a stabilisation now ... although there are still a lot of challenges.”²⁷

23. Christophe Prince, Director of Data and Identity at the Home Office, told us that:

“Some of the work that we have been doing within the forensics reform steering group ... has started to pull out what relevant key performance indicators and metrics you might expect to see to understand both the performance of individual areas and, ultimately, the health of the system overall.”

This was said to include the volumes of particular forensics and some of the data on the workforce.²⁸

24. The Minister of State for Courts and Legal Services, Ministry of Justice, Sarah Sackman KC MP, outlined how she saw the respective responsibilities. She said that:

“the Ministry of Justice has a part to play in this. Our role here is perhaps threefold. The first is in our responsibility to the proper and fair operation of our court system and the way in which forensic evidence can support that. Ensuring that the system is sustainable and operates fairly and with integrity to support the achievement and determination of just outcomes in criminal trials is vital. The second concerns the

²⁴ Forensic Capability Network, [New senior appointments in UK forensic science](#), 11 September 2025

²⁵ Full details of the role can be found here: Department of Work and Pensions, [Director of Forensic Services](#). [Q.7](#) (Prof McCartney): “There is a new director of [Forensic Services], although she does not have any forensic science services to direct. She has been employed for two years; presumably you will speak to her about her plans. She is supposed to be writing a blueprint for what is going to happen with forensic science as part of this Home Office reshaping of policing in general.”

²⁶ [Q.109](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

²⁷ [Q.111](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

²⁸ [Q.113](#) (Christophe Prince)

relationship that the MoJ holds in funding the Legal Aid Agency and the way in which that supports the funding available to defence solicitors when it comes to engaging experts to provide that evidence to the criminal justice system. The third is the wider set of relationships, for which we hold the responsibility, with the independent judiciary and with the CPS.”²⁹

She also set out the role she has in forensic science related to “miscarriages of justice and the role of the CCRC [Criminal Cases Review Commission]”.³⁰

- 25. The Minister noted that forensic science was in her main portfolio of responsibilities only indirectly through courts and legal aid policy, and agreed that “quite possibly, specifying forensic services as lying within a particular Minister’s portfolio would be of assistance because that would draw additional focus”.³¹ She said that as policing reform went on “We in the Ministry of Justice offer our view [but] the Home Office is the lead department for how this can function.”³²
- 26. The Policing Reform White Paper published in January 2026 said that the Government would establish a National Police Service, which it says will “deliver forensics as a national service to policing”.³³ It says that it will “consolidate accountabilities and decision-making authority for the delivery of police forensics in the NPS and establish the legal mandate to deliver forensics as a national service to policing and ultimately benefit victims and the criminal justice system.”³⁴
- 27. It also proposes the merger of the 43 police forces in England and Wales into a smaller number. An independent review of police force structures, which will report in summer 2026, will propose the number of forces and procedure for this merger.³⁵
- 28. **The issues identified in our previous inquiry have largely got worse. Forensic science is at serious risk of failing the criminal justice system. At the heart of these issues there is muddled and divided responsibility for capacity, resilience, quality, and fairness in forensic science. There is still a strong sense that no one takes overall responsibility for the forensic science system, in particular, ensuring sufficient funding.**
- 29. **Our previous inquiry encouraged better joint working between the Home Office and Ministry of Justice. Despite assurances at the time that this would be fixed, structures set up then have not been maintained. Forensic science should belong to and function on behalf of the whole criminal justice system, not just the Home Office.**

29 [Q 130](#) (Sarah Sackman KC MP)

30 [Q 131](#) (Sarah Sackman KC MP)

31 *Ibid.*

32 [Q 139](#) (Sarah Sackman KC MP)

33 Home Office, *From Local to National: A New Model for Policing*, January 2026, [CP 1489](#), p 46. Elsewhere (page 10), the white paper says “The NPS will bring together existing national bodies, including the National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC), the College of Policing, the National Crime Agency (NCA) and Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP), into a single organisation with a clear mandate and the powers to get things done.”

34 Home Office, *From Local to National: A New Model for Policing*, January 2026, [CP 1489](#), p 46

35 Home Office, *News story: White paper sets out reforms to policing*, 26 January 2026 and HC Deb, 2026, [cols 608–635](#)

30. The proposed creation of a new National Police Service to deliver forensics on a national basis offers a much needed opportunity for reform. However, progress has been slow: it was first announced in November 2024 but the Policing Reform White Paper was only published in January 2026. The proposed consolidation of forces will not come into full effect until 2034. Action to fix the forensic science system cannot wait that long.
31. If current governance arrangements were adequate, we would not have seen the stagnation or deterioration of the issues we previously identified. The Government has acknowledged that reform is needed and the Policing Reform White Paper is a welcome first step towards fixing the system, in particular by providing forensics on a national basis. But it is only a first step—further details, and action, are needed urgently to address the crisis facing forensic science, irrespective of the pace at which wider police reform happens.
32. *For reasons explored in greater depth later in this report, we recommend that the national provision of forensic science envisaged under the National Police Service is given sufficient separation from policing to ensure its independence, akin to the “sterile corridor” in place in Scotland. We refer to this as a “national forensic service”. We also advocate the immediate creation of a National Institute for Forensic Science to oversee areas such as research and development and training (see Chapter 5).*
33. *The abdication of responsibility for forensic science must end. A Minister in the Home Office and a Minister in the Ministry of Justice should have forensic science explicitly within their remit and they should work together to safeguard all aspects of the system, regardless of institutional arrangements.*

CHAPTER 3: PROVISION OF FORENSIC SCIENCE SERVICES

Forensic science market

- 34. Forensic services are largely provided either by private companies or, increasingly, in-house by the police. If the defence in any case wishes to obtain their own independent forensic science they must go to the market, and this has implications which we explore later.
- 35. As a major user of forensic services provided by private companies Chief Constable Paul Gibson, National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) Forensic Portfolio Lead, set out the police's strategic aim for the market:

“we want a flexible and agile market, one that gives value for money but allows for sufficient profit to make companies attracted to this business. We take the overview but because there are so few players that have the accreditation or will to enter the market, I guess that we have to work with what we have.”³⁶

- 36. Our 2019 report said that England and Wales had a “forensic science market which is becoming dysfunctional and which, unless it is properly regulated, will soon suffer the shocks of major forensic science providers going out of business and putting justice in jeopardy”.³⁷ This has now happened. Of the three major providers we heard from in 2018, one has been acquired (Cellmark by Eurofins),³⁸ and one (Key Forensic Services) has been through and out of administration and returned to the market offering a reduced range of services. In 2019 we warned that the instability of the market at that time was a risk to the criminal justice system and that the Forensic Science Regulator should be given responsibility for the market.
- 37. Former Forensic Science Regulator, Gary Pugh, provided an overview of the situation:

“I have seen this market go from the very early days, when it was not really a market. It was a change of funding mechanism to allow what was then the FSS to increase its resources to meet the demand from the police. This is by accident, rather than design. Before we regulate the market, we need to decide what we want it to do. It is a constrained, disjointed system at the moment and we have seen the risks. We have seen companies come and go and that can have major consequences.”³⁹

- 38. The current private or external market for forensic science services appears to be around £100 to £110 million per year.⁴⁰ The market is dominated by one company, Eurofins Forensic Services, whose Director, Dr Mark Pearse, put

36 [Q 67](#) (Chief Constable Paul Gibson)

37 Science and Technology Committee, *Forensic science and the criminal justice system, a blueprint for change* (3rd Report, Session 2017–19, HL Paper 333)

38 This acquisition was investigated by the CMA, but they ultimately decided that since there was no viable way that Cellmark could continue to function without the takeover, it could go ahead. Competition and Markets Authority, *Eurofins/Cellmark merger inquiry*, 18 July 2024.

39 [Q 105](#) (Gary Pugh)

40 [Q 12](#) (Prof Carole McCartney); [Q 68](#) (Chief Constable Paul Gibson) estimated the figure at around £60 million . The vast majority of forensic science services are purchased by the police, with a much smaller market for defence experts and private drugs testing.

Eurofins' share (now including Cellmark) at around £90 million.⁴¹ The bulk of the remainder is accounted for by Key Forensic Services. Their Managing Director, Des Vanhinsbergh, told us their annual turnover was around £18 million.⁴² So almost the entire market is dominated by two players, of which the largest accounts for over 80%. To put this in context, expenditure on forensic services provided by the police in-house was estimated by Chief Constable Gibson as around £500–550 million, across both digital and physical forensics.⁴³ This figure was subsequently confirmed by the Minister.⁴⁴

39. Professor Carole McCartney described an uncompetitive market, which “comes on top of the problems you have when there is only one customer: the police”, with a loss of capacity and of capabilities.⁴⁵ Professor Angela Gallop thought this restricted plurality of thought: “in the [previous] market, each different provider had a different professional personality” but this is now lost.⁴⁶ Gary Pugh additionally raised a concern about the historically unstable market presenting problems for evidence retention: “you could have companies coming in and out of the market but, if they leave, where do people go for the evidence that the CCRC [Criminal Cases Review Commission] needs five or 10 years after the event?”⁴⁷

Reasons for the constricted market

40. The forensic science market is unusual, with unique challenges. Dr Marc Bailey, the Forensic Science Regulator, set out some of the peculiarities:

“When you join [the market], you have to produce to the rigour both of the policing and the criminal justice systems. You have to retain evidence for many years, so that people can go back to it. You have to retain records. These all drive up costs. Any market has a high barrier to entry because of that and the market is going to be somewhat less fluid because of the barrier to entry, but that does not mean examples of that do not exist.”⁴⁸

41. Other witnesses made similar points about access to the market. Dr Des Vanhinsbergh thought the main problem was market access for smaller providers. While acknowledging that safeguards were necessary, he thought the barriers to entry were “very high” and put this partly down to the method of procurement adopted by the police:

“Sometimes the barriers are high for a reason. On the quality side, we need to ensure that we are providing the quality of service that the police and the criminal justice systems need. But, sometimes, it is just down to the structure of the procurement.”⁴⁹

41 [QQ 30 & 32](#) (Dr Mark Pearse). In correspondence following her oral evidence session with us, the Minister, Sarah Jones MP, put Eurofins' total revenue for 2025 (including Cellmark) at £97.2 million. Correspondence, *Letter from Sarah Jones MP, Minister of State for Policing and Crime, Home Office to the Science and Technology Committee*, 15 January 2026

42 [Q 31](#) (Des Vanhinsbergh)

43 [Q 68](#) (Chief Constable Paul Gibson). Estimating the total police expenditure here is problematic, as it is distributed across 43 forces and difficult to disaggregate from other expenditure.

44 [Q 112](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

45 [Q 7](#) (Prof Carole McCartney).

46 [Q 7](#) (Prof Angela Gallop)

47 [Q 105](#) (Gary Pugh)

48 [Q 105](#) (Dr Marc Bailey)

49 [Q 33](#) (Dr Des Vanhinsbergh)

42. He felt that larger organisations, such as Eurofins, were more able to access this managed procurement route.⁵⁰ The current “closed” market made it difficult for companies to attract investment.⁵¹ Forensic services can encompass a wide variety of analysis tools, including more generalist services such as DNA analysis and toxicology, to more specialist services such as ‘marks and traces’, which can include fibre analysis, glass and paint analysis, fingerprint analysis, footprint analysis, microscopy, etc. In the context of specialist services, such as many marks and traces, he argued that current procurement practices, in which such services were bundled with a range of others, made it difficult for a plurality of companies to bid:

“This year, we have seen a significant change in marks and traces. We were unable to bid for the recent tender that we have been discussing because all the marks and traces services were included in that lot. Because we could not deliver on every lot and would have been dependent on a subcontract, in effect with Eurofins, we were unable to bid, which means we no longer have a contract to deliver marks and traces services.”⁵²

43. Professor Gallop made a similar point, describing the procurement process as “horrendous” because of:

“the bunching of massive contracts together, fairly short timescales and price competition going through the floor. Suppliers are so keen to get as much work as they can to fill their laboratories and keep their scientists busy that they have been quoting prices that often barely make a profit, if at all, and sometimes even cost them money.”⁵³

44. Since 2020, police procurement of forensic services has been handled by BlueLight Commercial, a not-for-profit company established to procure goods and services across the emergency services.⁵⁴ Jo Osborne, Commercial Director, BlueLight Commercial, acknowledged that “barriers to entry remains one of the biggest challenges to us”. She said that BlueLight was “looking at how we can develop the market and encourage SMEs in particular to get more involved.”⁵⁵
45. The margins for businesses in this area appear to be thin. Professor McCartney described forensic service providers as “working on a shoestring” and “doing an incredible job, but it is unsustainable”.⁵⁶ She described a situation where companies are unable to make a profit, or to invest in research: “they are being starved, and their customer [the police] will not pay for quality or doing research … They will only pay for the bare minimum.”⁵⁷ Dr Mark Pearse of Eurofins also described the level of funding as “too low overall for the numbers of forensic scientists we need”.⁵⁸ Describing the reasons for Cellmark’s collapse, he pointed to cash flow and “legacy pricing” leading to a situation where its “cost base vastly outstripped the revenues coming in.”⁵⁹

50 *Ibid.*

51 [Q 40](#) (Dr Des Vanhinsbergh)

52 [Q 39](#) (Dr Des Vanhinsbergh)

53 [Q 4](#) (Prof Angela Gallop)

54 BlueLight Commercial, [National collaboration and direction, delivered locally](#)

55 [Q 67](#) (Jo Osborne)

56 [Q 7](#) (Prof Carole McCartney)

57 *Ibid.*

58 [Q 32](#) (Dr Mark Pearse)

59 *Ibid.*

46. One of the major concerns around the lack of profitability for forensic science providers is that they cannot afford to run forensic services that are loss-making, even if they are important for investigations: we explore this further in the section on risks to non-commercial specialisms. A further issue affecting the market, the burdens caused by regulation and accreditation requirements, is covered in Chapter 5.
47. The Government acknowledges these barriers. Amanda-Jane Balfour, Director of Forensic Services, Home Office, described some of the research she had done into the current market: “Being in forces and speaking to forensic providers, I have heard about the potential barriers to entry. I need to understand the evidence and data behind that to establish what the root causes of those barriers are.”⁶⁰ The Home Office Minister, Sarah Jones MP, said “many different small companies are innovative but cannot get the route to market because they do not have the funding.”⁶¹

Future market structure

48. Our 2019 report recommended that the Forensic Science Regulator be given responsibility for regulating the market, particularly procurement processes.⁶² While the Regulator was put on a statutory footing through the Forensic Science Regulator Act 2021,⁶³ it was not given the powers over the market we called for.
49. The current Forensic Science Regulator, Dr Marc Bailey, noted that the new Forensic Services Director at the Home Office may create a new market structure and thought this would need “an additional regulatory function” to oversee it. He appeared ambivalent as to whether this should be the FSR or “a new statutory organisation of some kind.”⁶⁴
50. Witnesses suggested alternative models. Professor Claude Roux, Director, Centre for Forensic Science, University of Technology, Sydney, advocated a partnership model in which the procurement authority and providers worked more closely to design the provision.⁶⁵ The Scottish model was also discussed: in Scotland, the Scottish Police Authority Forensic Service operates separately from the police themselves.⁶⁶ Ultimately, any new market structure requires careful thought as to its core purpose. As put to us by Dr Mark Pearse: “we have to review where we want to go with this market and what purpose a traditional, commodity-based, tender procured market serves for forensic science.”⁶⁷
51. The Minister agreed that the market was not ideal: “Is it comfortable that Eurofins now has an 80% share of the physical market? Absolutely not.”⁶⁸ She thought that: “The system is functioning” but conceded that “I do not think it is ideal. In part, the problem with the market is driving our

60 [Q 118](#) (Amanda-Jane Balfour)

61 [Q 118](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

62 [Q 18](#) (Prof Ruth Morgan) and Science and Technology Committee, *Forensic science and the criminal justice system: a blueprint for change* (3rd Report, Session 2017–19, HL Paper 333), paras 72 & 73. Prof Morgan acted as specialist adviser to that inquiry.

63 [Forensic Science Regulator Act 2021](#)

64 [Q 105](#) (Dr Marc Bailey)

65 [Q 51](#) (Prof Claude Roux)

66 See in particular evidence from Fiona Douglas, Director, Scottish Police Authority Forensic Service; [QQ 43–52](#) (Fiona Douglas)

67 [Q 32](#) (Dr Mark Pearse)

68 [Q 118](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

desire to introduce reform.”⁶⁹ However, she warned that “There will not be an immediate solution and, all of a sudden, Eurofins is not the largest [provider]. We have to work with the situation as we have it at the moment.”⁷⁰ The Minister remained committed to some level of privatisation in the system, saying that “we need the private sector—and we need it to work. We know that markets work when you have a good national framework and good regulation.”⁷¹

- 52. She said that police reform would benefit the market “by having a national centre that can procure, set the legal framework and standardise it”, noting that “when it comes to the market, your power in the marketplace is less because you might be [with individual police forces] procuring things separately.” The proposed reform would result in “better value for money”.⁷² She also suggested, following an example contract between the Metropolitan Police and Eurofins, more use could be made of “a built-in part of [a] contract that demands innovation”⁷³ to solve the problem of underinvestment in research and development by forensic science companies. She also explained that “one of the stipulations within the contract that it has with Eurofins is that it has to outsource to smaller companies for a proportion of the services that it is contracted to do. That is a good way of ensuring that you are supporting the smaller organisations.”⁷⁴
- 53. The Policing Reform White Paper sets out that, in the long run, “Through national procurement the NPS will buy technology and equipment once rather than 43 different ways, saving money through economies of scale”, including “a more consistent and resilient national forensics service.”⁷⁵ However, it does not set out an explicit role for the external forensics market beyond, presumably, continued procurement reform to lower costs and a statement that the NPS will “work in partnership with police forces and the commercial market to drive efficiency and innovation.”⁷⁶
- 54. **Our 2019 report warned that the forensic science market was at risk of becoming dysfunctional. This has now happened. Of the three major providers operating in 2018, one has been acquired (Cellmark by Eurofins), and one, Key Forensic Services, has been through and out of administration.**
- 55. **The commercial market is a now near-monopoly, with more than 80% of external forensic science services provided by Eurofins. The market is clearly not functioning well; forensic science companies have often been loss-making or operated with very thin margins. The barriers to entry for new businesses are extremely high. The near-monopoly status poses its own risks: for the range and quality of service provision; for the stability of forensic science in the UK should Eurofins exit the market; and for the Regulator who may be unwilling to impose sanctions on a near-monopoly provider.**

69 [Q 119](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

70 *Ibid.*

71 [Q 118](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

72 [Q 113](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

73 [Q 118](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

74 *Ibid.*

75 Home Office, *From Local to National: A New Model for Policing*, January 2026, [CP 1489](#), p 45

76 Home Office, *From Local to National: A New Model for Policing*, January 2026, [CP 1489](#), p 49

56. In 2019 we recommended that the Forensic Science Regulator role be expanded and resourced to have oversight of the market. This has not happened. It is unclear that anyone takes overall responsibility for ensuring a healthy market.
57. *The forensic science commercial market is in urgent need of reform, but the Policing Reform White Paper did not address it and leaves its future unclear. The Government should assess the concentration risks in the market due to the near-monopoly of Eurofins, and introduce measures to stabilise the existing provision, lower barriers to entry for new providers, and ensure that contracts from police forces or a National Police Service pay a fair price to the providers.*
58. *Contract design should be modified to incentivise small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to participate, for example with specialised procurement for niche areas or ring-fenced funding for SMEs. The Government needs to set out the long-term plan for the market in a reformed system, decide who takes overall responsibility for resilience and oversight of the market and provide appropriate resources to exercise this function.*

In-house provision of forensic science

59. Over recent years a substantial amount of forensic science has been taken in house by the police. We understand that in-house provision accounts for over 80% of police expenditure on forensic services. We have calculated this figure based on Chief Constable Gibson's (and the Minister's) estimate of in-house police expenditure of £500–550 million per year and estimates of the private sector market of £100–110 million. Firm figures are very hard to establish—as Chief Constable Gibson acknowledged, “it is difficult to obtain because it is ... co-ordinated with the budgets of the forces”.⁷⁷
60. Chief Constable Gibson described “a blended market. The most complex, high-volume, more significant analyses take part in the commercial market. The element of the market that exists in-house is more simple types of analysis and also the collection of exhibits from crime scene investigators, et cetera” as well as most digital forensics.⁷⁸ However, there are examples of police forces setting up their own laboratories.⁷⁹
61. Some witnesses expressed concern about the extent to which this work is now carried out by the police themselves. For example, Professor Gallop challenged the independence of the system:

“It is so easy to deflect an investigation. What you find depends very much on what you look for. If you are coming from a particular organisation—I would not want to say ‘with a particular mindset’—and you think someone has done something and you want to just see whether they have or not, spending as little money as possible, then your

⁷⁷ Q 68 (Chief Constable Paul Gibson). Written evidence from Tiernan Coyle, Consultant, Forensic Scientist ([FSC0012](#)). In his written evidence to this inquiry, Tiernan Coyle describes his attempts to obtain these figures through Freedom of Information requests.

⁷⁸ Q 71 (Chief Constable Paul Gibson).

⁷⁹ Thames Valley Police, [New state-of-the-art forensics centre planned for Thames Valley](#), 10 February 2023; BBC, [East Midlands police get own DNA profiling laboratory](#), 9 October 2017; GOV.UK, [Planning: BLC0300 - Merseyside Police - Forensic Toxicology Laboratory Services - Market Engagement Notice](#), 9 October 2025

selection of which items you look for and what tests you are going to do on them can skew the results you get and can skew what you make of the results.”⁸⁰

62. Professor McCartney argued that:

“Police are not scientists. There should be real independence and there has to be impartiality, and the science should be done by scientists. Everyone else around the world has recognised that you cannot turn police officers—nor should you—into forensic scientists. They are two different professions, and it is too risky in terms of impartiality and independence.”⁸¹

63. Dr Mark Pearse, of Eurofins, echoed this, arguing that public confidence in forensic results relied on separation between the policing and the science: “Having a sterile corridor between the organisation doing the investigation and independent scientists is a good thing.”

He continued:

“I worked for the Metropolitan Police and gave evidence as its employee. You are constantly juggling … integrity—that is, the deployment of the scientific method as an independent-thinking scientist versus the cognitive bias of working for an organisation that is prosecuting a case. There is no right answer to that. The overarching things should be cognitive bias and public confidence.”⁸²

64. The idea of a “sterile corridor” is a crucial factor in the Scottish system. In Scotland, forensic services are provided not by the police themselves, but by the Scottish Police Authority Forensic Sciences service. This was established by the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012,⁸³ which also created the Police Service of Scotland (merging eight previous forces) and the Scottish Police Authority (SPA). The police service and the forensic service report independently to the SPA. As Fiona Douglas, Director, SPA Forensic Sciences, noted, this created the so-called “sterile corridor” between the organisations.⁸⁴ Professor Niamh Nic Daeid, Director of the Leverhulme Research Centre for Forensic Science at the University of Dundee elaborated on the importance of this separation in the Scottish model:

“we have one forensic science laboratory, as you know, which is part of or works within an organisation called the Scottish Police Authority. That looks after Police Scotland and the forensic science laboratory, but there is what is called a “sterile corridor” between the two. That means that one is not driven by the other: the laboratory does not do work just for the prosecution; it does work for the criminal justice system and it looks at both sides of the argument, as I said earlier, with regards to the items recovered from scenes and the work done on them.”⁸⁵

65. The Scottish model operates in the context of a single unified police force. In contrast, in England there are currently 43 separate forces (though the

80 [Q.4](#) (Prof Angela Gallop)

81 [Q.4](#) (Prof Carole McCartney)

82 [Q.38](#) (Dr Mark Pearse)

83 [Police and Fire Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2012](#)

84 [Q.43](#) (Fiona Douglas)

85 [Q.9](#) (Prof Niamh Nic Daeid)

Policing Reform White Paper proposes a reduction in this number, with the final structure recommended by a review publishing in summer 2026).⁸⁶ Currently, the police forces coordinate through relatively loose mechanisms such as the National Police Chiefs' Council, which brings together police chiefs to coordinate their operations and issue guidance around forensic issues, and its Forensic Capability Network, which employs 31 staff who aim to coordinate police forensic efforts.⁸⁷

- 66. This landscape concerned some of our witnesses. For instance, Professor McCartney thought there was “a real fragmentation around the country when it comes to what forensic services you can get, depending on the police force and who they have a contract with and what for.”⁸⁸ Dr Vanhinsbergh criticised the varying policies for what evidence gets submitted to external forensic science providers, noting that there was “a large variation between police forces. There is not a standardised submission policy across policing”. He thought urgent work was needed on standardisation.⁸⁹
- 67. Scientists emphasised the importance of a holistic approach to forensic science investigations. Professor Gallop told us that:

“People, or police, seem to think that it is all about tests—just tests—and that you string together a few tests and Bob’s your uncle: you have the result and the evidence. Actually, it is about so much more than that. It is about which tests you do on what items and when you do them. It is about the whole investigative strategy and how you build on that. It is about understanding the crime scene, which is where all our forensic evidence, or most of it, comes from.”⁹⁰

- 68. Professor Roux said of forensic science in England and Wales: “The system is … overly market-driven … I can see a lack of a system-wide approach and a lot of focus on cost and turnaround time, rather than trying to maximise the information-rich content that forensic traces have.”⁹¹
- 69. One concern around the current mix of external and in-house provision is that it may hinder holistic, scientific case-based analysis. A non-standard submission policy means that the specific evidence and background information on a case that individual forensic science providers get varies from force to force; in some cases it can be limited to forensic scientists just carrying out tests to order, without information about the case that might allow them to interpret that case holistically. Dr Pearse talked about taking “the scientific discussions and the strategy away” from submissions units so that “we can talk properly around the good of the case”, rather than commoditising forensic science.⁹² He noted that: “If you then just have the model where a non-scientific expert or a non-scientist, a police officer, asks for lists of tests, then that is not very good … that is not a scientific way … to address the investigative need”.⁹³ Professor Roux described best-practice as “integrated services from crime scene to the most advanced lab specialties. It

86 Home Office, *From Local to National: A New Model for Policing*, January 2026, [CP 1489](#), para 9, Chapter 3

87 Written evidence from the Forensic Capability Network ([FSC0002](#))

88 [Q 2](#) (Prof Carole McCartney)

89 [Q 36](#) (Dr Des Vanhinsbergh)

90 [Q 4](#) (Prof Angela Gallop)

91 [Q 43](#) (Prof Claude Roux)

92 [Q 33](#) (Dr Mark Pearse)

93 [Q 32](#) (Dr Mark Pearse)

helps to have a holistic approach, so less fragmentation, fewer people between the different fields".⁹⁴

- 70. The concerns around fragmented provision were not restricted to potential quality variations. It is also inefficient. This was part of the rationale for the creation of BlueLight Commercial to handle the relationship between the police and the external market. Jo Osborne told us they were created to "do things once instead of 43 times ... we had very disparate responses with people competing in the market at the same time."⁹⁵ She later added that this duplication: "was adding cost to an already fragile market." BlueLight had been able to standardise products, specifications and process.⁹⁶
- 71. The same forces apply to internal provision. Dr Vanhinsbergh of Key Forensic Services, a commercial provider, argued that:

"The true cost of insourcing—that is, police setting up their own laboratories—is poorly understood and, to my knowledge, is not really published. Again, we would benefit from a piece of work on that to really understand what it costs to set up and accredit a forensic science laboratory".⁹⁷

He added that Key Forensic Services and Eurofins handled many thousands of tests a year and:

"There are economies of scale within that. We need sufficient volume to achieve our margins, but we can also achieve those margins by ensuring that we implement the efficiencies by doing large-scale analysis and investing in automated processes and data-handling processes. It cannot be cheaper for individual forces to carry out these tests themselves, because they do not have the same economy of scale."⁹⁸

- 72. Dr Pearse of Eurofins echoed this, describing "a mess. It really is a mess, a mixed message and a mixed strategy when forces start to insource." He acknowledged that insourcing created competition with his own business⁹⁹, as did Dr Vanhinsbergh, who described "an erosion of our margins."¹⁰⁰ Dr Vanhinsbergh also argued that, in an environment where margins for commercial providers were thin, the police were able to outcompete private providers in recruiting forensic science experts: "police laboratories typically pay quite a bit more in salary ... and obviously there is a pension on top of that."¹⁰¹
- 73. There appears to be a lack of strategic understanding of the cost and market impact of increased insourcing. As set out by Gary Pugh, former Forensic Science Regulator:

"In terms of the balance between police and the commercial sector ... we seem to have lacked ... thought about how this should operate in practice. The police service have—I will own up that I did this—ended up being provider and buyer. That means you have inevitable conflicts

94 [Q 44](#) (Prof Claude Roux)

95 [Q 66](#) (Jo Osborne)

96 [Q 69](#) (Jo Osborne)

97 [Q 37](#) (Dr Des Vanhinsbergh)

98 [Q 38](#) (Dr Des Vanhinsbergh)

99 [Q 37](#) (Dr Mark Pearse)

100 [Q 33](#) (Dr Des Vanhinsbergh)

101 [Q 38](#) (Dr Des Vanhinsbergh)

with no independent assessment of what the right solution is. We will drift to more insourcing, particularly because at the moment there is no control. A chief constable can just set up a forensic laboratory and start doing forensic science. If they meet the requirements of the [Forensic Science Regulator's] Code, that is fine. There is no scrutiny of all of those funding and investment decisions. I would start, foot on the ball, and look to see what is actually going on.”¹⁰²

- 74. Our evidence suggests that fragmentation across 43 police forces, coupled with an increase in in-house provision, is problematic. An attractive solution would appear to be to consolidate forces, or at least forensic science provision, as proposed in the Policing Reform White Paper. Chief Constable Gibson anticipated this in evidence to us: “there is an anticipation that forensics can be delivered on a national, regional and local basis with different tiers of service that sit within each of those realms. That is something we are working through as part of the transformation plan.”¹⁰³
- 75. The Minister, Sarah Jones MP, said: “A lot of the problems that we have seen in forensics over the years are a symptom of wider problems that we have had in policing, not least with the proliferation of police forces and the lack of efficiency and co-ordination that goes along with that.”¹⁰⁴ She pointed to the opportunities raised by the proposed police reforms in the white paper to standardise and reduce complexity in the in house provision: “At the moment, they [police forces] decide within each police force what they do in-house and what they do externally.”¹⁰⁵ She argued that “having 43 forces using different systems is not the way to do this, so centralisation and standardisation will help”¹⁰⁶, conceding that “it is a postcode lottery, in lots of different ways, across policing.”¹⁰⁷

- 76. She also told us:

“The thing I found most shocking, as a new Minister in this space, is the lack of real understanding of what is actually going on across the country on forensics. We do not know how much money is spent, how many delays there are or the balance between the private sector and in-house.”¹⁰⁸

She expressed hope that “If we can have performance data where we have standardisation of what is expected, what is good practice and what all forces should be doing, we can shine a light on forensics in a way that we just cannot at the moment.”¹⁰⁹

- 77. However, she was more equivocal around measures to secure the independence of forensic science from the police, saying “I do not think that, in order to deliver an unbiased and independent system, you have to divorce it completely from policing in the way that has been done in Scotland.”¹¹⁰ She said that “consistency around training and professional management” with

102 [Q 105](#) (Gary Pugh)

103 [Q 71](#) (Chief Constable Paul Gibson)

104 [Q 109](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

105 [Q 118](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

106 [Q 122](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

107 [Q 120](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

108 [Q 111](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

109 *Ibid.*

110 [Q 120](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

a new National Police Service rather than each police authority providing its own training would help secure independence. She also argued that “being able to have a line of sight to the forensics team in the national centre will help people raise professional issues that they may have in a local area” and that part of the role of the Forensic Science Regulator would provide “an accredited system where compliance involves the need for independence”. She argued that this was a “different [way] to deliver that independence.”¹¹¹ When pressed about the relative merits of Scottish system, she did concede that “in time, that may be where we end up”.¹¹²

- 78. The Policing Reform White Paper states the intention to “consolidate decision making authority for the delivery of police forensics” under the NPS to deliver all forensics as a service to policing in order to replace the “current, fragmented” system between forces. However, beyond saying that this nationally delivered forensics will comply with the Forensic Science Regulator’s Code and engender “the trust and confidence of criminal justice stakeholders”, the exact structure and safeguards are not set out.¹¹³
- 79. **There is a clear trend for more in-house provision of forensic science services by police forces. This raises concerns about oversight, quality, transparency, inconsistency and fragmentation between the 43 police forces in England and Wales. As individual police cases are increasingly fragmented between in-house capacity and external capacity, there are risks that forensic science becomes commoditised, preventing in-depth, end-to-end, scientifically consistent analysis.**
- 80. **Police organisations like the National Police Chiefs’ Council face an unenviable task in trying to coordinate approaches from 43 forces in England and Wales, often through voluntary guidance, and do not seem to have been successful in terms of addressing the risks. We welcome the proposed consolidation of police forces and the creation of the National Police Service to deliver forensics on a national basis, which may partly address this duplication and fragmentation, but questions of oversight and standards will remain.**
- 81. ***There is a need for much more transparency around in-house forensic provision: The Home Office should require forces to publish standardised data on their in-house forensics capacities, accreditation status and timeline for achieving accreditation, and any quality incidents. In-house and external forensics expenditure should be individual line items on budgets. This can be done before other reforms take place. Police forces should proactively cooperate with the Forensic Science Regulator to enable audits of their in-house forensics.***
- 82. ***There is a need to address the “commoditisation” of forensic science. The Home Office should encourage, in procurement and operation models, holistic interpretation of forensic evidence from crime scene to court, not just the cheapest or easiest tests to perform. In particular, the exhibit submission policy from police forces to external forensic science providers urgently needs to be standardised.***

¹¹¹ Q 120 (Sarah Jones MP)

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Home Office, *From Local to National: A New Model for Policing*, January 2026, CP 1489, p 48–49

83. There is also deep concern around a lack of independence or unconscious bias in whether, or how, specific tests are conducted or interpreted. There is a strong argument that, in the long run, forensic science provision should be taken out of the police service as far as is possible—as we did not hear convincing evidence that sufficient safeguards are in place.
84. *We welcome the Government's plan to consolidate forensic services into a single service. It provides an opportunity to improve oversight, quality, transparency, and consistency. Although the police will always need to be involved in commissioning and organising forensic science, forensic science should maintain its independence from the police.*
85. *In its creation of a national forensics service, the Government should maintain its independence from the police. One way to do this would be to follow the Scottish model of creating a “sterile corridor” between forensic science and the police. This will take time, but we believe it can be accomplished more quickly than the consolidation of police forces and should be embarked upon with urgency.*
86. *In the meantime, it is imperative that clear, enforceable standards and as much external scrutiny as possible are applied to in-house forensic science provision, in particular regarding what evidence is collected at crime scenes, which tests are conducted, and how the results are interpreted. Guidance from the National Police Chiefs' Council alone is unlikely to be sufficient.*

Equality of arms and forensic science in the courtroom

87. The issues discussed above about the increasing insourcing of forensic science by the police raise a further problem: equality of arms between the prosecution and defence. Forensic science is now largely controlled by the police, and the extent to which the defence has access to the science it needs is questionable.
88. Professor Niamh Nic Daeid set out her concerns:

“There has been a continued erosion in England and Wales of the independence of science. The scientific services provided to the criminal justice system are very much dictated by monetary value, which has its own knock-on effects in how that scientific evidence is generated and presented. It causes a real challenge; with this being driven predominantly through a prosecutorial frame, it causes a real challenge for the defence and for the defence expertise to explore that scientific evidence in its fullest sense.”¹¹⁴
89. She added that the chances of miscarriage of justice were increased because there was not “the scrutiny of the level of science that is required in order to have equality of arms across the system.”¹¹⁵
90. Other witnesses raised concerns about defence access to the science. Katy Thorne KC, a barrister specialising in defence, gave an example of the practical hurdles:

¹¹⁴ Q.3 (Prof Niamh Nic Daeid)

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

“prosecution experts are the custodians and gatekeepers. Let us think about a particular exhibit. Let us say a knife is examined by the prosecution experts in their lab. As the committee will appreciate, many of the prosecution experts will not do defence work anymore because they do not see it as lucrative enough. If the defence expert wants to perform the same tests on that knife, they have to go to the prosecution expert’s laboratory, which may be across the country, and do the test in the prosecution expert’s laboratory with the prosecution expert looking over their shoulder. That has an impact on how willing experts are to produce reports for the defence, but it is also incredibly labour-intensive to organise.”¹¹⁶

She thought “equality of arms is no longer in play in relation to forensic experts in court.”¹¹⁷

91. Concerns were not limited to practical or oversight issues. Many witnesses thought Legal Aid funding for defence experts was lacking and the system convoluted. Professor Carole McCartney described the Legal Aid Agency as:

“almost impossible to work with … because you have to get three quotes. Of course, you would have to find three experts and that is very difficult. Then it only ever goes with price, and we repeatedly hear that then it haggles on the price, so will knock down the lowest quotes. Very often, solicitors do not have the time and the money, and experts do not have the time or the money. Very often, they are doing this pro bono.”¹¹⁸

92. Similar accounts were given by Katy Thorne KC¹¹⁹ and Dr Mark Pearse, who described the process as “clunky and amateurish”.¹²⁰
93. Dr Pearse also told us that payment was slow, presenting cash flow problems for many sole trader experts, and he highlighted a disparity in rates between the prosecution and defence:

“The worst part of this, and the most jaw-dropping thing for me, is the rate itself. Right now, we have the Ministry of Justice that oversees the Crown Prosecution Service on the prosecution side, which pays north of £130 an hour for the services of an expert to do work for it, specifically in court preparation. It also oversees the Legal Aid Agency and pays £83 an hour to an expert providing somebody with defence. That is hardly equality in my view; it stinks.”¹²¹

116 [Q 53](#) (Katy Thorne KC)

117 *Ibid.*

118 [Q 9](#) (Prof Carole McCartney)

119 [Q 53](#) (Katy Thorne KC)

120 [Q 34](#) (Dr Mark Pearse)

121 [Q 34](#) (Dr Mark Pearse). Costs of forensic work during an investigation fall to the police (ultimately funded by the Home Office). The Crown Prosecution Service meets the costs of expert evidence in connection with case preparation. The rates are not set out in regulations (unlike the allowances for professional or ordinary witnesses) and are agreed case-by-case according to ‘Scales of Guidance’. We note that Eurofins have centrally agreed fees for the provision of their experts. The Crown Prosecution Service is a non-ministerial department funded separately by Parliament. The Ministry of Justice is responsible for the Legal Aid Agency, which pays for defence evidence. Rates for this are set out in the relevant regulations. See Crown Prosecution Service, *Expert Evidence* 10 November 2025; Crown Prosecution Service, *Witness Expenses and Allowances*; The Criminal Legal Aid (Remuneration) Regulations 2013, Schedule 5 ([SI 2013/435](#)).

94. Katy Thorne KC described how problems with evidence storage led to further concerns about equality of arms “This idea of national [evidence] storage where both sides get access would solve an awful lot of problems.”¹²² We explore this further in the report section on evidence storage and handling.
95. Our police witnesses did not seem to acknowledge the problem. Chief Constable Gibson told us “as far as I am aware, the defence obviously has access to forensic supplies to complete the necessary tests.” While he had no detail on occasions where forensic analysis was asked for but there was not capacity, he said the issue “was certainly not something that has come across my desk as a significant risk.”¹²³ On digital forensics, Deputy Chief Constable Jayne Meir, Digital Forensics Lead, National Police Chiefs’ Council, had a similar account: “The defence has the ability to scrutinise those reports and the activity of any digital forensics investigator and is also able to look at the devices themselves and utilise its own digital forensics experts should it wish to.” She did, however, note that demand was outstripping supply due to the growth of digital material.¹²⁴
96. Both police witnesses pointed to the standards enforced by the Forensic Science Regulator as a safeguard enabling a proper defence to be mounted.¹²⁵
97. The Home Office Minister, Sarah Jones MP, said that “we want to make sure that there is equality of arms and that we avoid the miscarriages of justice we have seen in the past”, noting that “a lot of the companies that work on the defence side are smaller and therefore more vulnerable in terms of their market space”.¹²⁶ Christophe Prince said on behalf of the Home Office that:
- “the defence plays a significant role in ensuring quality through the system, in providing early warnings to the Forensic Science Regulator and others ... While we are not taking direct responsibility for the defence services specifically—that falls to the MoJ—we are working collaboratively with them to ensure that the benefits that will come from the police reform will also accrue to the defence.”¹²⁷
98. The Ministry of Justice Minister, Sarah Sackman KC MP, saw her “responsibility in relation to forensic services as being one of justice and fairness ... is there an adequate supply of expertise, is it properly funded?”¹²⁸ She said that “The ability of the defence to access forensic experts with the requisite expertise and of the requisite quality is important.”¹²⁹ Speaking about the criminal justice system more broadly, she acknowledged that “the volume of information and the expertise required both to help the court and to interrogate that evidence has exploded, yet the system has been starved of funding and has not been reformed to respond to it.”¹³⁰
99. She acknowledged that the rates at which the Legal Aid Agency paid experts were “£104 an hour outside London and £83 an hour if they are within London”, but said that officials at the Legal Aid Agency told her that “they

122 [Q 59](#) (Katy Thorne)

123 [Q 71](#) (Chief Constable Paul Gibson)

124 [Q 71](#) (Deputy Chief Constable Jayne Meir)

125 [QQ 70–71](#) (Chief Constable Paul Gibson and Deputy Chief Constable Jayne Meir)

126 [Q 117](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

127 *Ibid.*

128 [Q 132](#) (Sarah Sackman KC MP)

129 [Q 133](#) (Sarah Sackman KC MP)

130 [Q 138](#) (Sarah Sackman KC MP)

considered that those rates were capable of sustaining the existing market, and that the demand for forensic experts from the defence was capable of being met at that rate.”¹³¹ This would seem to contradict evidence we heard elsewhere. It was said to be based on “constant interactions with providers”, but the Minister said that they would undertake an exercise to “proactively seek out views to understand the health or otherwise of the market” as part of a broader review of legal aid rates.¹³² However she argued that “the MoJ and the LAA do not currently take the view that there are cases where the need for an expert is going unmet at these rates; there is no evidence of that.”¹³³

100. Sarah Sackman KC MP highlighted that the rule around obtaining multiple quotes had changed: “providers are now required to submit their application for approval. If it looks out of kilter with usual rates … they might be asked to provide one alternative quote.” She said they recognised that the process that previously existed was “cumbersome.”¹³⁴ However, she said that “It is fair to say that we have not revisited the rates for forensic experts … within a tough fiscal environment, we are investing more broadly in the legal aid system, I have to pick my priorities, and where we have started is on stabilising and rescuing the systems and investing in criminal legal aid.”¹³⁵ She discussed ongoing reform to the Legal Aid Agency, including its digital systems, to enable prompt payment.¹³⁶
101. She also noted that the Criminal Cases Review Commission had “set up the Forensic Opportunities Programme to appoint a forensic services adviser … to embed the forensic science culture within the organisation, to harness new opportunities in forensics, to reopen old investigations, and to test the fairness where there are alleged miscarriages of justice.”¹³⁷
102. **There is grave concern about equality of arms for forensic science in the courtroom. Defence scrutiny provides crucial external checks on bad forensic science practice and bias. Yet the defence community of forensic experts is underfunded, fragmented, varying in quality, small in scale, and it faces significant administrative and financial barriers to taking part in many trials. This community plays a vital role in ensuring justice is done, but it is being allowed to wither away, risking miscarriages of justice.**
103. **The process for defence solicitors to obtain forensic expertise is difficult and labour intensive. Legal aid rates for defence expertise remain too low, and lower than the Crown Prosecution Service itself pays for equivalent expertise. The Minister assured us that current legal aid rates can support the demand for defence experts, but the size of the defence expert market will depend on the legal aid rate. The true metric for success is whether bad forensic science is challenged and miscarriages of justice avoided.**
104. ***The fragility of the defence expert ecosystem is a threat to justice that must be addressed. The Legal Aid Agency urgently needs to***

131 [Q 133](#) (Sarah Sackman KC MP)

132 *Ibid*

133 *Ibid*

134 [Q 134](#) (Sarah Sackman KC MP)

135 [Q 136](#) (Sarah Sackman KC MP)

136 [Q 137](#) (Sarah Sackman KC MP)

137 [Q 139](#) (Sarah Sackman KC MP)

review its rates for forensic scientists to facilitate equality of arms. At a minimum, they should be equivalent to the rates the prosecution pays and be paid promptly.

105. *Accreditation is likely to be impractical for solo or small defence practitioners, but a National Institute for Forensic Science (see Chapter 5) could maintain a register of approved experts which can be made available to the defence. These could operate under standards set by the Forensic Science Regulator.*
106. *The Legal Aid Agency and Ministry of Justice should monitor the availability and use of defence forensic experts, as well as promptness of payment, as part of determining whether the rates paid to them are adequate.*

Streamlined forensic reporting

107. Katy Thorne KC raised a further issue affecting equality of arms: the use of streamlined forensic reports (SFRs) in the courts. Introduced in 2012 to increase efficiency and reduce costs, SFRs offer a summary of key findings presented in a standardised way. An initial SFR (SFR1) is used in the process of charging a defendant or as part of case management hearings. It does not meet the level of detail required to constitute a witness statement or expert's opinion under the Criminal Procedure Rules, and may not have involved a full analysis of the exhibits or a detailed evaluation. Its purpose is to allow the parties to decide whether the evidence is relevant and for the defence to raise issues about it. If necessary, a second report (SFR2) is produced in compliance with the Criminal Procedure Rules, addressing the defence's concerns.¹³⁸
 108. The Westminster Commission raised concerns about this process. It argued that:
- “SFR1 reports are often prepared by an administrative member of staff, and it is often unclear who exactly has undertaken the testing, or the nature of their qualifications. An administrator is unlikely to fully understand the results, spot inaccuracies, or be able to highlight points which may affect interpretation.”¹³⁹
109. It further argued that SFR1s contained insufficient detail for proper challenge and led to insufficient disclosure of evidence to the defence. SFR2s, prepared by the scientist who conducted the tests, and including greater detail, were often not produced in a timely fashion.¹⁴⁰
 110. Katy Thorne KC, a member of the Commission, told us that SFR1s:

“do not set out any of the caveats. They do not set out any of the problems with continuity. They do not set out any of the sorts of disclosure issues that one would have expected back in the day. That requires the defence lawyer to understand the science without having any assistance from the expert and to identify what the problem might be. Unfortunately, that

¹³⁸ More detail on the process can be found at: Judiciary of England and Wales, *Better Case Management (BCM) Newsletter*, March 2017

¹³⁹ The Westminster Commission on Forensic Science, *Forensic Science in England and Wales: Pulling Out of the Graveyard Spiral*, June 2025, p 57

¹⁴⁰ The Westminster Commission on Forensic Science, *Forensic Science in England and Wales: Pulling Out of the Graveyard Spiral*, June 2025, pp 57–58

sometimes means you are instructing defence experts when they would not need to have been instructed if all that had been set out properly.”¹⁴¹

111. She argued that more detailed reports, overseen by a relevant forensic scientist would improve the disclosure process and save public money on commissioning further reports, which often turned out to be unnecessary.¹⁴²

112. The Ministry of Justice Minister, Sarah Sackman KC MP, said that:

“The Ministry of Justice does not decide or determine how streamlined forensic reporting is applied, and obviously we do not make decisions on an individual level ... the CPS ... bears responsibility for how that procedure is overseen.”¹⁴³

But added that the “cross-government steering groups” would “take that away” and look at concerns.¹⁴⁴

113. **Streamlined forensic reporting began as a well-intentioned cost-cutting measure but now risks providing insufficient scientific detail to enable the defence to challenge it in court.**

114. *The Crown Prosecution Service and Ministry of Justice should investigate and improve the process of Streamlined Forensic Reporting, with forensic scientists at a minimum supervising and counter signing the production of these reports. Minimum standards for SFRs should ensure that they include details of which tests have been undertaken and by whom, as well as an outline of the scientific basis of the tests and any limitations in the findings.*

Risks to ‘non-commercial’ specialisms

115. Forensic science has traditionally comprised a wide range of disciplines, or specialisms. However, we have heard that some of these specialist disciplines are now under threat. Professor Carole McCartney told us:

“There has also been also a real narrowing of our capacity and capabilities. We found that, beyond fairly standard DNA testing and toxicology analysis—which the police have a statutory duty to do—things like complicated casework, trace analysis, fibres and all those other things have just fallen off the radar entirely. They are very peripheral now.”¹⁴⁵

116. She explained that: “They used to be just a part of forensic science, but huge swathes of forensic science are now called ‘niche’ because they are very tiny and there is hardly any of it going on.”¹⁴⁶

117. Professor Angela Gallop confirmed this with specific reference to fibre analysis: “Ten or 15 years ago, we had about 40 fibre scientists; now we have a dedicated four or five, or something like that. That gives you an idea of the scale at which we have lost some of these things.”¹⁴⁷ She also cited forensic ecology, forensic pathology, and other cross-disciplinary specialisms

141 [Q 54](#) (Katy Thorne KC)

142 *Ibid.*

143 [Q 135](#) (Sarah Sackman KC MP)

144 [Q 138](#) (Sarah Sackman KC MP)

145 [Q 2](#) (Prof Carole McCartney)

146 [Q 10](#) (Prof Carole McCartney)

147 [Q 10](#) (Prof Angela Gallop)

as valuable, but noted that “all of that has been stripped away over the past couple of decades. We are now a shadow of our former selves.”¹⁴⁸

118. Witnesses were also clear about the consequences of losing these specialisms. Professor McCartney said:

“I would put my life savings on the fact that, in future, we will undoubtedly have miscarriages of justice that we will not be able to solve, either because we do not have the expertise or because we do not have the evidence because we did not seize it in the first place.”¹⁴⁹

119. Professor Gallop cited the murder of Stephen Lawrence and the ‘coastal path murders’¹⁵⁰ as cases where specialist disciplines were necessary for a solution: “We would never have solved those without textile fibres”.¹⁵¹

120. Katy Thorne KC highlighted that DNA evidence could not be relied on for everything:

“The particular problem in relation to DNA evidence is that the tests are now so sensitive, and you can get such extraordinarily tiny amounts of DNA from items, that it is not just a question of secondary transfer. It can be a question of third, fourth or fifth transfer, which means [your] DNA, for example, ends up on a cup that you have never touched. The problem with DNA is that we just do not know what we do not know, so we do not know how that has happened.”¹⁵²

This raises the salience of retaining access to a range of different types of evidence to analyse.

121. Warnings of a decline in capacity were echoed by the external forensic science providers. Speaking on behalf of the main commercial provider, Eurofins, Dr Mark Pearse said:

“The volume of marks and traces work—it is, as we discussed previously, 3% or 4% of our business—where the volumes are suboptimal and the costs of delivery, the maintenance of accreditation and investment in the infrastructure is not justified by the revenue that is brought in. Yet the police customer will tell us, quite rightly and understandably, that those services are still crucial to provide support to investigations of serious crime and threats to national security”.¹⁵³

He concluded by saying that “we have not lost any service types, but we have certainly downsized, consolidated and got to the point where the service lines, particularly in marks and traces, are not making profit and are not, therefore, sustainable.”¹⁵⁴

122. Witnesses agreed that the market would not support these specialisms in its current form. Professor Ruth Morgan told us that “it is incredibly difficult for the people who have those niche capabilities to remain viable in a solely

148 *Ibid.*

149 [Q.10](#) (Prof Carole McCartney)

150 Murders committed in Pembrokeshire in the 1980s by John William Cooper.

151 [Q.10](#) (Prof Angela Gallop)

152 [Q.58](#) (Katy Thorne KC)

153 [Q.39](#) (Dr Mark Pearse)

154 [Q.39](#) (Dr Mark Pearse)

forensic science context.”¹⁵⁵ Professor Claude Roux explained that “if it is only a market-driven system, these areas will be cut and it will create gaps, as we know.”¹⁵⁶ Dr Des Vanhinsbergh discussed attempts by Key Forensic Services to retain its marks and traces specialisms, noting: “These disciplines do not generate any profit margin for us; in fact, they are loss-making … I think it is the last-chance saloon for many of these services.”¹⁵⁷

123. Chief Constable Gibson set out the police view that they were “well aware of the existing risks to the provision of some niche services, including, as you say, marks and traces and some aspects of toxicology” noting that “these analyses are not particularly profitable for the commercial market” but that they were “keen, from a policing perspective, to retain the capability” as “part of our armoury”.¹⁵⁸ The “strategic marketplace plan” apparently “includes provision to ensure the sustainability of niche services”, however, Chief Constable Gibson noted that this would “require investment and resources in order to complete this piece of work fully.”¹⁵⁹ Jo Osborne from BlueLight Commercial said that “we will need to explore other contractual mechanisms, such as retainers and things like that … there are areas we could improve on within the niche services.”¹⁶⁰
124. Promises to act to retain these specialist disciplines are not new. Our 2019 report said that the procurement model for forensic services needed to be reformed to maintain “the capabilities of small providers in niche disciplines”.¹⁶¹ The Government’s response said it would “ask the Forensics Policy Steering Group to consider the requirements of a strategy to ensure the ongoing training of all forensic science practitioners, with a focus on maintaining competence in niche disciplines.”¹⁶² That steering group has since been disbanded and our witnesses gave every indication that little has changed, with Dr Vanhinsbergh telling us: “It is not a new issue. This has been a flagged up for several years and very little has been done about it.”¹⁶³
125. Dr Mark Pearse set out some possible solutions:

“Models such as having a national retainer fee for critical services such as these, which are suboptimal in terms of volume, would guarantee revenue and allow us both to make investments and to safeguard those disciplines for the future. At the same time, we would work together at a strategic level with policing and BlueLight Commercial to start doing continuous professional development with crime scene investigators and investigating officers in order to make sure that they are aware, and are reminded, of the full potential evidential value of these disciplines.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁵ [Q 23](#) (Prof Ruth Morgan)

¹⁵⁶ [Q 51](#) (Prof Claude Roux)

¹⁵⁷ [Q 39](#) (Dr Des Vanhinsbergh)

¹⁵⁸ [Q 70](#) (Chief Constable Paul Gibson)

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ [Q 70](#) (Jo Osborne)

¹⁶¹ Science and Technology Committee, *Forensic science and the criminal justice system: a blueprint for change* (3rd Report, Session 2017–19, HL Paper 333), para 73

¹⁶² HM Government, *Government response to the Lords Science and Technology Select Committee Report: Forensic Science and the Criminal Justice System: A Blueprint for Change*, July 2019, para 15

¹⁶³ [Q 39](#) (Dr Des Vanhinsbergh)

¹⁶⁴ [Q 39](#) (Dr Mark Pearse)

126. He expressed frustration that, despite numerous warnings, the forensic science system had not been able to safeguard these disciplines:

“We need to stop talking about that and do something to put together an economic model to make them sustainable. What is such a crying shame is that the level of funding we are talking about is in the weeds. Overall, at the moment, our service in that line is, let us say, £3 million to £4 million. We do not need much more than that to unleash it—to let it loose and flourish, work on and develop the science, and maybe work with academia to identify better methods and instruments to keep our infrastructure and instrumentation up to speed in these areas.”¹⁶⁵

127. Amanda-Jane Balfour, Director of Forensic Services at the Home Office, said: “These niche services—traces, marks, paints, fibres—are absolutely vital services for investigation, especially of complex and more serious crime. ... therefore, one of my priorities and objectives ... is to tackle this issue of niche services now.” She said she would work with private providers and BlueLight Commercial to “establish our strategic national approach and plan” to do this, but when asked whether more resources were required to protect and sustain them, she said “I do not know yet” and cited a meeting later in January 2026.¹⁶⁶ She added: “It is a clean slate at the moment in terms of what we might do ... which of those niche services will run out tomorrow? We need to do it with a risk-based, prioritisation approach.”¹⁶⁷
128. **A number of forensic science specialisms, particularly those categorised as ‘marks and traces’ (such as fibres and footprints) as well as some biological and forensic toxicology specialisms, are now at severe risk, having declined over many years. The demand for these services has fallen due to changing police policy to the point where they are unlikely to be commercially viable. External forensic science providers may be unable to afford to retain them, nor can we rely on in house provision as it currently exists to consistently apply and maintain this expertise.**
129. **However, there will continue to be cases which require this specialist expertise. There is a clear risk of avoidable miscarriages of justice in England and Wales from the loss of this “non-commercial” expertise. Despite warning of this issue in our previous inquiry, and promises to put a plan in place to preserve these disciplines, it is still unclear that there is any serious plan to maintain this vital expertise.**
130. ***Forensic science reform must result in a credible plan for the preservation of specialisms which are now at a crisis point. This could be done through procurement arrangements which include retainers to preserve this expertise, or through a National Institute for Forensic Science which acts as a hub for specialist expertise that is infrequently used and would otherwise be lost, or through the new national forensic service employing these experts to review evidence and cases on a national basis. It is time to stop talking about this and do it.***

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ [Q 114](#) (Amanda-Jane Balfour)

¹⁶⁷ [Q 116](#) (Amanda-Jane Balfour)

Evidence storage and handling

131. An issue that has raised major concerns in recent years is around the storage and handling of evidence that should be subject to forensic analysis. BBC and University of Leicester analysis showed that 30,000 prosecutions collapsed between October 2020 and September 2024 due to lost, missing, damaged, or insufficient evidence.¹⁶⁸

132. Professor McCartney explained:

“I have done a lot of research on police evidence with a colleague of mine, Louise Shorter, and there desperately needs to be something done about retaining evidential materials because, with the closure of the FSS, responsibility was dispersed to every police force to now keep its own investigative materials. It is costly and they are not experts in how to do it. So really, we should just take it off them. It is not something that individual police forces should be doing. They do not have the expertise and the money.”¹⁶⁹

133. She highlighted inconsistencies between the 43 police forces in England and Wales around evidence storage:

“the storage facilities of each police force ... have been cobbled together. Some forces have invested in it but it requires a big investment. Of course, if you are looking at policing, then building a big storage facility is not obviously top of a list of many forces’ priorities. Some of them are just old cell blocks that have been turned into cupboards.”¹⁷⁰

134. Professor Morgan described “something of a postcode lottery in whether or not your evidence will remain accessible and be preserved in ways that mean it is viable for reanalysis.”¹⁷¹

135. Katy Thorne KC set out the impacts of this on the criminal justice system:

“Have I had personal experience of important exhibits being lost or not stored in accordance with the guidelines? Yes, absolutely. That has happened many, many times. There is unfortunately a very great lack of standards and consistency across the country in relation to storage. As one example, the exhibits in a particular case were supposed to be stored and recorded—the guidelines suggested that they should be—but in fact many of them were lost. It was a cold case, but many were lost. One, an important item, was traced to a police officer’s home and had been used for training. The actual exhibit had been used as a way of training other police officers in how to identify particular issues. My experience and the experience of most people who do cold cases and appeals in particular is that the system is not working.”¹⁷²

136. Following the closure of the Forensic Science Service, the archive of evidence it used to maintain has been kept intact under a government-owned

¹⁶⁸ BBC, *Thousands of criminal cases collapsing due to missing or lost police evidence*, 6 June 2025. Note that the data includes all cases classed by the CPS as E72—which denotes ‘insufficient evidence to proceed’—while this does not necessarily imply the evidence is always lost (for example, it could include witnesses who decide not to testify after charges are filed), there are still concerns over evidence storage.

¹⁶⁹ Q 15 (Prof Carole McCartney)

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Q 27 (Prof Ruth Morgan)

¹⁷² Q 56 (Katy Thorne KC)

company, Forensic Archive Ltd (FAL), which stores evidence from criminal cases from before 2012. As its Executive Director, Alison Fendley, explained to us, its role has expanded since:

“FAL’s original mandate was to maintain a ‘closed’ archive, set up to maintain the old FSS records only. However, due to the fragility of the forensic science market we were asked to absorb the (electronic) archive of Forensic Telecommunications Service (FTS,) a digital forensic provider which went out of business in 2017, and also made preparations to take on the archives of both Key Forensic Services (KFS) and Cellmark when those companies were in parlous financial positions ... FAL is now designated the archive of last resort, available to assist the CJS (Criminal Justice System) should a FSP leave the market or require archiving assistance.”¹⁷³

137. Professor McCartney suggested by way of solution “you could expand the forensic archive we already have, which was just for Forensic Science Service materials. It has been opened once because a company went bankrupt and its materials were archived. But you could expand that or create a national archive.”¹⁷⁴ Katy Thorne KC concurred, noting that “The [Westminster] Commission has recommended a national storage capacity that is independent of the police. That would restore a little bit of faith in the way that exhibits are stored and accessed.”¹⁷⁵

138. Alison Fendley wrote that:

“The most popular option was the establishment of a National Forensic Archive. This would undoubtedly reduce the risk of loss of exhibits and increase assurance that material is being stored appropriately, for the right length of time, and would be accessible/locatable if required, either for cold-case investigation or criminal appeal.”¹⁷⁶

139. Professor Gallop also said the archive “would make an excellent base to be expanded”.¹⁷⁷
140. Responding to the BBC’s reporting on cases collapsing due to missing evidence, a Home Office spokesperson said: “We always expect forces to adhere to the National Police Chiefs’ Council’s (NPCC) guidance on storage and retention of evidence.”¹⁷⁸ The NPCC does maintain such guidance,¹⁷⁹ but does not oversee whether individual forces adhere to it—it is unclear that anyone has this responsibility.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, research has suggested that

¹⁷³ Correspondence, *Letter from Alison Fendley OBE, Executive Director, Forensic Archive to Lord Mair, Chair of the Science and Technology Committee*, 12 November 2025

¹⁷⁴ Q 15 (Prof Carole McCartney)

¹⁷⁵ Q 56 (Katy Thorne KC)

¹⁷⁶ Correspondence, *Letter from Alison Fendley OBE, Executive Director, Forensic Archive to Lord Mair, Chair of the Science and Technology Committee*, 12 November 2025

¹⁷⁷ Q 15 (Prof Angela Gallop)

¹⁷⁸ BBC, *Thousands of criminal cases collapsing due to missing or lost police evidence*, 6 June 2025

¹⁷⁹ National Police Chiefs’ Council, *National Digital and Physical Evidence Retention Guidance*, October 2022

¹⁸⁰ Carole McCartney and Louise Shorter , ‘You don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone’: Police retention of investigative materials’, *International Journal of Police Science and Management*, vol 26, Issue 1, pp 94–106: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/14613557231203493>

not all forces are aware of these guidelines.¹⁸¹ In her letter, Alison Fendley told us: “from work I have undertaken on behalf of the Forensic Capability Network (FCN), it is clear that forensic archiving is generally not managed well by policing, with material that should be retained being lost, mislaid, and sometimes inappropriately destroyed.”¹⁸²

141. Chief Constable Gibson in oral evidence appeared to believe that the forensic archive was still accepting new evidence,¹⁸³ but when we queried this, in follow-up written evidence corrected the record:

“The FAL was set up to maintain and manage the extensive archive of the FSS, on behalf of the CJS. It does not accept material from police forces on any current forensic casework, unless it is new work undertaken on an old FSS case already within the FAL archive. It is not routine for police forces to submit material to FAL, although there are regular requests made by forces for accessing material already held within the FAL. Materials relating to any new forensic casework undertaken since the operational closure of the FSS in March 2012 are being stored, managed and archived by FSPs and/or police forces themselves.”¹⁸⁴

142. On the potential of expanding the FAL, its Executive Director wrote:

“although it is expected that a national archive would save money across the CJS once established, especially when long retention times are taken into account, it will require significant initial investment and time to set up. Therefore several relatively easily implementable recommendations were also made, such as the introduction of a forensic archivist role within policing.”¹⁸⁵

143. This section of our report has focused on the challenges of storing physical evidence but digital evidence storage is also a significant challenge, as identified by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS).¹⁸⁶ We discuss this further in a later section.

¹⁸¹ Carole McCartney and Louise Shorter, ‘Police Retention and Storage of Evidence in England and Wales’, *Northumbria Law School*, vol 22, Issue 2, (2019), pp 123–136: https://researchportal.northumbria.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/22388654/Evidence_Retention_post_peer_review_version_IJPSM.pdf

¹⁸² Correspondence, *Letter from Alison Fendley OBE, Executive Director, Forensic Archive to Lord Mair, Chair of the Science and Technology Committee*, 12 November 2025

¹⁸³ QQ 78–79 (Chief Constable Paul Gibson): “Exhibits are stored in part by forces, as you say. There are also physical forensic exhibits and digital forensic exhibits, which are stored with suppliers for the duration of them being there. We also have something called the FAL, which is our archive; considerable numbers of forensic exhibits are stored there as well. The FCN has certainly been involved, through the standardisation and efficiency workstream, in making sure that there are consistent protocols on how forensic evidence is stored. Any risk is monitored again through my NPCC forensic portfolio board where I have the sub-leads from quality marketplace, digital forensics, fingerprints and other modalities that will feed in and raise any issues. Each force is responsible for its own forensic delivery in terms of the storage of what is in force. That is a matter for them, albeit, as I have mentioned, that there are now standard policies, asking forces to adhere to a consistent approach.” Then, later; “The Chair: Is there any new material going into the forensic archive? Dr Paul Gibson: Yes, as far as I am aware. Obviously, historic evidence is there from the old Forensic Science Service but there is still the capacity to store forensic samples within the archive.

The Chair: The new material is going into the forensic archive? Dr Paul Gibson: As far as I am aware. I cannot give you a volume though but I could make some investigations, if that would be helpful.”

¹⁸⁴ Written evidence from Chief Constable Paul Gibson ([FSC0005](#))

¹⁸⁵ Correspondence, *Letter from Alison Fendley OBE, Executive Director, Forensic Archive to Lord Mair, Chair of the Science and Technology Committee*, 12 November 2025

¹⁸⁶ His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), *An inspection into how well the police and other agencies use digital forensics in their investigations*, 1 December 2022

144. Government witnesses seemed open to the possibility of expanding the forensic archive. Sarah Jones MP said that “Local police forces will need evidence while they undertake their investigations … but there is a question around where it should be stored in the long term.” When asked whether the Government should fund a national archive, she said “My answer is yes, quite possibly.”¹⁸⁷ Amanda-Jane Balfour praised the work of FAL as “a fantastic, slick, professional capability” and said: “there are opportunities to look at expanding the scope of FAL to include, potentially, exhibit material and records on a national basis … We will explore this as part of the forensic reform.”¹⁸⁸
145. The Ministry of Justice Minister, Sarah Sackman KC MP, told us that “the CCRC has written to police forces on this subject … the storage and retention of historic forensic material is critical to the work of the CCRC … we need consistency across the country.” She said she was “open to” the idea of the Forensic Archive being expanded, calling it “a great idea”.¹⁸⁹
146. **The current fragmented national approach to evidence storage is a severe risk to the criminal justice system and cannot be allowed to continue. Missing and damaged evidence is collapsing criminal prosecutions and risks preventing re-testing and appeals. Since the closure of the Forensic Science Service, responsibility for retaining evidence has been dispersed across 43 police forces and multiple forensic science providers, producing widely variable practice, inconsistent standards, guidance that is not always followed, and loss or improper storage of exhibits. This responsibility has fallen to police who are often neither well-equipped nor resourced to carry it out. The current system is fragmented and likely to be more expensive and less effective than a national archive. The Forensic Archive that retains pre-2012 evidence has already had to step in on an emergency basis to store evidence from collapsed forensic science providers.**
147. *The burden of long-term evidence retention and storage should be taken away from the police and given to an independent national storage capacity. The Government should reopen the Forensic Archive. It should be empowered and resourced to routinely take new casework, handle transfers from police forces and providers, and deal with a higher volume of retrieval. The Archive could make use of regional hubs for storage, in particular where forces have been able to invest in adequate storage facilities.*
148. *While this is being set up, and for short-term operational storage of evidence, police forces should ensure they employ forensic archivists who can ensure that storage is to a high standard. Non-binding guidance from the National Police Chiefs Council is unlikely to be sufficient to ensure consistent storage across the country; the new National Police Service should set standards and inspect how evidence is stored and retained by forces.*

¹⁸⁷ [Q 121](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

¹⁸⁸ [Q 121](#) (Amanda-Jane Balfour)

¹⁸⁹ [Q 140](#) (Sarah Sackman KC MP)

CHAPTER 4: FORENSIC SCIENCE FIT FOR THE FUTURE

Research and development in forensic science

149. As with any scientific field, forensic science needs to develop. Research and new discoveries are essential to improve quality and enhance ability of the field to help deliver justice. In our 2019 report we raised concerns about the level of funding for research in the area and its oversight. In this context we recommended that a National Institute for Forensic Science be established to provide strategic oversight (see Chapter 5).¹⁹⁰
150. Witnesses to this inquiry expressed concern over the current state of the field. This included the funding available for universities, the ability of private sector providers to conduct research, and the overall coherence of the research landscape.

Research funding

151. Dr Des Vanhinsbergh distilled why it is difficult for forensic science research to access funding:

“It has been historically difficult for a forensic science project to be supported by grant funding, particularly when you are competing against genetics and the type of work that is done at, for example, the Sanger Centre—ground-breaking research that is leading to medical diagnoses. We are in the same arena when it comes to grant funding, really, and it is difficult to come up with a project that can compete.”¹⁹¹

152. Professor Claude Roux made a similar point, arguing that “Traditional funding bodies would more easily fund technology and highly innovative research” than research for forensic science.¹⁹² while Professor Ruth Morgan thought that the necessary research was not always within the remit of funding calls. She told us the sector was “reliant on a lot of research happening that is either unfunded or being shoehorned in as best we can.”¹⁹³
153. Forensic science research requires a lot of interdisciplinary conversations, both across science and between academia and others in the criminal justice system. Professor Niamh Nic Daeid told us that it needed “frank discussions between the scientists who do the science and the lawyers and judiciary who use the science for public good … so we can go off like little magpies, take science that has been done elsewhere and use it in a way that secures it for our own industry.”¹⁹⁴ She said, however, that UKRI:

“is not funding the core science. It is not funding projects to determine the persistence of fibres or DNA on materials, and that is what we need funded if we are going to interpret what finding those traces means in the real world. There is a pile of work to be done on how we engage with UKRI and how we work with it to try to get the right level of investment into this domain.”¹⁹⁵

190 Science and Technology Committee, *Forensic science and the criminal justice system: a blueprint for change* (3rd Report, Session 2017–19, HL Paper 333), paras 187 & 188.

191 Q 40 (Dr Des Vanhinsbergh)

192 Q 49 (Prof Claude Roux)

193 Q 19 (Prof Ruth Morgan)

194 Q 12 (Prof Niamh Nic Daeid)

195 Q 16 (Prof Niamh Nic Daeid)

154. Ideally, the forensic science providers would be closely involved in the process of translating academic insights into practical applications. However, Professor Nic Daeid told us:

“one of the things that … has been … impacted quite dramatically is the ability for the forensic science providers to undertake research. In normal circumstances … a research component was part of the activities that forensic science providers would become engaged with. Research is the lifeblood of science.”¹⁹⁶

155. Dr Des Vanhinsbergh of Key Forensic Services said of his company:

“We invest about 10% of our annual revenue on research and development … Even though we are an SME, we are trying to support the sector as much as we can, but there are too many barriers … and it is getting increasingly difficult … There is a lot of uncertainty going forward.”¹⁹⁷

156. We have discussed earlier in this report the tight margins on which the providers operate, as well as the discrepancies in how the 43 police forces deal with their forensic science requirements. In this context, the unpredictability of return on investment represents a key barrier for forensic science providers when undertaking research and development. Dr Mark Pearse, of Eurofins, summarised the issue of misaligned priorities, such as a mismatch between police demand for forensic services and the supply of new techniques, and the risk of wasted effort:

“We have done product development work in various areas where we see a potentially unmet need in the police. The issue in this area, though, is that, yes, we will invest to improve process for the good of service levels and sustainability within the business, but if we are to invest for new service offerings, we need to be able to get a return on investment—and to understand where that will take us for the upfront investment—because it is quite expensive and quite a lengthy process.”¹⁹⁸

157. He gave a specific example of a research project not yielding returns, where an anticipated “£1 million revenue forecast … by that customer resulted in a spend of £10,000.” He said that: “how we identify unmet needs and innovate, working with academia, and how that leads to a return on investment, needs some work.”¹⁹⁹

158. Other witnesses corroborated this misalignment of priorities by stakeholders in the sector. For instance, Professor Gallop argued that it was necessary for providers:

“to make sure that the potential users of what you are doing are keyed into the whole project and actually going to use it. I can think of three huge research projects carried out by private companies. The police all the time were saying, ‘Yes, this is exactly what we need’. When the time came … they say … ‘we are not quite ready for it’. It was just a horror show on three separate occasions. There was some really good technology, but you have to be careful about that.”²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ [Q.6](#) (Prof Niamh Nic Daeid)

¹⁹⁷ [Q.33](#) (Dr Des Vanhinsbergh)

¹⁹⁸ [Q.40](#) (Dr Mark Pearse)

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ [Q.15](#) (Prof Angela Gallop)

Oversight and coordination

159. The examples above point to a need for greater coordination and collaboration, a theme taken up by many of our witnesses. For instance, Professor McCartney told us the police “will always tell you, ‘Oh, but academics do not do the research that we want done’, and then academics will tell you, ‘We can’t get access to real-world data and cases that we can help on.’”²⁰¹
160. One area in which work is beginning to happen on better coordination, is the newly formed Policing Academic Centres of Excellence (P-ACE). Professor Morgan explained:

“The P-ACE, which was £4.5 million, was awarded to nine different centres across the UK for policing academic centres of excellence, and a small part of that has forensic science within it. The police also have the STAR²⁰² funding. That is there particularly for identification and tracing research, and it is in the region of £2 million a year for much more technologically-ready research, as well as research that will contribute to technological capabilities in policing. UKRI did a sandpit in 2023, which was up to £2 million.”²⁰³

Professor McCartney noted that the new centres were helping with “breaking down those barriers” between research and operational delivery.²⁰⁴

161. More generally, witnesses thought a strategy was necessary for the future of research, particularly in an incredibly rapidly evolving landscape. Professor Ruth Morgan warned that capacity and strategy for the future of forensic science research must be built, not assumed:

“We must have a strategy for forensic science research that ensures that we have both the immediate capabilities—underpinned by good science—and a pipeline coming through so that we are ready for the future things that are emerging very rapidly and are difficult to predict. We cannot assume that the tools we have now are going to be fit for purpose in the future.”²⁰⁵

162. Many witnesses emphasised the role of evolving digital forensics evidence types. Professor Roux argued that “significant research” was needed in this area, particularly with the advent of AI, to try to understand how to “deal with those types of traces and bring that field in, not as a silo or siloed area but rather within the forensic science framework.”²⁰⁶
163. Witnesses discussed where some of this research for the future is happening. Professor Morgan told us “the centre of gravity of that research is happening outside the university sector; possibly for the first time, it is happening in the commercial sector”. She thought there were “lots of benefits to that but also challenges.”²⁰⁷ Deputy Chief Constable Jayne Meir mentioned a “task and

201 [Q 14](#) (Prof Carole McCartney)

202 “STAR” stands for “Science, Technology, Analysis and Research”. The scheme funds research and innovation projects within the police. Forensic Capability Network, [UPDATED: STAR funding announced-have you got an idea for a research project?](#), 18 January 2023

203 [Q 19](#) (Prof Ruth Morgan)

204 [Q 14](#) (Prof Carole McCartney)

205 [Q 28](#) (Prof Ruth Morgan)

206 [Q 49](#) (Prof Claude Roux)

207 [Q 25](#) (Prof Ruth Morgan)

- finish group led by the Home Office” which was looking into research on deepfake detection.”²⁰⁸
164. Amanda-Jane Balfour agreed that “a cross-CJS approach that brings in academia, industry and the public sector” was needed for research and innovation.²⁰⁹
165. **There is a lack of coordination and funding for forensic science R&D.** Neither private companies nor the police have the budgets to invest substantially in research and development. This risks leaving forensic science services ill equipped for an age of rapidly developing technology. Forensic science has been described as a “magpie” discipline which relies on interdisciplinary research to apply new techniques from other areas of science. When research and development is carried out, misaligned priorities, such as a mismatch between police demand for forensic services and the supply of new techniques, risks wasted effort.
166. *There needs to be a long-term plan for the funding of research and development in forensic science, as well as the diffusion of novel techniques and best practice. A National Institute for Forensic Science could, in coordination with forensic service providers, police, criminal justice experts and academics, develop research priorities based on capabilities that would better serve criminal justice.*
167. *Cutting-edge interdisciplinary and applied research should be supported by UKRI, either through funding for research at a new National Institute of Forensic Science, or through specific grants for that purpose. The Government’s reforms to training the policing workforce should include greater training in newly emerging forensic science specialisms.*
168. *Research and development in forensic science benefits FSPs and police, and is a public good, but there is systematic underinvestment: An innovation levy, ring-fenced funding from the Home Office’s budget, or support from DSIT’s Missions funds (Safer Streets) could correct this.*

Digital forensics and AI

Digital forensics

169. In our 2019 inquiry we heard that at least 80% of all crime cases investigated by the Metropolitan Police had a digital element, whether it be CCTV, mobile phones and social media data, or cyber-attacks.²¹⁰ In our report we predicted that digital evidence “will become even more prevalent in trials”, recommended research on data retrieval and analysis, and suggested that the Government build capacity and resilience in this area.²¹¹ Since then, ever more of our daily lives are taking place digitally with a corresponding increase in the salience of such evidence, while the nature of technology

208 Q 77 (Deputy Chief Constable Jayne Meir)

209 Q 120 (Amanda-Jane Balfour)

210 Science and Technology Committee, *Forensic science and the criminal justice system: a blueprint for change* (3rd Report, Session 2017–19, HL Paper 333), para 145

211 Science and Technology Committee, *Forensic science and the criminal justice system: a blueprint for change* (3rd Report, Session 2017–19, HL Paper 333), paras 149–151.

continues to evolve. This has presented problems with storage and analysis of evidence; meanwhile developments in artificial intelligence have promised some solutions while also generating other challenges such as deepfakes.

170. One of the major concerns that has often been raised, including by a report from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies, Fire and Rescue Services,²¹² was around the backlog of devices that need to be analysed by digital forensics. Deputy Chief Constable Meir told us of

“the amount of digital evidence that is awaiting review and the delays that occur. HMIC reviewed forces in 2022. I would say that, since then, the number of devices awaiting review has been about the same. On the one hand, that is showing some improvement, because the number of devices and the volume of those devices is ever increasing, but it is definitely not where we want to be in terms of improving the timeliness of both gathering evidence and submission into the evidence process.”

She pointed to initiatives around automation and triaging of digital devices to help reduce these backlogs.²¹³ The Minister, Sarah Jones MP, noted “We know that there are about 20,000 backlog cases for digital forensics.”²¹⁴

171. Many witnesses highlighted the pace at which the landscape is evolving. Professor Sarah Morris, Professor of Digital Forensics, University of Southampton, told us that:

“the majority of digital forensics is firefighting … you cannot possibly cover all of the devices, updates and changes … There is a danger that we are becoming very reliant on tools in some areas. Tools will not cover the breadth of devices … it has to be dependent on the case. You could not cover everything all the time and keep up; there are not enough hours in the day.”²¹⁵

172. Jake Moore, Global Cybersecurity Adviser at ESET Security, also hinted at a pacing problem, stating: “criminals, they do not care about regulation”, leaving law enforcement in a constantly evolving environment, where they struggle to keep up.²¹⁶

173. In this context, Professor Gallop noted a seeming overfocus on digital forensics, to the detriment of traditional forensic science:

“investment and interest [seems] to have been diverted to digital forensic. If it is digital, then it can have whatever it wants. Whether it is successful or not … that has created a great problem for traditional forensic science, which will always be important”.²¹⁷

174. Professor McCartney also expressed concerns:

“Now we solve everything using digital forensics … it is not particularly well regulated … we will undoubtedly have miscarriages of justice that we will not be able to solve, either because we do not have the expertise

²¹² His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), *An inspection into how well the police and other agencies use digital forensics in their investigations*, 1 December 2022.

²¹³ Q 75 (Deputy Chief Constable Jayne Meir)

²¹⁴ Q 112 (Sarah Jones MP)

²¹⁵ Q 83 (Prof Sarah Morris)

²¹⁶ Q 92 (Jake Moore)

²¹⁷ Q 4 (Prof Angela Gallop)

or because we do not have the evidence because we did not seize it in the first place.”²¹⁸

- 175. Professor Morgan highlighted the differing nature of digital versus physical evidence. She noted that “we cannot transpose the way that we evaluate and interpret trace physical traces to digital traces”.²¹⁹ Professor Morgan demonstrated that physical evidence, such as a “drop of blood” often represents a “single object of study” where one is looking to draw out as much information as possible from an “incredibly small amount of material”. In contrast, digital traces, such as a “text or email” potentially involve an overwhelming amount of material and therefore objects of study. Therefore, the challenges lie first in finding what is relevant, then interpreting it—a marked difference from physical traces.²²⁰
- 176. She emphasised the challenge of managing multiple objects of study—ranging from the intent of the author to metadata—considering how this complex evidence can be presented particularly in a legal setting, which requires the ‘beyond reasonable doubt’ standard of proof. She suggested that this evolving challenge requires “a huge amount of work to be done.”²²¹
- 177. Katy Thorne KC told us that due to cost-cutting, much of the digital forensics analysis was being undertaken internally by the police “to a greater or lesser extent with expertise”. Therefore, “the defence has to go to forensic experts, perhaps unnecessarily, to clear up the mess” this can create. She urged the system “not to rely on non-expert experts. Do not rely on a police officer to do a download and interpretation; ask an expert to look at something.”²²²
- 178. Other witnesses spoke to evolving evidence types—with many noting the growing threat of fake information. Chief Constable Paul Gibson told us the police were “grappling with many challenges, such as deepfakes, synthetic media, AI and digital forensics”.²²³ Professor Morgan stressed that: “misinformation, disinformation and fake information are at the very top of the national security agenda” and suggested that forensic science was a well-placed discipline to address this.²²⁴
- 179. Jake Moore warned that “deepfakes, in particular, are one of the bigger issues” and that it was only “sometimes” possible to spot manipulation as “the technology is improving weekly at the moment”.²²⁵
- 180. Professor Sarah Morris also pointed to the “cat and mouse” nature of the problem: “Whatever we come up with to find a deepfake, there will be people who find alternatives as soon as it is released.” She thought there would always need to be a human “in the loop”.²²⁶
- 181. Jake Moore also emphasised the risk of miscarriages of justice if data could not be located. He said that due to:

218 [Q.10](#) (Prof Carole McCartney)

219 [Q.25](#) (Prof Ruth Morgan)

220 [Q.20](#) (Prof Ruth Morgan)

221 [Q.25](#) (Prof Ruth Morgan)

222 [Q.61](#) (Katy Thorne KC)

223 [Q.64](#) (Chief Constable Paul Gibson)

224 [Q.25](#) (Prof Ruth Morgan)

225 [Q.92](#) (Jake Moore)

226 [Q.91](#) (Prof Sarah Morris)

- “the increase in encryption … as well as the dark web … users will … not leave any evidence behind them … Without such evidence, you remove digital forensics from the case. We were giving devices back and we could not prove what was on there; that is a miscarriage of justice in itself”.²²⁷
182. Katy Thorne KC warned: “the issues with AI will be coming. Deepfakes will be coming. … I have not heard of it in cases yet, but it will be coming.”²²⁸
183. In particular, issues were raised around the lack of accreditation for digital forensics in-house in police forces. Steve Rick, the CEO of Forensic Analytics, said “to the best of my knowledge, although wet forensics are generally compliant with the [Forensic Science] Regulator’s Code, digital forensics are not.” In his area of cell site analysis, he said that: “No police force in … England and Wales … has pursued accreditation.”²²⁹ Matt Gantley, CEO of UKAS, said that “The lowest levels of compliance are particularly in the areas of digital forensics, data capture, processing, analysis and digital storage devices.”²³⁰ Chief Constable Gibson said that “Adherence to the Codes and the accreditation in physical forensics is more advanced than in digital forensics and areas such as CCTV at this moment in time.”²³¹ Professor McCartney warned: “We are so focused on digital … it is becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy … there are a lot of risks attached to that because it is not particularly well regulated. They have huge problems in digital forensics.”²³²
184. The police and regulators explained in part why accreditation lags behind in digital forensics, with Deputy Chief Constable Meir saying that:
- “the digital forensics activity that happens in a digital forensics unit is being accredited in forces … However, what is not currently accredited is when an officer seizes a device at an address … or what they may do in a police station using a kiosk where they triage and take material from that device.”²³³
185. Gary Pugh explained “The recovery of data is going to be a core competence of every detective, so we need to find a way to regulate the front line. Accreditation would be too onerous. We could not put every investigator through that same process.”²³⁴
186. Some measures have begun to be put in place in order to adapt to the volume and complexity of digital evidence. Chief Constable Gibson highlighted “increased automation across advanced analytics, digital forensics and other services and pointed to the work done by the Forensic Science Regulator to address “accreditation and regulatory compliance … to ensure that safe and robust evidence enters the criminal justice system”.²³⁵ Deputy Chief Constable Meir added:

227 [Q 88](#) (Jake Moore)

228 [Q 61](#) (Katy Thorne KC)

229 [Q 86](#) (Steve Rick)

230 [Q 96](#) (Matt Gantley)

231 [Q 72](#) (Chief Constable Paul Gibson)

232 [Q 10](#) (Prof Carole McCartney)

233 [Q 72](#) (Deputy Chief Constable Jayne Meir)

234 [Q 100](#) (Gary Pugh)

235 [Q 64](#) (Chief Constable Paul Gibson)

“Most recently, we have been working with the Forensic Capability Network on understanding which digital forensics tools are available to us, what the strength of the marketplace is and how we may tackle emerging risks in the digital forensics portfolio—particularly in relation to deepfakes, which have been mentioned. We now support a Home Office task and finish group looking specifically at AI in the criminal justice system.”²³⁶

Data storage

187. As with other evidence, digital evidence must be stored, sometimes for an extended period. This includes both devices, such as mobile phones, and the data itself. We heard that “we are not good in this country at storing data relevant to forensic science.”²³⁷
188. Deputy Chief Constable Meir told us that as the amount of digital material continued to grow, while police forces needed a more flexible, less burdensome storage solution—much material was currently stored on internal hard drives and servers.²³⁸ She told us it that any solution needed to be “cost effective, secure and ensure … a consistent approach across the country”. She noted that cloud storage and automation tools were not consistently used across all forces although they were “moving into” that direction.²³⁹ Deputy Chief Constable Meir noted that “around a third of forces”²⁴⁰ were using cloud-based storage, and this was needed “as the amount of digital material continues to grow”, but that “it can be costly to retrieve the evidence”²⁴¹ stored on the cloud and the police needed a more coordinated approach to procuring cloud storage.²⁴²
189. Dr Marc Bailey, the Forensic Science Regulator, supported an extension of powers that would ensure “cloud data, especially held in other geographic regions, is subject to the Code, so you are not seeing digital evidence becoming invalid because of that”.²⁴³
190. Professor Nic Daeid emphasised the importance of good data storage for the development of AI solutions:

“As we progress with … machine learning and artificial intelligence … data becomes key and king. We are not good in this country at storing data relevant to forensic science … If we made that data available … we can use that to … generate AI models.”²⁴⁴

She thought that an archive or repository for the data should be “a national asset”.²⁴⁵

236 [Q 65](#) (Deputy Chief Constable Jayne Meir)

237 [Q 15](#) (Prof Niamh Nic Daeid)

238 [Q 75](#) (Deputy Chief Constable Jayne Meir)

239 [Q 76](#) (Deputy Chief Constable Jayne Meir)

240 [Q 75](#) (Deputy Chief Constable Jayne Meir)

241 [Q 78](#) (Deputy Chief Constable Jayne Meir)

242 *Ibid.*

243 [Q 108](#) (Dr Marc Bailey)

244 [Q 15](#) (Prof Niamh Nic Daeid)

245 [Q 16](#) (Prof Niamh Nic Daeid)

AI and machine learning for evidence handling

191. Professor Morgan noted the “huge amount of potential” for the use of AI in forensic science²⁴⁶ and told us that it was already being used in “large-scale databases and triaging”, that AI was not “brand new” to forensic science, but that it is evolving, and that there was a “growing sense that we are entering into a significant decade in the changes that we are going to be seeing”²⁴⁷ She suggested it could go further, even bringing “about a renaissance of physical trace in terms of the capabilities that those technologies are going to bring us … particularly … fingerprints and footwear.”²⁴⁸
192. However, Fiona Douglas cautioned that the sector were still “novices” in understanding its applications. She warned that it “needs to be thought about carefully, particularly from a quality management and regulation perspective.”²⁴⁹
193. Professor Roux also emphasised the uncertainty in this area, suggesting that “Everyone is flying blind in that space.”. He noted that the rate of evolution in both digital forensics and AI, meant that “current systems are pretty much unsustainable”. He urged that “risk management of using AI must be done. The transparency must be addressed.”²⁵⁰
194. We heard that sufficient oversight was not yet present, which has led to some concerns about regulation of digital traces.²⁵¹ Furthermore, we were told that regulation would need to change as AI is integrated further, including careful consideration of ethics, statutory frameworks and quality standards in order to maintain public confidence.²⁵²
195. Within the context of the courts, Professor Roux stressed the need for human oversight and responsibility, not just regulation:

“You are not going to get a black box AI machine in the witness box, so the expert who has used such a system must be responsible for what they have done. It needs international standards, education and a lot of research … It needs collaboration between government, academia and the tech industry … it is absolutely crucial that there is integration of that space under a forensic science framework. Otherwise, we run the risk of going more and more towards what I would call pseudoscience.”²⁵³
196. Jake Moore described AI as “a necessary evil … a wonderful tool [that could] cause so many issues. To see it as a silver bullet is extremely dangerous. To see it as an extra pair of eyes or hands is fortuitous for the human using it”. He added:

“we do not want to release AI tools that are not perfect too quickly. In so many areas of technology, we see tech coming out just because it is new technology. It is released into the wild without real evaluation. We need

246 [Q 20](#) (Prof Ruth Morgan)

247 [Q 25](#) (Prof Ruth Morgan)

248 [Q 20](#) (Prof Ruth Morgan)

249 [Q 50](#) (Fiona Douglas)

250 [Q 50](#) (Prof Claude Roux)

251 [Q 25](#) (Prof Ruth Morgan)

252 [Q 50](#) (Fiona Douglas)

253 [Q 50](#) (Prof Claude Roux)

good legal frameworks ... better regulation of AI. If we can speed that process up in legislation and regulation, it will benefit everyone.”²⁵⁴

197. Similarly, Steve Rick of Forensic Analytics Ltd doubted that AI would be a panacea and thought it “quite dangerous if it is used in the evidential chain.” He pointed to problems experienced by the police in using AI to translate vernacular Albanian to illustrate some of the drawbacks.²⁵⁵
198. The Home Office Minister, Sarah Jones MP, told us:

“On deepfakes, there is a piece of work going on in the Home Office about this, but it is a huge challenge. We need the tools that tell us whether something is deepfake, and we need to work with the private sector to develop those tools.”²⁵⁶

199. Christophe Prince referred to “one quite promising tool” to identify deepfakes, which was “procured by policing and is being implemented.”²⁵⁷
200. The Minister was optimistic about the prospects for AI, stating that: “If we get AI right and we take away some of that bureaucracy, they [police] will have more time to be professionally curious and interested and to do the things that we want them to be doing when thinking about cases.”²⁵⁸ She talked about encouraging “police forces to use AI” in “low-risk cases” but warned that “if we get it wrong it is catastrophic.”²⁵⁹ She spoke of the need to “encourage an ecosystem of research and innovation” through UKRI and private sector providers to provide technological solutions to the problems in digital forensics including better triaging of which devices to analyse.²⁶⁰
201. Amanda-Jane Balfour described a piece of work that was commissioned jointly by her and the NPCC digital forensic lead “to identify which areas are ripe for automation, new technology and efficiency improvements, and to establish how we can reduce these backlogs quicker.”²⁶¹
202. The Policing Reform White Paper sets out the creation of “a new National Centre for AI in Policing (“Police.AI”) ... investing £115 million over the next 3 years” in order to “create a platform for identifying, testing and then scaling AI technology”, “enabling Chief Constables to deploy AI responsibly and in a way which builds and maintains public consent.” This will include “a public facing registry of the AI being deployed by police forces and the steps they have taken to ensure the reliability of tools.”²⁶² The White Paper refers to the backlog of 20,000 devices awaiting forensic analysis, which it attributes to “a lack of strategic coordination and funding across forces”.²⁶³
203. **Digital forensics is a growing area of concern. We highlighted the problems with the volume of such evidence, and the forensic science sector’s ability to process, analyse and store it, in our 2019 report, recommending a substantial programme of research into digital**

²⁵⁴ [Q 91](#) (Jake Moore)

²⁵⁵ [Q 91](#) (Steve Rick)

²⁵⁶ [Q 126](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

²⁵⁷ [Q 126](#) (Christophe Prince)

²⁵⁸ [Q 127](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

²⁵⁹ [Q 126](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

²⁶⁰ [Q 125](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

²⁶¹ [Q 125](#) (Amanda-Jane Balfour)

²⁶² Home Office, *From Local to National: A New Model for Policing*, January 2026, [CP 1489](#), p 13

²⁶³ Home Office, *From Local to National: A New Model for Policing*, January 2026, [CP 1489](#), p 18

forensics. The situation since then has barely improved, with backlogs still undermining timely justice.

204. The police are expanding their use of cloud storage, but consistency is needed in how digital forensic evidence is stored and analysed. The great majority of digital forensics work is handled in-house by the police. As we have seen with forensics more generally, this raises concerns around accreditation, regulation, and oversight.
205. Since our 2019 report, AI has developed rapidly. Generative AI presents an increasing challenge to the reliability of digital evidence: deepfake images and other data are increasingly difficult to detect. This will be a challenge for investigators, but also for courts: judges, counsel and jurors will all need to be equipped and assisted in understanding the evidential reliability of such material.
206. AI is also a potential means of analysing huge volumes of data. However, this needs to be done reliably, fairly, and in a trusted way, something which current AI models struggle with to the standards the criminal justice system demands. We were unconvinced that the current policing and criminal justice system is sufficiently well-equipped to make the best use of these technologies, nor is the market well-positioned to allow new providers to innovate.
207. *There is clearly an urgent need for a research and development programme, funded by the Government, to address multiple challenges associated with digital evidence, including how to store such evidence, how to undertake trusted analysis of digital forensic data, and how to manage emerging threats from deepfake images. As in many other policy areas, regulation and standards for the use of AI in forensics lag well behind the technology.*
208. *We welcome plans in the White Paper to develop AI capabilities, along with £115 million of new funding. It is unclear how much of this funding will be spent strictly on forensics. This should be clarified. The new centralised forensics function should build national capacity in this area, providing guidance and approved software, algorithms, and procedures, for the storage and analysis of digital forensic data and use of AI. These should be developed in coordination with the judicial system to ensure that the procedures are trusted and explainable for use in court. There will also need to be substantial training for officers involved in commissioning and using AI tools to understand their capabilities, limitations and risks.*

Training and retention of forensic scientists

209. Professor Gallop expressed concern that forensic science expertise was in decline:

“Take someone like me who has specialised in, among several things, the investigation of really complex and often historical cases. Now you could count them on fewer fingers than the fingers on one hand. It is terrifying to watch that expertise just drifting away and nobody really noticing.”²⁶⁴

264 Q.1 (Prof Angela Gallop)

She thought there could be a role for a national forensic science institute in identifying skills gaps and coordinating delivery with the universities.²⁶⁵

210. Professor Nic Daeid thought some current “forensic science” degree courses were inadequate:

“Many of them will teach a little bit of science and then bolt on forensic applications, which means that in some cases, but not all, we produce graduates who do not know enough science to be useful within the forensic science domain.”²⁶⁶

211. She thought that the skills needed were changing, degrees had not caught up and there was “a disconnect between what is needed and what we, as the academy, provide. We are simply not listening, and have not listened for some time to our colleagues in practice.”²⁶⁷

212. Professor Morgan argued for the importance of primary discipline undergraduate degrees followed by “master’s degrees that can then bring forensic science approaches, methods, theory and application capability to that first disciplinary skillset.” She stressed the need for an interdisciplinary approach:

“a thriving next generation of forensic scientists will be a broad and diverse group who have different disciplinary capabilities and can bring them together, but they then need to be able to critically think, be analytical and think laterally and across problem and challenge areas.”²⁶⁸

213. Professor Morgan’s main concern, though, was retention, particularly in the digital sphere: “it is difficult for forensic science entities to retain their talent because they simply earn so much more money in the private sector.”²⁶⁹ A similar point was made by Professor McCartney, who described salaries in the sector as “deplorable”.²⁷⁰

214. Ministers acknowledged these issues, with Sarah Jones MP noting that:

“we have had huge problems in forensics, with an ageing population in areas such as fingerprints. We have people moving to the private sector because they are paid more, and we have welfare issues where people are having to look at hugely challenging and upsetting information: are they being looked after properly? Having a workforce plan nationally where you can look at things like training, standardisation and those kinds of things can be transformational.”²⁷¹

215. The Government’s proposed National Police Service will incorporate the College of Policing and will therefore, in time, have a significant role to play in training provided by the police.²⁷²

- 216. There are concerns over the training of the next generation of forensic scientists and the retention of those that already exist; this**

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ [Q 16](#) (Prof Niamh Nic Daeid)

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ [Q 21](#) (Prof Ruth Morgan)

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ [Q 16](#) (Prof Carole McCartney)

²⁷¹ [Q 111](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

²⁷² Home Office, *From Local to National: A New Model for Policing*, January 2026, [CP 1489](#), p 10

becomes especially acute as experts trained in the former Forensic Science Service begin to retire. In particular, holistic, crime-scene investigation exposure, and end-to-end forensic science from crime scene to courtroom, is needed, but this practical on-the-job training is happening less often.

217. Witnesses raised concerns about the inadequacy of some forensic science undergraduate degrees. There is a concern many degrees might be training people for jobs that do not exist given extreme budget constraints in the area and the lack of clear career pathways. When combined with structural issues in how forensic science is provided, the risk is a ‘de-skilling’ of forensic scientists from holistic, expert scientific investigators to providers of commodified tests, to the detriment of justice.
218. *There is a need to provide quality training for the next generation of forensic scientists. Police forces should, where appropriate, facilitate trainee forensic scientists to follow the progress of individual cases to encourage holistic, end-to-end investigation, from crime scene to courtroom. The Office for Students should review forensic science courses, in particular their quality and the information made available to students about their job prospects, as it is a longstanding area of oversupply. A National Institute for Forensic Science, together with the proposed national forensics service and training function in the National Police Service, could coordinate key training in core methods and novel techniques and bring together forensic science providers, academics, and police forces.*
219. *As part of the Government’s renewed workforce and training plan, policing authorities should improve the quality of education in forensic science for all officers. They should seek to broaden the range of career paths that allow the scientifically trained to become forensic scientists.*

CHAPTER 5: OVERSIGHT, RESPONSIBILITY AND STRUCTURAL ISSUES

Forensic science regulation and accreditation

The evolving role of the Forensic Science Regulator

220. The Forensic Science Regulator is the regulator of forensic science activities within England and Wales's legal system. It is an individual post supported by a civil servant secretariat and is sponsored by the Home Office, although it is a publicly appointed role that "operates independently of the Home Office, on behalf of the criminal justice system as a whole."²⁷³ It is a small organisation. The FSR report 2023–24 noted that it operated with 8.4 full time equivalent staff, including the Regulator, and a budget of £788,137 a year, which was mostly staff pay.²⁷⁴ Dr Marc Bailey, the current Regulator, told us that he had "since had an increase in funding of about 20%. I now have a team of 14 people and an increase in operating budget".²⁷⁵
221. The Regulator is advised by the Forensic Science Advisory Council. The Regulator post dates from 2008. The office of Forensic Science Regulator was originally created without any statutory powers. It was given statutory powers in the Forensic Science Regulator Act 2021.²⁷⁶ This followed widespread and longstanding calls (including from this Committee in our previous inquiry) to give the Regulator statutory enforcement powers as it had previously relied on voluntary codes of conduct.²⁷⁷
222. The Forensic Science Regulator Act 2021 requires the Regulator to prepare and publish a Code of Practice for forensic science activities in England and Wales. It also provided the Forensic Science Regulator with powers to investigate and take enforcement action, including issuing compliance notices which can prohibit further forensic science activities, where there are substantial risks to criminal investigations or proceedings.²⁷⁸ The Code came into force in October 2023.²⁷⁹ During our inquiry we spoke to both Gary Pugh, the Regulator from 2021 to 2025 and over the period when the Code was introduced, and Dr Marc Bailey, who was appointed Regulator in July 2025.²⁸⁰
223. While the Forensic Science Regulator sets this Code of Practice, the UK Accreditation Service (UKAS) plays a role in assessing whether providers are compliant with the Code and issuing them with accreditation. Their CEO, Matt Gantley, explained that:

²⁷³ The Regulator is supported by a team of civil servants (5 scientists) with additional support provided by shared services from the Home Office and Home Office Science Secretariat. As part of this support, the Home Office occasionally procures small pieces of research on the regulator's behalf. Forensic Science Regulator, [About us - Forensic Science Regulator](#)

²⁷⁴ Forensic Science Regulator, [Annual Report 25 July 2023 – 24 July 2024](#), July 2025

²⁷⁵ [Q 98](#) (Dr Marc Bailey)

²⁷⁶ [Forensic Science Regulator Act 2021](#)

²⁷⁷ Science and Technology Committee, [Forensic science and the criminal justice system: a blueprint for change](#) (3rd Report, Session 2017–19, HL Paper 333), para 109

²⁷⁸ The Regulator sets out its own approach to ensuring compliance here: Forensic Science Regulator, [Policy on enforcement action taken by the Forensic Science Regulator](#), 24 April 2024

²⁷⁹ Home Office and Forensic Science Regulator, [Forensic science activities: statutory code of practice](#), 13 March 2023

²⁸⁰ Forensic Science Regulator, [New Forensic Science Regulator appointed for England and Wales](#), 22 July 2025

“we assess the forensic science provider to see if they meet the relevant requirements of the international standard as well as the code of practice for forensic science providers. If they meet all of those requirements, we grant accreditation, and then there is a process of surprise assessments every year, as well as, in the fourth year, a full reassessment of the whole system again … In addition … if there are complaints or a whistleblower, or we have issues raised to us confidentially and directly, we have the right to go and do an unannounced visit of the laboratory or the police forensic science provider to understand what is going on on-site.”²⁸¹

- 224. We heard from Steve Rick, CEO of Forensic Analytics, a smaller digital forensics company which had recently been accredited. Despite noting the “rigours” of the process he supported it because “it gives you an assurance that you have a verifiable process that is repeatable.”²⁸²
- 225. Gary Pugh explained how the Code related to the courts: “In the Act, it says that the Code is admissible in criminal proceedings and, if a person is not acting in accordance with the Code, there can be an admissibility challenge. This is the route by which forensic science regulation gets into the courtroom”.²⁸³ The Home Office Minister, Sarah Jones MP, said: “If you are not compliant and you are putting evidence forward in court, you have to say that you are not and there will be problems with that. That is an incentive as well.”²⁸⁴ On the approach to investigations Mr Pugh noted: “The Regulator can conduct an investigation if it believes that there may be a substantial risk to criminal investigations or proceedings. It can take enforcement action if it believes that there is a substantial risk, and issue a compliance notice.”²⁸⁵
- 226. Despite efforts to formalise the regulation of forensic science in recent years, there are still some gaps. Gary Pugh explained:

“I should have had a framework agreement between me and the Permanent Secretary. I did not have one. I worked with the Home Office. We found the template and produced it. When I left, it was sitting with the Treasury. This is still not published. … we did not have a process where someone—and I am not expecting the Home Secretary to—at a senior level would talk through what the requirements were for the Regulator, and whether those resources could be made available.”²⁸⁶

- 227. Dr Marc Bailey agreed, noting that “the framework agreement, it is still, sadly, waiting to be delivered. I would really like to encourage the Home Office to progress this … We do need this, and it will set some powers.”²⁸⁷
- 228. Dr Bailey set out that “I would still like to hold out for more resources … with that new staff, I was able to run a focused inspection this year … If I had more resources, I could do this more effectively.”²⁸⁸ He said that there was a need for “a budget for investigations … I am trying to get funding from the Home Office for an extraordinary [investigation, but] there is no

²⁸¹ [Q 98](#) (Matt Gantley)

²⁸² [Q 88](#) (Steve Rick)

²⁸³ [Q 94](#) (Gary Pugh). In addition, Criminal Procedure Rule 19.4 requires experts to set out the details of their accreditation in their reports. [The Criminal Procedure Rules 19.4 2025](#)

²⁸⁴ [Q 124](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

²⁸⁵ [Q 94](#) (Gary Pugh).

²⁸⁶ [Q 98](#) (Gary Pugh)

²⁸⁷ [Q 98](#) (Dr Marc Bailey)

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

structured mechanism for me to do that.”²⁸⁹ More resource would enable the Forensic Science Regulator to bring more activities under its recognised Code of Practice, with Dr Bailey saying: “Gary [Pugh] mentioned that there are 51 recognised forensic science activities. Why are there only 34 in the Code? It is due purely to the amount of time and resource” and said that more resources would enable “us to bring all of forensics up rather than selective areas.”²⁹⁰

229. He also told us:

“Another key area that I would really seek support on is information technology. For the first time this year, we had an IT portal—again, thank you to the Home Office—which enabled policing and other forensic science practitioners to submit data on their declarations and their compliance. It had a lot of teething problems and it is also only a step in the right direction. ... A lot of concerns have been raised with the Regulator about the difficulty of using the current version of the portal. More support on the portal and more integration would enable policing to improve their compliance so much more effectively, as well as the FSPs.”²⁹¹

230. Witnesses stressed the importance of regulation in this area and said that accreditation served an important purpose in maintaining quality control for forensic science. Dr Pearse of Eurofins told us that, prior to improved regulation:

“What we were facing were expert witnesses going into trials and presenting themselves in front of the court with very little way of demonstrating compliance to a quality culture and a standard. [The Code] is good. It has done well in defining what forensic science activity is all about and what standards are expected; that is detailed in a very lengthy and detailed Code of Practice.”²⁹².

231. Dr Pearse felt that Eurofins had “a culture of self-referral” to the Regulator and felt that the Regulator was working well with them.²⁹³ Dr Vanhinsbergh of Key Forensic Services also praised the Code: “The Code provides us with a really good framework—something that was absent in the past. Of course, it sets the bar quite high, as it should, and we strive to ensure that we maintain compliance for all the forensic science activities we carry out.”²⁹⁴ However, some smaller providers of forensic science have faced issues with the regulatory system which we will discuss in the next section.

232. Although the forensic science community generally welcomed putting the Regulator on a statutory footing, our witnesses highlighted some gaps and concerns. Professor Gallop told us that the Regulator might be unwilling to use their powers given the state of the market:

“We have a Regulator, and he sets timescales for when accreditation should be achieved. But, if the police say to him, ‘I’m afraid we can’t do

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁰ [Q.98](#) (Dr Marc Bailey). Dr Bailey subsequently explained in a correction to the evidence transcript that, while there were originally 34 activities, there are now 36.

²⁹¹ [Q.98](#) (Dr Marc Bailey)

²⁹² [Q.41](#) (Dr Mark Pearse)

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁴ [Q.41](#) (Dr Des Vanhinsbergh)

that, and if you're not going to let us do the tests if we don't have this accreditation, then I'm afraid the system will fall apart and we won't be able to do our job', then the timetables get put back. So it impinges on the Regulator.”²⁹⁵

233. However, this characterisation was strongly disputed by Gary Pugh, the former Forensic Science Regulator, who said in written evidence that:

“There is no ‘accreditation timetable’... My predecessor [Dr Gillian Tully] identified timescales for organisations to achieve accreditation but this was superseded by the statutory Code ... With regard to being fearful of disruption this is not a statement I recognise. As the Regulator if I took regulatory action that resulted in major disruption in supply of services I would inform relevant stakeholders but this would not in any way have inhibited me in [having] taken enforcement action in line with provisions of the [Forensic Science Regulator Act 2021].”²⁹⁶

234. Professor Morgan highlighted that:

“the recommendation that the Committee made in 2019 ... was not just about awarding statutory powers to the Regulator but about expanding and broadening the remit of that role and enabling it to do that regulatory work. That did not happen. That is why things are still challenging. We are seeing a piecemeal development rather than that broader picture of equipping that role to do the regulatory work.”²⁹⁷

235. Gary Pugh noted that there were issues around how the Forensic Science Regulator Act dealt with the UK’s different legal jurisdictions, noting “examples I dealt with where I could not have taken action against individuals who were giving evidence in England and Wales because they were not based in England and Wales” but instead in Scotland or Northern Ireland. He also highlighted that “Crown bodies are exempt from investigation and enforcement” by the Forensic Science Regulator under the Act, which affected “the National Crime Agency ... and immigration enforcement, both of which are not compliant with the Code” as they are exempt.²⁹⁸

236. Matt Gantley told us that:

“In the period from 2020 to date, the number of accredited bodies has gone from 71 to 92. As part of that process, we also evaluate compliance against the Code; Gary [Pugh] has highlighted the critical importance of that. The percentage compliance level has not changed significantly. It has gone from 68% to 67% of those accredited organisations.”²⁹⁹

237. Accreditation is uneven and depends on the area of activity. We have already discussed how some forensic science activities are not regulated under the Code due to lack of resources. Mr Gantley explained that:

“We see that, in the traditional areas of conformity assessment or forensic science activity, particularly relating to those areas covered by traditional scientific evidence, such as physical and chemical analysis—

²⁹⁵ [Q 4](#) (Prof Angela Gallop)

²⁹⁶ Supplementary written evidence from Gary Pugh ([FSC0006](#))

²⁹⁷ [Q 26](#) (Prof Ruth Morgan)

²⁹⁸ [Q 108](#) (Gary Pugh)

²⁹⁹ [Q 96](#) (Matt Gantley)

for example, bloodstain pattern analysis, handwriting analysis, body fluid identification and DNA recovery—they are well-established areas of accredited conformity assessment. What we have seen as a challenge in terms of achieving compliance to the Code as well as achieving accreditation is incident scene examination. The lowest levels of compliance are particularly in the areas of digital forensics, data capture, processing, analysis and digital storage devices.”³⁰⁰

- 238. Dr Vanhinsbergh criticised the efficiency of the oversight process: “Sometimes the process does seem quite convoluted and inefficient; this is the process of assessment by UKAS [which assesses for the FSR]. There has been a shortage over recent years of experts working for UKAS in certain areas ... It causes delays in the system.”³⁰¹ He conceded the process could be quite “onerous” for small companies and compared it unfavourably with the assessment process used in the Republic of Ireland.³⁰²
- 239. Witnesses highlighted inconsistency on whether the accreditation and regulatory system works for in-house forensic services. Professor McCartney raised issues with in-house police forensics:

“I think an assessment should probably be made at this point of how successful the Forensic Science Regulator has been. We know it has had repeated problems with police accreditation. Police have set up laboratories or have had fingerprint bureaux and so forth, and they have not been able to get accredited.”³⁰³

- 240. Dr Vanhinsbergh told us:

“My concern ... is that ... a case assessment and interpretation approach ... is not necessarily adopted to the same level in police laboratories. Having said that, some police forces operate very high-quality forensic science units that have the same level of accreditation and are also compliant with the Forensic Science Regulator’s Code, as it is now known. So, in theory, they operate to the same standards as us.”³⁰⁴

- 241. One particular issue that was raised was around the accreditation and regulation of crime scene examination, a crucial component of a full forensic science investigation. Professor McCartney said:

“We now have the problem of crime scene examination being accredited but then having huge adverse consequences in the capacity of crime scene examination to actually undertake it. I believe that has now been suspended because of the problems with it, as it is actually creating real obstacles to efficient crime scene examination.”³⁰⁵

- 242. Chief Constable Paul Gibson defended the approach of the police to accreditation:

“The very short answer is that our [Crime Scene Investigators] are accredited or certainly working towards accreditation through ISO

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ [Q 41](#) (Dr Des Vanhinsbergh)

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ [Q 13](#) (Prof Carole McCartney)

³⁰⁴ [Q 38](#) (Dr Des Vanhinsbergh)

³⁰⁵ [Q 13](#) (Prof Carole McCartney)

standards—international standards. That is really important in making sure that the recovery from scenes is consistent and has integrity. ... accreditation applies not only to policing elements of forensic science but providers as well. ... it is very comprehensive in terms of what you need to do. When you are inspected, you can sometimes get hundreds of actions to follow up to make sure that you are complying with the codes. We are working with the Regulator to make that that is as proportionate as possible but it is important to make sure that the integrity of the evidence is where it needs to be.”³⁰⁶

- 243. Dr Marc Bailey said that the police were “motivated ... pushing for a change ... to grow this young regulatory framework into a mature one.”³⁰⁷
- 244. There was some evidence that even regulated and accredited facilities could provide inaccurate results, requiring more pro-active regulation. Gary Pugh described the largest quality failure that he dealt with while he was in office, which related to “an organisation undertaking drugs-driving analysis ... My investigation into that and the outcome was that 1,700 prosecutions were rescinded, but, on the face of it, that company was compliant with the Code and fully accredited.”³⁰⁸ He noted that: “Traditionally, the investigation of incidents by the Regulator has been very reactive. We wait for things to happen and then investigate them”, but that he had pro-actively surveyed organisations to find out about their compliance to the Code.³⁰⁹
- 245. Dr Marc Bailey described his statutory powers as “adequate”, but noted that he would like “more formal recognition of inspection powers by the Regulator” and the ability to scale up financial penalties for larger organisations.³¹⁰ While acknowledging that the regulator has not yet issued any compliance notices, Dr Bailey defended the regulatory approach in a letter to the Committee pointing out that compliance notices were not the only regulatory action it could take.³¹¹
- 246. Gary Pugh highlighted that “one of the key sources of information about things that are not going well or where there is potentially unreliable evidence are the defence experts. The defence sector is critical”.³¹² This highlights the salience of our earlier recommendations around preserving the defence sector as part of a well-regulated forensic science system.
- 247. The Home Office Minister, Sarah Jones MP, summarised the situation as follows: “The Regulator now has a statutory footing—part of the Code that everybody has to adhere to is about independence—and has more teeth. It is early days, though.”³¹³
- 248. Christophe Prince noted, particularly regarding the regulation of the police and crime scene investigation: “We judge that, at the moment, there are still some teething problems, but they [the police and Regulator] have those

306 [Q 79](#) (Chief Constable Paul Gibson)

307 [Q 95](#) (Dr Marc Bailey)

308 [Q 94](#) (Gary Pugh)

309 *Ibid.*

310 [Q 97](#) (Dr Marc Bailey)

311 Correspondence, *Letter from Dr Marc Bailey, Forensic Science Regulator to the Science and Technology Committee*, 23 January 2026

312 [Q 98](#) (Gary Pugh)

313 [Q 120](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

open dialogues on a regular basis.”³¹⁴ He expressed optimism that the proper application of the Code would help to secure independence for forensic science: “There is an expectation on individuals, if they are to comply with the Code, that those things [independence, impartiality and integrity] are a key part of their activity.”³¹⁵ In response to concerns that the Regulator might be reluctant to use its powers he said that “I believe that it will act accordingly, using the powers that it has—notably compliance notices.”³¹⁶

- 249. The Policing Reform White Paper sets out that the National Police Service will “drive compliance with the Forensic Science Regulator’s code” in its national forensics service.³¹⁷
- 250. **Forensic science regulation has undergone significant change with the Regulator’s new statutory powers. Well-regulated forensic science is essential for criminal justice, but introducing regulation and increasing requirements for accreditation without taking into account the burden of compliance could undermine the market.**
- 251. *The cost of compliance with regulation should be taken into account in the prices paid by police, the Home Office, and the Ministry of Justice for forensic science. The Forensic Science Regulator will need more resources to enable it to inspect and monitor in-house provision of forensic services, to conduct investigations, to assist providers in compliance, and to upgrade IT systems.*
- 252. *The Home Office should, at the earliest opportunity, complete the framework agreement with the Forensic Science Regulator. This should include a line of reporting where the Regulator can raise issues that relate to defence provision with the Ministry of Justice.*
- 253. **Concerns have been raised that the Forensic Science Regulator may not be willing to use their powers in a consolidated market if it risks disruption to services, or undermining investigations, although the former Regulator has disputed this. Accreditation is important, as it is the main means of demonstrating compliance with the Forensic Science Regulator’s Code and verifying good practice. The role of the Regulator and accreditation authorities may be challenged by the increasing in-house forensic provision by police forces, particularly when it comes to digital forensics, where we have heard that the vast majority of digital forensics units in the police are not accredited.**
- 254. *Police forces should clarify whether they intend to pursue accreditation for both physical and digital forensics. The Home Office should also publish the accreditation status for all police forces. Police forces should take steps to ensure that their in-house provision is compliant with the Forensic Science Regulator Code and to cooperate with inspection. If police forces do not pursue accreditation, the Government should set out how they will ensure that in-house provision of forensic services by police forces is of high quality.*

³¹⁴ [Q 123](#) (Christophe Prince)

³¹⁵ [Q 120](#) (Christophe Prince)

³¹⁶ [Q 124](#) (Christophe Prince)

³¹⁷ Home Office, *From Local to National: A New Model for Policing*, January 2026, [CP 1489](#), p 49

255. *As the national forensic service is established it will need to work closely with the Forensic Science Regulator to ensure code compliance. Improvements to the forensic science regulatory regime will be undermined by a dysfunctional, fragile, or monopolistic market: these reforms must go hand in hand with stabilisation of the market and wider policing reform.*

Accreditation costs

256. Some witnesses raised concerns with the cost of accreditation, particularly as it affects smaller businesses and individual defence experts. Professor McCartney said:

“One of the big problems is the big shift there has been with regulation, with everybody having to be accredited now. This has been very burdensome on small companies and even sole traders, so it has had a real impact on the defence expertise side of things. Previously, a solicitor could get the police forensic reports and so forth and then say, ‘I’m going to take this and get my own defence experts’; now there are really no defence experts left to be found. That is for a series of reasons, not just the cost of accreditation.”³¹⁸

257. Professor Gallop concurred:

“Regulation has been so costly for smaller firms. Even for the smallest firm, it would be tens of thousands a year to get it and maintain it. For defence experts, who very often work on their own or in very small groups, that was just too expensive for them to afford.”³¹⁹

258. She argued that “the fees that UKAS, the accreditation service, charges for accrediting laboratories are absolutely huge, and something needs to be done about that.”³²⁰ The Westminster Commission report said that the accreditation process was referred to as: “over-engineered” and “disproportionate”, “overly arduous”, “serving to stifle disciplines”, and destabilising the market because of cost and resourcing. These charges were blamed for the departure of many independent experts and small companies from the forensic sector.³²¹
259. There is evidently a difference between how the major forensic science providers and the major laboratories that are getting accredited feel about the process compared to the smaller or entry-level providers. This was acknowledged by the Regulator, Dr Marc Bailey, who said “Looking at commercial providers, this committee has heard from the largest providers, which are Eurofins and KFS, which are dominant in the market. They are very happy with the quality of systems.”³²² Dr Vanhinsbergh told us that “When I think about costs and what keeps me awake at night, it is not the cost of accreditation, to be honest with you, although it is substantial”.³²³ He

318 [Q.6](#) (Prof Carole McCartney)

319 [Q.4](#) (Prof Angela Gallop)

320 [Q.13](#) (Prof Angela Gallop)

321 The Westminster Commission on Forensic Science, *Forensic Science in England and Wales*, June 2025, 4.101-108 of the Westminster Commission report

322 [Q.101](#) (Dr Marc Bailey)

323 [Q.43](#) (Dr Des Vanhinsbergh)

acknowledged though that “we are likely to spend up to £200,000 in 2026 on accreditation”.³²⁴

260. Matt Gantley, CEO of UKAS, defended the cost of accreditation:

“In terms of the cost of accreditation, the number of assessment days for smallest provider that we have under accreditation is around five. That translates to an overall annual cost of around £6,000. The most frequent cost of accreditation in terms of assessment days is around 15. That translates to a cost of around £20,000. Remember that that is done on a cost recovery, self-financing basis. I do not see those as being extortionate costs.”³²⁵

261. It is worth noting that this is not vastly out of line with Professor Gallop’s assessment that “tens of thousands of pounds a year” was paid in accreditation, which was described as too high for smaller practitioners. However, Mr Gantley argued “When it requires distinct professional expertise to go out and do an assessment activity, that is where there has to be a cost recovery model inherent within it. Our model is not to seek public funding for that. The provider pays for it.”³²⁶

262. Mr Gantley argued that accreditation was:

“done on a not-for-profit basis … Any small surplus that we make is reinvested into the business. The effort or the time that is taken to do an accreditation assessment is almost the minimum with which we are able to do in order to do a rigorous assessment of that forensic science activity. We are very mindful of the impact that that has, particularly on smaller, niche areas”.³²⁷

263. He argued that the fees had to be the same for everyone:

“If there is a very large organisation, such as Eurofins, that may undertake a niche activity—for example, digital forensics—and there is a very small organisation that does the same activity, we cannot give a subsidy to one but not the other. We have to be very careful, and the fee rate is standardised for everyone.”³²⁸

264. In our oral evidence session, the Regulator and the CEO of UKAS discussed ways in which they could make the regulatory and accreditation system easier to navigate for smaller companies. Dr Bailey said it was important to recognise that “not everyone can achieve ISO accreditation. We have already done some work on what can be done for the smaller FSPs, which aligns with ISO accreditation but is not the full accreditation.”³²⁹ Matt Gantley described a phased approach:

“We have already started discussions about how we create milestones to compliance. The primary objective is compliance with the Code, and accreditation is a model that allows demonstration of that compliance.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ [Q 103](#) (Matt Gantley)

³²⁶ [Q 100](#) (Matt Gantley)

³²⁷ [Q 101](#) (Matt Gantley) According to UKAS’ annual report, it made 7.2% profit on £48m of turnover in 2025—forensics is a relatively small part of the overall business of UKAS. UKAS, *A world of confidence for 30 years*, 2025

³²⁸ [Q 102](#) (Matt Gantley)

³²⁹ [Q 100](#) (Dr Marc Bailey)

- Through UKAS and the Forensic Science Regulator working together, we can create distinct and clear milestones that take an organisation all the way to compliance with the Code and, eventually, then on to accreditation.”³³⁰
265. The Home Office Minister, Sarah Jones MP, said: “You are absolutely right about the grumbles about accreditation and the cost of that, so we need to understand that better and make sure that it is working in the right way. We need to understand whether the problem is with the assessment service provided by UKAS.”³³¹
266. Christophe Prince said of the costs police forces faced to attain accreditation: “we think that there is some duplication around the level of accreditation required. There is also duplication around some of the other elements, such as validation within the techniques and the tool solutions.” He said that “The Government have indicated and given direction to the regulators to consider what steps they can take to reduce the burdens.”³³²
267. **UKAS says that its fees for accreditation are set on a cost-recovery basis and are therefore not unduly high. Yet the cost of accreditation is a substantial burden to smaller forensic science companies—often sole traders operating for defence parties—driving them out of the market. Nobody wants forensic science carried out by unqualified people with inappropriate methodologies, but if UKAS is unable to provide accreditation more cheaply, the only solution to maintain a thriving market of small providers is for their fees for providing forensic services to rise, or for these companies to be subsidised to achieve accreditation.**
268. *The Government should review the impact of UKAS’s accreditation costs on the market and propose measures to ensure that small providers are able to achieve accreditation while remaining viable businesses. This should include an analysis of whether the cost recovery structure employed by UKAS is justifiable when benchmarked against comparators. It should also include alternative routes to recognising technical expertise and competence for smaller providers, such as a register of experts maintained by the National Institute for Forensic Science, as well as supporting the milestones to compliance model that UKAS and the Regulator are pursuing.*

A National Institute for Forensic Science

269. Our 2019 report, recognising various gaps in the forensic science system for England and Wales, recommended the establishment of a National Institute for Forensic Science “to set strategic priorities for forensic science research and development, and to coordinate and direct research and funding. This body should work closely with the police, the judiciary, universities, private forensic science providers and the Forensic Science Regulator to fulfil these

³³⁰ [Q 100](#) (Matt Gantley)

³³¹ [Q 122](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

³³² [Q 123](#) (Christophe Prince)

duties.”³³³ The Government response said it would “carefully consider the business case for a National Institute”.³³⁴ Ultimately, it was not created.

270. Despite this, there are clearly areas of vital capacity for the future of forensic science that are not being adequately provided by the current system. These have been discussed earlier on our report, in sections including risks to “non-commercial” specialisms, research and development in forensic science, training and retention of forensic scientists and equality of arms for forensic science. We believe that there is a clear case for national capacity building in these areas, and a national institute could bring together existing expertise.

271. Professor Sarah Morris said that:

“I would welcome a national institute. I work with a lot of the UK forces, most of which are reinventing the wheel. They will be working on something unaware that another force has already come up with a solution or written its own tool to do that particular thing, so national co-ordination would be useful. When the Forensic Capability Network was introduced in 2000, we had high hopes that that was where it would go, but it has ended up being rather focused on smaller projects that are not reaching those on the ground.”³³⁵

272. Many witnesses agreed that this could be helpful. Professor McCartney said:

“One easy, quick thing to say is that we are almost the only country that does not have a national institute for forensic science … A national institute would be a galvanising thing. Then we could bring the brightest minds together. We could have a forensic science home and then push forward from there.”³³⁶

273. Professor Gallop said that, on the role a proposed National Institute could play: “we absolutely think that that is pretty critical and, through that … creating a series of academic centres of excellence.”³³⁷ Professor Nic Daeid discussed the importance of “a national infrastructure for forensic science research” with a particular focus on the use of research data.³³⁸ In Australia, Professor Roux told us that the National Institute there “has its challenges, but overall it has been extremely successful. It sets R&D priorities, acts as an honest broker and fosters collaboration … but it needs dedicated funding”.³³⁹ He said that: “there is definitely still a strong case for a national institute of forensic science in the UK.”³⁴⁰

274. Professor McCartney said that priorities for the National Institute should include “focusing on a national strategy for research … blue skies, horizon scanning, ground-truth database work … the non-sexy things that do not get funded.”³⁴¹ Fiona Douglas highlighted the “specialist types of forensic science” that are “never going to turn a profit in terms of the commercial

³³³ Science and Technology Committee, *Forensic science and the criminal justice system: a blueprint for change* (3rd Report, Session 2017–19, HL Paper 333), para 188

³³⁴ HM Government, *Government response to the Lords Science and Technology Select Committee Report: Forensic Science and the Criminal Justice System: A Blueprint for Change*, July 2019

³³⁵ Q 92 (Prof Sarah Morris)

³³⁶ Q 8 (Prof Carole McCartney)

³³⁷ Q 1 (Prof Angela Gallop)

³³⁸ Q 17 (Prof Niamh Nic Daeid)

³³⁹ Q 49 (Prof Claude Roux)

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁴¹ Q 14 (Prof Carole McCartney)

marketplace”; “whether it is a forensic institute or other structures that would allow Scotland, Northern Ireland, England and Wales, and Ireland as well, to work together to make sure that we keep these tools and techniques alive, there is absolutely a place for that.”³⁴² Katy Thorne KC suggested that the institute could: “have a register of experts who are expected to abide by a code of conduct. That would be a resource available to both sides” and that it could “provide training … [Primers] for practitioners and the judiciary to enable them to get up to speed a little bit on any particular area.”³⁴³

275. It is unclear whether the Government’s current approach to policing reform includes the establishment of a National Institute for Forensic Science in the form we outline below. However; Sarah Jones MP said:

“in the broader policing sense, we want to set up some form of national centre for policing—name TBC—that does some of the functions of policing from the centre. Forensics will sit within that and Amanda[-Jane Balfour], as Director of Forensic Science Services, will sit within that function. There is a huge raft of problems that we want to try to solve through this, and we do not underestimate how big this challenge is. But this is genuinely a once-in-a-generation opportunity to get this right across policing.”³⁴⁴

She said that she felt that their reforms were “about standardising training, having a workforce plan and thinking about R&D centrally.”³⁴⁵ Amanda-Jane Balfour said that they were considering ““What can we do once for the benefit of all in a national centre?””. That scoping work will start in earnest in February.”³⁴⁶

276. The Policing Reform White Paper sets out a range of ambitions for the policing workforce, including the creation of a national workforce strategy, as well as wellbeing support for the police.³⁴⁷ As discussed previously the National Police Service is envisioned as having a role in training the workforce through incorporating the College of Policing.
277. **Our previous report recommended the establishment of a National Institute for Forensic Science. This did not take place, but witnesses have told us that the recommendation is still important and many such models exist overseas. We believe that there are a number of gaps in the current forensic science system, especially around research, training, and co-ordination which could be filled by such an institute, alongside the national forensics service that the Government will set up in its policing reforms.**
278. ***The UK should establish a National Institute for Forensic Science. This can be done now, without waiting for longer-term police reforms. Its role will need to be coordinated with the national forensics service and the National Policing Service, the Forensic Science Regulator, and police procurement, but should include:***

342 [Q 46](#) (Fiona Douglas)

343 [Q 62](#) (Katy Thorne KC)

344 [Q 111](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

345 [Q 115](#) (Sarah Jones MP)

346 [Q 115](#) (Amanda-Jane Balfour)

347 Home Office, *From Local to National: A New Model for Policing*, January 2026, [CP 1489](#), Chapter 5, p 75

- *coordinating R&D priorities across the sector and conducting key R&D projects;*
 - *providing impartial advice and expertise to police and to defence barristers;*
 - *maintaining lists of trusted experts and forensic scientists for testifying in court;*
 - *advocating for the forensic science sector, formalising networks that already exist; and*
 - *maintaining important databases and guidance for best practice, in coordination with the Forensic Science Regulator.*
279. *At least until the national forensics service is set up, it should also include:*
- *assessing forensic science capacity across England and Wales, including in police forces and forensic science providers;*
 - *maintaining expertise in “non-commercial” or lesser-used but still important specialisms in forensic science, filling in the gaps left by for-profit companies and fragmented police provision; and*
 - *providing a means of training forensic scientists, whether in-house within police forces or external; analysing training needs and ensuring provision is appropriate.*
280. *If the Government elects not to establish such an institute, they should explain to us who is taking responsibility for each of these areas, the action they expect to take to improve the situation, and how progress will be monitored. In the long run, some of the functions of the institute may be transferred into the new national forensics service, but we still think that there is an immediate need for an institute to coordinate R&D, advice, training, and centralised expertise.*

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Responsibility for the forensic science system

1. The issues identified in our previous inquiry have largely got worse. Forensic science is at serious risk of failing the criminal justice system. At the heart of these issues there is muddled and divided responsibility for capacity, resilience, quality, and fairness in forensic science. There is still a strong sense that no one takes overall responsibility for the forensic science system, in particular, ensuring sufficient funding. (Paragraph 28)
2. Our previous inquiry encouraged better joint working between the Home Office and Ministry of Justice. Despite assurances at the time that this would be fixed, structures set up then have not been maintained. Forensic science should belong to and function on behalf of the whole criminal justice system, not just the Home Office. (Paragraph 29)
3. The proposed creation of a new National Police Service to deliver forensics on a national basis offers a much needed opportunity for reform. However, progress has been slow: it was first announced in November 2024 but the Policing Reform White Paper was only published in January 2026. The proposed consolidation of forces will not come into full effect until 2034. Action to fix the forensic science system cannot wait that long. (Paragraph 30)
4. If current governance arrangements were adequate, we would not have seen the stagnation or deterioration of the issues we previously identified. The Government has acknowledged that reform is needed and the Policing Reform White Paper is a welcome first step towards fixing the system, in particular by providing forensics on a national basis. But it is only a first step—further details, and action, are needed urgently to address the crisis facing forensic science, irrespective of the pace at which wider police reform happens. (Paragraph 31)
5. *For reasons explored in greater depth later in this report, we recommend that the national provision of forensic science envisaged under the National Police Service is given sufficient separation from policing to ensure its independence, akin to the “sterile corridor” in place in Scotland. We refer to this as a “national forensic service”. We also advocate the immediate creation of a National Institute for Forensic Science to oversee areas such as research and development and training (see Chapter 5).* (Paragraph 32)
6. *The abdication of responsibility for forensic science must end. A Minister in the Home Office and a Minister in the Ministry of Justice should have forensic science explicitly within their remit and they should work together to safeguard all aspects of the system, regardless of institutional arrangements.* (Paragraph 33)

Provision of forensic science services

7. Our 2019 report warned that the forensic science market was at risk of becoming dysfunctional. This has now happened. Of the three major providers operating in 2018, one has been acquired (Cellmark by Eurofins), and one, Key Forensic Services, has been through and out of administration. (Paragraph 54)
8. The commercial market is a now near-monopoly, with more than 80% of external forensic science services provided by Eurofins. The market is clearly not functioning well; forensic science companies have often been loss-making

or operated with very thin margins. The barriers to entry for new businesses are extremely high. The near-monopoly status poses its own risks: for the range and quality of service provision; for the stability of forensic science in the UK should Eurofins exit the market; and for the Regulator who may be unwilling to impose sanctions on a near-monopoly provider. (Paragraph 55)

9. In 2019 we recommended that the Forensic Science Regulator role be expanded and resourced to have oversight of the market. This has not happened. It is unclear that anyone takes overall responsibility for ensuring a healthy market. (Paragraph 56)
10. *The forensic science commercial market is in urgent need of reform, but the Policing Reform White Paper did not address it and leaves its future unclear. The Government should assess the concentration risks in the market due to the near-monopoly of Eurofins, and introduce measures to stabilise the existing provision, lower barriers to entry for new providers, and ensure that contracts from police forces or a National Police Service pay a fair price to the providers.* (Paragraph 57)
11. *Contract design should be modified to incentivise small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to participate, for example with specialised procurement for niche areas or ring-fenced funding for SMEs. The Government needs to set out the long-term plan for the market in a reformed system, decide who takes overall responsibility for resilience and oversight of the market and provide appropriate resources to exercise this function.* (Paragraph 58)
12. There is a clear trend for more in-house provision of forensic science services by police forces. This raises concerns about oversight, quality, transparency, inconsistency and fragmentation between the 43 police forces in England and Wales. As individual police cases are increasingly fragmented between in-house capacity and external capacity, there are risks that forensic science becomes commoditised, preventing in-depth, end-to-end, scientifically consistent analysis. (Paragraph 79)
13. Police organisations like the National Police Chiefs' Council face an unenviable task in trying to coordinate approaches from 43 forces in England and Wales, often through voluntary guidance, and do not seem to have been successful in terms of addressing the risks. We welcome the proposed consolidation of police forces and the creation of the National Police Service to deliver forensics on a national basis, which may partly address this duplication and fragmentation, but questions of oversight and standards will remain. (Paragraph 80)
14. *There is a need for much more transparency around in-house forensic provision: The Home Office should require forces to publish standardised data on their in-house forensics capacities, accreditation status and timeline for achieving accreditation, and any quality incidents. In-house and external forensics expenditure should be individual line items on budgets. This can be done before other reforms take place. Police forces should proactively cooperate with the Forensic Science Regulator to enable audits of their in-house forensics.* (Paragraph 81)
15. *There is a need to address the “commoditisation” of forensic science. The Home Office should encourage, in procurement and operation models, holistic interpretation of forensic evidence from crime scene to court, not just the cheapest or easiest tests to perform. In particular, the exhibit submission policy from police forces to external forensic science providers urgently needs to be standardised.* (Paragraph 82)

16. There is also deep concern around a lack of independence or unconscious bias in whether, or how, specific tests are conducted or interpreted. There is a strong argument that, in the long run, forensic science provision should be taken out of the police service as far as is possible—as we did not hear convincing evidence that sufficient safeguards are in place. (Paragraph 83)
17. *We welcome the Government’s plan to consolidate forensic services into a single service. It provides an opportunity to improve oversight, quality, transparency, and consistency. Although the police will always need to be involved in commissioning and organising forensic science, forensic science should maintain its independence from the police.* (Paragraph 84)
18. *In its creation of a national forensics service, the Government should maintain its independence from the police. One way to do this would be to follow the Scottish model of creating a “sterile corridor” between forensic science and the police. This will take time, but we believe it can be accomplished more quickly than the consolidation of police forces and should be embarked upon with urgency.* (Paragraph 85)
19. *In the meantime, it is imperative that clear, enforceable standards and as much external scrutiny as possible are applied to in-house forensic science provision, in particular regarding what evidence is collected at crime scenes, which tests are conducted, and how the results are interpreted. Guidance from the National Police Chiefs’ Council alone is unlikely to be sufficient.* (Paragraph 86)
20. There is grave concern about equality of arms for forensic science in the courtroom. Defence scrutiny provides crucial external checks on bad forensic science practice and bias. Yet the defence community of forensic experts is underfunded, fragmented, varying in quality, small in scale, and it faces significant administrative and financial barriers to taking part in many trials. This community plays a vital role in ensuring justice is done, but it is being allowed to wither away, risking miscarriages of justice. (Paragraph 102)
21. The process for defence solicitors to obtain forensic expertise is difficult and labour intensive. Legal aid rates for defence expertise remain too low, and lower than the Crown Prosecution Service itself pays for equivalent expertise. The Minister assured us that current legal aid rates can support the demand for defence experts, but the size of the defence expert market will depend on the legal aid rate. The true metric for success is whether bad forensic science is challenged and miscarriages of justice avoided. (Paragraph 103)
22. The fragility of the defence expert ecosystem is a threat to justice that must be addressed. The Legal Aid Agency urgently needs to review its rates for forensic scientists to facilitate equality of arms. At a minimum, they should be equivalent to the rates the prosecution pays and be paid promptly. (Paragraph 104)
23. *Accreditation is likely to be impractical for solo or small defence practitioners, but a National Institute for Forensic Science (see Chapter 5) could maintain a register of approved experts which can be made available to the defence. These could operate under standards set by the Forensic Science Regulator.* (Paragraph 105)
24. *The Legal Aid Agency and Ministry of Justice should monitor the availability and use of defence forensic experts, as well as promptness of payment, as part of determining whether the rates paid to them are adequate.* (Paragraph 106)

25. Streamlined forensic reporting began as a well-intentioned cost-cutting measure but now risks providing insufficient scientific detail to enable the defence to challenge it in court. (Paragraph 113)
26. *The Crown Prosecution Service and Ministry of Justice should investigate and improve the process of Streamlined Forensic Reporting, with forensic scientists at a minimum supervising and counter signing the production of these reports. Minimum standards for SFRs should ensure that they include details of which tests have been undertaken and by whom, as well as an outline of the scientific basis of the tests and any limitations in the findings.* (Paragraph 114)
27. A number of forensic science specialisms, particularly those categorised as ‘marks and traces’ (such as fibres and footprints) as well as some biological and forensic toxicology specialisms, are now at severe risk, having declined over many years. The demand for these services has fallen due to changing police policy to the point where they are unlikely to be commercially viable. External forensic science providers may be unable to afford to retain them, nor can we rely on in house provision as it currently exists to consistently apply and maintain this expertise. (Paragraph 128)
28. However, there will continue to be cases which require this specialist expertise. There is a clear risk of avoidable miscarriages of justice in England and Wales from the loss of this “non-commercial” expertise. Despite warning of this issue in our previous inquiry, and promises to put a plan in place to preserve these disciplines, it is still unclear that there is any serious plan to maintain this vital expertise. (Paragraph 129)
29. *Forensic science reform must result in a credible plan for the preservation of specialisms which are now at a crisis point. This could be done through procurement arrangements which include retainers to preserve this expertise, or through a National Institute for Forensic Science which acts as a hub for specialist expertise that is infrequently used and would otherwise be lost, or through the new national forensic service employing these experts to review evidence and cases on a national basis. It is time to stop talking about this and do it.* (Paragraph 130)
30. The current fragmented national approach to evidence storage is a severe risk to the criminal justice system and cannot be allowed to continue. Missing and damaged evidence is collapsing criminal prosecutions and risks preventing re-testing and appeals. Since the closure of the Forensic Science Service, responsibility for retaining evidence has been dispersed across 43 police forces and multiple forensic science providers, producing widely variable practice, inconsistent standards, guidance that is not always followed, and loss or improper storage of exhibits. This responsibility has fallen to police who are often neither well-equipped nor resourced to carry it out. The current system is fragmented and likely to be more expensive and less effective than a national archive. The Forensic Archive that retains pre-2012 evidence has already had to step in on an emergency basis to store evidence from collapsed forensic science providers. (Paragraph 146)
31. *The burden of long-term evidence retention and storage should be taken away from the police and given to an independent national storage capacity. The Government should reopen the Forensic Archive. It should be empowered and resourced to routinely take new casework, handle transfers from police forces and providers, and deal with a higher volume of retrieval. The Archive could make use of regional hubs for storage, in particular where forces have been able to invest in adequate storage facilities.* (Paragraph 147)

32. *While this is being set up, and for short-term operational storage of evidence, police forces should ensure they employ forensic archivists who can ensure that storage is to a high standard. Non-binding guidance from the National Police Chiefs Council is unlikely to be sufficient to ensure consistent storage across the country; the new National Police Service should set standards and inspect how evidence is stored and retained by forces.* (Paragraph 148)

Forensic science fit for the future

33. There is a lack of coordination and funding for forensic science R&D. Neither private companies nor the police have the budgets to invest substantially in research and development. This risks leaving forensic science services ill equipped for an age of rapidly developing technology. Forensic science has been described as a “magpie” discipline which relies on interdisciplinary research to apply new techniques from other areas of science. When research and development is carried out, misaligned priorities, such as a mismatch between police demand for forensic services and the supply of new techniques, risks wasted effort. (Paragraph 165)
34. *There needs to be a long-term plan for the funding of research and development in forensic science, as well as the diffusion of novel techniques and best practice. A National Institute for Forensic Science could, in coordination with forensic service providers, police, criminal justice experts and academics, develop research priorities based on capabilities that would better serve criminal justice.* (Paragraph 166)
35. *Cutting-edge interdisciplinary and applied research should be supported by UKRI, either through funding for research at a new National Institute of Forensic Science, or through specific grants for that purpose. The Government’s reforms to training the policing workforce should include greater training in newly emerging forensic science specialisms.* (Paragraph 167)
36. *Research and development in forensic science benefits FSPs and police, and is a public good, but there is systematic underinvestment: An innovation levy, ring-fenced funding from the Home Office’s budget, or support from DSIT’s Missions funds (Safer Streets) could correct this.* (Paragraph 168)
37. Digital forensics is a growing area of concern. We highlighted the problems with the volume of such evidence, and the forensic science sector’s ability to process, analyse and store it, in our 2019 report, recommending a substantial programme of research into digital forensics. The situation since then has barely improved, with backlogs still undermining timely justice. (Paragraph 203)
38. The police are expanding their use of cloud storage, but consistency is needed in how digital forensic evidence is stored and analysed. The great majority of digital forensics work is handled in-house by the police. As we have seen with forensics more generally, this raises concerns around accreditation, regulation, and oversight. (Paragraph 204)
39. Since our 2019 report, AI has developed rapidly. Generative AI presents an increasing challenge to the reliability of digital evidence: deepfake images and other data are increasingly difficult to detect. This will be a challenge for investigators, but also for courts: judges, counsel and jurors will all need to be equipped and assisted in understanding the evidential reliability of such material. (Paragraph 205)

40. AI is also a potential means of analysing huge volumes of data. However, this needs to be done reliably, fairly, and in a trusted way, something which current AI models struggle with to the standards the criminal justice system demands. We were unconvinced that the current policing and criminal justice system is sufficiently well-equipped to make the best use of these technologies, nor is the market well-positioned to allow new providers to innovate. (Paragraph 206)
41. *There is clearly an urgent need for a research and development programme, funded by the Government, to address multiple challenges associated with digital evidence, including how to store such evidence, how to undertake trusted analysis of digital forensic data, and how to manage emerging threats from deepfake images. As in many other policy areas, regulation and standards for the use of AI in forensics lag well behind the technology.* (Paragraph 207)
42. *We welcome plans in the White Paper to develop AI capabilities, along with £115 million of new funding. It is unclear how much of this funding will be spent strictly on forensics. This should be clarified. The new centralised forensics function should build national capacity in this area, providing guidance and approved software, algorithms, and procedures, for the storage and analysis of digital forensic data and use of AI. These should be developed in coordination with the judicial system to ensure that the procedures are trusted and explainable for use in court. There will also need to be substantial training for officers involved in commissioning and using AI tools to understand their capabilities, limitations and risks.* (Paragraph 208)
43. There are concerns over the training of the next generation of forensic scientists and the retention of those that already exist; this becomes especially acute as experts trained in the former Forensic Science Service begin to retire. In particular, holistic, crime-scene investigation exposure, and end-to-end forensic science from crime scene to courtroom, is needed, but this practical on-the-job training is happening less often. (Paragraph 216)
44. Witnesses raised concerns about the inadequacy of some forensic science undergraduate degrees. There is a concern many degrees might be training people for jobs that do not exist given extreme budget constraints in the area and the lack of clear career pathways. When combined with structural issues in how forensic science is provided, the risk is a ‘de-skilling’ of forensic scientists from holistic, expert scientific investigators to providers of commodified tests, to the detriment of justice. (Paragraph 217)
45. *There is a need to provide quality training for the next generation of forensic scientists. Police forces should, where appropriate, facilitate trainee forensic scientists to follow the progress of individual cases to encourage holistic, end-to-end investigation, from crime scene to courtroom. The Office for Students should review forensic science courses, in particular their quality and the information made available to students about their job prospects, as it is a longstanding area of oversupply. A National Institute for Forensic Science, together with the proposed national forensics service and training function in the National Police Service, could coordinate key training in core methods and novel techniques and bring together forensic science providers, academics, and police forces.* (Paragraph 218)
46. *As part of the Government’s renewed workforce and training plan, policing authorities should improve the quality of education in forensic science for all officers. They should seek to broaden the range of career paths that allow the scientifically trained to become forensic scientists.* (Paragraph 219)

Oversight, responsibility and structural issues

47. Forensic science regulation has undergone significant change with the Regulator's new statutory powers. Well-regulated forensic science is essential for criminal justice, but introducing regulation and increasing requirements for accreditation without taking into account the burden of compliance could undermine the market. (Paragraph 250)
48. *The cost of compliance with regulation should be taken into account in the prices paid by police, the Home Office, and the Ministry of Justice for forensic science. The Forensic Science Regulator will need more resources to enable it to inspect and monitor in-house provision of forensic services, to conduct investigations, to assist providers in compliance, and to upgrade IT systems.* (Paragraph 251)
49. *The Home Office should, at the earliest opportunity, complete the framework agreement with the Forensic Science Regulator. This should include a line of reporting where the Regulator can raise issues that relate to defence provision with the Ministry of Justice.* (Paragraph 252)
50. Concerns have been raised that the Forensic Science Regulator may not be willing to use their powers in a consolidated market if it risks disruption to services, or undermining investigations, although the former Regulator has disputed this. Accreditation is important, as it is the main means of demonstrating compliance with the Forensic Science Regulator's Code and verifying good practice. The role of the Regulator and accreditation authorities may be challenged by the increasing in-house forensic provision by police forces, particularly when it comes to digital forensics, where we have heard that the vast majority of digital forensics units in the police are not accredited. (Paragraph 253)
51. *Police forces should clarify whether they intend to pursue accreditation for both physical and digital forensics. The Home Office should also publish the accreditation status for all police forces. Police forces should take steps to ensure that their in-house provision is compliant with the Forensic Science Regulator Code and to cooperate with inspection. If police forces do not pursue accreditation, the Government should set out how they will ensure that in-house provision of forensic services by police forces is of high quality.* (Paragraph 254)
52. *As the national forensic service is established it will need to work closely with the Forensic Science Regulator to ensure code compliance. Improvements to the forensic science regulatory regime will be undermined by a dysfunctional, fragile, or monopolistic market: these reforms must go hand in hand with stabilisation of the market and wider policing reform.* (Paragraph 255)
53. UKAS says that its fees for accreditation are set on a cost-recovery basis and are therefore not unduly high. Yet the cost of accreditation is a substantial burden to smaller forensic science companies—often sole traders operating for defence parties—driving them out of the market. Nobody wants forensic science carried out by unqualified people with inappropriate methodologies, but if UKAS is unable to provide accreditation more cheaply, the only solution to maintain a thriving market of small providers is for their fees for providing forensic services to rise, or for these companies to be subsidised to achieve accreditation. (Paragraph 267)
54. *The Government should review the impact of UKAS's accreditation costs on the market and propose measures to ensure that small providers are able to achieve*

accreditation while remaining viable businesses. This should include an analysis of whether the cost recovery structure employed by UKAS is justifiable when benchmarked against comparators. It should also include alternative routes to recognising technical expertise and competence for smaller providers, such as a register of experts maintained by the National Institute for Forensic Science, as well as supporting the milestones to compliance model that UKAS and the Regulator are pursuing. (Paragraph 268)

55. Our previous report recommended the establishment of a National Institute for Forensic Science. This did not take place, but witnesses have told us that the recommendation is still important and many such models exist overseas. We believe that there are a number of gaps in the current forensic science system, especially around research, training, and co-ordination which could be filled by such an institute, alongside the national forensics service that the Government will set up in its policing reforms. (Paragraph 277)
56. *The UK should establish a National Institute for Forensic Science. This can be done now, without waiting for longer-term police reforms. Its role will need to be coordinated with the national forensics service and the National Policing Service, the Forensic Science Regulator, and police procurement, but should include:*
 - *coordinating R&D priorities across the sector and conducting key R&D projects;*
 - *providing impartial advice and expertise to police and to defence barristers;*
 - *maintaining lists of trusted experts and forensic scientists for testifying in court;*
 - *advocating for the forensic science sector, formalising networks that already exist; and*
 - *maintaining important databases and guidance for best practice, in coordination with the Forensic Science Regulator.* (Paragraph 278)
57. *At least until the national forensics service is set up, it should also include:*
 - *assessing forensic science capacity across England and Wales, including in police forces and forensic science providers;*
 - *maintaining expertise in “non-commercial” or lesser-used but still important specialisms in forensic science, filling in the gaps left by for-profit companies and fragmented police provision; and*
 - *providing a means of training forensic scientists, whether in-house within police forces or external; analysing training needs and ensuring provision is appropriate.* (Paragraph 279)
58. *If the Government elects not to establish such an institute, they should explain to us who is taking responsibility for each of these areas, the action they expect to take to improve the situation, and how progress will be monitored. In the long run, some of the functions of the institute may be transferred into the new national forensics service, but we still think that there is an immediate need for an institute to coordinate R&D, advice, training, and centralised expertise.* (Paragraph 280)

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF MEMBERS AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members

Lord Berkeley
 Lord Borwick
 Lord Burnett of Maldon (co-opted)
 Lord Drayson
 Lord Lucas
 Lord Mair (Chair)
 Baroness Neuberger
 Baroness Neville-Jones
 Baroness Northover
 Lord Ranger of Northwood
 Viscount Stansgate
 Lord Stern of Brentford
 Baroness Walmsley
 Baroness Willis of Summertown
 Baroness Young of Old Scone

Declaration of Interest

Lord Mair
No relevant interests
 Lord Berkeley
No relevant interests
 Lord Borwick
No relevant interests
 Lord Burnett of Maldon
Former Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales
Current member of the Supplementary Panel of the Supreme Court of the UK
 Lord Drayson
Chairman and shareholder of Locai Labs Limited
 Lord Lucas
No relevant interests
 Baroness Neuberger
No relevant interests
 Baroness Neville-Jones
No relevant interests
 Baroness Northover
No relevant interests
 Lord Ranger of Northwood
Co-founder, Business AI Alliance, a UK-based community of AI SMEs
 Viscount Stansgate
No relevant interests
 Lord Stern of Brentford
No relevant interests
 Baroness Walmsley
No relevant interests
 Baroness Willis of Summertown
No relevant interests
 Baroness Young of Old Scone

Former Chancellor, Cranfield University, which has substantial forensics faculty.

A full list of Members' interests can be found in the Register of Lords' Interests: <https://www.parliament.uk/hlregister>

APPENDIX 2: LIST OF WITNESSES

Evidence is published online at <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/193/science-and-technology-committee/publications/written-evidence/>

Evidence received by the committee is listed below in alphabetical order.

Alphabetical list of witnesses

BlueLight Commercial	QQ 64–80 , Jo Osborne, Senior Commercial Director, BlueLight Commercial
Tiernan Coyle	FSC0012
Earlham Institute	FSC0004
East Midlands Forensic Network	FSC0008
Professor Niamh Nic Daeid	QQ 1–17 , Professor Niamh Nic Daeid, Director, Leverhulme Research Centre for Forensic Science
Forensic Capability Network	FSC0002
Forensic Science Regulator	QQ 94–108 , Dr Marc Bailey, Forensic Science Regulator
Professor Angela Gallop	QQ 1–17 , Professor Angela Gallop
Home Office	QQ 109–129 , Amanda- Jane Balfour, Director of Forensic Services, Home Office
Home Office	QQ 109–129 , Sarah Jones MP, Minister for Policing and Crime, Home Office
Home Office	QQ 109–129 , Christophe Prince, Data and Identity Director, Home Office
Dr Angus Marshall	FSC0007
Professor Carole McCartney	QQ 1–17 , Professor Carole McCartney Professor of Law and Criminal Justice, University of Leicester
Jake Moore	QQ 81–93 , Jake Moore, Global Cybersecurity Adviser, ESET

Professor Ruth Morgan	FSC0001	QQ 18–29 , Professor Ruth Morgan, Director, UCL Centre for the Forensic Science
Professor Sarah Morris		QQ 81–93 , Professor Sarah Morris, Cyber Security Research Group, University of Southampton
Ministry of Justice		QQ 130–142 , Christina Pride, Deputy Director for Criminal Appeals Policy and Miscarriages of Justice, Ministry of Justice
Ministry of Justice		QQ 130–142 , Sarah Sackman KC MP, Minister for Courts and Legal Services, Ministry of Justice
Dr Mark Pearse		QQ 30–42 , Dr Mark Pearse, Director, Eurofins Forensic Services
National Police Chiefs' Council	FSC0005	QQ 64–80 , Chief Constable Paul Gibson, Forensic Portfolio Lead, National Police Chiefs' Council
National Police Chiefs' Council		QQ 64–80 , Deputy Chief Constable Jayne Meir, Digital Forensic Lead, National Police Chiefs' Council
Gary Pugh	FSC0006	QQ 94–108 , Gary Pugh, former Forensic Science Regulator
Dr Gethin Rees	FSC0003	Dr Gethin Rees, Senior Lecturer in Sociology, University of Newcastle and Leverhulme Trust Research Fellow
Steve Rick		QQ 81–93 , Steve Rick, CEO, Forensic Analytics

Professor Claude Roux	QQ 43–52 , Professor Claude Roux, Director, Centre for Forensic Science, University of Technology Sydney
Scottish Police Authority Forensic Services	QQ 43–52 , Fiona Douglas, Director, Scottish Police Authority Forensic Services
South East Forensic Network	FSC0009
South West Forensic Network	FSC0010
Matthew Tart	FSC0013
Katy Thorne KC	QQ 53–63 , Katy Thorne KC, Barrister, Doughty Street Chambers
United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS)	FSC0006 QQ 94–108 , Matt Gantley, CEO, United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS)
Dr Des Vanhinsbergh	QQ 30–42 , Dr Des Vanhinsbergh, Managing Director, Key Forensic Services
Wales and West Forensic Network	FSC0011
