



House of Commons
Science and Technology
Committee

**Forensic Science
Strategy: Government
Response to the
Committee's Fourth
Report of Session
2016–17**

**Second Special Report of Session
2016–17**

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Science and Technology Committee

The Science and Technology Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Government Office for Science and associated public bodies.

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The following were also members of the committee during the parliament:

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[Liz McInnes MP](#) (Labour, Heywood and Middleton)

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Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/science and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the relevant [inquiry page](#) of the Committee's website.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are: Simon Fiander (Clerk); Marsha David (Second Clerk); Sean Kinsey (Second Clerk); Dr Elizabeth Rough (Committee Specialist); Martin Smith (Committee Specialist); Amy Vistuer (Senior Committee Assistant); Julie Storey (Committee Assistant); and Nick Davies (Media Officer).

Second Special Report

On 17 September 2016 we published our Fourth Report of Session 2016–17, *Forensic Science Strategy* [HC 501]. On 24 November 2016 we received the Government’s response to the Report, which is appended below.

Appendix: Government response

The Government would like to thank the Committee for its report into the Forensic Science Strategy. The Government’s response is set out below:

Procurement

Recommendation: 1

The Government must produce a revised and more complete Strategy on the back of a consultation addressing the results of currently ongoing work by the police. When it does so, the Government should set out a clearer way forward for forensics procurement, which resolves the potential inconsistency of police forces increasingly organising their own procurements within a ‘consistent national approach’. (Paragraph 28)

Government Response:

The Forensic Strategy is not, nor was it intended to be, a detailed action plan. However it sets out a clear vision for the future of forensic science delivery and provides the necessary strategic direction required to achieve that. We do not intend to revise it.

The police-led Collaborative Law Enforcement Procurement (CLEP) programme is supported by the Home Office and focused on improving procurement in the categories of goods and services on which the police spend most money, including forensic services. The key elements of the CLEP programme are standardising what the police buy; aggregating force buying power, where possible joining it to wider public sector buying; and better managing contracts and suppliers.

The principles of the CLEP programme are driven through the Forensic Marketplace Strategy Board, (chaired by the NPCC Lead for Commercial Forensics, Deputy Chief Constable James Vaughan). This will ensure that police forces have a consistent national approach to forensic procurement whilst providing the flexibility that Police and Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables need to make the best local procurement decisions.

Forensic Science Research

Recommendation: 2

The Government should without delay commission the research promised by the minister on the reasons for the low proportion of forensic cases reaching court. (Paragraph 40)

Government Response:

We welcome the Committee’s recognition of the need for further research into the effectiveness of forensics. This was also highlighted in the Strategy. We have committed to commissioning further research into the effectiveness of forensics. Home Office researchers are in the process of developing a research project to evaluate the impact of forensic evidence on criminal justice outcomes (arrest, charge and conviction) for sexual assaults where the suspect is a stranger or unknown. The results of that research could potentially be ready by spring next year.

We know attrition rates in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) are low and many crimes will not reach court, but there is anecdotal evidence, though little systematic evidence, of the impact of forensic evidence. We accept that there is value in further exploring specific pinch points and causes of attrition, particularly in the more ‘downstream’ stages of the CJS. This project will help to identify the proportion of cases of serious sexual offences which progress through the criminal justice system, when forensic evidence is and is not present, and the impact that forensic evidence has on criminal justice outcomes once other factors are taken into account.

Recommendation: 3

The Home Office, in its input to the newly created UK Research & Innovation, should press for a greater priority—and share of funding—to be given to forensics research. The Government should also work with the Forensic Science Special Interest Group to relaunch its forensic research and innovation database, to help coordinate the work of public and private forensic scientists and businesses. (Paragraph 41)

Government Response:

We recognise that innovation is essential if police effectiveness is to be maintained in the face of changing threats and priorities. The Home Office Science Advisory Council and Home Office Chief Scientific Adviser are developing a set of research challenges that sets out areas where academia could enhance the knowledge infrastructure that underpins Home Office policy. These challenges include a number of areas for potential research in forensic science. This ‘Statement of Research Challenges’ is intended both to inform UK Research and Innovation and Research Council strategies, and to help academic organisations to articulate the priority that the Home Office places on these topics when making bids for funding.

The Joint Forensic and Biometric Programme will be undertaking a review of the current Research and Development landscape within the police. This will consider the opportunities available to ensure that research requirements are effectively prioritised

coordinated and opportunities for funding are identified and knowledge is shared effectively. This will include the options for the maximising usage of the Forensic Science Special Interest Group database.

Recommendation: 4

Any savings achieved from implementing the Forensics Strategy should not wholly be subsumed in general police budgets, but instead a significant proportion (we recommend at least half) explicitly ring-fenced and used specifically to fund the forensic science research needs identified by the Home Office and Ministry of Justice. (Paragraph 44)

Government Response:

Whilst we understand the Committee's desire to see more investment in forensic science research, it is not for the Government to direct the police on their expenditure. It is for Chief Constables and democratically elected PCCs to set their priorities in accordance with local needs and allocate their resources appropriately.

The government has placed a statutory duty on forces to collaborate where it is efficient to do so. Any savings generated from collaboration through implementation of the Strategy are for Chief Constables and PCCs to collectively invest in the interests of policing as a whole. Forces are now also able to bid for the police-led Transformation funding which provides an opportunity to transform policing and invest in digitisation, as well as enhance techniques and capabilities.

The Joint Forensics and Biometrics Programme will look at options to transform police forensics and biometrics, including making best use of research and development opportunities. This will benefit organisations across the Criminal Justice System, including the CPS, HMCTS, the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office.

Standards and accreditation

Recommendation: 5

The Government must be clear that, while some police forces may face particular challenges in securing accreditation, there must be no failure to meet the Regulator's deadlines. (Paragraph 55)

Government Response:

The Government fully supports the Regulator and we are clear that the timetable she has set out must be met by all practitioners providing forensic services to the Criminal Justice System. We are developing proposals to provide the Regulator with the appropriate powers to enforce this requirement.

Police forces are working with the Regulator to meet the deadlines and NPCC leads, with the support of the Home Office, will continue to monitor the progress of the police against the accreditation timetable.

Recommendation: 6

The Government must without further delay, and certainly before the end of the current 2016–17 Session, bring forward the legislation necessary to give the Forensics Regulator the statutory powers needed to ensure accreditation and standards compliance. (Paragraph 63)

Government Response:

We are clear on the need to ensure that the quality of forensic evidence in the criminal justice system is of a high standard, which is why we made a commitment in the Forensic Science Strategy to develop proposals to give the FSR statutory powers. Controlling the quality of evidence is critical to reducing the risk of serious miscarriages of justice and criminal trials collapsing as well to maintaining public confidence in the criminal justice system. We aim to take forward this important legislation as soon as is practicable.

The Strategy**Recommendation: 7**

The Government should acknowledge that the Forensics Strategy is an incomplete document which leaves too many issues and possible ways forward under-developed to constitute a coherent description of the Government’s policy and direction in this important area. The Government should now aim, on the back of the hopefully imminent publication of its long-awaited Biometrics Strategy and the conclusion of the police’s currently underway forensics service ‘scoping work’, to present a revised ‘draft Forensic Strategy’ for a full public consultation. Once that is done, we would hope to see a Strategy that justifies such a description. (Paragraph 82)

Government Response:

The Government consulted widely with a large number of stakeholders across the CJS before publishing the Forensic Strategy. We received strong support for the Strategy from those involved and we are very grateful to them for their input. Since publication, we have continued to work with our partners to implement the commitments we made and we have made good progress, recognising that not all are for the Home Office to lead.

The Forensic Strategy was developed in parallel with the Biometrics Strategy and is therefore closely aligned with it. We do not therefore accept that there is a need to revise the Forensic Strategy to take account of the Biometrics Strategy. The latter is in the final stages of completion and will be published shortly.

The Forensic Strategy sets out a vision for the future of forensic science delivery that will reinforce its legitimacy and capability. However, it is not the role of the Home Office to make operational policing decisions. It is for Chief Constables and PCCs, as operational leaders and elected local representatives to decide how best to deploy resources to effectively manage crime and local priorities, which includes forensic services. This is why reform and transformation in this area must be designed and delivered by the police.

Police forensics leads, with the support of the Home Office, have been working to develop the Joint Forensics and Biometrics Programme; a series of interdependent actions designed to explore ways to reshape police forensics in a way that improves and sustains local service delivery but with clear national governance and leadership across delivery systems. It will provide local teams with earlier access to the latest technology to deliver rapid and robust forensic services which meet the current and future needs of the public.