

SELECT COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Forensic Science

Call for Evidence

The House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee, under the Chairmanship of Lord Patel, is conducting an inquiry into forensic science. The Committee invites interested individuals and organisations to submit evidence to this inquiry.

When preparing your response, please bear in mind that short, concise submissions are preferred and responses must not be any longer than six sides of A4 – bullet points are acceptable. We do not expect you to address every question below. Equally, if there are any crucial issues not captured by the questions we pose, please highlight what they are and explain their salience.

How to submit evidence is set out in Annex I but if you have any questions or require any adjustments to enable you to respond, please contact the staff of the Committee on the details provided. **The deadline for receiving written submissions is 14 September 2018.**

Public hearings will be held in Autumn 2018. The Committee aims to report to the House, with recommendations in spring 2019. The report will receive a response from the Government, and may be debated in the House.

Background

In recent years concerns have been raised about the state of forensic science in the UK, and in particular in England and Wales. In July 2013 an inquiry by the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee concluded that major crimes could go unsolved unless the Government did more to support forensic science.¹ In 2015, the National Audit Office warned that forensic science provision was under threat because police were increasingly relying on unregulated experts to examine samples from suspects and crime scenes.²

In March 2016, the Home Office published its 'Forensic Science Strategy' to address some of these concerns.³ In the strategy the Government stated its intention to give the Forensic Science Regulator statutory powers but has yet to bring forward legislation to do so.⁴ In their

¹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmsctech/610/61002.htm>

² <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/The-Home-Office%E2%80%99s-oversight-of-forensic-services.pdf>

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/506652/54493_Cm_9217_Forensic_Science_Strategy_Accessible.pdf

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/506652/54493_Cm_9217_Forensic_Science_Strategy_Accessible.pdf

latest Annual Report, published in January 2018, the Forensic Science Regulator stated that “without statutory powers to enforce compliance, the Regulator cannot guarantee that all science being used in the [criminal justice system] is being carried out to the required quality standards”.⁵

A 2015 report by the Government’s Chief Scientific Adviser, [Forensic Science and Beyond](#), highlighted a number of challenges for the use of digital forensics including the availability of skills, the global nature of cybercrime, the scale of digital forensic investigations, the interface between digital information and physical information and the challenge of communicating this highly technical information throughout the justice process.

It is in this context that the Committee has decided to launch an inquiry into Forensic Science.

Scope

The Committee's inquiry will consider four broad areas:

- The contribution of forensic science to the delivery of justice in the UK and its strengths and weaknesses in doing so;
- The understanding and use of forensic evidence in the criminal justice system. The inquiry will look at the level of understanding within the criminal justice system and explore routes available to improve understanding by the judiciary, legal teams and juries, thus ensuring that forensic evidence, including digital evidence, is used effectively and robustly throughout the process;
- Standards and regulation, including the performance of the market for forensic services in the UK and the role of the Forensic Science Regulator;
- The forensic science research landscape, including the funding of research into forensic science, whether there is a need for new research programmes and what the focus of those programmes should be; and
- Digital Forensics – the detection, recovery, integrity, storage and interpretation of evidence from digital devices and networks in the investigation and prosecution of crimes.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674761/FSRAnnual_Report_2017_v1_01.pdf

Questions

1. Is forensic science contributing to the delivery of justice in the UK?
2. What are the current strengths and weaknesses of forensic science in support of justice?

Understanding and use of Forensic Science in the Criminal Justice System

3. What is the scientific evidence base for the use of forensic techniques in the investigation and prosecution of crimes? Are there any gaps in that evidence base?
4. How can the Criminal Justice System be equipped with robust, accurate and transparent forensic science? What channels of communication are needed between scientists, lawyers and the judiciary?
5. What is the level of understanding of forensic science within the Criminal Justice System amongst lawyers, judges and juries? How can it be improved?
6. Is the current training available for practitioners, lawyers and the judiciary appropriate?

Standards and regulation

7. Is the current market for forensic services in England and Wales sustainable? Are changes needed to ensure forensic science provision is maintained at the level required? What are the risks of a market approach, for example what happens if a provider goes out of business? And what is the impact on quality?
8. Is the system of accreditation working successfully to ensure standardised results and the highest quality analysis and interpretation of significance of evidence?
9. What role should the Forensic Science Regulator have? If the Forensic Science Regulator is to have statutory powers, what should these be?
10. What lessons can be learned from the use of forensic science in Scotland and Northern Ireland? What can be learned from the use of forensic science overseas?
11. Is the 'Forensic Science Strategy' produced by the Home Office in 2016 suitable?

Forensic Science research landscape

12. How should further research funding for forensic science be justified? What should be the focus of such research? What is the role of UK Research and Innovation, especially considering the interdisciplinary nature of much forensic science?
13. Where are the gaps in research and understanding of forensic science? How and by whom should the research questions be articulated to fill these gaps?
14. How can a culture of innovation in forensic science be developed and sustained?

15. Are there current or anticipated skills gaps? Who should have responsibility for and/or have oversight of training?

Digital Forensics

16. Are there gaps in the current evidence base for digital evidence detection, recovery, integrity, storage and interpretation?
17. Is enough being done to prepare for the increasing role that digital forensics will have in the future? Does the Criminal Justice System have the capacity to deal with the increased evidence load that digital forensics generates?

ANNEX I: GUIDANCE FOR SUBMISSIONS

Written evidence should be submitted online using the written submission form available at <https://www.parliament.uk/forensic-science-lords-inquiry-submission-form>. This page also provides guidance on submitting evidence. The deadline for written evidence is **14 September 2018**.

If you have difficulty submitting evidence online, please contact the Committee staff by email hlscience@parliament.uk or by telephoning 020 7219 5750.

Shorter submissions are preferred, no longer than six sides of A4. Paragraphs should be numbered. All submissions made through the written submission form will be acknowledged automatically by email.

Evidence which is accepted by the Committee may be published online at any stage; when it is so published it becomes subject to parliamentary copyright and is protected by parliamentary privilege. Submissions which have been previously published will not be accepted as evidence.

Once you have received acknowledgement that the evidence has been accepted you will receive a further email, and at this point you may publicise or publish your evidence yourself. In doing so you must indicate that it was prepared for the Committee, and you should be aware that your publication or re-publication of your evidence may not be protected by parliamentary privilege.

Personal contact details will be removed from evidence before publication, but will be retained by the Committee Office and used for specific purposes relating to the Committee's work, for instance to seek additional information.

Persons who submit written evidence, and others, may be invited to give oral evidence. Oral evidence is usually given in public at Westminster and broadcast online; transcripts are also taken and published online. Persons invited to give oral evidence will be notified separately of the procedure to be followed and the topics likely to be discussed.

Substantive communications to the Committee about the inquiry should be addressed through the clerk of the Committee, whether or not they are intended to constitute formal evidence to the Committee.

This is a public call for evidence. Please bring it to the attention of other groups and individuals who may not have received a copy direct.

You may follow the progress of the inquiry at: <https://www.parliament.uk/forensic-science-lords-inquiry>.