

News story: Forensic Science Regulator calls for statutory enforcement powers

The Forensic Science Regulator (FSR) has reiterated calls for statutory enforcement powers to ensure forensic providers and police forces in England and Wales meet quality standards, in her [annual report](#) published today (Friday).

Dr Gillian Tully has again urged the Home Office to put forward legislation to enable her to enforce quality standards. Currently the regulator sets the standards forensic science providers and police forces in England and Wales should meet but has no legal powers to enforce compliance, despite the government committing to introducing such powers in 2016.

The regulator's annual report also finds that dozens of police forces across England and Wales are making improvements in various areas of forensic science, including fingerprint comparison and areas such as crime scene examination and the extraction of data from digital devices.

However, she warned that both commercial forensic science providers and police forces in England and Wales are under financial strain, which represents a risk to the quality and sustainability of their work.

Forensic Science Regulator, Dr Gillian Tully, said:

Over the past year there has been progress in some areas by police in England and Wales but there is more work to be done to ensure all are adhering to internationally-recognised standards.

It is clear that the government must give this office the legal authority to enforce these standards and ensure the quality of forensic science continues to improve.

Dr Tully added that dozens of forces are now beginning to comply with fingerprint comparison standards. However, this follows an EU legal requirement to do so by March 25 2019 being brought into UK law. In October 2018 only 3 police forces in England and Wales had met the FSR's own non-legally binding deadline for fingerprint comparisons. She cited this as evidence of the need for statutory enforcement powers.

The FSR's annual report also updates on developments between November 2017 and November 2018 and priorities for the year to come. These include:

- the regulator's continued work to engage with those who influence policy and practice, including the Home Office and National Police Chiefs' Council, to highlight ways in which the quality of forensic science is

at risk and could be improved

- that forensic teams of police forces in England and Wales are insufficiently resourced to enable them to deliver operationally and achieve quality standards. In digital forensics the situation is even worse, where there are reports of police dropping cases because digital evidence is not available
- the letters the Regulator has written to the Chief Officers of 5 police forces requesting urgent action to ensure they use the latest contamination elimination database to avoid investigations being misled
- the publication for consultation of a draft quality standard for taking forensic samples from complainants in sex offence cases along with accompanying guidance
- an update to the latest regulator's codes of practice and conduct, which is due to be published in Spring 2019.

Press release: Coding to be taught in prison to help offenders return to the world of work

- New funding for pilot scheme to help carefully vetted prisoners learn digital skills
- Plans are part of a £1.2 million package to help underrepresented groups get jobs
- Three new Local Digital Skills Partnerships will help people get the skills they need to thrive in the digital economy

Prisoners will be taught coding to prepare them for work as part of plans to help marginalised groups become skilled in tech.

CODE 4000, an organisation that works with carefully vetted offenders and has led a successful trial at HMP Humber, has been given new funding by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to expand its scheme to HMP Holme House and reach more than a thousand more offenders.

The £100,000 award will also fund a new employment hub in Sheffield, providing support, mentoring and training for graduates once they have left prison, as the organisation looks to achieve its aim of developing a network of coding workshops in UK prisons.

The programme is modelled on the Last Mile project in the San Quentin prison in California which has helped almost 500 offenders with a zero per cent reoffending rate of participants. The national average reoffending rate in the US is 55 per cent.

To tackle reoffending – which costs society around £15 billion a year – the

Government has launched the Education and Employment Strategy which aims to create a system where each prisoner is set on a path to employment from the outset.

Minister for Digital, Margot James said:

The Government is committed to stopping the cycle of reoffending and a valuable asset to prevent recidivism is employment.

Equipping offenders with coding skills will help them into life-changing work and give them a path to a hugely rewarding career.

We have a world-leading digital economy and this new funding will help keep people out of prison so they can give back to their local communities as well as be a boost for our tech businesses.

Prisons Minister Rory Stewart said:

I want to see more offenders learning the kind of workplace skills which can set them on a path to a better future, which is precisely why we launched our Education & Employment Strategy last year.

Code 4000 is an excellent example of what can be achieved through education and training in prison. It not only helps offenders turn their lives around but also benefits society by reducing the chances of their reoffending, and I am delighted to see it receive this further funding.

Neil Barnby, Workshop Instructor, HMP Humber, CODE 4000 said:

Code4000 workshops are reducing re-offending at a measurable rate, because we keep in touch with our graduates. We are constantly seeing success after success. When I started teaching in prisons I thought that if I could change just one life, turn one person away from crime then I have achieved something truly marvellous.

I look back on the years that I have been teaching coding in prisons and can see all the lives I have had a part in changing for the better. Not just the ex-offenders but their families and, more importantly their children. It is an enormous sense of achievement and with this funding I look forward to changing even more lives.

Digital Skills Innovation Fund

More than £1 million will be used to fund regional and local initiatives to help people from underrepresented groups gain the skills they need for digital roles.

Programmes being funded include those targeted at helping women from disadvantaged backgrounds, people with autism and people living in lower socioeconomic areas. The aim is to help people get the skills to succeed in roles such as data analysts, programmers, software developers and digital marketers.

The funding will see new training courses, workshops and seminars led by tech experts alongside a mentoring scheme tailored to businesses.

Research reveals only 19 percent of women make up the tech workforce and are underrepresented in the uptake of digital qualifications. While unemployed adults are five per cent more likely to lack the basic digital skills than the national average.

The following Local Enterprise Partnerships will receive a share of the money to invest in their local communities:

West of England Combined Authority

Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire (D2N2) LEP working with Sheffield City Region and supported by Leicestershire LEP and Greater Lincolnshire LEP

Lancashire LEP

Heart of the South West LEP

More regions to launch Digital Skills Partnerships

Local Digital Skills Partnerships (Local DSPs) bring together regional businesses, charities, local authorities and academics to increase the digital skills of individuals and organisations in their region. Three launched last year in Lancashire, Heart of the South West and West Midlands Combined Authority.

Three more Local Digital Skills Partnerships will be set up in the South East; Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly; and Cheshire and Warrington. This takes the number of people with access to the programme to more than 10 million, boosting digital and technical skills, job opportunities and productivity across the regions.

More than 2.5 million free training opportunities, in areas such as basic online skills, cybersecurity and coding, have already been delivered through the Digital Skills Partnership.

ENDS

Notes to editors and further info:

Contact the DCMS Press Office on 0207 211 2210.

CODE 4000

Offenders take part in a four-stage programme from initial training to developing the technical skills to qualify as full-time developer and find employment on release. The courses are led by volunteers and industry

experts.

Stage 1: is a training phase, and begins with teaching the basics of HTML, CSS, and Javascript, before moving on to more advanced concepts such as Git, TDD, MVC, databases and full stack development.

Stage 2: allows successful graduates of Stage 1 to then work on real-world projects for external clients, which will also provide a modest income to the project.

Stage 3: will then see them working for clients in the real world on temporary day release.

Stage 4: aims to help them find full time employment as developers.

This employment hub in Sheffield will help them into work, stay in work and out of prison, and give back to their communities.

Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund – further quotes and info

Mike Blackburn, Lancashire LEP Board Director and Chair of the Lancashire Digital Skills Partnership, said:

We're delighted to have been awarded this funding which will enable us to deliver more accessible digital skills training to residents who are currently underrepresented in the local workforce.

The investment will also complement other programmes which focus on driving the region's digital economy as well as contributing to our wider inclusive growth strategy.

Lindsay Wetton, Senior Programme Manager, D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership said:

D2N2 are thrilled to be leading this exciting innovative digital skills project across the area in collaboration with Sheffield city region.

The focus is to support women and people with Autism, into digital skilled jobs through workshops, work experience and jobs.

West of England Mayor, Tim Bowles, said:

This is fantastic news and supports one of my key ambitions of improving job opportunities across the region. I want to ensure that everyone, regardless of background or personal circumstances, can access support to develop workplace skills so that they can fulfil their potential.

Digital and tech is an important part of the West of England's economy, and businesses have a particular need for skilled employees now, and this demand is expected to grow in the future.

Women are currently under-represented in digital roles and this new project will seek to tackle this by engaging with a wide group of women in communities, with the aim of moving us towards more representative and inclusive employment in digital roles across the region. This could include roles in virtual reality, VFX design or software development.

Digital Skills Partnership – further quotes and info

Clare Harris, Senior Skills Officer for Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP said:

We are delighted to have secured £75,000 of Digital Skills Partnership funding. As one of the best connected regional economies in Europe with a thriving tech sectors, it is important that people have the skills and confidence to take full advantage of our distinctive digital assets.

The project can make a tangible difference to residents, organisation and the economy of our area, helping to access and embrace the digital world and the opportunities that it brings.

By investing in the region, working with government and our partners, we can radically increase our contribution to the UK economy, while pioneering new systems, technologies and skills ways of working.

Philip Cox, Chief Executive of Cheshire and Warrington LEP said:

We are very excited to be a part of this initiative and to have a Local Digital Skills Partnership for Cheshire and Warrington. Being recognised by DCMS as one of the LEPs to deliver this project, shows the great potential Cheshire and Warrington has to increase our digitally-focused economy and increase productivity. Having the right digital skills offers fantastic opportunities for schoolchildren and adults when choosing a role.

Cheshire and Warrington LEP are keen to build upon our already dynamic economy by embracing and encouraging the skills our businesses need now and in the future. The Local Digital Skills Partnership will enable us to continue supporting the growth of our priority sectors as we move towards delivery of our Local Industrial Strategy.

More information on these three new Digital Skills Partnerships can be found [here](#).

Press release: Close season for coarse fishing on rivers starts

The close season runs from 15 March to 15 June 2019 and applies to all rivers and streams in England but does not apply to most still-waters and most canals.

During the close season Environment Agency officers, with support from Angling Trust Volunteer Bailiffs, will be conducting patrols to enforce the close season as part of Operation CLAMPDOWN, now in its seventh year.

During last year's coarse fish close season campaign, 927 patrols were conducted, recording more than 250 illegal or unlicensed offences.

Kevin Austin, Head of Fisheries at the Environment Agency said:

Our job is to protect fish stocks and improve fisheries. The majority of anglers, who fish legally, rightly demand that we take action to catch offenders.

During the close season our fisheries enforcement officers, supported by Angling Trust volunteer bailiffs, will be targeting illegal fishing. We take illegal fishing very seriously. Anyone fishing illegally can expect to be prosecuted and face a substantial fine. We urge anyone to report illegal fishing as quickly as possible by calling our incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

Public consultation on the future of the close season for coarse fishing on rivers –

The Environment Agency recently conducted an 8 week public consultation on the future of the close season for coarse fishing on rivers. It has now closed and more than 13,600 responses were received. The results are now being collated. Along with the existing evidence, this information will be used to determine if there is a case for changing the current close season byelaw.

Any proposed change to the current byelaw (whether to change the dates or remove the close season) must be advertised, to give everyone the opportunity to object (or support). We will respond to these objections, before applying

to government for confirmation. The final decision rests with Government.
Any decision to change the byelaw will not affect the 2019 close season.

Press release: Coding to be taught in prison to help offenders return to the world of work

New pilot scheme will help carefully vetted prisoners learn digital skills
and £1.2 million will help underrepresented groups get jobs

Press release: UK sends humanitarian experts ahead of Mozambique cyclone

Specialist humanitarian advisers, from the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), expected to deploy from London this evening (14 March).