

EVIDENCE, INVESTIGATION AND FORENSIC PRACTICE NETWORK

ANNUAL REPORT UPDATE 2026

Professor Penny Woolnough, Associate Director

INTRODUCTION

The Evidence, Investigation and Forensic Practice Network provides a focus for research in a range of specialist areas related to the role of the police in the recovery, interpretation and effective use of intelligence and evidence in the investigation of crimes and major incidents.

This includes the development and evaluation of policy and good practice in the strategic and tactical use of forensic sciences. Consequently, we work closely with key partners in Police Scotland, the Scottish Police Authority and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) across the range of projects and activities that are aligned with the network.

MEMBERSHIP

The work of the network is shaped by a Network Steering Group comprising eight academics and four practitioners from Police Scotland, SPA Forensic Services and the National Crime Agency:

- Dr Julie Gawrylowicz, Department of Sociological and Psychological Sciences, Abertay University
- Dr Susan Griffiths, School of Psychology, Aberdeen University
- Professor Lucina Hackman, Senior Lecturer in Human Identification, University of Dundee
- Dr Penny Haddrill, Centre for Forensic Science, University of Strathclyde
- Dr Niall Hamilton-Smith, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, University of Stirling
- Dr Richard Jones, School of Law, University of Edinburgh
- Dr Eva Rubinova, School of Psychology, Aberdeen University
- Dr George Weir, Computer and Information Sciences, University of Strathclyde
- Ms Fiona Douglas, Director Forensic Services, Scottish Police Authority
- Ms Joanne Tierney, Scottish Police Authority Forensic Services
- Detective Chief Superintendent Gary Cunningham, Police Scotland
- Mr Stephen Halls, National Crime Agency,

KEY ACTIVITIES/ HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2025/6

- We have focussed on **supporting researcher well-being** by organising a workshop for researchers doing emotionally demanding research on 31st October at Abertay University which was presented/facilitated by Dr Amy Burrell (University of Birmingham), Dr Julianne Kloess (University of Edinburgh) and Professor Penny Woolnough. The workshop was an important researcher development and networking event that explored what is meant by emotionally demanding research; identified potential ways in which these challenges can be approached/managed to maximise researcher well-being and facilitated networking and the building of longer-term connections for researchers in this domain. Output from the event has also been written up as a SIPR briefing report to facilitate wider learning and development.
- We have continued to contribute to the ongoing SPA **Value of Forensic Science Working Group** which aims to seek a suitable methodology to: understand the contribution of forensic science within the Justice System; determine how forensic science contributes to overall public safety, crime prevention and confidence in policing; influence decision making in the justice process; to influence research and innovation; support change and future strategic direction; use resources effectively and; define and track investment outcomes as well as demonstrate value for money to the taxpayer.

- We have **brokered relationships** between researchers and practitioners in several under-research areas related to the Network, supporting knowledge exchange and funding applications, for example:
 - Connections between Police Scotland's Incident Command (IC) Training Unit and interested academics in relation to research project(s) broadly around the areas of the psychology of incident commander and performance under pressure.
 - Connections between researchers at the University of Strathclyde and national/international partners interested in emergency response, decision making and resourcing in remote search and rescue. In addition to partners in Scotland (i.e., Police Scotland, Mountain Rescue and Coastguard), partners have been identified in Sweden (Police and University of Linköping who may host webinar) and Denmark, it is hoped partners in Norway, Canada and Finland will also participate.
- The network is passionate about **facilitating pathways to impact and the active translation of emerging research findings to practice**, for example:
 - Police Scotland Mental Health Task Force reached out to network aligned SIPR funded PhD student Nesha Chan for learning from her work on risk, missing and suicide to support work they are undertaking to develop a new Mental Health Needs Assessment Tool and associated Mental Health Dashboard and e-Learning.
 - We have continued to expand the reach of research in the Network by working with the Norwegian Police University College to deliver training to Norwegian Senior Investigating Officers on major crime investigation and decision making.
 - Considerable progress has been made in relation to the development of the first structured professional judgement tool for missing persons (SIPR funded/Network aligned PhD), with the completion of all stages of data analysis and the development of a prototype tool for Police Scotland.
 - Supporting Police Scotland Major Investigation Teams with strategies and decision making in the investigation of complex cases.
- **Funding and facilitating new research to support the development of tools and practice.** Network members are actively working to increase the number of funded PhD studentships that are aligned to the Network and focussed on development of new tools/techniques for application within policing/forensic services. An informal Network supervisor support/peer review group has supported a number of recent successful funding applications. New and ongoing studentships aligned with the network include:
 - NEW: Development of a trauma informed cognitive interview (Akhil Suresh; Abertay University; SGSSS funded)
 - NEW: Identifying best practice in video recorded interviews (Maria Shenouda; Abertay University; SIPR funded)
 - NEW: Development of a risk assessment tool for under 18-year-olds who display problematic behaviour, both offline and online (Student in recruitment; University of Glasgow; SGSSS funded)
 - NEW: Cybersecurity project enabling people to identify deepfakes (Abertay University; SIPR funded)
 - NEW: Understanding what happens when adults with learning disability go missing (Eloise Slaven; Abertay University; SGSSS funded)
 - ONGOING: Development of a structured professional judgement tool for missing person risk assessment (Nesha Chan; Abertay University; SIPR funded)
 - ONGOING: Facilitating long-term retrieval of stressful and non-stressful repeated events: mnemonics and interviewing interventions (O. Victory Ulamen; Aberdeen University; BBSRC funded)
 - ONGOING: Improving evidential value of interview reports with measuring confidence (Didem Nur Yurdakul; Aberdeen University; University funded)
 - ONGOING: Improving the Diagnostic Value of Perpetrator Descriptions (Abbie MacAskill, Aberdeen University; SGSSS funded)
 - ONGOING: Novel detection of New Psychoactive Substances (Ntau Mafisa, Strathclyde University; funded by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission)

- ONGOING: Development of a Forensic Method for Estimating Time Since Deposition in Semen and Vaginal Secretion Stains Using Small Non-Coding RNA Biomarkers (Sita Korkiatphithuk, Strathclyde University: self-funded).
- ONGOING: Analysis of Forensic DNA Markers Using Conventional and Advanced Technologies: Libyan Population Genetics Study (Mohammed Gusbi, Strathclyde University; funded by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Libya).
- ONGOING: The Forensic DNA Foundational Triad: A Systematic Approach to Establishing Forensic Laboratory Infrastructure, Population Genetics Diversity Analysis, and the Development of a Localised Allele Frequency Database (Dikani Salema, Strathclyde University; funded by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission).
- ONGOING: Application of Next Generation Sequencing in forensic DNA Profiling in the Qatari Population (Saleh Alsaadi, Strathclyde University; funded by the Ministry of Interior, Qatar).

PLANS FOR 2026/27

Over the next academic year, we will continue to take forward the exciting and impactful projects that are ongoing as detailed above and will:

- Work with the SIPR executive committee, SIPR Leadership Team and other partners to ensure the evidence and investigation network continues to support the broader SIPR strategic objectives.
- Continue to support the SPA-Forensic Services Value of Forensic Science Working Group and look forward to working closely with SPA-FS staff who will be driving forward SPA-FS research and development work.
- As part of a wider SIPR scoping exercise we plan to assess who across Scotland is doing research which aligns with the network. As part of this, we will identify associated ECRs and PGRs for greater involvement. Also, align current SPA-FS staff connections to / affiliations / working with Universities.
- Identify opportunities for knowledge exchange, research and pathways to impact, ensuring there is flexibility within the network to respond to new and emerging priorities
- In collaboration with Police Scotland and key partners, we will support new SIPR funded research examining the use of edge AI to enhance witness statement-taking (led by Dr Julie Gawrylowicz, Abertay University and Dr Eva Rubinova, Aberdeen University).
- We will also continue to support the delivery of research impact via the translation of research into policy and practice with national and international law enforcement partners.
- Dr Penny Haddrill and Professor Penny Woolnough will continue to represent the Network on the SPA-FS Value of Forensic Science working group, which oversees work currently being undertaken by the Leverhulme Centre for Forensic Science.
- Network webinars are in planning to continue our 'research to practice' webinars with anticipated webinars on: "Investigating child sexual offences" (Dr Julianne Kloess, University of Glasgow); and "AI voice-cloning and deepfake technology as weapons for fraud" (Dr Neil Kirk, Abertay University).
- Members of the Network are also keen to work with practitioners interested in undertaking SIPR Practitioner Fellowships and would welcome contact from anyone interested in potentially pursuing this.

Please do get in touch if you have ideas for activities / collaborations you would like the Network to support as we would be delighted to hear from you.