

# News story: Continuing cuts to forensic science threaten criminal justice

In [the report](#), which was published today (Friday 19 January), Regulator Dr Gillian Tully warns that the cuts highlighted last year have continued in the sector, with serious consequences.

Already, scientists have been required to give expert advice based on interim forensic reports because some police forces have refused to pay for the scientists to produce an admissible statement of evidence in court. Often there is little time left for practitioners to prepare reports on complex cases or keep up with scientific developments.

At the same time, police are spending less on their own forensic science practices. With the tendering process for commercial services being focused heavily on costs, more and more money is taken out of the system.

Further pressure is being put on individual scientists by the delay of many organisations in starting the process of attaining the required quality standards, the Regulator states.

However, the Regulator also highlights that despite the challenges, significant progress has been made in the sector and that many organisations have achieved the required standards, or are well on their way to demonstrate objectively that their methods are scientifically valid and their staff competent.

Forensic Science Regulator Dr Gillian Tully said:

There are a lot of hard working and committed forensic scientists doing their best, but they are not always supported by the system they work in.

A year ago I warned that funding was too tight, and now even more money has been taken out of the system. We cannot continue on this path.

I urge the government to put the role of the Regulator on statutory footing now, to enable me to ensure that all organisations providing forensic science evidence in the criminal justice system, meet the high standards required.

The failure of some police forces to give sufficient priority to achieving quality standards in their own forensic science work, is of great concern to the Regulator. Whilst it is understandable that senior police leaders have a wide range of priorities, if quality cannot be sufficiently prioritised, it

may become unsustainable for some forces to continue to carry out their own forensic science case work.

The Regulator also highlighted that a number of small forensic businesses have chosen, for financial reasons, not to move towards reaching the required standards. For these reasons, statutory powers are urgently needed so that the Regulator can ensure that all providers of forensic science deliver work to quality standards that are fit for the criminal justice system.

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## **News story: Dstl announces support of 2018's Year of Engineering**

The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) is proud to announce its support of the Government's pledge to make 2018 the [Year of Engineering](#). As a key campaign partner, Dstl will be promoting its state-of-the-art engineering work to demonstrate the creativity involved in designing solutions for military and security customers. With many internationally recognised subject experts, Dstl's skilled scientists and engineers are fantastic role models who can help young people, and their parents and teachers, see the potential of a future career in engineering.

In 2017, Dstl recruited 80 graduates and 27 apprentices across our divisions, who work on some of the UK's most exciting and interesting science and technology programmes, many of which have international and well as national implications. Engineers at Dstl work in a wide range of engineering disciplines including mechanical, electrical, materials and software. Every day they are working on a range of high-profile and exciting engineering projects including the Queen Elizabeth class of carriers, the F-35 Lightning II, unmanned aerial vehicles, ballistic protection and cyber security.

The Year of Engineering activities will build on Dstl's current Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) outreach programme with schools and universities, which sees its STEM Ambassadors out and about meeting as many young people as possible to help inspire the next generation of engineers.

Dr Bryn Hughes, Dstl Technical Director, said:

At a national level, there is a general shortage of well-trained and qualified engineers. If not addressed, this will have a long-term impact not only for defence and security, but also the prosperity of the UK. At Dstl, we encourage our engineers to meet young people as part of the STEM Ambassador programme, and raise the profile of the exciting opportunities offered through engineering in all its forms.

To this end we look forward to the opportunity in 2018 to really focus our efforts. We'll be working alongside other employers with the aim to inspire the next generation of engineers to join us in solving some of the UK's most critical problems with inventive engineering solutions both now and in to the future.

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## [Press release: HS2 reveals Colne Valley viaduct concepts](#)

The concept was developed by independent specialist architects Martin Knight in consultation with the [Colne Valley Regional Park Panel](#), and the [HS2 Independent Design Panel](#), consisting of architects, designers and experts in sustainability.

The viaduct concept document explores a range of options and ideas for how it can be sensitively and aesthetically sited within the Colne Valley, whilst addressing the technical demands of the project. It will help to inform further design work and technical development by Align, the main civil engineering contractor for HS2 between the Colne Valley viaduct and the northern portal of the Chilterns Tunnel. Align will engage the local community on these designs in spring 2018.

The concept has been developed around 14 key criteria, which were set by HS2 in consultation with the HS2 Independent Design Panel. These include whether the design fits the landscape, maintains views and landscape 'flow', is well proportioned and elegant.

The area of the Colne Valley through which HS2's route passes features a series of woods and lakes that developed when farming and quarrying ended, and sits alongside the Chiltern railway.

Chair of the Colne Valley Regional Park Panel, Jim Barclay, said:

The construction of the Colne Valley HS2 viaduct will have a significant impact on the Colne Valley area. The Colne Valley Panel which is drawn from local stakeholders, is very pleased to have been consulted and through a series of workshops, Panel Members have been able to understand the design principles for the viaduct. The Colne Valley Regional Park Panel looks forward to further engagement with HS2 and Align over the actual viaduct design.

As well as the viaduct itself, the concept document also explores innovative ideas for additional elements such as transparent noise-reduction barriers

with vertical lines which are visible to bats and wildfowl to reduce possible impacts, whilst creating a slimmer side profile of the viaduct.

Sadie Morgan, chair of the Independent Design Panel, said:

We are delighted that this imaginative and carefully-considered concept has been published, and can form the basis for wider discussions with the communities around the Colne Valley and all those who value and use the spaces and amenities within it.

The Independent Design Panel will continue to work hard to ensure that the viaduct's final design respects its location and communities, whilst being a shining example of great design that Britain can be proud of.

Construction partner Align will be responsible for developing the final design and constructing the viaduct according to technical specifications and within an agreed cost envelope.

HS2 programme director, Mike Hickson, said:

The Colne Valley viaduct will be one of the longest viaducts in the UK, and one of HS2's best-known structures. We are pleased and grateful for the work done by Martin Knight Architects, the Colne Valley Regional Park Panel and the HS2 Independent Design Panel to produce this potential scheme design. We have every confidence that our contractor, Align, will continue this collaborative approach and engagement, as they now develop their own scheme and then detailed design of this significant structure.

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## **[News story: Drive to raise education standards in areas most in need](#)**

Raising education standards by supporting underperforming schools and offering young people more opportunities to make the best of their lives are at the heart of a package of measures announced today by Education Secretary Damian Hinds.

Aimed particularly at disadvantaged areas across the country, today's moves include:

- More than £45million awarded to successful multi-academy trusts to help tackle underperformance and improve schools in areas that lack capacity;

- 75 projects sharing £25million to provide more support for schools, many of which will increase pupils' literacy and numeracy skills; and
- The publication of the next six [Opportunity Area](#) plans in Bradford, Doncaster, Fenland and East Cambridgeshire, Hastings, Ipswich and Stoke-on-Trent.

The announcement builds on the government's record of 1.9million more children now in good or outstanding schools than in 2010, England's pupils now amongst the world's best readers and GCSE and A levels reformed to match the best education systems in the world.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

As Education Secretary, I want all children to get a truly world-class education that not only inspires them to make the most of their lives but also gives them the opportunity to fulfil their ambitions, no matter where they live.

Standards are rising in schools across the country but there is more to do to make sure that every child benefits from the progress we've already made thanks to an incredibly talented generation of teachers.

By supporting good and outstanding schools to help others improve, and focusing on disadvantaged areas where our young people need extra help, we can continue to make a difference to people's everyday lives and build a Britain that's fit for the future.

As part of the [Multi-Academy Trust Development and Improvement Fund](#) (MDIF), announced in October 2017, over £45million will support multi-academy trusts to drive improvement. More than £30million of this will be targeted to around 300 academy trusts in areas facing the greatest challenges across England. The attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers has narrowed in recent years – by 7% at GCSE and 10.5% at KS2 since 2011.

The money will go to more than 400 multi-academy trusts (MATs) with a proven record to help them build their capacity so they can help drive further improvements and raise standards. Ofsted data shows that 450,000 children are studying in sponsored academies rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' that were typically previously underperforming.

Under the latest round of the Strategic School Improvement Fund (SSIF), 75 largely school-led initiatives will share £25million to help more children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including many to support to help master the basics of reading and maths in primary school. Overall, the SSIF is worth up to £280million over two years. It targets resources at the schools most in need to improve school performance, support teacher development and drive up pupil attainment.

The next six Opportunity Area plans – for Bradford, Doncaster, Fenland and East Cambridgeshire, Hastings, Ipswich and Stoke-on-Trent – have been

developed with local educators, employers and voluntary and community organisations and set out how they will improve the life chances of young people in these communities.

They follow the publication of the government's social mobility action plan [Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential](#) in December which focuses £800million of resources on those areas that can benefit the most. All 12 Opportunity Areas will benefit from a share of £22 million through a new Essential Life Skills programme, to help young people in these areas develop life skills in resilience, wellbeing and employability.

Among the initiatives confirmed today in the latest round of the Strategic School Improvement Fund is Cotgrave Candleby Lane School, a teaching school in Nottinghamshire. Funding will be used to improve reading outcomes across primary education by focusing on phonics and other reading practices in early years education, the teaching of comprehension at Key Stage 2, and measures to close or narrow the attainment gap between pupils.

Chris Wheatley, CEO of the Flying High Trust Partnership that runs the teaching school, said:

We are thrilled to be successful in securing our application. This project is testament to strong collaboration between Nottinghamshire County Council and Nottinghamshire Teaching Schools.

Drawing on the capacity of the school-led system; we aim to bring about sustainable improvement in reading across priority schools and a legacy of collaborative working to improve reading outcomes for all Nottinghamshire children.

Sir Kevan Collins, Chief Executive of the Education Endowment Foundation and Evidence Champion for the Opportunity Areas, said:

We know that your chance of getting on in life is strongly linked to where you grew up and that low levels of social mobility are becoming entrenched in some parts of the UK. Improving outcomes for young people in these 'coldspots' needs a concerted effort from local partners, schools and other organisations across every stage of a young person's life.

So it is welcome to see this evident in today's six plans. The need now is to move swiftly from planning to action so that children and young people experience the benefit of this investment.

To really have an impact, change has to be informed by evidence. Our Research Schools will be crucial in doing this in each of the Opportunity Areas. They will help to break down barriers so that research does not stay in the pages of academic journals but has a real impact on classroom practice. Allowing teachers to use lessons

from what's worked to inform their practice can make all the difference to attainment.

Ahead of the announcement, the Secretary of State visited Curwen Primary School in London to meet with pupils and teachers. The school is part of The Tapscott Learning Trust, which has been awarded a share of the Multi-Academy Trust Development and Improvement Fund. Chief Executive Officer of The Tapscott Learning Trust and Executive Head of Curwen Primary School Paul Harris said:

It was a great honour and privilege to be able to show the new Secretary of State around our fantastic, outstanding school. As a school, and now as part of The Tapscott Learning Trust, it is our core mission to work in partnership with other providers to improve children's life chances. We welcome the opportunity to be able to demonstrate to the Secretary of State some of the amazing work that we are doing and to also discuss wider educational issues, particularly the way in which we train and support teachers through the continued development of our Training Hub and also to improve primary sports provision from our new Sports Hub.

We are delighted to have been awarded this grant by the MAT Development and Improvement Fund to help and support our work, not just within The Tapscott Learning Trust, but for other schools. We are confident that having secured this funding this will now be achievable and enable us to achieve our vision. We also look forward to working in partnership as an accredited provider of courses for the Autism Education Trust.

Simon Bramwell OBE, chief executive of the SS Simon and Jude Church of England multi-academy trust, a small trust with four primary academies, has been awarded a share of the Multi-Academy Trust Development and Improvement Fund to take on and improve schools that need support raising attainment for disadvantaged pupils in Knowsley and Salford. He said:

We are delighted to have been awarded MDIF funding to help support school improvement in these areas. The funding will go a long way in enabling us to provide greater capacity and sustainability for delivering the school improvement model across the Trust.

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# Press release: UK and France to strengthen links in tech sector and artificial intelligence

The UK tops the list in Europe for global tech investors, with its tech firms attracting more venture capital funding than any other European country in 2017. In December it was named by Oxford Insights as the best prepared country in the world for artificial intelligence (AI) implementation.

France has made big strides in creating new tech businesses and encouraging entrepreneurs, with Paris's newly built Station F, a former railway station hosting startups, multinationals and investors, symbolising the country's ambition

Mr Hancock met his French counterpart, Françoise Nyssen, at the UK France Summit hosted by the Prime Minister and the French President, Emmanuel Macron, at Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst. He said the digital conference will take place this year and foster cross-Channel collaboration between academics, industry and government.

Its aim is to help both countries seize the economic and social benefits of fast-developing tech such as AI, and the conference will bring together experts on data, cyber security, digital government and digital skills to share their knowledge.

The countries also reaffirmed their commitment and support for the principle of net neutrality, which promotes a free and open internet. They agreed a joint statement to make sure users can access websites without internet service providers favouring or blocking particular sites.

This follows the launch this week of an Anglo-French alliance linking Imperial College London and the French National Centre for Scientific Research to strengthen relations in academic subjects underpinning AI, and the Franco-British AI Conference at the Alan Turing Institute on Tuesday.

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Secretary Matt Hancock said:

The UK and France are strengthening ties in technology and innovation. I'm looking forward to leading a cutting-edge digital conference this year which will see our world-leading experts in cyber security, digital skills, artificial intelligence, data and digital government share their talent and knowledge.

Both countries benefit when our digital economies are strong and the event will deepen our bonds and foster cross-Channel collaboration between those at the forefront of modern technology.



Julian David, CEO of techUK, said:

This event is a significant step towards greater collaboration between the British and French tech sectors. Both countries share similar opportunities and challenges as we build our leading digital economies through technologies like artificial intelligence, Internet of Things and cyber security.

International platforms for collaboration, such as the one announced by Matt Hancock today, provide valuable cross-border perspectives on many of the social, legal and ethical questions that will be raised as we continue to innovate.

Adrian Gregory, CEO of Atos UK&I said:

As a company that is proud of its European heritage, Atos welcomes the closer collaboration of British and French technologists.

And as a global digital leader with a long and rich association with the UK and with ten thousand UK-based people focused on transforming our customers' business through the best use of digital technology across the private and public sectors, we strongly believe in the mutual benefits that a closer working relationship will bring, particularly in the areas of AI, cyber security and data analytics, to forward-thinking organisations in both countries together with consumers. This will only serve to also strengthen the economies of both countries.

Stephen Kelly, CEO, Sage, said:

We welcome this deeper collaboration between two leading tech nations, France and the UK. For today's digital entrepreneurs the world has no borders, only opportunities to grow their business.

We have much to learn from each other as we bring advanced technologies like AI and collective intelligence into the everyday lives of small and growing businesses to improve productivity and growth.