

MAXIMISING THE VALUE OF DNA EVIDENCE THROUGH A SERVICE APPROACH

Trevor Howitt

The Forensic Science Service, Birmingham, West Midlands, England



The UK police service and the FSS established the world's first National DNA database (NDNAD) in April 1995. At that time the database was populated with samples taken from persons suspected of involvement in serious, sexual or drugs crime only.

Over the last nine years UK legislation has been modified to allow the police to take DNA samples from all arrestees. Furthermore the legislation provides for these DNA samples to be retained on the database indefinitely. In addition the UK government provided £300 million for a project to expand the NDNADB to reflect the size of the UK criminal population. The UK National DNA Database now contains the records of 2.6 million suspects/arrestees and 231,000 (undetected) crime stains.

The NDNADB custodian reports approx 650 "matches" between undetected crime stains and suspects each **week**, the majority of which are links between suspects and burglary or car crime offences.

The FSS has sought to maximise the value of this database by developing a "service" approach with some police forces. The key benefits of this approach are:

1. the FSS and police force jointly develop a forensic strategy to meet a policing issue rather than focusing on individual crimes,
2. the FSS provides a scientist to manage the forensic process on behalf of the force and to collate the management information pertaining to the service,
3. police resources are made available for the rapid examination of scenes for potential DNA samples and the processing of intelligence once a 'match' has been notified to the force,
4. the FSS processes the DNA samples very rapidly and returns matched to the force within days of the sample being received at the laboratory

This approach has been used very successfully with West Yorkshire Police (WYP) over the last two years in tackling burglary and car crime. This partnership project is known as 'Operation Converter'. The agreed service details are as follows:

1. WYP undertakes to attend a crime scene within 12 hours of the crime being reported and submit a DNA sample to the FSS within 48 hours of collection.
2. The FSS processes the DNA samples and returns the "match" reports to WYP within 7 days.
3. WYP processes the intelligence gained from the match report and guarantees to act upon the information within 3 days of receipt.

In this way a perpetrator of an “undetected” crime can be identified and arrested within days of an offence being committed. This approach focuses scarce resources on repeat and prolific offenders and has had a significant impact in the force concerned.

Two years into this partnership project the overall TRT from scene examinations to match report is just 6 days. Since October 2003 approx 600 profiles have been loaded to the database and 60% of which produced a “match”. (One Division/area of the WYP is currently reporting a 73% match rate).

The presentation will outline the FSS service approach, detail the WYP operation and highlight the success of this joint approach to crime management.