

SERVICE PROVISION IN THE FUTURE

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The future development of forensic science is rooted in history and this year we celebrate 20 years of DNA profiling. We have been on a journey together and during that time we have seen technology advance, sensitivity increase, and we now routinely do things we only dreamed about 20 years ago. But crucially we have learned many things. Probably the most important is the need to work in partnership with all parts of the Criminal Justice System (CJS), only then do we see the real value of forensic science. During this presentation we will demonstrate that when supply chains are treated as a whole, by all parties, with a view to improving and indeed monitoring the contribution of forensic science to the CJS, then real progress is made.

We will look back over the last 20 years at what we have achieved; right from the very first case where we recognised that forensic science was a small but essential and integral part of process. The Pitchfork case demonstrated the potential of DNA to eliminate a man who had confessed, the potential to screen an identifiable population, the potential to flush out the perpetrator and to support his prosecution or, as so often happens these days, his guilty plea. We will also look at the development of the National DNA Database which was another watershed example of everybody coming together to better serve the CJS; even the law was radically changed. As we look into the future, our next opportunity will make a step change in the way we support investigations. As with the start of DNA, advancements continue to blur the edges of where one organisation's contribution starts and another begins. The technology that we can put into our new Forensic Response Vehicles will cause us to revisit how the forensic supply chain works.

This is not about organisations therefore, but about service to customers and the CJS. By service to the CJS I mean contribution to the effective and efficient administration of justice. This contribution is equally applicable to helping the investigating officer 'solve' his or her case as to helping a court decide the question of whether or not an individual is guilty of an offence by providing evidence that is considered, informed and relevant to the issue. It lends itself to an information service provision, based on customer requirements, that is timely and cost efficient.

Innovation based on the best that technology can offer is needed to arm the supplier of forensic science with the tools to do the job. Technology I believe is also pushing us all to the same place; digitised information, provided in 'real time' that can be collated and value added through interpretation, comparisons, deductions and, importantly, supplied to those who need to use it when they need it most. The culture and skill of the forensic scientist will be to contextualise the information for the case at hand.

Throughout the talk I will major on DNA for illustrative purposes. In mitigation, all I can say is that DNA has had such a major impact on forensic science over the past 20 years. However, I apologise to the generalists and make the point now that while much is talked about DNA, and perhaps fingerprints and footwear, we lose all of the other skills at our peril; each has their part to play, and the information they gather needs to come together for the service we provide to be whole.