



**GOVERNMENT CUTS TO POLICE
SCIENTIFIC SERVICES:**

A CRIME SCENE EXAMINATION

1. Introduction

When a crime is committed (murder, assault, or burglary) some of the first police personnel on the scene will be the crime scenes investigators (CSIs) from the local police force scientific services department. Much featured by TV news and TV drama alike, the staff in the white boiler suits and face masks are police staff and they are UNISON members.

The evidence that these staff collect at the crime scene, and which they and colleagues process back at the police station, is vital to catching and bringing to justice some of the most serious offenders at large on the streets of the UK. Their job is demanding, emotionally stressful and requires a very high level of professional skill.

Try to picture how challenging and demanding it is to do this work. Then imagine how much harder it has become, as a result of the 20% cuts to police funding forced through by the Conservative led government.

Set out in this report are the very worrying results of a survey of UNISON members who work for police force scientific services. It shows just how much damage that government police cuts are causing to the capacity of police forces to gather the evidence to catch criminals who have committed the most serious offences. Police cuts are making our communities more dangerous places to live.

2. Synopsis

This report is split into the following sections:

- Executive Summary
- Background
- Police Scientific Services Cuts by Force
- UNISON Scientific Services Members Survey Results
- Conclusion

3. Executive Summary

UNISON's survey of our members who work in police force scientific services was undertaken in January and February 2015, using the on-line Survey Monkey application. The survey produced the following headline results:

- Number of respondents: 283

- Majority of respondents: Scenes of Crime Officers (68%)
- 92% of respondents report a cut in scientific services staff in their force since 2010
- 78% of respondents report other cuts to scientific services as well as jobs
- Scenes of crime officers and fingerprint experts are the most commonly reported job losses
- Detailed verbatim responses show that as a result of the cuts to funding:
 - Quality and victim services are under threat
 - The resilience of police scientific services has been seriously compromised
 - Staff stress and low morale is endemic
 - Expertise is being lost
 - Equipment is out-dated
 - Training budgets have been slashed
 - Some DNA evidence is not being sent for analysis due to cost considerations

UNISON also asked our police branches to confirm the actual number of job cuts in scientific services over the five year period from 2010 to 2015. We have not been able to obtain figures from all forces and it has been difficult to confirm the number of actual posts lost in circumstances where a number of forces have come together to operate scientific services on a collaborative basis.

However, despite these challenges, the figures which are set out at section 5 below indicate cuts to scientific services staff ranging from 5% to 42%, with the average cut in staff numbers being 21%.

4. Background

Police scientific services are the backbone of the evidential chain that brings serious criminals to justice. Most police force scientific services departments employ police staff, rather than police officers, in the following roles:

- Scientific Support Manager/Head of Scientific Services
- Scenes of Crime Officer/Crime Scene Investigator (SOCO/CSI)
- Senior SOCO/CSI
- Fingerprint Expert

- Footwear Expert
- Chemical Laboratory Staff
- Forensic Submission Staff
- Photographic and Audio-visual Staff
- Plan drawer

Police scientific services staff contribute to some extent to all areas of policing, but particularly the detection of crime and the progression of criminal investigation, from the most minor to the most serious and major crimes.

The actual structure of force scientific services departments varies from force to force, and the structure of the departments that have been collaborated, and therefore cover a number of forces, can be slightly more complex. However, there are broad similarities across all forces.

The department is usually headed by a Scientific Support Manager (SSM), or a Head of Scientific Services. These are senior positions within the force. A number of individual heads of department, such as the Head of Scenes of Crime and Head of Identifications (Fingerprints), will work to the SSM.

Scenes of Crime Officers/Crime Scenes Investigators, Fingerprint Experts, Footwear Experts, Chemical Laboratory Staff, Forensic Submission Staff, Forensic Deployment Staff, Photographic and Audi Visual Staff make up the operational establishment of scientific services.

The role that the public most closely associates with 'police forensics' is that of Scenes of Crime Officers (SOCOS) or more popularly known these days as Crime Scenes Investigators (CSI).

SOCOS attend scenes to recover fingerprint, DNA and other trace evidence to help investigations and detect crimes. However, the evidence collected then needs to be 'processed further' and this can be by other scientific services staff such as Fingerprint Experts or Chemical Laboratory Staff.

Fingerprint Experts are responsible for analysing and comparing fingerprint impressions lifted by SOCOS at crime scenes with those fingerprint impressions that are taken from persons in custody. If the fingerprint impressions 'match', they will report these as identifications or more commonly known as 'idents' of persons who have committed the crime.

Chemical Laboratory staff will chemically treat all items that SOCOS cannot examine actually at crime scenes. They will also use specialised techniques to enhance fingerprint impressions.

In some forces the role of chemical laboratories has developed and they now employ forensic scientists to examine items recovered by SOCOS that were

previously sent to external forensic science laboratories, such as searching clothing for blood.

Any footwear evidence recovered from crime scenes is forwarded to footwear experts for further examination.

Footwear evidence can be important and provide good evidence for detecting crime. Staff in these units can link crimes through footwear examination, provide intelligence on footwear impressions recovered from crime scenes and even compare footwear from crime scenes to that of suspects and provide evidential statements.

Some evidence recovered, such as DNA, will need to be submitted to external forensic science laboratories. There is a cost to the police for all external forensic examinations and therefore this is usually requested through the force forensic submissions unit and authorised by a Forensic Submissions Manager, although in some forces this role is performed by Senior or Principal Scenes of Crime Officers. The purpose is to advise on submitting items for external forensic examination, maximising the evidential opportunities and limiting costs to the police. This is particularly important for serious and major crimes where there may need to be a number of items requiring external forensic examination.

Scientific services staff liaise with nearly all internal police departments, particularly CID, and also liaise with a range of other experts such as forensic scientists, forensic pathologists, external forensic science providers and related agencies, to ensure that the police have the right support from 'science'.

5. Police Scientific Services Cuts By Force

Region	Force	No. of Scientific Services staff as at 01.04.2010 (or FTE)	Current No. of Scientific Services staff (or FTE)	Percentage change
Eastern	Bedfordshire	66	63	-5%
Eastern	Cambridgeshire	61.37	55.42	-10%
Eastern / SE	Essex /Kent	121.5	99.54	-18%
Eastern	Hertfordshire	96.81	72.45	-25%
Eastern	Norfolk	56	44	-22%
Eastern	Suffolk	44	38	-14%
East Midlands	Leicestershire	86	50	-42%
East Midlands	Northamptonshire	61.12	35.41	-42%
Northern	Durham	73	60	-18%

Region	Force	No. of Scientific Services staff as at 01.04.2010 (or FTE)	Current No. of Scientific Services staff (or FTE)	Percentage change
Northern	Northumbria	76	52	-32%
North West	Lancashire	141.11	105.15	-25%
South East	Sussex	114	103	-10%
South West	Gloucestershire	57.72	42.5	-26%
Cymru/Wales	Dyfed/Powys	30.3	25.8	-15%
Cymru/Wales	Gwent/South Wales	190	163	-14%
Cymru/Wales	North Wales	67.3	72.8	8%
West Midlands	Warwickshire	43.5	33.5	-23%
Yorkshire & Humberside	North Yorkshire	8	0	-100%

6. Results of UNISON's Scientific Services Cuts Survey

6.1 Number and Job Title of Respondents

The vast majority of respondents were Scenes of Crime Officers. 90 respondents did not choose one of the existing job titles, but wrote in their own job roles. This ranged from crime scenes investigators, forensic laboratory technicians, forensic investigations submissions officers, video/imaging/visual evidence officers, e-forensic technicians, DNA technicians and assistants, forensic collisions investigators, plans and mapping officers and many more.

The main categories of respondents were as follows:

- Scenes of Crime Officers: 132 (68%)
- Senior Scenes of Crime Officers: 24 (12%)
- Fingerprint Experts: 28 (15%)
- Photographers: 7 (4%)
- Footwear Experts: 2 (1%)

6.2 Cuts in Force Scientific Services Since 2010

92% of respondents (261) said that there has been a reduction in the number of staff in their force scientific services team since 2010. Only 4% (12 respondents) said there had been no reduction.

46% of respondents (125) indicated that these job losses had been the result merging of force scientific services functions as a result of force collaborations on a regional scale.

78% of respondents (217) reported that there have been other cuts, in addition to job losses, to their force scientific services unit.

6.3 How Many Jobs Have Been Lost?

We asked members to tell us how many jobs had been lost in their force?

0-5 Jobs:	23%
6-10 Jobs:	18%
11-15 Jobs:	17%
16-20 Jobs:	5%
Over 20 Jobs:	14%
Don't Know:	25%

6.4 Which Jobs Have Been Lost?

Respondents were asked which scientific services jobs had been cut; the vast majority indicated that SOCOs were the main role that has been cut:

Scenes of Crime Officer:	83%	(195 respondents)
Senior Scenes of Crime Officer:	36%	(85 respondents)
Fingerprint Expert:	61%	(143 respondents)
Footwear Expert:	19%	(44 respondents)
Photographer:	54%	(126 respondents)

93 respondents proceeded to tell UNISON about a range of other job roles that had been lost. These included roles that ranged from experts to senior managers and essential administrators.

6.5 What Impact Have the Job Cuts Had on Your Force Scientific Services Capacity?

Over 230 respondents commented giving worrying details on the impact of staff cuts on the services which victims of crime and the public could expect. The vast majority expressed concern that staffing cuts had compromised their ability to perform core work to tackle crime, with victims bearing the real consequences. Our survey paints a picture of forensic services running on out of date equipment, with budgets controlling the priorities and scientific services functioning on the goodwill and commitment of staff.

Quality and Victim Services Are Under Threat

The vast majority of respondents highlighted the quality of work as suffering. One simply said, *“No longer can the gold service be delivered, but a bronze service”*.

Other comments provide detailed information about the impact of job cuts on scientific services:

- *“Detrimental to our response times. Unable to provide vital and valuable resources when needed and requested by other teams. Time delays at scenes and subsequent sequential processes for processing evidence. Not meeting the public demand for providing an acceptable level of forensic capability”*.
- *“A reduction in analysis of exhibits recovered by CSI, no longer attend 100% of burglaries. Opportunities missed. Job cuts caused a change in shift patterns which ultimately meant we miss many jobs after 6pm that either, get forgotten about, or forensic chances are compromised by the next day. All vital as CSI/Scientific support contributes to the vast majority of criminal detections”*
- *“Fewer fingerprinting treatments available. Lack of services available from imaging units Lack of CSI supervision on a daily basis. Lack of CSI cover at certain periods throughout the day”*
- *“Severely impacting front line attendance, several crime types no longer warrant an automatic scientific service attendance, certain evidence types are no longer routinely submitted. Most submissions for DNA examinations now come with a battle with submissions staff as to why it is worth sending items and are usually only resolved senior officers demand action.”*
- *“We can no longer deal with major and volume crimes at the same time without causing major disruption or put the right amount of staff to a scene without endangering the evidence”*.

Many respondents highlighted the reduction in the services being provided to victims of crime and the wider community:

- *“Fewer staff to respond to calls quickly – victims often left waiting until the next day for attendance.”*
- *“Has impacted on the delivery times for examination of both volume and major crime scenes. Morale is at an all time low.”*
- *“Everyone is pushed to their limit and service delivery falling – turnaround times longer and poorer service being delivered.”*
- *“Reduced attendance. Slower turnaround of results and further analysis. More stress on staff. Reduced public service.”*
- *“Rare to attend lower priority jobs, such as car crime, injury photos, criminal damage, shed breaks. Victim has to wait longer for attendance as well as fewer staff. Often only one SOCO for a whole division, so much more time spent travelling meaning less available time for scene exams.”*
- *“Fewer technicians to process evidence types, longer turn-around times for results, some evidence types are lower prioritised and continually overtake by more urgent jobs”.*
- *“Fewer staff means a slower service throughout from CSI scene attendance to exhibit submission and processing”.*
- *“We have far less resilience for when big scenes occur. We have no in-house fingerprints, chem. lab, footwear or submissions”.*
- *“Reduced scene visits, fewer DNA hits, fewer fingerprint retrievals and footwear retrievals”.*

Overstretched Services: A Threat to Police Resilience

Some respondents highlighted their worries for a lack of resilience in current services if a major incident happens, or if levels of crime were to rise:

- *“We are stretched further, should a number of serious scenes come in close together we would not be able to respond adequately”*
- *“We are stretched when we have a major incident or operation. There is very little overtime available to staff”.*
- *“We’ve been unable to keep up with demand in normal working hours, pressured into working overtime, extended unpaid hours. Lost cases in*

court as work wasn't completed in time, overall stress levels are through the roof. Morale is at its lowest. Colleagues are actively looking for work elsewhere as a result of the overwhelming pressure we are under with no light at the end of the tunnel."

- *"Unable to keep up with processing PACE samples, returns from labs, or processing DNA hits".*
- *"Fewer resources to attend scenes within reasonable timescale to maximise forensic evidence leaving remaining staff being stretched and placed under increasing pressure. This also leads to less time for administration and work being overlooked."*

Staff Morale and Stress

Some respondents highlighted the impact of staffing cuts on staff, workloads, morale and stress. A brief sample of comments includes:

- *"More pressure on staff, more stress"*
- *"...poor morale, heavier workloads, stress".*
- *"Team morale has completely gone out of the window. We don't examine as many crime scenes as we used to so it's got to mean that vital evidence is being missed"*

Loss of Expertise

The loss of expertise was also a consideration for many respondents, affecting current and future services:

- *"We've lost 150 years plus of forensic experience. We now have a less experienced workforce under increased pressure"*
- *"Less resilience with less skilled people to deal with major crime"*
- *"Loss of around 40 posts has caused the following - loss of years of experience which results in time wasting, poor decision making due to lack of knowledge, waste of police funds and increased turnaround times, increased workload on remaining staff with increased stress levels"*
- *"...not able to get technical assistance specifically related to imaging/cctv. Reduced number of ID officers for footprints/finger prints. Inefficient deployment. Contamination issues at scenes."*

- *“Loss of years of experience. Cost of training replacement SOCO staff when it was discovered the cuts had no too deep. All at public expense when the force is trying to save money”*

6.6 What Impact Have Cuts, Other Than Job Cuts, Had On Your Force Scientific Services Capacity?

Over 180 comments were received detailing the effect of budget cuts on scientific services. One respondent told UNISON: “Money comes before justice”. Other respondents gave details of how cuts have been affecting the service, including lack of new equipment, lack of training, and stricter criteria for which crimes were now dealt with as a priority.

Overwhelmingly, respondents highlighted the impact on core services.

Cash Limits on Investigation and Analysis

- *“Have to argue for items to be submitted to forensic service providers. Also limits placed on the amount of items we can send for internal chemical development”*
- *“Certain volume crime types not being investigated. Certain evidence types no longer being authorised for examination. Threshold tests introduced for the volume crime types.*
- *“DNA budget cuts resulting in more restrictions on how many items are sent for DNA thus potentially letting criminals slip through the net.”*
- *“As a department we could have had many more positive results from the cases examined. A lot of our evidence is just stored away because of the cost when it should really be sent to the lab”.*
- *“No evening visits for volume crimes e.g. burglaries. Fewer staff on call for major crime. Reduction of DNA evidence being submitted to forensic service provider.”*

No Investment in Training and New Equipment

Other respondents highlighted the way that current budget cuts and false economies were storing up major problems for the future.

- *“Current and future capabilities will suffer as we shall find it increasingly difficult to offer the service we once did as well as stay up to date with training and technology as budgets are cut”.*

- *“All planned improvements in services have either been delayed or stopped, resulting in us being way behind in the use of IT. All other than absolutely essential training has ceased leaving staff under developed and feeling undervalued.*
- *“...no funding for courses which can impact on how we keep up to date to date with changes in technologies. Less money for equipment, all of which has an impact on how effectively we can do our job.”*
- *“No training budget. No essential courses for staff development. No funding or modernisation/technology improvements. Proposal to withdraw boots issued or health and safety reasons and sell them to us instead”.*
- *“CSI’s buying own equipment such as torches and cases.”*
- *“Training has suffered greatly as trainer roles removed from structure. Cuts elsewhere also impact scientific services especially ICT where vital IT infrastructure work is often delayed or even cancelled. Budget cuts in general also impact upon provision (and maintenance) of specialist equipment – vital in scientific services providing a quality service”.*
- *“Existing equipment not replaced as frequently, new equipment not purchased.”*
- *“We have had no new equipment for about 6 years”*
- *“Less equipment keeping vehicles much longer than is viable, therefore running vehicles that break down a lot more because they are old and worn out.”*

Negative Impact on Victims

Many respondents also highlighted the way cuts to overtime were affecting victims of crime:

- *“Reduced services to victims in the evening and weekends”*
- *“...the shift pattern has been altered due to cuts so that savings could be made on shift allowances. This has meant it is less effective cover and we are constantly having to cover other offices and are always short, which results in a lower level of service to our victims.”*

- *“No overtime for volume crime, therefore when units are dealing with major incidents volume crime is left to wait and those few staff that are working often miss meal breaks to keep the public served”*

7. Conclusion

The results of UNISON’s police scientific services survey show that this vital police function has not been spared from the government’s 20% cuts to police budgets.

Over 90% of police scientific services staff report job cuts to their teams, and data from police forces indicates an average 21% reduction in staffing numbers.

Scenes of crime officer jobs have been the most badly affected. As the personal testimony of many SOCOs who responded to the survey shows, this is having a very damaging impact on the ability of forces to capture evidence to bring criminals to justice.

UNISON calls on the government to reverse these damaging cuts to ensure that police forces have the resources to properly investigate crime and bring offenders to justice.

Police cuts are making our communities less safe – it’s time to reverse the damage.