

**Forensic
Network**

ANNUAL REPORT

2024/25

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Joint Foreword

This year we were delighted to launch our *Guidance for Transfers from Custodial Settings to Mental Health Services*. Concerns have been expressed in recent years about delays in transfer of people from prison to hospital. This guidance sets out the processes to be followed and establishes a data monitoring system with an escalation system for problematic cases. With the help of prison mental health services, we have had a 100% data return rate over the last year, and we can report that the average time from referral to transfer is currently 21.5 days. Over 24/25, six cases were placed on the problematic case register and all were resolved.



Dr Lindsay Burley CBE
Chair

We continue to focus on services for women and are pleased to report the opening of the interim high security service at the State Hospital. Work continues with national planners to develop low secure provision for women near to their home areas. Such plans were developing in 2019 in response to the Network's report on services for women but were paused due to the Barron Review and COVID.

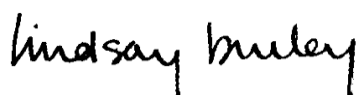


Professor Lindsay Thomson
Director

We were therefore pleased to learn that the Forensic Governance Advisory Group had reported to Scottish Government on governance structures for a new Forensic Mental Health Board and we await the Minister for Social Care and Mental Wellbeing decision on this. This decision will resolve the problem of planning blight that has resulted from geographical boards awaiting the outcome on a single board. This has prolonged the necessary estate developments to address the capacity issues, although this year we have carried out an extensive piece of work on capacity at the request of Scottish Government. The focus of this work was to establish streamlined and consistent processes across the estate to support patient flow. Through our ongoing collection of national data, including our annual census, we were able to accurately identify where bottlenecks were occurring. This work has laid a strong foundation for future estate planning and service improvements, ensuring that capacity challenges are addressed in a more coordinated manner.

The School of Forensic Mental Health has had another busy, productive year. It has expanded its range of short courses, engaged with academic partners to enhance course content and afforded staff many opportunities to meet and exchange knowledge through conferences and clinical fora. The aspiration is to stimulate new ideas, motivate and ultimately improve practice.

We thank the many contributors to the work of the Network via conferences, working groups, clinical fora, research and teaching.



Chair, Forensic Network



Director, Forensic Network

What We Do

Forensic Network

The Forensic Network was established in September 2003 following a review of The State Hospitals Board for Scotland. Detailed in the report 'The Right Place: The Right Time: Improving the patient journey for those who need secure mental healthcare' (Scottish Executive Health Department, 2002). Scottish Ministers requested the development of a Network to bring a pan-Scotland approach to the planning of services and patient pathways, and to address fragmentation across the Forensic Mental Health Estate (Gordon, 2003; Scottish Parliament, 2003).

OUR AIMS

The predominate focus of the Forensic Network's attention since its development has been on current challenges and the development of pathways:

- the configuration of the forensic estate
- defining levels of security
- developing admission and referral criteria
- outlining care pathways
- facilitating and responding to national initiatives and reports

Development of services for:

- adolescents
- people with intellectual disability
- women
- people with major mental illness
- people in prison
- people convicted of serious and violent crime

Quality Improvements across the forensic estate:

- management of personality disorder
- resolving clinical conflicts
- establishing processes for risk assessment and risk management
- developing, utilising and evaluating psychological therapies
- development of escalation processes to support timely patient care and transfer





School of Forensic Mental Health

The SoFMH was established in 2007 under the direction of the Forensic Network. This is a virtual school, offering teaching, training and research assistance to all professional groups and associated agencies involved in the assessment and care of individuals with a mental disorder who come into contact with forensic services.

The model involves expert clinicians, active in the forensic field developing and delivering short courses and the creation of formal qualifications in collaboration with higher and further educational establishments. Included is the development and delivery of the “New to Forensic” Programme suite (N2F).

The SoFMH has a strong research focus and supports the dissemination and commissioning of research to establish an evidence base for future service development.



OUR AIMS

To improve the quality of response, care, treatment and outcomes for people with a mental disorder who come into contact with, or whose behaviour puts them at risk of contact with, the criminal justice system, in ways that are non-discriminatory, promote equality and respect diversity.

01.

Offer multi-level and progressive provision of learning across the college and university interface.

02.

Improve public safety through enhanced risk assessment and risk management.

03.

Enhance clinical practice through the development and promotion of findings from large scale research projects.

04.

Promote high quality mental health care delivered on a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency basis.

Governance

The aims of the Forensic Network are achieved through the Forensic Network Advisory Board, a national stakeholder oversight group.



Operational delivery is overseen by the **Forensic Network Services Group** (formerly the Inter Regional Group), which plays a key role in monitoring patient flow across the estate and proactively addressing emerging challenges. The group includes representation from Forensic Mental Health services across all Health Boards, encompassing inpatient services at low, medium and high levels of security. To address specific issues, whether geographic, clinical, or policy-related, the group commissions short-life working groups. These groups are typically composed of professionals from across health, justice, social care, and the third sector, ensuring a robust and genuinely multi-agency approach to problem-solving.

We also work closely with our **Clinical Leads** and **Professional Groups**, who provide expert insight and help shape our responses to national consultations and emerging issues.

Partnership with Government

The Forensic Network is funded by the Scottish Government and meets quarterly with officials to review progress against agreed objectives. This close relationship ensures that our work remains aligned with national priorities, including the Mental Health Strategy 2017–2027 and outcomes from the Independent Review into the Delivery of Forensic Mental Health Services.

Why It Matters

Our governance is not just about structure; it is about impact. By bringing together the right people, at the right time, with the right focus, we're able to:

- Respond quickly to emerging needs
- Develop national guidance that's grounded in practice
- Support continuous improvement across services.

Driving System-Wide Progress

Forensic Network Objectives




In 2024/25, the Forensic Network continued to deliver against its national remit as a Managed Care Network, supporting the development, coordination, and improvement of forensic mental health services across Scotland. Our work was guided by the Scottish Government’s Mental Health Strategy 2017–2027 and aligned with the implementation of recommendations from the [Independent Review into the Delivery of Forensic Mental Health Services](#).









In agreement with Scottish Government, we structured our operational work around four key priorities:



Impact in 2024/25

This year, the Forensic Network has delivered a wide range of initiatives that have strengthened forensic mental health services across Scotland. From improving referral pathways and patient flow to supporting national service integration and shaping legislative reform, our work has been driven by collaboration, innovation, and a commitment to better outcomes for patients, carers, and professionals. The following highlights showcase examples of the tangible impact of our efforts in 2024/25.

- 
Streamlining Patient Referrals: We developed a refreshed version of the *Guidance for Patient Referral to or within Scottish High and Medium Secure Forensic Mental Health Services*, enhancing consistency and efficiency in referral pathways. This work lays the foundation for improved access and is due for publication in 2025/26.
- 
Improving Bed Capacity and Patient Flow: Through targeted stakeholder engagement, we identified actionable steps to address bed pressures and patient flow across the forensic estate. This led to the initiation of multiple workstreams and the submission of two reports to the Scottish Government.
- 
Guidance to support Transgender Patients: Although developed in 2023/24 and initially scheduled for release this year, the guidance was revised following the *For Women Scotland* court judgement and is now expected to be published in 2025/26.

-  **Reducing Transfer Delays:** We introduced a formal escalation process for hospital-to-hospital transfers, helping to minimise delays and maintain momentum in patient flow across services.
-  **Enhancing Coordination Between Custody and Care:** The publication of [Guidance on Transfers between Custodial Settings and Forensic Mental Health Services](#) has strengthened inter-agency collaboration, reduced delays, and provided a clear escalation route for complex cases.
-  **Supporting National Service Integration:** We played a key role in integrating Foxgrove, the National Secure Adolescent Inpatient Service, into the Forensic Network, ensuring alignment with national forensic priorities and pathways.
-  **Mapping Community Services:** We undertook a comprehensive mapping exercise of community forensic mental health services across Scotland. The final report, due in late 2025/26, will inform future service development and strategic planning.
-  **Influencing National Policy:** We provided Network-wide responses to key national consultations, including the Learning Disability, Autism and Neurodivergence (LDAN) Bill and the Adults with Incapacity (AWI) Amendment Act, ensuring that forensic mental health perspectives are represented in legislative reform.
-  **Delivering Robust Data for Planning:** We successfully completed the annual inpatient census with a 100% return rate, continuing to provide essential data that informs research, service development, and policy planning. In addition, we continued to collect a range of national data, including those focused on bed availability, prison transfers, and appeals against excessive security, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of system pressures and service needs.
-  **Advancing Women's Forensic Services:** We progressed recommendations relating to the development of services through the Women's Forensic Services Planning Group, driving improvements in care pathways and service provision for women in forensic settings. A High Secure service for women opened in The State Hospital in July 2025.
-  **Shaping Mental Health Law Reform:** We actively contributed to national workshops on the definition of mental disorder, ensuring that forensic mental health expertise informed the ongoing reform of Scottish mental health legislation. We also collaborated with the Scottish Sentencing Council, leading to its decision to develop sentencing guidance for people with mental disorders.

The achievements outlined in this section reflect the collective efforts of the Forensic Network and its partners to drive meaningful change across forensic mental health services in Scotland.

Professional Groups and Conferences

The Forensic Network supports a range of professional groups that bring together colleagues from across the estate to collaborate on discipline-specific challenges and share best practice.



Each professional group plays a vital role in shaping service delivery and advancing standards within forensic mental health. Their work is closely aligned with the strategic direction of the Network, with group chairs actively contributing to the Forensic Network Advisory Board. This structure strengthens communication, ensures alignment with national workstreams, and promotes the exchange of knowledge across disciplines. Through these groups, collaboration, innovation, and shared learning continue to be championed across Scotland's forensic mental health services.

During 2024/25, the Forensic Network office supported 18 professional group meetings. Each group delivered a busy programme of work, leading to the following key achievements:

- Delivery of the 3rd Annual Allied Health Professionals Forensic Conference.
- Re-establishment of the National Participate Forum and launch of new work on neurodiversity in forensic services.
- Delivery of the well-attended Lead Nurse Forum Conference in February 2025.
- Nursing contributions secured to national training programmes and academic course development.
- Commencement of a major review into the role of the forensic mental health nurse.
- Publication of the National IM Clozapine Protocol by the Pharmacy Group, approved by the Mental Welfare Commission.

We continue to seek advice and input from our professional groups when preparing responses to national consultations. This ensures a strong multi-disciplinary perspective is reflected. Over the past year, colleagues contributed to responses on the **Learning Disability, Autism and Neurodivergence (LDAN) Bill** and the **Adults with Incapacity (AWI) Act Amendment** consultations.

Building Capability, Shaping Practice

School of Forensic Mental Health (SoFMH) Objectives

The SoFMH offers teaching and training to all professional groups and agencies involved in the assessment and care of individuals with a mental disorder who come into contact with forensic services. It is the primary educator in the forensic field in Scotland and supports the promotion of research and the development of an evidence base for practice.

In 2024/25, the Forensic Network delivered a robust programme of learning and development activities, aligned with the strategic priorities of the **SoFMH Learning and Development Strategy 2023–2028**. This included several planned short courses, a diverse range of conferences and targeted clinical fora, all designed to support multidisciplinary practice and knowledge exchange across forensic mental health services.



Academic Courses



NEW
COLLEGE
LANARKSHIRE

MSc Forensic Mental Health

Delivered in partnership with the University of the West of Scotland (UWS), the MSc in Forensic Mental Health continues to be a highly successful programme. Following a rigorous validation process, it consistently receives excellent feedback from students. The course provides graduates with the opportunity to advance their knowledge, strengthen professional skills, and develop a critical understanding of the theoretical, methodological, and practical issues within forensic mental health.

Graduate Certificate in Personality Disorder

Also delivered with UWS, this long-standing programme has been running for over ten years and remains popular among practitioners across the Forensic Network and beyond. It comprises three modules: theory of personality disorder, risk assessment and management, and interventions and strategies.

Forensic Mental Health Module

The introductory Forensic Mental Health Module, delivered in collaboration with New College Lanarkshire (NCL), provides an accessible pathway into further study, including progression to the MSc Forensic Mental Health. Since moving to remote delivery in 2020, the course has broadened participation by enabling practitioners from across Scotland to take part without weekly travel commitments.

Our academic courses offer practical, evidence-based learning in forensic mental health, blending theory with real-world application. Students gain insights from expert faculty, develop critical skills, and engage with research, preparing them to make a positive impact in clinical practice, justice settings, and the wider community.



Short Courses

The SoFMH remains committed to addressing the training needs of forensic practitioners and partner agencies. To this end, we have developed a comprehensive range of courses and training events tailored to meet these specific requirements. These initiatives have generated strong interest in continuing professional development (CPD) among forensic practitioners, and we have actively supported opportunities for both knowledge enhancement and skill acquisition.

Across 2024/25, 13 short courses were successfully delivered, supporting training for a record 787 attendees. Attendance at these courses was highest amongst Health Professionals (67%), followed by Local Authority staff (26%), and growing participation noted from Third Sector organisations.

The courses covered a broad range of topics, including:

- **Clinical interventions** (e.g. MBT Skills, Enhanced Psychological Interventions)
- **Risk assessment** (e.g. Historical, Clinical Risk - HCR-20 v3)
- **Research and professional development** (e.g. Six Months to Publication, Shaping an idea into a Research Proposal)

We also developed and delivered training for the Judicial Institute, focusing on the mental health aspects of sentencing and supporting judiciary members to incorporate these considerations into their decision-making.

The SoFMH is committed to ensuring that the training needs of all practitioners across forensic mental health and justice services are met effectively. If there is a specific course you require or would like to explore further, please [contact the SoFMH](#) to discuss your needs.



Clinical Fora

Over the course of 2024/25, the School has continued to host a range of Clinical Fora. Whilst the Risk of Sexual Harm (RoSH) forum remained online, the majority of others returned to an in-person format, supporting valuable networking opportunities and giving participants dedicated time away from their services to engage with key topics.

In total, seven Clinical Fora were held and a wide range of topics covered:

- ▶ NHS & Scottish Prison Service Perspectives on the Challenges and Opportunities for Prison Healthcare
- ▶ Staff Wellbeing: How can we look after our most precious resource?
- ▶ Autism and Extremism
- ▶ MAPPA and the Order for Lifelong Restriction in Health Settings
- ▶ Care and Treatment for people with Intellectual Disabilities in Mental Health Settings

This series of events facilitated networking, education and operational development across the Network and reached in the region of **1,171 delegates**.



Conferences

The SoFMH continues to play a leading role in fostering knowledge exchange and professional development through its conferences. Over the past year, these events have provided a platform for practitioners, researchers, and partner agencies to share insights, discuss emerging trends, and explore innovations in forensic mental health.

In 2024/25, our four conferences attracted **283 attendees**, marking a significant return of diverse voices to the table. For the first time in several years, colleagues from the police, prison services, and the Third Sector joined, enriching discussions and fostering greater cross-sector collaboration.

**Forensic AHP
Conference**

**Lead Nurse Forum
Conference**





**Forensic Network
Research Special
Interest Group
Conference**

**Mental Health and
the Criminal
Justice System
(with BAFS)**



Participant Feedback

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive across all event types:

-  **88.8%** said events fully met or exceeded their objectives
-  **99.5%** rated events as Excellent, Very Good, or Good
-  **93.1%** found events Extremely or Very Useful
-  **99.5%** rated facilitators as Excellent, Very Good, or Good

Constructive feedback focused on accessibility and presentation style, with suggestions to share slides in advance and simplify technical language. These insights have been shared with trainers and Chairs to inform future delivery.

“Facilitator was engaging and knowledgeable — one of the best sessions I’ve attended.”



“Excellent opportunity to connect across disciplines and share best practice.”

Extremely useful and relevant to my role — great balance of theory and practice.”

The success of this year’s learning and development programme reflects the School of Forensic Mental Health’s ongoing commitment to supporting professional growth, enhancing multidisciplinary collaboration, and responding to the evolving needs of forensic mental health practitioners.

New to Forensic Suite

The *New to Forensic* Programme continues to be a cornerstone of the School of Forensic Mental Health's commitment to supporting practitioners entering the forensic mental health field. Designed to provide a structured and accessible introduction to forensic practice, the programme equips professionals with the foundational knowledge and skills required to work confidently and competently within secure care environments.

<h3>Mental Health</h3> <p>This original programme was developed for both clinical and non-clinical staff and promotes a self-directed, multi-disciplinary, and multi-agency approach to learning. Each participant is supported throughout their studies by a dedicated mentor ensuring a guided and reflective learning experience.</p> 	<h3>Essentials of Psychological Care</h3> <p>Introduced in 2015, this programme is designed to build psychological understanding and therapeutic capacity across the workforce. It places particular emphasis on helping staff develop a solid grasp of how psychological theory and practice can support forensic patients in making meaningful change.</p> 
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In addition to these core offerings, the SoFMH has contributed to the development of:

- **New to Forensic: Medicine**, a tailored programme for staff working in police custody.
- **New to Forensic: Let's Work Together**, a bespoke international programme developed in partnership with colleagues in Pakistan, launched in Spring 2025 as part of the Global Citizenship initiative.
- **Foundations in Forensic Care (FIFC)**, a programme developed in collaboration with the Forensic Managed Care Network in Northern Ireland.

Delivery and Reach

Since its inception, the *New to Forensic* Programme has grown significantly in reach and impact. Over 2,000 staff members have completed the Mental Health programme, representing a wide range of services and sectors across Scotland. In 2024/25, work continued to enhance the implementation of the *Essentials of Psychological Care* programme, with growing interest from both health and justice sectors.

A comprehensive review and refresh of the Mental Health programme was completed this year, with the updated version scheduled for publication in 2025/26. A review of the *Essentials of Psychological Care* programme is also planned to ensure it remains aligned with current practice, policy developments, and the evolving needs of the workforce.

The *New to Forensic* Programme continues to play a vital role in building capability across Scotland's forensic mental health services. As it evolves, the programme will remain responsive to practitioner feedback, emerging research, and strategic priorities, ensuring it continues to support high-quality, person-centred care across the forensic estate.

Research and Innovation

The SoFMH actively supports research across the forensic mental health estate through a range of initiatives, coordinated by the **Forensic Network Research Special Interest Group (FNRSIG)**. Meeting quarterly, the group brings together experts to drive collaborative research, share best practice, and contribute to a wide variety of impactful activities, some of which are highlighted below.

Annual Research Conference

The FNRSIG held its 11th National Research Conference on 07 November 2024. Returning to an in-person format for the first time since 2019, the conference took place in Stirling. Keynote presentations were delivered by Prof. Elizabeth Gilchrist (University of Edinburgh) on '*Evidence based pathways into intimate partner abuse*' and Prof. Jill Stavert (Edinburgh Napier University) on '*A Separate Forensic Mental Health System – Discrimination or reasonable accommodation*'. The event also featured a plenary session led by Dr Brian Gillatt and his team from NHSGG&C.

The conference offers a fantastic opportunity for focused discussion on forensic mental health research. It provides a particularly welcoming and supportive forum for first-time presenters and students to share their findings.

Census and Database

The Forensic Network annual census was conducted on 26th November 2024. The first census in 2013 was a full data set and for all subsequent years (2014 – 2023), the census has a reduced dataset which seeks to monitor the movement of patients through the forensic estate. There has been a strong investment by services and the Network in this as a tool for estate data analysis and we remain grateful to services for their engagement.

Requests to access the Census data have been received from several sources and work has been ongoing on the development of a national Forensic Network Inpatient Database.



[To read the Summary Report for the 2024 Census, please follow this link!](#)

Research Mapping

The annual research mapping exercise updates the development of the Forensic Network project list. Across 2024/25 this identified 41 planned, ongoing or recently completed research and evaluation studies within forensic mental health services and associated partner organisations.



[The research project list is available on the FN website.](#)

Communications & Engagement

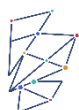
In 2024/25, the Forensic Network continued to expand its reach and influence, both nationally and internationally, through strategic communication, knowledge exchange, and active participation in global forums. Our engagement efforts are designed to amplify the voice of forensic mental health services, foster collaboration, and ensure that Scotland remains at the forefront of innovation in this field.



International Collaboration

Sharing our work internationally not only raises the profile of Scottish forensic mental health services, but it also brings new insight and partnerships that can benefit our whole system. Over the past 12 months we have continued to strengthen our global connections through:

- Presentations at the **International Association of Forensic Mental Health Services (IAFMHS)** Annual Conference in San Francisco, CA.
- Ongoing partnership with colleagues in Pakistan via the Global Citizenship Programme and delivery of *New to Forensic: Let's Work Together* Programme.
- A continually growing international audience, with website visitors from Europe, North America, Australia and Asia.
- A mailing list with subscribers from 12 countries worldwide.



National Communication

We have maintained a strong presence across digital and professional networks over 2024/25 and communicated to our stakeholders in a variety of ways, including:

- **Monthly event bulletins** highlighting upcoming training, conferences and resources.
- Regular updates on **Scottish Government Developments**, particularly the work of the Forensic Governance Advisory Group.
- **Consultation alerts** to ensure colleagues have opportunities to contribute to shaping national policy.
- Continued use of **social media** to share updates, insights and event highlights.

During 2024/25, we adjusted our approach to social media. For the first time, our follower count on X (formerly Twitter) declined, reflecting a broader shift in user behaviour on the platform. In contrast, our newly launched LinkedIn account gained momentum, with steady growth in both followers and engagement.



Looking Ahead

As we move into 2025/26, the Forensic Network and School of Forensic Mental Health remain committed to driving forward innovation, collaboration, and excellence in forensic mental health services across Scotland. This year's achievements reflect the strength of our partnerships, the dedication of our professional groups, and the benefits of collaborative working.

We will continue to build on this momentum through expanding our educational offerings, deepening our research capacity, and ensuring that our work remains responsive to the evolving needs of patients, carers, and practitioners. By fostering inclusive, evidence-based practice and championing cross-sector collaboration, we aim to deliver lasting improvements in care, safety, and outcomes.

In the year ahead, the Forensic Network and School of Forensic Mental Health will continue to deliver against our strategic priorities.

Key areas of focus include:

- **Referral Guidance:** Finalise and implement updated referral guidance for forensic mental health services across all levels of security. This work, developed in collaboration with key stakeholders, will streamline referral processes and promote consistent, collaborative decision-making across the estate.
- **System Coordination:** Facilitate cross-sector collaboration during periods of pressure across the forensic estate, identifying and implementing solutions to capacity challenges while improving patient flow.
- **Community Mapping:** Publish the findings of our national mapping exercise of Forensic Community Mental Health Teams, providing a clearer picture of service provision across Scotland.
- **Governance of Forensic Services:** We will support the Scottish Government in implementing decisions related to the development of a Forensic Mental Health Board for Scotland, once the outcomes of the Forensic Governance Advisory Group (June 2025) are confirmed.
- **Guidance to support Transgender Patients:** Publish the guidance developed in 2023/24 to support delivery of care and treatment to this patient group.
- **Professional Groups:** Continue to support regular Professional Group meetings to align service delivery with policy developments, address discipline-specific challenges, and promote the exchange of best practice.
- **Annual Census:** Undertake the annual forensic inpatient census in November 2025, maintaining our commitment to robust data collection and service planning.
- **IPCU Census:** Conduct a one-off census of forensic patients cared for within Intensive Psychiatric Care Units (IPCUs) across Scotland.
- **Foxgrove Support:** Provide ongoing support to Foxgrove, the National Secure Adolescent Inpatient Service, as it begins admitting patients.

- **MAPPS:** Contribute to national discussions on the use of the Multi-Agency Public Protection System (MAPPS) and ViSOR in Scotland, ensuring that Health and NHS Scotland needs and perspectives are clearly represented.
- **Education and Training:** Deliver our full suite of academic and short professional courses, alongside a diverse programme of clinical fora to support multidisciplinary learning.
- **SOLS and Prevent:** Continue to provide advice and support to further the operationalisation of the National Serious Offender Liaison (SOLS) and Counter-Terrorism (PREVENT) service.
- **Programme Review:** Undertake a comprehensive review of the *New to Forensic: Essentials of Psychological Care* programme to ensure continued relevance and impact.

We are deeply grateful to all who contribute to the Forensic Network and the School of Forensic Mental Health. The expertise, dedication, and collaboration of colleagues across health, justice, social care, the third sector and academia, drive the progress we achieve.