There was one question which I didn’t feel I addressed fully. This I recall related to whether increased automation in forensic science might impact upon job security and employment in the profession. I recall it was suggested by the Committee that there would still be a need for practitioners to be available to interpret evidence, and that automation of some methods might thus not impact upon jobs.

While I agree that forensic practitioners will continue to have an important role to play in the interpretation of evidence, I do feel there is an ongoing need to consider the possible impact of new technologies, such as so-called ‘Rapid DNA’ systems. Rapid DNA systems promise to reduce the time taken to produce an individual’s DNA profile from a saliva sample from 3-5 working days to less than 1 working day. As I understand it, Rapid DNA systems could allow DNA profiles to be produced within police custody suites and may not require investigators to send samples of bodily material to laboratories for processing. If Rapid DNA does negate the need for laboratory work, then there may be questions about how it might impact upon the work that may be available to commercial forensic providers in the future.

I do think the example of rapid DNA systems does therefore merit some further consideration of how new technology may impact upon the future size of the forensic market (which appears to be shrinking already), and the amount of work that might be available to forensic providers in the future.

If future technological developments do pose a risk to shrinking the forensic market, then that might threaten work available to commercial providers, which in turn might threaten the position of forensic practitioners employed by them, many of whom could be skilled in evidence interpretation. I am concerned that in such a scenario some of these forensic practitioners could exit the profession entirely, thus leading to a loss of key skills.

In addition, I think there are also possible questions to be raised concerning the interpretation of forensic data. For me these relate to how the interpretation methods and practices used by forensic practitioners based in-house in police forces, compare with those used by commercial forensic science providers.

26 October 2018