

'Advanced technology' to be used in testing sex offenders

By Adam Button

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Vera Baird: This will be a first for the UK

More than £171,000 has been given to two forces for the introduction of polygraph and eye detection testing for pre and post-conviction sex offenders.

Northumbria police and crime commissioner Vera Baird has received Home Office confirmation of the money, which was secured through a collaborative bid by Northumbria and Durham forces to the Police Innovation Fund 2016/17.

Ms Baird said: "Northumbria Police has been working incredibly hard with proactive investigations and encouraging victims, including those of historic offences, to come forward.

"I am therefore delighted to have secured funding which will allow us to use this advanced technology to help protect some of the most vulnerable in our communities.

"As demand increases there is a clear need to ensure robust risk management of alleged sexual offenders is in place and this new testing process will help us do just that.

"Introducing new eye detection testing will be a first for the UK and we look forward to rolling out detail of this pioneering way of managing offenders in the very near future – one of many innovative ways in which we are seeking to provide better protection for the people of Northumbria."

Detective Chief Inspector Jackie Coleman from Northumbria Police said the technology will help police ensure more accurate risk management of suspected and convicted offenders.

The potential for polygraph testing to be used in the UK was first considered in the Home Office's Review of the Protection of Children from Sex Offenders (2007).

Hertfordshire Constabulary and South Yorkshire Police have used the technology since 2014 to risk assess people suspected of downloading child pornography, but there is no national body to evaluate its success.

Critics have often expressed doubts over its accuracy, and claimed that polygraph testing needs to undergo intense scrutiny before its usefulness is fully understood.

Ché Donald, Police Federation of England and Wales lead for polygraph testing, said last December: "It is vital that the use of polygraph testing is subject to robust and systematic evaluation.

"In a perfect world, we would see both experts and experienced officers assessing how efficient, cost effective and ethical the use of polygraph testing is, particularly in comparison to other risk assessment techniques."

However, in an article published in *Police Professional* last May, former Hertfordshire assistant chief constable Chris Miller called for its wider introduction (see PP 457).

He said: "It offers the police a way of assessing risk based on better information than often they possess in their historical records; it enables them to manage complex offenders with better precision and it often offers those responsible for managing risk a higher degree of reassurance that they know enough to be effective."