



Quality Standards Specialist Group (QSSG)

**Minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2017
Home Office, 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF**

1 Opening and welcome

1.1 The Chair, Dr Gillian Tully, the Forensic Science Regulator (the 'Regulator'), welcomed all to the meeting. Apologies were received from Stephen Bleay, Glyn Hardy, Peter Harper, Anthony Heaton-Armstrong and Brian Rankin. See Annex A for the full list of attendees and apologies.

2 Minutes of previous meeting

2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 4 July 2017 had been approved by members prior to the meeting and were published on the GOV.UK website¹.

3 Matters arising

3.1 All actions from the previous meeting had been completed.

4 Lessons learnt from this round of implementation of the Codes

4.1 The Group was reminded that the formal requirement for accreditation to include the Codes of Practice and Conduct (the 'Codes')² was made in 2014, and that that in March 2016 it was announced by the Regulator that the scientific standards set out in the Codes would form part of the assessment for all new applicants. To date 13 organisations were accredited to the Codes, and 14 had recommendations to extend the scope of their accreditation to incorporate the Codes. A further 4 organisations had assessments scheduled, whilst 7 had withdrawn from the process due to a lack of preparedness.

4.2 The representative from the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) provided an overview of the accreditation assessments conducted over the past year by UKAS. This incorporated 22 visits, with over 700 findings in total. Of these findings, around 32 of these per organisation related to the Codes.

¹ Available from: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/forensic-science-regulator/about/membership#quality-standards-specialist-group

² Available from: www.gov.uk/government/collections/forensic-science-providers-codes-of-practice-and-conduct

4.3 The areas with the greatest number of findings were related to (in descending order):

- control of data;
- business continuity;
- test methods and validation;
- accommodation and environmental conditions;
- handling of items; and
- training of staff.

4.4 Within control of data, findings included the absence of data back-ups, a lack of documentation relating to reference databases and auditing, poor security (e.g. shared user log-in on computers) and a lack of folder access restrictions.

4.5 In relation to business continuity, findings included inadequate business plans or testing of such plans, a lack of information on subcontractors, and a lack of awareness of business plans by key staff.

4.6 Test methods and validation findings included that whilst validation was occurring, this validation was not in the format required by the Codes. In addition, incomplete risk assessments were identified, as was a lack of staff access to validation libraries.

4.7 Findings pertaining to accommodation and environmental conditions included a lack of elimination databases, and where such databases were present a lack of security restrictions were applied to them. In addition, in some organisations rooms were not locked when unoccupied, and user access to rooms was not sufficiently stringent.

4.8 In relation to handling of items, findings included a lack of policies concerning tampering and issues with disposal of biological material.

4.9 UKAS found that general technical requirements, such as vetting and knowledge of the Codes were not always present. Furthermore, there were concerns relating to the software being used by forensic units, some of which was no longer supported by the supplier, and little of which allowed auditing back to raw data. The QSSG discussed electronic systems, and queried whether additional guidance was required in this area. It was suggested the basis for satisfactory computer software was contained within the Codes, and that a competent IT department could design software that was aligned with the requirements in the Codes. Furthermore, it was opined within the Group that forensic units would benefit from having software requirements available to them that they could hand directly to their IT department.

4.10 The UKAS representative informed members that a significant number of forensic units were surprised by the depth of the accreditation assessment. The Regulator asked UKAS if this information, with confidentially maintained, could be published online.

5. Latent Fingerprint Examination – AAAS Report

5.1 The Regulator highlighted a recent report from the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) on latent fingerprint examination³. The AAAS Report concluded that even adding qualifying language to acknowledge the documented uncertainty in fingerprint comparison, the use of terms such as “identification” failed to deal forthrightly with uncertainty and allowed examiners to make claims that could not be justified scientifically.

5.2 The Regulator was of the view that the term “identification” does not provide the CJS with a transparent and balanced understanding of the outcome, including the level of uncertainty. These issues were amplified in the Streamlined Forensic Report (SFR) system, whereby the word “identification” was used in an unqualified manner was used to elicit guilty pleas. The Regulator therefore sought the views of the QSSG on this issue.

5.3 Members of the Group supported the Regulator’s concerns regarding the use of “identification” and suggested that validation conducted in relation to fingerprint examination did not support the high level of assurance provided by this term. In addition, it was discussed that the fingerprint community had largely accepted that such examinations were opinion, rather than fact.

5.4 The Group was asked to suggest alternative terms that could be used in the place of “identification”. It was proposed that since “excluded” is an established term used in fingerprint examinations, when the comparison indicates that two marks are not sufficiently similar, then the term “included” could be used in the opposite situation, in the place of “identification”.

5.5 It was cautioned that changing the term “identification” may have unintended consequences, given the term’s ubiquity across the Criminal Justice System (CJS).

5.6 The Regulator clarified that this issue was aimed at reflecting scientific uncertainty, and making forensic science practises more transparent.

Action 1: QSSG members to feedback to the Regulator concerning the use of the term “identification” in latent fingerprint examination.

5. Forensic gait analysis

5.1 The Group heard that the Chartered Society of Forensic Sciences’ Forensic Gait Analysis Working Group in collaboration with the College of Podiatry, has been asked by the Regulator, to write a standalone standard for forensic gait analysis. A draft of this document was provided to the Group for comment. It was anticipated the document would be published for public consultation in December 2017. Members were asked to provide feedback on the document within two weeks.

Action 2: QSSG members to provide feedback on the forensic gait analysis draft standard within two weeks.

³ Available from www.aaas.org/report/latent-fingerprint-examination.

6. Publication of ISO/IEC 17025:2017

6.1 The UKAS representative gave a presentation on the new version of ISO/IEC 17025, and highlighted some of the key changes relative to previous versions, and also the proposed UKAS transition arrangements. It was anticipated that the standard would be published in the next couple of months and at that time UKAS would publish a Technical Bulletin on their website with the finalised arrangements for transition. UKAS would also be offering some one day courses in the new standard and these would also be published on the website.

Action 3: Simon Iveson to update the QSSG work plan.

7. Scenes of crime – discussion on scope

7.1 Members heard that the scope included in crime scene examination has grown, especially in relation to digital forensics, and needed to be reviewed. The QSSG had previously advised that no further appendix or guidance was required beyond RG 201 and ILAC G19, but were asked if this remained the case.

7.2 Members emphasised that it would be useful to identify the responsibilities placed on the police forces, as opposed to forensic providers, in this area. Furthermore, the Group had concerns about communication and gaps that may develop between front line officers and those analysing the data. There was a need to identify all the staff involved in crime scene investigation and how they were linked.

7.3 In addition, it was suggested there was a variety of forensic activities currently occurring at scenes of crime that the Group may not be aware of. It was also cautioned that standards should be applied to activities, rather than people, as different organisations were using different individuals to perform the same tasks.

Action 4: The Forensic Science Regulation Unit (FSRU) to identify a list of definitions related to crime scene investigation for the QSSG to discuss.

7.4 The Group heard that the College of Policing (CoP) was developing guidance in relation to digital media investigations.

Action 5: Duncan Brown to provide information to the Regulator concerning guidance on digital media investigations being developed by the College of Policing.

7.5 It was suggested that it would be useful for members to feedback to the Regulator their views on the scope of crime scene investigation, specifically in relation to the point at which crime scene investigation begins.

Action 6: QSSG members to provide feedback on the scope of crime scene investigations to the Regulator.

8. Latest publications and consultations

8.1 The Group was updated on recent publications and consultations published by the Regulator⁴, which included:

- DNA mixture interpretation: draft guidance (12 September 2017).;
- DNA mixture interpretation software validation: draft guidance (12 September 2017);
- Code of practice for forensic anthropology - consultation (3 October 2017);
- Codes of Practice and Conduct – issue 4 (13 October 2017);
- Expert report content – legal guidance (16 October 2017); and
- Non-expert technical statements – legal guidance (16 October 2017).

8. The Regulator's 2018 Conference

8.1 It was confirmed that the Regulator's 2018 conference would be held at Birmingham City football ground on the 19 March 2018, with invites to relevant stakeholders to follow. The Group was asked for any topics they thought should be included in the conference programme.

Action 7: QSSG members to feedback on potential topics to be included in the Regulator's 2018 conference.

9. AOB

Joint Workshop with the Royal Statistical Society

9.1 Members heard that on the 30 October 2017 the Regulator, jointly with the Royal Statistical Society, hosted a workshop on developing a standard for evaluation interpretation. A wide range of stakeholders attended and the key outcome was a decision to define a likelihood ratio framework for evaluation interpretation. Further rounds of consultation were planned.

Statutory Powers

9.2 Members queried the progress of providing the Regulator with statutory powers. It was confirmed that the Home Office was seeking legislative opportunities to bring the matter before Parliament.

10. Date of the next meeting

13.1 The next meeting of the QSSG would take place on the 22 March 2018.

⁴ Available from www.gov.uk/government/publications?departments%5B%5D=forensic-science-regulator

Annex A**Present:**

Gill Tully	Forensic Science Regulator (Chair)
Ashley Beaumont	Cambridgeshire Constabulary
Mark Bishop	Crown Prosecution Service
Penny Carmichael	HO Science Secretariat
Craig Donnachie	Scottish Police Authority Forensic Services
June Guinness	Forensic Science Regulation Unit
Martin Hanly	Eurofins Forensic Services
Anya Hunt	The Chartered Society of Forensic Sciences
Simon Iveson	Forensic Science Regulation Unit
Julie Latawec	BSI
Chanda Lowther-Harris	Metropolitan Police Service
Sandy MacKay	Expert Witness Institute
Katherine Monnery	United Kingdom Accreditation Service
Nuala O'Hanlon	Forensic Science Northern Ireland
Karen Smith	Thames Valley Police
Kevin Sullivan	Independent
Thomas Vincent	HO Science Secretariat

Apologies:

Stephen Bleay	Centre for Applied Science and Technology, HO
Glyn Hardy	Legal Aid Agency
Peter Harper	Orchid Cellmark Ltd
Anthony Heaton-Armstrong	Criminal Bar Association
Brian Rankin	The Chartered Society of Forensic Sciences

Annex B: Actions

Action No.	Action	Owner	Deadline	Progress	Status
1	QSSG members to feedback to the Regulator concerning the use of the term "identification" in latent fingerprint examination.	QSSG members			
2	QSSG members to provide feedback on the forensic gait analysis draft standard within two weeks.	QSSG members			
3	Simon Iveson to update the QSSG work plan.	Simon Iveson			
4	The Forensic Science Regulation Unit (FSRU) to identify a list of definitions related to crime scene investigation for the QSSG to discuss.	FSRU			
5	Duncan Brown to provide information to the Regulator concerning guidance on digital media investigations being developed by the College of Policing.	Duncan Brown			
6	QSSG members to provide feedback on the scope of crime scene investigations to the Regulator	QSSG members			
7	QSSG members to feedback on potential topics to be included in the Regulator's 2018 conference.	QSSG members			