

Fingerprint Quality Standards Specialist Group (FQSSG)

Note of the meeting held on 25 November 2010, New Scotland Yard

10 Broadway, London SW1H 0BG

Present:

Gary Pugh (Chair)	Director of Forensic Services, Metropolitan Police Service
Prof. Jim Fraser	Centre for Forensic Science, University of Strathclyde
June Guinness	Forensic Science Regulation Unit
Andrew Rennison	Forensic Science Regulator
Michelle Painter	West Midlands Police (attending for Richard Small)
Karen Squibb-Williams	Crown Prosecution Service
Soheel Joosab	Forensic Science Regulation Unit (Secretary)

1. Welcome and Minutes of last meeting

1.1 Gary Pugh welcomed those present to the third meeting of the FQSSP.

1.2 Minutes of the last meeting (23 September 2010), with a minor correction, were agreed as accurate.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from:

Andrew Ritchie	GMP, Forensic Services Branch,
Richard Small	West Midlands Police

3. Actions from previous meeting(s) and matters arising

Actions from the last meeting (and previously outstanding actions) are attached in the FQSSG actions log (Annex A)

Action 6¹: Although this action was discharged, Mr Rennison advised the group that he had visited the NPIA's National Training Centre at Harperley Hall and met with Keith Fryer to discuss forensic fingerprint training programmes. It was felt that the training instruction provided was comprehensive. However, it was recognised that in the field further ongoing training was fragmented across police forces.

¹ To contact Keith Fryer/Mike Thompson to discuss the current variation of fingerprint training at a national and local level and feedback to group (Action for Mr Rennison)

While there seems to be disparate training of fingerprint examiners across forces, the group felt that their current main consideration should be around competencies rather than training. Nevertheless, it was recognised that, for a fingerprint standards purpose, competencies cannot wholly be divorced from training, and that it is a significant factor in maintaining and further developing competencies. However, as it is for organisations to facilitate developmental training for their examiners, an option might be to encourage the incorporation of the proposed fingerprint standards into training programmes.

Associated to this, a matter was highlighted that there is a culture among many examiners who have been through training programmes at the NPIA's Forensic Centre (Harperley Hall), that they consider themselves to be 'accredited' - this is an incorrect assumption. Although NPIA training programmes have been assessed and accredited, it does not stand that individuals who have attended the programmes are themselves accredited. It was felt that once a fingerprint standard has been established that this might be a matter for further discussion.

4. Paper: Consideration of a standard for fingerprint examination

Mr Pugh introduced the paper saying that it had been drafted to stimulate thinking and debate around what a standard might encapsulate and provide for individual practitioners and the broader organisational requirements.

The group were advised that, at this stage, ISO17025 methodology had consciously been avoided so to allow for primary thinking around the fundamentals of what fingerprint examination is about, fingerprint processes and associated examiner and organisational competencies.

- Section 1 (Basis for Fingerprint Examination)

Paragraphs 1&2: Mr Pugh said that the first paragraph to set out what he thought were the core competencies required of a competent examiner, with paragraph two highlighting that fingerprint examination is not an exact science but in many cases is entirely dependent on an examiners subjective interpretations, and therefore, open to human error.

This demonstrates that there needs to robust organisational systems in place to lessen possible mismatches or errors. Given this, the group felt that the second paragraph might benefit with a re-draft to include such terminology as perceptual, motivational and cognitive and to deconstruct these meanings from an examiners view, i.e. perceptual (preconception) and motivational (desire to do good job and not a desire to seek a specific outcome). Bearing in mind the points made, Jim Fraser agreed to re-draft paragraph two for further consideration by the group.

Action: Jim Fraser

Paragraph 3: The group agreed with the principles described in that there should be at least two (independent) examiners considering a fingerprint which is to be used in court. Additionally, it was suggested that where there is dispute between the two examiners that the print should be presented to an independent panel of three for consideration. It was also recommended that the process for elimination purposes should be as measured - as in certain circumstances a negative identification could be as important in court as a positive one. A further view was that an examiner might be asked to consider a print but not necessarily informed whether it was for ident or elimination purposes, by so doing this would better ensure that full competencies are being applied.

Paragraph 4: Mr Pugh said that given the role of fingerprint examiners and presentation of their findings in court, this paragraph attempted to provide a brief outline of what are considered to be the requirements of admissibility of expert evidence and the examiner's duty to the courts. Given that this section listed initial references only, Mr Pugh asked if Karen Squibb-Williams would add further detail to strengthen the legal reference points of admissibility and identifying what would be the most applicable points from an 'end-user' viewpoint.

Action: Karen Squibb-Williams

Within paragraph 4 references were made from a legal aspect as to what, within the proposed standards, should be the overriding objectives, duties and expectations of expert witnesses to the courts. To ensure transparency of the duties of expert witnesses, it was considered that that a lexicon should be produced which would clearly define the terminology used.

Bearing in the subject of terminology, Karen Squibb-Williams highlighted that clarification should be included which would define the distinction between an expert witness (or a skilled witness) and a professional witness and to also set out relative obligations. It should also be emphasised that such witness's obligations are governed by the MG Schedules (for in-house police witnesses and the CPS Disclosure Manual (Annex K) for all others. Accordingly, Karen Squibb-Williams agreed to draft a form of words for inclusion in Mr Pugh's paper (Karen would run the first draft by Mr Pugh for consideration).

Action: Karen-Squibb Williams

- Section 2 (Individual Competence)

Paragraph 6: as the paragraph indicated, that to further develop competencies there was a need to ensure that processes are written and embedded into organisational quality management systems which would allow for the regular examination of fingerprint examiners - perhaps annually - so to maintain and maximise competencies.

Mr Rennison said that he had recently produced, in hand with the Skills for Justice and in consultation with key stakeholders, a framework of forensic

science national occupation standards (FSNOS). In taking this work forward Skills for Justice also examined different assessment methodologies that are available to organisations to assess their practitioners as competent. Mr Rennison agreed that he would circulate the FSNOS to the group for their consideration and possible inclusion in the fingerprint standards

Action: Andrew Rennison

- Section 3 (Organisational Competence)

It was agreed that it is for an individual to achieve a level of competence for entry into a forensic fingerprint role. However, organisations have obligations and accountability on them to best ensure that their examiners maintain and develop their proficiencies.

As this section provides, there was consensus that quality management systems must have within them practices for regular evaluation of their fingerprint examiners and retain a list of staff deemed as competent. In suggesting that a Senior Accountable person be responsible for ensuring competencies, it was felt that within a police force that this should be at Chief Constable/Commissioner level or Managing Director level in the private sector. Provision should also be made that evidence of fingerprint examiners competencies be maintained and made available for possible assessment by an independent external body.

- Section 4 (General Considerations)

Line 11: 'Outcomes from Fingerprint Examination' – the term 'Outcome' should be clarified.

Line 13: Add the word Compliance, so to read '...Individual Competence and Compliance.'

Line 14: Given that this was an area which a prospective standard would have little or no bearing, it was agreed to remove this line.

Mr Pugh suggested, based on the points raised, that the next meeting of the group should look to refine the first three sections and expand on the fourth and from there produce a second draft of the of the paper.

5. Any other business

5.1 During the meeting references were made to a fingerprint toolbox (range of indicators/descriptors, it was therefore recommended that the toolbox be circulated to the group for their interest.

Action: Secretariat

6 Date of next meeting

6.1 Thursday 27 January 2011, 14:00-17:00hrs, room 764 (Victoria Block),
New Scotland Yard, 10 Broadway, London SW1H 0BG