

Fingerprint Quality Standards Specialist Group (FQSSP)

Note of the meeting held on 2 July 2010

New Scotland Yard, 10 Broadway, London SW1H 0BG

Present:

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| Gary Pugh (Chair) | Director of Forensic Services, Metropolitan Police Service |
| June Guinness | Forensic Science Regulation Unit |
| Andrew Rennison | Forensic Science Regulation Unit |
| Andrew Ritchie | GMP, Forensic Services Branch, |
| Richard Small | West Midlands Police |
| Soheel Joosab | Forensic Science Regulation Unit (Secretary) |

1. Welcome and apologies

Gary Pugh welcomed those present to the first meeting of the QSSP.

Apologies were received from:

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|-----------------------|--|
| Prof. Jim Fraser | Centre for Forensic Science, University of Strathclyde |
| Karen Squibb-Williams | Crown Prosecution Service |

2. Introduction

2.1 Mr Pugh provided the group with an outline of why the group had been established. He explained that he had been asked by the Forensic Science Regulator to chair the FQSSP with an aim to develop a current, and fit-for-purpose, quality standards framework for fingerprint technology which could be applied across the criminal justice system.

2.2 Mr Pugh said further that the Regulator had decided to establish the group in light of the expected publication of the final report from the Scottish Fingerprint Inquiry - due later in the year; and that ahead of the publication of that report it was the Regulator's intention, with the support of the group, to undertake preliminary discussions regarding a standards framework so to be prepared at the earliest opportunity for any recommendations emerging from that report.

2.3 As this was the first meeting of the group, Mr Pugh felt that the meeting could most usefully be used to identify initial areas of work, prospective outputs and key emerging issues. He explained that the current composition of the group had deliberately been kept relatively small to facilitate focus on a number of key deliverables of the proposed standard; from this other work streams will then develop.

2.4 In highlighting the Scottish Fingerprint Enquiry, there was a suggestion that it might be of value to approach Christophe Champod (of the University of Lausanne) to ask him to consider joining the group. Given his forensic fingerprint background and experience as an expert to the Scottish inquiry, he would greatly contribute to the work of the group. This would be left open for consideration at a later date.

2.5 The point was also raised that Jim Fraser is running a similar group in Scotland and, in view of that, it is important that there is no duplication of work between the two groups.

3. The role of standards in forensic science

3.1 Andrew Rennison thanked Mr Pugh for agreeing to chair the group and was grateful to those for finding the time to sit as members. He emphasised that that he would not be able to fulfil his role of setting and monitoring standards without the help of the domain experts in this group. He added that several other specialist groups had been established to advise on specific areas of forensic science and which contribute to the creation of quality forensic standards within their field.

3.2 He explained his role and agenda in setting standards across the wide range of the forensic science disciplines. Before the post was created there were ad hoc arrangements on standards and many overlaps, with the existing framework needing tidying up. He has published a first draft of forensic science specific standards for consultation and is working on a second draft (the Codes of Practice) following responses to that consultation – the latest draft Codes will be published for final consultation shortly. There will be a number of robust annexes to the Codes dealing with specific requirements for each forensic science discipline; importantly, fingerprints will be one of the annexes.

3.3 The annexes will be aligned with BS EN ISO/IEC 17025:2005 (for testing and calibration laboratories, as interpreted by ILAC-G19:2002), and will specify the requirements for management systems for providers of laboratory-based forensic science services to demonstrate their ability to consistently deliver products and services that meet the requirements of their customers.

3.4 Increasingly, police forces have quality management systems for their in-house forensic services and are certificated to ISO 9001 for fingerprints. Although police forces have ISO 9001 certification for their fingerprint functions, a small number of forces have extended this to cover all their forensic functions. Positively, some forces are moving towards accreditation to ISO 17025 for their in-house forensic laboratory functions – with a few having already attained ISO 17025 accreditation.

3.5 Mr Rennison advised there is a programme of work at EU level to create a statutory basis for the accreditation of forensic science services across all Member States; with the underlying principle to facilitate cross-border exchange of forensic science evidence which will be based on a common set of quality standards. He added that, as Regulator, he is closely involved in this work

which began with requirements for the accreditation of DNA and fingerprint laboratory activities.

3.6 The group felt that in taking forward this work opportunity might be offered to look at the mind thought, culture (i.e. how inaccuracies in conclusions are handled) and the training and ongoing re-evaluation of practitioners within the forensic fingerprint discipline. This might include a 'dip-sampling' process to scrutinise practitioner competencies.

3.7 In considering inaccuracies, Richard Small said that in the West Midlands fingerprint bureau if there is what might be considered an error in a fingerprint examiners findings that there is an arbitration process in place with peer review using three other examiners. Mr Small added that they also have their own in-house fingerprint standards manuals. Mr Rennison asked if it would be possible for him to visit the West Midland bureau to talk though first hand the arbitration process and that possibly the quality manuals referred to might be shared with the group – Mr Small agreed to this.

Actions: Richard Small/Andrew Rennison's PA

3.8 It was agreed that all documents produced by the group should be open to publication.

4. An overview of fingerprint examination and the role of standards (a discussion paper)

4.1 Introducing the paper, Mr Pugh said it was produced as a basis for initial discussion to help identify areas which may need to be addressed in order to establish fit-for-purpose standards in fingerprint examination. The paper predominately focuses on the areas of validation, process, systems organisation and practitioner competence.

4.2 Within the scope of the paper it made clear it was not the role of the group to act as arbitrator or evaluator of fingerprint examination. Mr Rennison echoed this point by emphasising that his remit was principally to establish and maintain robust quality standards, and not become involved in individual cases where practitioners conclusions are called into question. However, that is not to say that he, as the Regulator, would necessarily refuse to provide advice and guidance on a particular forensic fingerprint method/process if requested - as was the case when Lord Justice Thomas sought advice from the Regulator on Low template DNA process relative to the Regina v Reed and Reed appeal case.

4.3 It was agreed that the focus of the group should be the examination of the standards of competencies of practitioners in the identification of fingerprints and the reliability of that opinion, rather than the technical scientific process applied.

In looking to develop a forensic fingerprint standard, it was decided that the initial methodology of the FQSSP should be to:

a) explore current issues;

- b) how to manage/minimise the variation in expert opinion;
- c) consider the premise of uniqueness criteria and any current guidance – on this point Andrew Rennison said that he would ask Jeff Adams (FSRU) to carry out a literary search and produce a paper on what guidance exists on uniqueness criteria; **Action: Andrew Rennison**
- d) consider the variance by fingerprint experts of the ‘tipping point’ of decisions – Gary Pugh said that he would ask Lisa Hall to give a presentation to the group on the variances between fingerprint experts; **Action: Gary Pugh**
- e) to examine the disparity of fingerprint training;
- f) consider national occupational standards which might be integrated into a competency framework/standard which might be monitored by Skills for Justice;
- g) look at how fingerprint findings are presented in court by an expert witness;
- h) how to achieve practitioner compliance with a developed fingerprint standard;
- i) consider how fingerprint standards might be established on ISO 17025 elements in hand with the UKAS and Skills for Justice and so promote oversight of standards by those organisations;

5. Terms of reference

It was agreed that:

- paragraph 2 of the terms of reference that the word ‘expert’ should be replaced with ‘*examiner*’; and
- paragraph 2, 3rd bullet: to add a footnote defining the wording ‘*expertise to the criminal justice system*’

6. Current landscape

- Existing UK standards and policies

In bearing in mind existing standards and policies, it was felt by the group that the National Fingerprint Manual was somewhat out of date. Therefore, in considering a forensic fingerprint standard, it was agreed that it would be beneficial if a succinct piece of research be undertaken to find out what fingerprint policies, guidance and standards are currently in effect. Accordingly, it was agreed that Merv Valentine (GMP) be approached and invited to produce a summary paper of present policies and be invited to the next meeting of the group to present his findings.

Action: Andrew Ritchie

- current UK working practices and approaches

It was highlighted that most fingerprint bureaux have ISO 9001 and work to a three check verification. Although initially there are standard training programmes and the National Training Manual, it was highlighted that across the 43 police forces there is significant variability in ongoing mentoring and further developmental training. Given this, it was felt that establishing a single

quality standard would be challenging. It was therefore agreed that contact should be made with Keith Fryer/Mike Thompson to discuss the current variation of fingerprint training at a national and local level.

Action: Andrew Rennison

- Current challenges, research and initiatives

The group agreed that the most significant issue is the Scottish Fingerprint Inquiry which is looking at the steps which were taken to identify and verify the fingerprints associated with the case of HM Advocate v McKie. As the inquiry will determine the consequences of steps taken, report on findings of fact and make associated recommendations as to what new measures might be introduced in forensic fingerprinting, the group will consider the impact of the findings when announced.

From a European aspect, June Guinness offered to explore what work is taking place on promotion of best practice and developments on interpretation/comparison (particularly the Netherlands project adaptation to ident 1 methodology).

Action: June Guinness

- Australian model

The group discussed that Australian fingerprint bureaus are accredited to ISO 17025 standard and that the Australian model has a lot to commend about it. In view of that, Mr Rennison advised that he is aware that a number of comprehensive quality manuals and best practice guidance to promote quality standards have been developed. It was suggested that the Australian and New Zealand Forensic Science Society be contacted to discuss the possibility of their sharing with the group what quality systems they have in place, any fingerprint quality manuals and associated guidance.

Action: Andrew Rennison

- Scottish Fingerprint Inquiry

The group were advised that the proposed date for publication of the findings of the inquiry would be in the Autumn.

A suggestion was made that it might be prudent to prepare a draft communications note preparing the ground for the prospective publishing of a fingerprint standard.

- Literature review of fingerprint examination

This would link into the paper to be drafted by Jeff Adams.

- Survey of UK fingerprint bureau

The group discussed the possibility of producing a survey paper to send to fingerprint bureaus which would seek responses to elucidate what would be the

main concerns/difficulties in developing and establishing a fingerprint standard. An option might be to do this with the assistance of the NPIA (Forensics 21).

7. Scope and structure of a standard for fingerprint examination

7.1 It was agreed, as an initial step, that the examination of the Australian model would be a good place to begin.

7.2 It was agreed that for the next meeting a framework document should be produced setting out potential work streams for the group.

Action: Gary Pugh

8. Any other business

8.1 Andrew Rennison said, for the groups' information, that he would circulate the latest draft of his Codes of Practice.

Action: Andrew Rennison/Secretariat

9. Date of next meeting

9.1 The next meeting will be held on 23 September 2010, 14:00-17:00, room 764 (Victoria Block), New Scotland Yard, 10 Broadway, London SW1H 0BG