

Terms of Reference for the Practitioner Quality Standards Specialist Group

Status

1. The Practitioner Quality Standards Specialist Group (hereafter referred to as the “Specialist Group”) is a Standing Specialist Group established to advise the Forensic Science Regulator (“the Regulator”), the Forensic Science Advisory Council (‘the Council’) and other delivery partners (ACPO, NPIA, and MoJ (OCJR)), on matters within its remit.

Remit

2. The Specialist Group will support the Regulator and the Council by initially conducting a review, with recommendations, of the available options for the accreditation of practitioners involved in forensic science (excluding pathologists and forensic medical examiners) followed by ongoing assessment and advice on all matters related to the preparation, implementation and monitoring of practitioner quality standards within the remit of the Regulator. The Specialist Group will:
 - Define the scope of practitioners to be included in the review of practitioner quality standards, with options for later extension of the scope.
 - Review the current options for accrediting practitioners to ensure practitioner quality standards.
 - Recommend an option that best achieves practitioner quality standards in the delivery of forensic science to the criminal justice system.
 - Oversee the processes for monitoring and enforcing practitioner quality standards, including relationships with other bodies, within forensic science.

- Propose means of remedying any shortcomings, distinguishing between measures which fall within the remit of the Regulator and those which do not.
 - Make such other recommendations as appear appropriate.
3. The Specialist Group will, following a request from the Regulator develop additional standards, processes or policies for consideration by the Council and Regulator.

Composition

4. The following organisations will be invited to nominate suitable persons to membership of the Specialist Group:
- ACPO
 - NPIA
 - Skills for Justice
 - United Kingdom Accreditation Service
 - Forensic Science Service of Northern Ireland
 - Scottish Police Services Authority
 - Forensic Science Suppliers
 - Forensic Science Society
 - MoJ (OCJR)
5. The Chair, Deputy Chair and members of the Specialist Group will be appointed by the Regulator, with the approval of the Council.
6. The Regulator may at the request of, or following consultation with, the Chair of the Specialist Group, add to the membership of the Specialist Group or invite other individuals to serve on the Specialist Group for limited periods of time where additional skills, knowledge or experience are required.

Operation

7. The Specialist Group will operate in accordance with a detailed plan presented by the Chair and approved by the Regulator, who will be advised by the Council.
8. The Specialist Group will conduct its business out of committee as far as possible, but will meet as and when required in order to discharge its remit.
9. In the interests of public accountability, the Specialist Group will carry out its work as openly as possible, within the terms of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, subject to any necessary confidentiality requirements and any conditions set by Ministers or agreed by the Regulator.
10. No budget is delegated to the Specialist Group but such assistance as is reasonably required to enable the Specialist Group to undertake its duties will be provided, within available resources.
11. Membership of the Specialist Group is unremunerated. The Regulator may approve repayment of travel and subsistence costs necessarily incurred on Specialist Group business by any members who are unable to obtain reimbursement from their employers. Repayment will only be made where the Regulator has specifically agreed, in writing and in advance of the expenditure, to entertain claims from a named individual under this provision.
12. Where the business of the Specialist Group gives rise to the need for expenditure from the Regulator's budget (including any claims under paragraph 11 above), the Regulator's written approval must be obtained in advance of any commitment to the expenditure.
13. The Chair of the Specialist Group may establish such other procedures as s/he considers appropriate for the operation of the Specialist Group, providing that these are not inconsistent with the above.

Working Groups

14. The Specialist Group may, with the approval of the Regulator, establish such working groups as it considers necessary for the efficient and effective conduct of its business. Such working groups will be constituted with clear written terms of reference and will report to the Specialist Group.

Conduct

15. Members of the Specialist Group are required to observe the Seven Principles of Public Life endorsed by the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life. Each member must at all times act in good faith and observe the highest standards of impartiality, integrity and objectivity in relation to the conduct of the Specialist Group's business.

16. Any Specialist Group member has the right to bring to the attention of the Regulator any matter, which he or she believes raises important issues relating to his or her duties as a member. In such cases the member should, before approaching the Regulator, raise their concerns with the Specialist Group Chair to establish whether they might be resolved within the Specialist Group.

Confidentiality

17. In accepting appointment to the Specialist Group, members are required to accept that they will not disclose any information or documents presented to the Specialist Group without the approval of the Regulator. This includes any documents marked with any GPMS security classification (including RESTRICTED) and the content of any discussions relating to such information. Members undertake not to make copies of any such documents, and to follow the advice provided by the Regulator and FSRU about the handling of such documents.