

The terms of reference and methodology of the Group

Description

1.1. ***The Ethics Group: National DNA Database*** was set up as an Advisory Non-Departmental Public Body. On 25 July 2007, Meg Hillier MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office tabled a Written Ministerial Statement announcing its creation ‘to provide Ministers with independent ethical advice on the operation and practice of the National DNA Database (NDNAD) and related issues’.

The protocol governing the working of the Group provides that:

- i). Its role is to provide independent advice to Ministers;
- ii). It will comprise a chairperson with up to ten appointed members plus co-opted members;
- iii). It will be supported by staff in the Forensic Science Regulation Unit;
- iv). Its costs will be met by the Home Office within affordability constraints;
- v). Its Chair will have a seat on the NDNAD Strategy Board;
- vi). Any formal reports will be submitted to Ministers, through the Home Office.

The full Protocol can be found as Appendix B

Remit

1.2. The purpose of the Ethics Group is to advise Ministers on ethical issues concerning the NDNAD. This is to include ethical issues relating to:

- Services provided, and techniques employed, by approved suppliers of DNA profiles to the DNAD, comprising those currently provided and employed, and proposals for new services and techniques;

- Applications for research involving access to NDNAD samples or data;
- Other matters relating to the management, operation and use of the NDNAD.
- The Ethics Group may also, at the request of Ministers, conduct inquiries into other ethical issues relating to scientific services provided to the police service and other public bodies within the criminal justice system.

Operation

- 1.3. In the discharge of its functions the Ethics Group may undertake inquiries:
- At the request of Ministers;
 - At the request of the NDNAD Strategy Board;
 - On its own initiative.
- 1.4. The Ethics Group may, of its own volition, undertake inquiries in relation to matters falling within its remit if a simple majority of the Group resolves in favour of doing so. In the case of a tie, the Chair will have a casting vote.
- 1.5. The Ethics Group will normally aim to meet at least quarterly, and otherwise as agreed by the membership.
- 1.6. Support for the Ethics Group will be provided by the Home Office. No budget is delegated to the Group but such assistance as is reasonably required to enable the Group to undertake its duties will be provided, within available resources.
- 1.7. A member of the Home Office Senior Civil Service will be appointed as Sponsor for the Group. This is currently Andrew Rennison, the Forensic Regulator. The Sponsor will appoint a Committee Secretary, with responsibility for planning and arranging meetings, setting

agendas in consultation with the Ethics Group Chair; ensuring that papers are prepared and circulated on time and in good order; minuting meetings and assisting members in the discharge of their functions.

- 1.8. Appointment to the Ethics Group is for a period not exceeding three years: this may be renewed for a second term of up to three years by mutual consent of the Minister and the appointee and subject to a satisfactory appraisal.

Reporting

- 1.9. By the end of April each year, the Ethics Group will submit to Ministers a report on its work during the preceding year.
- 1.10. Where the Ethics Group is invited to advise Ministers on a particular issue, or where the Group decides to undertake an inquiry of its own volition, it will submit a report to the Minister through the Home Office Sponsor. The response will be provided by the Minister after due consideration of the recommendations.
- 1.11. Where the Ethics Group is invited to advise the NDNAD Strategy Board on a particular issue, it will submit a report to the Board, with a copy to the Minister, through the Home Office Sponsor. Any response will be provided by the Board, unless the Minister is minded to intervene.
- 1.12. In the interests of public accountability, the Ethics 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 conditions set by Ministers, or agreed by the Group. Meetings of the Group will not normally be open to members of the public, but notes of its meetings will be published, subject to any redactions considered to be necessary. Reports produced by the Group will be published at Ministerial discretion.

Conduct

- 1.13. Members of the Ethics Group are required to observe the Seven Nolan Principles of Public Life endorsed by the Committee on Standards in Public Life and to comply with the contents of the published Protocol.

- 1.14. 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 Committee's business.