



Forensic Science Regulator

Terms of Reference

Quality Standards Specialist Group

FSR-T-C02

Issue 2

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

1.1.1 This document sets out the terms of reference for the Quality Standards Specialist Group.

2. Implementation

2.1.1 This issue of the terms of reference became effective on 22 September 2020.

3. Modification

3.1.1 This is issue 2 of the terms of reference. Changes from previous versions are not identified.

4. Terms of Reference

4.1 Status

4.1.1 The 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”) and the Forensic Science Advisory Council (‘the Council’) on matters within its remit.

4.2 Remit

4.2.1 The Specialist Group will support the Regulator and the Council by providing advice on all matters related to the preparation, implementation and monitoring of scientific quality standards within the remit of the Regulator. It has absorbed the work of the former End User Specialist Group and in particular the requirement to assess and advise the Regulator on any shortcomings in the quality of forensic science delivered to the end users. The Specialist Group will deal with the following.

- a. Advise on the development and implementation of quality standards.
- b. Review quality standards prepared by the Regulator.
- c. Receive, in draft, standards developed by other specialist groups to ensure appropriate processes have been followed, that the standards are

consistent in format and approach and that they are suitable for the intended use.

- d. Support the work of other specialist groups by providing advice and assistance with regard to the production of standards.
- e. Advise on arrangements for validation and testing of processes, techniques or equipment to ensure the prescribed regimes are effective and proportionate.
- f. Oversee the processes for monitoring and enforcing quality standards, including relationships with other bodies, in the UK and abroad, within forensic science.
- g. Propose means of remedying any shortcomings in quality standards, distinguishing between measures which fall within the remit of the Regulator and those which do not.
- h. On request from the Regulator, review validation exercises and advise as to the adequacy of the validation.
- i. Review the work of the Specialist Group from an end user perspective and advise the Regulator on specific end user issues.
- j. Make such other recommendations as appear appropriate.

4.2.2 The Specialist Group will, following a request from the Regulator develop standards, processes or policies for consideration by the Council and Regulator.

4.3 Composition

4.3.1 The Specialist Group will be chaired by the Regulator or an individual appointed by the Regulator.

4.3.2 Membership of the Specialist Group will comprise persons in each of the following categories. Where stated, the relevant organisation will normally be invited to nominate a suitable person to the post.

- a. Law enforcement quality standards.
 - i. The National Police Chief's Council (up to 3 representatives, to include representation from the Performance and Standards Group and the National Quality Managers Expert Network).
 - ii. The National Crime Agency.

- iii. The College of Policing.
- b. Fire scene investigation.
 - i. The National Fire Chiefs' Council.
- c. Accreditation.
 - i. The United Kingdom Accreditation Service.
- d. Standards.
 - i. The British Standards Institution.
- e. Forensic science.
 - i. The Association of Forensic Science Providers (up to 3 representatives).
 - ii. The Forensic Science Northern Ireland.
 - iii. The Scottish Police Authority.
 - iv. The Chartered Society of Forensic Sciences for an individual with experience acting for the defence.
- f. Prosecuting authority.
 - i. The Crown Prosecution Service.
- g. Coroners.
 - i. One person nominated by the Coroners' Society of England Wales and Northern Ireland.
- h. Legal Aid.
 - i. The Ministry of Justice.
- i. Professional Body.
 - i. The Chartered Society of Forensic Sciences (may be the same person as nominated as in section e.iv above).
- j. Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl).
- k. Expert witnesses.

- i. If not already covered by the above nominees, approaches may be made to The Chartered Society of Forensic Sciences or The Expert Witness Institute or The Academy of Experts.

4.3.3 The organisations invited to nominate representatives to the Specialist Group may, from time to time, be amended by the Regulator following consultation with the Specialist Group.

4.3.4 Each organisation shall submit its proposed nomination for approval by the Regulator before appointment is confirmed.

4.3.5 If a member regularly fails to attend Specialist Group meetings, the Regulator may terminate his/her appointment and request a new appointee from the nominating body.

4.3.6 The Regulator may, following consultation with 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.

5. Operation

5.1 General

5.1.1 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 Forensic Science Advisory Council.

5.1.2 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.

5.1.3 In the interests of public accountability, the Specialist Group will carry out its work as openly as possible, subject to any necessary confidentiality requirements and any conditions agreed by the Regulator.

5.1.4 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.

5.1.5 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 agreed to entertain claims from a named individual under this provision.

5.1.6 Where the business of the Specialist Group gives rise to the need for expenditure from the Regulator’s budget, the Regulator’s written approval must be obtained in advance of any commitment to the expenditure.

5.1.7 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.

5.2 Working Groups

5.2.1 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.

6. Conduct

6.1.1 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.

6.1.2 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.

7. Data Protection

7.1.1 The contact details that members provide will be used by the Regulator, or the Regulator’s representatives, and shared amongst the membership of the

Specialist Group to facilitate member’s involvement in the activities of the Specialist Group as the Regulator deems appropriate.

7.1.2 Typically, this would mean that a member’s email address would be visible to the Specialist Group, and those supporting its work, to allow for debate within the Specialist Group. It would also allow for members to be receive other communication as the Regulator sees fit.

7.1.3 A Council member’s contact details will not be shared beyond the Specialist group and supporting staff ¹ without their express permission.

7.1.4 Details of how the Regulator uses a member’s personal information can be found in the Regulator’s personal information charter which can be found at:

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/forensic-science-regulator/about/personal-information-charter

8. Confidentiality

8.1.1 In accepting appointment to the Specialist Group, members are required to accept that there will be some information or documents presented to the Council that should not be disclosed without the approval of the Regulator; this will be indicated when raised in committee, in handling information on documents or covering emails. This includes any documents marked with any Government Protective Marking Scheme security classification (including ‘Official-Sensitive’) 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 Forensic Science Regulation Unit about the handling of such documents.

¹ Supporting staff include the Home Office Science Secretariat, members of the Forensic Science Regulation Unit and Home Office (or Home Office contracted) staff involved in administrative matters such as payment of expenses, issuing visitors passes etc.

Published by:

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Birmingham

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www.gov.uk/government/organisations/forensic-science-regulator