

## **Lessons Learnt**

Issue 7/ 2019

### **Exhibit Handling For Submission To A Forensic Unit**

**Key Words:** Fingerprints, drugs, exhibit handling, continuity, submission, labelling

This issue concerns events that have come to the attention of the Regulator, where on two separate occasions, exhibits from two separate cases have been erroneously merged.

The events concerned two separate evidence types, one with fingerprint exhibits and the other with drugs exhibits. For each evidence type, exhibits from the two cases were prepared for submission to a forensic science unit for analysis. However, similarities in exhibit numbers led to the fingerprint exhibits from the two cases being submitted as a single case and the drugs exhibits from the two cases being submitted as another single case. The receiving forensic units took the submissions at face value and carried out the requested examinations.

Both instances came to light when the officer in one of the cases realised that the exhibits in their case were either not as described or were not available for analysis having already been erroneously examined as part of the wrong submission.

One of these cases came to court and was dealt with before the error was spotted.

These events highlight two issues in particular.

Firstly, that clear and accurate labelling of items is imperative to mitigate the risk of confusion between cases with similarly identified exhibits.

Secondly, that constant vigilance and attention to detail is required when making submissions to, and receiving submissions at, forensic units.

## Things to consider

1. Whether individuals handling exhibits are aware of their specific responsibilities, and the consequences of errors.
2. Whether the responsibilities of those handling and creating exhibits are documented in sufficient detail in an up-to-date standard operating procedure.
3. Whether those handling exhibits have received appropriate and sufficient training.
4. Whether current processes for handling identified failings are documented and sufficient.

## Further reading

### **Lessons Learnt: Evidence Handling Error (Issue 1/2019).**

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/forensic-science-lessons-learnt-issue-1](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/forensic-science-lessons-learnt-issue-1)

### **Forensic Science Regulator's (FSR's) Codes of Practice and Conduct.**

[www.gov.uk/government/collections/forensic-science-providers-codes-of-practice-and-conduct](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/forensic-science-providers-codes-of-practice-and-conduct)

### **Legal Obligations (FSR-I-400)**

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/legal-obligations-issue-8](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/legal-obligations-issue-8)