

Lessons Learnt

Issue 6/ 2019

Dip Sampling Fingerprint Results

Key Words: Fingerprints, exclusion, dip sampling, peer review.

This issue concerns the use of dip sampling as a method for reviewing 'exclusion' results from fingerprint comparisons; that is where fingerprint comparisons have resulted in the 'exclusion' of a suspect from having left marks at various scenes.

Typically, such results are not routinely peer-reviewed on a case-by-case basis in the same manner that inclusive conclusions are, but are dip sampled. This may take place quite some time after the original conclusion has been reached and reported to the customer.

A number of occurrences have been brought to the attention of the Regulator where this review mechanism has resulted in the initial comparison conclusion reached being amended from 'exclusion' to 'identification' following the dip sample review. This changes an opinion that a suspect was not responsible for a mark, to an opinion that the suspect was responsible for the mark.

In the first instance, the Regulator is pleased to see that the procedures in place, in each instance, ultimately identified the 'incorrect' results and that 'correct' conclusions were then issued. Appropriate root cause investigations were carried out within each forensic unit and measures were put in place to mitigate a recurrence.

However, these issues highlight the need for constant vigilance and timely intervention when reviewing results and conclusions, whether they be inclusive or otherwise.

These issues also highlight the potential for 'incorrect' conclusions being further processed if they are not included in an appropriate dip-sampling regime, which poses a risk to the Criminal Justice System.

Things to consider

- 1) Whether dip-sampling frequency offers sufficient assurance that 'incorrect' conclusions are not being acted upon.
- 2) Whether dip sampling takes place in a timely enough fashion to allow for due consideration to be given prior to conclusions being issued.
- 3) Whether it is appropriate to treat 'exclusion' conclusions differently to 'identification' conclusions in terms of the review/quality assurance processes implemented.

Relevant documents

Codes of Practice and Conduct:

www.gov.uk/government/collections/forensic-science-providers-codes-of-practice-and-conduct#codes-of-conduct-and-practice

Guidance on Legal Obligations:

www.gov.uk/government/collections/fsr-legal-guidance

Fingerprint Comparison:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/fingerprint-comparison