

## **Lessons Learnt**

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### **Case Submission and Staff Elimination Databases (SEDs)**

**Key Words:** DNA contamination, elimination database, communication, transfer of cases, casework.

This issue details an event where DNA casework had been incorrectly sent to a forensic science provider (FSP) that contractually had no Staff Elimination Database (SED) set up for the staff from the submitting police forensic unit.

When the DNA casework contract was initially awarded by the police force to two FSPs, the Case Management Unit (the unit that authorises and transfers the work) agreed a policy that no DNA casework should go to a third FSP as they were not contracted or authorised to hold the appropriate SED.

However, at some point this information was not effectively communicated and in the initial stages of the contract, DNA casework was sent to the third FSP by mistake. As a result of this incident a SED was set up by the FSP for the police forensic staff and all the force's DNA casework profiles were checked against the SED. Once the searches were completed, one match was obtained from a DNA casework item submitted in 2013.

The item examined was a firearm that had been sampled across seven separate areas. The staff profile was detected on one of the swabs. This outcome ruled out gross contamination and suggests a lapse in concentration or an anti-contamination practice had occurred.

Further investigation revealed that these profiles were not loaded to the National DNA Database™ (NDNAD) as the scientist selected specific profiles for loading to the NDNAD.

Since 2013 the force's forensic unit has undertaken refresher training on DNA sampling and cleaning. In the last six years there have been no further SED matches against casework profiles, but there have been a few SED matches seen through environmental monitoring that were dealt with at the time.

## **Things to consider**

- 1) When work policies change, including admin-related ones, careful consideration should be given to determine the most effective way(s) to communicate and reinforce the key information.
- 2) Effective training and then ensuring that this has been absorbed by using simple, timely, effective post-implementation checks.
- 3) When work is transferred to another site or team, consideration should be given to whether they fully understand what is required of them and who to contact if they require further assistance.
- 4) When a profile of work changes always check that the relevant staff are certain of what is required. If unsure, seek advice from an appropriate source. For example, this might be when work is taken from a new force or by a new FSP.
- 5) Does your organisation have an up-to-date standard operating procedure on exhibit submission and handling? For example, does it include details on the responsibilities and expectations of individuals receiving, submitting and handling exhibits?

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

**The Control and Avoidance of Contamination In Crime Scene Examination involving DNA Evidence Recovery:**

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/crime-scene-dna-anti-contamination-guidance](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/crime-scene-dna-anti-contamination-guidance)

**The Control and Avoidance of Contamination in Laboratory Activities involving DNA Evidence Recovery and Analysis:**

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/laboratory-dna-anti-contamination-guidance](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/laboratory-dna-anti-contamination-guidance)

**DNA contamination detection – The management and use of staff elimination DNA databases:**

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/dna-contamination-detection](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dna-contamination-detection)