



## Biometrics & Forensic Ethics Group Information Sheet

# The Biometrics and Forensics Ethics Group

The [Biometrics and Forensics Ethics Group](#) (BFEG) is an advisory non-departmental public body sponsored by the Home Office. The purpose of the BFEG is to provide ethical advice to the Home Office and its ministers regarding Home Office projects that implement policies. Uniquely among the various ethical advisory bodies on the Home Office 'landscape', the BFEG is designated as 'independent' in the work it performs.

The BFEG was formed in 2017 as a successor to the National DNA Database Ethics Group. The [remit of the BFEG has since expanded](#) to cover a range of scientific areas which affect operations of the Home Office. Further details on the BFEG remit can be found on the [BFEG website](#).

### Membership

The BFEG is structured as a committee comprised of highly experienced unpaid professionals each with expertise in a distinct discipline. Membership is proactively reviewed every 3 years to ensure there are no knowledge gaps. To read more about the current [members](#) visit the BFEG website.

Further to the expertise of the group, the BFEG maintains strong relationships with stakeholders such as relevant commissioners, government departments, policing, non-governmental organisations, and academia to keep abreast of the policy, scientific and regulatory landscape.

### How the BFEG works

To maximise use of resource, the BFEG operates a number of smaller, specific working groups. Their work is reported to the full group at quarterly meetings and in annual reports. See below some examples of the type of work the BFEG undertakes through a few of the working groups:

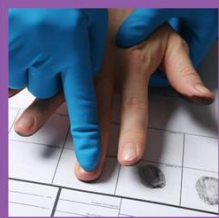


#### Data Ethics Advisory Working Group

- Focused on the ethical use and analysis of data in the criminal justice system
- Ongoing relationship project teams to verbally advise the Home Office on innovative uses of police data sets

#### Biometric Recognition Technology Working Group

- Focused on the ethical application of new and emerging biometric recognition technologies
- In the 2020/21 period the group developed a written report on the ethical issues in the use of live facial recognition technology



#### Home Office Biometrics Ethical Working Group

- Focused on sharing ethical guidance to the Home Office Biometrics programme
- Provided guidance and scrutiny on data protection impact assessments
- Attended live trials assessing feasibility of the biometrics self-enrolment sharing ethical considerations and recommendations

The BFEG always recommends that ethical considerations be built into project work from the outset. Where possible, it will assist in providing advice throughout a project's lifecycle. A set of regularly reviewed [ethical principles](#) underpin the advice the group provides.



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### The relationship between the BFEG and the Home Office

The BFEG is an advisory [non-departmental public body](#) which is sponsored by the Home Office. This means the BFEG advises the Home Office ministers (and when requested wider organisations in the criminal justice system) on ethical considerations in the operation of Home Office projects. The Home Office provides the secretariat who support the BFEG to deliver their advice. The BFEG members are recruited through the [public appointments](#) process. They are not remunerated, and they declare any conflicts of interest.

### Independence of the BFEG

While the sponsoring department of the BFEG is the Home Office, both the group and its members are regarded as independent givers of ethical advice within the Home Office.

As demonstration of the BFEGs independence:

- Each year roughly 30% of the BFEGs work is determined by its members, and 70% is undertaken by agreement between the BFEG and the Home Office.
- The BFEG does not need to seek approval from the Home Office to publish its work.
- Where the Group has concerns that its advice is not being considered, the BFEG is able to make recommendations to the relevant Minister and can publish specific recommendations in its annual report and on its website.
- The BFEG critically reviews any documentation (e.g., implementation plans for policies, updates, progress reports, analytical and technical project reports) presented to them by the Home Office (and other agencies), regularly acting as a scrutiny group and interacting regularly with Home Office policy teams.
- The BFEG can respond to government policy consultations as an independent expert group separately from the Home Office and can be critical of any departmental response. The views expressed are those of the BFEG, not the Home Office.

### Where to read the advice the BFEG shares

Transparency is important to the BFEG. Any reports and recommendations produced by the BFEG to ministers are published on the [BFEG website](#). Yearly activity is recorded in an annual report and regular updates are recorded in the published [minutes](#) of committee meetings.

While the BFEG aims to be as transparent as is possible, members are security cleared and often advise on projects where it is in the public interest that the specific details are withheld. In these instances, specific advice cannot be shared but high-level activity is recorded in the annual report.

### The BFEG expenses

Members of the BFEG are not paid. The members do receive reasonable expenses required to conduct BFEG activity (such expenses are reported within the published annual reports). Between May 2021 and June 2022, the BFEG's expenditure was £4351.15. There is no fee for advice which is provided by the BFEG.

### How to contact the BFEG

The BFEG welcomes engagement with groups and members of the public, and often hears presentations from external speakers to inform its work. An individual or organisation who would like to learn more or engage with the BFEG should contact the secretariat at [BFEG@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:BFEG@homeoffice.gov.uk). Persons working at the Home Office and seeking independent ethical advice for a project should contact the secretariat at [BFEG@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:BFEG@homeoffice.gov.uk) to discuss. The BFEG recommends getting in contact from the outset of your project, so that ethical issues and possible solutions can be explored at an early stage of project planning.

### How to get involved

We welcome you to contact the secretariat at [BFEG@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:BFEG@homeoffice.gov.uk) if you would like to speak to the BFEG or if you have any questions.

Recruitment to the BFEG is by [public appointment](#) and adverts are posted as vacancies arise. The BFEG is seeking to improve the diversity of its membership to ensure a fair and balanced representation. Additionally, the BFEG Chair can choose to co-opt individuals who have the necessary expertise to support a specific project. The secretariat would welcome contact from individuals who would like to be involved with BFEG's work.