



# Forensic Science Regulator

## Fingerprint Quality Standards Specialist Group

### Note of the meeting held on 30 January 2024 online via video conference

#### 1. Welcome, and Introduction

- 1.1. The Chair welcomed all the members a meeting of the Fingerprint Quality Standards Specialist Group (FQSSG). A list of attendees by organisation is available at Annex A.
- 1.2. The Chair introduced members of the working group to the deputy Chair who had been agreed with the Forensic Science Regulator (henceforth the Regulator) for contingency purposes.

#### 2. Review of Minutes and Actions Update

- 2.1. The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed with no corrections and would be published by the secretariat.
- 2.2. The outstanding actions from the previous meeting in December 2023 were review. The following updates were provided, and the remaining actions were closed.

Action 2: FQSSG members to consider and send proposed representatives for a working group to the FQSSG Chair and the representative from the Office of the Forensic Science Regulator.

- 2.2.1. Update on Action 2, December 2023: No suggestions had been received for representatives and so it was agreed that the representatives would sit on a working group to discuss the scope and would meet prior to the next meeting of the FQSSG: the Office of the Forensic Science Regulator (OFSR), Metropolitan Police (MPS), the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS), Greater

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Manchester Police (GMP) and the Forensic Capability Network (FCN)(to facilitate).

Action 4: Representative for the Office of the Forensic Science Regulator to identify and invite representatives from the Police Digital Service (PDS), the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), the Chartered Society of Forensic Science (CSFS) and the academic community.

2.2.2. Update on Action 4, December 2023: Representatives from PDS and CPS had been identified. A representative from CSFS was still to be considered.

### **3. Workplan Update**

3.1. The OFSR representative provided the group an overview of the updates to the FQSSG workplan. The key points were:

3.1.1. The commission from the Regulator regarding the scope of accreditation had been updated and would be circulated to the working group for consideration.

3.1.2. There had not been progress with regard to reviewing the terminology document, but this would be a priority going forward.

3.1.3. Capability for the Validation Supplier for the searching algorithm was anticipated for summer 2024.

3.1.4. Work on interpretation guidance would be considered by a specific subgroup and would feed into a larger specialist group of the Forensic Science Regulator, in which the FQSSG is represented.

3.1.5. The fingerprint manual would be moved away from the Regulator and will be held on a separate, individual gov.uk page. No host had been identified but this was not considered an issue.

3.2. The OFSR representative opened the floor for questions.

3.2.1. The Chair questioned whether considering the next collaborative exercises would be too specific for FQSSG. It was discussed who should have responsibility for this function with agreement this should be driven by the national fingerprint board with input from the FQSSG on what may be missing and should be sighted on work without driving this.

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**ACTION 1:** OFSR representative to update the workplan.

**ACTION 2:** Chair and representative for the OFSR to speak with the national fingerprint board regarding requirements for a collaborative exercise.

**4. Update from Police Digital Service Representative on Fingerprint Database Capability**

- 4.1. The programme director working on the digital fingerprint capability from the Police Digital Service (PDS) presented to members of the FQSSG on the new fingerprint comparison capability which was intended to standardise fingerprint provisions nationally.
- 4.2. The presentation provided an overview of the capability and the background, and current position.
- 4.3. The Chair thanked the representative for their presentation and opened for questions. A representative from GMP asked a question regarding uptake of the system which was responded to by the official from PDS, who also offered support for those seeking to onboard.

**5. Update from Crown Prosecution Service Representative**

- 5.1. A representative from CPS verbally updated the group on changes to the [CPS guidance on expert evidence](#).
- 5.2. The representative from CPS commented that the changes in the guidance were largely around the 2018 statutory instrument on fingerprint evidence. At the time the guidance largely indicated that if organisation was not accredited the evidence would not be put in front of the court (with certain exceptions). There are now numerous subcategories for accreditation which had created challenge and confusion.
- 5.3. The representative from CPS noted that the Home Office has indicated that the statutory instrument from 2018 would remain in place. With the implementation of the Forensic Science Regulators Code of Practice, to reflect changes in the regulatory landscape, the guidance had been amended.

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5.4. The representative from CPS commented that they would be keen to engage with the FQSSG on discussions regarding defining the forensic science activity as this would have knock on impacts.

5.5. The representative from the OFSR noted that these changes would complement the work of the FQSSG subgroup that would be reviewing the scope of accreditation.

5.6. Members of the FQSSG discussed circulation of the report.

**ACTION 3:** Representative from the FCN to circulate the updated CPS Expert Evidence guidance within the quality matters newsletter.

**ACTION 4:** Chair to circulate the updated CPS Expert Evidence guidance with the IRM.

**ACTION 5:** Representative from the OFSR to share the updated CPS Expert Evidence guidance in the next Forensic Science Regulator Newsletter.

## **6. Accreditation Schedule Wording**

6.1. The Chair raised that the wording would be considered by the working group. The item would remain on the agenda for future feedback from the working group.

6.2. Due to the working having not yet met, the agenda item was not covered. The group considered, outlined below, the agenda and how it might look moving forward.

6.3. It was considered how updates on the digital forensics' capability could be fed to the group in future.

6.4. The representative from the Home Office Biometrics (HOB) programme suggested they could provide updates on the matcher in the future.

6.4.1. The representative from MPS commented on the possible role of the FQSSG in development of guidance and sharing best practice for the use of the matcher algorithm. The representative commented on how not all organisations have IDENT1 within scope and suggested there should be support and

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encouragement to accreditation from those with IDENT1 in scope and those without and possibly from the FQSSG.

6.4.2. The representative from the OFSR noted that guidance has been shared in the past and can be developed as advice but determining best practice would be out of remit for the Regulator. A representative from HOB noted that the Home Office has been developing guidance and validation databases that could be made available in the future.

6.5. The chair agreed that updates could be shared in future by exception.

## **7. Update on Interpretation Specialist Group**

7.1. The representative from the OFSR provided a progress update to the members of FQSSG. This included informing members of the FQSSG the following:

- It had been determined that the 118-guidance document was too general, the approach the Regulator was seeking to take was to form guidance which was specific to each specialism.
- The interpretation specialist group had been formed to carry this work forward.
- The interpretation specialist group has wide membership across the network.
- Principles and general terms would be agreed by the interpretation specialist group within overarching guidance, with subgroups formed to develop topic specific guidance.

7.2. The representative from MPS, who represented the FQSSG on the Interpretation specialist group, shared their views on progress so far noting at the time of the meeting, the overarching guidance would need to be condense and simplified for fingerprint practitioners.

7.3. The representative from MPS shared reflections that it seemed there was a general move away from categorial opinions to evaluative, the representative raised that as more tools to support working practice were being developed whether this would be the right approach for fingerprints. This was discussed by the group.

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- 7.3.1. A representative from the defence science and technology laboratory (Dstl) shared that they were involved with re-drafting the ENSFI manual and noted this was also moving away from categorical evidence. The move was likely towards the weight of evidence but agreed that the jump to use of likelihood ratios was a large one.
- 7.4. The chair commented that a key deliverable would be that the delivery of the interpretation should not undermine the value of evidence. Maintaining the integrity of the evidence was a risk.
- 7.5. The representative from MPS shared with the group that they were reviewing possible knowledge transfer partnerships to consider what is possible can could be done for example to analyse available input data to inform decisions.
- 7.6. The representative from MPS raised that it would be important to educate the community to ensure understanding of the interpretation guidance once it had been published.

**8. Any other business**

- 8.1. The next meeting of the FQSSG was agreed for April 2024 and would take place as a hybrid meeting format.

## **Annex A**

### **Representatives present:**

Chair

Deputy-Chair

United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS)

Forensic Capability Network (FCN)

Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl)

Home Office Biometrics Programme

Police Digital Service

Forensic Information Database Service (FINDS)

Greater Manchester Police

Crown Prosecution Service

Metropolitan Police Service

Office of the Forensic Science Regulator

Home Office (secretariat)

### **Apologies received**

Fingerprint Associates Limited

Northumbria Police

Yorkshire and Humber Police