



Forensic Science Regulator

Biology Specialist Group (BioSG) meeting

**Note of the meeting held on 16th January 2025 in 23
Stephenson Street, Birmingham and Online via MS Teams**

1. Welcome and introductions

- 1.1. The Chair welcomed all the members to the second meeting of the Biology Specialist Group (BioSG) of the Statutory Regulator's remit. A list of attendees by organisation is available at Annex A
- 1.2. As there were new members to the group, the Chair asked the members to briefly introduce themselves and the organisations that they were representing.

2. Minutes and actions

- 2.1. The group reviewed minutes from the previous meeting, one of the Co-Chairs for the Non-Human Biology Sub-Specialist Group (NHBSSG) highlighted a discrepancy as the group was referred to as the 'Non-Human DNA' which is an incorrect reflection of the group's remit, as it doesn't solely focus on DNA but all non-human biological aspects. The representative of the Office of the Forensic Science Regulator (OFSR) amended the minutes within the meeting.
- 2.2. No other comments were raised regarding the minutes.

ACTION 1: OFSR to publish minutes of Biology SG meeting held in February 2024.

Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**3. ToR and membership refresh**

3.1. Prior to the meeting the ToR was circulated to the members of the Bio SG, the Chair and the OFSR representative led the discussion, wording and grammatical issues raised within the draft terms of reference were addressed within the meeting. The key points from the discussion were as follows:

- Addition of Association of Forensic Science Providers (AFSP) DNA Working Group Chair to the membership list
- Expansion of the abbreviations used for the organisations represented within the ToR at the beginning as that is the first time that they are mentioned.
- Addition of 'if not already represented within the membership' to 'Independent practise' under the membership section, as there may be a time in which there would be a requirement for an individual to represent an independent practise if it wasn't already represented within the BioSG.
- Addition of 'Academia if not already represented within the membership' under the membership section, as there may be a time in which there would be a requirement for an individual to represent academia if it wasn't already represented within the BioSG.
- Addition of 'Escalate and provide advice...' to capture the remit of the BioSG with assisting the Regulator.
- Addition of 'referrals' to the remit section of the ToR as there may be referrals in which the Regulator seeks advice of the members of the Biology SG.
- Addition of 'Human Tissue Act' to the list of requisite quality standards and guidance that the group will review to base provisions of advice and good practice from.
- Removal of 'invertebrates and vertebrates' from the Non-Human Biology area of expertise and person specification within 'Appendix 1' as within

Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes

the group there are a range of specialisms that do not sit within those descriptions.

ACTION 2: OFSR to update, finalise and publish ToR of Biology SG.

Biology portfolio organogram

- 3.2. The group then reviewed an organogram of the biology portfolio which was circulated to the members prior to the meeting. The organogram depicted the Specialist Groups and Working groups within the biology portfolio as well as links with two of the FSR's Specialist Groups (Interpretation Specialist Group and the Incident Examination Specialist Group)
- 3.3. The OFSR representative explained that as a result from the statutory powers of the FSR, the Specialist Groups have changed. The Biology SG is the overarching group that and the other Biology sub-specialist groups (Human Biology, DNA Sub-Specialist Group, Non-Human Biology) will fall under the Biology SG and that the work currently in progress across the portfolio will feed into the workplan.
- 3.4. It was explained that as the Medical Forensics SG does not sit underneath the Biology SG, as it is its own Specialist Group however, the group has links with both the Biology SG and the interpretation SG.
- 3.5. It was also explained that one of the Non-human Biology working group's has a link to the Regulator's Incidence Examination SG

ACTION 3: OFSR to amend abbreviations for the Human Bio and Human DNA sub specialists' group on the Organogram.

- 3.6. The AFSP body fluid forum Chair asked the OFSR representative whether a sub group of the AFSP scenes working group should be added to the Organogram. This was replied to and suggested that the AFSP body fluid forum Chair should liaise with the OFSR science lead who oversees the IESG.

ACTION 4: AFSP Body Fluid Forum Chair to check with AFSP Crime Scene Working Group whether they are liaising with or are represented on the FSR's Incident Examination Specialist Group (IESG).

Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**4. OFSR Code update**

4.1. The OFSR representative provided the members an update regarding version 2 of the Code. The main points of the update were:

- Sub-consultations for FSAs covered in the code had taken place since main consultation of version 2 of the code which was held in February 2024.
- An update was given in October 2024 at the annual FSR conference which outlined the structural changes that has taken place.
- Amendments to the FSAs and requirements has also been added to version 2 of the Code.
- The Code is now awaiting a parliamentary slot as it was delayed due to the new government being elected in, meaning that the OFSR are unable to provide the members information regarding a date of publication for version 2.

4.2. The OFSR representative also highlighted that the Regulator has sent out a request for information on use of evaluative opinion and activity level reporting to all organisations who conduct bio FSAs in facilities and at crime scene. This is due to a referral received regarding the quality of activity level reporting within Bio FSAs. They were expecting to have all responses back by February for review.

4.3. One of the Co-Chairs for the NHBSSG highlighted that they had not received this, despite being physically based outside the Regulator's remit they still report in England and Wales. This generated the following action:

ACTION 5: OFSR to communicate within the OFSR team and to the Regulator about organisations outside England & Wales delivering casework in England & Wales who did not receive notice for information on activity level reporting.

4.4. The Chair of the Human Bio distribution group queried where to find a definition for activity level reporting and was it in the Code.

ACTION 6: OFSR to confirm where the definition for 'Activity Level Reporting' is recorded and feedback to the Bio SG.

Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**5. Specialist Group meetings and work updates****Non-human Biology Sub-Specialist Group**

5.1. The Co-Chairs of the Non-human Biology Sub-Specialist Group provided and update for the members of the Biology Specialist Group, which included their remit, issues, key pieces of work and focus points. The main points of the update were:

- Early days for the NHBSSG, as membership has just been finalised, in the early stages of workplan development and selecting individuals for technical working groups.
- Conducted a landscape survey determining key stakeholders within the non-human biological community by putting together a stakeholder networking list.
- Highlighted that due to the complexities and interrelationships of the different disciplines would be considered a challenge which was highlighted by the Co-Chair as often data-sets and disciplines run in parallel with each other, an example given was plant distribution is underpinned by soil.
- Currently reviewing the Scenesafe scenes of crime handbook with members of the Non-Human Biology community to determine potential gaps and improvements that would be beneficial for the Non-Human Biology area. This generated a large discussion with the group which raised concerns regarding exhibit recovery, packaging and storage and the lack of information that is out there and the push to use the Scenes of Crime handbook.

ACTION 7: OFSR to ask the IESG lead if they understand how many forces use the guidance in the scene of crime handbook for recovery, packaging and storage.

Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**Human Biology Sub-Specialist Group - Body fluid distribution Working Group**

5.2. The Chair of the body fluid distribution working group (WG) provided an update for the members of the Biology Specialist Group. The main points of the update were:

- The last meeting of the Body fluid distribution WG was held in August 2024, the aim of this meeting was to agree and draft FSAs for FSA-BIO-200 and FSA-BIO-201.
- Drafting of both FSAs have been completed, BIO 200 focuses on the location and identification of body fluids and BIO 300 to be 201 in V2 of the Code, was about the distribution. This FSA caused issue within the community with respect to accreditation requirements.
- Due to the requirement for accreditation in BPA being paused for some time is allowing the group to look at all types of compliance mechanisms which is beneficial as it allows oversight to different mechanisms available in other professional disciplines so that the group can assess different options without going into the ISO type of framework.
- Attempting to establish some understanding of time since intercourse analysis and interpretation. Broadened the scope of the work and trying to encompass what might be dealt with within the distribution of the biological material
- The group aims to hopefully work closely with supporting the interpretation specialist group, as after the national meeting held in December 2024 it was apparent that there was a need to have a joined approach to activity level reporting.
- Group are working on revising 'FSR-C-102 Bloodstain Pattern Analysis: codes of practice' to convert it to a statutory guidance document.

Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**Medical Forensics Specialist Group**

5.3. The Chair of the medical forensics SG (MFSG) sent their apologies as they had prior commitments, however, they circulated an update to the members. The main points of the update were:

- Lack of recognition of medical forensics being a specialism like paediatrics, surgery etc. this means that there is no formal and competitive recruitment into a speciality training programme, which the FFLM believes should change so that there is a better quality assurance around the training of forensic clinicians.
- Main focus for many forensic clinicians is the upcoming deadline of 2nd October 2025 for SARCs to gain ISO 15189 accreditation to ensure they are compliant with the Code. This has proven to be challenging due to the need for additional staff to undertake this, great variability in SARCs and the additional costs which inevitably come with meeting the requirements. This has also been a big change to clinical services whose inspection has been and will continue to be by the Care Quality Commission for their non-FSA activities.
- Despite the delay of publication of v2 of the Code due to a change of Government following the General Election on 4th July 2024. The MFSG and the FFLM were pleased to learn that in v2, the clinical forensic work which is undertaken within police custody will come within the code. There is work on this by colleagues in the MFSG and it is right and proper that those detained for offences have an equitable service as those who are complainants (victims) of crime.
- 'Self-taken forensic swab services' which at least one service is available in the UK are causing great concern to the FFLM and others within the community, this entailed the production of a joint position statement on 10th September 2024, which can be found along with other position statements here: [Position Statements - FFLM](#).
- FFLM continues to regular updates of its documents. As noted in the last meeting the Quality Standards in paediatric Sexual Offence Medicine

Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes

have been published. The documents most closely associated with clinical forensic 'FSAs' are those managed by the forensic science committee (FSSC) details of which can be found here: [Forensic Science Subcommittee \(FSSC\) - FFLM](#)

- 5.4. One of the Co-Chairs for the NHBSSG raised a question about best practices for recovering and reporting medical mycology, to which it was confirmed that this topic was outside the MFSG remit.

ACTION 8: OFSR to ask HO pathology delivery unit if there is a contact or lead for medical mycology guidance primarily in connection to infant deaths, as there is an increased request to recover mould and fungi at properties

DNA Sub-Specialist Group

- 5.5. The Chair of the DNA Sub-Specialist Group provided an update to the members of the Biology SG regarding their current workstreams, potential issues. The main points of the update were:

- DNASSG have had two meetings so far, which were held in August 2024 and November 2024. Primarily meeting face to face with the opportunity to have a hybrid meeting if necessary.
- Last meeting focused on the development of the DNA and kinship guidance documents.
- Issue raised regarding the loading of samples to the database with body fluid attributions without presumptive testing being carried out, which has led to a revision in guidance for FSPs to have carried out presumptive testing before assigning a body fluid when loading to the database.
 - Two areas DNASSG are considering are the risk of previously loaded samples to the NDNAD and the risk of mixed DNA results where presumptive testing may or may not have been carried out, as it may not relate to the major component that has been loaded to the NDNAD
 - Risk assessments have been drafted by OFSR science lead for the group to provide feedback to the Regulator.

Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes

- Y-STR guidance document had recently been updated for republication as a journal publication by Bright et al (2024) commented that the wording regarding the formation of propositions were not as clear or accurate as they could be.

ACTION 9: OFSR to provide Bright et al reference on Y-STR propositions that specifically mentions FSR guidance.

Interpretation Specialist Group

5.6. The Biology SG Chair, who sits on the Interpretation SG as the Bio SG representative, provided an update to the members. The main points of the update were:

- The group are producing an overarching high level guidance document, which would be tailored to FSA specific guidance at a later date.
- Interpretation workshop held in Leeds on 9th October 2024, there were a number of tables considering different evidence types. This showed very early on the different stages certain FSAs were with reporting.
- In the morning of the workshop reviewed and provided feedback the draft guidance document produced by the Interpretation SG, which covers all types of interpretation (investigative, evaluative, analytical, categorical and factual), report types (full statements and SFRs) which fall within that FSA.
- In the afternoon of the workshop each of the FSA specific disciplines, reviewed the overall guidance in view of their specialism to determine how this would apply within their field and if there were any problems that they would need to address within their own FSA specific document.

6. Stakeholder and professional bodies updates**AFSP DNA**

6.1. The Chair of the DNA Sub-Specialist Group, also represented the AFSP DNA working group provided an update to the members of the Biology SG. The main points were:

Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes

- Last meeting of the AFSP DNA Working Group was held in November 2024
- Continuation of running collaborative exercises on interpretation, focusing on autosomal mixture interpretation. this raised issues regarding the quality of the DNA samples as they had degraded faster than expected, there was difficulty getting a good profile from the samples. Now considering whether to run this exercise again in 2025.
- Y-STR interpretation exercise also ongoing. Rather than sending samples, previously tested electronic results were sent out instead, the final date of submission is the end of Jan 2025. the samples provided are from 3 different scenarios and there are 3 different types of results which fall under conditioned mixtures, simple mixtures and single sourced results. This will provide useful information to determine whether there are currently any differences within current practices between the FSPs.
- Another collaborative investigative exercise which focuses on degradation. The test will run in three stages:
 - The first stage focuses on quantifying which uses standards to gain a benchmark.
 - The second stage focuses on DNA degradation at differing temperatures at different time points.
 - The third stage focuses on the extraction of the chemistry.

Body Fluid Forum

6.2. The Body Fluid Forum Chair provided an update to the members of the Bio SG. The main points of the update were:

- Last meeting was held 9th November 2024
- Next meeting is due to be held in Glasgow on the 25th and 26th January. The reason for the 2 day meeting is to discuss EAFS due to be held in Dublin from 26th – 30th may 2025
- Main aim of the AFSP for 2025 is to complete the publication of papers to commence their proposed projects. To complete the assessment,

Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes

interpretation, collation and piece that they're working on to continue to provide support to all body fluid forum member organisations and to continue collaborative work with external organisations.

- Co-Chair for the NHBSSG raised a question about best practices for recovering DNA from natural environments, such as vegetation and wood. The Body Fluid Forum Chair acknowledged the lack of specific guidance and suggested reaching out to the AFSP Scenes Group for more information. This generated the following action:

ACTION 10: AFSP Body Fluid Forum Chair to check with AFSP Crime Scene Working Group if there is guidance and/or issues to consider for the recovery of biological material.

UKAS

- 6.3. The UKAS representative provided an update to the members of the Bio SG. The main points of the update were:

- Awaiting the proposed agreement regarding the approach from the transition of version1 of the Code to version 2 of the Code which UKAS are working with the OFSR to develop this.
- Providing additional resource in the areas to assist with SARCs achieving accreditation by the October 2025 deadline.
- Currently going through a process to digitise their schedules of accreditation, and at the moment working towards a more standardised and unified approach.

Chartered Society of Forensic Science

- 6.4. The Chartered Society representative provided an update to the members of the Bio SG. The main points of the update were:

- Instead of offering one research grant opportunity per year there will now be two research grants offered by the Chartered Society.
- There is a working group that has been established which focuses on the Chartered forensic practitioner status, determining how the CSoFS may encourage colleagues to apply

Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes

- Next annual conference is due to be held in November 2025.

7. Workplan – draft BioSG and sub-group workplans for 2024/25, including guidance documents

7.1. The group worked through the draft workplan of the Bio SG and the sub group workplans for 2024/25. The main points of the discussion were:

- Addition of all work mentioned within the DIST WG chair's updates to the Bio SG to assist with keeping a track on everything they are working on.
- OFSR representative noted the need to include 'Medical Forensics' and relevant referrals that may be addressed within the Bio SG.
- There was a large discussion regarding the Case Review group commissioned by the Regulator and whether that would sit within the workplan and their work as well as the work being produced by the Interpretation SG. It was decided to monitor the developments from both groups and integrate relevant work generated into the work plan.
- The work plan for the NHBSSG needs to be updated based on the latest meeting minutes.
- Ensure all ongoing projects and new developments are accurately documented in the work plan.
- Regularly review the progress of each project and update the work plan accordingly.
- Continue to engage with stakeholders and incorporate their feedback into the work plan.
- Identify and document any risks and opportunities related to the projects and include them in the work plan.

ACTION 11: OFSR to update the workplan for the next meeting of the Biology SG.

Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**8. Research and development****UKRI Single Cell**

- 8.1. The OFSR representative provided an update regarding the UKRI are funding some pieces of forensic research, one of the projects is the single cell research piece of work, which entails separating and getting DNA from single cells. Project are meant to be 12 months long however, there is an extension request being put forward. Liverpool John Moores University as part of this project as they are setting up a volunteer database.
- 8.2. Currently the database has been restricted to include volunteered samples from higher education facilities, to determine how and if this database works. It was noted that there would be a press release in the near future and that the lead in charge of the database will possibly release a questionnaire to potential volunteers to determine whether they could or could not provide a sample donation.
- 8.3. It was highlighted that the future aim of this project was to set up a forensic database of potential forensic donors for future projects within academia or broader so that there is a central list of individuals who have stated that they are willing to provide certain bodily fluid samples.
- 8.4. The project has faced delays due to gaining ethical approval from the university as well as differences in collaboration agreements that needed to be in place as there are a number of universities working on this project.

ACTION 12: OFSR to gauge information as to judiciary stakeholder involvement in the UKRI trust project for the Chair and Scientific lead to be sought. The DMU contact to be provided by CSoFS representative.

ACTION 13: OFSR to circulate summary note of recent UKRI single cell stakeholder meeting.

Other research and development

- 8.5. No other research and development was raised by the members.

Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**9. Any Other Business**

- 9.1. The next meeting was discussed to be scheduled in July 2025 and held virtually on Teams, a date was yet to be determined.
- 9.2. No other business was raised.
- 9.3. The Chair thanked the members and closed the meeting.
- 9.4. A log of the actions recorded during this meeting is provided as annex B.

Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**Annex A – Meeting attendees****Representatives present:****In person**

Biology SG Chair

A representative from the Office of the Forensic Science Regulator (OFSR) (Biology Scientific Lead)

DNA Sub-Specialist Group Chair (also representing as the Association of Forensic Science Providers (AFSP) DNA Working Group Chair)

A representative from Forensic Science Northern Ireland (FSNI)

A representative from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA)

A representative from the Forensic Capability Network (FCN)

Online

Chairs from the Non-Human Biology Sub-Specialist Group.

A representative from the Chartered Society of Forensic Science (CSoFS)

A representative from the Association of Forensic Providers (AFSP) Body Fluid Forum Chair (also representing the Scottish Police Authority (SPA))

Body Fluid Distribution Working Group Chair

Medical Forensics Specialist Group Chair (joined meeting at 14:02)

A representative from the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS)

A representative from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl)

Apologies received

A representative from Forensic Science Ireland (FSI)

A representative from the Office of the Forensic Science Regulator (OFSR) (Scientific Support)

Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**Annex B – Summary of meeting actions**

ACTION 1: OFSR to publish minutes of Biology SG meeting held in February 2024.

ACTION 2: OFSR to update, finalise and publish ToR of Biology SG.

ACTION 3: OFSR to amend abbreviations for the Human Bio and Human DNA sub specialists' group on the Organogram.

ACTION 4: AFSP Body Fluid Forum Chair to check with AFSP Crime Scene Working Group whether they are liaising with or are represented on the FSR's Incident Examination Specialist Group (IESG).

ACTION 5: OFSR to communicate within the OFSR team and to the Regulator about organisations outside E&W delivering casework in E&W who did not receive call for information on activity level reporting.

ACTION 6: OFSR to confirm where the definition for 'Activity Level Reporting' is recorded and feedback to the Bio SG.

ACTION 7: OFSR to ask the IESG lead if they understand how many forces use the guidance in the scene of crime handbook for recovery, packaging and storage.

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ACTION 10: AFSP Body Fluid Forum Chair to check with AFSP Crime Scene Working Group if there is guidance and/or issues to consider for the recovery of biological material.

ACTION 11: OFSR to update the workplan for the next meeting of the Biology SG.

ACTION 12: OFSR to gauge information as to judiciary stakeholder involvement in the UKRI trust project for the Chair and Scientific lead to be sought. The DMU contact to be provided by CSoFS representative.

ACTION 13: OFSR to circulate summary note of recent UKRI single cell stakeholder meeting.