



Forensic Science Regulator

Incident Examination Specialist Group (IESG)

Note of the meeting held on 13 July 2023 in Birmingham and online via videoconference

1. Welcome, and Introduction

1.1. The chair welcomed all the members to the third meeting of the incident examination specialist group (IESG). A list of attendees by organisation is available at Annex A.

1.2. The representative from the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) raised amendments to the minutes of the last meeting. The Chair agreed with the correction and subject to the correction being incorporated, the minutes of the previous meeting were agreed and would be published by the secretariat.

Action 1: Secretariat to update and publish the April 2023 minutes.

1.3. A draft copy of the terms of reference (ToR) for the IESG had been shared with members ahead of the meeting. Members agreed the ToR, no corrections made.

Action 2: Secretariat to publish the first version of the IESG ToR.

2. Update from the IESG Chair

2.1. The two priorities for the IESG were noted as drafting the Forensic Science Activity Specific Requirements (FSA SR) for inclusion in a future version of the Code, and the work of the IESG subgroups.

2.2. Members were advised of the aim to consult with wider stakeholders on the incident scene examination FSA SR in November/December 2023.

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- 2.3. The consultation would be targeted and would include end users such as victim groups. Views of the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) technical forum should also be sought to ensure practicality before a wider consultation.

Action 3: Seek the views of the technical forum on the FSA SR before wider consultation.

- 2.4. It was noted that after a period of consultation, parliamentary approval would be required to publish version two of the Code including the FSA SR, as per the FSR Act 2021.
- 2.5. It was agreed that the draft FSA SR would need careful consideration prior to being submitted for consultation.

3. Update from the Office of the Forensic Science Regulator (OFSR)

- 3.1. The Regulator had formed a sub-group on Interpretation and Evaluative Opinions. This group was chaired by the previous Regulator and would include representation from all the Regulator's specialist groups. The IESG agreed that this should include representatives for incident examination, collision investigation, and fire investigation.

Action 4: Representative from the Office of the Forensic Science Regulator (OFSR) to speak to the chair of the FSR Interpretation Specialist Group regarding obtaining representation for collision and fire scenes on the sub-group.

- 3.2. The Regulator's annual conference was held in London, in June 2023. The IESG chair had given a presentation at the conference and the focus of this was:

- The five key challenges to be addressed in developing standards for incident scenes: scenes, scene activities, scene practitioners, Police services and prior experience of regulation design.
- Who the IESG were and the current/future work programme of the IESG.

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- The definition of incident scene examination and the FSA SR for incident scenes in the Code.
- Professional judgement and interpretation.

3.3. The Chair covered the main questions raised by attendees after the presentation were:

- If the IESG was still consulting on major crime scenes what expectation was there on police forces to achieve major crime accreditation as per the UKAS master schedule?
- When would fire scene investigation be incorporated into the Code?
- Where was disaster victim identification (DVI) on the FSR timeline, specifically as it related to scene examination?

3.4. The chair queried whether DVI would be an activity under FSA – INC 200 – forensic examination of deceased individuals. The representative from the OFSR would follow up on this.

Action 5: OFSR to establish where DVI would sit within the Code.

3.5. The representative from the OFSR provided an overview to the members of the IESG of the remaining presentations hosted at the Forensic Science Regulator 2023 conference.

3.6. The presentation on the risk matrix was discussed and it was noted that it was not clear to all within the Forensic Science community whether the risk matrix would apply to organisations or to individual reports. It was also noted that the “risk” was the risk of legal challenge rather than the risk to reliability of the evidence.

3.7. One of the representatives from the FCIN questioned how a practitioner would be informed if evidence included in their report had not been accepted by the court based on the risk matrix. A re-appraisal of findings may be required, and it would be better if the practitioner were aware of this in advance of attendance at court. The OFSR representative advised that it was expected that the risk matrix would be discussed at the next NPCC board meeting and if queries were

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passed to the relevant representative of that board they could be raised in that forum. The risk matrix was being led by the Ministry of Justice.

- 3.8. Members were informed that [a full summary of the questions, and respective answers, raised at the FSR conference](#) would be published on the Regulator's website.

4. Wildlife crime investigations

- 4.1. A representative from the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) presented to members of the IESG on the function and purpose of the NWCU, the key points were:
- The NWCU worked to deliver the NPCC strategy for wildlife crime at a local, national, and international level.
 - The NWCU also provided the UK response to international wildlife trade which was the 4th largest illegal trade after drugs, people, and counterfeiting.
 - The NWCU delivered training to police officers in wildlife crime across the United Kingdom.
 - The priority areas for the NWCU were hare coursing; crime involving birds of prey, badgers, bats, and mussels; international crimes such as ivory trading; and cyber-enabled wildlife crime.
 - That the NWCU worked with numerous stakeholders and special interest groups.
- 4.2. The NWCU had a forensic working group that worked with an academic partner on forensic methods to assist investigation of wildlife crime, such as recovery of contact DNA from bird feathers.
- 4.3. The members were informed that wildlife crime cases could be challenging and misunderstood. To address this the NWCU was providing training at no cost to provide police officers and staff with skills to manage wildlife crime cases, including scene management training.

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4.4. The NWCU representative noted that not all wildlife crime scenes were managed by the police which created an issue in the seizure of evidence. As an example, investigators from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) could act as agents of the Police. Members noted that there would need to be clarity around whether such agents of the Police would be expected to be compliant with the Code.

4.5. The Chair noted that the IESG needed to ensure that the FSA SR did not set requirements that unintentionally impacted on the work of others, such as those seizing wildlife evidence on behalf of the police. The IESG could consider whether a narrow set of requirements was needed to cover this activity.

Action 6: Chair to raise the issue of wildlife crime organisations acting as agents of the police, and subsequent potential requirement for compliance with the Code, at the crime scene investigator (CSI) technical forum.

4.6. Members thanked the representative for the useful and interesting presentation.

5. Incident Examination draft FSA SR

5.1. Members were thanked for their contributions to the development of the FSA SR and noted that balance, emphasis, practicality and addressing any missing elements would be focal points for the discussion.

5.2. The chair emphasised the point about balance within the FSA SR to avoid the overemphasis of certain activities, instead of sufficiently emphasising incident scene examination in totality, whether it is complex or routine.

5.3. There was also an emphasis on the practicality of the document for the practitioners and for UKAS when assessing the FSA which the chair highlighted to the IESG members.

5.4. The group discussed professional judgement and it was agreed that there still needed to be a clear definition, and the requirements for how it could be demonstrated. The following points were highlighted:

- Clarity over how professional judgement would be applied.
- Setting boundaries for using professional judgement.

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- Documenting decision making.

5.5. Guidance to support the interpretation of professional judgement may be needed, including how training and competence might be delivered.

5.6. The UKAS representative noted that the main issues arising in accreditation assessments were around note taking, validation, and competence.

5.7. The group then discussed validation. The main points highlighted were:

- There were two sections in the FSA SR relating to validation, these should be combined.
- The challenges around validation including reagents that become discontinued. A national approach to validation would allow a faster and more efficient reaction to reagent and consumables changes.
- Verification at multiple bases within one organisation – whether this approach was necessary for methods used only at scene.
- The need for practitioners to understand the purpose of using validated methods and the results of the relevant validation studies.
- The purpose of validation and verification in terms of demonstrating consistency. Three levels of method were considered: a standard method that is consistently used across organisations; a locally developed and validated method consistently applied across an organisation, and; a locally developed method subject to greater variation across an organisation. The validation and verification requirements for these three types of method may be different.
- The chair proposed a follow up meeting of a sub-section of members to discuss the requirements for validation separately.

5.8. The members were asked to continue to review the document and identify any thematic areas for discussion

Action 7: The IESG to continue to review the draft FSA SR and to share comments with both the chair and the OFSR regarding suggested thematic areas for discussion.

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- 5.9. The chair suggested that once complete stress testing of the FSA SR would be beneficial, asking relevant practitioners to apply the document to their work and test their interpretation. Members from the MPS offered to assist with this and provide mock scene facilities.

Action 8: Arrange a “stress test” of completed FSA SR with practitioners.

6. Subgroup updates

Fire sub-group

- 6.1. The chair of the fire sub-group provided an update to the members of the IESG. It was noted that the fire-group had their first meeting on 8th June 2023, with good representation from commercial providers and fire services.
- 6.2. The group had developed a draft FSA SR for fire investigation and was aligning this with the National Fire Chief’s Council/ UK Association of Fire Investigators Code of Practice.
- 6.3. The sub-group had discussed the use of virtual reality for training and competencies as fire scenes could not easily be mocked up. The UKAS representative noted that guidance from the Regulator would be required as to whether VR or immersive environments were acceptable for delivering training and/or competency assessments. The representative of the Scottish Police Authority – Forensic Services, highlighted that work had been undertaken in the SPA on use of virtual reality for fire scene competency assessment and would share a contact.

Action 9: SPA-FS representative to share contact for use of VR in fire scene training. OFSR to arrange link up with fire sub-group.

- 6.4. The challenges around validation of methods were also discussed by the sub-group and would be the focus of the next sub-group meeting.

Collision investigation sub-group

- 6.5. The sub-group held its first meeting on the 12th of July. It was noted that the group was gathering information for a collision investigation FSA SR. Scene interpretation and reporting were identified as key issues, along with understanding the requirements for uncertainty of measurement.

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- 6.6. It was highlighted to the group that in collision investigation there were differences between the scene activities undertaken by commercial companies and by police and both would need to be reflected in the FSA SR.
- 6.7. Other challenges identified by the sub-group were the dynamic nature of scenes and requirements around release of scenes; designated powers to seize exhibits, including vehicles; and suitability of recovery garages for carrying out examinations.

Covert sub-group

- 6.8. The representative from the National Crime Agency (NCA) and the chair of the IESG had been identifying interested parties from this sub-group and would be attending a meeting of relevant stakeholders in the next month.
- 6.9. The chair of the IESG was working with the United Kingdom Intelligence community to assist with identifying a covert subgroup chair.

Counter Terrorism (CT) sub-group

- 6.10. The IESG chair informed the group that he had contacted the Senior Accountable Individual (SAI) for the National CT Network. There had been a number of nominations for the sub-group.
- 6.11. The IESG chair also mentioned that he had also contacted DSTL and was waiting for a response.
- 6.12. The chair noted that the covert and CT sub-groups would need to link to the IESG and representatives from the two sub-groups would be added to the IESG membership.

7. Stakeholder updates

FCN

- 7.1. The FCN representative provided the update, and the main points were:
- FCN continued their support for CSIs via the technical forum
 - FCN had carried out four on site visits and six remote reviews of documents for different forces, there were ongoing.

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- There were some staffing changes as a result of maternity leave and staff leaving.
- The 63rd edition of Quality Matters had been published and IESG members were encouraged to raise quality issues and accreditation concerns through this document so the FCN could gain feedback.
- FCN was working with the efficiency, effectiveness, and mutual aid workstream regarding cleaning products and how solutions and support could be for central validation.
- FCN had produced four awareness videos to support understanding around accreditation requirements, and two additional videos to support understanding around validation.

7.2. The representative has reiterated that if there was a need for support then to contact the FCN.

UKAS

7.3. The UKAS representative informed the IESG members that three new staff members and a new operations director had been appointed.

7.4. The UKAS representative also informed the group that UKAS recruitment process was going well with seven fully trained technical assessors and eleven in training. There was a reiteration that any new applicants for a technical assessor would have to undergo an interview.

7.5. UKAS was progressing well with the assessments and looking at bespoke ways to carry out assessments, where it is applicable, this could be discussed further in a future IESG meeting.

Action 10: UKAS representative to share more information about bespoke assessments at the next meeting.

7.6. The UKAS representative reiterated to the group that the work to transition organisations to the statutory Code was quite intensive, and that a dedicated team was focusing on that to ensure transitions went smoothly.

CSI Technical Forum

- 7.7. The Metropolitan Police Service representative informed the group that the forum comprised 80 people nationally and it was continuing to grow.
- 7.8. The facilities and equipment group had looked at collating information for different layouts of drying rooms and developing centralised documentation around cleaning requirements.
- 7.9. The facilities and equipment group had also looked at friction ridge detail enhancement facilities. There was a lack of clarity around whether a powdering facility at a police station would require ISO 17025 accreditation to meet legislative requirements.

8. Any other business

- 8.1. The UKAS representative requested that future meetings be longer, and this was agreed by the IESG members.
- 8.2. The chair thanked all for coming and closed the meeting.

Action 11: Secretariat to schedule the next meeting of the IESG and circulate an updated FSA SR ahead of the next meeting.

Annex A

Representatives present:

In person

Chair

Forensic Science Regulator

Metropolitan Police Service

Thames Valley Police

United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS)

Association of Forensic Service Providers (ASFP)

Forensic Capability Network (FCN)

Forensic Collision Investigation Network (FCIN)

Office of the Forensic Science Regulator

Home Office (secretariat)

Online

Scottish Police Authority – Forensic Services

National Crime Agency

National Wildlife Crime Unit

Apologies received

Greater Manchester Police

Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, and Cambridgeshire Police

Cranfield University