

Note of Meeting

1 Welcome, introductions and matters arising

- 1.1 Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Attendees each introduced themselves.
- 1.2 AESAC member raised a possible declaration of interest which was having previously worked on a board of governors when, at the time, Robert Jenrick MP also was a member.
- 1.3 A full list of attendees is included in Appendix A.

2 Minutes and actions from the previous meeting

- 2.1 The minutes were agreed with no objections or amendments.
- 2.2 The actions from the last meeting were reviewed. The following updates were provided:
 - 2.3 2023_07_26_01, ACTION: Secretariat to develop a summary of the roundtable events which have taken place to share with AESAC.
 - Update: Policy were developing this log which the Secretariat would share once complete.
 - 2023_07_26_02, ACTION: Secretariat to arrange a meeting of the AESAC to discuss the interim report.
 - Update: It had been agreed that holding such a meeting would be postponed until after the September quarterly meeting.
 - 2023_07_26_03, ACTION: Representative from NAAB to share the process model with AESAC once complete.
 - Update: Development of the process model would take an extended time period. This action would therefore be on hold and NAAB would be invited to present an update when possible.

3 Policy update

- 3.1 An official from Scientific Age Assessment (SAA) Policy team provided the AESAC with an update on work priorities. These were as follows:
 - Improving understanding of the AESAC report and working to operationalise and implement SAA.
 - Secondary legislation was laid to specify scientific recommendations as per the recommendations in the AESAC report.

- The Ministry of Justice laid legislation to justify the use of ionising radiation in the form of x-rays for the purpose of age assessment.
 - Debates were to be scheduled regarding the legislation for November which would be supported by the SAA Policy team.
 - Working to design the implementation of SAA within the asylum process was an ongoing priority.
 - Continuing engagement with stakeholders and review of international practices.
- 3.2 The Policy official suggested to AESAC the possibility of holding a ministerial roundtable to discuss the science. Members of AESAC agreed to this.
- 3.3 The Policy official highlighted to AESAC likely future commissions that would be submitted.
- 3.4 The Chair questioned the Policy team with regard to the expected timelines for implementation of SAA. The Policy official responded that with a large volume of work to undertake before SAA could be implemented, timelines were still being considered.
- 3.5 The Chair reflected on the issue of consent and the implications of the process as defined in the Nationality and Borders Act 2022. The Chair queried what the response from registrant bodies had been.
- 3.6 The Policy team was researching existing guidance and practice in the medical community and criminal justice system. It was noted that a number of considerations were being explored.
- 3.7 An official from the age assessment design team presented to AESAC on the current SAA design process.
- 3.8 The Chair questioned where in the process quality assurance would be included.
- 3.9 It was responded that the SAA process would be in addition to the Merton assessment and that quality assurance would not be removed.
- 3.10 A member of AESAC noted that border officials were identified as the official conducting the initial age decision within the draft process, they questioned how the age would be disputed by the asylum seeker.
- 3.11 Policy clarified the initial age decision process to members of AESAC.
- 3.12 Members of AESAC highlighted that there were additional cohorts for consideration such as genuine children who were processed as adults and were then being identified to authorities at a later point, and individuals who were being smuggled into the country (and may enter into domestic servitude) who were then identified at a later date.
- 3.13 A member of AESAC queried if border officials would highlight individuals who claim to be adults but were clearly children. Policy officials confirmed this was the case and noted for awareness that often in these cases, the asylum seeker would still claim to be under 18 but would be thought to be younger than claimed.

- 3.14 AESAC questioned the point at which the Likelihood Ratio would be produced in the SAA process and whether a likelihood ratio was produced by Merton assessment, as had been implied by the flowchart which had been presented.
- 3.15 The Policy official clarified that Merton assessments alone would not result in production of a likelihood ratio and provided a clarifying explanation of the flowchart.
- 3.16 Following a comment from an AESAC member regarding the inaccuracies of dental age assessment, a Policy official reflected that the SAA policy team was working iteratively towards a more accurate approach to age assessment as a whole, acknowledging that no single technique could assign chronological age with precision.
- 3.17 A member of AESAC requested detail regarding the proportion of cases which were age disputed.

2023_09_27_01 Action: Policy official to share with AESAC data regarding the proportion of asylum-seeking cases which are age disputed.

4 AOB

- 4.1 No items raised.

Appendix A.

AESAC

Lucina Hackman (Chair)

Stuart Boyd (Co-Chair)

Tim Cole (Co-Chair)

Sally Andrews

Tabitha Randell

Denise Syndercombe-Court

Allison Ward

Present (Home Office (HO) officials and Stakeholders)

AESAC Secretary and Secretariat

Home Office Policy representatives

Apologies: Home Office Deputy Chief Scientific Advisor