



Digital Forensic Specialist Group (DFSG) meeting

Note of the meeting held on 8 July 2025 online via Teams

1. Welcome and introductions

- 1.1.1 The Chair welcomed the group, each member gave a short introduction as to their experience, relevant interests and topics they would like the group to address.
- 1.1.2 The members raised the following as potential topics; these would be picked up in the later agenda item:
 - a. Create procurement standards to ensure tools meet validation criteria.
 - b. Encourage vendors to provide validation data or assurance mechanisms.
 - c. Consider verification models for fast-evolving tools.
 - d. Develop guidance for Senior Accountable Individuals (SAIs) on tool adoption and oversight.
 - e. Develop a regulatory framework for specific aspects of digital forensics, similar to CCTV.

2. Scene setting by the Regulator

- 2.1.1 The Forensic Science Regulator (the Regulator) then outlined what he saw as the strategic role of the Digital Forensics Specialist Group in advising the Regulator on the regulation of digital Forensic Science Activities (FSAs). He emphasised the group's dual responsibility: to shape future regulatory needs and to oversee current definitions and requirements under the statutory Code of Practice (the Code). Highlighting the complexity and vast scope of digital

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forensics, more expansive than any other forensic domain, he stressed the need for nuanced, risk-based regulation.

2.1.2 The Regulator presented findings from a recent compliance survey, revealing a fragmented landscape and emphasised the complexity, suggesting that the breadth of the current digital FSAs may necessitate the creation of more specific FSAs, such as one focused specifically on vehicle systems forensics.

2.1.3 He also addressed a proposal from the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) to develop a national framework for some aspects of digital forensics, such as the use of kiosks. He cautioned that such frameworks must not be seen as a lower substitute for accreditation. Instead, they should include competency standards, validation mechanisms, and robust governance. The Regulator urged the group to consider how such a framework could realistically be implemented across diverse police forces. Noting that the CCTV framework does not remove the accreditation requirements, it simply recognises that risk may be controlled in other ways for some activities.

2.1.4 Finally, he highlighted the importance of tool validation, vendor accountability, and the need for regulatory responses to emerging risks. He encouraged the group to identify and prioritise these risks, offering support through guidance, notifications, and recommending regulatory action where necessary.

3. Terms of reference and membership

3.1.1 The draft terms of reference were discussed, it is largely a standard document for all the Regulator's specialist groups, however it did also set out the potential remit as follows:

- a. On the definition of relevant FSAs set out in the Code to ensure they provide the basis for effective regulation.
- b. On the regulatory requirements to be incorporated into the Code including FSA specific requirements that will ensure the provision of

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accurate and reliable forensic science evidence to criminal investigations and proceedings.

- c. On guidance to be issued under s9 FSR Act that will support the effective regulation of FSAs within this remit.
- d. On the most effective regulatory approach for FSAs within this remit, this will include the mechanism for ensuring compliance with the requirements set out in the Code.
- e. Where accreditation is identified under d., this will include advising on the application of ISO standards, the interpretation of ISO standards in respect of the undertaking of FSAs that are subject to the Code, and the applicability of any third-party guidance that is used in achieving accreditation where this is a requirement of the Code.
- f. On the general levels of risk to criminal investigations and proceedings in any of the FSAs under the remit of the Specialist Group.
- g. On recommended actions to address the levels of risk to criminal investigations and proceedings in any of the FSAs under the remit of the Specialist Group. This could involve feedback from horizon scanning and risk/opportunity analysis.

3.1.2 The group agreed that this did look to cover the main points and would consider it and provide feedback.

4. Compliance survey

4.1.1 The Regulator presented many of the key messages on compliance in his scene setting. Further discussion on other aspects of the survey continued in this agenda item.

4.1.2 Police forensic units typically also commission services, and the survey did ask if they had formal procedure for assessing the suitability of external organisations. This presented a mixed picture and responses varied, among those with a process in place, nearly half continued to place work with external organisations they had assessed as non-compliant.

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- 4.1.3 This is a concern; outsourcing should be to compliant organisations where they are available, but it is recognised that there are certain specialist sub-activities with very few or no compliant/accredited providers.
- 4.1.4 There was a discussion on the data quality. The group noted challenges in providing accurate data for certain fields, either due to system constraints or because the information was not captured in the format requested.
- 4.1.5 In submitting the data, it was not possible to distinguish between phone and computer forensics, resulting in an aggregated return. For those in the group who contributed data, this aggregation appeared to reflect a lower level of compliance than might otherwise have been shown. Conversely, others may have aggregated their data in a way that gave the majority picture.

5. Open discussion on challenges and priorities

- 5.1.1 A brief presentation was given outlining the range of topics across the various FSAs that could be considered for inclusion in the work programme. The FSA which had been broken down most was DIG 100, there will be a sub-group for DIG 100. The list was not presented in any particular order of priority.
- a. Accreditation, can assessments be made to “feel” more consistent?
 - b. Schedule Granularity & Risk Models.
 - c. Scene including triage cyber/digi-van.
 - d. Kiosks - Mobile Phone Examination by front line.
 - e. Vehicle systems and telematics.
 - f. Reverse engineering approaches outside or alongside tools.
 - g. Cloud access.
 - h. Software As a Service.
 - i. Broken/damaged/unique devices v chip-off.
 - j. Portless devices.
 - k. Other chip-off, repair etc.
 - l. Network forensics FSA rewrite.
 - m. Officer review of content.
 - n. Interpretation.

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- 5.1.2 There was a discussion around the current deepfake detection across media types, the need to explore the use of large language models in device searching and summarisation.
- 5.1.3 The issues under DIG 200 included the collaborative exercise, but also the potential to review any externally provided framework. There are plans to establish a subgroup to focus on DIG 200 and DIG 101.
- 5.1.4 The topics under video FSAs include speed estimation, item identification, comparison, deep fake detection, and interpretation. Each of these are typically carried out by different groups of practitioners, suggesting that if support for standards is deemed necessary, more than one sub-group may be required. The recovery and processing activities will continue to be covered by the NPCC CCTV portfolio, as much of this activity is contained within policing. However, if other areas of imaging and comparison are to be prioritised, a sub-group or working group with a wider range of representation will probably be required.
- 5.1.5 The audio FSAs do need attention, the FSAs are not as comparable to video FSAs as one might expect. If the plan to bring all FSAs under the Code is also adopted by the incoming Regulator, it may be necessary to establish a working group for the FSAs and for the potential re-write and incorporation of previous “audio appendix” as FSA specific requirement. At this stage these are options only.
- 5.1.6 A wider topic of understanding how digital evidence is used in court was discussed, how it is presented or combined with other evidence and by who.

6. AOB and Actions

- 6.1.1 Action 1: The Chair invited the group to consider whether any critical areas of expertise might be missing, or if there are additional types of expertise that should be represented within the group.
- 6.1.2 Action 2: The Chair requested group members to share which other groups they are part of in order to avoid a duplication of efforts and to ensure existing structures are used effectively.