

**Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**



# Forensic Science Regulator

## Interpretation Specialist Group (SG) Meeting

**Note of the meeting held on 12 August 2025 in 23  
Stephenson Street, Birmingham and Online via MS Teams**

### **1. Welcome**

- 1.1. Gill Tully opened the meeting, welcoming attendees and introducing Marc Bailey, the newly appointed Forensic Science Regulator.
- 1.2. Marc Bailey provided a background on his regulatory experience, notably at MHRA, and emphasised the importance of interpretation in forensic science, which he noted had emerged repeatedly in stakeholder discussions.
- 1.3. Several new members were welcomed to the group, including a representative from the national statistical society, and from the national policing network.

### **2. Actions from the previous meeting**

- 2.1. **Actions 60, 63 and 64** were with two members who were not present in the meeting. OFSR to follow up with both for an update before next meeting.
- 2.2. **Action 67** - Discussion focused on the need for proficiency testing that includes interpretation, not just analytical components. Current commercial tests, which tend to focus on analytical aspects are insufficient. The Regulator agreed to follow up with relevant colleagues.
- 2.3. **Action 68:** Coordination of discipline-specific guidance is ongoing by OFSR. Several subgroups have submitted drafts or updates, though none are finalized. Biology-related guidance is particularly complex due to multiple strands (e.g., human DNA, non-human DNA, kinship, body fluids, and medical forensics).

**Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**

- 2.4. **Action 74:** Attendance of a new member from the statistical community was confirmed and marked as complete.
- 2.5. **Action 75:** The refresh of the Cognitive Bias document has been handed to a new member of staff within OFSR. The member of staff will assess the timeline this work and update the chair.
- 2.6. **Actions:** 61, 79, 80, 82, 85 and 86 were marked as completed.
- 2.7. **Action 83:** Launch Strategy will be picked up later in the meeting.

**3. Review of progress on Main document**

- 3.1. OFSR presented updates to the draft guidance, which has had additional work since the last meeting including some further restructuring of document to aid readability.
- 3.2. The group is currently awaiting feedback on draft from the President of the King's Bench Division (PKBD). The main area that they have been asked for feedback on is the underlying principles within the document, especially in relation to issues such as R vs T.
- 3.3. The majority of feedback from the specialist group had already been actioned there were areas further discussion would be useful, which formed the basis of the groups initial discussions.
- 3.4. Discussion of active comments on draft document:
- 3.5. **Reference to 'categorical' in section 4.3.12. in the draft.**
  - 3.5.1. Representatives from statistical community raised concerns over the use of "categorical" in the draft, noting that many types of forensic evidence involve continuous measurements, not discrete categories.
  - 3.5.2. The chair clarified that that the term was not meant to imply strict categorical variables but rather groupings of expected outcomes to aid in pre-assessment, and help practitioners estimate probabilities under competing propositions (e.g., prosecution vs. defence).

**Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**

3.5.3. It was agreed that the OFSR would consider revising the language in this section to avoid confusion. Suggestions included replacing "categorical" with terms like "grouped expectations" or "anticipated outcomes", and clarifying that this approach is a practical simplification used when continuous modelling is not feasible.

3.6. **Statistical Expertise and Competence.**

3.6.1. A representative from the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) highlighted that while the document discusses competence, it does not sufficiently address situations where statistical expertise is necessary.

3.6.2. It was noted that interpretation often involves statistical reasoning, and in complex cases, practitioners may lack the depth of statistical knowledge required to ensure robust conclusions.

3.6.3. The Chair and legal experts cautioned against being overly prescriptive. Mandating consultation with statisticians could be problematic due to: Limited availability of forensic statisticians; Risk of creating a recursive requirement (i.e., needing a statistician to determine when a statistician is needed)

3.6.4. Instead, the group proposed informative rather than directive language, suggesting that statistical expertise is distinct and should not be assumed to be embedded within other forensic disciplines. This would encourage practitioners to recognize when statistical input is appropriate without making it a formal requirement.

3.6.5. Representatives from forensic service providers shared that statistical advice is typically sought externally, often through academic contacts or professional networks. It was acknowledged that such consultation is rare in routine casework but may be necessary for complex or novel scenarios.

3.6.6. It was noted that Section 4.1.2 of the draft guidance already includes "All elements of competence should be taken into account, including

**Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**

the use of statistics where applicable”. The group agreed this provides a reasonable foundation but could be expanded slightly to emphasize the distinct nature of statistical expertise.

- 3.6.7. The RSS is developing a register of statistical expert witnesses, which will help practitioners identify qualified statisticians for consultation. The group expressed strong support for this initiative and suggested it be referenced in future guidance or communications.

3.7. **High level inference**

- 3.7.1. The group discussed the wording in the draft document relating to high-level inference – where findings from different forensic science activities are combined.
- 3.7.2. There has been historical discussion around the challenges involved in this sort of approach to bringing evidence types together.
- 3.7.3. Concerns raised about combining multiple forensic evidence types and the risk of misleading conclusions if dependencies are not properly addressed.
- 3.7.4. Concerns were also raised about whether practitioners are sufficiently trained to combine findings across multiple forensic science activities (FSAs) – i.e. multi-discipline scientists are less common than they used to be in the industry.
- 3.7.5. Discussion as to whether this the role of the scientist – or of the court to bring these evidential strengths together. The Academic representative emphasised the legal risks of high-level inference. Where the inference is too complex for laypeople to understand, it may be for the expert to provide this. However if it crosses into fact-finding it risks trespassing on the courts role.
- 3.7.6. The group agreed that the relevant section of the document should have some additional redrafting to ensure that it sufficiently flags the

**Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**

risks discussed and recommends clarity when combining evidence, without prescribing detailed methodology.

**3.8. Descriptive conclusions without a calculated LR**

- 3.8.1. The group discussed wording within the current draft that refers to evaluations which are descriptive rather than numerical.
- 3.8.2. It was noted that the question of whether conclusions can be reached without formal likelihood ratios was a longstanding area of discussion with differing views within the industry.
- 3.8.3. It was agreed that in some cases, data limitations necessitate descriptive evaluations. It was also noted that the distinction is between evaluations which are 'unquantified' rather than 'quantified'.
- 3.8.4. Some further drafting of the wording in this section of the document will be considered.
- 3.8.5. The concern was raised that, while it makes sense that in some circumstances, practitioners will reach a conclusion based on their knowledge and experience, this creates risks around different approaches to the use of the verbal scale in such instances, depending on discipline. I.e. where 'strong' in one discipline might mean something different to 'strong' in a different discipline.
- 3.8.6. Calibration approaches are one way in which can support application of verbal scales in these situations. Calibration is already a point covered within the Interpretation Guidance document – however this is within disciplines, rather than across.

3.9. The Chair opened the floor to any additional comments on draft guidance document:

**3.10. References to a descriptive LR**

- 3.10.1. It was asked whether references within the draft guidance to using a 'descriptive LR' means using the verbal scale.

**Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**

3.10.2. The Chair confirmed that where probabilities have been assigned on the basis of unstructured observations from experience you would only report the verbal equivalent from the scale. The wording in this section of the document will be reviewed to confirm that this is sufficiently clear.

3.11. **References to a policy to minimise non-task relevant information**

3.11.1. The group discussed what was expected where the guidance states ‘forensic unit should have a policy in place to minimise the provision of non-task-relevant information whilst allowing task-relevant information to reach the expert’.

3.11.2. It was confirmed that this is about FSPs having a set of practical steps and controls in place to achieve this outcome. Wording for this section was suggested in the form ““forensic units should formulate and implement policies to minimise...”

3.11.3. It was also noted that adding a reference to the published Cognitive Bias Guidance Document within the Interpretation Guidance would be beneficial. The current version of the Cognitive Bias Guidance is due a refresh as per action 75.

3.12. **Calibration of expertise**

3.12.1. Competing concerns were raised about what the calibration of expertise section of the draft guidance is asking for in terms of proficiency trials. Forensic units have raised concerns about the much time this might require of practitioners to undertake calibration exercises.

3.12.2. Conversely, there have been concerns about experienced scientists being challenged in court as not being competent where they have not undertaken a proficiency trial. The concern was raised the current wording in the guidance implies that calibration is expected, even

**Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**

though suitable activity-level interpretation proficiency tests might not yet be readily available.

- 3.12.3. UKAS representative noted that there are schemes and exercises available that do include interpretation (e.g. Forensic Foundations), however these may be being underutilised at present. Their view was that there is a role for providers to be more active in looking for the proficiency testing that is already available, and it may be that the AFSP, or the OFSR could do more to drive this area. Internal benchmarking exercises were also highlighted as a viable interim solution.
- 3.12.4. A formal request was made within the group for formal guidance or wording for how scientists should approach reporting to the commissioning party and court if they are not able to demonstrate calibration of their expertise, for example where proficiency testing is not available.
- 3.12.5. There was a further discussion about the challenges surrounding the inclusion of GTD in calibration and how to approach certain types of Interpretation where it is not possible to produce GTD. For example sexual offence work.
- 3.12.6. The point was made that the challenges relating to calibration already exist, regardless of the guidance document. Experts may be cross-examined on how they know their judgments are well-calibrated. The group agreed that transparency is essential, and if calibration hasn't been done, or been possible, it must be disclosed.
- 3.12.7. **Action 87 (new)** – Chair identified that calibration of expertise is an area where the SG would need to get the Regulator's view as to how this should be approached within the guidance, given the range of views within the group.

3.13. **Presentation of evidence in court**

**Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**

- 3.13.1. The group discussed that references to this had been removed from the guidance as this was a large area, beyond the main focus of the guidance.

**3.14. Range of Opinion**

- 3.14.1. The group discussed the range of opinion table within the draft guidance. It was raised that the table details a large number of sources of potential variation in opinion, and it might not be clear whether there each of these factors would have to be addressed or considered in every case.
- 3.14.2. The Chair noted that there some classes of cases where this could be assessed once, with the same assessment being used for that class of case going forward, and revisited as needed where outside the expected circumstances.
- 3.14.3. The document doesn't expect this to be done afresh from scratch for every case and it is intended to help guide people where there is a case that you need to consider range of opinion.
- 3.14.4. It was suggested, to help clarify the intention, that the wording the could be changed to 'indicative criteria for assessing the range of opinion are provided in table one'.

**3.15. Suggested phrases/terminology to avoid**

- 3.15.1. Question raised as to whether the 'Phrases to avoid when reporting in the circumstance of a 'no comment' interview' also 'banned' in terms of evaluative approach situations. I.e. does this only apply to 'no-comment' situations, or are these words 'banned' more broadly?
- 3.15.2. Chair highlighted that the wording does not ban the phrases, but is providing a list of phrases we don't think should be used, with an explanation of why they should not be used.

**Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**

- 3.15.3. The group felt that the section was sufficiently clear as currently drafted.

**3.16. Conclusions for LRs Determined with Limited Data**

- 3.16.1. The group discussed Annex B in the draft guidance – there were concerns with how the wording of the evidential scale as currently set out in the section.
- 3.16.2. The absence of higher strength evidence (i.e. very strong, extremely strong) in the scale was discussed. It was noted that this section relates to situations where there is limited data, and as such the expectation is that a practitioner would not normally be able to go beyond strong evidence. However, the table does include note indicating that multiple observations in combination, may give rise to higher LR values.
- 3.16.3. There were concerns that the changes in the way the verbal scale is worded, from the previous legacy guidance document (Forensic Science Regulator Codes of Practice and Conduct: Development of Evaluative Opinions FSR-C-118) might result in a wording which was less easily understood by lay people.
- 3.16.4. There was a view that phraseology such as “in my opinion the observations are no more probable if [proposition A] rather than [proposition B] were true” are more understandable than the revised wording currently in the draft.
- 3.16.5. Following a wide ranging discussion covering the pros and cons of both the group agreed that a return to the earlier wording would be clearer.
- 3.16.6. Point made that the wording of the guidance does allow for experts to take appropriate alternative approaches where required. The language has to allow accuracy without being too proscriptive.

**Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes****3.17. Factual Reporting Section**

- 3.17.1. The group reviewed the wording of factual reporting section in regards to how a 'fact' was defined. Concern that the current wording of the definition might be insufficient, and not quite achieving its intention.
- 3.17.2. The group discussed a range of possible approaches to this wording. Agreement that further drafting of this section will be undertaken to resolve these issues. It was agreed that further information about when a factual report should or should not be used would be beneficial in this section.

**4. Working group Updates**

- 4.1. The group discussed where the special group needed to provide input to support the working groups developing the discipline specific guidance documents.
- 4.2. Key areas of discussion:
- 4.3. **Biology Sub-group:**
- 4.4. The group discussed how the different strands within the biology discipline might best be combined into a suite of guidance documents.
- 4.5. The group recommended medical Forensics being separated into its own document.
- 4.6. Body fluids and DNA, given their close links, should remain together in one document. Representatives from this discipline identified that they would seek a view from an expert on kinship analysis to determine whether it needed its own document, or could remain in the same guidance as the Body Fluids and DNA.
- 4.7. Non-human DNA is diverse (e.g., plant, animal) and may also require separate document.

**Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**

- 4.8. The existing draft is currently being streamlined to enhance readability. Once this has been completed, the revised draft would be circulated to the wider biology subgroup for feedback.
- 4.9. Digital - non-cell site**
- 4.10. Discussion as to how work relating to non-cell site digital work might be split up manageably. Proposal to split into subgroups, starting with mobile devices and computer forensics.
- 4.11. CCTV and Image content**
- 4.12. CCTV interpretation identified as a priority area needing guidance. During recent workshop, there were discussions around FSA DIG 301. This FSA covers a very large range of sub-activities, and it is hard to see how this could be tackled in a manageable way by a single working group.
- 4.13. There is NPCC CCTV advisory group that is sitting at the moment, and the group considered that this might be a starting point for establishing a sub-group. Other potential contributors in this area were also discussed.
- 4.14. Collision investigation**
- 4.15. Challenges identified in relation to FSA INC 101, and identifying the scope of interpretation within this FSA. The OFSR is actively looking at these challenges.
- 5. Next Steps**
- 5.1. Signoff process / consultation**
- 5.2. The group discussed the potential sign-off process for the finalised documents once completed. Possible approaches to reviewing drafts for readiness and consistency were discussed.
- 5.3. A particular area of debate was whether an external consultation should be undertaken prior to the formal publication of the guidance.
- 5.4. There was strong support from the group that the guidance should undergo public consultation before being finalised. Many members emphasised the

**Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**

importance of transparency as well as the benefits of feedback from the wider community.

- 5.5. The group also viewed that the guidance should not be released for consultation until feedback had been received from the judiciary.
- 5.6. Possible timeframes for such consultation were discussed, acknowledging that this would be dependent on when feedback on the draft was received from the PKBD.
- 5.7. It was also noted that final decisions on approach to consultation, and timings, sit with the FSR, who would need to consider the groups recommendation.

**6. AOB**

- 6.1. Biology representatives highlighted that it would be helpful for an organogram or similar information to be provided covering the structure and membership of the SG and Working Groups.
- 6.2. **Action 89 (new)** - The OFSR to look at drawing together an overview of the working group structure with more detail memberships of each WG.

**7. Date of next meeting**

- 7.1. It was agreed that the scheduling of the next meeting should be coordinated with the timelines for any consultation activities, ideally when consultation closes so the group can consider feedback.
- 7.2. **Action 90 (new)**– OFSR to feedback Regulator view on consultation and timelines to the SG once this is agreed.

**Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**

## **Annex A – meeting attendees**

### **Representatives present:**

#### **In person**

Chair

Forensic Science Regulator – present for start of the meeting.

Office of the Forensic Science Regulator (OFSR) Scientific Lead

Office of the Forensic Science Regulator's Scientific Support

Two representatives from the Association of Forensic Service Providers (AFSP) (Eurofins and Cellmark)

Chartered Society of Forensic Science (CSoFS)

Legal academic

Digital Forensics Specialist Group

Incident Examination Specialist Group (collision investigation)

Firearms Specialist Group

Biology Specialist Group

#### **Online**

Royal Statistical Society (RSS)

Incident Examination Specialist Group (scenes)

United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS)

Digital Forensics (policing)

#### **Apologies received.**

Incident Examination Specialist Group (fire investigation) x1

Fingerprint Quality Standards Specialist Group (FQSSG) x1

Medical Forensics Specialist Group

Bar council

**Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes****Annex B – Log of outstanding actions from previous meetings**

**ACTION 60:** RSS representative to review the relevance and utility of the RSS documents, particularly the RSS primer and to identify key insights

**ACTION 63:** MFSG representative to highlight the challenges in determining known values within the medical forensic community due to variability in biological and anatomical factors

**ACTION 64:** MFSG representative to highlight terminology within the draft guidance document that is cross-cutting within medical terminology and feedback to the members of the Interpretation SG at the next meeting.

**ACTION 67:** OFSR representative to explore opportunities for the Regulator to assist in obtaining higher-quality proficiency testing (PT), potentially through external bodies

**ACTION 68:** The co-ordination of sub-groups to produce discipline specific draft guidance documents, including templates for structure and topics with an agreed timeline.

**ACTION 75:** OFSR MTP Sci Support to refresh Cognitive Bias guidance document.

**ACTION 81:** Members to review the glossary of the draft guidance document, which will be an agenda item at the next meeting.

**ACTION 83:** OFSR and Chair to send out communications and a strategy of the FSA specific guidance to be developed with chairs/representatives from FSA specific groups.

**Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes – Minutes**

## **Annex C – Summary of meeting actions**

**Action 87 (new):** Chair identified that calibration of expertise is an area where the SG would need to get the Regulator’s view as to how this should be approached within the guidance, given the range of views within the group.

**Action 89 (new):** The OFSR to look at drawing together an overview of the working group structure with more detail memberships of each WG.

**Action 90 (new):** OFSR to feedback Regulator view on consultation and timelines to the SG once this is agreed.