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# Forensic Science Regulator

## Interpretation Specialist Group (SG) Meeting

### Note of the meeting held on 13 March 2025 in 23 Stephenson Street, Birmingham and Online via MS Teams

#### 1. Welcome and introductions

- 1.1. The Chair welcomed the members to the eighth meeting of the Interpretation Specialist Group. A list of attendees by organisation is available in annex A.
- 1.2. As there were new members to the group, the Chair asked the members to briefly introduce themselves and the organisations they are representing.

#### 2. Actions from the previous meeting

- 2.1. The action log was reviewed with relevant updates provided to the group. Resulting in a review of the actions. A log of the remaining outstanding actions is provided as annex B.
- 2.2. The minutes from the last meeting were agreed with no corrections.

**ACTION 77:** OFSR Scientific Support to publish minutes from the previous meeting, held in December.

#### 3. Review of progress

##### [Paper 3] Guidance: Interpretation for Forensic Science Activities

- 3.1. Prior to the meeting an updated draft of the guidance was circulated to the members of the group. The Chair provided a brief update to members that drafting suggestions from previous meetings had been introduced along with new comments and questions for review and consideration.

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- 3.2. The Chair highlighted to the group that at this stage of development of the draft guidance document, it would be best for the members of the SG to focus on aspects of the guidance that need expansion and address general commentary within the document, rather than phraseological aspects.
- 3.3. Regarding section 3.13 within the draft guidance, an AFSP representative (Eurofins) highlighted that clarification is needed to address that this section relates to evaluative opinion rather than investigative. The OFSR representative provided a suggestion which was agreed to by the members.
- 3.4. Due to the restructure of the Code, section 5.1.2 would need to be reviewed to ensure that there is no contradiction between what is written within the draft guidance and version 2 of the Code.

**ACTION 78:** OFSR representative to rework section 5.1.2 within the draft guidance document, to better align with the Regulator's approach within version 2 of the Code.

- 3.5. Calibration of expertise was discussed next; it was highlighted by the chair that this would be addressed separately by each of the FSA specific groups as there would be differences in how each discipline defines this term. The main points of the discussion were as follows:
- It was brought to the attention of the members that there are no PTs that test evaluative interpretation, the community would have to move towards urging the market to develop PTs or groups like the AFSP, the CSoFS and others to develop inter-laboratory comparisons.
  - The chair asked the CSoFS reps whether they were aware of any interest in the production of interlaboratory comparisons. One of the representatives responded that there would need to be knowledge regarding funding due to current assessments done for CSIs, however, they are happy to put forward a demand, but the servicing would have to be decided by the Regulator.
- 3.6. Regarding section 5.2.19 within the draft guidance document, there was a lengthy discussion regarding the meaning of this paragraph as it was unclear.

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The RSS representative suggested wording to clarify this section. This generated the following action

**ACTION 79:** Chair and OFSR to re-write Section 5.2.19 within the draft guidance document using phraseology suggested by the RSS representative.

3.7. One of the CSoFS representatives asked whether there were more terms that needed to be defined within the glossary section of the document. Both the Chair and the OFSR representative agreed that the glossary section needed to be completed.

3.8. The Chair noted that the placeholders within the draft guidance has more or less been covered so now an introduction can be written.

3.9. Regarding the sub sections 'balance', 'logic', robustness' and 'transparency' within section 4.1 of the draft guidance the Digital SG representative noted that the descriptions under these headings are not clear and suggested the use of the wording from the AFSP standard, which created the following action:

**ACTION 82:** OFSR and Chair to modify terms within section 4.1 of the draft guidance document to reflect other guidance documents and definitions.

**Cognitive bias**

3.10. Regarding section 5.1.15 of the draft guidance it was highlighted that practitioners were struggling to avoid cognitive bias whilst having enough information to form propositions and evaluate at the correct level. This is something that the Chair hopes the Interpretation SG assist in addressing within the overarching interpretation guidance and the development of a cognitive bias guidance document by the OFSR. As currently there is a misunderstanding that avoiding task relevant information means avoiding information which is not the case.

3.11. The OFSR representative highlighted that a practitioner within collision investigation noted to them that they are attending scenes and being told that they cannot be given any information. The collision investigation representative, reiterated that this should not be happening and is occurring due to some forces poorly applying the advice and guidance that has been provided.

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- 3.12. The collision investigation representative emphasised that the practitioner attending the scene should view the scene first to generate their own hypothesis and opinion and then obtain a briefing from the lead investigator, to ensure they are forming their own opinion primarily and then reviewing the opinion in light of what they are told. They also addressed that often when at a scene there are officers briefing the practitioner prior to them having the ability to view the scene and formulate their own opinions beforehand. It was highlighted that this needs to be addressed and there was a need for force education.
- 3.13. The Chair emphasised that practitioners cannot rely on thorough guidance, as there needs to be thorough training as well, this view was shared by the members of the SG.
- 3.14. The fire investigation representative added that they have faced similar issues within their discipline regarding the reluctance to share information.

**Transposing the conditional**

- 3.15. Within the guidance there were two new sections regarding transposing the conditional within the guidance document, the digital forensics SG representative noted that they like the new addition but feel it would benefit to link this section with section 4.1.6 as that directly ties with this section or to move this new addition to that section. The group agreed with the change to move the section.

**Verbal scales**

- 3.16. The group then discussed at length the verbal scales within the 'expressing a conclusion' sub-section of the draft guidance document, which was led by the chair. The main points of the discussion were:
- Within FSR-C-118 there was the use of a standard verbal scale, the Chair asked the group whether an ENFSI type scale should be used or whether there was a need for a different scale.
  - 2016 Paper from Lausanne sent to the Chair by a member of the Interpretation SG which addresses the development of their verbal scale which could be useful as their scale separates the proposition of which

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the results support from the level of support of the results. The chair noted that they liked this scale as it was clear and assists with understanding.

- The Chair noted that the verbal scale within FSR-C-118 was used for when there wasn't enough data to produce a quantitative level, and questioned whether the scale could be reliably and reproducibly split into seven parts like the quantitative scale or whether there would be the need to have more of a realistic scale. The EFS representative noted that the qualitative scaled used within FSR-C-118 covers the levels of support 'neatly', it was agreed that a seven point scale would be too detailed.
- The Chair liked to take forward from FSR-C-118 that if a sufficient reliable dataset was used, then the opinion should be expressed quantitatively and if there was some data used which is not robust statistically, then the opinion should be expressed at an order of magnitude level. And if you have not used a data set and are drawing a conclusion from your personal experience, then the opinion should be expressed qualitatively. This view was agreed with by the members of the Interpretation SG.
- It was not possible for the members of the SG to develop a standardised verbal scale within the time available within the meeting. The chair summarised the discussion and agreement that there can be the use of a quantitative scale and a scale for disciplines who express their findings qualitatively and there would be more information that would go into the discipline specific guidance. This produced the following action:  
**ACTION 80:** OFSR representative and Chair to consider an appropriate verbal scale and to provide examples to the members at the next meeting.
- One of the CSoFS representatives asked whether the term 'inconclusive' has been defined as currently there is confusion regarding what this means. The chair agreed and noted that this could be defined within the scale.

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- 4.1. The Chair then led the group onto the draft FSA specific document and highlighted to the group that currently this is a 'skeleton' document to assist the subgroups produce their own discipline specific interpretation guidance.
- 4.2. The Biology SG representative questioned whether the document had been shared to the subgroups this was responded to by the Chair who informed the members that this document was to be reviewed by the members of the Interpretation SG to ensure it is correct before distribution to the subgroups.
- 4.3. The Chair shared that the aim was to assist by giving a structure and help in terms of how each of the subgroups should translate the overarching guidance into guidance that is specific to their disciplines.

**Validation**

- 4.4. The group then discussed at length the 'Validation' sub-section within section 5 of the draft guidance document, which was led by the chair. The main points of the discussion were:
  - The Chair noted to the group that the addition of validation within the draft guidance highlighted the requirement to validate interpretive methods according to the Code, however, any specific considerations to relevant interpretive methods for disciplines should be given.
  - The Digital SG representative highlighted that the validation of measurement of uncertainty for consideration of actual traces could be added to this section as this is relevant within digital forensics.
  - The EFS representative noted that Validation is well prescribed within the Code but the sub-section within the draft guidance was not clear. The EFS representative posed the question whether there was an expectation for some guidance about evaluative opinion at activity level and the methodology, which would include how to achieve validation. The Chair replied noting that if guidance is needed to address the point raised, then extra guidance should be produced without contradicting what is set out within the Code.

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- The Chair also remarked on the gap in a lot of validation of interpretive methods and the differences within disciplines. It was highlighted that fingerprint comparison is all interpretive, which is all the validation whereas, activity level interpretation of biological traces has little validation. So this section within the guidance is to point out what has already been done and if there are any gaps within the validation.
- The Biology SG chair mentioned that validation would be new to some of the areas that are now under the Regulator's remit, notably non-human biology as they haven't had a large organisation; validation is a topic that hasn't been considered.
- The Chair stated that examples have been given within the draft to show the difference in how different disciplines would want to conduct their validation method, the examples were that fingerprints would want an end-to-end validation method whereas toxicology may want validation of the interpretation element from the same set of analytical data due to the variability in interpretation.
- The Chair reiterated that the draft guidance is not trying to redo what is already within the Code, and that there is section for the working groups to add worked examples of interpretation for a range of scenarios. The group agreed that this section would be useful for demonstrating consistency within the discipline and useful for practitioners who are in the earlier stages of developing interpretation guidance.

4.5. There was a large discussion and it was agreed that it would be useful for the FSA specific groups to have a copy of the draft FSA specific guidance document prior to the workshop so that disciplines who are at the beginning stages of developing guidance have a basis of what their FSA specific document would need to address for their area.

## **5. Workshop planning**

5.1. The OFSR representative noted to the group that the venue of the Interpretation workshop has been booked and will be held at Baskerville House in Birmingham on the 19th May 2025. They emphasised that at the initial

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workshop there were 84 attendees, and the venue booked for this workshop has a capacity of 100 people.

- 5.2. The OFSR representative noted to the members that the 'save the day' still needed to be sent to the prospected attendees and that the OFSR team would assist in running the workshop like the initial workshop.
- 5.3. The Chair addressed that the aim of the discussion would focus on shaping the agenda for the event. However, prior to establishing the requirements of the subgroups for the day and an agenda, it would be useful for the group to consider what went well, what didn't go well and what could be done differently from the initial interpretation workshop held in October.
- 5.4. The Chair and OFSR representative communicated to the members that an interpretation webinar would be held prior to the workshop to assist with understanding of the CAI approach for disciplines who are at the beginning stages of developing Interpretation guidance.
- 5.5. The group decided that it would be best if the different disciplines would have copies of the template FSA specific guidance to determine how the current template fits with their discipline.

**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.

## **6. Next steps**

- 6.1. The Chair highlighted that the next steps would be to finalise the draft guidance document for publication. They noted that the group has provided feedback and that all that is left is the development of a scale. The aim was to have a couple of options of scales in time for the interpretation workshop for consideration.
- 6.2. The chair summarised the next steps. These are identified in the actions below:  
**ACTION 81:** Members to review the glossary of the draft overarching guidance document, which will be an agenda item at the next meeting.

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**ACTION 84:** All to share training material related to CAI or other activities that may be useful for incorporation at the webinar or interpretation workshop in May.

**ACTION 85:** All to develop achievable FSA specific objectives for the interpretation workshop in May.

**ACTION 86:** All to develop or provide specific case examples or workshop problems specific to FSA areas for development.

## **7. AOB**

- 7.1. EFS representative highlighted to the group a recent request for information sent out by the Regulator regarding the use of evaluative opinion and activity level reporting to organisations who conduct Biology FSAs and asked whether the OFSR representative had a progress update. The OFSR representative responded that the member should liaise with the OFSR biology scientific lead as they would have more information.
- 7.2. The Digital Forensics SG representative noted to the group that Cellsite competencies was an area of concern and wanted to clarify if this was to be addressed in their discipline specific guidance This was responded to by the Chair who confirmed that was an issue to address within the discipline specific guidance.
- 7.3. Forces asked to provide a statement at offence level by the CPS, forces pushed back stating that this is a question for the court and not a question for the expert to answer.
- 7.4. The date for the next meeting was not yet agreed.
- 7.5. The Chair thanked all for coming and closed the meeting.
- 7.6. A log of the actions recorded during this meeting is provided as annex C.

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## **Annex A – meeting attendees**

### **Representatives present:**

#### **In person**

Chair

Office of the Forensic Science Regulator (OFSR)

Office of the Forensic Science Regulator Fast Streamer

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

Incident Examination Specialist Group (collision investigation)

Firearms Specialist Group

Biology Specialist Group

Chartered Society of Forensic Science (CSoFS)

Digital Forensics Specialist Group

#### **Online**

Chartered Society of Forensic Science (CSoFS)

Fingerprint Quality Standards Specialist Group (FQSSG)

Incident Examination Specialist Group (fire investigation)

Digital Forensics (policing)

Medical Forensics Specialist Group (joined meeting at 12:08)

Incident Examination Specialist Group (scenes) (joined meeting at 12:11)

#### **Apologies received**

Office of the Forensic Science Regulator's Scientific Support

United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS)

Royal Statistical Society (RSS)

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Bar council

A legal academic

## 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 61:** The addition of a reference within the draft guidance document to explain the context, implications and interpretations of R v T.

**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 70:** Members of the Interpretation SG to finalise the guidance document to be ready for presentation at the next planned conference.

**ACTION 74:** OFSR representative to engage with the Regulator to discuss the potential membership of RSS professionals working on statistical evidence presentation in court to the Interpretation SG.

**ACTION 75:** OFSR Fast Streamer to refresh Cognitive Bias guidance document.

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## Annex C – Summary of meeting actions

**ACTION 77:** OFSR Scientific Support to publish the minutes from the December meeting.

**ACTION 78:** OFSR representative to rework section 5.1.2 within the draft guidance document, to better align with the Regulator's approach within version 2 of the Code.

**ACTION 79:** Section 5.2.19 within the draft guidance document to be re-written by RSS representative.

**ACTION 80:** OFSR representative and Chair to consider an appropriate verbal scale and to provide examples to the members at the next meeting.

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

**ACTION 82:** OFSR and Chair to modify terms within section 4.1 of the draft guidance document to reflect other guidance documents and definitions.

**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.

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