



Firearms Specialist Group

Note of the meeting held on 24 June 2025 held in Birmingham and online via videoconference.

- 1. Welcome, introductions, review of actions and minutes**
 - 1.1.1 The Chair welcomed all to the ninth meeting of the Firearms Specialist Group (FSG). Members introduced themselves.
 - 1.1.2 The full list of the attendee organisations and apologies is provided at Annex A.
 - 1.1.3 The draft minutes from the eighth meeting were reviewed. Two minor amendments were identified:
 - I. 7.2.1 should refer to the “defence provided under Section 1(5) of the Firearms Act 1982”
 - II. Annex A should be amended to reflect representative from KFS/AFSP apologies as they were not in attendance.
 - 1.1.4 Chair asked for thanks to be passed on to Nadine Roache for the minutes from previous meeting which the group complimented on being very comprehensive.
 - 1.1.5 **Actions from previous meeting:**
 - 1.1.6 Action – Compliance with the code – It was confirmed that if you are compliant with the code for the sub-activities within the FSA which you have undertaken, then you are considered compliant with the code and don’t have to declare non-compliance.

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- 1.1.7 Action – Chair and OSFR to seek clarification and guidance from the Regulator regarding the potential definition of a distinct FSA for examining converted firearms – It was confirmed that for Version 3 of the Code there would be consideration of a separate FSA for this.
- 1.1.8 Action – With regards to peer review where unaccredited forces are doing SFR1s – this will be picked up later in meeting.
- 1.1.9 Action – On the issues of Turkish made top venting blank firers (TVBF), the chair has had a meeting with the National Crime Agency (NCA) and has provided his view on this issue. There are a range of views on this issue, a key point of discussion was the importance of presenting all sides of the argument. The debate is continuing and there has been a recent case in London. This will be picked up further later in this meeting

2. Updates

UKAS Update

- 2.1.1 Written update provided by UKAS ahead of the meeting, and presented on their behalf by the OFSR:
- 2.1.2 Advert currently on LinkedIn for Forensics Accreditation Specialist.
- 2.1.3 The Code of Practice transition from V1 to V2 is underway for organisations who are accredited to the Code.
- 2.1.4 The link for the Technical bulletin with full details will be shared after the meeting and can also be found here: [Latest Technical Bulletins - UKAS](#).
- 2.1.5 Discussions are ongoing with the OFSR regarding the approach to Incident Scene, Friction Ridge Detail and Section 5A which all have differing deadlines for when the Code comes into force.
- 2.1.6 The Firearms Specialist Group put on the record their thanks to Catherine Monnery, for all the work undertaken by her in forensic science, over many years. The Specialist Group wishes her well for the future.

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OFSR Update

- 2.1.7 Version 2 of the Code of Practice is now published and will be coming into force from October. There are no significant changes in relation to Firearms in version 2, however there are some wording changes which will be discussed later in this meeting.
- 2.1.8 One HEO has recently joined the team to support work, including in relation to this set of FSAs. Another HEO is also joining the team today.
- 2.1.9 OFSR is currently recruiting another G7 – to cover Incident and Scenes portfolio.
- 2.1.10 The current Regulator is due to leave office on 24th July 2025. We are still waiting for an announcement on who the new regulator will be, although we understand that one has been appointed.

3. Wording issues in Firearms FSAs

- 3.1.1 Wording issues have been identified within FSA-MTP-601, and FSA-MTP-602 which have been introduced with changes made in version 2 of the Code Of Practice.
- 3.1.2 Shotgun firing distance: it is not clear where this is currently addressed during the code. This would seem to belong in ballistics FSA, MTP-602, but the current wording of that FSA only refers to 'cuprous materials'. This activity may also be captured in the sections of that FSA talking about 'damage assessment' however this is not clear.
- 3.1.3 Within the classification FSA, MTP-601, it is not clear what the two exclusions, listed at section 66.3.2, are intended to mean given the current wording and both would seem more closely aligned with the ballistics FSA.
- 3.1.4 The first of these exclusions, referencing "distance from muzzle on discharge and accuracy" seems to be in the wrong FSA and is listed as unaccredited. The

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groups view was that this is an activity that should be accredited, and which would need to be moved to ballistics and worded more clearly.

- 3.1.5 The specialist group identified that it was important that these issues were resolved in the next version of the code (version 3).

4. Classification by unaccredited forces

- 4.1.1 The Chair summarised the background context and the existing concerns regarding unaccredited forces issuing statements (e.g. SFR1) relating to the classification of firearms. There is particular concern relating to the classification of Section 5 firearms, which carry a mandatory five-year sentence
- 4.1.2 The Regulator does permit unaccredited forces to undertake urgent classifications in-house, in exceptional circumstances, where this is required to support a remand in custody application, provided any such classification is then checked by an accredited provider within 72 hours.
- 4.1.3 As part of the safeguards, data returns must be provided to the Regulator's office to confirm that those forces using this allowance were complying with the rules and intentions of this special dispensation.
- 4.1.4 A review of the recent returns from forces using this dispensation has highlighted potential areas of concern.
- 4.1.5 It was not clear from one force's data return whether they were using the allowance as intended, i.e. for urgent remand applications only, or more widely as an initial triage system, given the number of classifications included in the returns.
- 4.1.6 It was also not sufficiently clear from some of the returns, whether all in-house classifications were being subsequently confirmed by accredited providers, and within the required timeframes.
- 4.1.7 The Chair noted that not all the returns have resulted in concerns. Many forces are only using the dispensation for a very small number of cases, as might be

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expected for urgent remand decisions, however one of the concerns is that some forces appear to be using the dispensation more widely.

- 4.1.8 Overall, there was concern that some of the police forces using this dispensation may not fully understand, or may not be fully meeting, its requirements. Further exploration is needed to fully understand the approaches such forces are taking and whether this reflects the intentions of the dispensation.
- 4.1.9 Representatives from the OFSR noted that there had not been any recent requests to use this dispensation and only ten forces have previously made such a request and are currently using it.
- 4.1.10 **Action 1 – Chair** to put together a brief report for the Regulator setting out the concerns based on what we have seen so far and potential for miscarriages of justice relating to this issue.
- 4.1.11 The group discussed whether auditing or another form of independent review of this dispensation might be helpful. It was noted that the conditions of the dispensation do state that the Regulator can audit the work if they feel it is needed.
- 4.1.12 It was noted that this may also be an area where NABIS could provide advice to forces via their liaison officers.
- 4.1.13 **Action 2 - for NABIS** to ask their liaison officers to see if the SPOCs (Single Point of Contact) in the relevant forces are open to advice.
- 4.1.14 Concerns were also raised that SFR1 reports may be being used for court, despite this not being their intended purpose.
- 4.1.15 There was a discussion around the possibility of looking at what CPS have been accepting, and whether SFR1s are being used for court use. There has been a previous discussion with CPS around this and a request for figures. At present, CPS are unable to provide such figures.

5. Classification of Top Venting Blank Firers

- 5.1.1 The Chair recently attended meeting with the NCA discussing the issues surrounding the classification of Turkish TVBF, during which the agency provided a 17 page document setting out their position, that an unconverted blank firer could be classified as a section 5(1)(aba) firearm.
- 5.1.2 The Chair noted that there are a range of opinions about this classification within the forensic firearms community, and it is key that those differences of opinion should be declared. When an examiner sets out their opinion in reports they should include why they have reached it, and if there are differing opinions what those opinions are. Examiners must also flag to the defence if there are things which could help in their case, such as a defence provided under section 1(5) of the Firearms act 1982.
- 5.1.3 The UKAS representative noted that UKAS have had internal discussions about where “assessment of convertibility” sits in terms of scope of accreditation. The current view is that is non-accreditable, and should therefore be declared as non-accredited with a mitigation table etc.
- 5.1.4 In terms of any future version of the code, this does not mean that undertaking ‘assessment of convertibility’ could not be added to the Code – that would depend on what the Code says – but consideration would need to be given as to whether it was accreditable based on the nature of the activity.
- 5.1.5 The group discussed the broader question about examiner expression of opinion, and how much advocacy is a practitioner permitted in terms of expressing an opinion. The group noted that there is existing Regulator advice about cognitive bias which includes a section on firearms, and the need to express alternative propositions.
- 5.1.6 The observer from SPA noted that in Scotland this is being looked at on a case-by-case basis. If there is a reason to suspect that an individual has been converting, or is planning to convert TVBFs, then they will explore whether they are readily convertible in the laboratory, but otherwise they are reported as an imitation firearm.

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- 5.1.7 The group noted that Northern Ireland has quite different legislation to England and Wales, and to Scotland.
- 5.1.8 **Action 3 - Chair** to propose wording for a potential notification for the Regulator's consideration, covering how such classifications should be reported including the current range of opinions. Chair's initial draft to be circulated to the group for input after the meeting.

Possible new working group focused on complex classification

- 5.1.9 The group discussed the possibility of setting up a new working group focused on complex classification issues, to provide a collective view such issues as and when they arise.
- 5.1.10 It was noted that Working groups tend to be tasks and finish, however there was agreement that the proposed group would need to be more permanent, given that it would be needed in response to issues as they arise.
- 5.1.11 It was also noted that any such group would most likely be comprised of members of the wider specialist group and therefore such complex issues might be better addressed as standing item within the Specialist Group agenda.
- 5.1.12 **Action 4 - Group** agreed this should be taken forward as a standing item on the Specialist Group agenda with specific work from group members to gather a range of views for items that come up in this area.
- 5.1.13 The possibility of getting barrister input and involvement was discussed, for example when there was a specific classification issue. A range of potential names were discussed.

6. Firearms Evidence Evaluation

- 6.1.1 The main Interpretation group has recently finished the draft of their guidance document.
- 6.1.2 Since the last specialist group meeting there has been an Interpretation workshop (in May). The document from that Workshop can be circulated to the wider Specialist Group. The key points from the document:

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1. Overlap – for example when does firearm work overlap with disciplines like toolmarks etc.
2. Digital imaging - at what point does this require additional expert imaging expertise.
3. How discipline specific interpretation guidance tackles areas of overlap.
4. Likelihood Ratios and verbal scale.
5. UKAS are accrediting Footwear and toolmarks as 'opinion'/evaluative' however it appears that is not currently happening consistently for firearms for all police forces and forensic service providers.

Action 5 – Representative from AFSP to circulate the document from the interpretation workshop to the firearms SG group.

- 6.1.3 Discussion with UKAS representative regarding the 'opinion'/evaluative' point above. While this is not happening for all providers at present, UKAS confirmed that there is a move towards this and there should be more consistency in this going forward. UKAS will only examine against what is currently within the schedule for that organisation, but organisations are able to ask for things to be added to their schedule.
- 6.1.4 The representative from AFSP has started drafting the discipline specific interpretation guidance for firearms.
- 6.1.5 The group discussed how areas of overlap between sub-activities might be handled within the OFSR template for this discipline specific guidance. There are challenges around how these can be handled efficiently within the guidance without resulting in an unwieldy document.
- 6.1.6 The group also discussed how best to get buy-in from interested parties and the importance of getting buy-in from the sector. There was a view that this may need to come from the Regulator.

7. Chair's Update

Firearms legislation consultation

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- 7.1.1 It is the intention of the current government to go back out to consultation on the separation between Sections 2 and Section 1 firearms and whether all firearms should be subject to Section 1.
- 7.1.2 This may not have particular implications for Forensic Science as such, but will have implications for the licensing system.
- 7.1.3 **Ranges**
- 7.1.4 Section 11(4) of the Firearms Act (1968) permits miniature rifle ranges to be run without a firearm certificate. There was a case in London of such a range situated adjacent to the M25. This went to court where the defendant was acquitted.
- 7.1.5 From the 1st of May, you now need a firearms certificate to run a miniature rifle range with a condition for running such a range.
- 7.1.6 **Sound Moderators**
- 7.1.7 Government announced intention to change the law relating to sound moderators. They will no longer be classed as an accessory which is controlled.
- 7.1.8 The current legislation is complex and results in items being classed differently depending on what sort of item they are fitted to. Whilst they will no longer be considered as a firearm in their own right, a certificate will be required for these to be purchased.
- 7.1.9 There details of this change is still being worked through – being brought through as primary legislation.
- 7.1.10 **Full Auto Selectors**
- 7.1.11 Government intention to classify full auto selectors as a firearms component part subject to section 5 of the Firearms Act (1968).
- 7.1.12 **3D printed guns**

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- 7.1.13 Government to change the law – it will be an offence to possess plans that can be used with a 3D printer to produce any part of a firearm.
- 7.1.14 Will be part of the border security bill.

8. AFTE Conference

- 8.1.1 Presentations that may be of interest:
- 8.1.2 Consultation to change AFTE theory of identification and reporting principles for toolmarks. Draft wording for principles – can be shared. This has already been out for consultation but there will be further opportunities to comment on revised version in the future.
 - 1) The Texas Forensic Science Commission recommended a move away from ‘Individual’ characteristics – this is likely to have knock on effects across forensic sciences.
 - 2) There is support for moving away from the use of ‘individual’ from some within the firearms community.
 - 3) There is a concern that views outside of America are not sufficiently feeding into discussions relating to these changes. There is intention for member(s) of the AFTE committee dealing with this to attend the next ENFSI conference.
 - 4) The AFTE committee want to move towards an ‘evaluative’ approach – and ultimately towards a statistical approach.
- 8.1.3 Other aspect of Texas Commission: there is a paper by Swofford et al. regarding error rates in forensic firearms comparison – there is a recommendation for people to use the approach from this paper.
- 8.1.4 Validation of 3D imaging systems used for forensic firearm comparison work – NIST have developed a new assessment tool for validating systems. This is currently being used within NIST.

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9. Workplan Updates

- 9.1.1 The group worked reviewed the workplan document, updating it based on the discussions in this meeting.

10. AOB

10.1.1 NTU Policing Academic Centre of Excellence

- 10.1.2 Nottingham Trent University (NTU) has been formally recognised by the NPCC and Economic Social Research Council as a policing academic centre of excellence (PACE).

- 10.1.3 There are nine centres announced, which will officially launch in November. Any police force can apply for funding to support work in the specific areas the different centres are working on.

- 10.1.4 Each centre will have an area of interest based on the work they already do. From a Firearms perspective NTU covers this in their portfolio as well as identification and tracing, so NTU may pick up the forensic firearms-related research.

10.1.5 NTU - Legal Definitions

- 10.1.6 NTU asked if the group had any information on what was required in terms of import and export licences for 'fired evidence' coming into or out of the UK.

- 10.1.7 **Action 6** – Chair to check what is required in relation to fired evidence coming into or out of the UK.

10.1.8 Date of next meeting

- 10.1.9 Next meeting scheduled for 21 October 2025 subject to confirmation.

Annex A

Representatives present in person:

Chair

Association of Forensic Service Providers (AFSP)

Nottingham Trent University (NTU)

Office of the Forensic Science Regulator (OFSR)

Principal Forensic Services

United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS)

Representatives present online:

The National Ballistics Intelligence Service (NaBIS)

Scottish Police Association (SPA)

Apologies received from:

NaBIS

UKAS

Crown Prosecution Service

Metropolitan Police Service Forensic Firearms Unit (MPSFFU)