Forensic Science Regulator

Guidance: Incident Scene Examination

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1. Contents

2. Scope

2.1 Approach to incident scene examination

2.1.1 Incident scene examination takes a holistic approach and considers an incident scene in conjunction with the requirements of an investigation and the criminal justice system (CJS). The aim of incident scene examination is to identify and locate, or note the absence of, physical material which has relevance and significance to inform the investigation including, where relevant, the reconstruction of past events.

2.1.2 The extent of the examination and the use of bespoke versus generic approaches will depend on the agreed level of service and will be proportionate to the complexity and significance of the incident.

2.1.3 Each incident scene presents a practitioner with a different environment and set of requirements, and effective examination requires risk identification, risk management, and professional judgement, with the necessary recourse to appropriate equipment, consumables, and methods. Training and competence in scene examination, therefore, needs to focus on applied learning and the ability to apply knowledge and skills to the range of circumstances that may be encountered.

2.2 Purpose of guidance

2.2.1 This guidance covers activities at incident scenes where the primary purpose is managing, searching, recording, or obtaining forensic science evidence, physical material or contact traces, such that any further testing or examination, either at the scene or subsequently, would be subject of another Forensic Science Activity (FSA) specified by the Forensic Science Regulator's Code of Practice version 2 [1] (the Code).

2.2.2 This guidance applies to those who are undertaking Incident Scene Examination (FSA – INC 100), rather than those who are commissioned to undertake specialist examinations, such as bloodstain pattern analysts, or specialist imaging practitioners.

2.2.3 This guidance does not apply to activities at incident scenes where the primary purpose is something other than conducting forensic science activities. For example, attendance for the purpose of managing risks to life, locating, or caring for a complainant, detention of suspected offenders, controlling access, or searches that would not be subject to the Code.

2.2.4 The structure of the guidance mirrors the sections in the FSA specific requirements for incident examination (section 90 of the Code).

2.3 Approach to compliance

2.3.1 To achieve compliance with version 2 of the Code, an organisation will be able to demonstrate that all the relevant requirements in the Code, including the FSA specific requirements (section 90) are met by all parts of the organisation that perform FSA – INC 100 from the date version 2 of the Code came into force (2 October 2025).

2.3.2 FSA – INC 100 does not distinguish between activities performed at volume and major incident scenes and compliance for activities undertaken at all the incident types relevant to the forensic unit is required.

2.3.3 Section 3.1.2 of the Code states that the Regulator may suspend the compliance requirements set, including any requirement for accreditation, and may reinstate any suspended requirements; the Regulator will notify forensic units that undertake the FSA and the CJS through a report issued under s9 of the Act.

2.3.4 The Regulator has suspended the requirement for ISO/IEC 17020 [2] accreditation to demonstrate Code compliance for FSA-INC 100 and has implemented a milestone-based pathway to compliance.

2.3.5 Annex [A] outlines the requirements organisations should meet to achieve each milestone.

2.3.6 Following the release of FSR Notification 01-2026 [3], organisations must meet the requirements for milestone one by 6 April 2027 and for milestone two by 2 October 2027.

2.3.7 The Regulator has deemed all sub activities outlined in part A of Annex [B] as minimum scope for this FSA if undertaken by an organisation.

2.3.8 The sub activities listed as part of the minimum scope (part A of Annex [B]) are deemed core activities and will not fall into the definition of being 'infrequently used'.

2.3.9 Specific methods used within these sub activities may be considered to be infrequently used if they meet the criteria of the Code (s24.2.9). In such cases, organisations must ensure appropriate controls, risk-based assurance measures, and method specific competency arrangements are in place. An example would be the use of wet powders to recover friction ridge detail at an incident scene.

2.3.10 It is important to note that meeting interim milestones does not constitute full compliance with the Code. Until all applicable requirements of the Code are met, organisations should continue to declare non-compliance, though the milestone status of an organisation can be referred to within the annex [x] table. Further guidance on declarations can be found in FSR-GUI-0001: Declarations of compliance and non-compliance with the code of practice [4].

3. Competency (Code section 27 and 90.2)

3.1 Section 90.2.1

General requirements

3.1.1 Professional judgement is defined in the Code as the application of professional knowledge and experience to reach a conclusion or recommendation about a situation.

3.1.2 Where forensic units are reflecting the effective application of professional judgement in relevant procedures these procedures include for example; competency frameworks, technical methods, procedures for scene approach and strategy setting.

3.2 Section 90.2.2

3.2.1 Section 90.2.2 requires that decisions arising from the use of professional judgement shall be made on the basis of the information objectively known at the time of making the decision. Where the practitioner has taken reasonable steps to analyse the information requirement, and has taken reasonable steps to obtain such information, it is not a failure of their professional judgement if subsequently other information comes to light, that could not reasonably have been known at the time, that affects the validity of the decision made.

3.2.2 Practitioners shall maintain and develop their knowledge in line with the requirements of the standard of conduct (Code, Part C) to ensure that their knowledge when making decisions is based on up-to-date studies and findings, and where possible backed by directly relevant scientific research or testing.

3.2.3 Knowledge held by the practitioner at the time the decision was made would also include information about the incident received either verbally or from the organisations information management systems.

3.2.4 Practitioners should understand the limits of their knowledge in making decisions at the incident scene. A limited, incomplete or inaccurate understanding of a scientific discipline that leads to a decision that negatively impacts on the outcomes from examination of the scene, or items/exhibit recovered from the scene, would not be considered competent use of professional judgement.

3.2.5 Equally where there is limited information available around the circumstances of the incident the practitioner should understand the impact of this on their examination strategy, such as considering examining a larger area initially, that could later be refined on receipt of further information.

3.3 Section 90.2.3

3.3.1 Professional judgement should not be considered a separate activity or skill but should be viewed as an inherent part of competent incident examination.

3.3.2 A competent practitioner or forensic scene manager should by definition be competently using professional judgement.

3.3.3 Competency in the effective application of professional judgement should be part of assessment of competence in incident examination.

3.3.4 Competence in incident examination will include competence in following documented procedures and in making professional judgement decisions. This will require a foundation of relevant knowledge and experience in incident scene examination including current forensic science principles, techniques, and methodologies.

3.3.5 Competency assessments should demonstrate that a practitioner can achieve a set of outcomes that meet the expectations of the forensic unit and could be understood by another competent practitioner. The assessment should test, where relevant to the role, a practitioner's ability to;

3.3.6 seek and interpret information relevant to the incident;

3.3.7 make an initial assessment of the scene, including to recognise and properly consider different types of evidence;

a. set and manage an examination strategy;
b. locate, protect, and recover items/exhibits appropriately;
c. document their activities;
d. manage contamination risk effectively;
e. collaborate with, consult and/or commission other practitioners and experts when required, and demonstrate an understanding of when this is required.
f. Report on their activities, including providing investigative opinions (see section 90.2.7)

3.3.8 Practitioners who co-ordinate those undertaking other FSAs at incident scenes should be aware of how those FSAs are defined in the Code.

3.3.9 Competency assessments should;

a. Reflect the requirements of the investigation team and wider end-user requirements;

3.3.10 Provide an equivalent scope and scale of challenge to the live operating environment of the practitioner being assessed; and

3.3.11 Take into account differences in operation conditions, e.g. weather conditions or lighting, which may affect the expected outcome or approach taken.

3.4 Section 90.2.4

3.4.1 Within a forensic unit there may be a range of roles that undertake FSA – INC 100, or sub-activities of the FSA, and the competency framework will define the requirements for obtaining competence for each of these roles (see section 22 - Competence).

3.4.2 Competency requirements will vary depending on the role, for example forensic scene manager roles may not require competency in the use of documented technical methods for recovery of material.

3.4.3 Assessment against the competency framework may be carried out internally or by an external provider.

3.4.4 It is neither practical nor necessary for forensic units to attempt to assess competence across every set of circumstances a practitioner may encounter, instead a well-designed competency assessment will test competence against a sub-set of circumstances to provide assurance that the practitioner is able to effectively apply their knowledge and skills at the types of incident relevant to their role.

3.4.5 It is therefore important that competency assessments are appropriately challenging and reflect the complexity of incidents attended and the role to be undertaken.

3.4.6 The way in which competence is developed, achieved, demonstrated and maintained shall be documented (Code 22.3.1). These documents may include personal logs, examination notes, training certificates, digital and/or image records, amongst others. The exhibits generated during competence

monitoring, for example lifts of friction ridge detail or DNA swabs, need not be physically retained as long as suitable images and/or records are retained.

3.5 Section 90.2.5

Initial/baseline competency requirements

3.5.1 Assessment using a scene with known outcomes may include use of virtual scenes and immersive environments.

3.5.2 Not all elements of the initial or baseline competency assessment need to be assessed using examination of a scene with known outcomes. A suitable framework for initial/baseline competency may incorporate some or all of the following:

a. Known outcome scene witnessing;
b. Table-top or facilitated assessment (e.g. Hydra or virtual reality, etc.);
c. Isolated method demonstration (i.e. a method assessed as a simulation outside of a scene scenario where the outcome, i.e. latent friction ridge detail, is known);
d. Knowledge checks or tests;
e. Professional discussions;
f. Mock court presentations;
g. Attending case debriefs by competent practitioners.

3.5.3 Demonstration of competence in following documented processes, such as technical methods, may be supported through isolated method demonstrations, for example documented during the training process. However, the competency framework should also provide assurance that the practitioner is competent to perform technical methods in an incident scene environment.

3.5.4 For some aspects of initial competence, a table-top/isolated method of demonstrating competency would not be appropriate, for example scene approach would require examination of a scene with known outcomes.

3.5.5 Practitioners should be able to demonstrate understanding of the available contamination controls and evidence their ability to apply the appropriate measures at an incident scene.

3.5.6 The aims of the training programme to meet baseline competency requirements should be documented so that it is clear when these have been met.

3.5.7 It is accepted that practitioners may make different decisions during assessment of a scene with known outcomes, however, the requirements for achieving competence will ensure that decisions taken still meet the expected outcomes to the required standard. For example;

a. An incident scene with an exposed area from which it is expected that fibres would be recovered. One option would be to recover the fibres as a priority and an alternative approach would be to protect the location whilst other examinations take place and recover the fibres at a later stage. Both would be accepted if they met the defined expected outcomes, the fibres were recovered, and a sound rationale was provided within the notes.

b. An incident scene where footwear marks would be expected to be recovered. One option would be to examine the flooring for footwear marks as a method of clearing a common approach path, and alternative would be to use stepping plates to protect any marks and recover them later in the examination. Both would be accepted if they met the defined expected outcomes, the footwear marks were recovered, and a sound rationale was provided within the notes.

3.6 Section 90.2.6

3.6.1 No specific guidance for this clause.

3.7 Section 90.2.7

3.7.1 The majority of reporting of incident examination and forensic scene management will involve investigative opinions. There is a distinction

between investigative and evaluative opinion and investigative opinion is defined in the Code as:

> An opinion that arises in casework and in which explanations are generated to account for findings. The provision of an explanation for an observation(s) is termed an investigative opinion.

3.7.2 In undertaking incident scene examination and forensic scene management, practitioners may draw inferences from their findings and report these as investigative opinion, for example:

3.7.3 The kitchen window appeared to be the point of entry as all other entry routes were secure and/or undamaged.

3.7.4 Aspects of the burglary scene appeared staged given the presence of broken glass outside beneath the window, with no glass observed inside.

3.7.5 Practitioners may be able to give a categorical interpretative opinion where it is possible to exclude something as a possibility. For example the cross head screwdriver recovered from the kitchen did not leave the impression on the window frame which appeared to be from a single-bladed tool.

3.7.6 Practitioners may also report statements of fact or observation, for example;

a. the window was broken and broken glass was located on the ground outside, below the window; or
b. the room was searched for visible bloodstains and no bloodstaining was found; or
c. the footwear marks were of a similar pattern to the sole of the home owner's slippers

3.7.7 Practitioners may be required to provide reports such as oral reports, examination notes, and initial forensic reports (e.g. MG22A) to support an enquiry, interview or a strategy in criminal investigations or 'reporting' by updating internal database systems which may include investigative opinions. As stated in the Code (section 31.2.1) such reports do not require a declaration of compliance or a defined quality check (see checking and review, section 20) prior to being provided to the commissioning party,

however forensic units should have a process in place to review investigative opinions where the opinion would have a significant impact on the investigation.

3.7.8 Where investigative opinions are challenged or further information is requested, the SFR process provides a mechanism for investigative opinion evidence to be provided to the CJS (see section 28.1.2 of the National Guidance for Streamlined Forensic Reporting [5]). As stated in the Code (section 31.2.2) such reports are subject to a defined quality check and declaration of compliance with the Code.

3.8 Section 90.2.8

Ongoing competency

3.8.1 For ongoing competency, the competency framework will describe the monitoring frequency for maintaining all the aspects of the practitioner's competence.

3.8.2 Practitioners should undergo some monitoring of competence annually, but this does not need to include all the elements of the practitioner's competence. The elements monitored should be selected on a risk basis factoring in; the practitioner's role, experience, and identified training needs; the complexity of the activity; the frequency of undertaking the activity; and the inherent risks in the activity.

3.8.3 Ongoing practitioner competence assessment shall include periodic witnessing of activities at a live operating environment (Code 90.2.8f), witnessing on scene should be undertaken at least every four years.

3.8.4 Risks to ongoing competence may be higher for practitioners who are; new to a role; returning to a role; where attendance at certain incident types is infrequent; or where the scope of their role has increased. Where risks to ongoing competence are identified the frequency of competency assessment should be reviewed.

3.8.5 Practitioners should reflect on their own performance and identify elements of their competence where the opportunity for continued professional development, further training, or competence monitoring would be beneficial.

3.8.6 To support evidence of ongoing competence practitioners should keep a record of activities that support their competence for example, further reading, partaking in or leading case debriefs, and training courses.

3.8.7 A suitable framework for ongoing competence may incorporate some or all of the following:

a. Known outcome scene witnessing;
b. Live scene witnessing;
c. Table-top or facilitated assessment (e.g. Hydra or virtual reality, etc.);
d. Isolated method demonstration (i.e. a method assessed as a simulation outside of a scene scenario where the outcome, i.e. latent friction ridge detail, is known);
e. Knowledge checks or tests;
f. Professional discussions;
g. Dip-sampling of casework;
h. Internal audits;
i. Peer and case reviews;
j. Mock court presentations;
k. Case debriefs;
l. Court attendance debriefs.

4. Initial request to attend an incident scene (Code 90.3)

4.1 Section 90.3.1

4.1.1 90.3.1a: The forensic unit shall record all instances when work requirements are discussed (see section 16 – review of requests, tenders and/or contracts), including decisions not to attend and any advice given in place of attendance.

4.1.2 90.3.1b: Decisions relating to the level and type of resources assigned may be based on incident type, potential outcomes, organisational priorities and

policing initiatives. The policy should include when external providers may be used to deliver aspects of the FSA.

4.1.3 90.3.1c: While it is beneficial that the examination strategy is discussed with the commissioning party for all incidents, it is for the organisation to stipulate the types of incident or circumstances where the examination strategy needs to be discussed with the commissioning party. Generic strategies for common incident types may not need to be discussed.

4.1.4 90.3.1d: see guidance at section 10.

4.1.5 90.3.1e: The forensic unit should also record when an incident is not attended and/or any advice provided in place of attendance. The forensic unit should inform the commissioning party if attendance is dependent on further information or other activity is required, for example firearms make-safe, provision of a critical witness statement or CCTV footage, or structural assessment of a building.

4.1.6 90.3.1f: The process to request additional or alternative personnel should set out how requests can be escalated if needed.

4.1.7 90.3.1g: No specific guidance for this clause.

4.1.8 90.3.1h: The request to attend an incident scene may lead to a difference of opinion between practitioners or a practitioner and the commissioning party, for example decisions on whether to attend, the timescales in which attendance will be carried out, or the extent or level of examination. Any differences in view should be recorded and, when possible, a consensus conclusion agreed upon, with the rationale documented. Where it is necessary to escalate the dispute this will be in line with the policy and include documentation of the final decisions and their rationale .

5. Forensic Scene Management (Code 90.4)

5.1 Section 90.4.1

5.1.1 Forensic scene management is performed at every scene and covers decisions from a request to deploy resources to reporting on findings.

Forensic scene management covers the decisions made by practitioners on all aspects of incident scene examination including; competence requirements, initial deployment requirements, initial actions, developing an examination strategy, co-ordinating others (where relevant), and decisions on the locations to perform examinations.

5.1.2 The forensic scene manager does not need to be a person in a supervisory position.

5.1.3 Forensic units may differentiate between types of incident or incident circumstances in terms of competence to perform forensic scene management.

5.1.4 Forensic units will need to define the different levels or tiers of forensic scene management they provide for:

a. Clarity on activities undertaken when declaring compliance with the Code where a forensic unit does not undertake all levels of forensic scene management.
b. Clarity on activities accredited to ISO/IEC 17020 where a forensic unit does not undertake all levels of forensic scene management.

5.1.5 The following tiers or categories may be considered useful, and these could be further sub-divided;

1. Forensic scene management of less complex incidents conducted by an incident scene examiner as part of their examination. May include co-ordination of another practitioner from the same forensic unit conducting less complex activities;
2. Forensic scene management of a defined set of incident types, e.g. sexual offences, shots fired, premises searches, conducted either by an incident scene examiner or a dedicated forensic scene manager. May include co-ordination of others, including those from other forensic units;
3. Forensic scene management of complex and/or dynamic incidents e.g. homicide and unexpected deaths, conducted by a dedicated forensic scene manager.

5.1.6 It is not necessary for the forensic scene manager to be competent in the other aspects of incident scene examination or the activities that they commission. However, the forensic scene manager should be aware of when collaboration with consultation and/or commissioning of other practitioners and experts is required (see 2.3.5g)

5.2 Section 90.4.2

5.2.1 The forensic scene manager should make an assessment of whether the scene can be effectively managed remotely, and this assessment will depend on issues such as, the experience of the forensic scene manager, the circumstances of the incident, the practitioners in attendance, and the information available.

5.2.2 Examples of the information the forensic scene manager could consider in determining if there is sufficient information to manage the incident remotely includes but is not limited to;

a. accounts made by first attending personnel, statements of persons involved, and results of any subsequent investigation undertaken;
b. relevant CCTV and/or Body Worn Video (BWV) footage;
c. direct communication with a member of the commissioning party who has knowledge of the incident scene and may be present at the scene when this information is received;

5.2.3 The information needs to be sufficient to make decisions on:

a. appropriate deployment of resources applicable to the examination;
b. decision making concerning the examination including initial examination strategy;
c. deviations to the examination strategy;
d. management of risks concerning potential contamination issues.

5.3 Section 90.4.3

5.3.1 Complex incident scenes may have more than one forensic scene manager, for example where a large or complex incident scene is sectioned into different zones, or where there is a need to separate different forensic

activities within one incident scene. In these situations, there should be a practitioner performing a co-ordinating role. The responsibilities of each forensic scene manager, including the practitioner performing the co-ordination role should be defined.

5.4 Section 90.4.4

5.4.1 What is viewed as reasonably practicable in terms of preservation will depend on the specific circumstances of the incident and the requirements of the examination. For example, what is practical in terms of preservation of an incident at a large outdoor event such as a festival, would not be the same as the preservation measures that could be achieved at an indoor, self-contained, incident such as in a home with a sole occupant. Decisions taken on preservation measures and their supporting rationale shall be recorded (Code, section 90.5.1a) and subject to review (Code, section 90.8.6).

5.4.2 If responsibility for the scene management is handed over to another practitioner this should be documented.

6. Initial actions at an incident scene (Code 90.5)

6.1 Section 90.5.1

6.1.1 90.5.1a – Identifying and preserving the incident scene as initially understood may not be at the beginning of the examination of an incident scene, for example where the responsibility for investigating an incident has been handed from one organisation to another.

6.1.2 90.5.1a – Scene boundaries are a separate consideration from scene cordons that may have been set and placed prior to attendance of a forensic practitioner. The practitioner should assess whether any cordons in place adequately preserve the incident scene and may advise on changes to the position or extent of the cordon. A record should be made that a cordon is in place. Distinct from the cordon the practitioner should;

a. determine the physical boundaries of their examination; and

b. record the time and date when any changes to these boundaries and/or preservation requirements were made.

6.1.3 No specific guidance for clause 90.5.1b.

6.1.4 No specific guidance for clause 90.5.1c.

6.1.5 90.5.1d – Additional personnel or resources may be required because the incident scene is too large for one practitioner to examine effectively or within a reasonable timeframe; or because practitioners with different competence are required, including from another forensic unit; or additional equipment such as ladders or lighting are required. Training and competence assessments for practitioners should include demonstrable knowledge of what other expertise is available, when it might be needed, and how to request it if needed.

6.2 Section 90.5.2

6.2.1 For further guidance on recording initial assessments see section 8 - Technical records.

6.3 Section 90.5.3

6.3.1 No specific guidance for this clause.

7. Developing an examination strategy (Code 90.6)

7.1 Section 90.6.1

7.1.1 At complex incidents or incidents with specific considerations, such as premises searches, the Senior Investigating Officer, or others, may produce a Forensic Strategy. A Forensic Strategy is an investigative document that describes how forensic science may support the investigation. Although these will vary in scope, depth and style, a Forensic Strategy will generally comprise a description of the outcomes considered achievable through the application of forensic science. These will be relevant to the specific incident and typically presented as a series of objectives.

7.1.2 Forensic Strategies set by a Senior Investigating Officer are not within the remit of the Code because they are investigative products which determine which FSAs may benefit the objectives of an investigation. A Forensic Strategy is an investigative document that identifies the investigative objectives that may be addressed through the use of forensic science. The examination strategy set by the practitioner undertaking examination and/or management of the incident will reflect the Forensic Strategy where it exists and may include examination activities to meet one or more of the objectives of the Forensic Strategy.

7.1.3 An examination strategy may have both generic and bespoke sections, for example check boxes or drop down lists for some elements. The advantages of generic strategies, or generic sections of strategies, are consistency of approach and ensuring all necessary elements are completed. Bespoke strategies, or sections, allow the practitioner to tailor their examination to the circumstances or the incident. Forensic units should ensure strategies cover all the necessary elements whether generic, bespoke, or a combination.

7.2 Section 90.6.2

7.2.1 Initial investigation requirements and information may be received from the investigating team and/or a practitioner in a forensic scene management role, such as a Crime Scene Co-ordinator. Where this information is not consistent with observations or findings made by a practitioner at the incident scene, there should be a discussion between the practitioner and the investigating team or forensic scene manager and where necessary the practitioner shall challenge the initial requirements or information received (Code 90.6.2).

7.2.2 Any changes to the examination strategy, the rationale, and who made the decision should be clearly recorded. Disputes may be escalated via the forensic unit's process (Code, section 90.3.1h).

7.3 Section 90.6.3

7.3.1 Actions taken by first responders, witnesses, and/or other forensic practitioners (e.g. when the organisation responsible for the investigation of an incident changes), along with any associated diagrams, notes or images should be taken into consideration by the attending practitioner.

7.3.2 The examination strategy should take into account information received and the requirements of any Forensic Strategy in place for the investigation, but should be impartial and consider alternative reasonable hypotheses.

7.4 Section 90.6.4

7.4.1 For further guidance on recording initial assessments see section 8 - Technical records.

7.5 Section 90.6.5

7.5.1 For further guidance on recording initial assessments see section 8 - Technical records.

7.6 Section 90.6.6

7.6.1 The examination strategy may need to set out what is not to be examined, for example, a generic strategy for vehicle examination may require fibre recovery from car seats, however the practitioner may not include fibre recovery and amend the generic strategy because the front windows have been smashed and the seats are covered in broken glass preventing effective tape lifting. This relates to decision making utilising professional judgement (see section 2 of this guidance). Early peer review of the examination strategy may form part of the early review to assure the quality of results (see section 10.1.2) when decisions are being made that could have a significant impact on the outcomes of the investigation, such as decisions to release or undertake a limited examination of a scene or part of a scene.

7.7 Section 90.6.7

7.7.1 Drafting examination strategies includes the need to consider whether additional practitioners are required. See guidance at section 5.1.

7.8 Section 90.6.8

7.8.1 90.6.8e.v. - The examination strategy should record when there is a need to undertake any reconstruction activities and at what point in the examination these will be carried out. For example, righting of overturned furniture to search underneath, re-positioning of furniture to apparent original positions in a room to assist investigative interpretations.

7.9 Section 90.6.9

7.9.1 No specific guidance for this clause.

8. Co-ordination of others at incident scenes (Code 90.7)

8.1.1 No specific guidance for this section.

9. Technical records (Code 90.8)

9.1 Section 90.8.1

9.1.1 The policy on note taking should consider the needs of other users, such as the CJS, audit and peer review, and recognise that the value of recording information may not be to the practitioner but to other users.

9.2 Section 90.8.2

9.2.1 Information received includes that actively sought by the practitioner, such as information from incident recording systems, reports from other practitioners and emergency service personnel. It also includes any relevant information given to the practitioner by complainants and witnesses. Relevant information would be pertinent to the examination strategy.

9.3 Section 90.8.3

9.3.1 No specific guidance for this clause.

9.4 Section 90.8.4

9.4.1 Examination notes will include information received, factual information, records of decisions made, and the rationale behind the decision.

9.5 Section 90.8.5

9.5.1 There may be situations where notes cannot be made contemporaneously however, it is expected that this will be in exceptional circumstances and not routine. Notes should be made while at the incident scene.

9.5.2 If notes are handwritten, they should be clear and legible.

9.6 Section 90.8.6

9.6.1 Decisions may be discussed and agreed upon with another practitioner or commissioning party, when this happens the name/identifier and role of the person in agreement should be recorded within the notes.

10. Environment and facilities (Code 90.9)

10.1 Section 90.9.1

10.1.1 90.9.1a – Amongst the considerations for suitable equipment and consumable storage the forensic unit should include the following factors:

a. Security controls, such as restricted access, to prevent loss or damage of equipment and consumables;
b. Undertaking a risk assessment to identify contamination risks and appropriate mitigations. These may include; restricted access, requirements for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), a cleaning regime, separate storage of critical consumables.
c. Where relevant, provision of appropriate temperature storage equipment and temperature monitoring, e.g. chilled storage for reagents.

10.1.2 90.9.1b – Amongst the considerations for suitable vehicles the forensic unit should include the following factors:

a. Access to vehicles and security when not in use or parked outside of incident scenes.
b. Undertaking a risk assessment of vehicles to identify contamination risks and appropriate mitigations. These may include; segregation of critical consumables, separation of consumables from items/exhibits, a cleaning regime, processes for vehicles going out of the control of the forensic unit (e.g. for maintenance or use by another unit) and their return to use.
c. Availability of equipment and consumables, for example, stock management (minimum and maximum stock levels), and consistent vehicle layout so staff are familiar with what is stored where.
d. Where necessary, appropriate temporary storage for items/exhibits (see below).

10.1.3 90.9.1c – The Code sets out requirements for item/exhibit storage, including temporary storage such as in vehicles, (section 29.4.2) and these include:

a. that items/exhibits can at all times be uniquely identified;
b. that any specific measures relevant to the item/exhibit type are identified, e.g. firearms, valuables;
c. continuity records including movement of the item/exhibit between locations;
d. prevention of tampering with or otherwise compromising the item/exhibit;
e. restricted access;
f. prevention of deterioration;
g. preservation, as far as possible, in the item/exhibit's original form.

10.2 Section 90.9.2

10.2.1 This clause relates to decision making by a forensic practitioner at an incident scene on whether to undertake examinations at the incident scene or at another suitable location. This clause does not relate to the examination

of items/exhibits received at a forensic unit, the examination of which should be conducted as per the forensic unit's service level agreement (SLA).

10.2.2 Examination of individuals, including deceased individuals are the subject of different FSAs (FSA - INC 200 and FSA - INC 201) and not covered by this guidance.

10.2.3 90.9.2a – Factors that may mean that an incident scene is not conducive to the effective examination of an item/exhibit include; restricted access, challenging weather conditions, lighting level, risks to health and safety such as cannabis factories and unsafe buildings, security risks and risks to personal safety.

10.2.4 90.9.2b – It is expected that contamination risks for DNA and trace material would be difficult to manage adequately at ad-hoc locations, because of the risk of contamination from the environment. For locations routinely used for examinations, such as vehicle recovery garages, a contamination risk assessment could be undertaken, and appropriate mitigations put in place.

10.2.5 90.9.2c – no specific guidance on this sub-clause.

10.2.6 90.9.2d – no specific guidance on this sub-clause.

10.2.7 90.9.2e – For locations that are routinely used for examinations, such as vehicle recovery garages, the agreement may form part of an SLA or be documented within a force policy/approved locations list. The forensic unit could consider conducting audits at some of the 'business as usual' secondary examination locations (e.g. vehicle recovery garages) where examinations can sometimes occur to ascertain/assure they are fit for purpose. If agreement of the commissioning party is required and cannot be obtained, then the item/exhibit should be recovered rather than examined at an alternative location.

10.3 Section 90.9.3

10.3.1 The rationale for carrying out activities at locations that are routinely used for examinations, such as vehicle recovery garages, could be recorded as part of an SLA and so would not need to be recorded on each occasion. A

documented rationale is required when carrying out activities at alternative locations that are outside of usual procedure/BAU/SLA approved locations.

10.3.2 Practitioners need to be aware of the SLA and when a documented rationale is required.

10.3.3 Forensic units should monitor decisions made regarding the location to undertake examinations where these have been carried out at a location other than the incident scene.

10.3.4 The following tables provide examples of appropriate justification for performing activities outside of an incident scene at an ad-hoc location.

Examination and location	Rationale
Examination of large sheeting for footwear marks in CSI office/ vehicle garage / local police station meeting room	Large piece of sheeting found on floor in cannabis factory. No adequate lighting at scene and very poor ventilation, which could potentially cause harm to health. Alternative location made appropriate using groundsheets/paper. Better space and lighting to examine for footwear marks. Contamination risks are adequately managed.
Search of luggage for concealed digital devices in a Border Force office	Search needs to be undertaken away from where the luggage was recovered and in a short time frame. Contamination risks are adequately managed.

10.4 Section 90.9.4

10.4.1 The following table provides examples of activities that may be performed as part of the end-to-end process of incident examination away from the incident scene and the necessary assurances to mitigate risk.

Activity and location	Assurances
Tasking - whilst in a vehicle belonging to the forensic unit and stopped safely on a public street	The practitioner; • has access to material/equipment to record information • makes use of an encrypted force device, using authorised log-in to relevant systems and a privacy screen

	• ensures notes are securely stored and not visible from outside the vehicle.
Writing reports at a home address	The practitioner; • makes use of an encrypted force device, using authorised log-in to relevant systems and a privacy screen • stores casefiles securely, e.g. in a lockable cabinet. • Undertakes their work away from family members/ using privacy screens • follows the relevant policies for remote working and information security.

10.4.2 Items/exhibits, including removable storage media containing data such as memory cards, should not be taken to a home address or other unauthorised location and should be taken to an authorised storage site as soon as practically possible after recovery/creation. The forensic unit shall have procedures for the management of removable storage media used to transfer data (Code section 26.7).

11. Assuring quality of results (Code 90.10)

11.1 Section 90.10.1

11.1.1 The purpose of this review is to provide assurance that the forensic unit's policies and processes have been followed and to provide assessment of ongoing competence. It is distinct from the review of the examination strategy (see Code, section 90.6.9) and quality checks of reports (see Code, section 31.2.2).

11.1.2 A review could be undertaken at an early stage, such as before an incident scene is released from the forensic unit's control. This approach may be taken where there is more than one practitioner present at the incident scene and/or the circumstances of the incident are complex or unusual. Early review is of particular importance when decisions are being made that could have a significant impact on the outcomes of the investigation, such as decisions to release or undertake a limited examination of a scene or part of a scene.

11.1.3 Where relevant, peer review shall establish whether any investigative opinions made are impartial, consistent with the observations and findings at the incident scene, and fully documented within notes.

11.1.4 The proportion of examinations to be peer-reviewed is for the organisation to determine and should be risk-based, i.e. a greater proportion of high-risk incidents, such as unexpected deaths, may be checked than more routine incident types.

11.1.5 Peer review should be undertaken prior to provision of statements for the CJS.

11.1.6 The forensic unit may undertake other activities to assist with assuring the quality of results such as proficiency tests and collaborative exercises, see section 30 – Assuring the quality of results.

11.2 Section 90.10.2

11.2.1 No specific guidance for this clause.

12. Other requirements

12.1 Contamination risk management (Code 23.1 and 23.3)

12.1.1 Requirements for contamination management relevant to incident examination can be found in sections 23.3.1, 23.3.2, 23.3.3 and, 23.3. 8 to 23.3.12 of the Code. Guidance on contamination controls for incident scenes can be found in FSR-GUI-0016 [6].

13. Modification

13.1.1 This is the second issue of this document under section 9 of the Forensic Science Regulator Act 2021.

13.1.2 The PDF is the primary version of this document.

13.1.3 The Regulator uses an identification system for all documents. In the normal sequence of documents this identifier is of the form ‘FSR-###-####’ where (a) (the first three ‘#’) indicate letters to describe the type of document and

(b) (the second four '#') indicates a numerical code to identify the document. For example, this document is FSR-GUI-0006 and the 'GUI' indicates that it is a guidance document. Combined with the issue number this ensures that each document is uniquely identified.

13.1.4 If it is necessary to publish a modified version of a document (for example, a version in a different language), then the modified version will have an additional letter at the end of the unique identifier. The identifier thus becoming FSR - GUI - 0006 - #.

13.1.5 In the event of any discrepancy between the primary version and a modified version then the text of the primary version shall prevail.

14. Acknowledgements

This guidance has been developed and reviewed by the Incident Examination Specialist Group.

15. Review

15.1.1 This document is subject to review by the Forensic Science Regulator at regular intervals.

15.1.2 The Forensic Science Regulator welcomes views on this guidance. Please send any comments to the address as set out at the following web page: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/forensic-science-regulator or send them to the following email address: FSREnquiries@forensicscienceregulator.gov.uk.

16. References

[1] "Forensic Science Regulator," [Online]. Available: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/forensic-science-activities-statutory-code-of-practice-version-2 [Accessed July 2026]

[2] International Organization for Standardization, BS EN ISO/IEC 17020:2012, General criteria for the operation of various types of bodies performing inspection, 2012.

[3] "Forensic Science Regulator," [Online]. Available: Regulator's notification 01-2026: changes to compliance requirements for FSA-INC 100 - GOV.UK [Accessed July 2026]

[4] "Forensic Science Regulator," [Online]. Available: Declaring compliance with the code of practice (FSR-GUI-0001) - GOV.UK [Accessed July 2026]

[5] "Forensic Capability Network," [Online]. Available: National SFR Guidance v6.1 | FCN [Accessed July 2026]

[6] "Forensic Science Regulator," [Online]. Available: Crime scene DNA: anti-contamination (FSR-GUI-0016) - GOV.UK [Accessed July 2026]

17. Abbreviations and Acronyms

Abbreviation	Meaning
BAU	Business as Usual
BPA	Blood Pattern Analysis
BWV	Body Worn Video
CCTV	Closed-Circuit Television
CJS	Criminal Justice System
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic Acid
FSA	Forensic Science Activity
FSR	Forensic Science Regulator
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SFR	Streamlined Forensic Report
SLA	Service Level Agreement

18. Annex [A] – Milestone Requirements for FSA – INC 100 – Incident Scene Examination

Milestone 1

Organisations will have a corporate competency framework in place for all crime types and across all sites for the outlined minimum scope. This will include forensic scene management.

Milestone 2

Organisations will have adopted a risk-based approach to anti-contamination and proportionate note taking.

Milestone 3

Organisations will be able to demonstrate that all sub-activities outlined in the minimum scope (part A of Annex [B]) are valid/fit for purpose across all crime types if they undertake them. Organisations may choose to expand their scope to include additional sub-activities (listed under part B of Annex [B]) however they must ensure that appropriate validation/verification processes are in place before declaring compliance when these activities are undertaken. will have adopted a risk-based approach to anti-contamination and proportionate note taking.

19. Annex [B] – FSA – INC 100 Scope Activity List

PART A: FSA – INC 100 Minimum scope					
Activity	**FSA sub activity**	**Validation required?**	**If yes - already widely validated?**	**if no - how to demonstrate fit for purpose**	**Notes**
a. **Forensic scene management, including but not limited to: (compliance to milestone 1 is expected to include all of the sub-activities listed)**					
scene assessment and control	a.i.	no	n/a	Competency assessments using known outcome incidents/ case review/ professional interviews/ knowledge test/ PT	Includes visual search (footwear, toolmarks, blood etc). Part of overall scene search - training and competency assessment should include scene assessment searching and consideration of relevant contamination controls.
setting examination strategy	a.ii.				The process of forensic scene management (FSM) does not need to be validated but it does need to be shown as fit for purpose for example through PT, audits and case reviews. May need to list levels of FSM if the forensic unit only undertakes FSM at specific incident types (see guidance section 4.1.5)
coordination of activities at the incident scene	a.iii				
management of other practitioners and activities	a.iv				
interpretation of the incident scene	a.v				
b. **Examination of surfaces and items and recovery of items such that further testing or examination that is specified as an FSA in the Code can be undertaken.**					

Compliance to milestone 1 requires compliance for all of the following activities if an organisation undertakes them.					
Recovery of material for DNA analysis	b	*yes – for full Code compliance	yes	Review validation produced by others to determine suitability for adoption in your force.	Expectation is that this would include swabbing of material for DNA analysis, for example blood, saliva, semen and cellular material. Cutting out and recovering to a pot does not need validating and should not be listed on a schedule.
Recovery of friction ridge detail	b	*yes - for full Code compliance	yes	Carrying out further verification if your assessment identifies different end user requirements, processes or risks that have not been covered. If the recovery method (e.g. powder) hasn't been validated elsewhere already, consider changing your inhouse method to reflect those demonstrated as suitable elsewhere, or seek collaborative/national validation opportunities.	Expectation is that this would include all aspects of examination for and recovery of friction ridge detail used by the organisation – visualisation using lighting, powder enhancement (**to include all powders used at scenes by the organisation), and all recovery methods used by the organisation for the purpose of analysis and comparison This includes evidential 1:1 photography as a method of recovery if used by the organisation.
Recovery of footwear marks	b	*yes - for full Code compliance	yes		Expectation is that this would include all aspects of examination for and recovery of footwear marks used by the organisation – visualisation using lighting, powder enhancement (**to include all powders used at scenes by the organisation), and all recovery methods used by the organisation for the purpose of analysis and comparison. This includes evidential 1:1 photography as a method of recovery if used by the organisation. (Not ESLA)
***Competency assessment of all activities listed above is required for compliance to milestone 1.** **There is no requirement for validation/verification or ISO/IEC 17020 accreditation for compliance to milestone 1.** **Where there is a method already validated, additional support for forensic units around validation may be found on the FCN Knowledge Hub.** ****The sub-activities fall unequivocally within the defined minimum scope of FSA INC 100 comprising specific techniques, tools, procedures may be considered 'infrequently used' where their utilisation meets the criteria set out within the Code of Practice section**					

24.2.9. In such cases, organisations must ensure that appropriate controls, risk-based assurance measures, and method-specific competency arrangements are in place, consistent with the expectations of the Code, section 24 governing the application of infrequently used methods.

PART B: FSA – INC 100 Additional activities outside of minimum scope					
Examination of surfaces and items such that further testing can be carried out (possible additional activities on top of the minimum scope, these would need to be listed individually on an accreditation scope):					
Activity	**FSA sub activity**	**Validation required?**	**If yes - already widely validated?**	**if no - how to demonstrate fit for purpose**	**Notes**
Presumptive testing - biological material	BIO 200 sub-activity b under INC 100	yes	KM and HMX, not others		Schedule should list presumptive testing and the specific test(s) validated/verified. Could include tests for semen and saliva if routinely done by CSI.
Recovery of footwear marks - ESLA	b	yes	no		
GSR - recovery using sampling kit	b	yes	no		If the provider has validated the sampling kit, then just verification will need to be done in force.
Physical recovery of 3D marks	b	yes	no		Includes casting of footwear marks,toolmarks and tyre marks. Specify the casting product on the schedule. Cutting out would not need to be validated.
Recovery of trace material - taping/gel recovery	b	yes	no		Validation should cover all the types of trace material to represent evidence types that will be recovered by tape or gel recovery.
Recovery of trace material - forceps/scalpel/to pot	b	no	n/a	Show how contamination risks are managed.	

Recovery of ignitable liquid residues	b	yes	yes	no		
Activities that are not considered FSA – INC 100 but could be listed on an ISO 17025 schedule as performed at incident scenes:						
ALS search for biological material	BIO 200 (or possible future FSA for imaging)	yes	not in CSI		Could be blood, saliva, and/or semen. Validation should cover the biological materials searched for at incident scenes. If ALS is only used to search for specific biological material e.g. semen, then this would need to be specified on the schedule.	
Chemical visualisation of biological material	BIO 200	yes	not in CSI			
ALS search for marks (footwear, cleaning marks, FRD etc)	MTP100 or 300 (or possible future FSA for imaging)	yes	not in CSI			
Imaging for subsequent comparison (i.e. scalable images) - ALS	MTP100 or 300 (or possible future FSA for imaging)	yes	no		Imaging of anything that could be used for comparison (footwear, FRD, tyre marks, etc). Validation to include the range of surfaces that might be imaged (including something to represent bodies) and appropriate end users. This imaging is with ALS.	

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Data capture, processing and analysis from digital storage devices	DIG 100	yes	not in CSI		

General activities (Compliance required but not required to be on accreditation scopes or listed in mitigation annexes):						
packaging of exhibits	36.1.1a.ii	no	not in isolation	n/a	fitness for purpose would be part of demonstrating that the end-to-end process is fit for purpose	Includes recovery of items/exhibits when the purpose of further examination or testing is unknown.
labelling	36.1.1a.iii	no				
transportation	36.1.1a.iv	no				
storage	36.1.1b	no				
preservation, recovery and recording including:		no	no			
record photography	36.1.1b	no	no		camera fit for purpose and the securing of the data.	
Video/ 360/ drone		no	no		Video/360/ drone cameras fit for purpose	If any measurements or image comparison from the videos, then DIG 301 applies
case assessment	36.1.1e.ii	no	no		fitness for purpose would be part of demonstrating that the end-to-end process is fit for purpose	
reporting	36.1.1e.v	no				
provision of evidence	36.1.1e.vi	no				
provision of opinion	36.1.1e.vii	no				
provision of advice		no				

Other activities:

- **Deceased/body parts** - at a scene fall under FSA – INC 201 – compliance with the Code is not required for photography or examination/recovery of deceased/body parts/bones or items/exhibits from deceased/body parts and no declaration or mitigation is required. This may fall under FSA - INC 100 in version 3 of the Code and forces should look to validate examination and recovery activities from bodies/body parts in preparation.
- **Examination of witnesses/complainants/detainees** - is FSA – INC 200. Compliance with the Code is not required for photography or examination/recovery of items/exhibits from witnesses, complainants or detainees or taking of elimination prints/samples and no declaration of mitigation is required. (Note that Forensic medical examination of complainants is FSA – BIO 100).
- **Firearms** – should not be considered differently to any other items at an incident scene unless the sub-activities of FSA – MTP 601 are undertaken, in which case this FSA applies. The 'make safe' process does not form part of this FSA but is an important part of the workflow and should be carried out by practitioners competent to preserve other potential evidence types on an item/exhibit.
- **GSR** – recovery of GSR from surfaces/items at a scene is considered to be part of FSA – INC 100. However, recovery from witnesses/complainants/detainees is FSA – INC 200 and from deceased or body parts would be FSA – INC 201.
- **Fire Investigation** – examination of fire scenes for the purpose of determining the origin, cause and development of a fire is FSA – INC 102. Compliance with the Code is not required and no declaration of mitigation is required. However, if the examination is for contact traces, biological and physical material, such that any further testing or examination would be subject to another FSA specified by the Code, then the scene is a location as defined in FSA – INC 100 and FSA – INC 100 applies.
- **Vehicles** – examination of vehicles for the purpose of determining the cause of a collision is FSA – INC 101. Compliance with the Code is not required and no declaration of mitigation is required. However, if the examination is for contact traces, biological and physical material, such that any further testing or examination would be subject to another FSA specified by the Code, then the scene is a location as defined in FSA – INC 100 and FSA – INC 100 applies.

20. Annex [C] – Decision making examples

Decision theme	Incident circumstances	Decision(s) made (would meet objectives)	Decision(s) made (may not meet objectives)
A decision to deviate from standard processes to recover evidence.	Outdoor assault scene, blood trails, blood on vehicles in the street, and discarded items in street. Very limited information and victim's condition is unknown. Adverse weather conditions.	Decision to commence recovery activity at scene with limited information to preserve evidence.	Decision not to recover blood from a broken window on the vehicle as had been unprotected and there could be contamination.
A decision to deviate from standard processes to recover evidence.	Outdoor assault scene, blood trails, blood on vehicles in the street, and discarded items in street. Very limited information and victim's condition is unknown. Adverse weather conditions.	Decision to use markers for later triangulation for measurements rather than two-point measures for each exhibit to maximise speed of recovery before evidence was lost.	Decision to not to photograph a footwear mark because of the weather and only gel lift, even though the practitioner is aware that the gel lift is unlikely to provide a mark suitable for comparison.

Decision theme	Incident circumstances	Decision(s) made (would meet objectives)	Decision(s) made (may not meet objectives)
A decision to deviate from standard processes to recover evidence.	Outdoor assault scene, blood trails, blood on vehicles in the street, and discarded items in street. Very limited information and victim's condition is unknown. Adverse weather conditions.	Decision to recover exhibits rather than sample in situ as a result of the contamination risk assessment.	Decision not to recover a drinks can as it is a “moveable object”
A decision to deviate from standard processes to recover evidence.	Outdoor assault scene, blood trails, blood on vehicles in the street, and discarded items in street. Very limited information and victim's condition is unknown. Adverse weather conditions.	Decision to examine a vehicle outside of a forensic facility to mitigate the risk of evidence loss from recovery.	Decision not to recover or sample an item that was handled briefly by a first responder because of contamination risk.
Limiting or delaying examination of a scene because of conditions at the scene or health and safety concerns.	Public unrest and community impact at a high-profile incident.	Delay examination to deploy other resources to support, calm and build rapport with community.	

Decision theme	Incident circumstances	Decision(s) made (would meet objectives)	Decision(s) made (may not meet objectives)
Limiting or delaying examination of a scene because of conditions at the scene or health and safety concerns.	Incident scene not structurally sound.	Decision to have a structural assessment of the scene prior to commencing examination.	
Limiting or delaying examination of a scene because of conditions at the scene or health and safety concerns.	Incident scene not structurally sound, or risk to health (e.g. asbestos, excess pigeon excrement, animal welfare issues, or inaccessibility of evidence).	Decision to request additional resources to access evidence on the roof, requirement for rope access or additional resources to access safely.	
Amending the examination strategy because of the scene assessment, evidence found, or new information received.	Incident scene is a sexual assault in a large park, initially little information on precise location of the assault.	Further information received, decision to reduce areas for examination; (e.g. CCTV footage recovered that provides a more precise location of the offence).	Used condom found and decision not to examine the scene for footwear marks as primary evidence already recovered.

Decision theme	Incident circumstances	Decision(s) made (would meet objectives)	Decision(s) made (may not meet objectives)
Care of complainant a priority to improve rapport, communication, and trust.	Vulnerable complainant or complainant with additional needs.	Decision to amend standard PPE to allow the complainant to see the practitioner's mouth when speaking (no face mask worn).	
Reduced actions in recognition of post incident environment – e.g. flooding / no preservation / passage of time.	Incident that was reported to police some days after it occurred. No scene preservation and significant post incident disruption and change.	Assess the type of incident and complainant needs. For a routine burglary offence: decision to speak with the complainant and undertake a limited scope examination	
Reduced actions in recognition of post incident environment – e.g. flooding / no preservation / passage of time.	Incident that was reported to police some days after it occurred. No scene preservation and significant post incident disruption and change.	Incident and/or complainant assessed as at high-risk decision to undertaken examination with a wide scope to attempt to recover evidence.	

Decision theme	Incident circumstances	Decision(s) made (would meet objectives)	Decision(s) made (may not meet objectives)
Reduced actions in recognition of post incident environment – e.g. flooding / no preservation / passage of time.	Historic sexual offence, significant change to scene since offence alleged to have occurred. e.g. building work, redecoration, change of ownership.	Assessment of incident scene and information provided and comparison to layout at the time of the offence to identify of areas for inclusion / exclusion in the examination strategy.	Decision not to examine the incident scene despite there being the potential for evidence to be recovered (e.g. original carpets still present)
Decision to request additional, specialist practitioners.	Scene of a bloodletting assault.	Decision to request attendance of a BPA expert to support interpretation of bloodletting events.	
Decision to request additional, specialist practitioners.	Scene of a bloodletting assault.	Decision not to request a BPA expert and for a practitioner to sample based on circumstances and information such as witness accounts, CCTV, and the timeline of investigation.	

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