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## **Fingerprints – a road map for reform**

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**December 2013**

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## **Fingerprints – a road map for reform**

The programme was funded by the Scottish Universities Insight Institute (SUII) and workshops were held in March and July 2012.

### **Program Team**

Professor Jim Fraser, University of Strathclyde

Professor Sue Black, University of Dundee

Mr Tom Nelson, Director, Scottish Police Authority Forensic Services

### **Program website:**

<http://www.scottishinsight.ac.uk/Programmes/Programmes20112012/>

FingerprintsARoadmapforReform.aspx

### **Programme Objectives**

These events were unique given that there has never before been a gathering of international fingerprint experts, managers and policy makers for this purpose. The first workshop consisted of senior international figures from academia, police and practice and aimed to analyse the issues, establish causes and failings, and make proposals for their resolution and future prevention. The second workshop focussed primarily on the communication of outputs from the first workshop to the practitioner community and engaged with this community to assess the realism of the proposals developed and their support for implementation.

Areas explored include:

- Identifying factors that contributed to the undesirable outcomes in these cases, how they arose and interacted
- Identifying factors of general relevance to fingerprint practices irrespective of jurisdiction
- Identifying practical and theoretical mechanisms to address the issues.

Specific issues explored included:

- Implications of previous poor practice?
- Evaluation of fingerprint identifications fit for purpose?
- Implications of adopting probabilistic interpretation in legal, professional and training terms?

- Significance of human factors such as cognitive bias and the human-machine interface
- Training of fingerprint experts, police and legal personnel?

## Impact

It was anticipated that these outputs would form the template for extensive changes to procedures in fingerprint examination and use of fingerprint evidence by the police and criminal justice systems. This would result in systematic improvements in the understanding and use of fingerprints. In Scotland these outputs will be of particular relevance to the Scottish Government and the various other parties involved in responding to the recommendations of the McKie Inquiry. It is also highly likely that recommendations will be of significant impact more widely, throughout the UK, continental Europe and the USA.

‘The workshops provided a useful insight into varying attitudes towards reform among fingerprint practitioners and underlined the changes needed in order to embed a modern quality management culture’

Andrew Rennison, Forensic Science Regulator

## Outputs

During the course of the two workshops a brief targeted questionnaire was circulated. The purpose of this was to obtain views of delegates regarding some of the specific challenges faced in the reform of fingerprint practices. A particular aim was to establish if there was consistency of views between managers and policy makers compared to practitioners. The survey provided the first data of this type and featured as an agenda item at the Forensic Science Regulators Fingerprint Quality Standards Group in 2012. The data was used to inform decisions and planning by the Forensic Science Regulator as well as other organisations involved in the reform of fingerprint policies and practices.

The data was also presented at a national meeting (Forensic Science Regulators Annual Stakeholder Conference 2013).

The survey process was also used independently by the Metropolitan Police to carry out an internal assessment of their fingerprint practices.

Both workshops were also reported independently in two articles the journal 'Fingerprint World' by delegates who attended each (Robert Doak FFS, Humberside Police and William Morris, Leicestershire Police.)

'Overall, the workshop was a very stimulating experience. Both days were crammed full of discussion about serious issues within fingerprinting that need to be solved, the workshop was a very stimulating experience.'

William Morris FFS. Forensic Identification Officer, Leicestershire Police.

Professor Jim Fraser  
Dec 2013