

**ASSOCIATION OF CHIEF POLICE OFFICERS IN SCOTLAND**

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Our Ref 4595/S/B/95  
Your Ref CP/N/12  
Date 14th December, 1995

W.A. Gilchrist, Esq.,  
Crown Office Policy Group,  
25 Chambers Street,  
EDINBURGH, EH1 1LA.

Dear Mr. Gilchrist,

**DRAFT LORD ADVOCATE'S GUIDELINES ON FINGERPRINT EVIDENCE**

I refer to your letter dated 4th December, 1995, in connection with the above subject and apologise for the delay in our response on this matter.

I can now confirm that the draft Guidelines have been considered by the SCRO Fingerprint Liaison Group and although their recommendations are still being considered by our Crime Standing Committee it may be of assistance to you to have sight of these views prior to the meeting of the Crown Office Standing Committee on Expert Evidence.

The Liaison Group have concluded that:

1. It is time to review the current national standard and the Guidelines are appropriate to prevent degradation of the only Forensic Science which is definitive in its conclusions.
2. Experts from all Scottish Fingerprint Bureaux are prepared to express opinion on Marks yielding less than the existing standard.
3. More emphasis should be placed on the quality of Mark rather than a specific number of characteristics.
4. Poor quality impressions that displayed incomplete detail, contamination with background material, smudging or blurring, as opposed to those where detail was clear and displayed rarity of pattern or characteristic, would be deemed of no value (insufficient for comparison or formulation of opinion). Because of the variances outlined above, it is unwise to set a numerical threshold.
5. Supplementary reports in relation to eliminations, Marks of no value and outstanding Marks, etc, can be produced, but to do so on a routine basis would significantly impact on the workload of the Bureaux with added resource implications.

6. Notwithstanding the aforementioned, it is of paramount importance that fingerprint experts within any Bureau are subject to structured training to a nationally agreed standard. This should be supplemented by performance monitoring inclusive of comprehensive checks on identifications made, routine auditing of all procedures and the regular competence testing of experts.

Delegates at meetings of the Liaison Group felt that the above are significant proposals and look forward to consultation with the Lord Advocate's department prior to any guidelines in relation to fingerprints being finalised.

I trust these interim comments are of assistance to you and I shall write again when I receive the final response from our Crime Standing Committee.

Yours sincerely,



(Sir William Sutherland)  
Chief Constable  
Hon. Secretary