Leisa Nichols-Drew – Written evidence (FRS0062)

The following statements are personal opinions, observations and experiences from a career within the UK Criminal Justice System since 2000.

Background Information:
Forensic Scientist with 18 years practitioner experience within major crime evidence recovery casework unit with the former Forensic Science Service (FSS) in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire and now at Cellmark Forensic Services in Abingdon, Oxfordshire.

Senior Lead Examiner with extensive expertise in co-ordinating complex forensic laboratory examinations of homicides, sexual offences, armed robberies, cold case reviews, also engagement in terrorism investigations. Also attendance at crime scenes, post-mortems, court and case conferences as requested.

Current skillset includes trace recovery (particulates, hairs, fibres etc) with biological evidence searching, presumptive chemical testing and documentation (blood pattern analysis, blood, cellular material, saliva, semen).

Previous FSS laboratory roles included Lead Technical Trainer (responsibility for writing and delivering all FSS evidence training packages), Quality Advisor and (reviewing and writing the evidential examination standard operating procedures as part of the quality management system and designing laboratory examination areas for adherence to ISO 17025,) and Laboratory Auditor (ensuring quality compliance and investigating any non-conformities).

Currently employed as a Lecturer at De Montfort University (DMU) in Leicester on the BSc (Hons) Forensic Science undergraduate degree course. When there no DMU commitments, this free time is used to partake in casework at Cellmark Forensic Services.

Awarded a Churchill Fellowship in 2018 from the UK Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, to investigate international forensic responses to knife crime. Within two phases this Churchill Fellowship will involve travelling to Canada and Australia to engage with forensic experts, investigators and researchers.

Understanding and use of Forensic Science in the Criminal Justice System
6. Is the current training available for practitioners, lawyers and the judiciary appropriate?

In my experience, the training of practitioners within Forensic Service Providers (FSPs) is specialised to the requirements of each company. However, there is no apparent consistency in training between FSPs. A national training provider or educational institution could endorse or accredit these courses for their content.
This could then additionally provide a cohesive approach for judiciary and lawyers.

During my recent research travels to Canada and Australia there are varied training approaches utilised. Online courses offering virtual training resources was a particular highlight.

**Standards and Regulation**

7. Is the current market for forensic services in England and Wales sustainable? Are changes needed to ensure forensic science provision is maintained at the level required? What are the risks of a market approach, for example what happens if a provider goes out of business? And what is the impact on quality?

In my opinion, there is some contingency in the capacity of FSPs to respond to market changes. For instance, where a provider may be at risk of closure then this casework is then transferred to other FSPs.

However, the UK forensic science marketplace is highly changeable due to the tendering process of police forces. Therefore, it could result in different offences being submitted to a variety of FSPs. A FSP may then have to outsource a service to another FSP to ensure that the casework targets are achieved.

8. Is the system of accreditation working successfully to ensure standardised results and the highest quality analysis and interpretation of significance of evidence?

   - Accreditation of Forensic Service Providers (laboratories) to ISO17025 and potentially ISO17020 (inspections e.g. crime scenes) is a successful rigorous system ensuring quality management and regular independent inspections via UKAS.
   - However, it is my opinion that police forces may require support and guidance as to the requirements for obtaining and maintaining accreditation as it is a continual process and not merely a task completed when the initial accreditation is achieved.
   - The accreditation process to ISO17025 itself does not relate to the significance or interpretation of evidence. Whereas, ILAC G19 is specific to forensic science and the UK Forensic Science Regulator guidelines and documentation do relate to and advise on evidential interpretation.

**Forensic Science Research Landscape**

12. How should further research funding for forensic science be justified? What should be the focus of such research? What is the role of UK Research and Innovation, especially considering the interdisciplinary nature of much forensic science?

   - The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust funded my recent Churchill Fellowship related to knife crime. This was a unique opportunity in that it is typically difficult to obtain funding for forensic science research.
- In my opinion, interdisciplinary research via partnerships of industry and academia could aid the research arena, particularly as translation to real world issues results in impact.

13. Where are the gaps in research and understanding of forensic science? How and by whom should the research questions be articulated to fill these gaps?

- The transfer and persistence of evidence should be researched further to provide essential background data to aid in the interpretation and evaluation.
- Previously, CAST hosted regular academia and practitioner meetings related to fingermark evidence in which pertinent industry issues were discussed that could be aided with research. This communication model would be useful for all evidence types as long as it were transparent to all interested parties.

15. Are there current or anticipated skills gaps? Who should have responsibility for and/or have oversight of training?

- A national forensic science training consensus could be a positive initiative to ensure consistency between and within organisations.
- Training is resource intensive (in time and personnel) which can impact on casework, especially as trainees will be mentored following successful achievement of competency.

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