

IDENTIFICATION PROCESS – GOOD PRACTICE

Procedural Advice for Police Officers and Staff Involved in the Identification Process Following the Discovery of Unidentified Bodies/Remains

Introduction

This document is intended to be used by police officers and staff involved in the identification process following the discovery of an unidentified body or human remains. Every case should be treated as suspicious until all investigative avenues have been exhausted and it is established that there are no suspicious circumstances.

It is important to recognise the likelihood that the deceased person may not be a resident of the UK. This may pose additional difficulties in identification and create a need to exchange information with forces or organisations outside UK jurisdiction (see page 11 and 12 for details). The services of the UK Missing Persons Bureau should be engaged at an early stage of the investigation ('the Bureau'; see page 9 for further details). Reference should also be made to relevant procedures according to Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) processes in the event of mass fatality incidents. Information in relation to this should be available from your force DVI lead.

Procedural Statement

The police service is committed to:

- Treating the deceased person with due dignity and respect;
- Identifying all deceased persons and remains accurately and promptly;
- Giving consideration to cultural needs;
- Ensuring a sympathetic and caring approach throughout the identification process which includes the recovery, investigation and subsequent family liaison;
- Assisting the duties of the Coroner.

Implications of Failure to Adopt Procedural Advice

Failure to follow correct identification procedures may lead to an incorrect or late identification of the deceased person. The implications to the police service are obvious as it has the potential to raise doubt as to the effectiveness and credibility of the investigation and any subsequent prosecution. It may result in loss of reputation, exposure to civil litigation and unnecessary waste of resources.

It could also have a serious impact on the mental and physical health of family and friends who have either been misinformed about the death or informed later than is reasonable.

CASE EXAMPLE – INCORRECT IDENTIFICATION

In January 2003 the decomposed body of an unidentified man was found in Manchester. Subsequent investigation identified a 67 year old man, John Delaney, who had gone missing from a nearby hostel in April 2000 and who matched the description. The identification was established through medical similarities and his family informed. No primary form of identification (e.g. DNA) was obtained. The man's body was cremated.

In May 2008 the Missing Live programme featured the details of an elderly man who had been found wandering disoriented in Oldham in May 2000. He was unable to remember his name and had been living in a local care home under the name David Harrison. This appeal was seen by John Renehan who made contact in the belief that the man was his father, John Delaney. DNA analysis established that this was John Renehan's father and not the body that was cremated.

Overriding Principle

Nothing in this document detracts from the primary responsibilities of police attending the scene of any death, which are:

- Preservation of life;
- Identification and preservation of primary and secondary scenes;
- Securing evidence;
- Identifying the deceased person;
- Identifying any suspect(s).

General Principles

A Coroner is responsible for:

- Identifying the deceased person:
- Investigating the cause and circumstances of sudden deaths where the cause is unknown or where the death is violent or unnatural

The police have a duty to assist a Coroner to perform his/her statutory obligations, albeit that local arrangements may affect the extent to which that assistance extends.

Roles and Responsibilities

Investigating Officer – An officer who is at least a substantive detective constable with responsibility for:

- Execution of all administrative and investigative tasks;
- Arrangements for attendance of support staff during post mortem examination;
- Recording data during post mortem examination.

Supervising Officer – An officer who is at least a substantive detective inspector with responsibility for:

- Oversight of the investigation;
- Review of the case after 7 and 28 days, 3 and 6 months, 1 year.

Coroner's Officer - Responsible for:

- Liaising with the Coroner;
- Practical arrangements for the post mortem examination;
- Oversight of the investigation for the information of the Coroner;
- Liaison/advice to family of deceased person where known.

Scenes of Crime Officer – Responsible for:

- Photography during post mortem examination;
- The taking of fingerprints and forensic samples as appropriate;
- Advising on securing and preserving evidence to nationally agreed standards

Identification Criteria

There are three main categories of Identification namely:

- Primary – includes identification by DNA, fingerprints, odontology or uniquely numbered surgical implants;
- Secondary – includes identification of jewellery, personal effects, distinctive clothing, marks, scars, tattoos and includes comparison of x-rays, physical disease, blood grouping or tissue identification;
- Supportive – includes comparison of photographs, descriptions and clothing and may also include factors that tend to suggest that identity can be deduced, such as where the body was located.

One example of a primary category can stand alone for identification purposes, however, two examples are required in the secondary category. The supportive category should only be used to support the other categories unless, in exceptional circumstances, there is absolutely no other option.

It follows, therefore, that whilst the Coroner will seek to prove beyond all reasonable doubt that identity is properly established, there may be occasions when the matter is satisfactorily concluded on the balance of probability.

Visual identification in isolation is not sufficiently reliable particularly in cases where there are trauma injuries to the deceased person, decomposition is present or the body has been found in water.

- For further information refer to the 'Guidance on the Identification of Bodies' produced by Professor Guy Rutty, Forensic Pathologist, Leicester University. The document can be accessed via the POLKA site (<https://polka.pnn.police.uk>) or by contacting the Bureau on 0845 000 5481.

Mortuary Identification Procedure

An initial discussion with the pathologist is required regarding the need to identify the deceased person as well as establish cause of death in line with their responsibilities under the Coroner's Rules.

The accurate recording of data and high quality imagery prior to and during the post mortem (PM) examination is crucial to the successful identification of the deceased person.

It must never be assumed that once retrieval of any one of the three main primary identification samples has been successful, identification will naturally follow. These samples can only be compared against those held on the National DNA (NDNAD), National Missing Person DNA (MPDD) or Fingerprint Databases. If the deceased person has not come to the attention of police before there will be a reliance on samples being obtained from missing person investigations. It should be noted that historically these samples have not routinely been collected or stored nationally, therefore, at present these samples are available in only a small percentage of cases. The Code of Practice implemented in April 2009 requires the taking of samples during missing person investigations which should continue to improve the proportion of cases where such samples are available and assist with subsequent identification.

In the absence of an immediate identification, direct comparison of ante-mortem (AM) data recorded within outstanding missing person reports will be conducted. This stage of the identification process is therefore crucial to the prospect of success.

Documentation

To assist in the identification process it is recommended that the person responsible for recording the data completes an Interpol DVI (PINK) Form. The form is comprehensive and if completed correctly will provide exhaustive data to assist the investigative strategy and hopefully determine the identity of the deceased person.

Whilst originally intended for Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) it is still a valuable resource for single cases, especially as it is the internationally recognised format for circulation of unidentified bodies. It is also the preferred option of the Bureau.

This form is available electronically at <http://www.interpol.int/INTERPOL-expertise/Forensics/DVI-Pages/Forms>.

Imagery

All photographs should be taken by an experienced forensic photographer because images taken at different angles and distances can make a significant difference in the appearance of the deceased which can impact on the likelihood of identification. Full length photographs should be taken of the front and rear of the deceased person, with and without clothes, as part of the PM process.

Ordinarily three photographs of the head should be taken looking at the face and view from the left and right sides. In cases where circulation of original images is impractical due to decomposition or trauma injury to the face, an additional two photographs must be taken equidistantly at angles of 45 degrees to assist with facial sketching, digital enhancement or manual/computerised facial reconstruction.

In dental cases the images should show the upper and lower sets individually with an additional image of both sets visible from the front. Some mortuaries are equipped with portable x-ray machines which should be used to take images of the jaws, teeth and any other extraordinary identifying feature. If such a machine is unavailable consideration should be given to sourcing one from elsewhere. In the absence of a machine, photographs should be taken if this adequately progresses the matter.

Images can also be taken using digital computed radiology (CR) which concentrates on the skeleton and produces a 2 dimensional image, or computed tomography (CT) scan, which provides a 2 or 3 dimensional image of soft and hard tissues of the body. The latter is particularly useful for facial reconstruction techniques. These specialised techniques are not routinely available and require forward planning.

Scaled photographs should also be taken of all clothing, jewellery, personal effects, marks, scars, tattoos and any other distinguishing features. This is particularly important for featuring on the Bureau website when photographs of the deceased person may not be appropriate (more information in the Bureau section).

Clothing and Footwear

Clothing and footwear can reveal a lot of information about the deceased person including lifestyle, possible country of origin and size.

Full details of clothing and footwear should be noted on the DVI Form including details of the type of garment, material, colour, label and size. Scaled photographs should be taken of all clothing and footwear to include the labels.

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Consideration should be given to the submission of undergarments for forensic examination with a view to identifying sexual partners. Each case is to be considered on its own merits and the advice of SOCO (Scenes of Crime Officers), CSI (Crime Scientific Investigators) and Scientific Support staff should be sought. Clothing should not be washed pending this decision.

Clothing should be removed from the body with minimal damage being caused. If it is necessary to cut the clothing off, it is preferable to cut along any existing seam in order to preserve the outward appearance of the garment should it be necessary to circulate via a press release to the media.

Footwear can also be examined by a forensic podiatrist for later comparison with footwear from possible missing persons. A Footwear Best Practice Manual V1_0 can be found on POLKA in the Forensics Community.

All clothing and footwear should be retained and handled in accordance with Force Policy.

Personal Effects

Full details of all items including glasses, contact lenses, identity papers and other personal effects should be recorded on the DVI Form.

It should be borne in mind that it is not always possible to recover fingerprints from the deceased person. In view of this, great care should be taken when handling these items so as to ensure that fingerprints are not obliterated during the searching/recovery phase.

All items should be photographed, retained and handled in accordance with Force Policy.

Jewellery

Jewellery can also reveal a lot of information about the deceased person, including lifestyle and possible country of origin.

Full details of jewellery and watches should be noted on the DVI Form, including details of type of item, brand, material, colour, design, inscriptions and hallmarks. These details should include where each item was worn.

Scaled photographs of the worn items should be taken. Once they are removed they should be photographed separately to assist with future press releases or identification strategies. Whilst jewellery may be commercially mass produced, it is possible that the combination of jewellery worn or the presence of handmade or designer pieces could be unique to the individual and may therefore bear clues as to the identity of the deceased person.

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Hallmarks on jewellery could also disclose not only the country of origin but the region within that country that they were assigned. Advice can be sought in the first instance from the Goldsmiths' Company website at <http://www.thegoldsmiths.co.uk> There may also be names and/or dates inscribed on items such as rings, bangles, lockets and watches. Locketts may hold photographs of loved ones which could be suitable for circulation in their own right.

All jewellery and watches should be retained and handled in accordance with Force Policy.

Physical Description

Details of the following descriptive features should be recorded on the DVI Form;

- state of the body
- estimated age
- height
- weight
- build
- race
- head
- hair
- forehead
- eyebrows; eyes
- nose
- facial hair
- ears
- mouth
- lips
- teeth
- smoking habits
- chin
- neck
- hands
- feet
- body hair
- pubic hair
- circumcision
- other peculiarities.

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The strict order of the DVI Form should be followed and reference made to the useful graphic help notes.

A body sketch is provided which should be used to show all distinguishing marks etc. Photographs, as a minimum standard, should also be taken of anything distinguishing. It is important that references to marks, scars, burning, etc, noted by the pathologist are of no significance to the DVI Forms if they were inflicted at the time of death or after. The DVI Forms are purely to assist with the identification procedure.

Fingerprints

Fingerprints must be obtained where feasible. Advice from a SOCO should be sought at the earliest opportunity as it is essential that a good quality set of fingerprints are taken and a number of retrieval techniques can be used to do this depending on the condition of the deceased person. Fingerprints include palm prints and may include plantar impressions. Do not remove limbs to conduct these enquiries.

Any finger or palm prints obtained from the deceased person must be submitted at the earliest opportunity to the local force fingerprint bureau for searching. Approximately 20% of the adult male population has a fingerprint record on IDENT1. The use of a mobile fingerprint reader such as a 'lantern' device may yield fast results where the cadaver is not in an advanced state of decomposition and can give an indicative identity result in seconds or a few minutes.

If the result is negative it will then be a case of comparing prints with those of outstanding missing person cases where there are descriptive or geographical links to the deceased person. Advice should be sought from the Bureau who can advise on long term retention of these prints.

Where finger or palm prints have been obtained from the deceased person and they have no fingerprint record but a possible identity is suspected, it may be possible to obtain marks for comparison by conducting a fingerprint examination within the home or working environment of the individual. It must be borne in mind that exclusivity of any marks found is the key to a successful identification where this approach is used. Chemically treating items, such as paper, that can be taken from these locations and that the missing person may have handled is relatively straight forward. For instance, items such as the inside of payslips or diary pages may yield useful finger marks that are quite likely to belong to the individual of interest and can be used for comparison purposes.

Footprints cannot be searched, but could potentially be compared against marks obtained from a place of residence, as above, where a possible identity is suspected.

DNA

DNA must be obtained and submitted to the force Forensic Service Provider (FSP) for comparison against the National DNA Database and National Missing Persons DNA Database.

If the result is negative it will then be a case of attempting to obtain DNA from outstanding missing person cases where there are descriptive or geographical links to the deceased person. This can be achieved by either seizing personal items used exclusively by the missing person (such as hairbrushes, toothbrushes etc.) or by kinship DNA sampling (obtaining samples from proven blood relatives). In the latter case it is prudent to seek multiple donors and ensure the relevant consent forms are completed.

Further advice is available from the Bureau, the Forensic Service Provider or the Home Office National DNA Delivery Unit.

Toxicology

The use of prescription and illicit drugs can be identified which may assist in ascertaining the lifestyle of the deceased person. Body fluid, hair, soft and hard tissue can all be used for this purpose. The results may lead to further lines of enquiry if the prescription drugs are uncommon or prescribed in an unusual combination.

Biochemistry

Biochemical tests may show that the deceased person suffered from medical conditions such as diabetes or thyroid disease. Various samples can be subjected to testing. The results may assist with further lines of enquiry or in the elimination of possible cases.

Isotope analysis is a developing technique designed to assist with identifying possible geographic regions where the person may have lived prior to their death. Further advice for this is available from the NCA Specialist Operations Centre on 0845 000 5463.

Internal Examination

Examination will include the head, chest, abdomen, other internal organs, skeleton/soft tissue and other various checks. All findings must be fully recorded on the DVI Form.

The role of the UK Missing Persons Bureau

General

The Bureau operates the central national database of missing persons and unidentified bodies/body parts and persons, and maintains a Dental Record Index, to assist both national and international exchange of information. It provides a free cross-matching service to assist the reconciliation of missing person cases with unidentified person or body cases across the UK.

The Database

Since the introduction of the Code of Practice in 2009, all police forces are required to submit case details to the Bureau for inclusion on its HERMES database in respect of:

- All persons reported missing in the UK;
- All foreign nationals reported (via Interpol or any other means) as missing in the UK;
- All UK nationals reported as missing abroad;
- All unidentified bodies, body parts or persons found within the UK.

Whilst unidentified bodies/body parts/persons have to be reported to the Bureau within 48 hours, missing person cases are not required to be submitted until 72 hours have lapsed since the initial report being made to police, and no later than 84 hours, unless there is a particular cause for concern. It should also be noted that some forces are as yet unable to transfer regular data to the Bureau, therefore, it should not be assumed that HERMES holds live data.

Consideration should be given to circulating the subject's details via an all forces PNC broadcast or a selected force broadcast (e.g. SE region). If there is a possibility the subject may be from another force area, the Force(s) should be contacted directly in the first instance.

The Bureau has developed a website to publicise information about unidentified people, bodies and remains, enlisting the help of the public to maximise chances of identification. Photographs of deceased persons are featured on the site but require full permission of the user to view; if this is not appropriate then photographs of clothing, jewellery and distinguishing features will be used. The public can review unidentified cases and send details regarding a potential identity via the online reporting form. The Bureau will review the information and if appropriate pass it to the investigating force for their attention. The website has led to several successful outcomes and is an important and valuable publicity tool in unidentified investigations.

The Bureau is open weekdays between 08:30 and 5:00 to provide further advice and support to forces dealing with these enquiries.

Notification to the Bureau

The first line of enquiry to identify the deceased person will be to check missing person reports recorded locally. These checks will extend to those recorded elsewhere in the force area where the deceased person is found, and/or neighbouring or specific force areas if there are reasons to suspect the deceased person may have a connection to that area.

In the event that these prove negative, and identification is not made within 48 hours, you must submit case details to the Bureau.

Once you have notified the Bureau on 0845 000 5481 or via missingpersons@nca.pnn.police.uk and have submitted the relevant forms, they will carry out checks to determine if any person reported missing and notified to the Bureau matches the details of the unidentified body or remains. They can also circulate the case details to other Forces, if required, via their network of single points of contacts (SPOCs).

All missing person and unidentified body cases must be cancelled within 24 hours where they have been traced or identified and next of kin informed, with details of their name, date of birth and method of identification.

Forensic Identification Databases

Dental Records

The Bureau currently holds the central dental index for missing persons and unidentified bodies, therefore it is essential that charting information from your deceased person be submitted to the Bureau at the earliest opportunity to support the comparison process.

DNA

The Home Office holds the National Missing Persons DNA Database (MPDD) for the retention of profiles of missing persons and unidentified bodies. Details should be sent to this database as well as the National DNA Database for comparison, via your Forensic Service Provider. In order to be able to do so the Bureau's database (Hermes) reference will need to be supplied. This can be obtained from the Bureau following notification of the case.

NOTE: It is important that an accredited forensic supplier (e.g. LGC, Cellmark) is used to obtain the DNA profile otherwise this cannot be searched or loaded on either database.

The Code of Practice 2009 requirements specify that:

- In high risk missing person cases the forensic samples should be obtained within 24 hours of the report being made.
- In all other cases they should be obtained within 7 days.
- All samples should be retained and submitted if the person is still missing after 28 days, although this can be done sooner if required.

Information to the Bureau

The prompt electronic transfer of the following is requested by the Bureau:

- All photographs
- DVI Form
- Dental Charts
- FSP DNA references

Useful Contacts

The Bureau has a network of contacts within charities and other partner agencies that are prepared to publicise missing persons and/or unidentified bodies found. These organisations may provide publicity via their websites or publicity material such as flyers, posters etc.

International Contacts

The Bureau has a network of international contacts both in law enforcement and NGO's that can be utilised for information exchange. This network does not bypass Interpol procedures but can be engaged simultaneously to make the process faster and more efficient.

The Bureau has an agreement in place with each of the North Sea bordering countries from France through to Scandinavia. The Bureau will notify this North Sea Group if a body is found in the sea and it is possible that it may be someone from their shores. Likewise these countries will notify the Bureau of bodies they find on their coast line.

NCA Specialist Operations Centre (SOC)

Advice is available from the NCA regarding specialists involved in varying aspects of identification including odontologists, facial mapping experts, sketch artists, facial reconstruction experts, forensic podiatrists etc. as well as medical experts involved in providing expert opinion with the National Injuries Database team. The SOC can also assist with arranging age progression images for long term missing person cases that could be used for comparison against unidentified persons.

The SOC can be contacted via 0845 000 5463 or via SOC@nca.pnn.police.uk

The role of the Police National Computer (PNC) Bureau

Within 48 hours of finding an unidentified body the PNC Bureau should be notified of details. The purpose of this circulation is to create an Information Marker on the PNC that an unidentified body has been found. This record is then searchable from any PNC terminal and will be a useful tool for those investigating missing person reports. The PNC Bureau will also, by separate request, create a PNC Bulletin detailing the case for circulation to all forces.

Once the body has been identified and next of kin informed, the case must be cancelled at the PNC Bureau. This must be done within 24 hours of the identification.

The role of Interpol

With increasingly internationally transient communities, it may be the case that the deceased person has been reported missing from a foreign country.

If the enquiries previously detailed are completed and an identification has still not been made, or it is suspected that there may be an international dimension, a circulation via Interpol should be considered. This circulation is called a Black Notice and will be circulated to the 187 member nations. To action this circulation you should contact your International Liaison Officer.

Police Gazette

Details of the unidentified body can be circulated through the Police Gazette by contacting the Bureau on 0845 000 5481 or by completing an on-line submission to be found on POLKA in the Police Gazette Community.

The role of the Press/Media Office

The press/media office should be briefed at the earliest opportunity when assistance of the media is needed.

Consideration should be given to releasing digitally enhanced images, sketches or computer generated images to assist in identification. These images could be released in conjunction with images of jewellery, clothing or personal effects. It is crucial that not all identifying data is released in order that responses can be adequately screened prior to allocation of resources.

Details of Contacts and Websites listed in this Document

Missing Persons Bureau:

missingpersons bureau@nca.pnn.police.uk

Telephone: 0845 000 5481

<http://missingpersons.police.uk>

Specialist Operation Centre:

SOC@nca.pnn.police.uk

Telephone: 0845 000 5463

Interpol DVI (pink) form:

<http://www.interpol.int/INTERPOL-expertise/Forensics/DVI-Pages/Forms>

Goldsmiths' Company:

<http://www.thegoldsmiths.co.uk>

Police Gazette:

POLKA – Police Gazette Community

National Footwear Collection Reference:

[**POLKA - Forensics Community**](#)

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