

**Title:** Effective evaluation of forensic interviews: The Forensic Interview Trace (FIT)<sup>©</sup>

**Running Title:** The Forensic Interview Trace (FIT)<sup>©</sup>

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## **Effective evaluation and analysis of forensic interviews: The Forensic Interview Trace<sup>®</sup>**

### **Abstract**

Forensic interviewing forms an integral part of a police/law enforcement officer's main duties and responsibilities. However, not every interviewer possesses suitable interview skills to be able to complete this effectively. Despite the introduction of the PEACE model of interviewing, with the last 'E' focusing specifically on 'Evaluation', this stage of the interview model rarely gets the attention it deserves. This is concerning given the need for forensic interviews to be legally 'bomb-proof'. Although the Griffiths Question Map (GQM) has gone some way to assist in the effective evaluation of forensic interviews, focusing solely on question types restricts its use in evaluating the entirety of a forensic interview. However, the more recently developed Forensic Interview Trace (FIT)<sup>®</sup> allows the reviewer to record all aspects of a forensic interview, including questioning, interviewee responses, and interviewer and interviewee characteristics. This ensures that effective evaluations of forensic interviews can be undertaken to ensure compliance with relevant guidance and legislation, whilst continuously evaluating individual interview performance to ensure that effective interview skills pertain to best practice.

**Keywords:** Forensic interviews, police, evaluation, questioning, information gain

## Introduction

### The Forensic Interview

Forensic interviewing is a crucial part of the judicial process to progress any investigation, with the intention of gathering as much accurate and reliable information as possible (Oxburgh & Ost, 2011). The PEACE model in England and Wales provides interviewers with an ethical foundation for interviewing any type of interviewee (Williamson, 2006). PEACE is the mnemonic acronym for the five stages of forensic interviewing; (Planning and preparation, Engage and explain, Account clarify and challenge, Closure, and Evaluation (CPTU, 1992a, b; NCF, 2000). It is now the most widely used and accepted method of forensic interviewing for victims, witnesses and suspects across the world including (but not limited to) Australia, parts of Canada, England and Wales, New Zealand and Norway. An adapted version of the various phases of the PEACE model of interviewing, as outlined by NCF (1996; 1998; 2000 [pp. 37-71]) and Centrex (2004, p.77-79) are detailed below:

**Planning and preparation** – This is a vital part of all investigative interviews (whether a victim, witness or suspect) and interviewing officers must first consider how the interview might contribute to the overall investigation. The interviewing officer/s should have a clear understanding of the purpose of the interview and should consider when and where it will take place. If there are two interviewing officers, they should be clear what each other's roles are within the interview, but they should also be aware of all known facts in the case and, if interviewing a suspect, they should have all available evidence against him/her (and have any exhibits available) and know at what point in the interview the evidence will be disclosed. Before commencing the interview, the interviewer should make any necessary arrangements for the attendance of other persons such as a legal advisor, a Registered Intermediary<sup>1</sup>, Appropriate Adult, interpreter etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Communication experts called in by police and the criminal justice system with backgrounds in speech and language therapy, psychology, mental health, vulnerability *per se* and recruited, selected, trained and accredited by the UK Ministry of Justice.

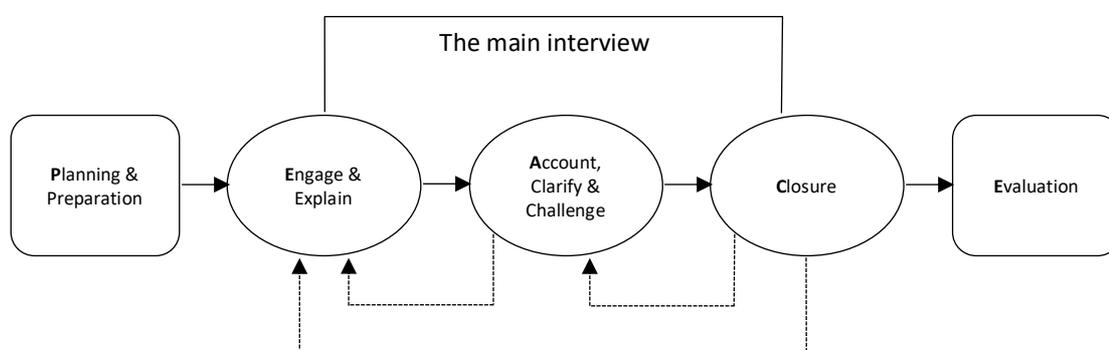
**Engage and explain** – This is the first main phase of the actual interview (see figure 1) and involves the opening of the interview and building rapport with the interviewee – this phase is crucial to the interview’s overall success; however, anecdotal evidence suggests this phase is not given the attention it deserves. Interviewers should use appropriate language, avoid legal jargon, should be flexible in their approach, and try to create a relaxed atmosphere reassuring the interviewee if necessary. All individuals present in the interview room should be introduced and their roles explained. The reasons for the interview and the procedures that will be followed in the interview should be explained, including how long (approximately) the interview will last, together with a basic outline of the interview, including who will ask the most questions, who will be taking notes, and the introduction of any exhibits. Interviewees should be encouraged to say when they don’t know, or are unsure about something.

**Account, clarify and challenge** – The aim of this phase is to gain as much information as possible and in the interviewee’s own words; this helps increase accuracy and consistency. Interviewer/s should obtain an initial free recall from the interviewee and then sub-divide the account into sub-sections to probe for more detail or clarify any details provided. The interviewer may use several attempts to get the interviewee to recall their events; this may involve encouraging the interviewee to change their perspective before challenging them on all relevant factors using appropriate questioning techniques (e.g., open depth or open breadth questions [Tell..., Explain..., Describe...], followed by focussed prompts, also known as probing or 5WH questions [Who..., What..., When..., Where..., How...]). During the challenge part of this phase, the officer/s should introduce any relevant exhibits (if a suspect) and other evidence available.

**Closure** – This phase involves the interviewer/s summarising what has occurred during the interview to ensure that there is a mutual understanding about what has taken place. This is an ideal opportunity to verify that all aspects have been sufficiently covered (with the interviewee and the second interviewer if appropriate). The interviewer/s should also explain what will happen after the interview is completed. If this phase is conducted appropriately, it should facilitate a positive attitude towards the interviewee helping the police in the future.

**Evaluation** – This phase is vitally important. It is not just about the evaluation of how much information was obtained, or whether a confession was obtained (if a suspect), rather, it should include the interviewer/s evaluating their own personal performance including questions asked, information obtained, whether sufficient rapport was established, whether empathy was used throughout, and whether all aspects of the model were upheld. Adherence to policy and practice should also be reviewed.

Figure 1 shows the linear model that includes all processes before, during and after the PEACE interview.



**Figure 1.** The PEACE model of interviewing (adapted from the National Crime Faculty [NCF], 1996, p.21).

The current paper addresses the 'Evaluation' stage of the PEACE model (the last 'E' in PEACE; Oxburgh & Dando, 2011), as anecdotal evidence suggests it rarely gets the attention it deserves and warrants. This is concerning on a number of levels. First, such evaluations ensure the interviewer is complying with the appropriate policies and practices, as well as legislative practices. Second, this stage allows for the interview to be examined within the context of its aims and objectives and for further areas of investigation to be identified. Third, in addition to the procedural aspects of the forensic interview, conducting effective evaluations allows the interviewer to reflect upon their own practice and consider what (if any) improvements could be made in their future interviews. This is becoming increasingly important given the often-limited refresher training and resources available to those conducting forensic interviews (Wright & Powell, 2006). Interviewers are required to be skilled in their practice, especially as they can be held accountable for their own performance. As such, interviews must be legally 'bomb-proof' as well as being ethical and effective (see Oxburgh & Hynes, 2016).

## **The Importance of Conducting Evaluations of Forensic Interviews**

Conducting interviews is a highly complex and dynamic process regardless of the type of interview conducted. Interviews of a forensic nature must consider a vast amount of issues when interviewing victims, witnesses and/or suspects, including those relating to information gained from the account and subsequent impact upon the progression of the investigation and any procedural and technical issues (De Fruyt, Bockstaele, & De Greek, 2006). Maintaining effective interview skills pertaining to best practice, is, therefore, vital and can be achieved with continuous evaluation of the individuals' interview performance.

Anecdotally, police officers make reference to not having enough time or resources to evaluate their interview performance, especially if the investigation is high-profile in nature. Although this is not overly surprising given the limited funding and resources available to police forces in England and Wales, it is concerning. Information gained in such interviews often goes on to inform the subsequent stages of the overall investigation, thus, making this an important stage within the judicial process (Smets & Rispens, 2014). Although the interviewing of any type of interviewee (victims, witnesses, suspects) forms an integral part of a police/law enforcement officer's main duties and responsibilities, not everyone possesses suitable interview skills to be able to complete this effectively (Bockstaele, 2002). In addition, what police officers believe they are doing in terms of questioning practice does not always reflect what is actually occurring (Oxburgh, Gabbert, Milne & Cherryman, 2016; Farrugia & Gabbert, submitted). As such, evaluating forensic interviews allows individuals to not only explore areas of best practice that are already being completed, but also and perhaps more importantly, identify those areas that may require further learning. This ensures that further interview performance can be enhanced and optimised (Smets & Rispens, 2014) and that the quality of forensic interviews is maintained and improved where necessary.

There are varying views as to what constitutes a 'good quality' or 'effective' interviews (Baldwin, 1992), given the different variables that can be accounted for. For example, the context of the interview; whether it be within a forensic context or within other contexts such as that of a doctor-patient interaction, or individual personalities and the impact of question type; individuals may respond to specific types of questions which others may class as of poorer quality (Shepherd & Griffiths, 2013). In addition, those attempting to make an evaluation of a 'good quality' forensic interview may discover that there are very few

ground rules as interviewers will interview in their own way (although it is expected this will be in accordance with interview guidelines and legislation). Consequently, it can be difficult to assess the ‘quality’ of any given interview. However, within a forensic interview context, initial research has highlighted that the interview is of ‘good quality’ if considerations have been given to, for example: (i) the appropriate planning and preparation being completed (ii) a knowledge and compliance with the law has been shown; (iii) appropriate questioning has been applied, and; (iv) the use of rapport and empathy (amongst other factors; McGurk, Carr, & McGurk, 1993; Milne & Bull, 1999; Stockdale, 1993). More recent research has also advocated that a ‘good quality’ interview should also include the use of a free narrative and refers to the amount of detail elicited from the interviewee (Westcott, Kynan & Few, 2006). Thus, methods of evaluating forensic interviews need to be able to accommodate for all of these factors (and more).

### **Current Methods in Evaluating Forensic Interviews**

Currently, there is no standardised practice for evaluating forensic interviews in England and Wales, despite the PEACE model of interviewing being used for several decades. In fact, some organisations do not complete any evaluation of their interview performance, risking a decline in skillset or an increase in malpractice (Lamb *et al.*, 2002). Of those that do monitor performance, the methods in which forensic interviews are evaluated differ widely.

Various research conducted into the evaluation of forensic interviews has established that interview quality is improved following the ‘coaching’ of police officers in interview competencies or supervision of forensic interview practices, thus emphasising the importance of interview supervision in ensuring the maintenance of best practice (Lamb *et al.*, 2002; Powell & Wright, 2008; Smets, 2012). In addition to standard supervision with a mentor or superior, discussing interview performance amongst peers (known as ‘interviewing’) is another method which can assist in performance monitoring (Smets & Rispens, 2014). This can be undertaken in addition to individual evaluations of interviews, group and/or individual coaching. However, whilst interview performance is enhanced immediately after or during the interview evaluation, research has indicated that learned investigative interview skills drop significantly once each supervision session has ended (Lamb *et al.*, 2002). This suggests the need for regular and ongoing supervision and support. Yet, there is still no standardised

method or tool to assist those required (or keen) to maintain and develop their skillset through the evaluations of their own interviews. Some police forces and academic researchers use the Griffiths Question Map (GQM; Griffiths, 2008).

### **The Griffiths Question Map**

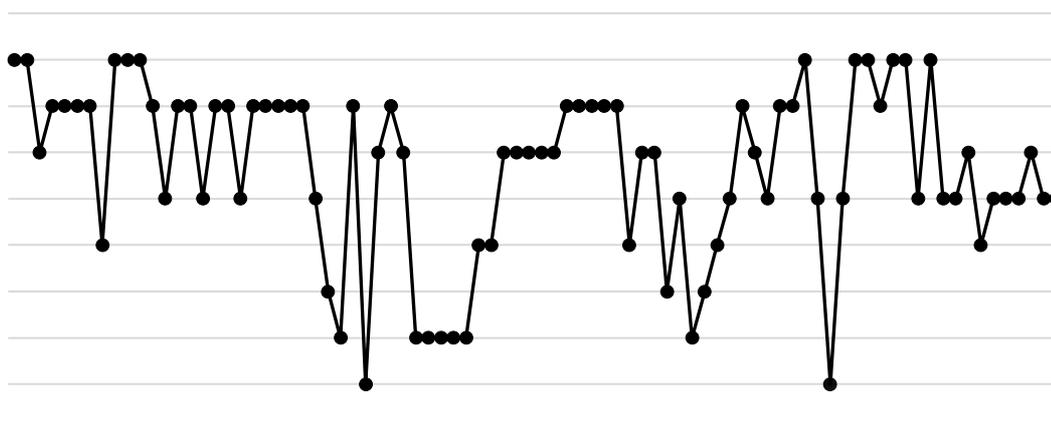
The Griffiths Question Map (GQM) is a tool which ultimately maps the chronology and sequencing of questions asked across the timespan of an investigative interview (Griffiths, 2008). Using question types defined individually and categorised as appropriate and inappropriate within the psychological literature (Hargie & Dickson, 2004; Milne & Bull, 1999), the GQM provides the reviewer with a visual record. The following eight question types are utilised as part of the GQM (see Griffiths, 2008 for full details):

**Appropriate:** (i) open, (ii) probing, and (iii) appropriate closed

**Inappropriate:** (iv) inappropriate closed, (v) leading, (vi) multiple, (vii) forced choice, and (viii) opinion/statement

The GQM can be created and managed using an Excel spreadsheet and allocating one line for each question type. This allows for each question type to be plotted onto the appropriate line. The plots are subsequently joined together so that a visual map is formed of the question types used during the interview (see Figure 2 for an example). In addition, the reviewer can manually insert blocks of times or breaks taken for example.

This tool is efficient in that it is relatively easy to train individuals to categorise questions appropriately and utilise the GQM. Griffiths (2008) trained serving police officers in the use of the GQM and its effectiveness. He found that the level of agreement between police officers for all question types was 87.1%. Further research has also highlighted the usefulness of the GQM. Dodier and Denault (2017) used the GQM to objectively describe the way in which an interviewer questioned an adolescent during a police investigation. Furthermore, its graphical representation of the quality of an interview has also proven useful in court proceedings when evaluating evidence. For example, Griffiths (2008) outlines a case study whereby a trial Judge excluded an interview from the proceedings due to the erratic style of questions asked, illustrated graphically via the use of the GQM.



**Figure 2.** Example of a completed GQM (adapted from Griffiths, 2008, pp. 222-223)

Whilst there is no doubt that the GQM has assisted in the evaluation of interviews *per se* and provides a useful visual display of the types of questions asked during an interview, its use is somewhat limited. Conducting forensic interviews (or interviews of any nature) is a highly complex and dynamic process and involves more than the questioning of an individual. Focusing solely on question types restricts the GQM's use in that it does not provide many other details (i.e. length or specific details of responses provided, use of rapport, empathy, impact of interviewee characteristics; Dodier & Denault, 2017), that may impact upon the forensic interview process and that may be of specific interest to interviewing officers when evaluating their own interview performance, or to other professionals working as part of the criminal justice system (expert witnesses, legal professionals, members of the judiciary), or indeed to academics researchers. The evaluation of the quality of the forensic interview requires a tool that will encompass more than the questioning strategy.

## **The Forensic Interview Trace<sup>®</sup>**

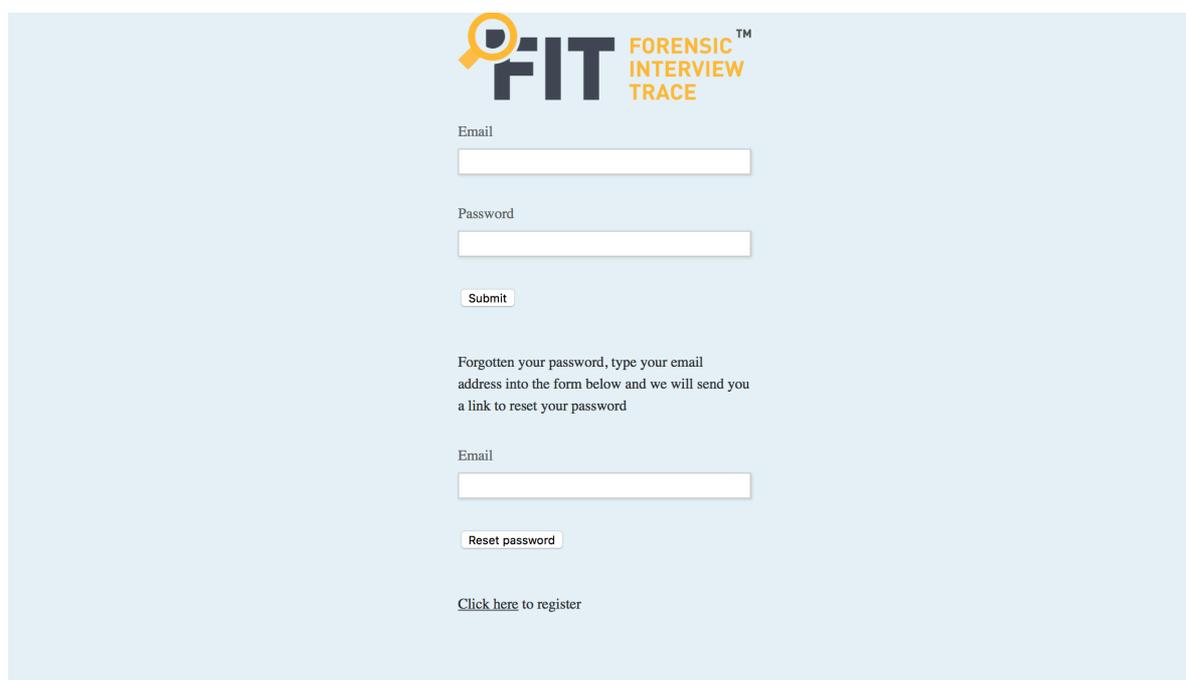
### **Background**

The Forensic Interview Trace (FIT)<sup>®</sup> is a secure computer programme that has been specifically developed to: (i) record the structure, content and characteristics of a forensic interview involving victims, witnesses and suspects (or 'persons of interests'); (ii) visually

represent the structure and content of forensic interviews, and (iii) assess the efficacy and quality of forensic interviews for the purposes of national and international judicial processes (including police and law enforcement agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the private sector), and the continuation of professional development of interviewers.

### Use and Access to FIT<sup>®</sup>

The FIT<sup>®</sup> can be installed on institutional services and subsequently used on an individual, group or institutional basis with each user provided with secure log-in details (see Figure 3). Each user will only have access to their own individual interviews, with a hierarchy of secure access to supervisors and line-managers. Users can upload and store audio/video files of forensic interviews in addition to the upload and storage of documents relevant to the planning and preparation of such interviews. Each user can record details of all demographic information relating to the interviewer and interviewee, plus interactions during the selected interview/s, including, but not limited to: (i) types of questions asked; (ii) information gained from the interviewee in response to the questions asked; (iii) breaks taken, and; (iv) other persons present etc. In addition, the user can add notes or comments justifying particular questioning styles or other relevant material.



The image shows a web-based login interface for FIT (Forensic Interview Trace). At the top center, there is a logo consisting of a magnifying glass icon over the letters 'FIT', followed by the text 'FORENSIC INTERVIEW TRACE'. Below the logo, there are two input fields: one labeled 'Email' and one labeled 'Password'. A 'Submit' button is positioned below the password field. Underneath the submit button, there is a text-based link for password recovery: 'Forgotten your password, type your email address into the form below and we will send you a link to reset your password'. This is followed by another 'Email' input field and a 'Reset password' button. At the bottom of the page, there is a link that says 'Click here to register'.

**Figure 3.** FIT secure log in page.

Once all of the information is uploaded and the interview is analysed by the user, the FIT<sup>®</sup> provides a visual ‘trace’ and summary of the entire interview (minute-by-minute; see figure 4) and enables full evaluation and reflection of the interview and the interviewer/s’ behaviour and skills for the purposes of continuing professional development (see figure 5). The FIT<sup>®</sup> is fully customisable to the needs of the specific clients regardless of background (e.g. police and law enforcement, NGOs, financial institutions, insurance companies etc.) and full reports of each interview can be downloaded and printed if required.

Open questions (breadth)												X	X			X		X	X
Open questions (depth)	X	X				X								X	X		X		
Probing/Focused (wh- questions)					X														
Encouragement/Facilitators																			
Echo statements																			
Closed questions			X	X			X		X	X									
Forced choice/Option posing																			
Multiple questions																			
Opinion statement																			
Leading questions																			
Clarification							X			X									
Person						2		1				1	1			3			
Action	2								1	1	1	1	1	1		3	1		1
Location																			
Item																			
Temporal											1	1	1						
Suggestability																			
Compliance	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Acquiescence																			
Interruption by Interviewer																			
Silence by Interviewer																			
Suggestion of Possible Scenarios																			
Summary																			
Communication Aid																			
Empathy																			
Time	00:26:30	00:26:42	00:27:00	00:27:12	00:27:25	00:27:49	00:28:57	00:29:24	00:29:39	00:29:43	00:30:21	00:30:32	00:31:17	00:32:34	00:32:47	00:33:25	00:34:23	00:34:46	00:35:10

Figure 4. Example (a) of visual trace produced by FIT<sup>®</sup>

## Engage and explain

[«Back](#)

Please select whether any of the following featured in the interview.

### Introductions

- : Investigator introduced him/herself.
- : All colleagues and other persons present introduced to interviewee.
- : Investigator explained what the interview was about.
- : Investigator asked if interviewee had discussed their memories about the incident with anyone, prior to the interview.
- : Investigator explained rights to legal advice (where relevant).
- : Investigator explained about any recording procedure and use of material (where relevant).
- : Explain reasons for arrest and interview topics (where relevant).
- : Investigator provided clear caution, or local equivalent (where relevant).

### Engage phase

- : Establish use of preferred name.
- : Address any concerns or anxieties.
- : Build rapport.

*Specific rapport techniques; tick any that featured in your interview:*

- : Rapid rapport techniques (i.e., intentional use of similarities to promote trust, engagement, and cooperation).
- : Subtle use of mirroring.
- : Active listening (i.e. "uh huh", and paraphrasing).
- : Open body language.

### Explain phase

Please select all that featured in your interview.

*Explanations relating to interviewer behaviour, including:*

- : It was made clear that the investigator or 2nd interviewer (where appropriate) will be taking notes.
- : It was made clear that the investigator/s will not interrupt.

*Explanations relating to expectations of interviewee, including:*

- : It was made clear that everything should be reported in as much detail as possible.
- : It was made clear that specific information is valuable (such as unique descriptions that help distinguish one person/car/object/etc. from another).
- : It was made clear that the interviewee should not guess.
- : It was made clear that qualifiers (such as "I don't know", or "I'm not sure") can and should be used.

Briefly describe any additional information about the Engage & Explain phase of the interview.

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Save & continue »

**Figure 5.** Example (b) of visual trace produced by FIT<sup>®</sup>

The FIT<sup>®</sup>, therefore, allows all aspects of a forensic interview to be incorporated into the analysis and reflection, ensuring that the whole of this dynamic process can be captured and evaluated upon. This allows for the maintenance of effective interviewing skills whilst upholding a ‘good quality’ interview. Whilst still in its infancy, the FIT<sup>®</sup> is currently being piloted by several organisations in evaluating forensic interviews.

## Conclusion

Forensic interviewing is a crucial part of any investigation and since the introduction of the PEACE model of interviewing, the onus is now on gathering reliable and accurate information. Although the interviewing of any type of interviewee (victims, witnesses, suspects) forms an integral part of a police/law enforcement officer’s main duties and responsibilities, not every interviewer possesses suitable interview skills to be able to complete this effectively (Bockstaele, 2002). The last ‘E’ of the PEACE model focuses on ‘Evaluation’, yet anecdotal evidence suggests it rarely gets the attention it deserves. This is concerning given the impact that forensic interviews have on furthering the investigation. In addition, forensic interviews need to comply with local/current policies and legislative guidance, and, given that interviewers are regularly held accountable for their interview practice, such interviews must be of ‘good quality’ and legally bomb-proof (Oxburgh & Hynes, 2016).

Currently there is no standardised practice for evaluating forensic interviews in England and Wales (and indeed in many other countries). Some organisations utilise standard supervision with a mentor or superior, others undertake individual evaluations of interviews or participate in group and/or individual coaching. However, whilst interview performance is enhanced immediately after or during the interview evaluation, research has indicated that learned investigative interview skills drop significantly once each supervision session has ended (Griffiths, 2008; Lamb *et al.*, 2002). This suggests the need for regular and ongoing supervision and support.

The Griffiths question map (GQM) is one tool that has assisted in evaluating interviews to some extent (see Griffiths, 2008). Mapping the chronology and sequencing of questions across the timespan of an interview, it provides the reviewer with a visual record. However, given the dynamic and highly complex process of a forensic interview, focusing

solely on question types only goes some way in effectively evaluating forensic interviews. Evaluations of forensic interviews consists of more than monitoring question types.

The Forensic Interview Trace (FIT)<sup>®</sup> is a secure computer programme that has been developed to specifically address this problem. All characteristics of a forensic interview can be recorded on the programme subsequently leading to a visual trace of the entirety of the forensic interview. This allows the reviewer to explore all aspects of their interview performance, whilst uploading notes and comments to justify specific questioning strategies or other decision-making processes. The FIT<sup>®</sup> is a new tool that is able to effectively assist in maintaining the quality of the forensic interview, whilst upholding the necessary interview skills individuals require.

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