



Professor Gavin Oxburgh and Dr Laura Farrugia

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## New technology to improve police interviews

**Researchers from Northumbria University have developed new software which will allow police and law enforcement officers to evaluate and improve their interview technique.**

All police officers undergo in-depth training on how to carry out interviews with victims, witnesses, and suspects of crime in a way which builds rapport and engagement – but research shows that these skills start to decline after a relatively short period of time.

The Forensic Interview Trace (FIT)© app will allow police officers, and anyone else carrying out interviews in a professional capacity, to continuously review and develop their technique to ensure they are getting the most out of interviewees in an effective and respectful way.

The software has been developed by [Assistant Professor of Psychology Dr Laura Farrugia](#) and [Professor of Police Science Gavin Oxburgh](#), of Northumbria University; alongside Professor of Psychology Fiona Gabbert, of Goldsmiths, University of London.

Initially developed with funding from the Ministry of Defence, the FIT app© has recently been trialled by officers at several police forces across the UK as part of a pilot study.

It will now be tested and developed more widely before being made available nationally and internationally for police and security forces around the world.

As a Registered Intermediary, accredited by the Ministry of Justice, Dr Farrugia regularly works with vulnerable victims and witnesses, supporting them to give evidence to the police and to the court in criminal trials, and advising on best interview techniques and communication strategies.

This experience, combined with her academic research in forensic psychology, gives her valuable insight into the importance of skilled interviewers.

As she explains: “Our aim was to create a formal tool which would allow police officers to look back at their interviews and evaluate which parts were successful and which could have perhaps been done differently.

“We know that reflection is a great way to learn, and that taking the time to evaluate past interviews can help when planning future ones.

“The feedback we’ve had so far from the police officers piloting the FIT© software is that they are finding it a really valuable tool which is allowing them to get the best possible result from their interviewees, while at the same time contributing to their own professional development.”

Also involved in the development of the FIT app© is Professor Oxburgh – a globally recognised expert in humane interview and interrogation techniques.

He was recently part of an international steering committee, made up of specialists in the fields of law enforcement, criminal investigations, national security, psychology, criminology, and human rights, tasked with exploring the immorality and ineffectiveness of torture.

Led by former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, Professor Juan Mendez, the group compiled '[The Mendez Principles](#)' – a set of recommendations outlining international best practices for investigations.

Since then, Professor Oxburgh has been [working with the global criminal justice watchdog Fair Trials](#) to carry out training with police forces in East Africa and Central America, based on The Mendez principals.

Speaking about the FIT app©, he said: “Research shows that rapport-based interviews are the most effective, and many police and law enforcement officers in many countries around the world are trained in these techniques. However, there was no tool available to allow them to continue their learning and development once working in their role, which is where the idea for the app came from.

“We believe this technology has great potential, not just in supporting police officers in their roles, but in encouraging and supporting the use of internationally approved interview techniques, which respect the interviewees’ human rights.

“This is something which we take for granted in the UK, but which is still not a given in many countries around the world, and anything we can do to uphold professional interview standards is a positive step forward.”

Working alongside Dr Farrugia and Professor Oxburgh has been Professor Fiona Gabbert, of Goldsmiths, University of London, who is past chair of the Scientific Committee of the International Investigative Interviewing Research Group.

She added: “Effective rapport-based interviewing is a skill that must be learned, practiced, and maintained. The FIT app© has been designed to

support all of these areas in a user-friendly way.”

Northumbria University has strong links with police forces across the UK through its [Centre for Crime and Policing](#), which is home to a wide range of academic disciplines including criminology, psychology, forensics, sociology, law, and social work.

The University is also training the next generation of police officers through its [Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship programme](#) and [Professional Policing BSc \(Hons\) degree](#).

The FIT app© will also be used by students and academic researchers as part of its development.

Anyone interested in finding out more about the Forensic Interview Trace app, or taking part in a pilot of the software, should contact Dr Laura Farrugia, [laura.farrugia@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:laura.farrugia@northumbria.ac.uk).

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