

Ensuring integrity: establishing minimum standards for the accurate playback of audio and video evidence within courtrooms

Dissertation examining the lack of standardised playback equipment in courtrooms, highlighting the need for minimum standards that mirror ISO certified AV evidence laboratory practices.

Key details

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Police region	North West
Level of research	Masters
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Research context

The accurate playback of audio and video (AV) evidence in courtrooms is essential for ensuring the integrity of legal proceedings. However, the absence of standardised equipment and protocols across UK courtrooms leads to inconsistencies in evidence presentation.

While forensic laboratories operate under [ISO/IEC 17025:2017](#) to ensure accuracy in AV analysis, no equivalent standards govern courtroom playback systems. This lack of regulation results in courts using outdated or improvised setups, potentially compromising the reliability of AV evidence.

This dissertation evaluates whether modern courtrooms are adequately equipped for accurate AV

evidence playback, examining equipment variability and its alignment with forensic standards. By identifying gaps, assessing minimum equipment requirements and comparing courtroom setups, the research aims to propose improvements that enhance evidence reliability.

Additionally, it explores strategies for implementing upgraded facilities with minimal disruption and the necessary training for legal professionals to ensure accurate AV playback. Ultimately, the study seeks to establish minimum standards that uphold the integrity of AV evidence presentation in legal proceedings.

Research methodology

A qualitative approach will be adopted, involving observations of courtrooms across Merseyside. The researcher will document similarities, differences and variations in AV playback setups, then compare these findings against ISO standards to assess their alignment with forensic best practices. The researcher's background in forensic AV analysis, including roles as a Visual Evidence Officer for Merseyside Police and as an AV Specialist during the Hillsborough Inquests, will inform the critical evaluation of whether courtroom AV systems uphold evidential integrity and if standardised guidelines are necessary.

Data collection will include:

Courtroom observations

- Observing live court sessions to capture how AV evidence is presented, reflecting the jury's experience.
- Surveying Merseyside courtrooms to assess AV setups across various venues. Focusing on Merseyside will enable an in-depth analysis of various courtroom and case types, with the potential for national application if the issue proves to be widespread.
- Using a standardised worksheet to note findings and enable diagram annotations to document equipment placement and configuration.

Expert consultation

- Interviewing judges, King's Counsel, AV experts and courtroom staff to gather insights on AV playback issues and equipment preferences

The study ultimately aims to determine if courtroom AV systems meet the necessary standards for evidential integrity and to propose improvements that ensure consistent and accurate playback of AV evidence.

Research participation

Inviting established forensic experts in audio and video analysis and courtroom personnel to share their insights and experiences on AV playback challenges encountered in courtroom settings.

Please [contact the researcher](#) for further information.