

Fingerprint experts must explain error under oath

MARCELLO MEGA

SENIOR fingerprint experts will be forced to explain in court under oath why they mistakenly insisted a print found at a murder scene had been left by a police officer.

Lawyers for the Executive, who are defending a Â£750,000 writ by the former Strathclyde officer, Shirley McKie, have dropped an appeal that would have protected the experts from testifying in the civil case, and from possible criminal prosecution.

Now, they will have to explain themselves at a five-week hearing to begin in February 2006 and could face criminal charges if it emerges that their misidentification was malicious.

The civil hearing has the potential seriously to embarrass and undermine Scotland's biggest police force and the Crown Office.

Both bodies have continued to maintain that the print in question was Ms McKie's, even though experts from around the world have demonstrated beyond any doubt that it was not.

Ms McKie was falsely accused of entering a murder scene against orders in February 1997 and was later tried for perjury when she refused to admit guilt.

It has now emerged that there were disagreements between Scottish fingerprint experts at the Scottish Criminal Records Office as to whether a mark left at the scene was hers.

Ms McKie's father, Iain, a retired Strathclyde officer, said yesterday: "We welcome this decision. We look forward to the court hearing in the knowledge that those who give evidence will have to swear to tell the truth.

"We only regret that it is still so far away."

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