Chapter 3. Investigative Interviewing: Best Practice in Questioning Witnesses and Suspects

The function of an investigator is to collect information. Victims and witnesses are a major source of information. Whenever possible, a full investigation, including the interviewing of victims and witnesses, should be carried out before any suspects are interviewed. The subsequent questioning of suspects in detention in accordance with the principles of investigative interviewing helps to ensure that what is said during questioning by a suspect is said freely and can be relied upon by the judicial authorities. In this chapter the skills necessary to conduct an effective investigative interview are considered; the structure of an investigative interview is explained; and a model of interviewing that has been given the acronym ‘PEACE’ is introduced. This shows the different tasks that need to be performed, and suggests that they can be organised around five sequential stages.

(A) CREATING AN INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEW – THE PEACE MODEL

It is highly likely that accurate and reliable information will be obtained from a well-planned and carefully conducted investigative interview. The PEACE model provides a structure for such an interview.246 The acronym PEACE is derived from the first letters of the following terms:

- Preparation and Planning
- Engage and Explain
- Account, Clarification, and Challenge
- Closure
- Evaluation

246 For a description of some similar models, see Williamson, supra note 201.
(a) Preparation for Interviews

There are a number of points to be considered in the preparation and planning phase of all interviews. These points can form the basis of a written plan:

- How might this interview contribute to the investigation?
- What is known about the interviewee?
- What are the legal requirements?
- What points must be established to prove an offence has been committed?
- Practical arrangements for the interview.

Preparing for an interview gives an opportunity to review the investigation, establish what evidence is available and decide what is to be achieved from the interview. This phase of the preparation and planning stage covers such questions as:

- Which persons need to be interviewed and in what order?
- Why is the evidence from this particular person important?
- Is there information that needs to be obtained urgently?
- Should the interview with the suspect take place now, or be left until more information about the circumstances of the offence has been obtained?

To interview effectively the interviewer needs to take account of the interviewee as an individual. Every interview must be approached with an open mind, and interviewers are required to act fairly in the circumstances of each case. In these respects the following factors are worth considering:

- *Age, gender and domestic circumstances of the interviewee.* This helps in establishing a relationship with the interviewee. In certain types of crime, for example rape, it is important to consider the gender of the interviewer.

- *Cultural background of the interviewee.* This affects such matters as the way in which the person prefers to be addressed, and provides an indication of how formal the approach needs to be. The interviewer must also consider