



# NATIONAL COMMISSION ON FORENSIC SCIENCE

**NIST**  
National Institute of  
Standards and Technology  
U.S. Department of Commerce

## View on Accreditation Program Requirements

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### **Type of Work Product: Adjudication of Public Comments on Draft Document**

#### **Public Comment Summary:**

The document was posted as proscribed by Commission by-laws. Four individuals or groups submitted comments. All were supportive of accreditation, but had comments asking for clarification of specific language in the document recommendations.

#### **Adjudication Process Used by Subcommittee:**

The subcommittee met via teleconference on August 2 and 8, 2016. All comments, responses and proposed changes to the views document were discussed in detail. The revised document was submitted to the subcommittee for a vote on August 12, 2016.

#### **Itemized Issues and Adjudication Summary:**

1. The Association of State Criminal Investigative Agencies (ASCIA) wanted the Views document changed to A Directive Recommendation and the following statement included:

“NIJ/DOJ should support and encourage continuous improvement of the accreditation process and provide support for ALL FSSPs through funding, research and other initiatives.”

*A Directive Recommendation is not appropriate for this topic since the Attorney General has no authority over the independent accreditation bodies. This document can only express the views of the National Commission.*

2. One individual had several comments that asked for clarification on several of the bulleted points.  
“1st bullet - Is this in reference to full assessments or surveillance visits? Shorten the time period to what?  
3rd bullet - Expand the requirements of ISO 17011 definitions- what do you want to expand them to?  
6th bullet - Incorporate unannounced visits- on top of the recommended annual surveillance visits or in lieu of?  
11th bullet - % blind re-examinations- standard % across all categories of testing? What about one and two person units?  
14th bullet - Method validation- What about laboratory developed methods? These are allowed and there are standards set up in ISO 17025 for this. If external sources/studies are required there will be no more laboratory developed methods and ISO may as well get rid of these standards.  
15th bullet - Systemic issues in forensic science- says issues should be addressed- addressed by whom?”

*The recommendations in this document were not intended to provide specific, frequencies, times,*

*percentages or other numbers for accreditation program activities but instead to recognize good practices that already exist and the benefit that could come from increasing those practices or shortening time frames. Language was clarified throughout the recommendations to address these questions. The recommendations were re-organized to identify those that applied to accrediting bodies and those that require new standards for FSSPs to meet.*

3. One individual had sixteen comments requesting more specificity in the language of the recommendation language. Due to the length of the comments they will be identified by number and paraphrased. The original language can be found in the public comment.
  - a. 1- full compliance with ISO/IEC 17011
    - i. *There are accrediting bodies in forensic science that are not in compliance with 17011. This was intended as a general statement for those and any new accrediting body that might begin to accredit FSSPs (anticipating more entering the market to provide services). It was not the intention to say existing ABs are not in full compliance. Removed "full".*
  - b. 2- further improvement
    - i. *Sentence was deleted and new language about the critical nature of work performed by FSSPs*
  - c. 3- shorten time period between assessments
    - i. *ISO/IEC 17011 allows accreditation cycles to be selected by accreditation bodies therefore, assessments may be performed every 2, 3, or 4 years. Upon discussion within the subcommittee, it was in general agreement that a shorter accreditation cycle, and more frequent assessments was appropriate for FSSPs due to the critical nature of the work performed. Revised language and added footnote.*
  - d. 4- require surveillance visits every year other than full assessments
    - i. *Based upon the collected knowledge and experience of the subcommittee while quality is practiced every day, if no visit occurs for several years there is a longer time period when issues might not be found. This was suggested as an expansion of existing good practice. No change.*
  - e. 5- expand requirements of ISO 17011 definition of surveillance visits
    - i. *The subcommittee did not mean to revise the definition of Surveillance visits under 17011 but to require that all surveillance visits include a review of technical work determined as needed by accrediting body and FSSP. Revised language.*
  - f. 6- ensure appropriate technical assessors for categories of testing
    - i. *The subcommittee has direct knowledge/evidence of this practice. No change.*
  - g. 7- require ABs to provide continuous training and feedback
    - i. *The ongoing evaluation of assessors to identify and address training needs, in addition to ongoing opportunities to perform assessments and receive feedback on performance ensures the continued growth and strength of assessors to perform the work, strengthening the overall program. Clarified language to show it was directed to accrediting bodies.*
  - h. 8- targeted and random sampling as well as case observations
  - i. 9- develop standards for sampling plans to account for casework volume
  - j. 10- increase case observations/witnessing
    - i. *Condensed these bullets into one recommendation that emphasized the recommendation that AB reviews should be related to volume of work and*

*number of analysts in an FSS. Included comment that both random and target reviews are beneficial. Removed reference to “increase” as subcommittee agreed it did not add value as written.*

- k. 11- increase percentage of technical reviews
  - l. 12- increase requirements of PT testing plans
  - m. 13- increase robustness of testimony monitoring program
  - n. 14- method validation by external and internal
    - i. *It was acknowledged that these four bullets required specific standards to be developed by the AB and met by the FSSP. The recommendations were not intended to provide specific, frequencies, times, percentages or other numbers for accreditation program activities but instead to recognize good practices that exist in forensic science accreditation programs and the benefit that could come from establishing specific percentages or other standards for FSSPs in these areas. Standardized implementation of requirements agreed upon by all forensic science ABs and based upon standards from OSAC or other technical groups would also benefit the entire community. These were not meant as criticisms of existing standards but recognition of good practices that could be improved by a more consistent application across labs. For example effective monitoring of testimony can be accomplished best by those familiar with forensic science and the specific strengths and limitations of a particular case (i.e. other FSSP personnel). Laboratory methods/validations should be based on work generally accepted in the forensic and/or scientific community. It did not mean to say that all methods must be externally validated. Condensed into one statement that includes action for both accrediting bodies and FSSPs and further revised language to clarify.*
  - o. 15- DOJ seek aggregate data
    - i. *Revised language to remove confusion about “data” and “report” and included “identifying trends”. Added language about providing information to NIST/OSAC for review and action.*
  - p. 16- continuous improvement
    - i. *This is similar to other generic statement we have made in Views and Recommendations of the NCFS to encourage improvement but the subcommittee agreed it was very general and removed it.*
4. The American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors (ASCLD) Board of Directors supports the Commission views Regarding Accreditation Program Requirements and encourages forensic science accrediting bodies to incorporate the stated requirements into their accreditation program.

The ASCLD Board of Directors recommends the inclusion of the following statement to the Views Document:

“The Commission recognizes efforts continue on the development of national and international standards specific to forensic science. In 2015 permanent ISO Technical Committee 272 – Forensic Sciences was created and they are developing standards for forensic analysis specific to the following:

Part 1: Recognition, recording, collection, and storage of material

Part 2: Analysis and examination of material

Part 3: Interpretation

Part 4: Reporting

Additionally, the Organization for Scientific Area Committees is also reviewing and recommending standards and guidelines for the practice of forensic science in the U.S. Once the national and international standards are approved, the Commission recommends accrediting bodies review all applicable standards and adopt them as appropriate for the continual improvement of forensic science in the U.S.”

*Agreed with suggestion, added an additional recommendation to list and final sentence to document.*