



NATIONAL COMMISSION ON FORENSIC SCIENCE

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

Views of the Commission Regarding Accreditation Program Requirements

Subcommittee
Accreditation & Proficiency Testing
Status
Initial Draft

Date of Current Version	16/05/16
Approved by Subcommittee	31/05/16
Approved by Commission	[dd/mm/yy]

Note: This document reflects the views of the National Commission on Forensic Science, and does not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Justice or the National Institute of Standards and Technology. This document does not formally recommend any action by a government entity, and thus no further action will be taken upon its approval by the Commission.

Overview

The National Commission on Forensic Science (NCFS) has previously adopted a policy recommendation on the Universal Accreditation of all Forensic Science Service Providers (FSSP). Accreditation helps to ensure both ongoing compliance to industry standards and continual improvement of a FSSP's operations. Accreditation assesses a FSSP's capacity to generate and interpret results. Accreditation criteria are based on accepted industry standards and applicable international standards. Accreditation uses these criteria to assess the quality of the FSSP's management system by examining, among other things, staff competence, training and continuing education; method validation; appropriateness of test methods; traceability of measurements and calibrations to national standards; suitability, calibration and maintenance of test equipment; testing environment; documentation, sampling and handling of test items; and quality assurance of data including reporting results and proficiency tests.

While universal accreditation can demonstrate ongoing compliance with industry best practices, promote standardization, and improve the quality of services provided by FSSPs nationally; it is recognized that strengthening the accreditation programs will also strengthen the FSSPs and forensic science overall. Accrediting bodies in forensic science must meet the requirements of ISO/IEC 17011 to gain Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) Signatory Status with the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC). Accrediting bodies may need to exceed those requirements to achieve consistency and strengthen the industry overall. The views below include proposed changes to accrediting body structure and accreditation programs including requirements and standards for the FSSP that may assist in further strengthening the forensic industry overall.

Views of the Commission

It is the view of the National Commission on Forensic Science that the overall accreditation of forensic science service providers could be strengthened by, at a minimum, full compliance with ISO/IEC 17011 for all accrediting bodies offering services to forensic science service providers. Further improvements could be achieved with the consistent adoption/incorporation of the following requirements by accrediting bodies:

- Shorten the time period between on-site assessments.
- Require surveillance visits every year a facility does not have a full assessment.
- Expand the requirements of ISO 17011 definition of surveillance visits.
- Ensure appropriate technical assessors for categories of testing conduct assessments. (Assessors should have recent work as an analyst in the discipline.)
- Require accrediting bodies to provide continuous training and feedback to assessors.
- Incorporate unannounced visits/assessments.
- Include targeted and random sampling as well as case observations/witnessing when reviewing casework.
- Develop standards for sampling plans that account for casework volume and number of analysts.
- Increase the number of annual case observations/witnessing.
- Increase the percentage of technical reviews.
- Require a specific percentage of blind re-examinations.
- Increase requirements for proficiency testing plans (e.g. number of external per year/cycle based on a percentage of analysts.)
- Increase the robustness of the testimony monitoring program including in-person monitoring and transcript review with a mandated frequency.
- Require method validation to include both external sources/studies of the overall performance and reliability and internal studies of appropriateness and performance.
- DOJ should seek aggregate data issues/non-conformities from all assessments of forensic science service providers from each accrediting body. Anonymity and confidentiality should be maintained as the purpose of the report is to review systemic issues in forensic science that should be addressed.
- DOJ should encourage continuous improvement of the accreditation process and provide support through funding, research and other initiatives.