

NEWSLETTER No 17

January 2011

Forensic Science Regulator

Andrew Rennison was appointed as the Forensic Science Regulator for three years in February 2008. The Home Office Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Crime Prevention, James Brokenshire MP, recently announced Andrew's appointment for a second three year term. Andrew commented "I am delighted to be able to continue the important work of regulating quality standards in forensic science. We need to ensure that quality standards are adopted and maintained across the board. Many people and organisations have collaborated with me and my team to develop a quality standards framework, I am grateful for that and look forward to working with them all over the next few years". Details of the Minister's announcement are available at:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/parliamentary-business/written-ministerial-statement/forensic-science-regulator/?view=Standard&pubID=851293>

The Forensic Science Service (FSS)

Most readers will know already of the government's decision to close the FSS through a managed closure by March 2012; the Regulator's involvement on the Transition Board overseeing the wind-down has now been confirmed.

The Regulator acknowledges the pioneering work of the FSS to introduce quality standards for forensic science laboratories, by being the first organisation in the world to be accredited to BS/EN ISO 17025 for its forensic analysis work and for implementing technical standards for DNA STR profiling for the National DNA Database and is grateful for the considerable support and contributions to his work by staff from the FSS. The Regulator's priority is to ensure that the quality of forensic science continues to meet the

requirements of the CJS in the developing and changing landscape of forensic science service provision, by building on the existing high quality standards and expanding it to cover the various mechanisms of delivering forensic science services to the CJS.

Forensic Science Regulator's conference

February 2011 was indicated in the last newsletter as the likely date for the Regulator's next annual conference. In view of the current budget restrictions the Regulator has decided to review the style and format of his conferences which were always run at no cost to delegates. The conferences were always popular and required large venues which are no longer affordable.

The Regulator has decided to offer a range of regional workshops and events to cover the same range of stakeholders and delegates, but with focus on more specific issues. More details will be made available in due course.

Codes of Practice and Conduct

Thank you to all those who responded to the consultation on the Codes of Practice and Conduct, we received responses from over 40 people making nearly 400 specific comments. The responses were considered in detail by an editorial group and at a meeting of the Quality Standards Specialist Group on 16 December. The Codes have now been revised based upon feedback received and dry runs with a number of BS/EN ISO 17025 accredited organisations will begin in January/February 2011.

To ensure stakeholders are aware of how the Codes are developing, the working draft that will be used in the dry runs will be posted onto the Regulator's website in January /February 2011 with the caveat that they are still subject to revision.

The United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) will run the dry runs to ensure that the quality framework functions as the Regulator intended and that the Codes do not add any disproportionate or unintended additional requirements. Feedback from the dry runs will be used to finalise the Codes with a view to final publication in April 2011.

In the meantime plans are progressing with ACPO and the NPIA to have the police in-house laboratories accredited against BS/EN ISO 17025. A letter from Chief Constable Chris Sims, as the ACPO lead on forensic science, covering this was recently sent to all Chief Constables.

Accreditation against BS/EN ISO 17025 by UKAS, following the current UKAS requirements, is a necessary prerequisite to meeting the standards in the Regulator's Codes of Practice. Laboratories are encouraged to carry on with accreditation, which in the future may be enhanced to meet the additional requirements of the Codes and should not be viewed as an additional layer but rather an explanation of BS/EN ISO 17025 for forensic science laboratories operating in the UK, but with some minor additions.

Work is continuing with UKAS and other stakeholders to develop suitable crime scene standards, with firm plans developing to pilot and evaluate BS/EN ISO 17020 as a suitable standard for accreditation by UKAS. UKAS are inviting expressions of interest, from UK based bodies who undertake scene of crime investigation, to participate in a pilot assessment programme. Details are available on the UKAS website (www.UKAS.org). Police involvement in these pilots is being managed by the Regulator who is working with two forces who have expressed an interest in being involved.

Court of Appeal judgement R v T

The redacted judgement in October last year in the case of R v T (2010 EWCA Crim 2439) is causing some interesting and valid debates across forensic science and legal circles. The Regulator was invited to make a submission to the Court during the hearings and has received the Court's consent to publish a redacted version of that submission. The judgement will shortly be considered by members of the Forensic Science Advisory Council and it is hoped that a response with guidance from the Regulator and Council will be available for publication soon after.

Forensic Archaeology

Standards

The forensic archaeologists who had previously been registered with the Council for the Registration of Forensic Practitioners wished to develop clear

standards for the field and formed a group to achieve that aim. The work of the Group was supported by the Institute for Archaeologists and the Regulator. The standards have been drafted and considered by the Institute which - has adopted them as a draft standard. The current draft is available at URL:

<http://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/node-files/Forensicdraft.pdf>

The Institute will now consider the draft, and any comments on the draft, before agreeing the final version of the standards. If recipients of the newsletter would wish to comment on the draft they can do so to the Regulator's office and they will be collated for discussion with the Group and the Institute.

The work of the Group must be commended and particular thanks go to Natasha Powers and Lucy Sibun - who accepted the responsibility for drafting and reviewing the standards.

The Institute

The Institute is in the process of forming a special interest group for the field of forensic archaeology. This will incorporate a sub-group for those actually practicing the profession. The initial membership of the sub-group will be based on the Group which has been involved in preparation of the standard. Further information will be provided on the Institutes Internet site at URL:

<http://www.archaeologists.net/>

Forensic Science Society Contribution to Quality Standards

The Regulator was pleased to attend the Forensic Science Society's Competency Testing day on 24 September. The development of a process designed to test general and specialist knowledge as well as the application of practical skills makes a significant contribution to quality standards for some practitioners operating within the forensic arena who provide occasional expertise in the forensic arena over and above their normal professional work. This assessment of competence focuses upon the individual and does not cover organisational processes. The reliability and validity of methods used by these occasional experts is dealt with by peer-review methodology.

Although piloted with Forensic Podiatrists the model is applicable to other specialists and anyone who would like more information should contact the Society (email President@forensic-science-society.org.uk or carol.ostell@forensic-science-society.org.uk or telephone 01423 506068).

The Society has recently launched its Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Scheme to promote an on-going commitment to professional standards for its members. CPD will be a specific requirement for the new category of Chartered Forensic Practitioner which is intended to provide assurance to the Criminal Justice System of the current and competent practice of those Chartered individuals. The personal commitment to professional and ethical standards at the individual level complements the quality framework which is founded upon UKAS accreditation of institutions.

Within the arena of quality standards a holistic approach provides for greater confidence and the role of the professional body is integral to this.

Recent BS/EN ISO 17025 Accreditations

Accreditation against BS/EN ISO 17025 is a significant step towards meeting the requirements of the Regulator's Codes. The number of organisations working in the forensic science sector achieving accreditation to BS/EN ISO 17025 is increasing, with more working towards accreditation. Those that we are aware of that have recently achieved their first accreditation against this standard are:

- **MD5 Limited**
- **CCL Forensics Limited**

The scope and details detail of accredited activities can be viewed through the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) website at www.UKAS.org.

If you are a forensic science provider and have recently achieved your first accreditation through UKAS then please do let us know.

Consultation – small businesses - The Forensic Forum

The Regulator remains committed to consulting with a broad range of stakeholders, including small businesses and sole traders.

The Forensic Forum is now hosting a private area for the use of independent forensic service providers, for Directors of SME's or sole traders. The group is called Forensic Independent Service Companies (FISC) and is moderated by the staff of the Forum and Kathy Manlove (Manlove Forensics). The aim of this is to create an environment where small providers of forensic science services (and sole traders) can discuss issues with others in a similar position. This will hopefully promote debate and improve communication between the numerous smaller providers. To access FISC please either send a message to the Forum moderators asking to join FISC or, if new to the site, use the following link to register and select FISC as your group. You may be asked further questions about your company to verify that you fall within the membership criteria.

<http://theforensicforum.co.uk/forum/index.php?PHPSESSID=f574a9cb98e89994b2753cb7002f531a&action=register>

Finally

Please feel free to distribute this newsletter to your colleagues.

Many thanks for the feedback received on earlier Newsletters, any comments or suggestions for content are welcomed by the editor and his email address is: soheel.joosab@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

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