

**NEWSLETTER No 16**

**September 2010**

**Codes of Practice and Conduct – personal message from the Regulator**

*Following considerable consultation among many forensic experts and other stakeholders I am pleased to announce the publication at the end of July of a final draft of my 'Codes of Practice and Conduct for Forensic Science Providers and Practitioners in the Criminal Justice System'. These Codes derive from the 2009 consultation on 'Quality Standards for Providers of Forensic Science Services to the Criminal Justice System' and the feedback I received. They will, when finalised, set the quality standards framework including supplementary requirements for accreditation to BS/EN ISO 17025, a standard that is already in place for most forensic science laboratories.*

*There will be a short period for final consultation on the Codes and I would recommend all interested parties consider them carefully and feedback by September 10<sup>th</sup> 2010 using the form available on my website. I am very grateful to all those who have willingly given their time and support to work on the Codes and to their organisations for allowing them the time to be involved.*

*These Codes are the first stage of a single quality standards framework for forensic science used in the Criminal Justice System to replace the ad hoc approach to standards used over previous years. They are built on internationally recognised good practice of accreditation for forensic science.*

*The requirements in the Codes and appendices are aimed at three levels:*

- 1. the provider organisation;*
- 2. practitioners; and*
- 3. scientific methodology.*

*The Codes explicitly apply to all organisations and practitioners whose primary role is to provide forensic science services into the Criminal Justice System in England and Wales, whether government, commercial or police service.*



The Codes are available as an electronic version only, and can be downloaded from:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/police/forensic-science-regulator/reports-publications/>

- **Next steps**

#### The Police

The Regulator will be working on plans with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) to manage the roll-out of laboratory standards to police forces, who should wait to hear from the NPIA on their next steps to take.

The matter was discussed at the last ACPO Council meeting following which the Regulator has had a meeting with Chief Constable Chris Sims who leads for ACPO on forensic science issues. The Regulator fully accepts that everything needs to be done to manage and reduce where possible the costs of meeting the standards set by him. He recognises the current context in which the police service finds itself, as with other areas of the public sector, compared to when work on the quality standards framework commenced.

#### Crime scene

The initial focus is on laboratory standards but work continues to develop equivalent standards for crime scene work and exhibit handling. Victim and suspect examinations (forensic medical examinations) will be added in due course.

The Regulator is meeting with UKAS and stakeholders in September to finalise the accreditation requirements and pilot testing plans for BS/EN ISO

17020 as a standard for crime scene investigations. Some organisations are ready to apply for accreditation against this standard.

- **Government plans**

Clearly current and emerging government plans across different departments, but in particular the Home Office and policing have to be factored into the Regulator's plans and work. The Regulator is liaising closely with Home Office officials and has had one meeting with the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, James Brokenshire.

- **Appendices to the Codes of Practice and Conduct**

The Regulator advertised earlier this year for organisations to apply to be on a procurement framework to facilitate the development of standards in other areas of forensic speciality. The framework is close to being finalised but is now subject to necessary budget and spending agreements with the Home Office.

The Forensic Toxicology Network has produced a set of standards and guidelines for forensic toxicology which have been agreed with the Regulator and will be published for consultation in due course. Forensic archaeologists, in collaboration with the Institute for Archaeology, are advanced in their work on guidelines and standards for forensic archaeology. A small group of forensic anthropologists are similarly at an advanced stage in developing guidance and standards.

The Regulator's Digital Forensics Specialist Group will shortly agree standards for the forensic imaging of data storage media in computers and mobile telephones which will be published as an appendix to the Codes. Professor Jim Fraser has successfully chaired the group to this important stage and is now standing down to assist in developing standards for fingerprint technologies. Jim deserves our thanks for his support in this work. The Digital Forensics Specialist Group is soon to form two sub groups to look at video and audio analysis.

- **Code of Practice and Performance Standards for Forensic Pathology**

The standards for forensic pathology in England and Wales are currently set out in the Code issued, by the Secretary of State and the Royal College of Pathologists, in 2004. The Regulator's Forensic Pathology Specialist Group, again in partnership with the Royal College, has prepared a new version of the Code. This has been the subject of limited consultation by the College. The draft is now being reviewed following that consultation. The final draft will be provided to the College for a more general consultation exercise in the near future at which point it will be available on the Regulator's website and a notification sent out.

- **Coroners Legislation**

The Ministry of Justice is considering the secondary legislation necessary to support the operation of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. The Forensic Pathology Specialist Group has submitted a paper for setting out issues that could, helpfully, be dealt with in the new legislation.

- **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. Accreditation in the traditional forensic sciences is already well established. 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:

- **Forensic Telecommunications Services Limited**
- **The Metropolitan Police Service, Directorate of Forensic Services, Specialist Evidence Recovery and Imaging Services (SERIS)**
- **Forensic Access Limited**

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

- **National DNA Database Ethics Group**

This year's annual report from the Ethics Group of the National DNA Database was published on 29 July. Hard copies are available, as well as a copy that can be downloaded from the Regulator's website.

- **Forensic Science Regulator's Conference 2011**

Wednesday 16 February 2011 has been provisionally set for next year's annual conference building on this year's highly successful event in Birmingham, further updates will be provided. It is likely that the conference will remain in the Birmingham area.

- **Forensic Podiatry Seminar and Competence Testing Event**

The Forensic Science Society in association with Professor Wesley Vernon and Mr Mike Allen has formulated a model for the testing and certification of competence. The one day event has been organised for 24 September 2010 in Sheffield as a pilot addressing "Professional Standards in Forensic Podiatry". This is the first seminar and assessment centre of its type and is directly relevant to all individuals operating in forensic podiatry who seek to demonstrate their Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and competence as practitioners in the field. It may also be of interest to other forensic practitioners in regard to the assessment event *per se* and model underpinning it. Further details are available on the Forensic Science Society website:

<http://www.forensic-science-society.org.uk/News/CompetenceTesting/ForensicPodiatrists>

- **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](mailto:soheel.joosab@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk)

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