

<b>FSR Regulatory Notice 01/2020</b>	
<b>Effect of Covid-19 pandemic on accreditation</b>	
<b>Issue date: 20.03.2020</b>	<b>Effective date: 20.03.2020</b>
<b>Previous notice(s) which are amended/withdrawn by this notice being issued: None</b>	

## **Issue**

This Regulatory Notice has been issued to assist forensic units with their business continuity planning in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **Incident Scene Investigation**

In light of Her Majesty's Government advice on social distancing as a precaution during the Covid-19 pandemic, the United Kingdom Accreditation Service will be conducting all assessments remotely until at least 31 May 2020 (see [www.ukas.com/news/coronavirus-outbreak/](http://www.ukas.com/news/coronavirus-outbreak/) [accessed 18 March 2020]). Accordingly, it will not be possible for forensic units to proceed with initial assessments for their incident scene examinations until June at the earliest.

As a result, the deadline of October 2020 for forensic units to gain accreditation to ISO/IEC 17020 and the Forensic Science Regulator's Codes of Practice and Conduct (the Codes) will no longer apply. A revised deadline will be determined when the restrictions on travel and the immediate impact of the pandemic have eased. Issue 5 of the Codes will reflect the suspension of the incident scene investigation accreditation deadline and the revised deadline will be communicated in a Regulatory Notice. It is anticipated that delay to the deadline for incident scene investigation accreditation will be at least six months.

For clarity, this notice applies only to incident scene investigation and does not apply to forensic collision investigation or fire investigation, where different deadlines apply.

In the interim, the Regulator would urge forensic units who perform incident scene inspection activity to embed and refine their quality management

processes in preparation for assessment as soon as possible after on-site assessments resume.

### **Other Accredited Activities**

Due to the requirements of The Accreditation of Forensic Service Providers (Amendment) Regulations 2019, forensic units should consider prioritising maintenance of their accreditation for fingerprints and DNA services, where resources are stretched. Toxicology services should also be prioritised, since there is a shortfall in capacity.

Issue 5 of the Codes, which will be issued within the next few weeks, will include the following new provision relating to exigent circumstances, which includes the Covid-19 pandemic:

Where accreditation is required, and exigent circumstances mean that a method other than that as detailed in the schedule of accreditation needs to be used and there is no legal impediment,<sup>1</sup> this should be made clear to the instructing party and the fact that accreditation should apply and was not held should be declared in any statements or reports. Section **28.2 Declarations of Compliance and Non-Compliance with Required Standards** details some options for declarations. The expectation is where any required standard is not met fully, in addition to the declaration, that a separate annex<sup>2</sup> to the statement or report is also produced which details how the risk is mitigated.

It is clear that the coming months will stretch forensic science capacity significantly. However, there may be individuals having to self-isolate, who would normally be engaged in practical laboratory or scene activities, which cannot be carried out remotely. Forensic units are requested to consider ways in which their quality management could be boosted by using the skills of such individuals to conduct proactive quality reviews, trend analysis, investigations and document reviews.

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<sup>1</sup> See also The Accreditation of Forensic Service Providers Regulations 2018 and The Accreditation of Forensic Service Providers (Amendment) Regulations 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Producing an annex dealing with issues arising from partial or non-compliance allows the complex issue to be dealt with in the statement/report and could allow forensic units to produce standard lines to take for certain methods. Further detail on the content of the annex is available in the Regulator's publication, Expert Report Guidance FSR-G-200 available from: [www.gov.uk/government/collections/fsr-legal-guidance](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fsr-legal-guidance) [Accessed 19/03/2020].