



Forensic Quality Services - International

Forensic Requirements for Accreditation FQS-I Policy Based on Guidance Documents

FRAP-2: Proficiency Testing

REVISION LOG

Version	Issued	Changes
May 2004	May 2004	First issue of document
2006/1	June 26, 2006	Added revision log; extended annual proficiency test requirements to require PT of major sub-categories within a four-year period; modify definition of a suitable proficiency test to recognize that ISO 43-compliant tests may not be available.
2007/1	September 6, 2007	Add references section; add specification for maintaining PT records; expand discussion of "appropriate" PT; define "satisfactory completion"; add section explaining possible FQS-I actions for unsatisfactory PT performance.
2008/1	January 24, 2008	Delete FQS-I address and phone numbers from cover sheet.
2009/1	January 30, 2009	Verbiage changes

BACKGROUND:

The FQS-I FRA-1 5.9.1 includes the following:

The quality control procedures necessary in any particular area of work shall be determined by the laboratory responsible for the work, based on best professional practice. The procedures shall be documented and records shall be retained to show that all appropriate QC measures have been taken, that all QC results are acceptable or, if not, that remedial action has been taken.

b) An effective means for a forensic science laboratory to monitor its performance, both against its own requirements and against the performance of peer laboratories, is to take part in proficiency testing programs. When participating in proficiency testing programs, the laboratory's own documented test procedures should be used. Performance in the programs shall be reviewed regularly and where necessary, corrective action should be taken.

This language implies that decisions with regard to the appropriate level of proficiency testing activity should be left to the laboratory; however, the NACLA requirements for recognition of Accreditation Bodies require, *inter alia*, that:

The minimum amount of appropriate proficiency testing required per laboratory is:

5.3.1.1 One activity prior to gaining accreditation;

5.3.1.2 One activity relating to each major sub-area of major disciplines of a laboratory's scope of accreditation at least every four years.

Note 1: Appropriate proficiency testing activity includes international or national interlaboratory comparisons or measurement audits run or approved by the AB itself. Preference should be given to international inter-laboratory comparisons where these are available.

Note 2: Four years is the maximum interval. Accreditation bodies are encouraged to shorten that interval where there are significant changes to a laboratory's staff or scope of accreditation.

Note 3: An AB should use proficiency testing programs which comply with the operational procedures detailed in ISO/IEC Guide 43-1 (1997).

The frequency and extent of proficiency testing by the laboratory is also a factor in determining surveillance procedures and accreditation assessment intervals.

FQS-I POLICY:

1. Agencies must successfully complete a minimum of one appropriate proficiency test in their proposed scope of accreditation prior to gaining accreditation, and
2. An accredited agency shall successfully complete annually:
 - a) a minimum of one appropriate proficiency test in each category of testing that appears on its scope of accreditation. Over a period of four years this must include at least one proficiency test in each major sub-category of testing within the agency's scope of accreditation; and
 - b) any proficiency testing requirements of field specific standards pertinent to activities within the agency's scope of accreditation, e.g., the DNA proficiency testing requirements of the FBI Quality Assurance document (QAS).
3. *Successful completion* means that the testing results conformed to the expected results, or, if discrepant results were obtained, that corrective actions appropriate to the severity of the discrepancy(s) were taken by the agency.
4. FQS-I will maintain on its web site a list of available external proficiency test providers; however, the list is provided for informational purposes only and does not imply endorsement by FQS-I. The choice of the proficiency testing schemes and the verification of the providers is ultimately the responsibility of the agency. The agency should be able to justify to FQS-I during the scheduled assessment of the agency the use of the program(s) that meet the agency's particular needs. Criteria that an agency might use to determine "appropriate" proficiency tests include, but are not limited to: (1) those provided by competent proficiency test providers, e.g., those accredited to ILAC G13/ISO Guide 43; (2) established and universally accepted programs within the agency's scope of accreditation; and (3) programs specified by regulatory agencies and other specifiers of accreditation.
5. FQS-I assessors will evaluate the adequacy of the proficiency test performance of an agency in the light of its overall quality assurance procedures and performance. These shall include internal procedures for competency monitoring and the effectiveness of corrective action policies and procedures.
6. FQS-I-accredited agencies shall maintain their proficiency test records for a minimum of one complete cycle of accreditation to ensure that all records are available during surveillance and reassessment. This shall include records of corrective actions taken to address test results that do not conform to expected outcomes.
7. Unsatisfactory performance by an accredited agency in proficiency testing schemes can affect its accreditation status. FQS-I may take actions such as continuing accreditation subject to completion of corrective actions, suspension of accreditation for

the particular tests, and withdrawal of accreditation for the relevant tests. The specific actions will depend upon the particular issue and the history of performance of the accredited agency.

REFERENCES:

ISO/IEC Guide 43-1:1997: *Proficiency Testing by Interlaboratory Comparisons – Part 1: Development and Operation of Proficiency Testing Schemes*

ISO/IEC Guide 43-2:1997: *Testing by Interlaboratory Comparisons – Part 2: Selection and Use of Proficiency Testing Schemes by Laboratory Accreditation Bodies*

ISO/IEC 17011:2004: *General Requirements for Bodies providing assessment and accreditation of conformity assessment bodies*

ILAC-P9:2005: *ILAC Policy for Participation in National and International Proficiency Testing Activities*

ILAC-G22:2004: *Use of Proficiency Testing as a Tool for Accreditation in Testing*