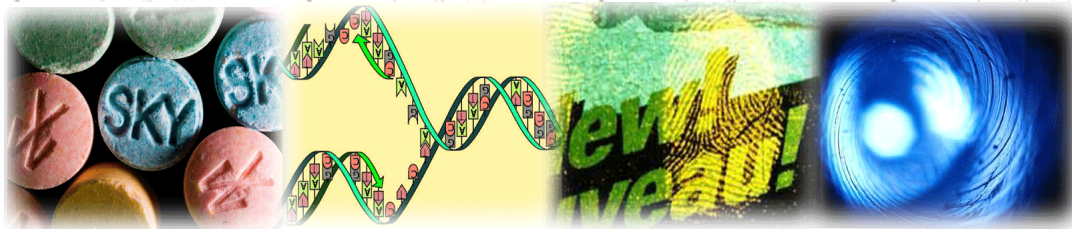


The FQS Update



*"Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending."
Carl Bard*

There are Choices

Did you know that there are three accrediting bodies in the U.S. that provide forensic accreditation to ISO/IEC 17025? The ability to choose can offer you considerable advantages in procurement of your accreditation, and this special issue of the Update will give a brief factual overview followed by more detail on what FQS has to offer.

The accrediting bodies are: A2LA, ASCLD/LAB International and FQS. All three have successfully completed external evaluation of their program to the demanding level of the ISO standard for operation of accrediting bodies, and are recognized internationally as providing equivalent standards of accreditation.

All three can offer some "firsts": A2LA was the first of the three to be recognized internationally, the ASCLD/LAB legacy program (the precursor to the ASCLD/LAB International accreditation) was the first forensic accreditation in the U.S., and FQS was the first accrediting body in the U.S. to provide a forensic program to ISO/IEC 17025. Note that for DNA laboratories there is one significant difference in that only FQS and ASCLD/LAB International are recognized by the NDIS board, and both are recognized by NIJ as providers of forensic accreditation.

The international mutual recognition assures you that all three accrediting bodies are operating to equivalent standards, but it does not mean that they are operating identical programs. There are several features of the FQS program that our customers have found of value, but the most important is that we offer **flexible scopes of accreditation**. When an agency applies to FQS for accreditation, we work with them to define the tests and materials that they want covered. That matrix is known as the scope. The agency can elect to have only one area in its scope to begin with, such as DNA or Controlled Substances. This lets you introduce the concept gradually and have sections build on the experience and strengths of the others as all progress to the desired goal of all being accredited. As sections become ready, or as new tests or testing areas are introduced, they can be added to the scope. Flexible scopes also mean that if there is a failure in one test for one evidence type then accreditation can be suspended for that specific area without having to include other areas in the scope that are performing to specification.

Not a crime lab but conducting forensic work? FQS provides accreditation to ISO/IEC 17025 to several testing laboratories that are conducting forensic investigations but that are not crime laboratories in the generally accepted sense. We also have recently launched a program for agencies that are forensic service providers but that are not testing laboratories, mainly crime scene and other activities based in law enforcement agencies. The new program uses ISO/IEC 17020 as its basis. In brief it offers all the quality systems rigor and assurance that is found in ISO/IEC 17025 but does not contain the parts of the latter that are specific to chemical or biological testing. Although new to the United States, the program is similar to one that has been operating successfully in Europe and that is the basis for a forthcoming International Guidance that will cover the whole forensic process. Please contact FQS Manager of Accreditations Terry Mills at tmills3@bellsouth.net or 850-375-6992 with any accreditation questions or concerns.