

Accreditation: A tool to support the criminal justice system

The accreditation process determines, in the public interest, the technical competence and integrity of organisations offering testing, inspection, calibration and certification services. UKAS is the **only** national accreditation body recognised by Government to assess these types of organisation against internationally recognised standards.

Confidence in Forensic Services

There are a number of third party assessment services available that can assist in providing confidence in activities that support the criminal justice system so it is important to choose the right one to get the right level of confidence.

Accreditation

Accreditation is the only mechanism that determines the technical competence and integrity of the organisations offering forensic testing and inspection services. ISO/IEC 17025 and ISO/IEC 17020 not only contain requirements for the quality management system of the organisation but they also include detailed and specific technical criteria for the operation of the technical service including ensuring the competence of personnel.

Management System Certification

ISO 9001:2000 is a generic standard for quality management systems applicable to all organisations irrespective of type, size or product or service provided. It can be applicable to organisations that provide forensic services **but certification against ISO 9001:2000 should not be interpreted to mean that an organisation has demonstrated the technical competence to produce valid and accurate information and results.** This is because with certification to ISO 9001:2000 the emphasis is on establishing an organisation's compliance with requirements for a quality management system. It does **not** contain technical requirements for personnel and operations.

Personnel Certification

Personnel certification (or registration) schemes do exist to provide confidence in the competence of individuals. The standards and criteria used to assess competence of personnel vary according to the scheme provider. These schemes focus on individuals' competence but do not provide any assessment of the organisation within which the individual operates. Where this service is used it is essential that users have confidence in the competence of the organisation that provides certification of individuals; this can be delivered by using an **accredited** Certification Body.



Benefits of accreditation

UKAS accreditation offers transparent solutions that deliver:

- **Public trust:** confidence that forensic activities are carried out impartially and competently.
- **One stop shop:** accreditation has a broad application across the Home Office, the Police service and Government as a whole, covering multiple sectors and multiple disciplines in a consistent way.
- **Flexible solutions:** underpinned by requirements specified in regulations, standards or codes of practice.
- **Cost reduction:** organisations operating efficiently and effectively with oversight by UKAS, reducing the need for regulators or organisations to establish their own assessment and approval activities.

How will UKAS support the criminal justice system?

Scene of Crime Examination

Accreditation has underpinned quality assurance of forensic analysis for almost 20 years, ensuring confidence of analysis of samples and results produced in the laboratory. However, until now the examination of, and collection of materials from, crime scenes has not been covered by accreditation.

UKAS has been working with ENFSI (European Network of Forensic Science Institutes) and EA (European co-operation for Accreditation) to formulate a new and consistent approach to the accreditation of Crime Scene Examination throughout Europe. EA and ENFSI have developed guidance to assist with the application of the international standard ISO/IEC 17020 which will be used for the assessment and accreditation of scene of crime work. UKAS is also working with key stakeholders to ensure its process is robust and effective in determining the technical capability of crime scene units.

Accredited examination and collection of materials from crime scenes will provide additional confidence in the integrity and chain of custody of the materials being collected.

To find out more, please contact ian.ronksley@ukas.com

Areas already benefiting from accreditation include the examination or analysis of:

- Drugs, Accelerants, Glass, Paint
- Toolmarks, Footwear, Vehicles
- Fingerprints
- Body Fluids, Fibres, Blood Patterns
- DNA
- Questioned Documents
- Computers , Mobile Phones
- Firearms, Firearms Discharge Residue, Explosives

Fingerprint Examination



The comparison of fingerprints is one of the oldest forms of forensic science but curiously was one of the most recent to be accredited.

UKAS has assessed organisations undertaking the enhancement and recording of fingerprints for some time but has more recently become involved in assessing the process of the comparison of fingerprints. UKAS accreditation is an independent demonstration of the competence of an organisation to undertake the comparison of fingerprints in a robust and consistent manner.

Forensic Analysis



UKAS has been involved in assessing laboratories undertaking forensic analysis since the 1980's. This now covers a broad range of examination and testing activities, which is frequently extended to meet the increasing needs of forensic practitioners.

UKAS accreditation not only provides authoritative assurance of the technical competence of a laboratory to undertake specified analyses but also reviews particular aspects relevant to the Criminal Justice System, for example, continuity of evidence, management of casefiles, storage of exhibits. In addition accreditation determines the competence of staff, the validity and suitability of methods, the appropriateness of equipment and facilities, and the ongoing assurance through internal quality control.

Many forensic laboratories, from large multi-site organisations to smaller specialist companies, are now accredited.

The National DNA Database



- The National DNA Database was formed in 1995 and now contains over 3 million profiles. These profiles are derived from samples taken from individuals under arrest, and are loaded on to the database and compared with profiles from samples taken from crime scenes.
- The Custodian of the National DNA Database has specified that a supplier of DNA profiles to the database must not only meet the Custodian's own standards but must also hold UKAS accreditation. This arrangement has been formalised in the UKAS publication LAB 32.
- UKAS accreditation plays a key role in ensuring the integrity of the profiles submitted to the National DNA Database.

Security Systems



- The ACPO Sector Scheme for security alarm installers was developed to try and reduce the number of false alarms that police forces were having to respond to.
- Accredited certification bodies audit and certify the installers of security systems against the requirements of the Association of Chief Police Officers Sector Scheme.

For further information please contact:

Katherine Monnery, Assessment Manager Forensics
Email: katherine.monnery@ukas.com
Telephone: 020 8917 8400

Or visit our website www.ukas.com

Schedules of accredited organisations are listed on the UKAS website www.ukas.org – keyword Forensic

Delivering
Confidence

