

FORENSIC SCIENCE ACCREDITATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SUMMARY OF THE 21ST MEETING
28 May 2014

Mr Chris Pearman opened the meeting welcoming the Committee members to the 21st meeting of the Forensic Science Accreditation Advisory Committee.

Committee Membership

The Committee welcomed Detective Senior Sargent Rick Sinclair from NSW Police to the Committee representing Fingerprints.

The Committee discussed the current membership terms which are due for expiry before the next meeting.

This covered the following disciplines:

- Forensic Biology
- Illicit Drugs
- Toxicology
- Parentage Testing
- SMANZFL representation

Expressions of interest will be requested from NATA's members prior to the expiry of the existing terms.

Representation of SMANZFL on the Committee will be requested through the Chair of SMANZFL, highlighting the mutual benefits of this arrangement.

Forensic Science Application Document

Discussions were held around case files, records of personnel access and rapid DNA instruments. These were resolved and therefore the application document can progress to NATA's internal review process prior to public comment.

It was noted that the *Policy Circular 40, Forensic Operations Module (FOM)*, is a direct duplication of the relevant sections and will also require review following issue of the application document.

Rapid DNA instrumentation and accreditation

The committee discussed the emergence of Rapid DNA systems which could be used within, or outside, of a traditional laboratory setting. NATA highlighted that this was perfectly acceptable, that point of care testing was commonplace across Medical Testing and that accreditation criteria needed to be flexible to allow for advances in technology.

As the rapid DNA systems include all processes within the one instrument, existing criteria for molecular separation cannot be applied. Potential wording for the application document was discussed and amendments were made to this.

Increasing innovation in forensic processes

The Committee held discussions on the perceived barriers to having efficient laboratory systems and that some organisations have linked NATA accreditation and ISO/IEC 17025 to preventing this from occurring.

It was agreed that ISO/IEC 17025 does not prevent alternate systems from being implemented provided the requirements of the Standard are being met. It was highlighted that ISO/IEC 17025 is due for review with the management system requirements aligning with those in ISO/IEC 17020 which are outcome based. The Committee further highlighted that ISO/IEC 17025 is about technical competency and that this is required of Forensic facilities.

Further discussions were held around ISO 9001 and the AS 5388 series. The group were informed that JAS-ANZ would not allow a certification standard (ISO 9001) and a technical standard (AS 5388) to be jointly used for the certification of laboratories.

Secretary's note: There is a joint ILAC and IAF (International Accreditation Forum) resolution (#7/2007) which prevents Certification Bodies certifying their clients against ISO/IEC 17025 or ISO 15189. AS 5388 would be viewed as a series of standards providing interpretative guidance for ISO/IEC 17025.

Questions raised during public consultation of the agenda

Feedback received/issues identified regarding the assessment to Forensic Standards AS 5388?

No specific feedback has been received that there are any concerns over the assessment process. To date this has involved just one fully accredited organisation and one undergoing assessment.

Committee members noted that the gap analysis produced by NATA and available on the NATA website has been beneficial in identifying additional areas that are required for accreditation.

Inconsistencies between AS 5388.1 and Forensic Accreditation Criteria

The Committee agreed that the NATA forensic application document will be updated to remove the highlighted paragraph which is providing confusing information. The Committee considered that the photograph of the fingerprint is the exhibit.

Interpretation and resolution of technical differences and 'equivalence' of practices

NATA can have a position regarding an interpretive issue where this is consistent with accepted practice amongst the profession (and supported as such). However, NATA in general, will not hold one view where differing opinions may exist amongst the profession. If something is obviously incorrect in a standard, this would be taken into account.

NATA is not able to determine that any item can be waived in a standard and as such any changes, inconsistencies and errors need to be communicated to Standards Australia (SA). Additionally, it is understood that SA no longer issue amendments where small changes are made to the document. It would be in the next review period that any changes are made to the document.

Intelligence reporting

There are currently no NATA or ISO/IEC 17025 barriers to providing a result to a client that is preliminary (that is, it hasn't been through the case review stage but has been authorised for release). This is an accepted practice provided that the client is informed of the preliminary nature of the result. Where a written report is provided, this simply needs to highlight that it is not the final report. Upon discussion with the Committee, some facilities may issue a report stating 'not for court purposes' or 'preliminary report'.

This is referenced in the ISO/IEC 17025 Standard Application Document for accreditation of testing and calibration facilities May 2014.

Attendance of a Quality Manager as a Technical Assessor

The Committee did not feel that this was appropriate given the role of the Technical Assessor is to assess compliance against ISO/IEC 17025 in the areas of technical expertise relevant to forensic science. The NATA staff member is responsible and qualified for assessing the management systems. Any assessment is about ensuring the facility meets the requirements of the Standard and not to ensure that the same management systems are adopted by all laboratories.