

Supplementary written evidence submitted by Gillian Tully CBE, former Forensic Science Regulator (BFF0005)

I write to clarify an issue that was raised in last week's session regarding accreditation scope, and to follow up on a point that was not raised in the session, regarding support for small businesses to gain accreditation.

Firstly, the scope of an organisation's accreditation relates to the areas of work covered by the accreditation. The required scope for accreditation is set out in a 'statement of standards and accreditation requirements' within the Forensic Science Regulator's Codes of Practice and Conduct, so there is no doubt what is required of any organisation providing forensic science. By way of example, organisation A conducts computer and mobile phone examinations. It holds accreditation for mobile phone data extraction and analysis but not for computer data extraction. Organisation A would therefore be compliant with requirements for its mobile phone extraction and analysis but not for its computer data extraction work. Another organisation (B) only conducts mobile phone data extraction and analysis, so if it had an accreditation scope covering mobile phone data extraction and analysis, it would be fully compliant with the requirements. So the relevant question is more about which organisations are compliant with the required standards, as opposed to which organisations have (any) accreditation.

As the Ministers have written, over £50m has been invested in police forensic science through the Transforming Forensics Programme and the Forensic Capability Network. While I was Forensic Science Regulator, I was keen to find a way to make accreditation more affordable and accessible for small businesses. To that effect, I had been working with UKAS and the Chartered Society of Forensic Sciences, to see if a centrally developed and assessed quality management system, which could then be accessed by small businesses, would assist such businesses to gain accreditation in a cost-effective manner.

In response to the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, the Government response included the following:

“we note that the Regulator is working with UKAS and the Chartered Society to determine how to reduce the costs of accreditation for niche and smaller private providers. We do not wish to pre-empt this work but will consider any support the Government can offer as part of this process as it progresses. For example, Home Office officials will explore whether grant funding can be found for this purpose.”

I now understand that the Government has decided not to provide any funding to assist with this initiative. The amount sought was very modest (£300k over 3 years) in comparison with the £50m plus provided to assist police forensic science. I am not privy to the rationale for this decision, but I am deeply disappointed that there is not a more equitable approach.

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