



The  
Chartered  
Society of  
Forensic  
Sciences

## **Guide for Course Providers**

The Educational Accreditation Scheme provides the assurance from independent, qualified assessors on behalf of the Chartered Society of Forensic Sciences (CSFS).

### **Introduction**

The following overview is intended to outline the general intent and approach by the CSFS in developing and implementing its Educational Accreditation Scheme. It does not form part of any contract or agreement with any individual or organisation.

The CSFS launched an Educational Accreditation Scheme for those Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) delivering courses that contain substantial forensic science contents. The courses intended for educational accreditation will normally be Bachelors' degrees, with Honours (BSc), integrated Masters (MSci) or post graduate qualifications such as taught Masters degrees (MSc) at Levels 4-7. Courses with less forensic content can apply for Recognition.

### **Setting Standards**

The scheme was developed to help establish and maintain standards of education in forensic science and involves major employers and professional interests. It is the aim of the CSFS to assist HEIs in achieving these standards by providing access to advice and contacts to them. Educational Accreditation is based on a series of Component Standards. The Component Standards address specific areas of forensic practice. They are intended to augment, not replace, the underlying scientific knowledge of the forensic components. For example, the laboratory analysis component standard does not include basic laboratory procedures such as pH measurement, volumetric procedures, or weighing. The Society Component Standards form a substantial part of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) benchmark statement for forensic science and as such provide an excellent basis for quality standards within the forensic sciences.

### **Component Standards**

The Component Standards are written in succinct, comprehensible terms. In line with the CSFS's desire for continual improvement and HEIs are encouraged to comment on and become involved in the operation of the scheme. Universities with educational accredited courses can do so by automatic membership of the CSFS's Education and Liaison Forum (ELF) following educational accreditation.

All forensic courses will have the core Interpretation, Evaluation & Presentation of Evidence (IEPE) Component Standard. The general forensic science degrees are covered by two

further Component Standards; Crime Scene Investigation and Laboratory Analysis. Additional specialist areas will have their own Component Standards in addition to the IEPE. There are also the National Occupational Standards which are applicable to various employment roles whilst the Society's Component Standards are invaluable in addressing the educational and development needs pertaining to relevant roles in the forensic field.

Providers should be aware that project work within a programme normally makes a significant contribution to elements of the component standards, in particular to the IEPE standard. In preparing a submission, providers are encouraged to review the knowledge, skills and practices delivered in this way and to incorporate them within their matrices. The delivery of such aspects of the component standards in a synoptic fashion within project-based extended exercise or module is regarded positively by the assessment panel. The Society expectation is that most projects within a programme will be laboratory based/practical/experimental/data generating and include a critical analysis of that data, rather than being purely a review of the literature, as a practical project will contribute to more of the component standards.

### **Educational Accreditation Cycle**

Achievement of educational accreditation will entitle the HEI to use the appropriate logo in their literature (the logo is copyright of the CSFS). Once achieved, educational accreditation will be maintained by regular contact between the HEI and the CSFS; there will be a full reassessment every six years with one annual surveillance visit and two paper submissions. In an environment of substantial numbers of forensic courses, the benefits to a HEI of accreditation are the independent recognition and assessment of their course's achievement of standards developed by the profession and the differentiation of their course from non-accredited courses in the eyes of potential students and other stakeholders. Additionally, involvement with the scheme will provide HEIs with access to a large resource of professional advice.

### **Process of Educational Accreditation – Deciding how many Component Standards**

Educational Accreditation of a course will be dependent on the HEI demonstrating to the satisfaction of the CSFS assessors that the course in question meets the component standards. This is normally three Component Standards of two plus the IEPE. Under certain circumstances (agreed by the Chair and the assessment team) there may be only two Component Standards involved and the CSFS will expect an increased depth to the standard. For example a course heavily involved in Laboratory Analysis may gain accreditation with only the Laboratory Analysis Component Standard and the IEPE or a course heavily involved in Crime Scene may opt to have only the Crime Scene Investigation and the IEPE. It is however generally expected to have two Component Standards plus IEPE as the QAA benchmark requires a knowledge of the whole investigative process. The Society will still permit the two component standard approach but will expect to see at least some taught element covering the remainder of the investigative process.

## **Support through Educational Accreditation**

Recognising the large amount of work and paper generated by most University approval and validation procedures, the CSFS has designed the scheme to minimise the amount of duplication of effort consistent with identifying sufficient evidence of compliance with the Standards. The CSFS will appoint a Partner whose initial role will be to assist the HEI through the application and submission process. In order that a Partner can be appointed and deliver advice as early as practicable, it is advisable that the HEI informs the CSFS of its intention to apply before the HEI devotes significant resources to the preparation of its application documentation. The Partner will not normally be a member of the initial educational accreditation assessment panel but will be the main liaison route between the HEI and the CSFS until that panel is established.

## **The Independent Panel of Assessors**

For each application received, the CSFS will appoint an assessment panel consisting of a forensic practitioner, a forensic academic, and an independent scientist who will act as the overall Chair of the panel. The panel will decide on behalf of the CSFS whether the Component Standards have been met. The panel will base their decision upon the written submission by the HEI and a follow-up visit to the institution. The written submission will be a commentary with supporting information (e.g. validation documentation, course notes etc) demonstrating how the Component Standards are being met, and will continue to be met. The exact form of the submission can be negotiated between the HEI and the panel or partner.

## **A HEI Lead Representative**

The HEI needs to appoint a representative as a point of contact with the CSFS (it may be that the HEI appoints more than one person). This person will need to be at least an affiliate of the Society. This person will normally be a member of academic staff who either teaches on the course(s) for which accreditation is sought or who has managerial responsibility for the course(s) concerned. This is a key role to link with the CSFS for many of the future liaison with the CSFS e.g. the Education and Industry Liaison Forum. As an approximate guide, the application for educational accreditation will normally comprise one written submission (matrix) for each Component Standard that the HEI is claiming to be met by the course(s) for which educational accreditation is sought (the template for this is provided by the Society). This submission will provide a commentary which clearly shows how the Component Standard concerned is, and will continue to be, met by each of these matrices. All submissions are now done [online](#). This submission will provide:

- (1) A commentary that clearly shows how the Component Standard is and will continue to be met by each of these courses (matrix).
- (2) Show how the staffing resources will be dedicated to the delivery of the course(s), CVs and support documentation.
- (3) The physical resources (including facilities) will enhance the achievement of the outcomes listed in the relevant Component Standards.

Note that there is no expectation on the part of the CSFS that the Component Standards are to be delivered as self-contained units or modules within the course(s) for which educational accreditation is being sought. All documentation to be provided to the Society at least 1 month in advance of the agreed visit date. The panel visit to the HEI by the assessment panel will be performed at a mutually convenient time in order to:

- meet with:
  - the teaching team and management personnel with a direct responsibility for the running and resourcing of the course(s) to discuss the contents of the application for accreditation;
  - some of the students on the course(s);
- Peruse samples of marked work and any other relevant documents that are supplementary to the HEI's application for accreditation.
- See the facilities and resources that are made available to students on the course(s).

### **Educational Accreditation or Not**

Normally, this visit will last one working day. At least ten working days before the visit, the Chair of the assessment panel will supply the HEI concerned with an itinerary for the visit. If, in the view of the CSFS, informed by the report of the assessment panel, all of the items in the assessed Component Standards (to include the Component Standard for the Interpretation, Evaluation and Presentation of Evidence) are being, and will continue to be, met by a given course, then the CSFS will accredit that course.

If, however, in the view of the CSFS, this condition has not been fulfilled, educational accreditation will not be awarded. Under these circumstances, the partner will liaise between the CSFS and the HEI Representative, stating the CSFS's objections to the educational accreditation. If the HEI wishes to reapply on the basis of amendments in their provision to meet the requirements set out by the CSFS then the HEI needs only to resubmit these amendments (on the assumption that everything else remains as in the original application).

There are four possible outcomes (1) Accreditation (2) Accreditation & Requirements (3) Accreditation & Conditions and (4) no award.

### **The Timeline**

Given the variety of both courses and states of preparedness of HEIs, there is no set timetable for educational accreditation. The important milestones are: the decision of the HEI to seek educational accreditation and agreement between the HEI and the CSFS on the costing and timetable of educational accreditation, appointment of a Partner and HEI Representative, readiness to apply, appointment by the CSFS of the assessment panel, assessment, and a decision by the CSFS on educational accreditation. It is imperative that HEIs recognise the value of informing the CSFS at the earliest stage of their intent to apply, so that the CSFS can assist to the maximum effect. Essentially the pace to gain accreditation

is set by the HEI although the CSFS endeavours to provide timeframe guidelines so the process does not drag!

### **Retaining Educational Accreditation**

Where a course has been accredited this accreditation lasts until any of the following:

- the HEI no longer offers the educational accredited course or decides that it no longer requires accreditation for that course;
- the HEI informs the CSFS that the course can no longer meet all of the requirements of one or more of the Component Standards that form the basis of the accreditation (note that the HEI is required to do this, should the situation arise);
- the CSFS has reason to believe that the HEI can no longer meet all of the requirements of one or more of the Component Standards that form the basis of the accreditation;
- the course, or part thereof, that is responsible for the delivery of part or whole of one or more of the Component Standards that form the basis of the accreditation fails a teaching quality assessment (or its equivalent);
- the CSFS decides that it no longer wishes to offer one or more of the Component Standards that form the basis of the accreditation.

The CSFS will maintain contact with the HEI not only to assist the HEI to maintain the adherence of its accredited course(s) to the Component Standards that form the basis of the educational accreditation but also to report to the CSFS any potential breach of these Component Standards. It is the responsibility of the HEI to advise the CSFS of any change to anything (including, but not exclusively, facilities, personnel, organisation, or courses) that may adversely affect the delivery of the course or the achievement of the Component Standards. Failure to notify such changes as soon as practicable will result in immediate withdrawal of accreditation.

Further information about the overall process can be obtained via the web site or contacting the Society at [accreditation@csofs.org](mailto:accreditation@csofs.org) or telephone 01423 534646.

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