

## **A Position Paper for International Professional Certification of Digital Evidence Professionals, version 3.2**

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### **The Rational**

People, training, education and objects can be certified. Certification indicates that “X” has met criteria of performance standards established by a consensus of experts. Whether referring to a person who is a Board Certified Forensic Pathologist, or a certified brake installation on an airplane, basic criteria must be met that demonstrate a specified competency for the awarded certification. In general, people are certified and organizations are accredited.

Professional certification evolves in response to external demands placed on a profession or a subset of expertise within a profession or internally from a need recognized within that community. In the case of crimes related to digital evidence and the subsequent forensic examination of digital evidence, there is pressure from the courts and from international organizations, to establish standards and definitions for the international exchange of digital evidence. In law enforcement and forensic science communities, it has become apparent to many that a coordinated certification effort is needed.

The establishment of international professional performance standards by the professionals who work in that field seems reasonable and necessary. Professional certification currently exists for several forensic science disciplines. The establishment of certification standards would help insure that crime scene experts who collect digital evidence, a forensic examiner who examine the recovered digital evidence and the investigator who analyzes the digital evidence would all be applying the same principles and standards in their activities, written reports and in court testimony. The basic areas of 1) collection and preservation 2) examination and 3) analysis may be performed by one person or three separate individuals. However, the basic principles must be followed throughout. Professionals can easily list the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) that are needed to perform the various tasks related collecting, preserving, examining and analyzing digital evidence. These KSAs would form the basis for the certification test questions and practical examinations.

A body such as “The International Board for Forensic Digital Evidence Professionals” could allow the complimentary development of standards across the three areas. For example, basic certification categories could be envisioned as:

1. Collection and preservation of digital evidence
2. Forensic examination of digital evidence
3. Investigative analysis of digital evidence

All three areas might have a “generalists exam”. “Specialty exams” within any or all of these areas would evolve as specialty areas develop. Exams showing proficiency in a specialty would be developed by the community needs as the specialty areas evolve. For example, a forensic examination of small hand held devices or an investigative specialty in money laundering could become specialty levels of certification.

Professional certification would be a win: win for both the practitioners and the trainers. Based on the “Knowledge, Skills, Abilities” (KSA’s) as defined by the experts, the certification board examination questions would be developed and validated by outside specialists. Likewise these same criteria would be the basis for course development. Having knowledge of the KSAs would assist course developers in designing training.

### **History & Certification**

During the 1980s the American Board of Criminalistics, The American Board of Forensic Toxicologists, The American Board of Questioned Document Examiners etc., were formed. In the mid 1990’s, I recall a question circulating in the forensic science community, “Who certifies the certifiers?”. The American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS) responded and assisted in the development of the **Forensic Specialties Accreditation Board (FSAB), Inc.**, which established criteria for accrediting bodies that certify forensic specialties. The FSAB includes the certification criteria by which knowledge, skills and abilities are assessed, documented and maintained to meet accreditation requirements for certifying boards. The following are a few examples of the FSAB criteria:

1. Some general considerations that accreditation boards must consider procedures that are:

- valid and non-discriminatory
- accessible to all applicants (no membership requirements or unfair fees)
- evaluation criteria must be published

2. Some of the organizational considerations for the certification body include:

- Be a legal entity or part of a legal entity
- Governed by a board that is independent
- Board includes representatives from all levels of certification issued
- Formal procedures for nominating members
- A current board will not nominate the majority of their successors
- Documentation that outlines responsibility for each component of certification
- Shall have sufficient personnel and funds
- Ensure that training or related activities does not compromise the confidentiality, objectivity or impartiality of the program
- Procedures in place for
  - Ethics and professional standards
  - Confidentiality
  - Examination procedures
  - Question validation

- Security of records
  - Maintaining certification
  - Resolving disputes
  - Appeals
  - Complaints
  - Audits
  - Suspending certification
  - Revoking certification
  - Re-certification
- Maintain a quality system appropriate for the number of applicants and certificants

### **Maintaining Professional Certification**

Maintaining professional certification requires an effort on behalf of the certificant to regularly meet re-certification requirements. Some certifying boards require that a given number of points be accrued each year by the certificant. These points may be accrued by a number of activities: case related work, taking certified courses, teaching, lecturing, research, testifying successfully in court on relevant topics.

### **Keeping Pace with Technology**

There are unintended consequences of most things. I believe that an international certification board would be responsible to keeping abreast of the latest technologies in order it give specialty examinations and certifications in new areas. This process might evolve into a clearing-house for the latest technologies as well.

### **Closing Thoughts**

Developing an international professional certification board is a huge undertaking, like most things that are worth doing. However, it is all about process. No matter how complex the problem, it can be broken down into small sequential tasks that are doable in a reasonable amount of time. The FASB, Inc., has defined the requirements. It will be expensive. It will require organizational skill, technical knowledge, skills, abilities and international persistence. It can be accomplished.

### **Closing with a Favorite Quote**

*“Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent. Genius will not; un-rewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan “press on” has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race.”*

*Calvin Coolidge*

Shall we.....?