



AMERICAN BOARD OF CRIMINALISTICS

Restructuring of ABC Certification Schemes

The American Board of Criminalistics (ABC) has been the primary certification body for criminalists since its creation in the early 1990's. Over the last thirty years the ABC Boards of Directors have made many changes to the various certification schemes. Those changes were made to ensure the ABC continued to meet the needs and desires of the profession and the criminal justice system to provide a quality process of peer review by which a practitioner is recognized as having attained the professional qualifications necessary to practice in one or more disciplines of criminalistics.

When the ABC was created, certification of criminalists was very rare and fragmented and though ASCLD/LAB was accrediting laboratories, many laboratories had yet to become accredited. The criminal justice system was starting to demand external review and accountability of forensic science laboratories and its personnel. The ABC knew it was essential to have its program evaluated by an external accreditation body to prove its validity, but none existed until the creation of Forensic Specialties Accreditation Board (FSAB). The ABC was the first forensic science certification body to be accredited, though the FSAB was still internal to the forensic science community.

Several years ago, the ABC Board of Directors (BoD) voted to seek accreditation from outside the forensic science community and work towards ISO/IEC 17024 (ISO) accreditation. Following that decision, the BoD has allocated significant resources to train ABC staff in ISO rules, processes, test development and validation. This resulted in initiating the creation of ISO compliant certification schemes. The fruit of this work can be seen in the recent introduction of two new certifications, Forensic DNA and Biological Screening, with an eye on a Foundational Knowledge Examination yet to be developed. During the development of the new certification schemes, it was determined that proficiency testing could no longer be a requirement for an accredited certification scheme without the ABC creating its own proficiency tests. The BoD determined it was inappropriate for the ABC to become a proficiency test provider. Since performing a proficiency test is currently the sole difference between an ABC Diplomate and a Fellow, the BoD initiated a complete review of all current and historical certification schemes in light of the progress toward ISO compliance.

While considering the future of the Diplomate and Fellow designations, the ABC asked for the opinions of our certificants in a survey in the fall of 2019. We received 478 responses to this survey, over 40% of our certificants. Summaries of the results can be found in the Spring 2020 newsletter and in the 2019 Recertification Survey Results document on our website. One of the questions in the survey focused on the future of the Fellow program. The BoD carefully reviewed the responses to that survey. The comments were particularly helpful and informative. Armed with the opinions of our certificants and considering the current direction of the ABC, the BoD made the difficult decision to eliminate both the Fellow and Diplomate designations effective January 1, 2021.



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Please know that this decision was not made lightly. Many of our Board members are or were Fellows. A significant amount of time has been dedicated to discussing a way to retain this program and if it is in the best interest of our certificants and our organization. Ultimately, the decision was made to end the program at the end of this year.

What does this mean for you, our certificants?

- The current certification designations will remain as-is until the end of the calendar year.
- Beginning January 1, 2021, there will no longer be a differentiation between Diplomate and Fellow. Certificant credentials will be identified using the following scheme:

Biochemistry	ABC-BC
Comprehensive Criminalistics	ABC-CC
Drug Analysis	ABC-DA
Drug Analysis, Technical Specialist	ABC-DAT
Fire Debris	ABC-FD
General Knowledge Examination	ABC-GKE
Hair and Fiber	ABC-HF
Molecular Biology	ABC-MB
Molecular Biology, Technical Specialist	ABC-MBT
Paint and Polymer	ABC-PP

- In January, the Certificant list on our website will be updated to reflect the new certification credentialing scheme.
- New paper certificates will not be issued until current certificates expire. This decision was made as a means to control costs. If you wish to have a new certificate, you may request one using the Certification Conversion Form (09-0802F) found on our website. There is a \$15 fee for a new certificate.
- The proficiency review process that is currently underway will continue until completed.
- When submitting 2021 recertification packets, you will no longer be required to submit a proficiency testing reporting form.
- Recertification fees due in 2021 will all be at the current Diplomate level.
- Requests for conversion to Fellow conversion will no longer be accepted. Any requests received after July 1, 2020 will not be processed.



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The BoD understands the changes to the certification process are significant and essential for the continued improvement of the ABC. It is crucial that the criminalistics community have an externally reviewed certification program practitioners can rely on as one prong of their professional credentials. These changes will ensure the ABC is the source of criminalistic certification into the future.

We appreciate your patience during this transition.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this information, please contact the ABC Board of Directors at <https://www.criminalistics.com/contact-bod.html>