RECOGNITION OF ABFDE

The value of certification lies in the legitimacy of, and the standards upheld by, the certifying body. That is why the American Society of Questioned Document Examiners (ASQDE) recognizes certification by the American Board of Forensic Document Examiners (ABFDE) as an effective and independent assessment of proficiency within our profession.

The ABFDE was founded in 1977 under a grant by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. Since its inception, like the ASQDE, the ABFDE has required candidates to document that they have completed at least 24 months of full-time training or its equivalent. No other certifying body in the field of forensic document examination has had this requirement for the entirety of their existence. Why is this important? Because published industry standards dictate such training. Further, multiple studies into proficiency have noted a significant decrease in accuracy by those whose training does not meet this standard. The ABFDE also requires that all aspects of forensic document examination be included in the training, requires a four-year degree or higher from an accredited university or college (or equivalent), and testing for form and color blindness.

One of the most important factors in the value of a certification is the testing process. ABFDE candidates undergo a rigorous three-pronged testing process consisting of 1) a general knowledge written test, 2) several multi-faceted practical problems, and 3) defense of one or more of their practical problems in front of a peer panel. Completion of the practical examinations alone can take upwards of one month and the entire process can take up to a year. Candidates must successfully complete each prong.

The ABFDE is independent of all government agencies, member-based professional organizations, and any other body of forensic document examiners. In the view of ASQDE, only a truly independent organization can objectively conduct such testing without possibly giving deference to their own memberships or agencies. While ASQDE recognizes ABFDE certification, there is no relationship between the organizations and our recognition comes with no special benefits to the ASQDE membership or to ABFDE.

Finally, since March 1, 2007, ABFDE has maintained accreditation by the Forensic Specialties Accreditation Board (FSAB) as a Conformity Assessment Body. Accreditation provides a level of confidence that a certifying body actively seeks to remain independent and objective by accepting oversight by the FSAB.

In assessing the quality of a certifying body, one should ask the same questions that we asked:

1. Do the training requirements meet current published industry standards?
2. Does the certifying body recognize all published industry standards for the discipline?
3. Is the certifying body fully independent of other organizations?
4. Is the certifying body accredited?
5. Does the certifying body also double as a member-based technical organization?
6. Does the proficiency test include numerous actual examinations using common equipment such as microscopes or spectral analyses devices?