



Laboratory Products Focus

A CASE STUDY WITH THE CENTRAL SCIENCE LABORATORY

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The Central Science Laboratory (CSL) is an executive agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). CSL is situated just outside York. It employs around 750 people and performs laboratory testing in four main areas of work; Food Science, Plant Health, Wildlife and the Environment.

The analysis of food forms part of CSL's work. David Galsworthy, Head of Quality Systems at CSL said. "The work is very much focused on both natural and man-made contaminants found in food. An example of this type of work we do relates to the scare over the widespread use of illegal food dye that happened a few years ago. CSL was responsible for developing the methodology and setting up the surveillance programmes to check the ingredients being used in the food industry."

ACCREDITATION FOR ACCURACY

The accurate testing of food samples requires the use of highly advanced instrumentation and methodology. In order to demonstrate to its customers that the analysis is being carried out as accurately and robustly as possible, CSL has obtained UKAS accreditation to the laboratory standard ISO 17025.



Galsworthy explained the importance of this standard to the industry. "The ISO standard demonstrates the competence of a laboratory and is a crucial part of ensuring the quality of our work. In many cases UKAS accreditation to ISO17025 is a prerequisite for the work undertaken and an expectation within the food industry. If we didn't have the accreditation we wouldn't be able to do the work.

Accreditation to ISO 17025 accounts for a huge proportion of our work in the analytical area. Gaining accreditation gives customers the confidence that a laboratory's systems have been assessed by a third party for technical competence. It is a very rigorous test and demonstrates that the data produced on assessment reports is fit for the customer's intended purpose."

DELIVERING CONFIDENCE

In today's market, it is vital that customers and stakeholders can have confidence in the quality of the work, which is one of the main reasons why CSL also opted for accredited certification to ISO9001. Galsworthy said. "One of the drivers has been the requirement to have all areas of research brought within an integrated quality system. A number of years ago, there was a major mistake in a UK research laboratory that was conducting research into BSE or mad cow disease. The research was compromised as the samples of cow's brain and sheep's brain had been mixed up, meaning that the wrong brain material was analysed. As a result, a Joint Code of Practice for quality assurance within research was developed by DEFRA in conjunction with the Food Standards Agency (FSA)."



CSL identified accredited certification as the best method for conforming to this new code of practice. Galsworthy

continued. "CSL decided that to formalise the quality system it would seek accredited certification to ISO 9001. By gaining certification to this standard, we have been able to ensure that all our work meets the quality standard of this Joint Code of Practice."

A HELPING HAND FOR BUSINESS

Despite being an executive agency of DEFRA, about a third of CSL's work comes from commercial organisations, meaning it has to compete in a business environment. This means that CSL is looking for its accredited certification to provide business benefits beyond mere compliance. Galsworthy believes that it does: "The industry is moving away from accredited certification just for the sake of compliance. We are using it to actually make the business run better, by increasing efficiency and reducing waste, duplication and losses. It has helped to improve methodology, efficiency of sample throughput, staff training and overall competency. Accreditation has been instrumental in driving these process throughout our organisation and help the business to grow and develop."

Another major benefit of accredited certification has been the harmonisation of our systems. Galsworthy said. "CSL was originally formed in 1996 by the merger of a number of smaller laboratories. As a result, there was a tendency for each site to employ its own different systems. The certification process of ISO 9001 has been a very successful method for ensuring that we have one unified system in place throughout the whole organisation. We use that same model in all aspects our work and there's no reason why other organisations couldn't implement a similar approach for their quality systems."

GREENER PASTURES

When the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food (MAFF) was transformed into DEFRA, the department's priorities were realigned along more environmentally aware lines. In response to this CSL has also obtained accredited certification to the environmental standard ISO 14001. This standard examines how the organisation impacts on the environment at a local level through waste management and emissions. Galsworthy continues. "We are looking to reduce our carbon footprint in terms of all of our activities. Examples of that are recycling tins, paper and double sided printing. Energy management is another important aspect of this, including turning off lighting, and making sure that PCs and photocopiers are switched off at night. Certification to ISO 14001 has given confidence to our customers that we have environmental management systems in place and are doing as much as we can to produce our work in an environmentally friendly manner."



THE ACCURATE TESTING OF FOOD SAMPLES REQUIRES THE USE OF HIGHLY ADVANCED INSTRUMENTATION AND METHODOLOGY

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