

It's Time to Re-think Quality

Quality Management is a non-negotiable aspect of today's investigations, Sarah Allen, Head of Organisational Development, Quality and Forensic Science at BlackRainbow, explains how the NIMBUS integrated case and quality management system helps underpin this vital work.

As a child, Sarah was fascinated by science and always dreamed of working in a role where she could indulge her passion for science whilst contributing to the greater good.

Her dream came true when she joined Thames Valley Police as a trainee fingerprint officer. She spent the next sixteen years honing her forensic craft, working in operational and managerial roles at West Mercia Police, the National Crime Agency, and then a national policing improvement programme, where she shared her experiences and expertise of ISO accreditation with the wider police service.

Integrity

During her time working in various operational roles, Sarah realised the importance of effective quality management systems that support the integrity and professionalism of the vital work conducted by staff in policing and the wider criminal justice system.

Her passion and commitment to promoting quality standards comes with an important caveat, in that she believes they must be built into working methods and procedures in a way that continually improves products and services whilst supporting and encouraging staff, rather than overloading them with additional processes that are too overly bureaucratic, cumbersome, or too time consuming. 'I understand that the introduction of quality standards and accreditation requirements are sometimes met with resistance because staff feel they don't have the time to devote to, what seems like, an increasing workload. It is crucial that the changes and benefits are explained and understood by everyone, including the people on the frontline,' explains Sarah.

'For me it is all about continuously improving the speed, effectiveness, and efficiency of investigative outcomes.'

Sarah is also a passionate advocate of the importance of 'protecting our evidence, protecting the criminal justice system, and ultimately protecting the public. When applied practically, quality standards do just that.'



Career

Her career took an exciting trajectory two-and-a-half-years ago when she joined the technology company Black Rainbow as Head of Organisational Development, Quality and Forensic Science. It was a timely move as it coincided with the challenges arising from the adoption of national standards for all forensic disciplines in England and Wales; ISO/IEC 17025 and ISO/IEC 17020 accreditations, and Forensic Science Regulator (FSR) Codes of Practice and Conduct compliance.

Her role initially focussed on the expansion of the NIMBUS case management system from a predominantly digital forensic solution to encompass the wider and nuanced requirements of traditional forensics. However, her role grew to include the development of the NIMBUS QMS module to help solve the difficulties UK forces were facing with ISO accreditation.

Ethos

Sarah has spent the past two-and-a-half years working with customers and listening to their requirements to help embed the quality management ethos into NIMBUS so that it becomes a routine part of everyday operational business.

'The quality management system sits at the core of NIMBUS. By integrating your existing quality management system into NIMBUS, you are embedding that quality culture into everything you do in an investigation.'

NIMBUS now offers its customers a fully integrated electronic quality management and case management system that systematically reduces administrative burden, ensures evidenced conformity to quality and operational requirements, and promotes the all-important quality culture within policing.

At the end of the day, it's all about supporting our customers to catch the bad people, exonerate the innocent, and improve the service that we have all invested so much of our lives in'.

Sarah is highly complementary of the fact that NIMBUS takes quality management to another level, such as the use of NIMBUS workflows which translate paper based standard operating procedures into dynamic operational or technical workflows.

The workflows not only guide the user through the compliant path, gathering contemporaneous notes, but also checks competency levels and asset validations to ensure the required tasks are carried out by the right people with the right tools. This is what sets NIMBUS apart from its competitors and has led to positive customer feedback and endorsements from UKAS assessors.

'It's really rewarding to work with customers and see them go through a change process with NIMBUS that improves and enhances everything they do. It has such a positive impact on the entire investigation process.'

Benefits

Sarah emphasises that NIMBUS also has many other benefits that make a positive contribution to the integrity of the investigation process. The fact that NIMBUS is highly configurable and flexible means it is agile enough to respond to the constant demands and changes that today's investigations and investigators face, particularly in the fast-paced area of policing.

As well as ensuring NIMBUS provides a robust quality management system for its customers, Sarah stresses the importance of Black Rainbow as an organisation, adopting its own robust QMS. Sarah

Future

Looking to the future, Sarah explains that the introduction of the Forensic Science Regulator's Statutory Powers will place even more onus on police and law enforcement organisations to ensure their work meets the required national standards.

'NIMBUS supports future changes and will evolve to ensure that we continue to provide a solution that helps forces achieve ISO accreditations and compliance with FSR Codes of Practice and Conduct', explains Sarah.

'Customer engagement is the most important aspect of our business, so it's important that we continue working alongside our customers to listen to them and support their work, and ensure we help them meet these statutory requirements,' she says.

'At the end of the day, it's all about supporting our customers to catch the bad people, exonerate the innocent, and improve the service that we have all invested so much of our lives in'.

