



QMS-Essential

University of Limerick

Tailored Quality Management System

Framework for Professional Service Units

Revision 2

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Purpose and Scope of This Document

The purpose of this document is to describe 'QMS-Essential', a tailored quality management system framework that has been designed for implementation by selected UL professional service units. QMS-Essential is based on the [ISO seven principles](#) of quality management. Collectively, these principles provide the framework that defines the scope and ethos of the QMS, which is then operationalised in practice by each unit through the unit's processes and procedures.

This document begins with a brief overview of QMS-Essential: definition, key components, benefits and practical implementation strategy. Each step in the process is linked to one of the seven principles of quality management, which are outlined individually on the pages to follow. A brief statement that outlines the rationale behind each principle is given. Evaluation criteria, which can be used during a quality review by the quality review group (QRG) to assess the unit's conformance to the principle, are specified. Finally, questions for self-evaluation are provided, which can be used by the unit and auditors when making an in-house assessment of the status of the QMS and when preparing for a quality review.

What is QMS-Essential?

QMS-Essential is a tailored version of the '[Standard UL QMS Framework](#)' for professional service units. QMS-Essential has been devised for professional service units that:

- Have small numbers of staff, typically 10 or fewer
- Newly established units
- Have not previously participated in a formal quality review

The rationale for having UL professional service units implement a QMS is to ensure that the units focus on 'quality' and aim to continually improve the services they provide. QMS-Essential is somewhat less complex than the standard UL QMS framework. For smaller professional service units, it is intended that QMS-Essential would be appropriate to the unit's workload and resource base. For the latter two types of unit above, it is intended that QMS-Essential would act as a stepping stone towards the implementation of the standard UL QMS framework, which they will be required to implement after undertaking their first formal quality review.

Guided by the above principles, the Director of Quality is responsible for deciding which QMS framework (standard or essential) will apply to any given professional service unit.

QMS-Essential comprises the following key components:

- **Key business processes:** These outline the main functions and activities carried out by the unit (i.e. '*what we do*').
- **Operational procedures:** These identify the operational steps associated with the key functions and activities (i.e. '*how we do it*').
- **QMS processes:** These outline the processes specifically related to quality (e.g. auditing, documentation control, communications and training & development).
- **Annual audit schedule:** This identifies what processes are being audited, by whom and when (i.e. '*how we know it works*').
- **Quality improvement plan:** This provides a central repository for all quality-related activity within the unit (e.g. customer feedback, audit findings, staff suggestions, etc.).
- **Quality team:** The team members have overall responsibility for ensuring that 'quality' remains firmly on the unit's agenda.

Benefits of QMS-Essential

The implementation of QMS-Essential by a unit provides the unit with a number of benefits. QMS-Essential:

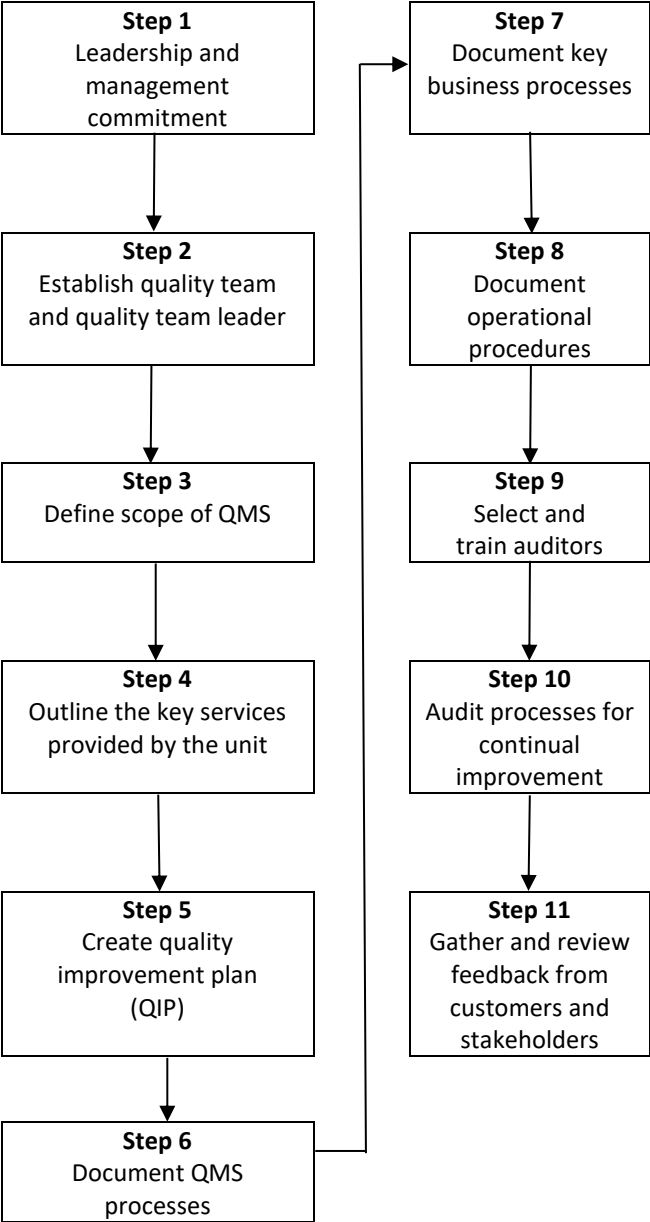
- Helps to direct the unit's activities to meet customer and regulatory requirements and improve the unit's effectiveness and efficiency on a continual basis
- Provides a framework for planning, implementing, documenting and assessing the work carried out by the unit
- Ensures key activities are carried out more consistently and with oversight
- Facilitates both a top-down (leadership and management commitment) and bottom-up (staff involvement) approach to quality management
- Enables knowledge and skills to be shared through the use of clearly defined processes and operational procedures, which facilitates cross-cover when staff are absent
- Requires teamwork, which invokes an ethos of inclusiveness and helps improve staff morale
- Facilitates an evidence-based approach to be taken to continual improvement

Implementation in Practice

QMS-Essential provides the building blocks needed to manage quality in a structured way. For QMS-Essential to be successful, all staff within the unit should be involved in its development, implementation and continual improvement.

Figure 1 below depicts a model of best practice for QMS-Essential implementation in the form of 11 practical steps to be followed. The table on page 4 provides a detailed explanation of each step in the process and specifies the QMS principle(s) that each step relates to. Units implementing QMS-Essential can use the steps as a guide to ensure that all seven QMS principles are being adhered to.

Figure 1: A model of best practice for QMS-Essential implementation



Explanation of the 11 Steps to QMS-Essential Implementation

- **Step 1 – Leadership and management commitment:** The first step in QMS implementation is to establish leadership and management commitment to quality management. A top-down approach to quality management is key. Management should review the QMS at regular intervals to ensure it is relevant and fit for purpose. *(Principle 2)*
- **Step 2 – Establish a quality team and quality team leader:** The quality team will be appointed by management and should represent all sections of the unit. A quality team leader who will take ownership of driving QMS implementation must be appointed. Regular meetings should be conducted and an open communications process established. *(Principle 3)*
- **Step 3 – Define the scope of the QMS:** With reference to the UL QMS-Essential framework (this document), define the overall scope of the QMS. Setting out clearly what the QMS will include enables its implementation to be project managed. *(Principle 2; Principle 4)*
- **Step 4 – Outline the key services provided by the unit:** Make a list of all the main services provided by the unit. This list can be used when documenting key business processes. *(Principle 1; Principle 4)*
- **Step 5 – Create a quality improvement plan (QIP):** The QIP should be used as a central repository for all quality-related activity. It should outline the activity that is required, the person responsible, the timeframe, the source of the activity and the proposed action. The QIP should be monitored and reviewed at every quality team meeting. *(Principle 5; Principle 6)*
- **Step 6 – Document QMS processes:** The following QMS quality-related processes must be documented:
 - QMS Audit (what is to be audited, by whom, when and how the findings are to be actioned)
 - Documentation Control (how you control the main documents in your QMS-Essential, e.g. where published, approval method and revision control) *(Principle 4; Principle 6)*
- **Step 7 – Document key business processes:** The main functions/activities carried out and services provided by the unit (*'what we do'*) are the unit's key business processes. Each high-level business process should be underpinned by a detailed set of operational procedures (the next step). *(Principle 4)*
- **Step 8 – Document operational procedures:** A set of operational procedures (*'how we do it'*) should be documented to support each key business process. Operational procedures outline the specific steps involved in undertaking the activity (i.e. a process) and are more granular in detail than the documented process. *(Principle 4)*
- **Step 9 – Select and train auditors:** Auditing is a vital component of any QMS (*'how we know it works'*). It is both a mechanism to determine if the QMS is doing what it is intended to do and a means of checking the functionality of the documented processes and procedures. The unit should put in place a team of QMS auditors comprising staff from different functional areas and levels within the unit. Auditor training can be scheduled with the Quality Support Unit. Ongoing refresher courses will be provided when necessary. *(Principle 3; Principle 5)*
- **Step 10 – Audit processes for continual improvement:** An annual audit schedule should be compiled by each unit. This will outline the process to be audited, the assigned auditor and a specified timeframe. The QMS process for auditing will outline the key responsibilities for the audit function. *(Principle 5)*
- **Step 11 – Gather and review feedback from customers and stakeholders:** Feedback from customers and stakeholders is a vital component of a QMS (*'how we know it works'*). Feedback can be obtained through focus groups, surveys, web-based systems, etc.). All feedback received should be included in the QIP for action. All units should close the feedback loop by reporting on actions taken as a result of feedback. *(Principle 1; Principle 7)*

Principle 1: Customer Focus

“The primary focus of quality management is to meet and strive to exceed customer requirements. Every aspect of customer interaction provides an opportunity to create more value for the customer.”

Evaluation Criteria

- The extent to which customer requirements and applicable statutory and regulatory requirements are determined and met.
- Evidence that risks and opportunities that can affect service delivery are determined and addressed.
- The extent to which the unit focuses on enhancing customer satisfaction.
- Objective evidence of obtaining and acting on customer feedback (opinion surveys, focus groups, compliments, complaints) and reporting back on actions taken (closing the feedback loop).

Self-Evaluation Questions

- Have you identified your key customers?
- How do you ensure that statutory and regulatory requirements (if applicable) are met?
- How do you collect, analyse and use customer feedback to improve your processes/activities?
- What changes have been made as a result of feedback?
- How do you close the feedback loop?
 - To whom do you report the activity?
 - How do you report back to customers on actions taken?
 - How do you communicate outputs to other stakeholders?
 - Do you publish customer feedback reports?

Principle 2: Leadership

“Leaders at all levels establish unity of purpose and direction and create conditions in which people are engaged in achieving the quality objectives of the unit. By ensuring that quality is embedded in the ethos of the unit, leaders can ensure that all strategies, policies, processes and resources are aligned and being used to pursue a common direction and to achieve a common set of objectives.”

Evaluation Criteria

- The extent to which the unit has clear leadership and direction.
- Evidence that the unit complies with existing and new legislation/codes of practice to ensure regulatory compliance.
- An evidence-based approach to risk identification and management to give assurance that the QMS can achieve its intended results.
- The extent to which the responsibilities and authorities for relevant roles are assigned, communicated and understood.
- When addressing changing needs and trends, the extent to which management considers the unit’s current knowledge and determines how to acquire or access any necessary additional knowledge.

Self-Evaluation Questions

- What actions are taken to ensure statutory and regulatory compliance with new and existing legislation/codes of practice?
- How do you ensure a unit-wide commitment to quality?
- How do you identify risks and opportunities that could influence performance?
- What measures are taken to address the identified risks and opportunities?
- How do you assess the effectiveness of actions taken to address risks and opportunities?

Principle 3: Engagement of People

“It is essential for the university that all staff are competent, empowered and engaged in delivering high-quality service. Everybody is responsible for quality. To manage a unit effectively and efficiently, it is important to involve all staff at all levels and to respect them as individuals. Recognition, empowerment and enhancement of skills and knowledge help to engage people in achieving organisational objectives.”

Evaluation Criteria

- The extent to which the unit ensures that employees are competent on the basis of education, training and/or experience.
- Evidence that annual Performance and Development Review System (PDRS) meetings are conducted with all staff.
- The identification by management of the responsibilities and authorities for all relevant roles and the extent to which these are assigned, communicated and understood.
- The extent to which staff are made aware of the value of their individual contribution to the effectiveness of the QMS.
- The encouragement of teamwork to invoke an ethos of inclusiveness and collaboration.

Self-Evaluation Questions

- How does management ensure that staff have the competencies and skills required to perform their work tasks?
- How is staff development planned to enable the unit to achieve its objectives?
- How often do you conduct PDRS meetings?
- How do you encourage staff to contribute to making the QMS more effective?
- How are staff suggestions for improvement recorded?
- Are teams used for quality improvement initiatives?
- How is collaboration encouraged within the unit?
- How do you facilitate open discussion and sharing of knowledge and experience?

Principle 4: Process Approach

“Process approach is a management strategy that can be used to manage and control unit processes and how these processes are supported by operational procedures. Processes outline what the unit does; procedures specify the operational steps involved.”

Evaluation Criteria

- The extent to which the unit documents its activities as key business processes.
- The extent to which key processes are supported by operational procedures.
- The extent to which the unit systematically assesses the effectiveness of processes in an evidence-based manner.
- The documentation of the following QMS processes:
 - QMS Audit
 - Documentation Control

Self-Evaluation Questions

- What is the scope of your QMS?
- How do you assess the effectiveness of your processes in an evidence-based manner?
- Are your key processes/activities supported by documented operational procedures?
- Have you identified the records that are needed to maintain your QMS?
- How do you ensure the QMS is embedded into daily work practices?

Principle 5: Continual Improvement

“Continual improvement is the ethos underpinning quality management systems. Improvement is essential for a unit to maintain current levels of performance, to react to changes in its internal and external conditions and to create new opportunities. Continual improvement is a recurring activity to enhance performance. Continual improvement should be a permanent objective of every unit.”

Evaluation Criteria

- The extent to which the unit determines and selects opportunities for improvement based on identifying opportunities and needs through the analysis of data.
- Evidence that the unit records and actions all improvement activity in a quality improvement plan.
- The extent to which the unit systematically audits all processes/activities to ensure they are fit for purpose.
- The extent to which the unit regularly monitors performance against actions outlined in the quality improvement plan.

Self-Evaluation Questions

- How are opportunities for improvement identified by the unit?
- Does the unit have a quality improvement plan?
- Does the quality improvement plan specify actions to be completed, by whom and by when?
- How often is this plan reviewed?
- Does the unit have an audit schedule?
- Does the unit have a panel of trained auditors?
- Are audit findings recorded in the QIP?

Principle 6: Evidence-Based Decision Making

“Decisions based on the analysis and evaluation of data and information are more likely to produce desired results. Units should be cognisant of what they are measuring, why they are measuring it and what they are doing with the results. Facts, evidence and data analysis lead to greater objectivity and confidence in decision making.”

Evaluation Criteria

- The extent to which the unit uses data in the decision-making process.
- The extent to which the unit ensures that data and information are accurate, reliable and secure.
- The extent to which data is evaluated to (i) assess and enhance customer satisfaction; and (ii) identify opportunities for improving the QMS.

Self-Evaluation Questions

- What quality-related data are measured by the unit?
- How are data used to inform decision-making?
- How do you know that your processes are working as intended?
- How do you ensure that the data you use are accurate, reliable and secure?

Principle 7: Relationship Management

“Sustained success is more likely to be achieved when a unit manages relationships with its interested parties to optimise their impact on the unit’s performance. The unit should monitor and review the information about all interested parties and their relevant requirements and outline how the relationship is managed.”

Evaluation Criteria

- The extent to which the unit monitors and reviews feedback from relevant stakeholders.
- Identification by the unit of collaborative working relationships with key stakeholders and how these relationships are managed.

Self-Evaluation Questions

- How does the unit manage relationships with key stakeholders?
- How do you ensure two-way communication with stakeholders?
- How do you ensure that your working relationships with key stakeholders are collaborative?

Approvals and Revision History

Written by the Quality Support Unit (QSU), this QMS-Essential framework document was approved by the Vice President Academic & Registrar (VPA&R) and noted by the Governing Authority Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance (GASPQA) committee on 5th October 2017.

The document will be revised from time to time on foot of feedback and experience. Incremental revisions that do not individually or collectively alter the fundamental tenets of the framework (as initially approved) will be approved by the Director of Quality.

The current revision of the document is published on the QSU website (www.ul.ie/quality).

| Rev. no. | Date | Approved by | Details of change | Process owner |
|----------|-----------|--|--|---------------------|
| 1 | 6 Nov '17 | VPA&R: Sept 2017 Noted by GASPQA: 5 Oct '17 | Initial release | Director of Quality |
| 2 | July '22 | Director of Quality | Reformatted to UL corporate colours and changed 'support unit' to 'professional service unit'. | Director of Quality |