



QMS-Essential

University of Limerick

**Tailored Quality Management System (QMS)
Framework for Professional Service Staff in
Academic and Support Units**

Revision 3

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1. Purpose and Scope of This Document

The purpose of this document is to describe 'QMS-Essential', a tailored Quality Management System (QMS) framework that has been designed for implementation by professional service staff in academic and support 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 individual and unit processes and procedures.

2. The Seven Principles of Quality Management

The UL QMS Framework is broadly based on the ISO seven principles of Quality Management.



Figure 1: Seven Principles of Quality Management ([ISO 9001](#))

3. What is a Quality Management System?

A Quality Management System (QMS) is a framework for planning, implementing, documenting and assessing the work performed by a unit. It is a set of defined **policies** and **procedures** that provide a formal framework describing the way everyday business is conducted within a faculty/department/unit.

Based on [Deming's](#) Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) Cycle, the QMS Framework provides a cyclical process for the implementation and review of a structured quality management system.

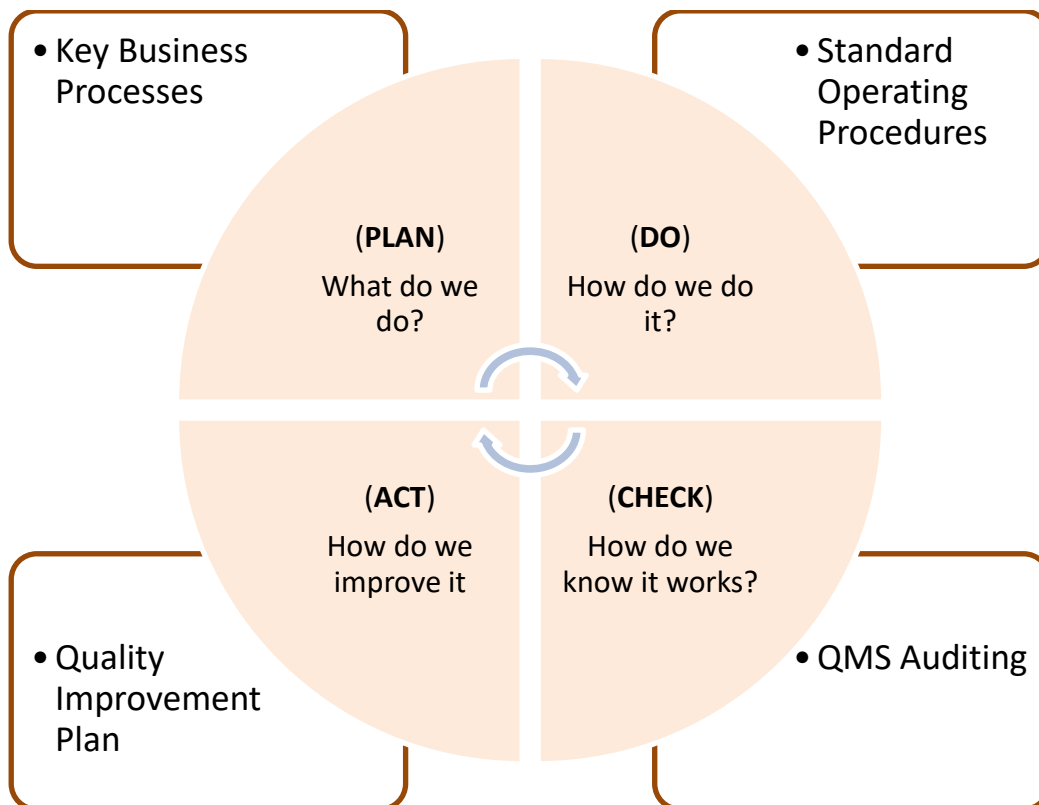


Figure 2: Deming's PDCA Cycle

4. 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 staff/units that:

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

4.1 Purpose

The rationale for having a UL professional service QMS is to ensure that the unit has a continuous focus on 'quality' and continuous improvement. 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. It is intended that QMS-Essential would act as a steppingstone 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.

4.2 Scope

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.

4.3 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

4.4 How Quality Supports Compliance

The Irish Universities Association (IUA) published the [Code of Governance for Irish Universities](#) in 2019. The 'Code' places a responsibility on all universities to implement good corporate governance standards. The responsibility for identification and accurately reporting on compliance and non-compliance lies with UL Management and Governing Authority. However, all University staff are responsible for effective operation of internal controls. Internal control refers to the set of principles, procedures and practices adopted by the University to ensure integrity, promote accountability & compliance, prevent fraud and encourage quality enhancement. Implementation of a QMS can help to support compliance.



Figure 3: How Quality Supports Compliance

4.5 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.

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.

Figure 4 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.

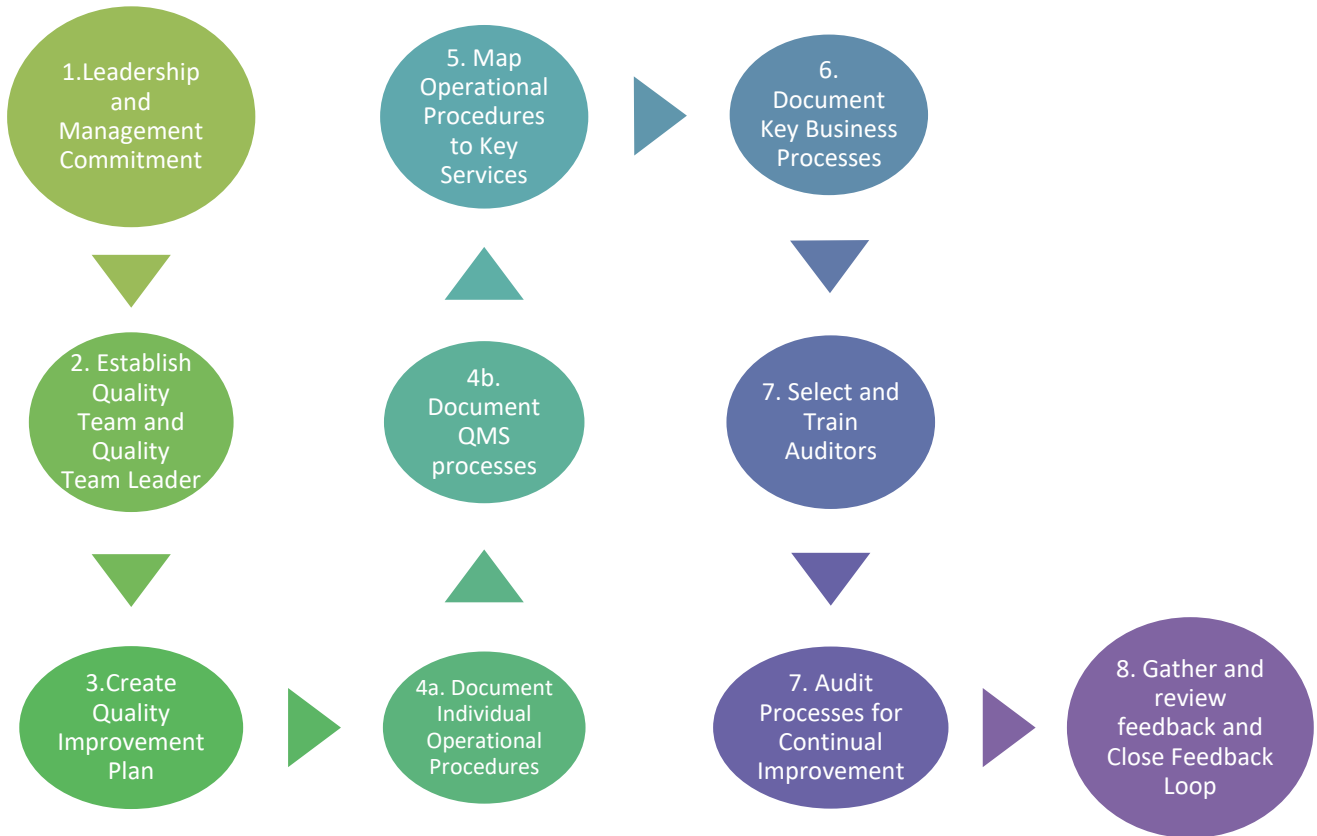


Figure 4: A model of best practice for QMS Essential Implementation

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. This ensures both a top-down and bottom-up 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 – Create a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP):** A QIP is a detailed work (project) plan which evolves into a set of actions. 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 4(a) – Document operational procedures:** A set of operational procedures ('how we do it') should be documented for each key task performed by individual staff members. Operational procedures outline the specific steps involved in undertaking the activity and are more granular in detail. *(Principle 4)*
- **Step 4(b) – Document QMS processes:** The following QMS quality-related processes must be documented:
 - QMS Auditing (to ensure all processes are audited on a regular basis for continuous improvement)

- Training and Development (to ensure all staff have the competencies required for their role and that the unit complies with PDRS requirements)
 - Communications (to ensure an effective process is in place to communicate with all staff and stakeholders)
 - Documentation Control (to ensure QMS documentation is controlled and in line with UL policies and procedures (e.g. GDPR, Records Management and Retention))
(*Principle 4; Principle 6*)
- **Step 5 – Map operational procedures to key services:** Group operational procedures into logical service clusters. This list can be used to identify and document key business processes.
(*Principle 1; Principle 4*)
 - **Step 6 – 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 created in step 4. (*Principle 4*)
 - **Step 7 – 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 8 – 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 9 – Gather and review feedback and close feedback loop:** 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*)

5. Evaluating QMS against 7 Principles

Principle 1: Customer Focus

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

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

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

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: Quality Enhancement / Continuous Improvement

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

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 is accurate, reliable and secure?

Principle 7: Relationship Management

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 |
| 3 | 3 May '23 | Quality Committee | Updated to include the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 7 principles of quality management 2. Overview of a QMS 3. How quality supports compliance 4. Revised implementation model | Director of Quality |