

THE SMALL BUSINESS STANDARD

A basic standard for quality management systems
in micro, small or medium sized businesses
where certification is not a requirement

This publication has been prepared by members of the CQI's Management Consultants
Register (MCR)

Feedback on the Small Business Standard

Any opportunities to improve the Small Business Standard should be submitted for review to the MCR
Registrar at mcr@thecqi.org.

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The CQI Management Consultants Register

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Notes:

- 1) This standard has been designed for use in ventures such as micro businesses, small and medium size businesses. Where the term 'management' is used in relation to a micro business it may simply mean the proprietor. Where the term 'employee' is used it may refer to permanent staff, hourly paid or temporary personnel.
- 2) Text in italics is provided for guidance and is not a mandatory requirement of this standard.
- 3) Where design is undertaken it will be seen as part of the services supplied to your customer. Designs may need to be checked to ensure that they adequately address regulatory and customers' requirements and changes to design may need to be controlled. In some sectors (e.g. engineering design) businesses may have to employ checking by a competent person other than the design's originator, even if this involves the use of an outside agency or person.

1. Management Responsibility

Communicate your values to your employees through your own example and behaviour. Results depend on a correct combination of leadership, strategy, resources and processes, people and culture.

A valuable tool in the achievement of business success is forward planning. This should be customer focused and include financial and performance targets, the provision of adequate resource and trained people.

The management will maintain annual plans which:

- define the management's policy related to the provision of products and services meeting customers' needs and expectations
- identify regulatory or sector requirements which are to be met in the provision of products and services
- identify financial and activity performance targets and the maintenance of physical and human resource needed to achieve the targets
- identify minimum training requirements for people involved in management, customer contact, processing and verifying

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2. Business reviews

Performance measurement, however simple, is essential in verifying the achievement of the business plan.

Regular reviews of the plans will be undertaken by the management. Records of the reviews will be maintained. The reviews will compare results with targets to provide a basis for improving customer satisfaction, business success and management/process methods.

3. Customer care

Valuing customers and meeting their expectations is a key to success. Making sure that your product or service meets your customers requirements before it is delivered will save you time and money and build your reputation. Apart from providing them with quality products and services, communication is a tool that can keep customers coming back - even when they have made a justified complaint!

The management's policy for meeting customers' needs and expectations is to be publicly displayed or otherwise communicated to employees and customers.

Only products, services and conditions will be offered that can be provided in full. When accepting orders from customers, the methods used will ensure that the customers' exact requirements are known and that the products or services can be supplied in accordance with those requirements.

There will be an effective communication system for dealing with customer complaints and opportunities provided for customers to make favourable comments. Customer satisfaction will be assessed at the time of the business review.

Where responsibility of customers' property is assumed, due care is to be taken to protect the property from damage or loss.

4. Staff and employees

Valuing both employees and the business is good for morale. Employers have a social and legal obligation to treat employees fairly.

All people employed in the business will be provided with written contracts. Hours of work and remuneration are to be, as a minimum, in accordance with national and local requirements.

All employees will understand their responsibilities and how they should achieve the required results.

5. Working environment and processes

Business objectives are more likely to be achieved if a suitable environment, equipment and training is provided. Maintaining training and other process records is valuable for your employees and protects your business from risk.

The management will provide a suitable and safe working environment. Equipment necessary for the production of products and services will be provided and properly maintained in accordance with regulatory requirements and the manufacturers' instructions.

Regulatory requirements and instructions related to the operation of equipment are to be readily available to the relevant people. Persons using the equipment are to have had appropriate training.

Methods or processes will be in place to provide the customer with what management and the customer expect.

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Storage facilities will be provided which protect materials and products from deterioration or damage. Products with a defined shelf life will be controlled and removed from stock and disposed of when date-expired.

6. Suppliers

Recognising the importance of your suppliers is good for your business. The quality of bought out products and services can have a significant impact on the products and services provided to your customers.

Suppliers of products and services are to be selected on the basis of quality of products, reliability of service (including timely delivery) and cost.

Purchase orders may be verbal or written, as agreed between the business and the particular supplier. Adequate information will be provided when ordering to ensure delivery in accordance with requirements.

Any supplier shortcomings that arise should be considered during the business reviews.

7. Documentation

Having current regulations and requirements available helps to ensure they are met. It also provides protection in the case of a dispute. Properly designed invoices, bills, purchase orders, etc, can have a positive impact on business.

Management will be aware and have access to the relevant regulatory documents. Documents given out to customers and other external parties will, as a minimum, contain all normal contact details.

8. Preventing and correcting product or service problems

Preventing the occurrence of problems is part of the planning process. With the best will in the world, things can go wrong, so we must be prepared to deal with problems as they occur and, if appropriate, take action to prevent them happening again. Accept that employees may make mistakes and encourage them to identify opportunities to improve and to learn from mistakes.

Annual plans will consider the effect of any changes in business conditions, objectives or targets relating to customer satisfaction, the quality of processes, products and services. Appropriate actions necessary to prevent problems will be included in the plan.

Where a problem arises, action may be taken to rectify the problem and prevent recurrence. This action will depend on the seriousness of the problem and the risk to which the business is exposed.

9. Records

Records provide the basis of assessing business success.

In addition to the annual plan, management will assess what records need to be kept to minimise exposure to risk, for example contract documents, personnel records, etc. Management will decide on the period for which these records are held.