

A Career in Quality, so good I would recommend my own son and daughter to pursue one

Main arguments

For: Emma COX, Executive Director, Customer Services CQI
Against: Russ BURROWS, Head of Corporate Development, Civil Nuclear Constabulary

Supporting arguments

For: Lee CARTNEY, Team Manager - Quality & Manufacturing, JAM Recruitment.
Against: Kevin DEAN, PhD student in economics, University of London

The debate centred on whether those present would recommend a career in Quality to young people starting out in their working life.

Some 26 people attended the debate, and 10 of those voiced their views after the main and supporting speakers had presented.

A straw poll was taken before and after the debate, to answer the question:

A Career in Quality is so good I would recommend my own son and daughter to pursue one

	Supporting the motion	Against the motion
Before the debate	5	7
After the debate	7	5

Comment from Chair:

It is interesting that there were far more comments during the debate giving argument not to recommend a career to young people, yet the straw poll shows a swing towards accepting the motion. Clearly the profession has much to do to change the image.

① The arguments to recommend a carer in Quality.

It provides long term opportunities

- Quality does not restrict one to a silo existence, it offers a 360° view of a business both across the scope of the processes and from the top to the bottom of the organisation.
- Quality is required in all sectors of commerce and industry.
- Experience is valued; yes there is a need for ongoing education but knowledge of things past helps common sense approach.
- Some multi-nationals require all their graduate intake to spend time in Quality as a part of their training.

It provides a good grounding in business values

- A background in Quality is helpful when transferring to a new job
- Provides the opportunity to see how all disciplines work
- Provides a good basis to running one's own business.
- Quality professionals have a good set of work values; right first time, consider implications of actions,

In recent years there has been an increasing demand for quality professionals.

- A recent survey of business leaders showed:
 - * 93% believe Quality is required for a business to move ahead
 - * 95% believed it was needed to provide customer satisfaction
- A survey by JAM recruitment showed that Quality professionals are an aging workforce (31% with over 21 years experience). This source of employees needs to be replaced.
- In the last two years there has been a change in the perception of industry, concerning the importance of Quality in industry. This has been recognised in recruitment needs.

Provides recognition to the Quality professional

- The successful Quality person will help change the culture of an organisation

An interesting and challenging career

- It may not provide the highest monetary reward, but many in the debate agreed they had experienced an interesting and challenging job in Quality.
- Often to get a good knowledge of a process before transferring to Quality is the best route into a Quality career.

② The arguments against a career in Quality

Unfortunately, the motion statement itself gave rise to ambiguity. It states a career, suggesting a lifetime in the same profession. Whereas there would be little argument against a period of one's career in Quality being beneficial, it is not necessarily the case for a lifetime. It is a discipline, not a career.

Quality is a very wide topic and has many different possible career paths

- It is not easy as one might think to choose which aspect of quality to pursue
- Manufacturing is the main industry where Quality professionals work. Manufacturing accounts for only 3% of employment and is reducing. Hence opportunities are limited unless you want your child to work in China.
- Most people enter Quality from another field. There is no clear route from school, through further education.
- Auditing tends to be a second career, as there is a key requirement to understand the processes before you can audit them.
- UK Ltd tends to compartmentalise Quality. Overseas it is frequently seen as a good career with good prospects.
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Remuneration

- Using data from the ONS, does not paint a good picture for monetary rewards for Quality professionals. In a list of 422 job titles having an average salary of £26.2k, QA manager was n°43 with a salary of £37k, QA technician was n°207 with a salary of £24k. Both below the jobs of electronic engineers £44k, production manager £39k, police sergeant £39k

Status

- The CQI is one of 103 Chartered Professional Bodies in the UK
- The mindset in the UK is that Quality is a lowly job.
- It is difficult to name someone who is recognized for having made significant input to national life through quality, possibly because their prime career was elsewhere and they dipped into quality; engineering, process improvement, statistics.
- The CQI had difficulties finding a new president from the captains of industry and commerce.
- When you tell people you work in Quality, for most people their perception is of a mundane job.
- In the Wall Street Journal's list of 250 jobs, Quality does not feature. Quality control for a food producer was found in a list of *the 10 worst jobs ever*.
- Some multi-nationals have closed their Quality departments.

Job satisfaction

- Spending one's whole life assessing how well the requirements of a process comply with the inherent characteristics found is not what we would want for our offspring.
- A frequent criticism by Quality professionals is that
 - * management at best pay lip service to recommendations
 - * the business fails to correct root causes of error
- We know it is people who cause error not machines and to spend one's life persuading people to change is tough.
- It is often difficult to be creative in a Quality job, to be able to see where the difference has been made.
- The Quality manager get loaded with all the odd bits no-one else wants
- Many colleagues assume the role of the Quality professional is to push paper and not understand the processes.

Power / influence

- How often is the head of quality in the very top organizational layer?
- There is often the debate as to whether quality is an overhead or a profit centre.
- Do colleagues say Oh good the quality people are coming to help or do they groan about the bureaucracy and only get involved when absolutely necessary?

③ Other associated comments

- The profession of Quality is not publicised enough. It seems that often people doing high powered jobs in Quality prefer to be called by another title. For example Head of OFSTEAD or OFCAL are senior quality roles.
- The perception of what Quality professionals do is clearly misunderstood and has contributed to the poor image it often has.
- There needs to be a better defined path for quality training; recently many college courses have disappeared through lack of funding.
- Engineering has well defined paths and quality needs to do the same.
- In the UK the title Quality is misunderstood and needs to be changed or shown to the population what it is; people need to use the title of Quality more.
- It took years for the old personnel profession to re-brand itself into the modern HR; it will take Quality a similar time, but the question still remains as to what it should call itself.
- The CQI should consider giving honorary membership to non-quality professions who have served industry & commerce well in a Quality way.

④ Summary

Against

- Quality today is a concept not a career.
- Industry is changing and to be successful one needs a good understanding of Quality, but not to be recommended to young people as a route from school.

For

- Quality provides the possibility of an interesting, challenging job with good recognition for success.
- The job content is often more important than the monetary rewards.
- There are many career paths into the profession.

Notes by Richard KIRBY, Chairman of Thames Valley Branch of the Chartered Quality Institute

28th January 2012