

## **The Way to Go: USM Libraries' Milestones on Quality**

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### **Introduction to Universiti Sains Malaysia Library Establishment and Performance Indicators**

Libraries have through time being established based on some form of standards or performance indicators. However, these are mere standards that act as a guide and framework to be adopted fully or partly according to the capabilities and practicality of implementation. These performance indicators enable libraries to use objective data and information for library decision making within a strategic planning framework. These might include new measures or derived measures from existing data such as ratios of volumes per faculty or student. The indicators also link to strategic management initiatives and may be used to answer questions on performance by both internal and external agencies.

All these indicators are there to assist us in maintaining an acceptable level of service. Full adoption therefore cannot be guaranteed unless there is some authority or agency that set the requirements and then check or audit the Performance and Quality. One such agency is the National Accreditation Board or "Lembaga Akreditasi Negara (LAN). This Board is entrusted with ensuring that each educational institution fulfills minimum requirements set.

In its initial establishment (1969) USM library gradually implemented work processes and services based on practices of other established universities of developed countries. By the 1990's the Library had already adopted acceptable international standards of facilities and services. These include:

- Collection Development that meet teaching, learning, research and consultancy needs
- Standard library practices in Acquisition, Processing and Services
- Inter Library Loans and Gift & Exchange
- Upgrading of processes from manual to automated systems
- Records in MARC format
- User Education Programmes
- Internet Workshops for Academic Staff
- On-going Staff Training
- TQM Initiatives and Practices

### **Quality Assurance in Malaysian Universities**

Most countries in the world have established some form of quality assurance in their education system with a specific body or institution that assess them continuously.

Europe as an example has ENQA, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, disseminates information, experiences and good practices in the field of quality assurance (QA) in higher education to European QA agencies, public authorities and higher

education institutions. Likewise, Malaysia has established her Assessment Panel under the Quality Assurance Division, Higher Education Department, of the Ministry of Higher Education.

“The internal assessment or self-study is an important part of the quality assurance process. Through a self-study process, the institution brings together representatives of the administration, the academic staff, students and other constituents to:

- (a) Collect and review data about the institution and its educational programme.
- (b) Analyse the data to identify the institutional strengths, areas of concern and opportunities.
- (c) **Develop strategies to ensure that the strengths are maintained and problems are addressed.**
- (d) **Make specific recommendations for further quality enhancement.”<sup>1</sup>**

For the above purpose, the Quality Assessment Panel of the Ministry then assess the report and make visits in order to evaluate the institution's capacity and organization of resources as well as the performance and effectiveness of its programme.

One of the subjects of scrutiny is none other than the Library. We therefore, had to ensure that points **c** and **d** mentioned above be catered for. At the same time, the Library was working closely and supporting the university's quality initiatives.

### **Background to USM's Quality Initiatives**

The 1990's had been a decade of internationalization for higher education throughout the world. While working on approaches in implementing internationalisation under the Institutional Management in Higher Education of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), one of the projects of focus was quality assurance. Recognising these strategies USM like many other universities introduced Internationalisation Quality Review Process (IQRP) in 1998.<sup>2</sup> Prior to 1998, much work was undertaken before its adoption.

This saw the beginning of a more structured approach to Quality Assurance because amongst the objectives of IQRP was:-

- To increase the awareness of the need for quality assessment and assurance in internationalisation of higher education.
- To develop a review process whereby USM can adapt and use a set of guidelines/framework to assess and enhance the quality of internationalisation strategies according to their own aims and objectives.
- To strengthen the contribution that internationalisation makes to the quality of higher education.

### **Malaysian Public Services Department Requirements (Government Circulars)**

All government agencies, including public universities in Malaysia are bound by the Public Services Department (PSD) circulars which are circulated periodically. Quality Assurance had been an important item in these circulars especially those that specified the implementation of TQM practices.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://apps.emoe.gov.my/qad/procedures2.html>

<sup>2</sup> Universiti Sains Malaysia (1998). Internationalisation of Quality Review Process (IQRP).

Therefore, Prior to IQRP, USM had introduced quality activities as a response to the government's call on promoting a quality culture amongst government organisations and institutions. In responding positively to this call, USM had to encourage participation from all departments within the university.

The evolution of the university's Quality culture thus began much earlier than IQRP with promotional activities beginning with Quality Day in 1996, Quality Week in 1997 and Quality Month in 1998. Activities include exhibitions, forums, seminars, which saw the participation of students, staff members and Schools. Initiatives also came in the form of various other approaches. Such were the adoption of management approaches like TQM, ISO 9000, Benchmarking and Balance Scorecard.

One catalyst for implementation of Q practices was USM's Annual Quality Award which boosted the spirit of competition and participation from all sectors. These awards cover various quality focuses such as product, customers and services.

### **USM Library Services - The Early Phases of Quality Awareness**

In supporting both PSD and the University's initiatives, the Library as provider of Facilities and Support Services had become one of the core participants during the initial stages of discussions. Quality objectives can be said to be common terminology amongst most libraries wherever they are. In the 70's and 80's for example the Library had specified its own standards for the Cataloguing Division (25 books per day) as well as the Readers Services Division (4 minutes for each manual loan transaction). As early as 1994 and till 1996 was seen as the early phases of exposure to TQM practices. In 1995, management of housekeeping was further improved with the adoption of 5S principles followed by the formation of the Quality and Productivity Committee. From these projects onwards, the library had started its tireless efforts in ensuring quality services.

As one of the strengths of any university, libraries must always and have always maintained their performance. Time to time they undertake initiatives towards keeping abreast with state of affairs, state of the art in technology as well as ensuring their effectiveness.

With this vision for quality, the Chief Librarian then was selected to be a member of USM's ISO Working Committee in April 1997. Together with a few selected Departments, dialogues and workshops were held throughout the year under the stewardship of USM's Quality Bureau. The USM Library was also amongst the few Departments within the university that strived to continue to undertake quality programmes and efforts through the formation of various quality related Committees.

In the process, the following Committees took shape as the need arose. These committees were for the implementation and ensuring maintenance of TQM practices and ISO certification activities:-

- Quality Improvement Teams
- 5S
- ISO
- Counter Services
- Benchmarking

The beginnings of efforts toward seeking ISO certification began in November 1997 when Heads of Departments were required to identify core processes. While this was going on, the Library strived in providing quality services when in 1999 the Library was awarded the Quality Award for Services. This is a reward of recognition, appreciation and support by the university for any effort taken towards achieving quality services.

## **ISO Certification and its Implication**

The statutory requirement for government agencies in Malaysia to be assessed for their quality services by the end of the year 2003 was a requirement specifically stated in the government circular "*Pekeliling Kemajuan Perkhidmatan Awam Bil.2 1996 - Garis Panduan Bagi Melaksanakan ISO 9000 dalam Perkhidmatan Awam*" (Circular on the Enhancement of Public Services No.2 1996 - Guidelines on Implementation of ISO 9000 in Public Services)<sup>3</sup>. In complying with government circulars, it has further motivated our library to adopt and maintain it. The formulation of the Library's Quality Policy and the appointment of a Quality Manager in 1998 were a stated commitment toward certification for ISO 9001:1994 in 2001. Though certification was received in 2001, it took us almost 4 years of preparation. Assuring Quality was therefore a struggle initially but later became a part and parcel of library services.

Generally, the ISO Standard emphasise on user satisfaction as a performance indicator. As applied by business management and marketing services user satisfaction as a performance indicator has increasingly become an area of interest for libraries. This meant that Customer Complaints is an important element in the Standard

When organizations speak of recognition it is ISO certification that provides the qualification of an acceptable level of quality product or service. The accreditation has been an obvious sought after acknowledgement amongst many manufacturing and trading business because ISO certification has been recognized for its importance as a management and marketing tool.

The adoption of ISO 9000 Standards and successful certification therefore, had further assisted the Library in providing a measure of quality performance because certification proves that the Library has gone through a rigorous regiment of self-analysis, self-inspection and documentation of processes. There is therefore no doubt about the certification's role as an excellent management and marketing tool.

## **ISO Working Committee**

From the appointment of members of a Task Force in 1998, a Working Committee was later appointed to ensure the maintenance and continuity of certification. Sustainability as an important subject was not just a matter of concern for certification but also a matter of concern for the working committee. To avoid exhaustion within the committee it was agreed that each committee member serve for a 2 year period. Every two years, new members were assigned to undertake specific responsibilities. This approach had also been a practical way of making all Librarians more exposed and acquire experience of maintaining QMS.

In sustaining certification, organisations have to comply with current versions. With the introduction of MS ISO 2000 version, all organisations had to make the necessary changes and adaptations.

## **Adoption by all Three Campuses**

The success of certification in 2001 was not the end but the beginnings of a continued strive towards quality assurance. With the appearance of version 2000 we had to ensure adoption in the following year. Management made the right decision to incorporate all three campuses for certification and extending the scope of adoption of QMS. This was a challenging period as we had to train additional staff from the medical and engineering campuses and at the same time expand the documentation.

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<sup>3</sup> Habsah Abdul Rahman, Abdul Akla Wan Ismail, Mohd Idris Hj Ali. ISO Certification - a marketing tool... Presented at the International Conference on Libraries, 14-16 March 2005, Penang, Malaysia.

The effort began with the first meeting to adopt version 2000. A new working committee was formed to include members from the branch campuses. The first meeting was held in April 2002 and followed by another meeting in Kelantan in April 2002. The year 2002 later became a year of endless discussions and meetings in ensuring all three campuses achieved accreditation.

Distance between our three campuses had created the necessity for improved approaches to documentation. "Necessity is the mother of invention", a proverb which can never be defied.

### **Digital Documentation (e-Doc)**

Much of the work undertaken in the field of ISO 9000 Quality Management was focused on complying with ISO 9000 requirements to get or maintain a certified Quality Management System which in many cases has resulted in very high levels of record-keeping and form-filling.

Many organisations that adopt ISO certification are of the opinion that it produced excessive bureaucracy, rigidity and inflexibility in the process of standardisation of practices and therefore difficulty in documentation.

The idea of a fully electronic documentation which was to be web-based became not just desirable but an appropriate approach for USM QMS. After much discussion, the team put forward the idea of a digital documentation system of all work procedures and work instructions. This was inclusive of all other related documents such as Lists, and Manuals and accompanying forms.

The whole ISO documentation then transformed from a purely printed format to a digital format. The idea of a fully electronic documentation which was to be web-based became the right answer. In standardising work procedures and work instructions, USM libraries now have better control, standard practices between campuses and Quality Assurance of our procedures and services.

Since 2002, the Library's QMS, is stored, maintained and accessed from e-Doc. At last, editing and updating became tireless.

Our approach and method of documentation had been commended by the Auditing body (SIRIM QAS International). We noted that we have taken the lead in this and through their Audits on other organisations; they had recommended that those organisations refer to us for ideas in documentation.

### **Quality Principles**

Requirements under ISO QMS standardisation spells out the following principles which reflect assurance in quality performance and services. These principles are:

- Customer Focus
- Leadership
- Involvement of Pople
- System Approach to Management
- Continual Improvement
- Factual Approach to Decision Making
- Mutually Beneficial Supplier Relationships

## **Customer Focus**

It is Customer comments and complaints is an important aspect within customer focus as it is the point of understanding what is important to the customer. From time to time customer satisfaction has been analysed and reported at the Management Review Meetings. Decisions relating to products or services related to customer requirements are then made.

## **Benefits of ISO Certification as a Quality Assurance Tool**

Due to the international recognition, ISO 9000 is liable to bring about the quality it is meant to address. It is therefore considered as a model to which organizations must conform if they are to ensure their legitimacy and credibility.

The standard has had a positive impact on our practices. For example, it is really important to have an efficient quality control process when we undertake technical processing because the clauses specify and require strict adherence to standards set as spelled out in the Quality Objectives. The ISO system has thus helped us monitor our processes and outputs better.

Another notable aspect of both the ISO standard is the emphasis on user satisfaction as a performance indicator. Over 400,000 certificates had been granted by the end of December 2000 proving its world-wide acceptance.

## **The Way to Go**

From the year 2002, the Library has to ensure that any improvements and changes to QMS be documented and practiced accordingly.

In charting our success with ISO accreditation, we had achieved the following:

- 2001 - Certification for MS ISO 9002:1994 (Main Library only)
- 2002 - Upgrade to certification of MS ISO 9001:2000 and the extension to the Health and Engineering Campuses
- 2003 - Maintenance of Certification
- 2004 - Reassessment - Accreditation extended to 2007
- Dec. 2005 - Forthcoming Surveillance Audit for Maintenance

Looking and comparing with counterparts in the same field of services is one way of knowing our status quo. A survey had been undertaken on the status of quality assurance amongst academic libraries in Malaysia. Based on the responses received we found that:-

- Many academic libraries have now achieved MS ISO accreditation.
- Those that have yet to adopt ISO certification have adopted many TQM practices.
- Quality Objectives have been part and parcel work processes and services by all academic libraries.

## **Training and Better Understanding**

There has been much information exchange on experiences in adopting ISO standards and certification. Academic libraries in Malaysia have all come closer by continuously communicating on issues of certification and through visits and discussions we try to maintain and that assure quality products and services to our customers.

## **Conclusion**

Our Quality journey has come a long way with many years of input by library personnel and support by other Departments in the university. However, the journey will not end as long as we are here to serve our customers.

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