

ISO Certification:

Everything you need to know.



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The adaptable and scalable nature of the ISO system means that the specific set of processes that are right for your business is pretty much unique. The downside of this is that what's involved in implementing an ISO system can seem difficult to pin down - as it depends on the scale of your business and changes by industry and standard.

However, there are many common elements to this system that bring together the best from operations the world over. Here we help demystify the entire process. We begin with the most basic of questions - why should you go for certification in the first place.



Why should you get an ISO?



To allow your organisation to grow.

Without losing control of all the intricate operational processes that have made it successful so far. This is especially the case if those processes have been created and delegated by one person, usually the founder.



To increase your chances of winning tenders.

To make it clear - achieving ISO certification will not guarantee that you will win all the tenders you bid for. However, in many cases, holding an ISO is a bid requirement or a strong 'nice to have' and will work in your favour.



To demonstrate good working practices.

Industry specific accreditation or certification sends a clear message that your organisation has the expertise required to work to a globally accepted level in your field.



To unify different parts of your organisation.

If your organisation has grown through mergers and acquisitions, you'll likely be running different systems across a range of sites. This is inefficient and can even present a barrier to teams working together. An ISO system will ensure commonality across all part of your business, both now and as you expand further.



To operate at a world-class level.

The systems you'll use to run your business will help you reduce waste, boost profit and increase staff morale and customer retention. You'll be able to expand more efficiently and increase your return to your shareholders or company owners. You'll also be able to advertise that you've obtained a third party audited, globally recognised, label of excellence that will raise your profile within your industry.

What's involved and how you get there.

Implementing an ISO system and achieving certification or accreditation will require you to look at every area of your operations. It's comprehensive and robust - and like all projects can be broken down into smaller steps. Here's a list of how you get from here to there.

1 Decide on your ideal operational strategy.

This is the opportunity for you to implement the procedures you've always wanted and change the ones that aren't working. Remember to take account of how your business may develop in the future.

You'll need to consider:

- Legislation
- Organisations structure
- Procedures
- Financial and ethical targets
- Operating profit
- Suppliers and outsourcing partners

The result can be mapped any way you like - as a description or a flow chart - as long as it works for your business and everyone understands the outcome.



2 Make clear the stance you will take in key areas.

Create relevant policy documents for each of these areas.

This may include:

- Quality
- Environment
- Health and safety
- Treatment of staff
- Customer satisfaction
- Complaints ethical issues.

This list is by no means complete and you may need additional key areas that fit your industry.



3 Create specific tasks from the documented strategy.

Now you should have a set of policy documents plus an overview of your company structure and strategy. From this you can list specific objectives. These should be laid out clearly with target dates and person responsible noted. Of course the person responsible should be senior enough to complete the task, and someone should be given overall responsibility so all the tasks on the list get done.



It's worth noting that the above three steps are essential for any and all organisations to maintain control of their activities.

ISO requires that procedures follow a particular approach - for example, activities need to be allocated to specific people, recorded appropriately and reviewed periodically within the organisation by internal audit and senior level management review. It's this senior level management review that will trigger change, development and continuous improvement and, ultimately, produce the results that an ISO system can achieve.

With that in mind, the following steps ensure that everyone understands the system and the company continues to develop as a whole:

4 Agree a standard reporting approach.

There needs to be a co-ordinated documentation control procedure for writing, editing, reviewing and releasing new procedures, policies and other corporate decision and evidence recording documents.



5 Make staff training a key part of their development.

Each employee needs to be given the skills they need to do their job now, and in the future as responsibilities change. This needs to be managed as part of the staff review programme and refresher courses given where necessary.



6 Act on your strengths and weaknesses.

You'll need to set up a complaints / compliments system to ensure that all feedback is:

- recorded
- reacted to appropriately
- followed up to gauge outcome at a later date

The outcomes feed into the management review so trends can be identified - both positive and negative - and changes at a procedural level can be made accordingly.



7 Walk the walk.

The new processes and procedures generated need to become how your business operates. Staff, and even your customers, need to understand and follow your own procedures. Clearly this is how these procedures actually produce results for your business, but also removes the perception that ISO is merely 'added bureaucracy' because the resultant systems are not 'added' - they are just how you work.



8 Teach your staff to love audits.

Internal and external auditing is part of maintaining an ISO standard - and with good reason. Your staff will need training in how to carry out an internal audit and why this is important for your business. Auditing is about catching people doing things right (and giving them praise as a result) - not about catching them out or finding fault.



ISO Assessment

With the above in place, you're ready for the actual assessment by an external auditor that is able to grant certification or accreditation should all the requirements be met.



The assessment is carried out in two stages:

Stage 1

The assessors review the systems and documentation as written against the demands and the requirements of the standard in question. If this stage is passed, then you're ready to operate in accordance with the accepted procedures.



Stage 2

Following operation for at least three months, together with internal auditing and management review, the second stage assessment takes place. This is really to determine whether you have been following your own systems that were approved in Stage 1. If you have then you'll be assessed as having passed and will gain your certification (or accreditation in the case of ISO 17025).

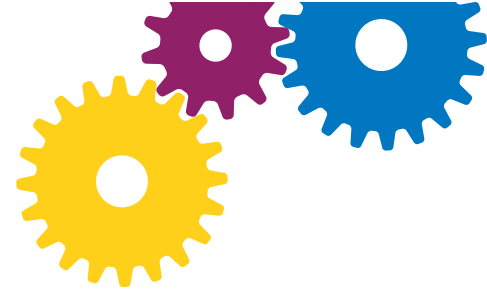


List of documentation you might need:

- Policies, objectives and targets.
- Procedures.
- Organigram and related responsibilities.
- Process description or flow chart.
- Templates for reports and forms.
- Schedules for internal auditing, training, review of customer feedback, management reviews etc.



What ISO can (and can't) do for your business.



Implementation of an ISO standard has shown the following benefits to many organisations:

- ✓ Generates a complete and robust system across an organisation, encompassing continuous improvement and training.
- ✓ Increases financial returns, enhances efficiency, raises corporate profiles and reduces the use of resources.
- ✓ Helps to remove unnecessary duplication and the associated paperwork.
- ✓ Engenders an internal sense of pride in achieving and maintaining the standard for annual assessments.
- ✓ Adds a strategic level to the corporate offering through an improved profile and competitive advantage.
- ✓ Increases customer confidence.
- ✓ Attains recognition of achievement by external parties – locally and further afield.
- ✓ Reduces the cost of environmental permits and lowers insurance premiums.

However, there are things it can't do, namely:

- ✗ It won't deliver improvements to your business unless you actually implement the processes into your daily operations.
- ✗ It doesn't automatically guarantee that you'll win every tender or close every sale you go after.
- ✗ It doesn't maintain itself – someone will have to make sure you're adhering to the process, by holding the required management reviews, and liaise with the assessors.
- ✗ It won't turn a fundamentally flawed product or business model into a profitable one.
- ✗ It will never, ever deliver the results possible if your senior management doesn't wholeheartedly buy into it.

The Qualitation Guarantee:

We've been helping companies achieve ISO certification for over 17 years. In this time we've achieved **100% first time success** in attaining every single ISO standard that our clients are seeking. We commit to doing what it takes to ensure that this record is maintained.



How long will it take?

This varies according to your own organisation and depends on the scale and scope of the operations to be included, the standard chosen, the amount of time you have to dedicate to the project, external events and simply when an assessor is available.



However, we promised to demystify the process, so here are some basic guidelines to timeframe that will help to give you an idea of how long the process may take in your own organisation:

- For an organisation of less than ten employees, running a fairly smooth operation. 9001 and/or 14001 and/or 18001 can be achieved between seven and 18 days of our time. This will take place over at least three months and no longer than 18 months.
- For the same organisation to carry out AS9100, ISO 17025 or TS 16949 it would take a little longer. 15 to 25 days of our time over a 5-18 month timeframe would be typical.
- However, ISO 13485 might require only 6-10 days over a 2-6 month timeframe.

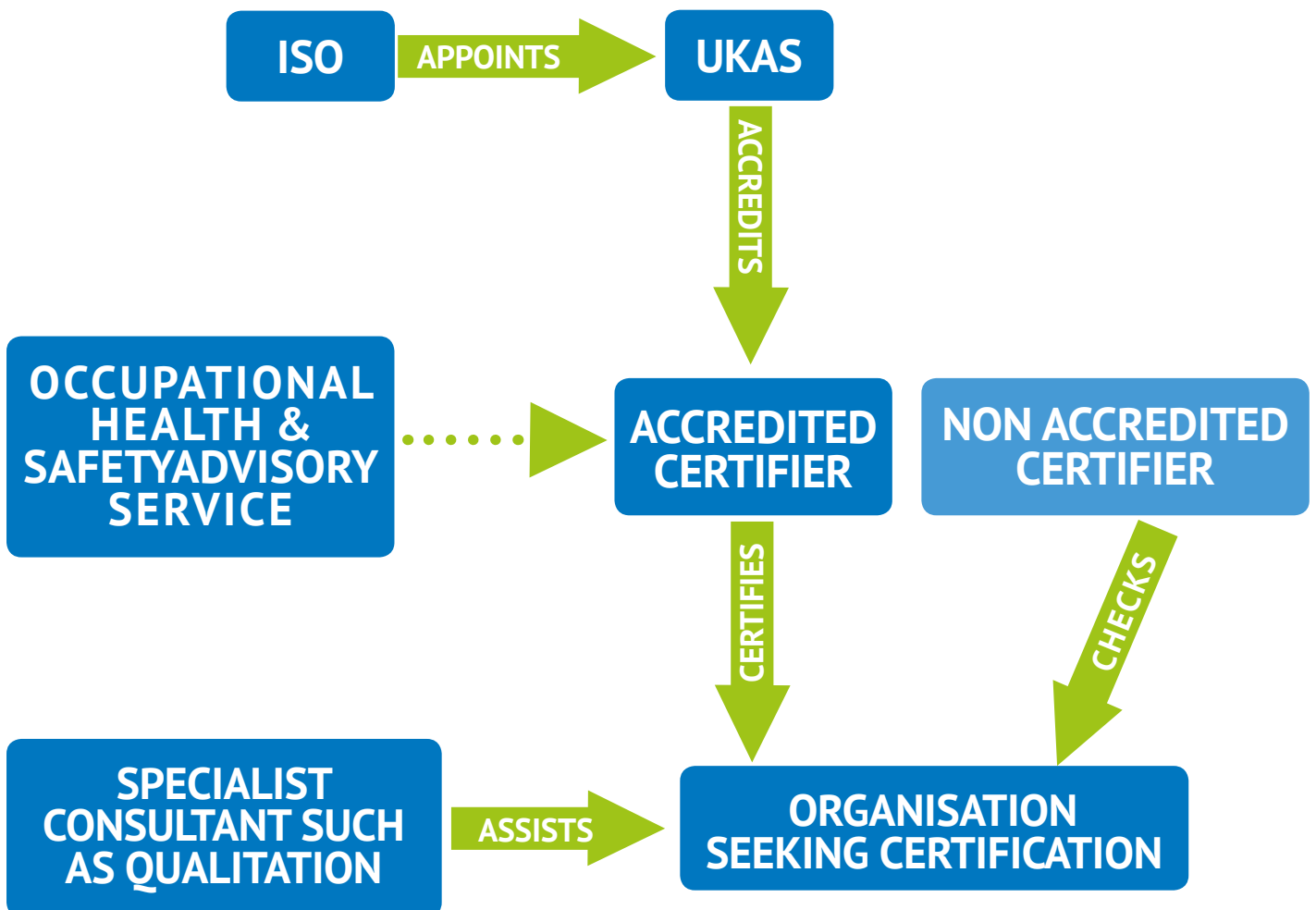
Larger organisations, additional standards, and complex or unique processes may lengthen the certification time and usually result in more specialist expertise needed.

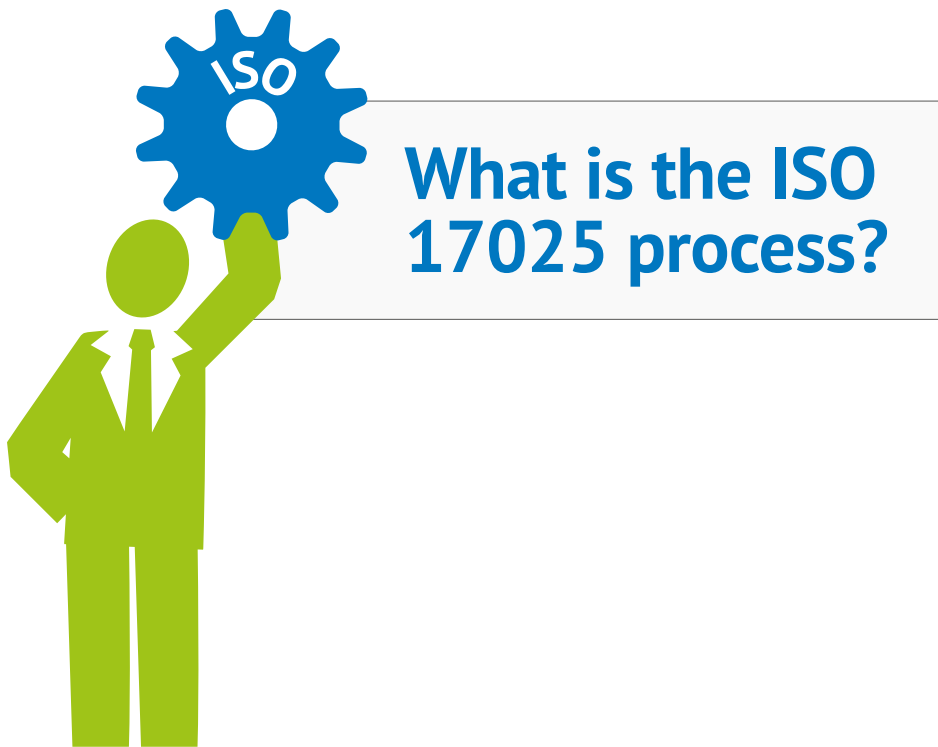
Multiple sites can be very different in their timescales: often this depends on whether they choose to have the standard(s) installed across all sites at the same time, or tackle each one in series.





What is the normal ISO standard process?





Who can provide Certification?

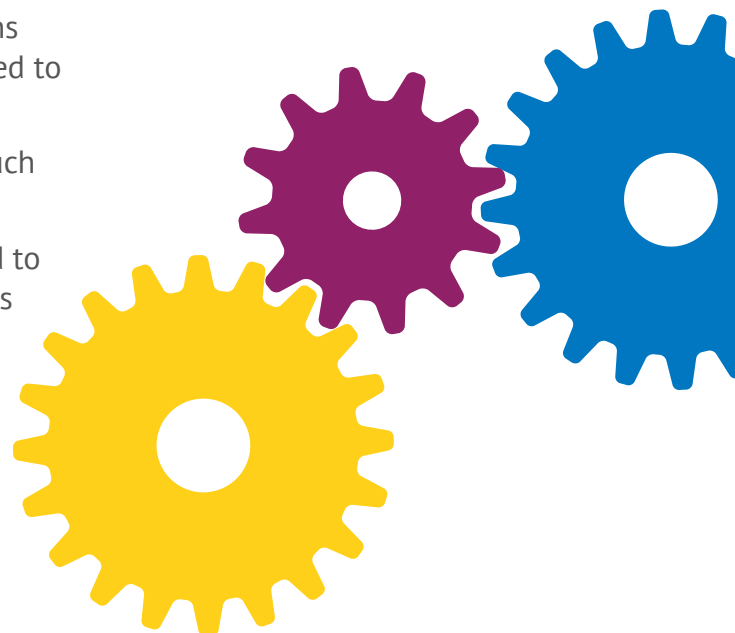
Any organisation stating that it can perform certifications should be able to demonstrate that it has been accredited to do so.

The ISO route is that the appropriate body carries out such accreditations (in the UK this is only UKAS).

There are other accreditation bodies that are not related to ISO (and are sometimes set up by the certification bodies that they subsequently accredit).

These are not illegal in any way - but they are not in conformance with the formal ISO approach.

The current trend is that this is being discouraged by more and more bodies, including public sector tendering organisations, so that the only acceptable route for them is to use an ISO accredited body.



Is there a grant for ISO standards?

There are almost always a range of options. There are grants available, depending on which standard you need to get. It also depends on where you are within the UK.

Most grants are match funded to between 30% and 50% - meaning that the grant will be for a third to a half of the cost and you'll provide the rest of the funds. Many are restricted by the size of your organisation or what field you are operating in.

We can talk you through what's available. It's in our interest to help you get any financial help you can as we can then provide our services at less of a cost to your own business.



Taking it further.

We hope that many of your ISO questions have been answered through the information presented in this guide. If you'd like to discuss your own requirements further including getting an individually costed proposal, then call us on: **0845 600 6975** or email: **enquiries@qualitation.co.uk** and we'd be happy to help.



Following the success of our BSI audit, I want to convey our thanks for helping us achieve this success.

The auditor was impressed with how prepared we were and advised that this was the first instance she had seen in two years where there had not been a single non-conformance at either the Stage 1 or Stage 2 audits.

The result has been a quality management system that not only conforms to the ISO standard, but that fits with the way we operate our business. We were able to take your guidance and further grow our processes and documentation to suit our needs.

Chantal Watling

Quality Manager, Wolfram



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