Quality Assurance Policy

Our overall approach to quality assurance

As will be apparent, we are a small organisation whose aim is to deliver high quality consultancy services through the personal involvement of our three Principal Associates and a small number of other Associates who help us on larger projects and whom we trust implicitly.

Even were it possible for an organisation such as ours to gain and maintain a certified international-standard quality assurance accreditation, we do not believe that it would either help us in our work or add any additional reassurance to our clients. The best assurance we can give our clients comes through their meeting us as Principal Associates personally and being assured, through the evidence of our work, as to the quality of the service we offer.

We therefore have is a structured way of running projects which we follow, religiously, in every case; the key elements of this are outlined in the following paragraphs.

The management of projects

Consideration of invitations to tender

We propose for work where we feel we have underpinning knowledge required and something to contribute. We do not submit what might be regarded as more “speculative bids” for work.

Understanding the client’s needs fully

Understanding the client’s needs starts with the invitation to tender. We will always seek clarification from the client on aspects of the project that are not clear from the documentation provided. Where purchasing regulations permit (and we accept that unfortunately in many cases they no longer do so) we will seek a face-to-face briefing from the client on what precisely they are looking for. We always attend tenderers’ open forum meetings.

Assuming that our proposal is successful, our first request is for a detailed initial set-up meeting with the client to confirm our understanding of the project and to discuss any issues arising from our proposed methodology. We will also request access to any required reading or initial research at this point.

Finally we always share our research instruments with the client before they are used in the field – this gives the client the opportunity to ensure that we are covering all of the key areas in an appropriate manner.

Fielding an experienced team to deliver the project

Our most experienced and senior staff are involved in the day-to-day delivery of projects. Our associates are all highly experienced.

Identifying an appropriate project manager

We have a choice of three equally experienced Project Managers among our Principal Associates, and will choose the one that is most qualified and experienced to lead the project in hand.

Briefing the team fully before work begins

The project manager assumes responsibility for initial background research and briefing the team prior to fieldwork commencing. The briefing is generally face to face (allowing team members the opportunity to raise questions and discuss issues) and takes between half a day and a day, depending on the complexity of the project and the degree of familiarity that the team members already have with it.

Maintaining regular contact with the team throughout

Regular contact with the team is maintained throughout the project:

- As a matter for course – for example sharing notes of interviews, reading etc around the team
- At specific points in time – for example a key task in every project is for the team to meet to consider findings prior to drafting the report.
- On a more ad hoc basis, as matters arise that require communicating across the team.

For longer projects we also run additional team briefings before each tranche of fieldwork to ensure that, as the world inevitably moves on, the team remains up to speed with developments, current thinking etc.

Maintaining regular contact with the client throughout

There are key points during a project when we specifically look for client contact:

- On commissioning – we hold set-up/project initiation meetings as soon as possible after contracts are awarded to ensure that the project starts promptly and with direction
- As research instruments are prepared – to ensure that we will be covering all the relevant ground in our fieldwork. We note that we are required to do this under the terms of the draft Agreement; but it is in any case our normal practice to do this
- As fieldwork is set-up – to keep the client informed of progress and ensure that any difficulties are highlighted promptly
- During reporting – to share our headline thoughts with the client prior to drafting outputs.

The extent of more ad hoc contacts varies considerably according to the project.

Documenting all fieldwork

We always document all fieldwork formally and share it among all team members. This is important for at least two reasons:

- What may seem like a one-off point to one member of the team may actually prove to be a more common finding when shared with other team members.
- With the best will in the world, there is a risk that views are skewed by more recent discussions – documenting the key points from all discussions as they occur helps to prevent this.

Reviewing all outputs

All outputs – interim and final and including research instruments – are reviewed by team members before they are shared with the client and then used in the field.

For fieldwork instruments, we also pilot and review to ensure that they are doing the job that we thought they would do when drafting them.

Client feedback

We seek feedback from the client at the end of the project. We do this orally rather than via a standard "feedback form" since we are aware that clients often have their own internal processes in relation to this activity and we do not want to put clients to more work by duplicating them.

Overall quality management and control

We take the quality of our work extremely seriously. The approach outlined in the preceding paragraphs is followed in each project; every member of our team will be fully aware of the elements of this approach and will experience the key elements of it. Indeed, having worked as sub-contractors for other consultancies, we believe that our own team will be far more aware of our quality management processes than we have been when working for others who, we assume, have comprehensively documented and/or certified QCSs/QMSs.

The evidence from the field is that our quality management process works. We have a reputation for producing outputs – interim and final – that are substantially "right first time" and require little amendment before being finalised. We can categorically state that we have never received any adverse comments from clients about the quality of any aspect of our work.

V3.6
December 2013