

REGISTRATION AND CERTIFICATION OF QUALITY PERSONNEL ACCORDING TO THE EOQ SCHEME

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Keywords: training, certification, EOQ scheme, quality personnel,

ABSTRACT

At the paper some of the main advantages of the EOQ harmonized scheme for the registration and certification of quality personnel are discussed together with recognition procedure for SZK as EOQ agent. Also our first experiences in training and certification of personnel for EOQ quality systems manager (who holds the responsibility for the creation and implementation of a quality system within a company or organization) are presented.

1. INTRODUCTION

In most European organizations, the battle to have quality recognized as a fundamental management discipline has been won. Professionals are now more mobile than ever and, with moves towards greater harmonization of business practices within the Euro-pean Union and beyond; there is a real demand for a European system of quality training and qualifications. The focus has therefore now shifted to the experience, training, qualifications and recognition of quality personnel. Merely having people with specific responsibilities for quality does not guarantee that you have quality personnel.

Such a system exists in the shape of the EOQ Harmonized Scheme for the Qualification and Registration of Quality Personnel. The European Organization for Quality (EOQ) established the scheme as part of its mission to strengthen Europe's economic system by promoting improvement in all aspects of quality - from developments in quality systems management through to the use of quality as a competitive market force by anticipating customer needs and creating customer confidence.

The EOQ Harmonized Scheme for the Qualification and Registration of Quality Personnel, introduced in 1994, uses the training and qualification schemes that already exist in most of the EOQ's member countries and strengthens them by harmonizing the relevant procedures. But the EOQ scheme does not prescribe how the training of quality personnel should be conducted. The EOQ's goal is to achieve mutual recognition of qualifications within the scheme and, hence, the registration and/or certification of quality personnel.

2. THE EOQ PERSONNEL REGISTRATION SCHEME

The European Organization for Quality, EOQ, is an autonomous, non-profit making association under Belgian law. As the co-coordinating body and catalyst for its 34 national full member organizations (FMO's), the EOQ has a unique outlook on the contribution that quality makes to organizations of all types, in all sectors, right across Europe. The EOQ was established in 1956 and its present membership is comprised of 34 national European quality organizations, as well as institutions, companies and individuals from all over the world.

The idea of creating the "European Quality Engineer" is not new. The Education and Training Committee of the EOQ discussed this idea already more than ten years ago. However, at that time the requirements were not very clear. Quite a number of EOQ Full Member Organizations (FMOs) performed training courses for different target groups; the most important were Quality Inspectors and Engineers. There were certain other difficulties at that time: the different languages in the FMO countries was one, the not yet existing common guideline for Quality Systems was the other.

The situation changed when the ISO Standards Series 9000 were accepted, published and put in force as a harmonized European Standard Series EN 29000 to 29004. Industrial customers were no longer satisfied with product certificates and quality marks, they asked for an Indication, a witness and a proof of the capability to produce quality I an information which could be gained prior to the supply of the products and even prior to the time of placing an order .

The certificate demonstrating the quality capability was the logical consequence. In this context the national organizations dealing with the certification of quality systems with the aim of an international recognition of the quality system certificate and the European Organizations striving for mutual acceptance of certificates, the European Network for Quality System Assessment and Certification (E-Q-Net) on a bilateral basis and for multilateral acceptance of certificates the European Committee for Quality assessment and Certification (EQS) asked for a unified or harmonized qualification of relevant auditors.

The EOQ as the competent organization with FMOs performing already training in the field of quality engineering and auditing recognized that it was its task to become active. The EOQ was aware right from the beginning that the training and education of quality auditors was not a matter of training in a short seminar. Training of auditors can only be based on a sound knowledge of quality engineering and experience with quality systems, quality tools and methods.

The Education and Training Committee, on proposal of the EOQ Executive and the General Assembly) started a survey in order to learn more about the training offered by the FMOs of EOQ in their countries. The result showed that in almost all countries the FMOs perform training courses for different levels of target groups, some specifically for auditors. The survey also proved that training of auditors cannot be and is not an isolated training in the Quality field. A brief history of establishing EOQ Harmonized Scheme is:

- 1985-1990 The EOQ Education and Training committee defines the Knowledge and experience of Quality Professional.
- 1990-1993 EOQ builds the EOQ Personnel Harmonized Scheme

- June 13, 1993 in Helsinki EOQ General Assembly accepts the Memorandum of understanding for establishing an EOQ Harmonized Scheme for the Qualification and Registration of Quality Personnel.
- January 1, 1994 Official date of launching of the EOQ PRS
- August 1994, SAQ receives the first EOQ accreditation as agent of EOQ for registration of Personnel
- January 19, 1995 DGQ receives the recognition certificate as agent of EOQ for registration of Personnel
- October 30, 1996 The EOQ Personnel Scheme is recorded in the document A European Quality promotion policy for improving European Competitiveness (Ch III, 2, e) : *"One of the main methods of bringing coherence to the quality world ...would be to ensure that training programs develop similar approaches.....In this contest, the work already carried out by bodies such as the European Organization for Quality (EOQ), which has developed harmonized scheme, at European level...could be of exemplary value."*
- June 1, 2003, SQA (SZK - Slovensko združenje za kakovost) receives the recognition certificate as agent of EOQ for registration of Personnel.

Harmonized EOQ rules and procedures were established for both the qualification and the registration of quality personnel. These rules and procedures are based on EN 45013 *"General Criteria for Bodies Operating Certification of Personnel"* and the new ISO 17024 standard *"General requirements for bodies operating certification schemes for persons"*. The requirements to be fulfilled by the EOQ FMOs are national accreditation, the submission of the organizations quality manual and a declaration of conformity in accordance with EN 45014 and ISO 17024. Procedure for the recognition of Full Member Organization (FMO) sharing the EOQ Personal Registration Scheme (PRS) is presented in **Figure 1**.

To set up its harmonized scheme, the EOQ first agreed with its participating FMOs on the requirements needed to achieve international conformity. Harmonized EOQ rules and procedures were then established for both the qualification and the registration of quality personnel. For an FMO to be recognized as an agent, it must either prove that it is accredited as a certification body by its national accreditation authority or undergo a rigorous peer evaluation by auditors appointed by the EOQ for that purpose.

All recognized FMOs are also audited periodically by the EOQ. Participating FMOs must satisfy the EOQ at all times that national procedures meet the requirements of the harmonized scheme. FMOs are also obliged to recognize the training and certification provided by other bodies in their countries, so long as they meet the EOQ scheme's rules and requirements.

Each FMO offers up successful candidates (trained by themselves or by other qualifying and registered national bodies) in the five categories to the EOQ General Secretariat, which is the central point for registration and the issuing of certificates. Each registration and certificate carries an exclusive identification number, which ensures that each record is dedicated and can easily be traced and updated as necessary.

There are today 17 countries recognized as EOQ agent: Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.

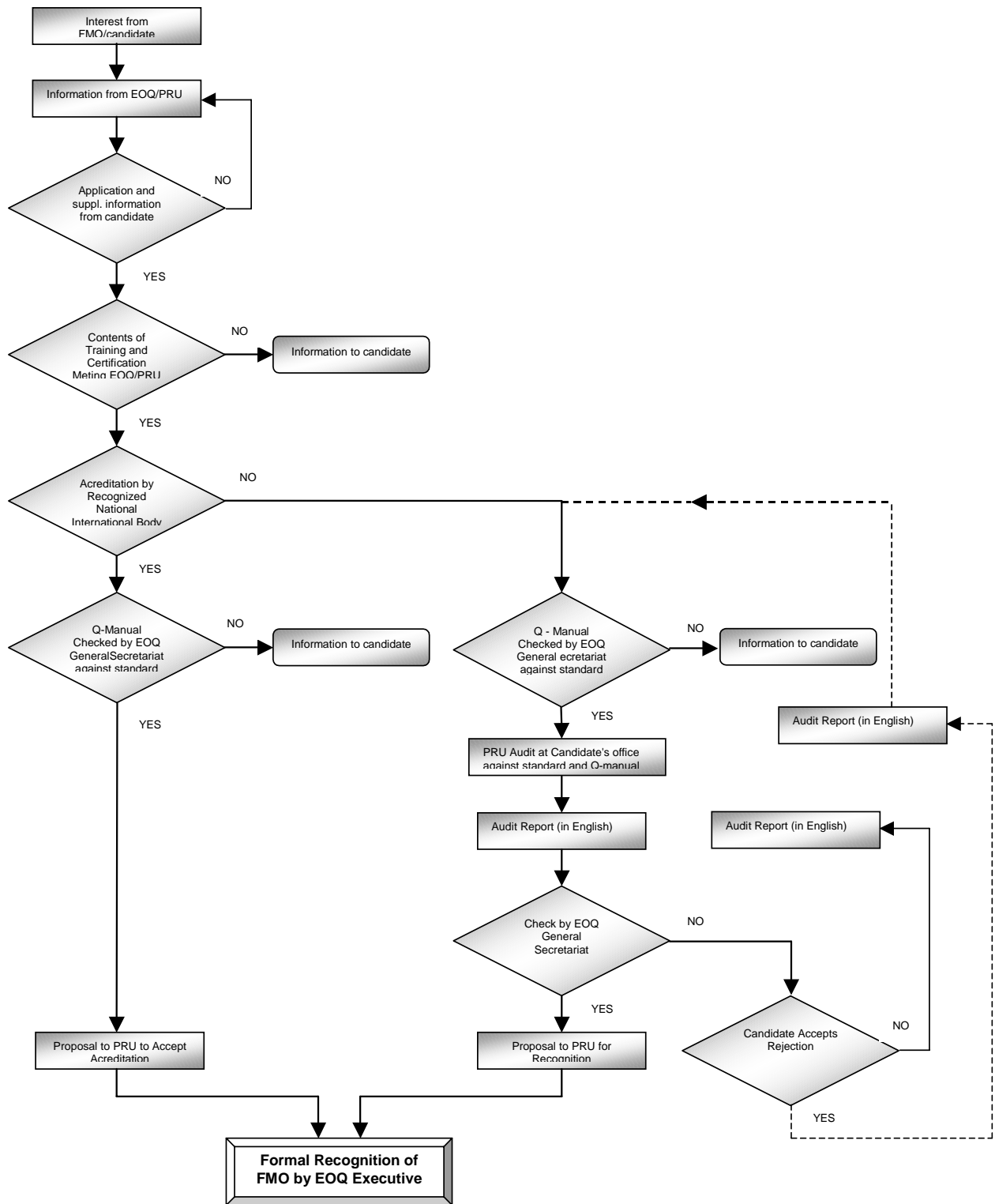


Figure 1: Procedure for the recognition of FMO sharing the EOQ PRS

3. CATEGORIES OF EOQ SCHEME

The EOQ scheme has been welcomed as being genuinely European and has been commended for its openness, transparency and credibility in the eyes of a wide range of users. Eleven categories of quality personnel are identified by the EOQ scheme:

- An **EOQ quality professional** is, for example, a quality engineer with responsibilities for devising and applying quality techniques.
- An **EOQ quality systems manager** holds the responsibility for the creation and implementation of a quality system within a company or organization.
- An **EOQ quality auditor** is a person qualified to conduct external (third party) audits.
- An **EOQ TQM assessor** is qualified to perform self-assessments (internal assessments) and/or third party assessments (external assessments). He is also eligible to take part in the assessment process for the national quality awards. The assessments are performed according to Business Excellence models, European or equivalents.
- An **EOQ environmental systems manager** holds the responsibility for the creation and implementation and further development of an Environmental Management System.
- An **EOQ environmental auditor** is qualified to perform environmental audits (2nd and 3rd party audits).
- An **EOQ TQM leader** is qualified to lead, coach and support in a professional manner management and staff of an organization in the management of change towards TQM, in accordance with TQM/Excellence models, either European or equivalents.
- An **EOQ Health and Safety Systems Manager** is qualified to hold the responsibility for the creation and implementation of a Health And Safety Management System (HSMS)
An EOQ Health and Safety Auditor is qualified to perform health and safety system audits (2nd and 3rd arty audits)
- An **EOQ Process Manager** is qualified to be a co-coordinator and multiplier of the: process oriented way of thinking in the organization, identification, management and improvement of the organization's processes, recognition of optimization potentials, promotion of the systematic realization of the organization's strategy
- An **EOQ management system consultant** is capable of understand and to be able to explain, to indicate relevant methods, help to apply them and to manage the process and content of consultancy project, to elaborate and integrate relevant methods, to moderate and interpret the results of consultancy project and to generate measurable benefit

4. EOQ QUALITY SYSTEM MANAGERS

EOQ quality systems managers must have the ability to install quality systems that meet the requirements of any size of company and to act as the management representative. They must be able to perform product and process audits, to act as internal auditors and to be partners for certification audits. Candidates for the EOQ quality systems manager category should hold a university degree or equivalent, relevant to their fields of employment.

Again, the definition of equivalence is a matter for the agent FMO. Summary of the education and training requirements for the EOQ Quality Systems Managers (QSM) is presented in **Figure 2**.

Before qualifying as a quality systems manager, the candidates should have accumulated appropriate practical workplace training and experience over a minimum period of two years. In addition they should have at least two years' practical experience in quality assurance, part of which should be in quality systems management. EOQ quality systems managers should be open-minded, quality-minded, honest, loyal, skilled and ready to accept and to learn new techniques. They should have managerial abilities, demonstrate the ability to work in teams and should be cost-conscious.

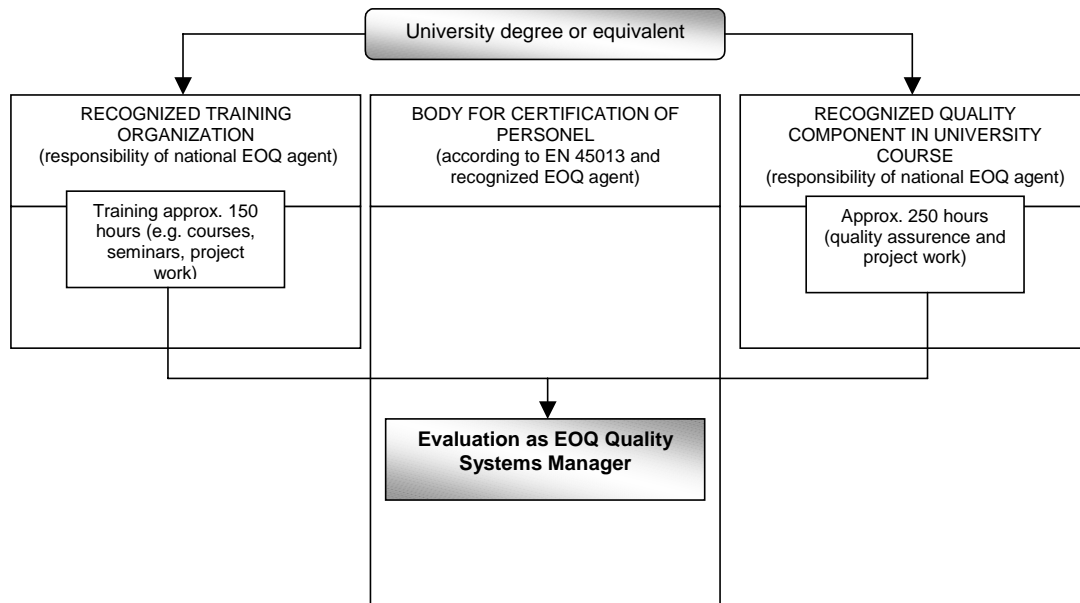


Figure 2: Education and training requirements for EOQ-QSM

The EOQ quality systems managers must be competent in all quality management techniques:

- Quality system principles,
- Review and evaluation of quality related costs considerations,
- Quality costs systems,
- Quality data information systems/ communications,
- Quality documentation and records,
- Product safety and liability,
- Personnel recruitment, education and training related to quality,
- Evaluation of statistical methods,
- Treatment of non-conformance,
- Corrective action programs,
- Maintenance and improvement of quality systems,
- Supplier evaluation,
- Management of measuring and testing equipment,
- Management of quality inspection and quality assurance in each phase element,
- Initiating quality motivation and quality improvement programs,
- Advanced quality management methods,
- Development of quality audit programs.

5. SLOVENIAN QUALITY ASSOCIATION CERTIFICATION BODY – CB SZK

SZK is a legal entity established in accordance with the Association Act (Zakon o Drustvih, UL SRS 37/74, 42/86). The association is a non-profit organisation, which is represented by its president. The association was founded in 1991 with 1000 members today. Members of the association are individuals who take an active part in systematic quality management in their environment. SZK started with the project of setting-up all formalities to become an EOQ FMO at the beginning of 2001 (CB within the structure of the SZK is presented in *Figure 3*).

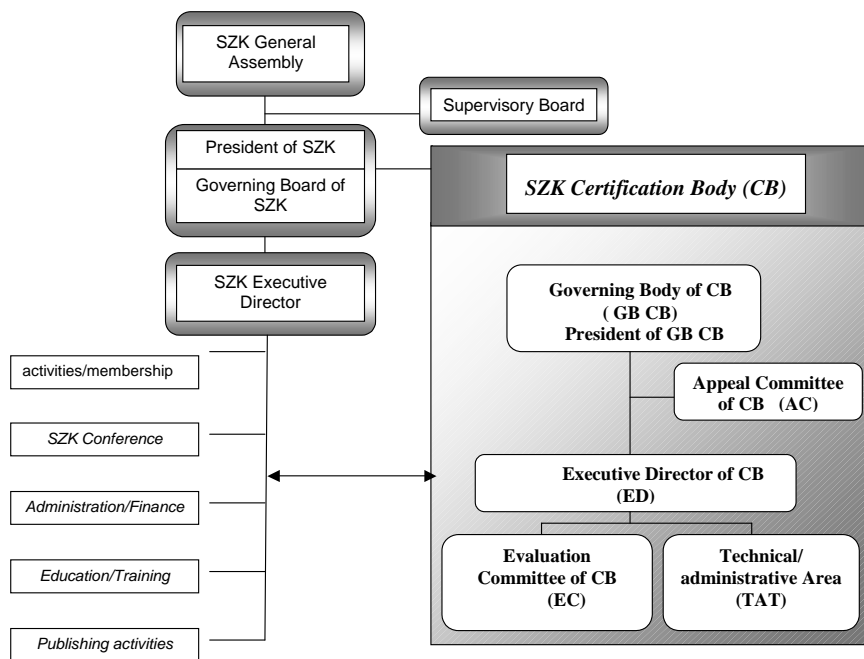


Figure 3: The structure of the Slovenian Quality Association

With the certification of expertise and with the integration of this kind of expertise into business structures of various organisations, SZK wish to contribute significantly to the expansion and establishment of the idea of quality. With this we follow the vision of “*taking an active part in extending knowledge to practise*” and “*being internationally connected*”. Policy and objectives of certification, defined at Quality Manual, are as follows:

- Fulfilling demands and expectations of clients for certification.
- The certification is ensured to every interested party under equal conditions. These can be applicants who have passed training in the field of expertise that is the subject of certification, or applicants who have obtained this expertise in some other way.
- Independence, impartiality and objectivity in the process of certification. Persons who have participated in the evaluation will not make the decisions on certification.
- Safeguarding confidentiality of certification candidates’ information, obtained during the course of certification; respecting the Law on Security of Personal Information. -
- Professional execution; ensured necessary sources; financing and competent certification executants
- Respecting all demands of external documents
- Certification will always be carried out in entirety and will not be restricted on the grounds of undue financial, cadre, organizational or other limited conditions, candidate’s priority status, and various certificates attending training courses.
- Effective and responsible execution. With the manual, all interested parties are given the opportunity of an insight into the certification scheme.
- Professional (up-to-date, independent, impartial and objective) resolution of eventual appeals, complaints or other forms of dissatisfaction expressed by clients.

The certificate ensures the qualification that is compatible with the requirements of the European Quality Organisation harmonised scheme. It is also recognized and acknowledged in all countries in which their organisations are members of the EOQ (an example of EOQ recognition certificate and the total number of issued certificates from all categories of EOQ scheme – more than 30.000 - is presented in Figure 4).

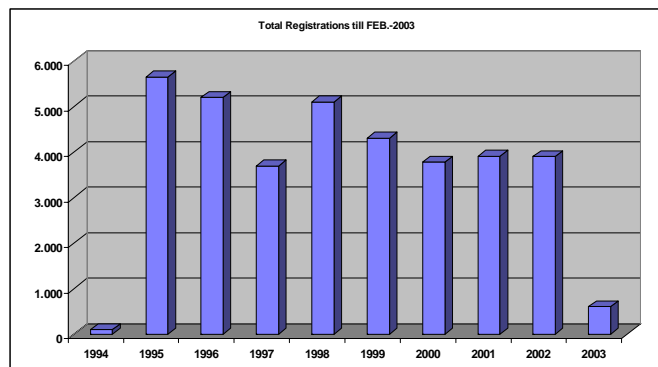


Figure 4: EOQ recognition certificate for EOQ-PRS and total registration on February 2003

6. CONCLUSION

Establishing independent Certification Body inside the organizational structure of SZK and being recognized as a Full Member Organization sharing EOQ Personal Registration Scheme (accreditation by EOQ according to the EN 45013 and ISO 17024 at 1st of June 2003), CB - SZK firstly started with issuing certificate for EOQ quality systems managers. (31 Quality system managers have been certified until now).

After concluding the project it is difficult to estimate the benefit of the introducing EOQ Scheme for certification of quality personnel into the Slovenian quality environment (moreover due to the very high level of existing knowledge, skills and experiences of quality professionals). However general opinion from our first generation of Quality Systems Managers has been very positive, some important thoughts are as follows:

At abundance of seminars, tools, models... in the field of quality, the teaching material, its professional presentation and finally the exam and certification is the only proper method towards the achievement of total quality, which is necessary for present quality manager who have to establish and maintain the system of quality management in the organization.

Looking back to the beginning of my training, when, as a complete greenhorn in the field of quality, I began to perceive my future field of work, it is difficult to believe, that it is possible to go through such a big transformation. During this four-week learning period inadaptible electrical engineer, having difficulties to accept novelties, changed into a person, who continually thinks about changes and their influences on the costs.

I am convinced that not only Slovenian organizations but also the whole of Slovenia needs this qualification. For some time I have been receiving confirmations from my colleagues and friends that in many places we are not only as good as, but even significantly better than well established and recognized foreign companies.