Prerequisites for the Successful Implementation of a Quality Management Framework (QMF)
The experiences of embedding quality management systems across a range of universities and other higher education providers both in Australia and overseas has underlined six central prerequisites that must be met for successful implementation to be achieved.

1. The Importance of Leadership
All quality systems, including the UTAS QMF, emphasise the importance of leadership in the implementation and maintenance of those systems. Without strong leadership quality ‘systems’ remain stillborn – reflected only in policy documents, not organisational activity. For a successful implementation of quality principles and provisions, they not only need to be understood, owned and actively supported by senior management, but also need to be backed by consistent messages on quality.

Leadership is important within the organisational units too. The practical implementation and on-going maintenance of QMF requirements needs the directed application of dedicated staff time. Commonly, each organisational unit identifies an individual or committee with responsibility for establishing, monitoring and the ongoing management of the quality system in their areas of activity.

In establishing new organisation-wide management initiatives, leadership by individuals and organisational units is also highly valuable. Often champions are identified who can act as pioneers in the implementation of the QMF. These champions, whether they be individual quality coordinators, quality coordination committees, or divisions, faculties, schools or other organisational units, act as models, sharing their experiences and expertise as each organisational unit works to meet quality requirements.

2. The Importance of Information
Whatever methodology, or combination of methodologies, is utilised by organisational units to embed the principles and provisions of a QMF, it important to ensure that all staff receive clear information on that QMF. That information encompasses:
- what a QMF is;
- what the organisation’s QMF is;
- why a QMF is being implemented across the organisation; and
- what the benefits of the QMF will be.

So they might make informed choices concerning process, decision makers within the organisational units also need to know:
- alternative methodologies for implementing and maintaining on an on-going basis the requirements of the QMF.

Ongoing information during the implementation phase of the QMF, and subsequently following the embedding of the framework across the organisation, is also necessary to keep staff and stakeholders informed on issues and developments, and to engender the sharing of narratives on challenges faced and successes gained. It is also valuable to disseminate good practice models both from within the organisation and elsewhere.
3. The Importance of Contextualisation

Initially, some changes in focus may be required during the implementation of a QMF in the way organisational units approach goal setting and planning, particularly around populating the content of an evolving quality system or an off-the-shelf quality management system. However, although there may be resource and professional development implications, the amount of extra work is minimal. Every organisational unit decides on objectives, plans for those objectives, deploys to achieve them, evaluates what they do and reports on outcomes in some way or other. A QMF requires these processes to be formalised around a set of quality principles and policy provisions.

A new layer of planning and reporting requirements is not usually required. Rather, adjustments to current processes bring them into line with the requirements of the QMF. For example, annual organisational strategic or management plans and reports integrate the principles and provisions of the QMF thus helping to ensure on-going compliance with the requirements. Also, opportunities are often presented to rationalise the flow of feedback required by central management. A QMF’s inbuilt evaluation, continuous improvement and reporting processes may subsume other planning and reporting processes.

The contents of each institutional unit’s plans and reports remain specific to the activities of that unit, preserving the individual and contextualised nature of those documents. This latter dimension is particularly important in a research and teaching university such as UTAS. What may be considered the key criteria for quality processes and outcomes will vary significantly across the organisation. Any or all of the following conceptions of quality could be applicable, depending on the activities of the organisational unit involved.

Quality is a concept that lacks a common definition that could be applicable in all fields, for every phenomenon or any subject. The guiding principle is that the more complex, many-folded or abstract the object under quality measurement is, the more difficult it is to come up with a satisfactory definition. The reason why it is not possible to find the one and only definition for higher education in literature lies in the fact that higher education is one of these objects. Relying on different authors we could divide the definitions of quality into the following categories: quality as special or unique, refinement, goal-compliance, worth the price and quality as changing and reshaping.

**Quality as exceptionality, excellence.** This definition sets a goal for universities and academic communities to be always the best; belong to the elite and achieve better outcomes than the others.

**Quality as zero errors.** This approach defines quality as consistent flawless outcome or perfection.

**Quality as fitness for purpose.** This is the definition used most frequently regarding higher education. According to this concept, we have to decide to what extent the service or product meets the goals set, says what it does, does what it promises and proves it to the third party.

**Quality as transformation, reshaping.** According to this point of view, the main customer of the higher education quality is a student whose understandings, attitudes and objectives change and evolve in the course of the study process. The better the graduate can manage in the future working life with the help of the knowledge, experience and skills acquired at the university, the more fully has the particular university met its goals.
**Quality as threshold.** Specific standards and norms are defined; a threshold is set that the institution should cross in order to certify that the instruction meets the quality standards.

**Quality as enhancement.** This viewpoint focuses on the constant development and raise of quality that is primarily the task of the academic personnel. The given concept stresses academic freedom and autonomy of university in quality insurance.

**Quality as value for money.** It is a populist approach that equalizes quality and value, especially value for money.¹

Thus, one of the quality criteria for an organisational unit that issues student testamurs may well be *Quality as zero errors* – the avoidance of mistakes in the testamurs. On the other hand, *Quality as exceptionality, excellence* is a strategic objective of many universities, both within Australia and overseas. Similarly, *Quality as threshold* will occupy a wide range of academic and administrative organisational units in Australian higher education providers as the Higher Education Standards are rolled out through the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA)², and *Quality as transforming, reshaping* is frequently an explicit goal of university learning and teaching plans. The concepts of quality as *fitness for purpose, value for money* and *enhancement* are, notwithstanding Janne Parr’s comments attempting to limit the scope of the latter two, foci to one extent or another of every higher education provider.

To what extent each of the quality criteria listed above are embedded into each organisational unit’s quality processes, and in relation to what activities, informs each aspect of those processes from the setting of objectives through planning, deployment, evaluation and improvement activities.

### 4. The Importance of Data Management

Within each organisational unit, assuming that objectives have been set, plans developed and the deployment of actions to meet those plans undertaken, the monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes those activities is a critical step in fulfilling the requirements of a QMF. These monitoring and evaluation processes can take many forms and, again, are best developed and implemented locally by organisational units. Most higher education institutions, including UTAS, have also developed reviews and benchmarking policies to guide organisational units in those two specific areas of the evaluation of outcomes.

In the most effective quality systems a comprehensive knowledge management strategy is developed in parallel with the implementation of the QMF. Without access to accurate centrally held data that meets the needs of the organisational units a QMF cannot be fully implemented. An effective knowledge management strategy identifies the centrally managed data needs of all organisational units, ensures the collection of that data, and ensures the data is available to the organisational units when and how it is required.

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5. The Importance of Support Processes
A QMF may be conceptually straightforward, but nevertheless usually represents a new departure for most organisational units when it is being implemented. Also, the successful implementation and maintenance of a QMF in a complex institution such as a university requires the availability of professional expertise and knowledge in quality assurance processes in a number of key areas.

Firstly, both during the implementation stage and on an ongoing basis, organisational units, and particularly the staff within them tasked with the responsibility for quality assurance, require clear and targeted information and advice on:

- which approach, or combination of approaches, to quality assurance would best suit their range of activities;
- how to effectively implement and maintain that system;
- developing a quality process that meets the requirements of the QMF, integrating those processes into the strategic or management plan;
- implementing that plan;
- developing or adopting methodologies to evaluate outcomes, including for projects that meet the requirements of the policies for reviews and benchmarking;
- collecting, analysing and interpreting data; developing or adopting data management methodologies;
- subsequently improving processes and outcomes;
- ensuring reports meet the QMF requirements;
- closing the loop and, as necessary, re-conceptualising their quality cycle based on the outcomes evidenced; and
- good practice in quality processes occurring within the organisation and elsewhere.

This challenge has been addressed by most Australian and overseas universities that have implemented a QMF by the establishment of dedicated quality units. In Australia these include the University of Technology Sydney, the University of New England, the Ballarat, Newcastle, Edith Cowan, Griffiths, Monash, Newcastle and Swinburne Universities, and RMIT. Overseas these include universities in Wales, England, Scotland, Ireland, South Africa, Palestine, the West Indies, Sri Lanka, New Zealand, Mauritius, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Germany, Sweden, Malaysia, Thailand and the USA. Many of these quality units include planning, review and risk management functions and some reporting functions, but all have been established to supply information, advice and support on quality activities for their respective university communities. Quality unit staff have expertise in quality assurance, planning, reviews and benchmarking.

Also, most staff responsible for implementation within the organisational units require professional development in quality assurance processes to ensure they (i) develop and sustain the information and skills to be able to use the available professional expertise and knowledge effectively, and (ii) develop and maintain their quality systems. Professional development programs on quality assurance designed to meet the needs of organisational units accompany the effective implementation of a QMF.
6. The Importance of Central Monitoring and Review
Although the underlying principles and provisions are common across an institution, a QMF will in all likelihood be implemented in differing ways and at differing rates by individual organisational units. Also, as noted, a QMF when it is implemented has requirements and processes not usually encountered before by most organisational units. For these reasons, it is important to centrally monitor the roll out of a QMF in order to ensure its successful implementation. Senior management normally oversees the implementation of a QMF and monitors the roll out, usually supported by a quality unit. Similarly, an organisation wide change such as this is usually reviewed in a timely manner to identify any issues that need to be addressed and action adjustments that may be necessary.

Once a QMF is fully embedded, reviewed and adjusted as necessary, successive organisational unit reports on quality are submitted centrally to senior management who are thus in an ideal position to take quality issues forward to decision-making and governance bodies for consideration. It will also enable any whole-of-institution principles and provisions to be addressed.

The governance and decision-making bodies in the University are in turn able to review strategic objectives and adjust quality management processes as necessary based on clear evidence of activity undertaken and standards achieved across the organisation, address related resourcing issues, and give further direction on quality issues to the organisational units.

For information on the UTAS QMF go to [http://www.dvc.utas.edu.au/quality](http://www.dvc.utas.edu.au/quality)