



*...without fear,
or favour...*

CASE STUDY

UNITED SUSTAINABLE ENERGY AGENCY

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Tom Whitehead, Head of Business Development



The United Sustainable Energy Agency (USEA), a not-for-profit company, provides services across all sectors to help clients reduce their carbon output, adapt to climate change and tackle fuel poverty.

For an environmentally aware company, the ISO 14001 standard was an obvious choice, but the organisation also decided to implement the ISO 9001 quality management standard at the same time.

WHY ISO CERTIFICATION?

As a growing company providing services within the environmental sector, the USEA wanted to make sure they were practicing what they preached. They were also keen to gain recognition for their already notable 'green' efforts, such as putting in place their Green Travel and Sustainable Procurement Policies. ISO 14001 became the natural fit as it is internationally recognised, with more than 10,000 certified organisations in the UK.

However, the motivation to achieve ISO 14001 certification wasn't just to impress clients; the USEA wanted the implementation process to help motivation and collaboration within the company, fostering continuous improvement and innovation amongst staff.



At the same time, it was decided to integrate ISO 9001 too. This was to both improve internal practices and, just as importantly, help the organisation win more business.

As with most BAB clients, the USEA didn't have a dedicated person tasked to implement the standards. In order to spread the additional workload, Jan Deacon, Head of Sustainable Energy Services took on the responsibility of becoming Environmental Systems Manager whilst Tom Whitehead, Head of Business Development became the Quality Representative for ISO 9001. Their roles were the day-to-day implementation and ongoing maintenance of the standards.

CERTIFICATION PROCESS

Once an organisation decides to go ahead with their certification, they are assigned a Lead Assessor who remains the principal contact throughout the registration process and beyond. Prior to a formal Audit, the Lead Assessor visits to explain the standard and undertakes a conformity assessment of the organisation's current arrangements. The organisation then receives a detailed report including all required actions and, together with their Lead Assessor, determines an appropriate timetable for the Audit Assessment.

As someone new to ISO standards, Tom explained his experience of the implementation process;

“ We had all sorts of preconceptions about what the implementation process would involve. We were expecting the implementation to be complicated and time consuming. In actual fact, although there was plenty of hard work involved, we found that much of the implementation had already been done and all that was missing was the documentation and evidence to prove it. ”

“ The way in which BAB led us through the process from the outset made us feel much more confident and comfortable that we would be able to achieve certification without too many tears. Going for ISO 9001 at the same time, we wondered if we had bitten off more than we could chew, but this was not the case. The two standards sit well together and BAB made the process very straightforward. ”

As Tom and Jan found, the ISO management standards family all follow the same principles. They are, by design, intended to fit together as a complete management system. A further upside of implementing more than one standard at the same time is cost savings.

Once an organisation is ready and has filled the gaps highlighted in the pre-Audit report, they are visited once more for the formal Audit. This will reveal the effectiveness of the management system and whether it meets all of the requirements of the standard. Tom went on to explain how the Audit went against their preconceptions;

“ *Our perception was that the audit would be like a test and that the auditor would be looking to catch us out. This was not the case at all; in fact the approach is much more consensual than that. The auditor was checking that we met what the standard required, but they also looked for opportunities where improvements could be made. The feedback from the auditor, both at the pre-Audit stage, and at the full Audit was incredibly helpful. What we appreciated most about the auditors was their easy manner, which put us at ease and helped make the audit experience a good one.* ”

Understandably, the highlight of the process for the USEA team was finding out they were successful in achieving certification for both standards. Tom proudly commented;

“ *We were very pleased that for ISO 14001 we were able to go beyond what was expected of the standard, and delighted that we were able to achieve ISO 9001 certification at the same time with no minor or major faults.* ”

BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Successful organisations recognise that their claims are only truly credible when their credentials are validated by a respected third party. ISO standards also help bring a more

motivated workforce, less costly re-work and increased client satisfaction. Being certified can also help companies to gain external finance, qualify for tenders and set them apart from competitors. In fact, 1 in 5 of BAB's clients see an increase in new orders as a direct result of achieving ISO certification; according to findings from their most recent client satisfaction survey.

Tom and Jan tell us of the benefits they have seen so far, 4 months after successful implementation.

“ *The benefits to the business so far have been in the documentation and discipline that is required to meet the standards. ISO 14001 certification has allowed us to reflect on the work we have done within the company to reduce our own environmental impact. It has shown us that we have a huge amount of innovation, expertise and commitment within the company that we can use to assist other companies to follow our lead.* ”

“ *For ISO 9001, the benefits are that we can now present ourselves as a quality company within our proposals and tenders which has given us a better chance of winning contracts in a highly competitive market. The standard has helped us to build efficiency into our business to make ourselves more competitive and to focus more on our customers. We hope that by listening to our customers more closely we can provide them with better services in the future.* ”





THE DIFFERENCE

Something the USEA were acutely aware of was that, in order for implementation to be a success, they had to get buy-in from all staff. From the start then, they sought to include colleagues as much as possible. Jan, for example, enlisted a team of environmental champions to assist in various environmental matters, from dealing with waste, to green travelling. After achieving certification, Jan talked about the importance of team involvement;

- “ *The environment champions proved to be a real asset when it came to engaging all our staff in the process of developing our environmental policy and action plan. We ran a series of environmental action planning workshops which combined development of our environmental policy with environmental awareness training. The variety of style of facilitation kept things interesting, the champions came up with some fun activities which were great for engaging staff. //*
- “ *Because all staff had the opportunity to influence our environmental policy, they have taken ownership and individual responsibility for implementing our environmental action plan. I have no doubt that with this level of staff commitment we will maintain the excellent green business standards we have achieved and*

continue to be creative in our commitment to continuous improvement. We are not perfect, but we are a lot closer to our vision of what an exemplar green business should be and we are justly proud of our ISO 14001 international environmental standard award and all thanks to staff engagement. //

WHY BAB?

BAB has over 40 years experience in the assessment industry and is UKAS accredited, with their reputation established in 1969 as a specialist in certification scheme management. In more recent years, BAB has been able to boast a 99% client recommendation rating and are customer service award winners.

- “ *After an initial search, USEA short listed a group of certification bodies. Tom tells us why he favoured BAB over the competition. “We chose the British Assessment Bureau because they presented a clear proposal which set out exactly what was involved and communicated this in a simple way that we could understand. They were also friendly and efficient to deal with. //*

BAB pride themselves on being as straight-forward as possible in their service delivery. Providing a Fixed Fee quotation, clients are made aware of all costs upfront.

THE BRITISH ASSESSMENT BUREAU

Our reputation was established in 1969 as a specialist in certification scheme management. In 1997, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry approved the use of the word 'British' in our corporate title in recognition of our pre-eminent status.



Today, we certify organisations to recognised standards like ISO 9001 (quality management) and ISO 14001 (environmental management) and provide a range of associated training. Outside of ISO standards, we design and manage bespoke assessment schemes. Such schemes are based on the establishment of standards, which can be developed to be recognised company-wide, industry-wide, nationally or internationally.

We are active in the area of setting national standards and are expert contributors to the influential British Standards

QS/01 and AUS/01 committees. These committees have the responsibility for representing the UK in quality management and audit standards issues, as an ISO (International Organization for Standardization) member.

Above all else, we believe it essential to work with our clients as true partners. To this end we are committed to being recognised as the most customer focused certification body in our industry. In independent client satisfaction surveys, 99% of our clients said they would recommend us. We are also proud to be a customer service award winner and have been a recognised Investor in People since 1999.

UKAS

The United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) is the sole National Accreditation Body recognised by Government to assess organisations that provide certification services to internationally agreed (ISO) standards.

Because we are UKAS accredited, our clients can be assured that they are receiving the most appropriate service for their needs. Engaging a UKAS accredited certification body is often a stipulation for public sector tenders and large-scale private sector supply chain work. It also facilitates access to international markets since the UKAS name is recognised throughout the world.

Our maxim 'without fear or favour' typifies our ethical approach. We will never allow the fear of consequences or the promise of favour to influence our professional judgement. In addition, as a UKAS accredited certification body, we are overseen by a powerful Impartiality Committee that ensures our objectivity and independence.



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON
CERTIFICATION AND HOW YOU COULD
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