

## **QUALITY MANAGEMENT**

How does a research company manage its quality? Does it simply design its own set of systems and procedures or does it look to acquire a certificate from an accredited quality assessment body? With either route, what are the implications with regards to working with clients and partner organisations?

## **QUALITY STANDARDS**

Here is a quick summary to the quality badges relevant to the research industry.

- **ISO 9001** is the internationally recognised standard defining the requirements of a Quality Management System and is suitable for all businesses providing a product or service. As 9001 is a generic quality standard a research organisation might consider first acquiring this standard before all others.

- **ISO 20252** is the International Quality Control Standard for Market, Opinion and Social Research. There is no universal equivalent for the industry and many regard this as the 'must have' for a Research organisation. The origins of 20252 are found in BS711/MRQSA and the standard retains strong synergies with the Market Research Society and the Data Protection Act.

- **ISO 27001** is the International standard defining the requirements of an Information Security Management System and is designed to help companies manage information across their organisation. Introduced in 2005 the standard has attracted quick attention from public and finance sector clients purchasing research services, with some government departments insisting their suppliers have the standard prior to tender.

## **ISO 20252**

The research standard is divided into 7 sections, with the key requirements found in sections 3-7:

1. Scope
2. Terms & Definitions
3. QMS Requirements
4. Managing the Research
5. Data Collection
6. Data Management/Processing
7. Reporting on research projects

QMS requirements follow a similar structure to 9001: a set of control documents including quality objectives, a quality policy, procedures and key templates, version control as well as complaints handling, client satisfaction monitoring, internal auditing, senior management reviews, a commitment to continual analysis and improvement, appointment of a 'quality manager' and quality representation across the business. There is also mention of data confidentiality, record keeping and anti-virus policies.

Sections 4-7 provides research teams with a focussed and disciplined approach to the entire research process from enquiry to delivery stage, including a minimum set of requirements for proposals, data collection, data processing, data tables/other outputs and for the final report/presentation. There is also substantial input and guidance on recruitment, appraisals, briefing, training, moderation, validation and the management of respondents and their data in terms of handling, transfer, storage and retention.

*In the 2010 edition of the Research Buyer's Guide, 66 organisations in UK & Ireland declared having 20252.*