



How AQAP audit and registration through BSI has strengthened System Design Evaluation Ltd (SDE)

“BSI is the brand you go with... you know you’re going to get the right support when they turn up. Why would I change”

Ian Beaton,
Managing Director, SDE

Certification benefits

- AQAP is an instantly-recognized symbol of quality and excellence
- One set of standards is leveraged in tandem with another (AQAP and ISO 9001), both enhanced by BSI’s powerful global brand as auditor
- Thorough auditing of processes by BSI ensures critical recognition from major clients
- Twin standards provide a platform to build on SDE’s existing track record, move into new markets and develop new partnerships

At a glance

AQAP (the Allied Quality Assurance Publications), is a series of standards developed by NATO as the quality management system for defence industry suppliers. AQAP registration is an integral element of many military contracts awarded in NATO countries, and regarded as essential by many contractors.

With BSI’s help, UK contractor System Design Evaluation Ltd (SDE), has recently achieved AQAP registration, and is confident that this will help it build on its existing success as a preferred supplier to the Ministry of Defence (MoD), government agencies, industry partners, and project teams.

Customer background

Hertfordshire-based defence technology company SDE is a defence industry engineering consultancy specializing across land, sea and air domains. It provides expertise in assessment, safety management, design engineering, research and modelling of weapons and munitions systems. Founded almost 30 years ago, SDE has an annual turnover of over £2m, and employs 20 full-time staff, supported by 30 associates. The firm's work ranges from assisting policymakers at government level to technical assistance at operational level, from procurement, to trials management, to R&D.

Why certification?

Certifications to quality management system standards have been embedded within SDE since its earliest days, not least because the company is expected to have them by customers, especially the MoD, but also the wider defence industry internationally. "We've had certification by BSI to the quality management standard ISO 9001 for as long as I can remember, and our recent registration to AQAP dovetails very nicely with that, and works well for us," says Managing Director Ian Beaton. "BSI's guidance has helped us achieve this strong combination."

As a defined standard for quality assurance of defence products, in particular, AQAP certification complements the wider scope of ISO 9001 certification, which covers everything from people, processes and training to facilities and equipment.

Beaton explains that the decision to add AQAP to SDE's standards set was driven primarily by the requirements of its key customer, the MoD and its operating agencies. "The MoD is a massive organization with a huge procurement arm, and within that there are numerous project teams, many of which have now begun to demand AQAP certification as part of quality procedures within projects they're offering to contractors. So when you're bidding, if you don't have AQAP, you're almost excluded from the start."

Benefits

Around 15% of the MoD projects that SDE bids for now require AQAP, says Beaton. He reckons that three contracts his firm has won this year were down to its AQAP certification. "That may not sound many, but each individual project can be quite sizeable in terms of value," he says.

Although SDE's management systems have always been robust and efficient, Beaton is keen to emphasize the positive effects of AQAP on the company's internal processes, particularly in relation to the documentation procedures of the project managers. And at a more general level, it has improved the audit trail, making information much more readily accessible.

Achieving successful audit by BSI and registration to AQAP has required resources and effort at a project level, but Beaton is sure it has been well worth it. "When examined from a corporate level, it's been of real benefit, because you're winning business that you otherwise wouldn't," he says.

Implementation

SDE used an external quality management consultancy to compare the company's processes in relation to ISO 9001 against the AQAP procedures it needed. Based on this gap analysis, an AQAP procedure was created that could 'sit on top' of current processes, and be highlighted whenever required by customers.

For Beaton, although AQAP has dovetailed well with ISO 9001, the biggest hurdle to overcome has been a cultural one. "We now have to record every transaction with the client, backwards and forwards, and impress upon staff the need to take any new regimes on board," he says. "People often resist change, and although with AQAP the changes have been very subtle, it's sometimes these smaller changes that are the hardest to implement."

BSI's role

Beaton continues, "BSI has been very helpful from the start, especially with the pre-audit process. Having access to the

BSI perspective early on as to where we should be going really helped us get to – and through – the final stage."

Using the gap analysis mentioned earlier, SDE drafted the AQAP procedure, but it was the regular communication with, and guidance from, BSI that helped it transform its draft into a final version that fulfilled all necessary requirements for registration.

BSI now conducts AQAP audits in parallel with SDE's ISO 9001 audit and that has worked extremely well, as Beaton explains, "Every nine months we get a visit and the most recent one commented on how well the two processes 'bolt' together."

BSI has been SDE's standards provider for many years and Beaton is quick to say why: "BSI always does a thorough job. The auditors recognize what we are, and understand what we need. When we need something different, as with AQAP, they are able to adapt and respond."

SDE is now registered to two AQAP procedures, Design & Development, and Production, and in future it anticipates using BSI again for two more registrations, for Inspection and Test, and Final Inspection.

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