

Ludmila Benkovičová
President
Statistical Office
of the Slovak Republic

Bratislava 22 September 2009

Dear Mr. Cheung,

We read with great interest the document suggesting establishing a generic national quality assurance framework, which could be utilized by a country to introduce new quality assurance procedures or to systemize those currently used.

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic belongs to those statistical offices that have implemented quality management system according to internationally recognised standards. In our Office we developed and implemented the quality management system on all management levels according to the ISO 9001 standard, enhanced by the Code of Practice and some elements from the Common Assessment Framework. The quality assurance framework is the integral part of the quality management system we have implemented. Here we use the framework developed in the European Statistical System, which was lead by Eurostat and which is frequently cited in your document. The framework corresponds to our requirements. Moreover the further development of this framework is ensured by Sponsorship on quality established recently in the ESS.

For this reason we would suggest to orient the initiative not on assurance framework itself, but on more complex framework – quality management system. In our opinion the quality assurance, sooner or later, will have to be incorporated into a broader system – quality management system (incl. all supporting processes like HRM, etc.), which offers a good framework for continual improvement of the complete work related to quality issues in broader context and thus for performance improvement of the whole institution. In our opinion the NQAF in Fig 2 (focusing on management of core statistical functions) is by philosophy more quality assurance than quality management system. Our comments regarding the text on ISO standard are in the annex to this letter.

We will be very happy to co-operate together with Eurostat and other partners within the ESS on development of such a framework (quality management system) to develop system approach to management with the aim to continually improve performance of institution by enhancing satisfaction of interested parties.

As for the assurance framework itself we encourage and suggest utilising the results of the Eurostat work on development of this framework. For this reason we also suggest to ask for comments on your document the Sponsorship on quality – via its Eurostat's members.

We are looking forward to further cooperation.

Best regards,

Mr. Paul Cheung
Director
Statistics Division/DESA



Comments to the part II. A. Quality concepts (based on ISO 9001:2008, ISO 9000:2000)
Point 14:

For NSIs the context may be characterized as follows:

- NSIs are government not private enterprise. They are not profit based. They supply data to non-paying users rather than to paying customers. For the most part, the users cannot influence quality through purchase decisions.

Comment: The ISO 9001 has been developed to assist organisations of all types, sizes and product provided, to implement and operate effective quality management system. In this standard the organisation is defined as follows: group of people and facilities with an arrangement of responsibilities, authorities and relationships (example: company, corporation, firm, enterprise, institution, charity, association...). It means, an organisation can be public or private and the ISO standard is applicable in a national statistical institution.

Note: NSI always supplies products to paying product receivers (ISO uses only one term for product receiver and this is – customer; see bellow for definition of customer) - national statistical institutions are financed (in advance) by taxpayers. None of the products of these institutions is free of charge. Some product receivers even pay additional price for additional service.

The national statistical institution is not profit based, this is true. It is a value based organisation, which is more general perspective than profit based; this perspective is used by any type of the organisation.

The voice of the product receiver has great impact on the position of national statistical institution regarding image, credibility, ... thus its existence. This impact has much harder consequences regarding quality improvements than simple purchase decision.

- Some of the users are actually internal users, for example the national accounts is a user of data from numerous surveys as well as a producer.

Comment: In ISO 9001 the customer is defined as follows: organisation or person that receives a product (example: consumer, client, user, beneficiary, purchaser...); a customer can be external or internal to the organisation.

This fully corresponds also to the need to maintain and optimise internal process interfaces in a national statistical institution to meet requirements of internal customer (well known interface between NA and its suppliers)

It means, the ISO is applicable in a national statistical institution.

- The primary inputs are typically data from individual enterprises, households and persons, whether collected directly or through administrative processes.

Comment: The ISO 9001 does not specify the type of inputs; it generally asks the organisation to ensure that requirements regarding input are specified and input received from suppliers conform to these requirements.

The requirement was transformed into the SO SR environment in the following way: the SO SR ensured that requirements regarding input are specified and data obtained from data suppliers (reporting units, administrative data suppliers...) and input for infrastructure conform to these requirements.

It means that the ISO is applicable in a national statistical institution.

- The core production processes are transformations of these individual data into aggregate data and their assembly into statistical products.

Comment: The ISO 9001 is based on the process approach. In this standard the process is defined as follows: set of interrelated or interacting activities that use resources to transform inputs into outputs in the regulated environment. The process approach as follows: systematic identification and management of the processes in the organisation and particularly of the interactions between such processes.

The standard does not limit the transformation (as well as inputs and outputs) to specific cases. It also fully covers the situation in national statistical institution.

It means - applicable in a national statistical institution.

- The primary products (typically called outputs) are statistics and accompanying services.

Comment: The ISO 9001 has been developed to assist organisations of all types, sizes and product provided, to implement and operate effective quality management system. In this standard the product is defined as follows: product is result of a process.

There are four generic product categories: services, software, hardware, processed materials. Service is a result of at least one activity necessarily performed at the interface between the supplier and customer and is generally intangible. Provision of service can involve, for example: ...an activity performed on a supplied intangible product; the delivery of an intangible product (e.g. the delivery of information in the context of knowledge transmission).

It means - applicable in a national statistical institution.

Note:

The ISO 9001 standard specifies requirements for a quality management system. It does not define how to implement these requirements. It is up to the organisation to select the most efficient way for implementation, which requires creative approach (at least ability to adapt the text to the situation in organisation) combined with a common sense.
