



# PAIN TO PROFIT

**PQQs: How ISO Certification can help you sail through pre-qualification and win more work**

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## PAIN

Most specialist contractors and suppliers I speak to say that pre-qualification questionnaires (PQQs) are the current bane of their lives! It is certainly the case that excessive prequalification demands can be a drain on resources. Furthermore, for ambitious specialists seeking to position themselves as prequalified to deliver high profile construction projects for a number of customers two other factors add to the burden:

- The sheer number and variety of the questionnaires that they are presented with; and
- Particular questions, essentially seeking the same information, presented in a different way and in a different order

When most businesses are very lean following difficult times, all this can inevitably divert specialists' attention away from other pressing business needs and waste money, time and effort.

*“Excessive prequalification demands can be a drain on resources”*

## A NECESSARY EVIL BUT IT COULD BE WORSE

Our Main Contractor customers, Local Authorities, and major government departments clearly require a mechanism that allows them to identify suitably qualified and experienced businesses; the modern construction industry is one of long supply chains of specialist contractors and suppliers. They need to know who the safe pairs of hands to work with are. It is important to recognise that prequalification is an initial filter of interested suppliers who can then be short listed for the tender stage. If prequalification is in respect of a specific project, additional project-specific questions can also be used to filter out those companies that do not have the technical capability to successfully complete an invitation to tender.

This need for “customer assurance” could actually take other forms which would put an even bigger burden on specialists (though further demands on buyers as well). Greater certainty for buyers would be obtained for example from a specific audit of a supplier which would typically involve both office and site verification of capability, before accepting the supplier as meeting their requirements. Here the buyer’s greater certainty would come at a greater cost to you the specialist! A lesser version of this might still involve an office visit for a “desktop” assessment which would include for example obtaining copies of certificates, details of company procedures etc. Good old PQQs can in fact be the cheapest way for us specialists to pre-qualify if we get our act together. Indeed, they can provide buyers with a wider choice of suppliers but, because they actually can provide less certainty for the buyer unless they are completed correctly, there is a chance for those of us who put the effort in to stand out!

*“PQQs can in fact be the cheapest way for us  
specialists to pre-qualify if we get our act together”*

## A CHANCE TO SHINE!

PQQs therefore are an unavoidable feature of today's contracting landscape and specialists need to not only minimise the burden but also grasp the opportunity that PQQs present. Half-hearted attempts are worse than not bothering as they could convey the wrong and inadequate impression of your business's capabilities.

***“Specialists need to not only minimise the burden but also grasp the opportunity that PQQs present”***

To be eligible for prequalification, it is necessary that suppliers demonstrate that they possess or have access to the governance, qualifications and references, expertise, competence, health and safety/ environmental/quality/ financial and other essential capabilities to the extent necessary for them to be considered appropriate to undertake work and deliver services for potential buyers. The operative word here is “demonstrate”. It is a wasted opportunity to rush through a PQQ to get it off your desk; this is a golden opportunity to demonstrate all that is good about your business. Why would you not put your best foot forward when asked/given a chance to do so? If you don't want to work for someone, not only on the project at hand but possibly not in the immediate and not-too-immediate future, then the best way to do so is via an inadequately completed PQQ.

Possibly the best definition of a PQQ can be adapted from the world of Local Authority procurement, “A submission, tailored towards the needs of the purchasing organisation and it's activities, of your company's ability to deliver the requirements of a contract(s), which is evaluated against set criteria to establish your suitability for undertaking work to standards required”. However in terms of this guidance it is worth thinking of a PQQ as akin to a “Company CV”. Would you ever consider presenting a half-hearted or rushed personal CV? Do you think you would stand much chance of a positive outcome if you did? Like any good CV, your PQQ submission is an opportunity, whatever its format to set out clearly, with your best evidence tailored to the requirements of the issuing customer, why your company can and should do the work required.

***“It is a wasted opportunity to rush through a PQQ to get it off your desk”***

## A SET OF AUTHORATIVE ANSWERS TO USE OVER AND OVER AGAIN?

There have been many attempts to rationalise PQQs, arguably the most important so far being PAS 91 Construction Prequalification Questionnaires whose grand objective is streamlining and reducing the cost of prequalification in the construction procurement processes and which has contributors ranging from Trade Associations, Builder's Profile, major government departments (construction industry customers!), local authorities, the HSE, RIBA and vendor assessors. The idea behind this is that the consistent use of a set of common questions in all construction related prequalification activity would have three major benefits:

1. Significantly reduce the resources invested by suppliers in such activity
2. Enable buyers to more reliably source suppliers solely on the basis of the level of assurance they provide (i.e. the extent to which the answers to the questions given by the suppliers are complete and are appropriately checked and evaluated)
3. Allow the right suppliers to access work where the risk levels are appropriate with their abilities.

We can hope that one day soon our customers, and their buyers, will get their act together and institute a common approach to PQQs, after all the benefits to them as managers of long supply chains of the introduction of PAS 91 to procurement prequalification processes can include considerable saving in time and money when compiling, using and comparing prequalification questionnaires, more supply chain certainty about basic prequalification requirements and that more suppliers (notably specialist contractors of all sizes) can be encouraged to take part, giving wider choice to clients. In addition, the universal use of this PAS could also help to raise the overall standard of communication, understanding and supplier capability across the construction sector.

Coincidentally, at the time of going to press, the Build UK Action Plan set an objective to “develop and implement a solution to the current bureaucratic and repetitive process of pre-qualification that meets the needs of clients and other stakeholders and is beneficial to the construction supply chain”. That laudable objective does in fact involve the adoption of the PAS 91 questions! Let us hope that does come to pass, but until it does specialists need to work out for themselves how they can become efficient and, more importantly, effective at completing PQQs. An uncommitted approach is worse than not bothering.

***“Specialists need to become efficient and, more importantly, effective at completing PQQs”***

Remember the brutal truth about pre-qualification – it is to rule us in or to rule us out! The stage within the project procurement process when our customers determine who goes forward, probably onto a tender shortlist. An effective PQQ response cannot guarantee that we will win the project but a poor response will guarantee that our customer has an opportunity to rule us out there and then. It is even more than assessing basic capability before a detailed requirement is put before a potential supplier: why would a supplier who submits a less-than-serious PQQ convince a buyer that they will eventually submit a serious bid? Nobody wants to waste their time further down the line. As well as ruling in or ruling out the PQQ process is also a mechanism to reduce the number of respondents, even those who appear to have made a serious stab at it, to a manageable number of serious bidders at the second stage. Does that mean we should even worry about what type of question is being asked? For example is it just a fact-finder, is it a “yes / no” or “in/out” question that could be a deal-breaker or is it a question by which we are going to be compared to others? We could go mad trying to determine which is which and I’m showing you how to spend less time on PQQs not more! Is it not better to accept that a PQQ is about not only qualification but also about ranking and therefore determine to always put your best foot forward?

***“Why would a supplier who submits a less-than-serious PQQ convince a buyer that they will eventually submit a serious bid?”***

So we know there is a bewildering variety of PQQs which add to our frustration but there is lots of commonality as well. We could do worse than prepare a set of our best responses to the questions specified in PAS 91. It is after all this PAS that has compiled a set of questions aimed at enabling the acquisition of the essential information required in all prequalification processes in a uniform and commonly usable, manner.

If we are to compile our best set of authorative answers we will:

- Make our PQQ response more and more efficient
- Commence a process that will provide a self-assessment of where we are and what quality information we can muster
- Understand what essential quality, health and safety, and environmental management looks like
- Introduce the role of an “information manager” which will be a head start when we encounter BIM

- Be ahead of the game when PAS 91 is adopted

There are clear benefits to us as specialist contractors and suppliers which will include

- Reduced cost of prequalification
- Increase in the possibility of participating in additional prequalification processes i.e. do more with the same level of input
- Freeing up often scarce resources to invest in potentially more profitable activity
- Meeting widely accepted prequalification criteria which can and will be recognised by all potential buyers
- Access/advance to the tendering processes in a resource efficient manner.

I am suggesting there is every reason to create an internal store of your best information; information which once compiled can be used time and again, and easily maintained and kept up to date – by a designated “information manager” as mentioned above who can direct the efficient completion of PQQs quickly and easily using these pre-prepared answers.

We know there will always be project-specific questions but again we can prepare; your best response to core questions will be readily available and can be tweaked with minimal effort (see the section on project-specific questions).

Understanding common questions (i.e. those that are typical and are relevant to all construction-related procurement) and preparing our best answers (asking ourselves all the time where can we shine) will result in less confusion, less possibility of misunderstanding what information is required, less time taken to prepare responses, less cost and paperwork, and more confidence in the process bringing greater certainty that questionnaires have been completed correctly, and giving us more time to spend on other business activity.

So what, in detail, are those common questions that we should prepare our best answers for?

***“Remember the brutal truth about pre-qualification  
– it is to rule us in or to rule us out!”***



## WHAT ARE THE TYPICAL QUESTIONS AND WHY ARE THEY ASKED?

So what are the typical questions and why are they asked? What questions could we prepare our best answers to and be confident that they would suffice for nearly all PQQs and nearly all the questions within each individual PQQ?

Let's get a few easy things, which we don't want to spend too much time on, out of the way first

There will clearly be some early fact finding information questions:

- Supplier name, key roles and personnel and contact information for enquiries
- Your legal status (sole-trader/limited company etc)
- Registered office address/Registration number if registered with Companies House or equivalent/Charity registration number/VAT registration number/Name of immediate parent company/Name of ultimate parent company if applicable
- Insurance – Employer's Liability/Public Liability/PI/Product liability – with policy numbers, limits of indemnity, expiry etc.

These can all be collated and held electronically, and simply inserted or copied and pasted into the PQQ you are currently addressing by one of your admin staff. Insurance policies and VAT certificates and the like can all be readily available on pdf's for uploading. Make sure any uploads are clearly identified as your documents and you may also need to add a unique supplier reference number for the PQQ at hand.

Further financial information will certainly be expected to ensure the resources to undertake the project in hand. The nature and extent of the accounts provided will be commensurate with the business requirements and legal obligations of the supplier. We cannot cover them all here. You will know what you need and again pdf's can be readily available.

Finally in this opening section you should expect some probing about business and professional standing i.e. in respect of any business-related, criminal or civil court proceedings and/or judgments. In some instances and in some sectors such judgments will mean automatic exclusion but there will be plenty of other instances where they do not necessarily constitute a reason for rejection. It is very important that all relevant information is provided if this is the case in your business so that a proper assessment is made. Once again, your best explanation of the circumstances can be pre-prepared in advance.

Let's get on to more substantive matters. In my research for this report, the same theme/comment kept coming up which shouldn't really surprise us but is certainly worth stating so I will paraphrase it,

***“Most bids these days, particularly across the Public Sector and high profile Main Contractors, are extremely hot on subjects such as health and safety, the environment and quality management”***

I will address each of these below.

## QUALITY MANAGEMENT

I am going to reverse the order of that paraphrased quotation and look at quality management and the questions that are asked first.

Quality management is the bedrock upon which everything else hangs. Get this right and adding capability around health and safety management and environmental management and increasingly BIM processes becomes much easier.

The questions that are asked give you a clue as to what good looks like. More than that, the questions are “lifted” from ISO 9001, the international standard for quality management, because the framework described in ISO 9001 is the epitome of what good looks like!

*“The questions that are asked give you a clue as to what “good” looks like”*

More than that, the questions are “lifted” from ISO 9001, the international standard for quality management, because the framework described in ISO 9001 is the epitome of what good looks like!

To illustrate my point, and this is recommended in PAS 91, a common opener to any section on quality management will say something like “this section need not be completed if your organisation holds a UKAS (or equivalent) accredited independent third party certificate of compliance with BS EN ISO 9001 and can provide the supporting evidence requested” In other words, if you have secured ISO 9001 Certification then you can safely ignore the questions under quality management.

(By the way, that point about UKAS is vital! Don't be misled by “(or equivalent)” as I have asked UKAS is there anything equivalent and practically speaking there is not! If you are going to secure ISO Certification don't take a chance – go to a UKAS accredited auditor, see <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/dont-take-chance-your-iso-certification-andrew-foy?trk=mp-reader-card>.

Sailing through PQQs is not the best reason for securing ISO Certification; but securing ISO Certification will allow you to sail through PQQs! As most PQQs say, “you do not need to complete this section ...” if you have ISO 9001 Certification. That is because with ISO 9001 you have done ALL your pre-qualifying up front! You have already made a “customer assurance” statement, you have already been independently assessed to be a quality managed company, i.e. you are that elusive “safe pair of hands”.

***“With ISO 9001 you have done ALL your pre-qualifying up front!”***

But before I climb on to my soap box completely, let's look at typical questions in this area.

The opener is something along the lines of:

***“Do you have a policy and organisation for quality management?”***

Potential customers very often ask for a “Quality Policy Statement” whether via a PQQ or not. This should provide evidence that your organisation has and implements a quality management policy that is authorised by the MD or equivalent and periodically reviewed at a senior management level. This is your declaration that you intend to be a quality managed company and the policy should be relevant to the nature and scale of your works and set out responsibilities for quality management throughout the organisation.

So to add to your general business information that we discussed in the previous section you should add a one-page quality statement and also a simple organisation chart showing where various levels of quality management responsibility lie. Actually writing down such responsibilities, if you have not already done so, is a valuable process and makes you really think about this as well as providing further documentation that you can store and upload as required.

PAS 91 suggests the next question should be:

***“Do you have arrangements for ensuring that your quality management, including the quality of construction output and general performance, is effective in reducing/ preventing incidents of sub-standard delivery?”***

The ISO Certification process is all about “demonstrating” that you have quality management locked down. Unsurprisingly therefore, PQQs are looking for evidence that you “keep copies of documentation setting out quality management organisation and procedures that meet currently agreed good practice.” These should include the arrangements for quality management throughout the organisation. They should set out how the company will carry out it's policy, with a clear indication of how the arrangements are communicated to the workforce. What are your procedures to ensure right-first-time delivery with demonstrable evidence of a quality handover? Get them finalised and documented and added to your developing store of information.

***“Do you have arrangements for providing your workforce with quality-related training and information appropriate to the type of work for which your organisation is likely to bid?”***

“Competence” is a fundamental ISO concept; you need to show that people doing jobs for you are “demonstrably” competent to do so. So the evidence that we need to prepare here is to show that your organisation has in place and implements, training arrangements to ensure that its workforce has sufficient skills and understanding to discharge their various responsibilities. These arrangements should include a programme of training that will keep the workforce up-to-date with required knowledge about quality-related issues, including copies of job profiles, training manuals and training records.

A training matrix identifying how you have defined “competence” in your business and how you are ensuring your people are either competent already or being trained to be competent is ideal. Start or amend yours now and have it readily available in your information storehouse; especially as it can be enhanced in relation to other questions and used time and time again.

***“Do you have procedures for reviewing, correcting and improving quality performance?”***

Why is this question asked? Because no arrangements for managing quality or a quality management system ever stands still. The nature of construction activities also means that we are forever working on new sites with new scenarios, for new customers and maybe even under new contractual obligations. Our quality arrangements are therefore always being challenged. It is vital therefore that we have the means of reviewing our performance and learning lessons. If we make mistakes we need to have a mechanism for detecting them and ensuring that we don’t make them again. So our information storehouse needs to have our chosen procedure for monitoring what we do and acting on what we find.

***“Do you have arrangements for ensuring that your own suppliers apply quality management measures that are appropriate to the work for which they are being engaged?”***

Any person or business we subcontract to or engage to work on behalf, including labour-only subcontractors is, for all intents and purposes when it comes to delivering for our customers, our employee. They can obviously affect our product and service for good or bad. We therefore need to show that we have evaluated them in some way and also that they are working in the manner in which we wish – it is after all our name up front not theirs. So we need to show both how we engage such suppliers – be they labour only subcontractors or another bona fide small subcontractor – and also ensure how we ensure their required performance.

***“It is after all our name up front not theirs”***

## HEALTH & SAFETY MANAGEMENT

The questions that are asked under H&S not only again give you a clue as what good looks like but hopefully you can see that a quality bedrock can be built upon.

More than that, the questions are lifted from OHSAS 18001 because this is regarded as the “gold standard” for effective health and safety management.

Again, PAS 91 suggests that all good PQQs should say in relation to H&S management that “this section need not be completed if your organisation holds a UKAS (or equivalent) accredited independent third party certificate of compliance with OHSAS 18001 and can provide the supporting evidence requested”.

There's that point about UKAS which I don't need to cover again but what is worth repeating is that should you secure Certification to OHSAS 18001 then you don't need to complete the H&S section. You have pre-qualified already.

***“If your business has already secured OHSAS 18001 Certification then you don't need to complete the H&S section you have already Pre-qualified!”***

Being able to miss out a load of questions is just one minor benefit of Certification as I said previously. So let's look at typical questions in this area and by now you will not be surprised to know that all subsequent questions are topics/issued covered by OHAS 18001! Issues you will cover during the 18001 process to the great benefit of your business should you choose to do so.

***Do you have a policy and organisation for health and safety (H&S) management?***

Just as with quality management we need evidence of a periodically reviewed H&S policy, endorsed by the MD and relevant to the anticipated nature and scale of your activities. Our potential customer will also need to understand your responsibilities for H&S management at all levels in the organisation. This last requirement could be satisfied by again endorsing your organisation chart to show H&S responsibilities. Like all other documents and information that are being proposed here, once this is sorted and agreed and put to paper it can be used over and over again so is another essential part of our information storehouse.

***Are you able to describe your arrangements for ensuring that your H&S measures are effective in reducing/preventing incidents, occupational ill-health and accidents?***

You are clearly expected to understand the health and safety risks that your business faces in its operations (indeed it is a fundamental requirement of 18001 that you demonstrably understand those risks, and can demonstrate your effective controls to deal with and minimise them). Preventing incidents and accidents begins with this understanding and “competent” (see below) people need to then go to work on risk assessments and method statements. Your RAMS need to be understood by your workforce, implemented correctly under adequate supervision where required, and monitored constantly, making improvements as and when required. Should an incident and/or accident occur (and these will need to be recorded and studied for trends or other indicators of problems) the root cause needs to be determined and corrected and your RAMS updated accordingly. It is only such vigilance that can foster a track record of “effective” H&S measures. Effective measures will include how you communicate and implement your H&S arrangements at all levels and this is discussed further below. What can you place in your information store?

***Do you have access to competent H&S advice/assistance – both general and construction/sector related?***

We talked earlier about the need for demonstrable “competence” in relation to quality management and we are in the same area here: do you have competent safety expertise in the business which is appropriate to what you do or if not, do you have an external source with adequate construction related experience and knowledge? The former (internal) is preferred and it is all a question of what is appropriate. Ensuring your site managers have an SSSTS or SMSTS qualification will go a long way to ensuring your sites are set up for effective health and safety management. For some businesses this might be enough if backed up by an external advisor on an “as need” basis. Other contactors may wish to bring even more expertise in-house and consider the NEBOSH suite of qualifications as appropriate to them. Greater competence means greater risk management. Whatever you decide you will need to demonstrate your arrangements so CVs and qualifications are required in your information set, even for external advisors. This is discussed further below.

We can deal with two more of the PAS 91 questions at once:

***We can deal with two more of the PAS 91 questions at once: 1) Do you have a policy and process for providing your staff/workforce with training and information appropriate to the types of activity that your organisation is likely to undertake? 2) Does your staff/workforce have H&S or other relevant qualifications and experience sufficient to implement your H&S policy to a standard appropriate to your activities?***

Again we are in the world of competence; active training arrangements to ensure your workforce has sufficient skills and understanding to discharge their duties including ensuring that training is refreshed as required. How do you keep on top of this? All this can of course go on the same training matrix that we referred to earlier which should also include your definitions of H&S competence that you want in your business at different levels – and this may mean the acquisition of qualifications such as SMSTS and NEBOSH as previously discussed. Is your training matrix up-to-date? Does it include everything that you need to demonstrate your arrangements for health and safety competence? This will involve a bit of legwork but once done will be easily maintained and more importantly for our conversations here, readily available to upload and satisfy all questions of competence across many areas that PQQs will go into including copies of certificates (for staff and external advisors and labour-only subbies).

Clearly, levels of health and safety competence, and the onus to demonstrate it, will rise markedly if you intend to undertake for example the roles of ‘Designer’ and ‘CDM co-ordinator’ under the CDM Regs. But the same reasoning applies – make sure you have all the necessary information (and in this case particularly experience, track record, qualifications and CPD) documented and ready for use.

On the information front you want an ever-increasing database of RAMS, COSHH, noise assessments etc., not just for everyday use but to upload to PQQs so that there is no doubt that on the health and safety front you know what you are doing and are on top of things. Show how the information is used correctly and is communicated effectively.

***Do you check, review and where necessary improve your H&S performance?***

You will remember from the section on quality management that questions like these are asked because no health and safety management system ever stands still. The nature of construction activities also means that we are forever working on new sites with new scenarios, for new customers and maybe even under new contractual obligations. As with our quality arrangements, health and safety implementation is always being challenged by different site conditions, different coordination requirements, different programmes etc. It is equally vital therefore that we have the means of reviewing our health and safety performance and improving it where required. OHSAS 18001, like the ISO family of Standards, will



demand this so it is no surprise to see it asked on a PPQ. Clearly, we can combine our chosen procedure for monitoring quality with what we intend to do and act upon with regard to health and safety.

### ***Do you have procedures in place to involve your staff/workforce in the planning and implementation of H&S measures?***

What is often called “participation and consultation” is very important in the world of health and safety. People’s voices need to be heard and there must be ways and means of doing so. How do you communicate and implement your health and safety arrangements? Do you have a designated H&S office or a senior manager with H&S responsibility (who would be identified as so on the organisation chart above)? A larger specialist contractor might have a Safety Committee; smaller ones may rely on tool box talks. Whatever you do, there must be an “open door” policy in relation to H&S matters and involvement encouraged. Site managers, with the help of their skilled operatives, are clearly essential to appropriate and effective RAMS and communicating the same, along with site inductions, site safety audits and tool box talks, offers ample opportunity to allow and encourage people to get involved. Review your arrangements and document what you think is your best practice here – even if it is aspirational at this stage and get it into a format within your information store that can be communicated regularly through your PQQs.

### ***Do you routinely record and review accidents/incidents and undertake follow-up action?***

We mentioned the recording and investigating of incidents and accidents above as an essential part of ensuring that your health and safety measures are effective. There is also a legal dimension to this such as the RIDDOR Regs. Any robust health and safety management system will have an investigation procedure and it is another of the fundamental ISO principles that when things go wrong you will swing into action to kill off the issue at source having discovered the “root cause”. What is your accident/incident procedure? Does it include root cause analysis, identifying and implementing corrective measures and then following up to ensure that what you did was effective in putting things right? It needs to! You also need to show a track record of recording and reviewing and rectifying incidents and accidents over many years. Get these items in your store of information that will always be required by PQQs.

### ***Do you have arrangements for ensuring that your suppliers apply H&S measures to a standard appropriate to the activity for which they are being engaged?***

We should always be looking for efficiencies and just as we were required above to show how we select and control suppliers and subbies in relation to quality issues we should add in our health and safety expectations here

also. Any person or business we subcontract to or engage to work on our behalf on our sites will be construed as an employee by our customers. We therefore need to show that we have included them in all our health and safety measures (and also evaluated them beforehand as adequate to work for us!). What are your arrangements? Get them pinned down and be ready to demonstrate them.

***Do you operate a process of risk assessment capable of supporting safe methods of work and reliable project delivery where necessary?***

This is such a basic requirement that it has already come up in questions already considered. Any H&S training (such as SMSTS) will involve risk assessment guidance and you must ensure the means for compiling effective risk assessments exist within your business. The operatives who undertake the provision of your products and services must understand the health and safety risks as second nature. Your process and examples will be required for demonstration so get your best examples into your information store.

***Do you have arrangements for co-operation and co-coordinating your work with others (including other suppliers, notably contractors)?***

Construction is a sequential process and there will be other subbies working before you, probably alongside you (especially when programme pressures pile up) and after you (unless of course you are the ultimate finishing trade). It follows therefore that demonstration of your understanding of how co-operation and co-ordination of the work is achieved in practice will be required. It may even be the case that other organisations are involved in drawing up your method statements/safe systems of work etc. including arrangements for response to emergency situations. It will almost certainly be the case that you will need to include details of how comments and input from your suppliers and manufacturers is properly taken into account.

## ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

You will have seen that there are similarities in the way the quality and health and safety sections were compiled and the questions that were asked. If I tell you that the suggested framework in ISO 14001 (Environmental Management) is considered the epitome of what good environmental management looks like then you will quickly conclude that the questions that PAS 91 suggests are required in this area are lifted from ISO 14001! You should also conclude that the documents and procedures we have considered to satisfy previous PQQ questions can in most instances be extended to include environmental issues just as we extended them to include health and safety. The guidance below therefore will be brief and will reiterate that point.

You will expect, correctly, that PAS 91 recommends as an opener here, “this section need not be completed if your organisation holds a UKAS (or equivalent) accredited independent third party certificate of compliance with ISO 14001 and can provide the supporting evidence requested”

As you would also expect there’s that point about UKAS again!

***The major sections of any PQQ – quality, health and safety and environmental management – can be ignored if you hold UKAS accredited Certification to ISO 9001, ISO 14001 and OHSAS 18001.***

Then we could feasibly have a situation where you have a thirty-odd page PQQ where the question on page 1 says, “Do you hold ISO 9001 Certification? If so proceed to page 10”. When you get there, page 10 says, “Do you hold ISO 14001 Certification? If so proceed to page 20”. When you get there, page 20 says, “Do you hold OHSAS 18001 Certification? If so proceed to page 30”! And then all you are left with is a few fact-finding questions. You have certainly done most of your pre-qualifying already.

Soapbox firmly locked away so let’s look at typical questions in this area.

### ***Do you have a documented policy and organisation for the management of construction-related environmental issues?***

It will be no surprise that we need evidence of

- A periodically reviewed H&S policy, endorsed by the MD, relevant to your activities
- Responsibilities for environmental management at all levels in the organisation (again, and for efficiency, endorse your organisation chart which is already prepared for your information store).

### ***Do you have documented arrangements for ensuring that your environmental management procedures are effective in reducing/preventing significant impacts on the environment?***

This question presupposes that you understand your business's potential impact on the environment so that you can put in control measures to reduce or prevent them. You will therefore at least have to do an assessment of your interactions with the environment and what the impacts could potentially be (as you would expect this is one of the fundamental requirements of ISO 14001) and what measures you subsequently put in place to control, reduce or prevent them especially in potential emergency situations. Your store of information therefore requires evidence of this exercise having been undertaken and it will need to go further to demonstrate the effectiveness of your control measures. This will begin with training and communication and correct implementation. Constant monitoring, making improvements as and when required, coupled with investigation of any incidents that determines root causes and corrects them will allow you to show an intent to test your procedures and ensure their effectiveness over time. You also need to consider under the environmental heading such issues as buying sustainable materials, energy management and waste management.

### ***Do you have arrangements for providing employees who will engage in construction, with training and information on construction-related environmental issues?***

“Competence” again! Having talked about the importance of and issues around a training matrix previously it is simply a case of ensuring that environmental training (as appropriate to your business) is given the same attention as to what knowledge, information and/or qualifications are required by your people. Clearly your training matrix should cover all areas (quality/health and safety/environmental/BIM) and can therefore be uploaded to satisfy a range of PQQ requirements.

***Do you check review and where necessary improve your environmental performance?***

It will be clear by now that any “management” system - quality, health and safety, environmental -includes measures to review and improve performance. If nothing else, ISO Certification is about improving your business over time and “Continual improvement” is arguably the most fundamental quality management principle of all. More importantly, it should also be clear that we should combine our chosen procedure for monitoring quality with health and safety and environmental issues and again be able to upload one document that satisfies a number of PPQ requirements.

***Do you have arrangements for ensuring that any suppliers you engage apply environmental protection measures that are appropriate to the activity for which they are being engaged?***

To finally confirm the point I made in the first paragraph of this section above about combining our efforts to cover as many requirements as possible we simply ensure that when we evaluate a supplier’s health and safety competence we look at their environmental competence (such as is needed by us) at the same time so that our list of “approved suppliers and subcontractors” covers all PQQ issues and can be uploaded once!

## BIM

BIM is clearly a new but unstoppable initiative and increasingly questions on BIM capability are appearing in PQQ's.

The questions that are asked under BIM give you a clue as to what our customers want so you arrive "pre-qualified". In preparing our FIS BIM Process Training for Specialist Contractors product we asked main contractors what they wanted in this area and they said they wanted satisfaction of "the PAS 91 BIM Questions"!

There is no UKAS accredited certification for BIM yet although various training schemes are emerging. The FIS BIM Process Training certainly addresses the "PAS 91 Questions" below.

### ***Do you have the capability of working with a project using a "Common Data Environment" as described in PAS 1192:2:2013?***

Given what we have looked at before this is an uncharacteristically specific question. Not many contractors could answer this fully in the affirmative at the moment. This is clearly an area where you might need external training and if you were faced with this question tomorrow the best you could do might be to state that you have or about to engage appropriate training. There is of course an opportunity here to gain advantage by moving quickly. You will need to demonstrate not only an understanding of what a "Common Data Environment" is but also your ability to exchange information in an efficient and collaborative manner (this is beyond the scope of this document but I refer you to the FIS training scheme and before that to the free FIS BIM Toolbox <http://thefis.org/bim4fitout/training/>). Not for the first time PAS 1192-2:2103 is mentioned which is available as a free download from the BIM Task Group website.

### ***Do you have documented policy, systems and procedures to achieve "Level 2 BIM" maturity as defined in the Government's BIM Strategy? (Level 2 BIM describes a specific range of BIM capabilities (see PAS 1192-2:2013).***

From what we have seen before this is a more familiar question as it talks about "policy" and "procedures" which we have encountered previously but again it presupposes a knowledge of "Level 2 BIM" and again refers to PAS 1192-2. Again, for a quick guide download the free FIS BIM Toolbox.

***Do you have the capability of developing and delivering or working to a BIM Execution Plan as described in PAS 1192:2:2013?***

A BEP (BIM Execution Plan) is your main contractors BIM strategy on a particular project which you will be expected to contribute to – see FIS BIM Toolbox.

***Do you have arrangements for training employees in BIM related skills and do you assess their capabilities? Demo training arrangements to ensure can implement and deliver projects in accordance with policy and procedures to achieve Level 2 BIM.***

Hopefully you will immediately think in relation to this question that your training matrix that we have mentioned so often needs to include BIM knowledge and training. The comments above about “Level 2 BIM” reapply and again, this document is about PQQs and we don’t have the scope to describe all that is required here but the free FIS BIM toolbox does and the FIS BIM Process Training will certainly address all the relevant issues.

## PROJECT SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

You might say that a common set of authoritative answers that I am proposing will only go so far as there will always be “project-specific” questions. Well unless you are doing something totally new and different on each project there is still lots of productive groundwork to be done here.

Would you agree that project specific questions will be something along the lines of:

1. Do you have the technical ability to carry out the project activities?
2. Have you carried out activities of the same or similar nature?
3. Have you provided goods or services of the same or similar nature?
4. Do you have the facilities to fabricate, supply and deliver the goods and services?
5. Do you have the staff to do so?

Surely you will agree that if you have or are preparing your best answers that show you in the best light – see the last section - then you are well on your way. So what else do you need?

You could easily prepare a template for your best and high-profile jobs that compiles the necessary information, or even better case studies or project profiles showing completed jobs (your growing track record) and the skills and competencies that you brought to bear. All this is excellent testimony to your experience and reliability and could contain:

- Project description, value and Client brief
- Any pre-construction services, including advice, surveys and design drawings, planning, programming and quality management plans.
- Principal products and/or services
- Health & Safety management examples
- Environmental management arrangements
- Cost control
- Specific methods for service delivery and customer satisfaction.
- Details of meetings, communications and interactions co-ordination
- Description of quality handover
- Qualifications of you and your team
- Your BIM capability (for when the times comes. And it is a question of “when” not “if”!

An increasing stock of informative core-business case studies will suit almost any project-specific PPQ question so start filling your information store.

***“All this is excellent testimony to your experience and reliability”***



## WHAT ELSE MUST YOU DO FOR A SLICK PQQ RESPONSE?

Hopefully we have covered the major question areas and individual questions that all PQQ's will demand a response to and for which you should prepare your best answers. But a successful PQQ will require more than showing your project capabilities no matter how advanced they are - it's also very important to get your unique features across.

You might say you don't have any unique features but all businesses have elements about them which set them apart. What are yours? Brainstorm with your colleagues and agree what they are and what message you want to be getting across. Your attributes, your mission, culture and values all have a place in your submission and so do awards, reputations, and differences. These could well be the final piece of the jigsaw, having defined your competences that make you the right fit. There is no getting away from being judged alongside other applicants so make sure you have given the customer every opportunity to choose you – but get straight to the point, no need to waffle! Where do you add value? Ask this question of your business and get the answer. Make sure it comes out loud and clear.

We have seen a number of efficiencies to be enjoyed if we prepare our best set of authoritative answers and some key documents that we can use in a variety of responses. What else do we need to develop a slick PQQ process and get even more benefits?

Agree roles and responsibilities in preparing stock answers before the next PQQ arrives and decide who is going to do what so that everyone gets good at their bit.

There are always a few project specific questions so get your best examples ready. When did you successfully deal with a particularly demanding quality installation or cope with extraordinary environmental and/or health and safety situations? Any contractor with a few years under their belt will have their “war stories” to tell. Use them to your advantage.

Having your best examples ready means that they can always be added to and/or made ultra-specific if needs be.

Keep coming back to your set answers to make sure all your good points are included.

Do you have partnerships and or key suppliers whose involvement with you can be highlighted to your advantage?

Compile mini-CV's of key personnel – site managers, commercial people, and support staff - which can be constantly added to and updated.

Obtain a variety of your best references showing the range and versatility of your offering; ALWAYS ask for a reference for a job well done.

When the next PQQ comes in

- Do a quick review for “specificity” by your “information manager” or equivalent who you have already identified. This will be easily gauged with practice and then you can allocate the PQQ or parts of it to your agreed PQQ experts identified above
- Make sure you know the requirements and whether or not you can be successful. However slick you get if you feel there is a low chance of success then don't fill it in! The best way to prevent wasted time on the production of PQQ's leading to bids that you can't win is not to fill them in – BUT a great way to waste time is a half-hearted response that has blown the opportunity that could have opened up if done well
- With your increasing stock of examples and answers in your information store you can align the requirements of the bid with the various strengths and competencies of your company.
- The art in all this will always be to know what to change and when it needs changing but will again come with practice.
- Review and submittal will be easier because you have already checked your stock answers.
- Your management of your content will cut down on time!
- You can turn these thoughts into a checklist specific to you - a great checklist in place can make the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful PQQ.

Pardon the obvious but these things can go against you if not paid attention to:

- Has the document been signed in by the appropriate person in all the relevant places?
- Return the PQQ by the given time and date
- Make sure you return in the format requested and in line with submission instructions
- Keep a duplicate copy for any queries.
- Have you checked for errors and/or omissions?
- If handwritten, can the customer actually read it?
- Is your information consistent?
- Have you filled it with marketing bumph? If so, take it out, that's what your website is for.
- Are additional documents clearly referenced?
- Is it too generic –have you tailored it to the project in hand?
- Have you made comments without evidence? You always need evidence to support your claims. Don't assume the customer knows how good you are.

## SUMMARY

Your Customer can only evaluate what you have submitted!

*Be honest, about your PQQ submission.*

Is it a “full” response exceeding requirements, with well evidenced and relevant examples?

Is it an exceptional demonstration by you of your relevant ability, understanding, experience, skills, resources and quality measures required?

Could it give your potential customer a high-level of confidence about your intent and capability?



# CERTIFICATION