

## Making Quality Our DNA: An ISO 21001 Journey Across Six Institutions

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In the education sector, quality is no longer a differentiator — it is an expectation. As the Dean – Quality for a diverse group of institutions, I recently had the privilege of leading the successful ISO 21001:2018 (Educational Organization Management System – EOMS) certification of six entities: Four schools (CBSE, State Board, and IB); One College of Nursing and One College of

Paramedical Sciences

Achieving this in a single integrated effort was not just an operational milestone. It was a strategic transformation that strengthened our academic culture, stakeholder trust, and institutional capability.

What made this journey truly meaningful was the shift it demanded; a deliberate transition from a person-driven approach to a process-driven culture.

For years, many educational institutions have relied heavily on individual expertise, personal initiative, or legacy practices. While valuable, such reliance often leads to inconsistency, information silos, and challenges in sustaining excellence. ISO 21001 helped us break this cycle by:

- Institutionalizing structured processes that ensure continuity regardless of who is leading a department
- Aligning every academic and administrative function with clearly defined objectives and measurable outcomes
- Creating ownership and accountability across teams
- Strengthening transparency and communication with parents, students, faculty, and stakeholders



This transformation was not just about documentation or compliance. It was about building a culture where systems drive quality, where data informs decisions, and where continuous improvement becomes a shared responsibility.

From standardizing curriculum design and admission processes to enhancing student support, faculty capability, and governance mechanisms — the EOMS journey helped us redefine what quality means in our context.

In a multi-campus system, applying EOMS brings one powerful benefit: alignment without losing individuality. Each institution preserves its unique character, culture, and academic identity while operating within a common, structured quality framework. This balance ensures consistency across the system, yet allows every campus the flexibility to innovate, respond to its community, and grow in its own context.

## The Challenge: Six Institutions, One Goal

Achieving certification for six institutions simultaneously felt like hitting the jackpot; exciting, intense, and full of moving parts.

Each institution came with its own unique context:

- Schools operating under different boards (CBSE, State, IB)
- Nursing and Paramedical Colleges governed by independent professional councils
- Teams at varying stages of process maturity
- Diverse documentation practices and levels of audit readiness



Creating one unified system while respecting the distinct academic DNA of each institution was not only our biggest challenge — it ultimately became our greatest strength.

## Key Steps That Made It Possible

### 1. Building Ownership Through Process Leaders

We identified and trained process owners across all major functions like Academics, HR, Admin, Accounts, IT, Student Support, Library, Transport, Examination, and more.

Their responsibility went far beyond maintaining documents. They were empowered to own, monitor, and continuously improve their processes, fostering a culture of ownership and responsibility.

### 2. Developing Integrated Yet Customised Documentation

Each institution required a complete suite of documents —

- Policies
- SOPs
- Process maps
- Risk registers
- KPIs
- Records and evidence mechanisms



We created a standardized system framework while customizing the content to fit each board/council's academic guidelines. This ensured uniformity without compromising institutional uniqueness.

### 3. Strengthening the Monitoring & Review Culture

Frequent internal audits, compliance checks, evidence reviews, classroom observations, stakeholder surveys, and management review meetings became part of our quality rhythm.

These mechanisms ensured that quality was not an annual activity but a continuous cycle of reflection and improvement.

#### 4. Conducting Pre-Audit Readiness Sessions

To eliminate surprises and build confidence, we organized simulations, mock audits, and real-time corrective-action sessions.

This preparation made both Stage 1 and Stage 2 audits significantly smoother, more predictable, and well-coordinated.

#### What We Learned Along the Way

**Quality is not an event — it is a culture:** ISO certification is only the beginning. Sustaining the system requires leadership commitment and team alignment.

**KPIs transform clarity into accountability:** Performance rises organically when teams know *what* to measure and *why* it matters.

**Continuous improvement works when feedback flows freely:** Structured feedback channels like students, parents, faculty, staff — helped us identify gaps early.



**Cross-functional teams are the real game changers:** Academic, administrative, and support departments collaborated like never before.

#### What's Next?

Certification is not the end. It's a beginning to a new journey and our next mission is to:

- Strengthen digital integration of processes
- Deepen academic audits
- Align KPIs with quality outcomes
- Build capacity across all teams
- Make quality actionable for every stakeholder

ISO 21001 has given us a structured foundation — now we are ready to raise the bar even higher.

#### Conclusion

Education shapes the future, and quality shapes education. Leading this transformation across six institutions has been one of the most enriching professional experiences of my career. To everyone who contributed, from staff to students to auditors — this achievement belongs to all of us.

The ISO 21001 certification journey was far more than an audit exercise, it was a transformational shift in how our institutions think, work, and grow. Moving from person-driven practices to a process-driven culture has created a system where quality is consistent, scalable, and sustainable across all campuses.

What truly made this achievement possible was the collective commitment of our teams — Right from involvement of the leadership to Heads of Institutions, process owners, faculty, administrative staff, and support departments, who embraced change with openness and professionalism. Their ownership turned an ambitious vision into a powerful reality.

Today, our six institutions are not just certified; they are stronger, more aligned, more accountable, and more future-ready. And this is only the beginning.

With a robust EOMS framework in place, we are now positioned to innovate boldly, respond effectively to stakeholder needs, and build learning environments that uphold excellence every single day. What began as certification has evolved into a daily discipline of quality enhancement.

**Continuous improvement is a journey. And we have just begun.**