

SUPPORT ENGINEERING FOR THE TOUGHEST CHALLENGES

**QUORUM** Logistic Support Limited

## Seven Key Questions to Ask Your Potential Integrated Logistic Support Partner



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Whilst historically a military discipline (it was introduced to the UK's MoD in 1993), the proven ability of Integrated Logistic Support (ILS) or Supportability Engineering to enhance project performance and effectively manage and minimise risk, has seen it increasingly used across other core industries over the past few years – from the healthcare and pharmaceutical sectors to renewable energy, utilities, and rail.

This increase in demand has naturally seen a rise in the number of providers offering such services, but how do you differentiate between them, and find the partner offering the best solution for you and your business? We've put together a guide outlining the top seven questions you should ask any potential ILS partner to ensure that your projects are in the safest of hands...

## Q1

# What type of operation are you?

All of the ILS service providers out there will of course operate in very different ways and will range from individual consultants and owner-operated businesses to large corporate groups.

Whilst all should have in-depth knowledge of ILS in practise, they're likely to vary in terms of breadth of expertise, and in how they actually deliver their services to you. Individual consultants, for example, may work on a single project at any one time and so you, as their client, will be their sole and exclusive focus throughout the project's duration. Self-employed individuals are perhaps more likely to specialise in a specific sector – which is fantastic if yours is their area of brilliance, but not so good if what you do falls outside of their realm of expertise.

Organisations that are part of a group are likely to offer a wider breadth of industry expertise, as they'll naturally have a much larger pool of specialists. The size and expertise of their team may also facilitate the delivery of a range of dedicated training programmes on behalf of clients to their own in-house teams to develop their theoretical knowledge. However, in terms of 'how' they do business, they are more likely to be constrained by corporate bureaucracy, which may result in a lengthy onboarding process and drawn-out or 'red taped' decision-making procedures.

Owner-operated providers will benefit from being independent, with any decision-making processes likely to be quick and agile, with the capability (and autonomy) to onboard new projects within days (rather than weeks). As their client, you'll also benefit from a breadth of team knowledge and expertise, as well as a strong and robust support network. On-the-job training is likely to account for a prominent proportion of their programme delivery, providing your team with valuable practical and hands-on experience.

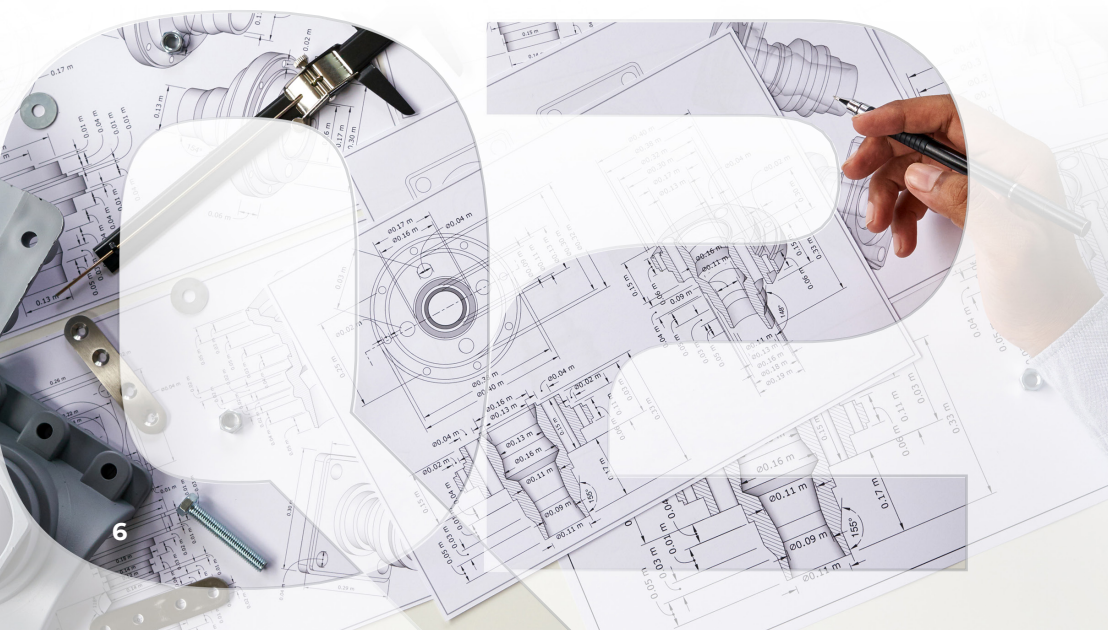
## Q2

# What services do you provide?

This question is definitely worth asking of any potential partner to ensure that every element of your project is covered. Some providers choose to specialise in niche areas relating to the wider Supportability Engineering discipline, for example: technical documentation, BID support, or obsolescence management.

Selecting a provider who offers everything under one roof (from initial Supportability Analysis and Risk Analysis & Management through to Human Factors Integration and Training) may be a better option for you if you don't have the time (or patience) for multiple lines of communication and potential HR headaches, or want to minimise costs associated with the procurement of numerous partners.

When asking a potential partner this question, do ask for specifics. Very large organisations can, on the surface, look very capable in a vast amount of areas. But, when you delve a little deeper it's often the case that these businesses are organised into individual units that effectively operate as separate entities. The people you initially talk to may not actually have the direct knowledge and expertise that their corporate material alludes to, and may not even be able to draw on other units across the organisation easily.



## Q3

# How much industry expertise do you have?



As highlighted previously, some ILS providers may bring to the party specific and in-depth expertise of a single industry and/or ILS discipline. Others may bring experience across a range of industries and disciplines. It's worth asking for an overview of their experience, and specific examples of companies they've worked with in the past too.

With ILS itself originating from the military sector, and with a number of other industries adopting stringent 'Defence Standards' (for example, the NHS) – partnering with a team who have armed forces experience can ensure your project reaches those high-quality benchmarks.

In addition, if your organisation operates globally, you need to be reassured your potential supplier has the capability and experience to deliver a worldwide ILS project.

There are lots of benefits to bringing in expertise from other industries - innovation, fresh perspectives, and knowledge of toolsets previously unknown to you - to name just a few. But, do beware. Language is key - and different industries naturally use different languages. When seeking out the right partner for you, do outline the issues you're looking to address with as little jargon and as few acronyms as possible - and let your potential partner explain their solution. One person's LSAR is another's BIM Dataset and one industry's ILS is another's Asset Management – so do consider exactly what you're looking for, and identify those who speak your language.

# Q4

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## What accreditations do you have?



When engaging with any supplier, it's important to know that they're committed to providing the highest-quality service at all times. Some industries, particularly the defence sector, have extremely strict requirements when it comes to supplier certifications.

ISO certifications, for example, are evidence of an organisation's commitment to meeting global benchmarks and support (amongst others) the standardisation of systems and processes, the continual improvement of procedures, and the enhancement of efficiencies.

Any ILS supplier should be accredited to ISO9001, which is the international standard that specifies requirements for a quality management system – and demonstrates that they consistently provide services (or products) that meet customer and regulatory requirements.

Other certifications and registrations that may be worth checking out include Chartered Engineer (CEng) status, European Engineer (EUR ING) status, and any defence-recognised accreditations obtained through the official Defence Learning Environment (DLE). Any one of these demonstrates that the supplier has exemplary levels of education, training and experience within core disciplines relevant to ILS processes.

## Q5

# Rules and regulations are forever changing how can we ensure we remain compliant?

In any industry, the regulatory environment can be a minefield and a tough one to navigate – particularly when guidelines and practice standards are constantly evolving. As a business, it's vital that you remain legally compliant – to ensure the ongoing safety and reputation of your team, customers and stakeholders.

Any ILS provider worth its salt will undertake a commitment to ongoing professional development through training courses and programmes in order to ensure that the guidance and support they're delivering to their clients is accurate, up-to-date, and compliant. Some providers will also offer dedicated training programmes to their clients' teams alongside on-site and on-the-job mentoring.

With many sectors using defence standards as their benchmarks of quality and safety, those ILS providers who work directly with the MoD will naturally have an advantage as they'll have unique access to the most up-to-date information regarding changes to all and any guidance and legislation (restricted to defence personnel and approved contractors). Through working with the defence sector on a regular (often daily) basis, these organisations will also have a comprehensive understanding of any terminology relating to the regulatory arena and will subsequently have the capability to cascade this advantageous information down to clients.

Suitably Qualified and Experienced Personnel (SQEP) is a term that originally came from within the UK's nuclear industry, but is now often referred to across other sectors including defence. To be accredited with the SQEP title, an individual must demonstrate that they have reached high levels of education, that they possess several years of industry experience, and that they adhere to stringent codes of ethics. This gives any client added reassurance that their preferred partner has the capabilities to resolve any technical issue or challenge to a required standard.

## Q6

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Is the incorporation of ILS into a project more vital than ever now post-pandemic?

Business continuity and contingency planning have always played an integral part in any successful organisation, but with the events of the past couple of years presenting unforeseen challenges to those across all industries, preparation has never been more important.

With the ongoing turmoil on a global scale relating to supply chain disruption, increased costs of materials, and fuel shortages, the focus on supportability engineering and the reassurances and peace of mind it can provide in terms of future viability has increased for many.

ILS is essentially about ensuring that your business is able to keep up and running, cost-effectively - with a calculated level of flexibility built-in and the application of agile project management processes to address any planned disruption. Time and money are ever-more crucial, and so having secure and robust systems in place, and processes and procedures that minimise risk, avert over-budgeting, and mitigate project delay is not only recognised as being hugely valuable, but absolutely project critical.

Further information on why continuity reviews are more important than ever to any business can be found [here](#).

## Q7

# What's the potential impact of getting it wrong?



The old adage 'If you fail to plan, you're planning to fail' couldn't be truer here. Reacting to a situation when it goes wrong is undoubtedly more costly – from a time, money and reputation perspective – than proactively preparing for all and any eventualities from the outset.

Organisations often start out undertaking the long-term planning process themselves, but it's never too far down the road when they realise the very real extent of the task ahead. And the impact of not getting it right can be significant.

For example, poor technical documentation can lead to (at the very least) lack of procedural adherence, decreased efficiencies, and increased operational risks. Having unreliable equipment, or not having equipment at the right time in the right place, can result in increased downtime and poor productivity. Inadequate (or lack of) training can mean equipment is not operated to maximum capability or optimum efficiency, resulting in inferior quality, high costs, and lengthy delays.

We've all experienced and/or know of projects that haven't quite gone to plan, and we can all absolutely learn from these challenges and 'heed the lessons of failure' in order to ensure future project success.

## Contact

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Quorum Logistic Support Ltd  
Quantum House  
Hadley Park East  
Telford  
TF1 6QJ  
United Kingdom  
+44 (0) 1952 671950  
[info@qlsl.com](mailto:info@qlsl.com)



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