

## THE IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE AVIATION MRO INDUSTRY

An interview with **Rachael Clarke**, Farsound's new Quality Manager



Rachael Clarke has enjoyed a long-standing career in Quality Assurance. She recently joined Farsound as Quality Manager and oversees the company's robust quality assurance management processes.

Here, Rachael talks about how she arrived in her current role and what working at Farsound means to her. She also discusses the importance of Quality Assurance across the MRO supply chain and how that helps her hold both Farsound and its suppliers accountable at every stage.

### Q. Could you tell us a little about your career before you joined Farsound?

A. I've worked within Quality for just over 15 years now, holding jobs in a variety of industries. I started my career as a Quality Admin Assistant in a food manufacturing company, working my way up the ranks to be a Quality Technician, Quality Engineer and finally Lead Auditor.

I then switched to the defence sector, where I joined a company that worked closely with the Ministry of Defence. I worked as a Product Quality Assurance Engineer and dealt with products on the shop floor to make sure they met strict quality requirements. I later became Senior Quality Assurance Engineer there, which helped me navigate the key changes that were happening in Quality Assurance around the transition from ISO9001 to ISO9001 2015.

After that, I moved into aviation, working for a machining company, and then on to the medical sector. This is a critical industry, very much like aerospace. I worked with ISO13485 certification for a worldwide medical company manufacturing instruments and sterilisation. Again, I found myself immersed in Quality Engineering in an industry that I hadn't worked in before, which taught me a lot. Finally I made my current move to Farsound as a Quality Manager, bringing me back to the more familiar ground of aviation and defence.



**Q. When you joined Farsound, it represented another promotion for you?**

**A.** Yes. I joined Farsound in April 2021. It was a promotion and the next step up from what I've been doing in my other roles. It gives me the ability to share all my knowledge from working in different industries, as well as in MRO and aviation, and to basically advance my career to the next stage. Now, I oversee the entire Quality control team at Farsound and I am in charge of ensuring that the Quality Assurance process is implemented correctly across the entire supply chain.

I really enjoy my role. Every day is different. There's lots of things that need to be done. I tend to deal with the systems side, like the company procedures relating to Quality, Environmental as well as documentation. I'm also responsible for the inspection department, where I deal with the First Article Inspection Reports. So, if we need to submit one on behalf of a customer, I will compose and compile that. Additionally, I manage all our auditing – both internal and external. Simply put, I ensure that we meet all the regulations we need to; not just the AS9120 but also ASA100 industry certification.

**Q. Why is Quality so important for a company like Farsound that supplies aircraft parts all over the world? And How does it work when you are sending parts from the UK to another part of the world where perhaps they have different quality standards?**

**A.** In my view Quality is really important and something that everyone must be responsible for. Working in the aerospace industry brings it home to me that if any of your family or friends are going to travel by aeroplane on holiday or for work, it's important to make sure that the quality of all the parts meets the required regulations and standards to keep them safe in the air. If the worst happened and an aeroplane part didn't meet those regulations causing something to happen to that aircraft, you've put peoples' lives at risk. That makes what we do incredibly important.

As for working with other parts of the world, it can be quite difficult because our interpretations of some of the standards may be different to other countries. The Quality team needs to fully understand the regulations and standards that need to be met in whatever country we are sending parts to. We must also be able to explain the requirements to the country or customer we're dealing with. They must feel confident that we know that what we are trying to send over to them meets both their required standards and regulations and ours.

**Q. What levels of Quality does an aviation company have to live up to in order to comply?**

**A.** Quality can be interpreted so differently by different people. You've got your official standards and regulations that will define your guidelines of what needs to be met. At Farsound, we have our AS9120 in place, which is our quality management standard certification. This is basically the distributions version which is part of AS9100-the aviation quality management standard. It includes all of the ISO 9001 requirements, plus specific requirements related to aerospace distributors.

We also have ASA 100 for the MRO distribution side as well. Additionally, ISO14001 links into our AS9120 because it's a business management system. All the different standards interlink into one another. A good Quality Management system incorporates these and ensures that all the data that is pouring in at each step of the production process is organised and analysed alongside real-time associated parameters. This helps the management team to take decisions and project the risks involved as precisely as possible.

At the same time as ensuring our official certifications, we've also got to meet our customers' expectations. If we don't meet these, we can't do business with them. These can be different things. For example, they might be looking for their suppliers to be Rolls Royce approved or have approval from certain other major customers as well.



**Q. As the world emerges from the coronavirus pandemic and starts to fly again, we hope to see the aviation sector recover. How important is Quality in that process?**

As I said before, Quality will always be important and something that everyone is responsible for. It must exceed the scope of customer satisfaction alone as failure to meet the required standards can lead to severe consequences. The aviation industry has always relied upon ensuring the very best experience for its customers. This is true now more than ever, as the industry seeks to rebuild people's confidence after a global crisis and encourages customers to return to their pre-pandemic flying habits.

A Quality programme like the one we have at Farsound is a staple part of any organisation's operating system, particularly following the coronavirus pandemic. All eyes will be on safety as the world returns to normal. We must keep on carrying out all of our business processes and tests without compromising the standard quality requirements, regulations and compliance guidelines. All the while working to return the aviation sector to normal working conditions.

**Q. What does joining Farsound as Quality Manager mean to you?**

I'm passionate about Quality and everything that goes on with it. It's all about the customer, the suppliers and the final product. I relish the chance to make sure the right product goes out of the door to the customer at the right time, here at Farsound. Now that I am a Quality Manger with Farsound, I can see the progress I am making in my own career. Plus, it's given me the opportunity to help Farsound grow its business and maintain its reputation for quality products at the same time.

Having a robust Quality Assurance system is non-negotiable for us and being entrusted to oversee it is a real privilege for me. I enjoy coming to work and I like the fact that no two days are the same. The aviation industry is fast-moving and it is essential for me to keep up. Many regulations are updated frequently, which keeps me on my toes and keeps my knowledge fresh.

Everything I learn and do at work has a direct impact on the company and its ongoing safety record and commercial success. Quality Assurance really is at the heart of meeting customer expectations and maintaining a strong brand reputation through a safe, reliable and optimised aviation system. I am incredibly proud to be an integral part of all of that. The future looks exciting and I can't wait to see what's next.

