

EQUASS

A response to a European approach to quality

The modernisation of the Social Services sector in Europe creates a demand for quality assurance and effectiveness in service provision. Its calls for international benchmarking, bench learning and continuous improvement.

The introduction of a market approach will lead to more competition between service providers and requires transparency and efficiency. National authorities and funders will include quality criteria in their tender specifications in order to ensure adequate and sustainable services.

The creation of an Internal Market will increase cross border service provision. It calls for a quality label at European level to provide guarantees to users and to help them identifying “good” service providers.

The Communication of the European Commission on Social Services of General Interest (2007) calls for a non compulsory European quality framework for social services to set, to monitor and to evaluate quality standards.

The UN Convention on the rights of people with disabilities (2006) emphasises the underpinning human rights approach which

requires empowerment as a pre-condition for participation. EQUASS can help public authorities as well as sectoral stakeholders with the practical implementation of the UN Convention.



The High Level Group on Disability (2007) presents quality principles and criteria which are agreed and rectified by all EU Member States and the European Commission. The principles are fully compliant with the EQUASS Principles for Quality.

The Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 of the Council of Europe (2006) identifies quality of services as a vital element of any implementation strategy at national level, and requires continuous improvement.

A reference study validated that providers of VET services can meet the core criteria of the **Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) for Vocational Education and Training (VET)** through EQUASS certification

The need for a sector-specific approach

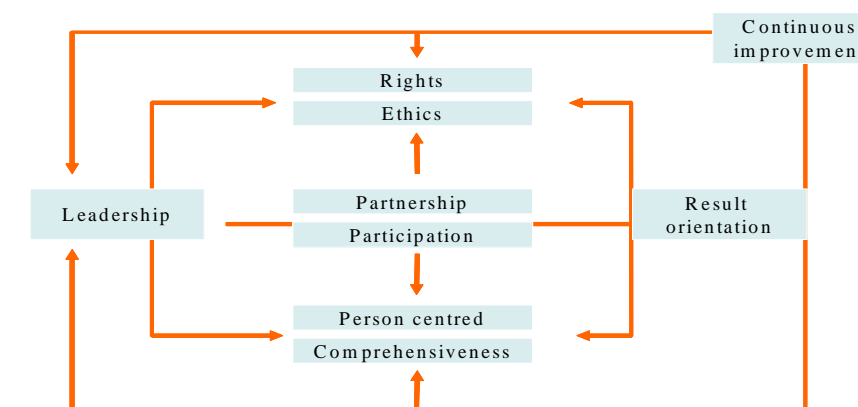


combine the viewpoints of the major stakeholder groups in the social sector.

Principles for Quality

A European quality system should be *flexible* enough so it can overcome legal, socio-economic and cultural differences in the different EU member states. Moreover, such flexibility should ensure that the European concept of quality can be compatible and complementary with existing national quality systems in the

sector. These aims can be achieved by using the concept of principles for quality (key values) that are translated into criteria and indicators, rather than to come up with prescriptive standards.



A European-wide stakeholder consultation to identify the fundamentals of quality in the social services sector resulted in the definition of nine Principles for Quality which are the basis of all EQUASS certification programmes.

What is EQUASS?

The European Quality in Social Services (EQUASS) is an initiative of the European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR). EQUASS provides comprehensive services in the area of certification, training and consultancy services in the area of quality in the provision of social services. The certification programmes are complementary to existing quality certification programmes at the national level and are overseen by an independent International Awarding Committee that includes representatives from key European Stakeholders

The mission of EQUASS is to enhance the social services sector by engaging service providers in quality and continuous improvement, and by guaranteeing service-users quality of services throughout Europe.

Certification Programmes

The EQUASS certification programmes fully comply with the European requirements for quality in the social sector expressed in the principles for quality in service provision defined by the High Level group on Disability and the core criteria of the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) Sector.

Quality in Social Services (EQUASS Assurance)



EQUASS Assurance *guarantees quality* of service provision by certifying compliance with 38 criteria based on the Principles for Quality. EQUASS Assurance is customised for the social sector and the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. An organisation that meets the EQUASS Assurance criteria is certified for a two years period.

Excellence in Social Services (EQUASS Excellence)



EQUASS Excellence is awarded to any service provider that can demonstrate achievements and continuous improvement on all Principles for Quality. The EQUASS Excellence criteria are non-prescriptive in the sense that compliance can be achieved in various ways. An organisation that meets the EQUASS Excellence criteria is certified for a three years period.

Outstanding performance in Social Services (EQUASS Award)



EQUASS Award aims to identify and recognise *out-standing performance* on the Principles for Quality. The EQUASS Award is given to a social service provider as a result of a voluntary competition in evaluating and benchmarking the performance of social service providers.

Training Programmes

The training programmes have been designed to support the EQUASS certification programmes.

- **Information seminars** on all aspects of quality
- **In-depth-trainings** in writing an EQUASS Excellence self-evaluation report
- **Training of auditors and consultants** who are accredited after a successful completion of training, and can afterwards work in the system
- **Initiation programmes** to carry out a 'Quick Scan' for identifying current performance on the criteria of EQUASS Excellence

Consultancy Services

- Support to EQUASS licence holders
- Support services to individual service providers in the implementation of EQUASS Excellence and EQUASS Assurance
- Internal review for EQUASS Excellence applicants
- Information presentations, contributions to seminars, conferences and other national and international events
- Advice to applicants and policy makers
- Consultancy services on request of external consultancy agencies
- Technical assistance within Europe and abroad



Who could benefit from EQUASS?

- **Service users:**
 - ✓ offering them a guarantee of quality of the offered services
 - ✓ helping them to make a choice between various service providers
- **Public authorities** (funders, policy makers, public administration) in:
 - ✓ promoting the quality in the sector at a general level
 - ✓ putting in place the provisions of key instruments at European and international level
- **Service providers:**
 - ✓ Improving the quality of the service delivery and optimising management systems
 - ✓ Distinguish them from competitors with the aim to obtain a sound place on the market
 - ✓ Being compliant to the national legal provisions that require quality certification

Information

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