

Quality assurance systems

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Quality assurance systems are a tool to help you run your organisation more effectively and efficiently. They also help to ensure that a minimum standard of quality is being met for a product, service or project.

For the voluntary and community sector, there are some recognised quality assurance systems that measure the quality of your organisation and which assure service users, members, volunteers and funders that your services perform to a certain standard.

What's out there?

There are many different **quality assurance systems** that focus on a single aspect of your service (such as human resources) or your organisation as a whole. You will need to decide on the right system for your organisation and find out what exactly it would involve. The following systems are familiar within the voluntary and community sector:

PQASSO (Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations)

Developed by the Charities Evaluation Services specifically for the voluntary and community sector, PQASSO is the leading quality standard and used most widely across the sector. Originally developed as a self-assessment model, the system covers all aspects of running an organisation. Its flexibility means it can be used by all types of organisations, including charities, social enterprises, and community interest companies. It is also appropriate for all sizes – from small community groups with a handful of employees to larger charities with over 2,000 employees. The system now offers an externally-accredited PQASSO Quality Mark which is endorsed by the Charity Commission at certain levels.



NAVCA Quality Award

A rigorous, externally-audited, evaluation for support providers (also known as local infrastructure) such as your local CVS (Council for Voluntary Service) or equivalent. A support provider will offer guidance to local community groups, voluntary and faith organisations to help them set up, develop and grow. These services might include governance advice, guidance on funding or a volunteering function. This award is assessed against nationally-approved performance standards that look at the quality of services offered to local voluntary and community groups. Once awarded, the Quality Award is valid for three years.



Factsheet

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Investors In People (IIP)

This is a single focus standard, designed for any organisation and recognised across the voluntary, public and private sectors. Investors in People aims to improve organisational performance through people management and development. It is externally assessed and results in a quality mark which is valid for three years.



ISO 9000

ISO 9000 relates to quality management and is designed to help organisations meet the needs of customers and other stakeholders. The system looks at how you deliver your products, services and activities through the processes that you use. The standards are published by ISO, the International Organisation for Standardisation, and are available through the British Standards Institution. They are part of a wider set of 'ISO' standards, including ISO 14001 Environmental Management Systems. However, the most commonly used ones for our sector are ISO 9000 (quality management) and ISO 9000:2008 (quality management systems). The ISO website includes particular guidance for small or medium sized organisations on how to implement the systems. Once certified, organisations can carry the ISO mark for the relevant standard that has been achieved.



Common Inspection Framework

This is for all organisations delivering publicly-funded learning and skills projects. It is the framework used by Ofsted when carrying out inspections. It focuses on the quality of learning provision.

Investors in Diversity

This has been developed for all organisations in all sectors. The standard focuses on inclusion, equality and diversity. It has been developed by the National Centre for Diversity.



How it works

Quality assurance is achieved through continuously checking performance and demonstrating the quality of your performance through your policies and procedures.

Key Words

Accreditation – the process by which an organisation is given certified recognition for meeting a particular set of standards (often through an external assessor)

Full cost recovery – securing funding for all the costs involved in running a project

PQASSO – Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations

Quality assurance systems – a tool to help you run your organisation more effectively and efficiently

Quality mark – certification awarded by an external body showing a standard has been met

Quality standard – an agreed level of service or organisational performance that should always be met

Self assessment – the process of critically reviewing the quality of your own performance and provision as an organisation

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Step 1: Agree on a standard – each quality standard is different and will have its own way of measuring and developing the quality of your services. You will have to research and agree internally on what standard is most appropriate for your organisation. There are also different cost implications, which also depend on how much resource it will take to implement. For instance, some quality assurance systems may require external training and some are more rigorous than others. Whilst you can usually work towards your own deadlines, the length of time it may take may vary depending on what existing structures you already have in place, or whether you are starting completely from scratch. However, remember the tale of the tortoise and the hare – it is better to take time and care to be sure of reaching your destination. You may also be able to build the implementation costs for a quality assurance system into a particular project or funding bid (based on a full cost recovery basis).

'If all other things are equal, the organisation with the quality mark or system in place will be favoured'

Step 2: Carry out a self-assessment – Some standards will offer a self-assessment that you can complete, or you might be able to obtain one from your local CVS (or equivalent). A self-assessment is the process of critically reviewing the quality of your own performance and provision as an organisation. It is based on specific criteria or indicators to measure the delivery of your service (including any outputs or outcomes that are achieved). For many systems it is the evidence that you can provide (to show how you reach the criteria), which is important.

Step 3: Draw up an action plan – The next step might be to draw up an action plan to show how improvements will be made, by when and by whom. This should outline specific tasks or milestones and who is responsible for these.

Burnside Community Centre decided to implement PQASSO 'to have a systematic structure in place that is active and adaptable'.

Their staff received two days of training by a licensed PQASSO mentor, with further support in completing the self-assessment and developing an action plan. Through this process, the Centre developed a sustainable plan for the future. As a result, they have been able to secure funding from a variety of sources and their facilities are well used.

The Centre staff are pleased with their experience and the benefits it has brought to their organisation: 'PQASSO can be flexible to suit all needs and can be adapted to benefit service users and achieve the longevity of an organisation'.

They also felt it was quite easy to use as a process: 'It is broken down into 12 Quality Areas and three levels. You do them at your own pace as there is no time limit. You can decide what order to work through them so it can fit into what your organisation is working on'.

Step 4: External assessment – Many quality systems are externally accredited. This means that someone from outside the organisation will check the evidence submitted and issue the relevant award or certification. The accreditation will often last for three years, before an organisation is

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externally assessed again.

Step 5: Implement the action plan and review your progress – A quality assurance system is a tool for continual improvement and should be reviewed on a regular basis (rather than swept away for another three years). By keeping it up to date in systematic way, you will have an excellent framework for organisational development.

Who benefits?

As service providers, organisations need to make sure that what they do is of a good standard. A quality assurance system will help you to deliver high quality services (for your service users) through a structured framework. It also helps to deliver consistently good services. For instance by having a structured induction process for volunteers, it can aid the planning process and save time and resources, as well as making a huge difference to the experience of the volunteer.

'They were very impressed... doing PQASSO was a big help'

A community centre receiving a visit from the Big Lottery Fund

Quality standards are also good tools to demonstrate to funding bodies, service users and partners that you are committed to continual development and can offer a consistent level of quality through a recognised system.

Links to the quality assurance systems outlined in this factsheet:

- PQASSO – www.ces-vol.org.uk/PQASSO
- The NAVCA Quality Award – www.navca.org.uk/services/quality/qualityaward
- Investors in People – www.investorsinpeople.co.uk
- ISO9000 – www.iso.org/iso
- Common inspection framework – www.ofsted.gov.uk
- Investors in Diversity – www.nationalcentrefordiversity.com/diversity-awards/investors-in-diversity-awards/

Further links and support:

- Charities Evaluation Services – the main provider of support and advice on quality and evaluation systems for the voluntary sector – www.ces-vol.org.uk
- Salford CVS's Quality Counts project, which closed in December 2012, produced a number of helpful information sheets on the different types of quality assurance standards – www.salfordcvs.co.uk/salford-cvs/quality-counts
- For any further information, guidance and support, please visit www.gmvss.net

For any further information, guidance and support, please contact Bolton CVS on: 01204 546010 or e-mail: admin@boltoncvs.org.uk



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