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Quality Systems

Systems for improving your organisation: a brief guide to Quality

All organisations want to do the best possible work and provide the best possible services. To set about achieving this, organisations regularly need to go through a process of assessing what they are doing and working out how to do it better. This is now generally referred to as a 'quality' process.

Many organisations build up their own internal quality system – a process of monitoring, evaluating and developing their work. Other organisations will adopt a *quality assurance* system - a formal, nationally recognised, process. Some quality assurance systems are purely for use within an organisation, others lead to certification by an outside body.

A number of quality assurance systems are currently being used by community and voluntary organisations. We outline these in this information sheet and look briefly at what you might get out of introducing one.

What do you want to achieve?

There are many reasons for using a quality system, whether your own internal process or a recognised quality assurance system. For example, you may be looking to:

- H Improve services.
- H Make the organisation more efficient.
- H Become more accountable to users.
- H Achieve credibility in the wider world, and in particular with funders.

It is important to work out in advance precisely what you want to achieve. If you have many aims, they may prove to be incompatible or very difficult to achieve simultaneously. You may find it helpful to go back to basics and ask yourselves the key questions 'What is our organisation's purpose (our central aim or objective), and how will we achieve it?'



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Is a quality assurance system right for you?

Your organisation may already have in place procedures for monitoring, evaluating and developing your work. If you are satisfied that these are enabling you to do high quality work and manage your organisation effectively, then you may not feel that a quality assurance system is necessary.

However, organisations often come under considerable external pressure, especially from funders, to demonstrate the quality of their work and their management efficiency. The Charity Commission expects every charity to work towards a set of standards laid down in its publication *The Hallmarks of a Well-run Charity*. Introducing a quality assurance system, especially a system which leads to external certification, would provide the necessary assurance to funders and other bodies, and to your users or members.

Of course, if you have doubts about your evaluation procedures or the standard of your work, then a quality assurance system may be just what you need, regardless of funders.

How does quality assurance work?

A quality assurance system is intended to raise the standard of work and ensure consistency. All follow the same broad framework:

- H Set your standards – agree the level of performance which users, staff and management committee expect from your organisation and the values (eg equal opportunities or environmental impact) which underpin your work.
- H Self-assessment – evaluate your work to see in which areas you are reaching the agreed standards.
- H Set priorities – decide which areas of work need improving or developing.
- H Draw up an action plan – state what needs to be done, who will do it, how and when.
- H Do the work.
- H Review progress – check what changes have been made and whether these have produced improvements.

All of the systems stress that this is not a one-off process to improve your organisation – quality assurance should be an integral part of your work, planning and management. Everyone in your organisation should be involved in some way – staff, volunteers, management committee members or trustees and, where appropriate, users.

**Charity Commission
Direct
PO Box 1227
Liverpool
L69 3UG**

Tel: 0845 3000 218

Minicom: 0845 3000 219

www.charitycommission.gov.uk

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Contact details for each of these organisations are on page 5 and 6 of this information sheet.

Which system?

There are a number of systems developed for, or used by, community and voluntary organisations. Each will involve your organisation in differing levels of expense and staff time. Below are the most common, with a very brief description of their approach. At the end of this information sheet, we give details of where to find out more about the systems which interest you.

PQASSO (Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations)

This is designed specifically for small to medium-sized community and voluntary organisations. It helps you to assess and improve almost all aspects of your work. It is fairly easy to use, you can introduce it at your own pace and it is not externally assessed. It is cheap to buy - the pack costs around £75 and a CD-Rom which complements the paper pack costs a further £45. Locally, if there is the demand, the Working Together Project will run courses on how to use PQASSO.

Quality First

This is designed specifically for small to medium-sized organisations without any paid staff. It is very cheap, easy to use, you can introduce it at your own pace and it is not externally assessed.

Investors in People

This scheme concentrates on managing and supporting staff to help achieve your aims, and does not look at all aspects of your organisation. You can work towards the standard yourself at your own pace or undergo external assessment. Financially and in staff time, the costs could turn out to be very high: the pack costs around £80 but, if you work with Investors in People, the initial assessment costs £550 per day.

EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) Excellence Model

This is not strictly a quality system, but is designed as a framework for continuous improvement. It helps you to map out stages for assessing every aspect of your work, identify where improvements are needed and compare your organisation with others. It is demanding and usually takes an organisation a year to work towards external assessment.

ISO 9000

This concentrates on service delivery and will help you improve how you run your activities or provide your services. It is expensive and time-consuming, and a fairly complex system.

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Social auditing, reporting and accounting

These processes are designed to help your organisation improve its ethical and social approach by increasing its accountability and the involvement of different 'stakeholders'. They are fairly complex and time-consuming, but you introduce them at your own pace.

Charter Mark

This is a system for organisations which provide services to the public and helps ensure that you put those who use your services at the heart of everything you do. You carry out self-assessment before applying for external assessment, with re-assessment every three years. The cost varies.

Quality Mark

This is designed for organisations providing legal information and advice to the public, and is free to those in receipt of public, local authority or charitable funding. There are 3 standards relating to Information, General Help, and Specialist Help. The system is fairly easy to use, but potentially time-consuming and involves external assessment.

Matrix

This is a quality standard designed for organisations which provide advice and guidance on learning and work or which provide support in these areas to socially excluded communities. It is demanding and it is recommended that groups work with a Matrix advisor before moving to accreditation. The costs, in time and money, could be high – accreditation costs £550 per day.

Before you start – a few tips

It is vital to plan very carefully before introducing a quality assurance system. Below are a few tips which may seem obvious but are often overlooked!

- H Consider setting up a small working group to ensure that the process is carried through effectively.**
- H Make sure that everyone in the organisation – trustees, members, staff and volunteers – is involved in and supports your quality system. This is important both at the planning stage and when you eventually introduce the system.**
- H Decide what you want to achieve.**
- H Decide whether it will be better to use a recognised system or to improve your internal processes.**

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- H Assess the time and money which your organisation has available.
- H If you opt for a recognised quality assurance system, find out as much as you can about the ones which look most appropriate before deciding which is most suited to your organisation.
- H Draw up a plan and realistic timetable for working through the quality system.

Contact details

For general information about quality systems

National Council for Voluntary Organisations
Regent's Wharf
8 All Saints Street
London N1 9RL
Tel 0800 2 798 798 | www.ncvo-vol.org.uk

Charities Evaluation Services
4 Coldbath Square
London EC1R 5HL
Tel 020 7713 5722 | www.ces-vol.org.uk

Quality Assurance Systems

PQASSO
Charities Evaluation Services
See address above

For training courses in PQASSO

Brighton & Hove Working Together Project
Brighton Junction, 1A Isetta Square
35 New England Street
Brighton BN1 4GQ
Tel 01273 810248 | www.workingtogetherproject.org.uk

Let's Protect Project by Safety Net
Manor Offices, Emmaus
Drove Road, Portslade
Brighton, BN41 2PA
01273 411613
info@safety-net.org.uk | www.safety-net.org.uk/

For groups working with children & young people

Quality First
Birmingham Voluntary Service Council
138 Digbeth
Birmingham B5 6DR
Tel 0121 6434343 | www.bvsc.org

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Investors in People

Investors in People UK

7-10 Chandos Street

London W1G 9DQ

Tel 020 7467 1900 | www.investorsinpeople.co.uk

EFQM Excellence Model

British Quality Foundation

32-34 Great Peter Street

London SW1P 2QX

Tel 020 7654 5000 | www.quality-foundation.co.uk

ISO 9000

British Standards Institution

389 Chiswick High Road

London W4 4AL

Tel 020 8996 9000 | www.bsi.org.uk

Social Accounting & Auditing

New Economics Foundation

3 Jonathan Street

London SE11 5NH

Tel 020 7820 6300 | www.neweconomics.org

Charter Mark

Charter Mark Team

Cabinet Office, 4th Floor

Kirkland House, 22 Whitehall

London SW1 2WH

Tel 020 7276 1755 | www.chartermark.gov.uk

Quality Mark

Legal Services Commission

85 Grays Inn Road

London WC1X 8TX

Tel 020 7759 0000 | www.legalservices.gov.uk/qmark

Matrix

ENTO, Kimberley House

47 Vaughan Way

Leicester, LE1 4SG

Tel 0870 770 2468 | www.matrix-quality-standard.com