



T3SC Factsheet

Quality Assurance

What is Quality Assurance?

Quality Assurance (QA) is a way for your organisation to make sure that it is always delivering the best it can to its service users, members, volunteers and funders. Through continuous monitoring and evaluation of your performance and through the collection of evidence you can show that your organisation is continuously improving what it does and how it does it. It's a way of measuring what your organisation does against other organisations doing similar work or against set, recognised standards.

This system of checking your organisation's quality is an ongoing process. The monitoring of what your organisation does and how it does it is continuous to ensure that you are always meeting the new standards that are always developing.

How does it work?

This depends to a very large extent on the QA system that you choose to implement. However most QA systems will have a series of specific areas that they will focus on. Most systems will have a range of standards that your organisation is expected to meet across a range of quality areas in order to be recognised as a quality organisation. In most QA systems how you achieve those standards is down to you, there is no set methodology, it is the evidence that you reached the standards that is of concern. Most quality systems are externally accredited. This means that there are people from outside your organisation who will come in to determine whether or not your organisation is meeting the standards required by the QA system to be deemed a quality organisation. A few systems are not externally accredited. This means that the responsibility for meeting the standards and the thoroughness and levels to which your organisation meets set standards is down entirely to your own organisation.

Which one should we use?

There is no right or wrong QA system. There are simply a variety from which you can choose. The right one for your organisation will depend upon what you want it to achieve, and how you want to work. Also you need to think about what kind of evaluation processes your organisation wants and needs and what you can afford. A useful point to remember is that most QA systems are externally evaluated and this evaluation has a cost associated with it.

Why do you need it?

As service providers especially, but also as organisations which are often membership based you need to make sure that what you do for your service users and for your membership is up to a good standard. Up to standard can mean many different things however, from meeting basic legal minimum standards to the standards expected by service users, to the standards that you are funded to achieve. One reason that often prompts many voluntary sector organisations to begin to implement a Quality Assurance System is that a funding body requires it. This is usually because the funder needs to make sure that the organisation they are funding has the systems to both handle the money itself and also to spend it efficiently and effectively. For funders a Quality Assurance system is a good way of making sure of this. If your organisation is thinking of tendering for a contract from the council then ensure you are providing the quality assurance system that they require.

What is there to choose from?

There are many different QA systems on the market. We have run through a few of those which are popular and/or well known in the voluntary sector.

ISO 9000

ISO 9000 is a series of different QA standards which are internationally recognised and therefore externally evaluated. They are based on the needs and expectations of a customer base and were originally designed for use in industrial or product based organisations. These days the standards remain well used in the industrial sector but are not widely used in the public sector or voluntary sector. The standards and the systems associated with them are much more easily applied and understood in the context of a relatively large organisation, however there is nothing to prevent their use in a smaller organisation.

Investors In People (IIP)

Investors in People is probably the most well known of all quality systems or standards in the UK. It again is externally evaluated and is based entirely on an organisation's people base, i.e. its staff and/or volunteers. The system has several basic principles to which an organisation must subscribe along with standards which then need to be met and evidence collected which will prove the standard the organisation has achieved. Again this is mostly used by relatively large organisations where the staff are the primary resource of the organisation. However it has been successfully applied in the voluntary and the public sectors.

EFQM/Business Excellence Model

This is another very popular model throughout Europe. The Excellence model is based on the European Foundation for Quality Management model of quality management. It is once again a method used widely in large business organisations and less with the voluntary and community sectors (though it has been shown to have possible applications in this area.) The model is seen by those who develop it as a tool for continually improving your own organisation through understanding where you're at, where the gaps are and enabling you to develop solutions. The Excellence Model is externally evaluated.

PQASSO

PQASSO stands for Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations. As the name suggests it has been developed specifically for smaller organisations for whom many of the other QA systems are not appropriate. It was developed by the Charities Evaluation Service and was developed with the voluntary sector in mind as well, and as a result it is widely used across the sector. It can be externally evaluated but most organisations choose to evaluate it internally. There are costs associated with buying the work pack and for the external evaluation. While this has been developed with many of the problems associated with other QA systems in mind it along with them is simply a model and therefore cannot be entirely suitable to every organisation and the decision about which QA system to use depends on the needs of your group and the type of organisation that you are.

For further information: you can find details of all the above systems on their websites: www.eqfm.org.uk, www.iip.co.uk, www.iqa.org.uk, www.pqasso.co.uk or contact T3SC.

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