Adopting a Quality Assurance System in your Organisation

Introduction

The concept of quality is not new and is ever-present in our work and results we achieve. From the very small group to the large organisation quality, and quality systems, form a key part of running an organisation, its services and activities. As an organisation grows quality consideration becomes ever more important in its operations.

So what is Quality as we know it?

Quality is about learning what you are doing well and striving to do it better. It also means finding out what you need to change to make sure you meet your beneficiaries' needs.

What is a quality assurance system (QAS)?

A QAS is a formal management system that you can use to strengthen your organisation and how it operates. It is intended to raise standards of work and help you to do everything consistently.

Why should you consider one?

There are a number of reasons why Quality Assurance is important for an organisation:

- Service users and the general public expect high standards when they use your service;
- There are increasing pressures on voluntary organisations to be formally accountable to their funders, to prove that their performance is of a high quality and to adopt more business-like management;
- Organisations may have to demonstrate how quality can be guaranteed, and how they perform in comparison with others;
- Contributes to ensuring that your organisation is fit for purpose in the eyes of external stakeholders.

Implementing a quality assurance system can increase an organisation's credibility by demonstrating its accountability to various stakeholders. A quality assurance system also enables an organisation to strive for continuous improvement in all it does and improve the way in which it manages and delivers its services and activities – saving time and money in the long-run.

Some funders ask about an organisation's approach to quality as part of their funding application process. Others may ask that a quality assurance system be introduced, and almost all funders require evidence of the quality of service provision through regular monitoring reports.

Which Quality Assurance System should you use?

There are many quality assurance systems to choose from. However it is important to choose a system that fits with the size of your organisation and the kind of services that you deliver.

Most quality assurance systems are now externally accredited. This means that someone outside your organisation will visit to determine whether or not your organisation is meeting the standards required by the quality assurance system that you have chosen. A few systems are not externally accredited and the thoroughness and levels to which your organisation meets set standards is entirely down to you. External evaluation can be expensive and may seem out of reach, especially if you run your operations on a tight budget. The good news is that your existing funder may be able to support you to develop one.

This factsheet focuses on the PQASSO quality standard. It also provides a brief outline of other popular quality assurance systems in the voluntary sector.

PQASSO Quality Standard

PQASSO has been around for almost 30 years and is one of the leading quality assurance systems used by the voluntary sector in the UK. It was developed in 1997 by the Charities Evaluation Services (CES) and designed for use by all sizes of organisations. The CES merged with NCVO In 2014.

The system offers a staged approach to implementing quality through (currently) three levels of achievement which means you can move from one level to the next until you achieve all three levels.

The PQASSO 4th edition standard was released in 2016 and the levels available reduced from three to two. Assessment against the 3rd edition ended in autumn 2017.

It is important to maintain the position at the level that you achieve and remain until you are ready to progress to other levels.

Features

PQASSO is a self-assessment tool and an organisation can progress by using the work-pack containing the standards and indicators.

It is built around 12 quality areas which cover all aspects of an organisation to enable it run effectively and efficiently.

As a self-assessment tool an organisation can control the process and pace at which the standard is implemented.

Uses for PQASSO

PQASSO is a holistic quality assurance system and has many uses:
- It has strong outcomes focus and helps to measure the differences to the organisation and service users that come about through planning and implementing

improvements;
- can be used as a health check tool;
- can be used to help identify and manage risk;
- it is used as a governance tool;
- it is used to support continuous improvements.

External assessment and recognition

Most organisations are choosing to work towards the externally assessed PQASSO Quality Mark standard, which validates an organisation's progress made through self-assessment. The external audit is carried out by PQASSO Quality Mark peer reviewers, who are members of the voluntary and community sector and have been trained for the role.

In recent years the PQASSO Quality Mark has received the endorsement of the Charity Commission for all three levels of the Standard. This means that those organisations achieving the Quality Mark will receive the Commission's badge of approval which signifies that they meet the 'Hallmarks of an Effective Charity'. The arrangement is due to come to an end sometime in 2018.

How long will it take to develop and achieve the PQASSO standard?

It will depend on a number of factors including commitment and resources available to support the process within your organisation. You should however pencil in about six to twelve months on average.

Developing and implementing PQASSO

If you are interested in achieving a PQASSO Quality Mark you may want to read the following resources:
- PQASSO – the basics: https://www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/pqasso

- PQASSO Quality Mark and how much it would cost:
  PQASSO Accreditation

- How to achieve the PQASSO Quality Mark:
  Achieving the PQASSO Quality Mark

Community Southwark has an accredited PQASSO mentor who can take you through the steps and processes involved and support you to implement the standard. For more information please contact the Development Team on 020 7358 7020 or email development@communitysouthwark.org

Other popular standards used in the sector

There are lots of quality standards to choose from and what you pick may depend upon the size of your organisation, your budget and the services you provide. You may also know of service specific standards that you must adhere to.

Here are some of the popular standards. Community Southwark can support you to get everything in order to go for any of these standards.

1. Investors in People

A well-known quality assurance system it was developed in 1991 and can provide an independent stamp of approval for prospective staff and other stakeholders. The Standard is externally evaluated and designed to advance an organisation's performance through the management and development of its people. It is used by all sizes of organisations where the staff are considered the primary resource.

Core principles

The IIP Framework is based on three core performance headings centred on continuous improvements. The headings are further broken down into 9 key indicators that you assess your organisation against.

2. Investing in Volunteers

Investing in Volunteers is a quality standard for organisations which involve volunteers in their operations. The Standard enables organisations to review their volunteer management and also publicly demonstrate their commitment to volunteering. The Standard is managed in England by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) following merger with Volunteering England in January 2013.

The Standard is based on four areas of volunteer management:
- planning for volunteer involvement;
- recruiting volunteers;
- selecting and matching volunteers, and
- supporting and retaining volunteers.

These are further divided into nine indicators and 46 practices.

To help you through the journey of achieving the Investing in Volunteers standard, the process has been broken down into the following six steps

3. Advice Quality Standard

The Advice Quality Standard (AQS) is the advice agency-specific quality standard for voluntary and community organisations. It is a nationally recognised quality standard for the provision of legal advice and information about the law and legal entitlements. The AQS is awarded to organisations delivering legal advice and information services at three levels: information, general advice and general advice with casework. It has a strong focus on assessing the quality of advice given and user views.

At a higher level, the SQM Delivery Partnership manages and awards the Community Legal Service Specialist Quality Mark Standard to organisations delivering legal advice at specialist level, which includes representation at tribunals.

The AQS framework consists of seven quality areas that you assess against. It offers two levels to apply and be externally audited: Advice only and Advice with Casework. The audits and certificate last for two years after which you need to apply for another audit.

4. **Matrix Standard**

The matrix Standard is the national quality standard for organisations delivering information, advice and/or guidance on learning and work to support individuals in their choice of career, learning, work and life goals. The services can be delivered through a variety of channels - face-to-face, through training, learning, remotely, or through a website.

The Standard is based on four elements:
- Leadership and management
- Resource
- Service Delivery
- Continuous Quality Improvement

The Framework includes a self-assessment tool to help organisations determine where the gaps are and what further work is required. Assessment is based on achieving excellent end-results that anyone working or visiting your organisation will 'consistently hear, see and experience'.

For information on the assessment process and costs click here

5. **ISO 9001:2015**

The ISO standard dates back to 1946 and places the concept of process management at its core. As the name suggests, the standard was revised and updated in 2015. It is one in a series of international standards and designed for use by all sizes of organisations and sectors to help them become structured and efficient. The Standard operates on a 'documented system' approach and is built on a set of seven core quality management principles:
- Customer focus
- Leadership
- Engagement of people
- Process approach
- Improvement
- Evidence-based decision making
- Relationship management

Although applicable to all types and sizes of organisations the ISO 9001 standard is not readily used in the voluntary sector. Certification is carried out by external bodies in different parts of the world and not by ISO. Click here for more information.

Preparing for Quality Assurance

Implementing a Quality Assurance system effectively will take a few months and it is important that you commit sufficient resources (time, people and money) to doing it properly. A quality system should be integrated into all aspects of your organisation's work, rather than being seen as an add-on. It should involve time and commitment from different people within your organisation.

Resources

NCVO/Charities Evaluation Service: PQASSO - PQASSO Quality Standards for Charities

- NCVO/Know How Non Profit: Quality Systems and Frameworks - https://knowhownonprofit.org/organisation/quality/quality/models#
- Advice Quality Standard - http://advicequalitystandard.org.uk/
- Charity Commission http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/about-the-commission/our-status/our-work-with-other-regulators-and-organisations/endorsing-quality-standards

Support

If you would like any support with quality assurance, measuring impact or any other issues facing your organisation, please contact the Development Team at Community Southwark: development@communitysouthwark.org.uk or 020 7358 7020.