



Working with Quality Standards



What are Quality Standards and why are they important?

The quality of your services and products is something you should consider carefully. This is of course particularly important for many social enterprises that want to ensure they have the greatest positive impact by providing the best possible service or product. To help you with this, there are organisations that set standards for what quality means for your enterprise, or a certain aspect of it (e.g. staff, customer service).

Social enterprises will often face demands or will need to demonstrate to stakeholders such as funders or beneficiaries that:

- they meet the needs and demands of their clients/users/beneficiaries, and that they are satisfied with the quality of services offered
- they provide users with efficient, well run and consistent services
- they can work effectively with limited resources or short-term project funding

Social enterprises may also face competition from other organisations offering similar services or products. This may be in competition for grants, contracts or for clients. Working with quality standards is one way in which your social enterprise can tell others about its quality.

How do Quality Standards work?

When the terms 'quality standard' or 'quality system' are used, they refer to a formal management system or standard that can be used to strengthen your organisation. PQASSO, Investors in People, Development Trusts Association 'Fit for Purpose', the EFQM Excellence Model and the Quality Mark are all examples of 'off-the-shelf' quality standards or systems. These all guide you through a series of things to do or implement in your organisation that will ensure quality. Once they are satisfied your organisation has met their criteria, they award a 'mark' or logo so that you can tell other people.

The other option, rather than using an external standard, is for your organisation to decide what 'quality' is for you and set your own standards to uphold. Your own quality standard or processes should basically express the level that you want for the key functions within your business, and then show how you will measure that you are achieving them. Our Understand, plan, do review guide can help you to do this.

Things to look out for when working with quality standards

Local authorities and other public sector organisations are often charged with achieving 'best value.' They will be interested to know how your social enterprise can help them meet this objective. Best value does not mean the cheapest. It simply means that suppliers are selected on the basis of key factors such as cost, quality and reliability. Working with quality standards or demonstrating how your organisation improves its performance can help you convince local authorities that you offer them 'best value'.

Start working with Quality Standards

In order to decide whether you should work with quality or quality standards, you should begin by asking yourself:

- Is there a particular area that needs improvement, such as human resources, financial management, or governance?
- Is there the drive and interest for undertaking a holistic process of looking at all of the organisation's internal processes?
- Is it important to our stakeholders that we have an externally validated mark of quality?

- Are we part of a group of organisations who have a quality mark? For example, the Development Trusts Association or Social Firms UK?

If you answer yes to these questions, you can follow up with the relevant standards or organisations that promote them.

Some examples of Quality Standards

- Co-operative, Environmental and Social Performance Indicators (CESPIs) were developed by Co-operatives UK to help co-operatives determine how they are living their co-operative principles and delivering on their social purpose.
- Development Trusts Association 'Fit for Purpose' is a diagnostic tool that can help a new or developing community enterprise in assessing its strengths and areas for improvement against key criteria.
- Investors in People is designed to advance an organisation's performance through its employees, or the management and development of the organisation's people.
- PQASSO (Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations) is a quality system that helps management to run an organisation effectively and efficiently. Created by and for the voluntary sector, it asks organisations to take a systematic look at what they do and to decide exactly where improvements are needed.
- Star Social Firm. Social Firms are businesses whose social mission is the employment of severely disadvantaged people. The Star Social Firm is a quality standard for Social Firms. It is awarded to Social Firms that have proved the quality of their business and the employment they provide for severely disadvantaged people.

Further information

Compare different Quality Standards:

<http://www.proveandimprove.org/new/tools/index.php>

Visit the CESPIs website:

www.cooperatives-uk.coop/Home/miniwebs/miniwebsA-z/cespis

Visit the Development Trust Association 'Fit for Purpose' website:

<http://www.dta.org.uk/activities/programmes/fitforpurpose.htm>

Visit the Investors in People website:

www.investorsinpeople.co.uk

Visit the PQASSO website:

<http://www.ces-vol.org.uk/index.cfm?pg=42>

Visit the Star Social Firm website:

<http://www.starsocialfirms.co.uk>

Read our guide to Identifying your stakeholders:

www.blondon.com/SocialEnterprise/SettingUp/Firststeps/Identifyingyourstakeholders.aspx

Read our guide to Understanding and measuring Social Impact:

www.blondon.com/SocialEnterprise/Monitoringandevaluation/Understandingandmeasuringyoursocialimpact.aspx

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