

## Good Practice Guide

### Quality Assurance/Quality Awards/Quality Tools

The voluntary and community sector is complex and diverse and is affected by changing demands from funders.

A significant amount of voluntary sector income comes either from government sources (local and national) or charitable trusts. This funding makes organisations more formally accountable and they are more likely to have to prove that their performance is of a high quality and to adopt more 'business like' management. In the future, a quality award may become compulsory in order to be able to tender for contracts under new procurement arrangements.

As a voluntary organisation you may want to show that you are always working to high standards and want to demonstrate the quality and consistency of the services you provide. People who use voluntary organisations' services, especially funders and commissioners, expect high standards and quality services. Having a quality award can mean that your fundraising activity is more successful and your service provision taken seriously.

#### What is a quality assurance system?

There are many definitions of this but one of the simplest is:

"A systematic approach to identifying and responding to the needs of your service users so that you can provide an appropriate service consistently and to agreed standards."

Some larger voluntary organisations have developed their own internal quality systems but the voluntary and community sector are much more likely to adopt one of the 'off the shelf' ones which have been tried and tested, are recognised by funders and will be less time consuming than trying to develop their own.

#### Why invest in quality?

- Focuses on what the organisation is doing
- Brings people together to identify areas for improvement
- Demonstrates the quality of services to funders
- Improves satisfaction of service users, staff and volunteers
- Improves effectiveness and efficiency
- Motivates people to make visible progress
- Acts as a dynamic tool for identifying where the potential problems are and empowers staff and volunteers to address them
- Sets improvement targets and priorities and monitors progress against them

#### Which quality assurance system to choose?

There a number of systems available – below and on the following page are the most common with a brief description and contact details for further information.

#### Quality First

This is designed specifically for small to medium sized organisations without any paid staff. It is cheap (£34 including postage and packing), easy to use and can be introduced at your own pace. It is self assessment.

**Contact: Quality First at Birmingham Voluntary Service Council**  
**[www.bvsc.org/development/quality-first.html](http://www.bvsc.org/development/quality-first.html)**

## **PQASSO – (Practical Quality Assurance for Small Organisations)**

This is designed specifically for small to medium sized community and voluntary organisations. It is a self assessment system or organisations can acquire an externally assessed kitemark. The fee for the kitemark depends on the size of the organisation and the level at which they are being assessed. The self assessment PQASSO is fairly easy to use and can be done at your own pace. The workbook costs £95 plus 10% postage and a CD Rom to compliment the workbook costs a further £54 plus 10% postage. RVA can provide advice and support for groups wanting to use the PQASSO system.

**Contact: Charities Evaluation Services [www.ces-vol.org.uk](http://www.ces-vol.org.uk)**

## **Investors in People**

This scheme concentrates on managing and supporting staff to help achieve your aims and does not look at all aspects of an organisation. IiP focuses on key aspects of an organisation's capabilities as a good employer. Unless you can obtain funding for IiP, it can prove quite costly. Assessor costs are around £550 + per day. For a small organisation, assessment will normally require 2 days (half a day preliminary visit, one day of interviews and half a day to write the report).

**Contact: [www.investorsinpeople.co.uk](http://www.investorsinpeople.co.uk)**

## **ISO 9001**

This is a group of standards that aims to help organisations achieve customer satisfaction by focusing on 'how things are done' . External assessment is carried out by a certification body. Although the standard was originally oriented towards the manufacturing sector, it has been developed over time to encompass both product and service organisations across all three sectors.

Currently there are few examples of usage within the voluntary and community sector.

Many VCS organisations, however, are now having to look at ISO 9001 in order to qualify for a local authority tender or to achieve preferred supplier status. ISO 9001 accreditation attracts the highest score on a PQQ (Pre-qualification Questionnaire) or full tender submission and is the only externally verified and EU recognised quality system (Office for Government Commerce Guidance 2007)

**Contact: [www.iso.org/iso/home.htm](http://www.iso.org/iso/home.htm)**

## **Investing in volunteers**

Investing in Volunteers is the UK quality standard for all organisations which involve volunteers in their work. The Standard enables organisations to comprehensively review their volunteer management and also publicly demonstrates their commitment to volunteering.

The organisation managing the process in England is Volunteering England.

**Contact: [www.investinginvolunteers.org.uk](http://www.investinginvolunteers.org.uk)**

## **Before you start**

It is vital to plan very carefully before introducing a quality assurance system. It often seems like hard work but can reap many benefits for an organisation.

## **Factors to help:**

- Setting up a small quality working group to ensure that the process is more effective (and it shares the load!).
- Making sure everyone is involved – trustees, staff and volunteers. This is vital, even from the planning stage.
- Encourage openness and honesty in problem solving.
- Think about which system will best suit your needs.
- Drawing up a plan and realistic timetable for working through the quality system you choose to implement.
- Talk to other groups who are using quality systems.
- Don't treat it as a paper exercise - you are looking for real improvements.
- Get support and advice from staff at RVA.

**For more information contact RVA on 01653 600120 or email [post@rva-cvs.org.uk](mailto:post@rva-cvs.org.uk)**