

# EQUASS 2018 ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

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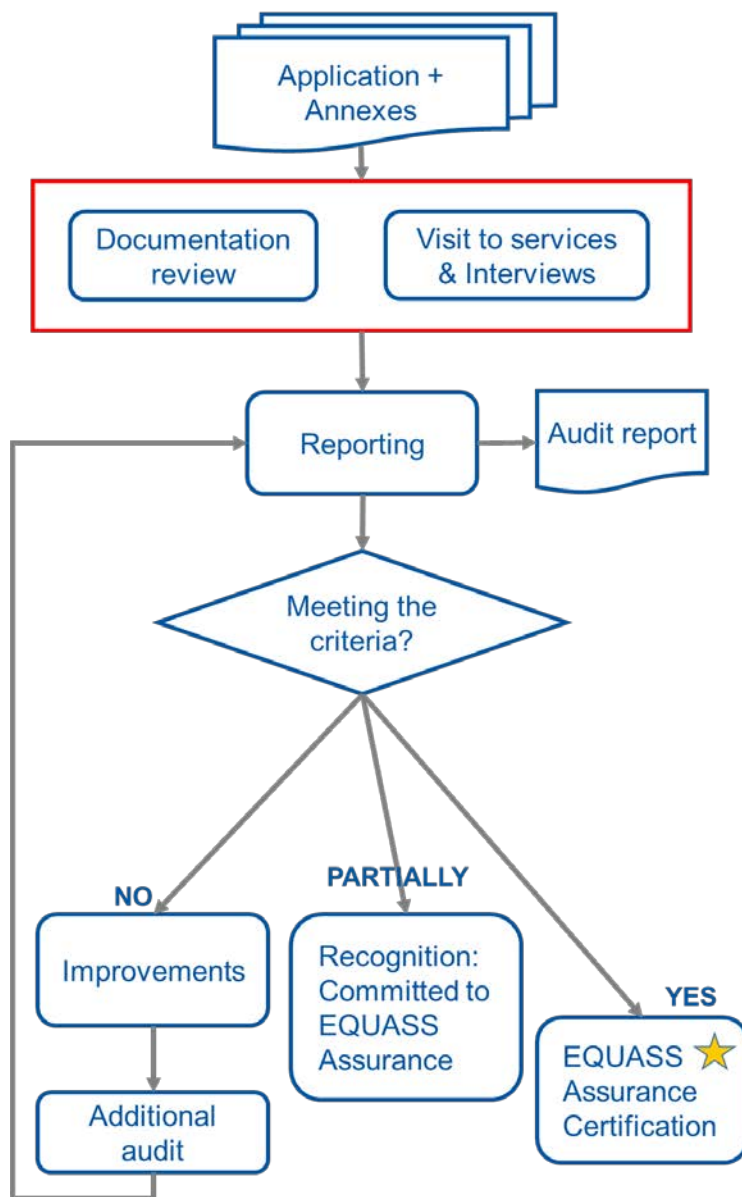
## Introduction

The European Quality in Social Services (EQUASS) is a European and sector-specific quality system for organisations that provide social services and that are committed to comply with fundamental values and quality principles in the social sector. EQUASS aims to enhance the social services sector by engaging service providers in quality and continuous improvement and by guaranteeing service users quality of services throughout Europe.

EQUASS operates on well-defined criteria, performance indicators and an external audit procedure. It is important to mention that all EQUASS processes and procedures are monitored and approved by a European Awarding Committee in which the most important sectoral stakeholders at European level are represented. Moreover, those processes and procedures are subject to permanent monitoring and continuous improvement on the basis of feedback from applicants and auditors.

This document gives a brief overview of the EQUASS 2018 Assurance procedures that are to be applied by the applicant, the auditors, the EQUASS Local Licence Holders and the EQUASS Secretariat, in the process of the certification by EQUASS. The description follows the chronological steps in the EQUASS 2018 Assurance process and refers to the underlying documents for supporting this process. This EQUASS Assurance process is shown as a flow chart in the figure below. The numbers for the supported documentation refer to the supported documents mentioned in this file.

## List of supporting documentation



Supporting documentation	
Application	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Selection of the auditor	7, 8
The Audit	9, 10
Reporting	11, 12
Certification	13, 14,

1. EQUASS 2018 Application e-form (including annexes for approaches and results)
2. Guidelines for EQUASS 2018 Assurance application
3. EQUASS 2018 Assurance Administrative checklist
4. EQUASS 2018 Audit pricing document
5. Rights and Duties of EQUASS customers
6. Approach and procedures for LLHs

7. EQUASS 2018 Auditor profile
8. Code of Ethics for auditors
9. EQUASS 2018 Assurance Site visit preparation form
10. EQUASS 2018 Assurance Scoring instrument for auditors
11. EQUASS 2018 Assurance Audit Report
12. EQUASS 2018 Assurance intermediary report
13. EQUASS Graphical Charter
14. EQUASS 2018 Applicant Feedback form (online)

## 1. Application and self-assessment

- **Application dossier**

The applicant is entitled to define the scope for the EQUASS Assurance application. This scope can be the entire organisation that provides social services (or VET services) as well as one single department or business unit within that organisation. An essential criterion is that the application relates to a number of services<sup>12</sup> directly provided to persons and contribute to their inclusion and/or an improved quality of life. The scope of the application is expressed in the application form and the certification will also explicitly refer to this defined scope.

- ✓ *Supporting documents:*

1. EQUASS 2018 Application e-form (including the annexes for approaches and results)
2. Guidelines for EQUASS 2018 Assurance application and other supporting information

- **Administrative check**

The relevant EQUASS Audit coordinator (LLH or EQUASS in Brussels) will check the eligibility of the applicant and the services concerned, as well as the completeness of the dossier. If some elements of information are missing or if the application form and the checklist are not duly completed, the applicant will be asked to do so. The audit process will only continue if the dossier is completed.

- ✓ *Supporting document:*

3. EQUASS 2018 Assurance Administrative checklist

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<sup>1</sup> See; Commission Communication "Services of general interest, including social services of general interest: a new European commitment", COM (2007) 725 final, 20.11.2007.

<sup>2</sup> The service may take place in the service provider's building, or be provided by mobile teams that go where the service users are.

## 2. Selection of the auditor

An EQUASS auditor, selected by the EQUASS secretariat, will carry out the external audit. The auditor will be independent and qualified, meaning that he/she has successfully completed a training for EQUASS 2018 auditors and fulfils the knowledge, skill and attitude requirements identified by the EQUASS Awarding Committee. Nominated auditors must also follow calibration training within a period of maximum 3 years from the date of their nomination. A complete list of all nominated auditors can be found on the EQUASS website.

The auditor is trained in the approach of quality management and in how to understand the Principles for Quality and the EQUASS 2018 Assurance criteria. He/she is an expert in audit methods. The auditor is responsible for all phases of the audit including the drafting of an audit report.

The relevant EQUASS Audit coordinator (LLH or EQUASS in Brussels) supports and monitors the auditor throughout the audit process.

✓ *Supporting documents:*

EQUASS Assurance Auditor profile

Code of Ethics for auditors

### 3. The audit

Auditing an applicant on compliance with EQUASS 2018 Assurance criteria is based on the information provided in the application form: executive summaries of key approaches (1 A4) and overview of the results / achievements. The audit consists of four steps:

- ***Desk review***

The auditor will receive a (digital) copy of the application form, the executive summaries of the key approaches and an overview of the results / achievements. He/she will complete the desk review and desk scoring on the basis of that information.

Based on a review of the documentation, the auditor will identify priorities for discussions, interviews and documentation review during the site visit. He/she will also select the required documentation in the checklist that need to be made available during the site visit for a review.

- ***Preparation of site visit***

The auditor will send a proposal for the planning and the programme of the site visit to the applicant at least two weeks (10 working days) before the proposed and agreed dates. The planning and the programme must be agreed by the applicant and communicated to the auditor and staff of the applicant's organisation. The auditor will use the 'Site visit preparation form' for communicating the planned site visit. The auditor will visit the services, meet a number of staff, service-users and other stakeholders who are relevant for the scope of the audit.

The audit plan contains following elements:

- Date and time to review the documentation and other information resources.
- Time for giving the feedback on the site visit to the applicant and the staff.
- Time to do the synthesis and final audit report.
- Time for visiting the service operations
- An interview with the Chief Executive Officer is obligatory, limited in duration (max 1 hour) and must take place at the end of the site visit.

The site visit plan should be flexible and permit changes based on collected information during the site visit.

The plan will be communicated and agreed with the applicant and sent to the relevant EQUASS Audit coordinator (LLH or EQUASS in Brussels) and to the applicant.

✓ *Supporting document*

EQUASS 2018 Assurance Site visit preparation form

• **Site visit**

The auditor will collect evidence for verification of the performance on the EQUASS criteria and the required results through interviews, examination of documents and observation of activities, situations and conditions. Site visit observations will be registered and reported. At the end of the site visit, prior to the audit report, the auditor will hold a meeting with the relevant staff of the applicant and present to them his/her observations. This feedback aims to ensure an understanding of the audit findings and the recommendations given in the audit report. It should however be clear that the feedback does *not* constitute a formal outcome or decision on the audit.

**Note on number of days for a site visit**

The standard number of days for a site visit (single site) is two days of 8 hours a day. Large organisations (> 250 FTE Staff) and multi-site organisations (> 1 site) will require more days for a site visit. This number of additional days for multi-site applications is determined by the formula:  $\sqrt{\#}$  identified sites.

The maximum number of sites included in a multi-site audit is 10, and the sites to be visited will be selected by the auditor.

Additionally, organisations with between 251 and 500 FTE staff require one additional audit day and with more than 500 FTE staff two additional days are required.

The EQUASS Audit Pricing Document details the number of audit days per sites and staff size.

The final decision on the number of days for a site visit and the number of additional days for site visit will be made by the EQUASS secretariat, with guidance from the Audit Pricing Document.



✓ *Supporting documents:*

EQUASS 2018 Application e-form (filled in by the participant and checked by the auditor)

EQUASS 2018 Assurance Site Visit preparation Form

EQUASS 2018 Assurance scoring form

EQUASS 2018 Audit Report

EQUASS Audit Pricing document

- ***Reporting***

After the site visit the auditor reviews the outcomes of the audit (scores, required documentation and the results). The auditor prepares and writes his/her comments in the audit report and is responsible for the accuracy and completeness of this report and must be sent to the EQUASS secretariat within 5 working days after the site visit.

If the auditor finds areas or principles that do not comply with the minimum requirements for EQUASS Assurance, he/she will also provide the audit report with the areas for improvement, which will be forwarded to the client as well. This feedback will also include a short overview of recommendations, which will be the basis for the additional audit (see 6.)

The EQUASS secretariat will communicate the audit report to the applicant and will send an overview of certified organisations to the members of the EQUASS Awarding Committee.

## 4. Certification

The EQUASS Awarding Committee certifies an applicant with EQUASS Assurance if all criteria meet the minimum criteria for EQUASS 2018 Assurance certification. The EQUASS secretariat will communicate the decision of the EQUASS Awarding Committee to the applicant.

In case of a successful application, the Secretariat will send an EQUASS Certificate, which specifies the validity period (3 years) refers to the scope of the application. The successful applicants will receive guidelines on the use of the EQUASS Quality Mark logo. The name and information of the certified organisation (as provided in the application) will be disseminated on the EQUASS website<sup>3</sup> and through its social media channels<sup>4</sup>).

Finally, every applicant (successful or non-successful) receives a link to an online form to provide feedback on the audit process, the auditor and the EQUASS procedures in general.

### Criteria for EQUASS assurance certification

EQUASS Assurance certification:

- Minimum average score per Principe: 04.0 points (stage 2)
- Minimum score per criteria: 02.0 points (stage 1)
- Minimum over all score: 40.0 points
- Maximum over all score: 55.0 points
- Counter balancing between Principles is NOT allowed
- Counter balancing between criteria in the Principle is limited<sup>5</sup>.

An organisation that has shown satisfactory performance on the EQUASS 2018 standard and meets all the requirements above, can be considered as an organisation that has solid and clear approaches and systems in place that are well understood by staff and put in to the daily practice in all relevant parts of the organisation. An organisation that is meeting the

<sup>3</sup> [www.equass.be](http://www.equass.be)

<sup>4</sup> [www.facebook.com/EQUASS.Brussels](https://www.facebook.com/EQUASS.Brussels) and [https://twitter.com/EQUASS\\_Europe](https://twitter.com/EQUASS_Europe)

<sup>5</sup> The following criteria should have a minimum score of 4 points (level: 2): Leadership: criteria 1 and 2. Staff: criteria 10. Rights: criteria 13 and 15. Ethics: criteria 19, 22, 23 and 24. Participation: criteria 27, 29 Person Centred Approach: 31, 32, 33 and 35. Comprehensiveness: criteria 37. Result orientation: criteria 43. Continuous Improvement: criteria 48.

requirements for EQUASS 2018 Assurance certification has tangible results on the core concepts of the EQUASS 2018 standard. These results are based on valid indicators that are relevant in the national context.

An organisation that does not meet all requirements above will be rewarded with the recognition: "Committed to EQUASS Assurance"

## **Progress reports**

The applicant will have the obligation to report the progress and outcomes of the implementation of improvement and development on an annual basis (within 12 months after receiving the certificate, and again another 12 months later). This intermediary reporting will be provided according to a format designed by EQUASS. The auditor will review the report of the Service Providers and give feedback (recommendation and/or suggestions for development / improvement). This reviewed report with suggestions will be validated by EQUASS in Brussels and send to the social service provider.

Social service providers that do not send their progress report in the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 24<sup>th</sup> month of their certification do not fulfil the requirements for having maintained their formally recognition with EQUASS Assurance certification. In that event, EQUAS may decide to withdraw certification on the basis of not having met the formal requirements for certification.

## 5. Additional audit

In case it does not meet the requirements for EQUASS 2018 Assurance certification, the applicant will receive the recognition “Committed to EQUASS Assurance” and the EQUASS Secretariat will in its letter mention the possibility to go for an additional audit or to submit an appeal (see section 7)

An additional audit may take place if the applicant confirms that the recommendations for improvements that have been identified in the audit report are implemented within 6 months after the audit. The additional audit will be organised and carried out after receiving the applicant’s report on improvements.

The applicant will report its improvements during the additional audit. The additional audit will only deal with the criteria which were not met in the initial report. The audit will follow the same procedures as a regular audit (see above) but with a limited focus on the criteria on which improvements have been made. Consequently, the duration of such an additional audit is shorter, and the number of days for the site visit will be determined by the EQUASS secretariat. The costs for this additional site visit will be charged to the applicant.

## 6. Appeal and complaints

- ***Appeal***

In case an applicant for EQUASS certification does not agree with the conclusion that not all indicators are met, and with the related decision not to award that organisation with EQUASS 2018 Assurance, it can submit an appeal. The appeal must be submitted in written (letter or e-mail) by the director of the applicant or the person that signed the application within 30 days after receipt of the letter with feedback on the audit. The appeal needs to be addressed to the EQUASS Secretariat or a Local License Holder who will pass it on to the EQUASS Secretariat.

The EQUASS Secretariat has to confirm receipt of the appeal within 10 working days, and will organise a re-audit by another auditor with a large experience and high reputation. The re-audit will follow the same process and procedure of a regular audit and its result is final. The costs of this re-audit need to be borne by the applicant in case the second audit is also negative. In case of a positive re-audit, the costs will be borne by EQUASS.

Also any interested party can dispute that a service provider deserves EQUASS certification, and this can be done as long as the EQUASS certification is valid. The EQUASS Secretariat will undertake an inquiry with the certified organisation, the auditor, and the LLH. Unless there are strong indications that there is an actual and clear violation of EQUASS 2018 Assurance criteria, the EQUASS Secretariat will rely on the work of its auditors and the reliability of its procedures, and consider such an appeal as insusceptible. In case of serious allegations and strong indications, EQUASS will organise a re-audit and potentially withdraw the certification. The EQUASS Secretariat will in any case send a formal reply to the complainant within working 30 days after having received the appeal, and re-assessment or further investigations should come to a conclusion in maximal 60 days from receipt of the appeal from third parties.

- **Complaints**

Regardless the outcome of an application process, any applicant for EQUASS certification can submit a complaint about the auditor or the EQUASS process/ procedure. The complaint must be submitted in written (letter or e-mail) by the director of the applicant or the person that signed the application within 30 days after receipt of the letter with feedback on the audit. The complaint needs to be addressed to the EQUASS Secretariat or a Local License Holder who will pass it on to the EQUASS Secretariat

The EQUASS Secretariat will confirm receipt of the complaint within 10 working days. In cases of complaints: EQUASS will follow its complaint procedures<sup>6</sup>, which can be summarised as follow:

- Registration of the complaint
- Investigation and discussions with all parties involved
- Proposal for a resolution
- Inform all persons concerned on the resolution
- Report annually on the complaint to the Awarding Committee

The EQUASS Secretariat will send a response to the applicant within 30 working days after receipt of the complaint.

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<sup>6</sup> See: Complaint procedure