

EQUASS ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

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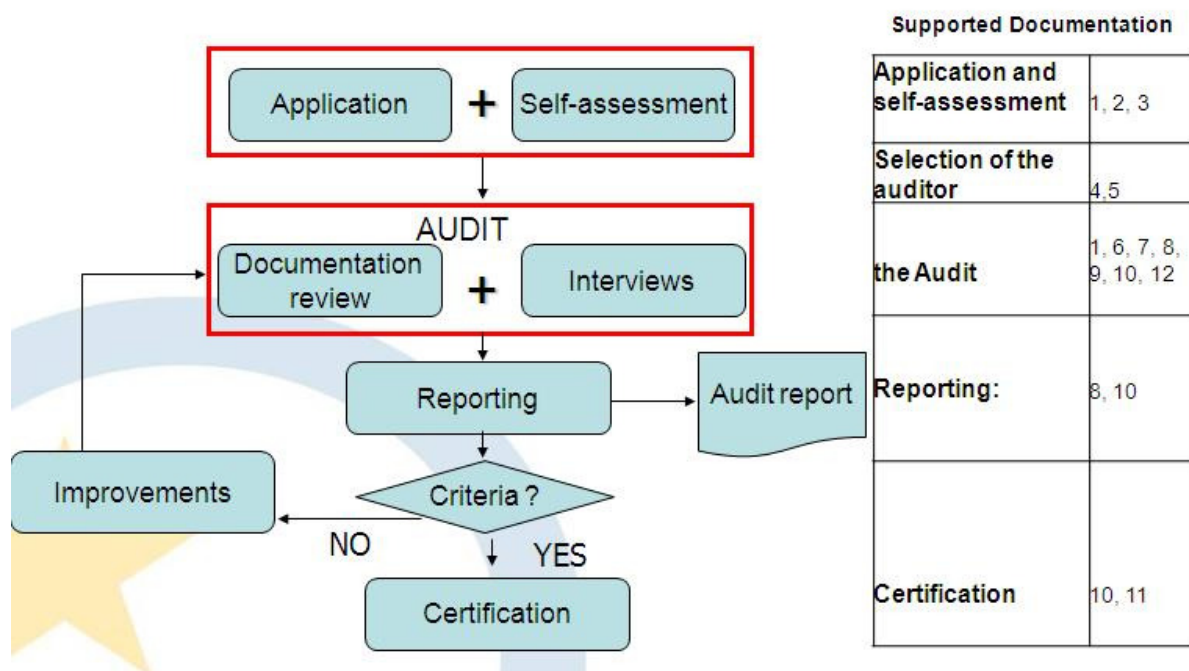
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1. Introduction

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 Assurance procedures that are to be applied by the applicant, the auditors and the EQUASS Secretariat, in the process of the certification by EQUASS. The description follows the chronological steps in the EQUASS 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

- 1 EQUASS Assurance Application form (including checklist for self-assessment)
[EQ-ASS_APP_004FOR_ENSSGI2012-Application Form](#)
- 2 Guidelines for EQUASS Assurance application
[EQ-ASS_APP-029GUI_ENSSGI2012-Guidelines for Assurance Application](#)
- 3 EQUASS Assurance Administrative checklist
[EQ-ASS_APP_008ACL_ENSSGI2012-Administrative Checklist](#)
- 4 EQUASS Assurance Auditor profile
[EQ-ALL_TRN-028PRO_ENSSGI2012-Auditor Profile](#)
- 5 Code of Ethics for auditors
[EQ-ALL_AUD_022ETH-Code of Ethics](#)
- 6 EQUASS Assurance Site visit preparation form
[EQ-ASS_AUD_011PRP_ENSSGI2012-Site Visit Preparation Form](#)
- 7 EQUASS Assurance Checklist for auditors
[EQ-ASS_AUD_009ACL_ENSSGI2012-Checklist for Auditors](#)
- 8 Audit Report
[EQ-ASS_AUD_012REP_ENSSGI2012-Audit Report](#)
- 9 Additional information (including logo)
[EQ-ASS_APP_007ADD_ENSSGI2012-Additional Information Form](#)
- 10 Overview of certified organisations
[EQ-ASS_INF_PDF020-Overview of Certified Organisations](#)
- 11 Feedback form
[EQ-ALL_CER_014EVA_ENSSGI2012-Audit evaluation form](#)
- 12 EQUASS Pricing document (for the prices and calculations of the number of days needed for multi-site applications)
[EQ-ALL_COR-030PRI-EQUASS Pricing Document \(Internal\)](#)

2. 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 social services¹ directly provided to persons (incl. VET services) at one or more sites. The scope of the application is expressed in the application form and the certification will also explicitly refer to this defined scope. Interested organisations can apply for EQUASS Assurance certification during the entire year.

The self-assessment is carried out by the applicant with the checklist which is included in the application form. The applicant indicates if the organisation meets the EQUASS Assurance criteria by answering 100 questions. The evidence of implementation is listed in the application form so the auditor knows where and how to verify.

- ✓ *Supporting documents:*

1. EQUASS Assurance Application form (including checklist for self-assessment)

[EQ-ASS_APP_004FOR_ENSSGI2012-Application Form](#)

2. Guidelines for EQUASS Assurance application

[EQ-ASS_APP-029GUI_ENSSGI2012-Guidelines for Assurance Application](#)

- **Administrative check**

The EQUASS secretariat 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 Assurance Administrative checklist EQ-

[ASS_APP_008ACL_ENSSGI2012-Administrative Checklist](#)

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

3. 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 auditors and was nominated by the EQUASS Awarding Committee. Nominated auditors are also obliged to follow calibration training within a period of maximum 3 years. 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 Assurance criteria and indicators. 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 EQUASS secretariat supports and monitors the auditor throughout the audit process.

✓ *Supporting documents:*

EQUASS Assurance Auditor profile

Code of Ethics for auditors

4. The audit

Auditing an applicant on compliance with EQUASS Assurance criteria is based on the information provided in the application form and the results of the self-assessment. The audit consists of four steps:

- ***Desk review***

The auditor will receive a (digital) copy of the application form including the self-assessment and supported documentation. 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 document review during the site visit. He/she will also select a maximum of 15 documents mentioned 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 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.
- An interview with the Chief Executive Officer is obligatory, limited in duration (max 1,5 hours) 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 EQUASS Core Expert and to the applicant.

- ✓ ***Supporting document***
EQUASS Assurance Site visit preparation form

- **Site visit**

The auditor will collect evidence for verification of the information in the self-assessment form through interviews, examination of documents and observation of activities, situations and conditions. Site visit observations must be registered. 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: $V <\# \text{ identified sites}>$. 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. 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 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.

✓ **Supporting documents:**

EQUASS Assurance Application form (filled in by the participant and checked by the auditor)

EQUASS Assurance Site Visit preparation Form

EQUASS Assurance Checklist for auditors

Audit Report

Additional information (including logo)

EQUASS Pricing document

- **Reporting**

After the site visit the auditor reviews the self-assessment results as reported by the applicant for each criteria and indicator. The auditor prepares and writes his/her comments in the audit report and is responsible for the accuracy and completeness of this report. The audit findings will be reported in a specific area in the checklist of the self-assessment 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 100 % with the EQUASS criteria, he/she will also provide a feedback 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 4.)

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.

5. Certification

The EQUASS Awarding Committee certifies an applicant with EQUASS Assurance if all criteria have been met, so a 100% compliance with the criteria is required. 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 signed by the Chairman of the Awarding Committee, which specifies the validity period (2 years) and the refers to the scope of the application. The applicants will as well receive guidelines on the use of the EQUASS Quality Mark logo. Finally, it should be mentioned that every applicant (successful or non-successful) receives a form to provide feedback on the audit process, the auditor and the EQUASS procedures in general.

6. Additional audit

In case of an unsuccessful application, the EQUASS Secretariat will in its letter always mention the possibility to go for an additional audit or to submit an appeal (see section 6)

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 in a checklist for self-assessment, but only deal with those indicators which were not met. The audit will follow the same procedures as a regular audit (see above) but with a limited focus on the indicators 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 on the applicant.

7. 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 Assurance, it can submit 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 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 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 submit the complaint for discussion to the Awarding Committee. In case of a complaint about an auditor, the EQUASS Secretariat will first seek explanation from the auditor, and adds this information to the complaint that is passed on to the Awarding Committee. The EQUASS Secretariat will send a response to the applicant within 30 working days after receipt of the complaint.