

The EQUASS Learning Community

The EQUASS Learning Community (ELC) is considered to be an initiative for establishing an international network of social service providers who are committed to the EQUASS principles for quality and to quality improvement through learning by exchange of current practices and by common learning events based on results of benchmarking on common indicators.

The ELC allows social service providers to gauge their own position, creates a learning curve to help improve performance and helps boost transparency, profile and image. The ELC typically shows up any areas for learning. Providing comprehensive insight into the performance of a social service provider, it allows the provider to identify any areas in need of improvement and actions that need to be taken.¹ The ELC also provides insight into relationships between performances. Social service providers may use the ELC outcomes in communicating with stakeholders to improve their profiles and promote transparency.

The ELC process is a practice of systematically comparing performance as a starting point for improvement, and involves collecting and reporting on data from different social service providers and/or organisational units. This ELC benchmarking process allows comparison of social service providers' performance and that of other ELC members. ELC benchmarking will help social service providers to broaden their perspective and to make them less inward looking.

The learning aspect in the ELC is the most important aspect of the ELC-network. Bench learning (=learning based on bench marking) is defined as: "systematically investigating the performance and underlying processes and practices of one or more reference organization providing social services in a particular field, and comparing one's own performance with these practices, resulting in action-oriented learning".

How does the ELC work?

The ELC network will organise national and international bench learning events. The national and international bench learning events will offer initial training, learning activities and workshops where social service providers can meet and exchange practice based on identified needs for learning. The program of the bench learning events will be based on the needs and expectations of the ELC members.

Piloting ELC concept in 2015 and 2016

The ELC concept has been piloted in Estonia (October 2015) and Lithuania (February 2016) and will be piloted in Norway (June 2016) and Portugal (TBC 2016). Social service providers who are committed to the EQUASS system applied on voluntary basis to participate in piloting the ELC concept. Five EQUASS certified organisations participated in the ELC pilot in Estonia and 4 EQUASS certified organisations participated in the ELC pilot in Lithuania. These pilots have been a one-day event in which EQUASS social service providers compared and exchanged performances and practices on the topics: Quality Culture and Persons Centred Approach. Prior to these pilot events information and data (Quality Culture Survey and various individual plans) are collected in order to be analysed and made comparable. The events have been facilitated by Guus van Beek (EQUASS), Geir Moen (Equal Consulting) and Michael Crowley (CQC-Crowley Quality Consultants). During the two events, participants had the opportunity to present, compare and exchange the results of the analysis and their current practices. This process of comparison and exchange helps participants to learn from each other and decide how to improve their current practices and ways of working. Both events have been evaluated. The figure shows the result of evaluation.

¹ Note that benchmarking in this concept is always considered as an instrument to improve and never an end in itself, and that benchmark outcomes should always be tested against the vision and the policies of the Social Service Provider.

Nr.	Criteria	Tallinn		Vilnius	
		Score	Variation	Score	Variation
1	Overall quality of the benchmarking and bench learning event	4,64	0,67	4,71	0,45
2	Content of the benchmarking and bench learning event	4,82	0,40	4,86	0,35
3	Relevance of benchmarking and bench learning for your organisation	4,91	0,30	4,86	0,35
4	Quality of the trainer(s) / facilitator(s)	5,00	0,00	5,00	0,00
5	Documentation (Papers, presentations, PowerPoint etc.)	4,55	0,82	4,86	0,35
6	Location of the benchmarking and bench-learning event	4,45	0,69	4,57	0,49
7	Information about the benchmarking and bench-learning event	4,73	0,47	4,29	0,88
8	Session 1: Introduction quality Culture Analysis	4,45	0,69	4,43	0,73
9	Session 2: Analysing the Quality Culture Results	4,55	0,82	4,71	0,45
10	Session 3: Benchmarking and bench-learning from Quality Culture results	5,00	0,00	4,71	0,45
11	Session 4: Introduction Person Centred Approach	4,55	0,52	4,29	0,70
12	Session 5: Analysing Individual Plans of organisations	4,80	0,42	4,57	0,49
13	Session 6: Benchmarking and bench-learning from other Individual Plans	4,90	0,32	4,50	0,76

The scale: 1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = satisfactory, 4 = good, 5 = excellent

A selection of qualitative feedback from participants can be illustrated as: *“Innovative and more practical way / method of learning”*; *“More similar events on other topics”* and *“You were very well prepared. Good methods for group work. The way the different organisations were benchmarked, helped us to see differences and similarities”* and *“Good that we have an impression what other organisations have so we can improve ours.”*

We also receive practical suggestions how to improve the organisations’ learning process. These suggestions will be put into practice at the next ELC-pilots in Norway and Portugal. After evaluating all pilots, an extensive evaluation report will be written based on the figures and qualitative feedback of all who have participated in piloting the ELC concept. Based on feasibility of the ELC concept and the needs of the social service providers, EQUASS will decide how to continue with facilitating bench learning at National and International context.

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