



Welcome to the first issue of the EQUASS Newsflash in 2012! This publication is an initiative of the European Quality in Social Services to provide you with regular updates about the most recent developments and achievements of the EQUASS System.

The EQUASS Newsflash is published three times a year. New issues will be published in September and December.

Upcoming events

20-21 September 2012

Benchmarking on Quality with EQUASS, Amadora, Portugal

1-2-3 October 2012

EQUASS Excellence training, Amadora, Portugal

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New EQUASS Assurance Certified Organisations

The following organisations have been certified since the last Newsflash :

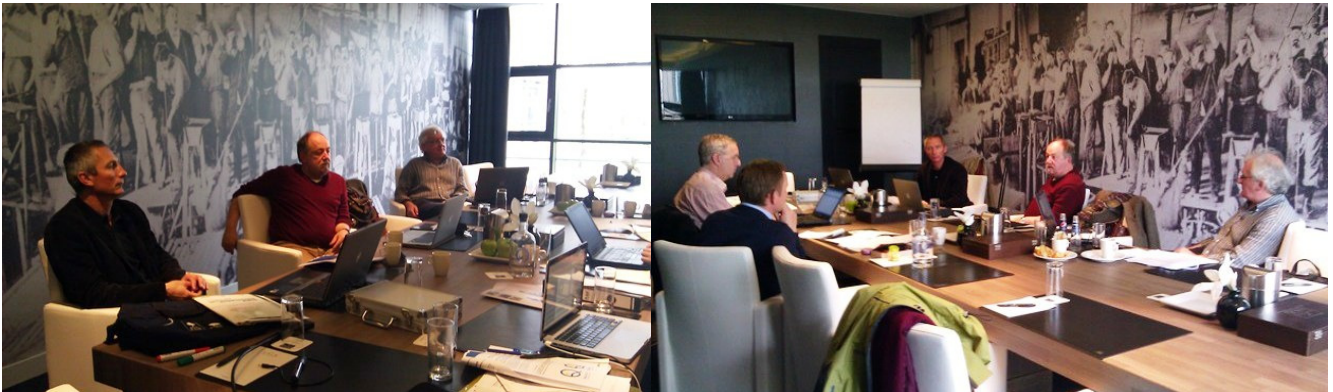
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EQUASS Awarding Committee

The EQUASS Awarding Committee met in Brussels on 9 May 2012. The European sectoral actors and stakeholders that compose the Committee were presented with the progress of EQUASS in Europe, and approved the nomination of EQUASS auditors. The Committee also finalised the requirements for the EQUASS Excellence Quality Mark and the Stairways to Excellence recognition. Another prominent topic of the meeting was the discussion regarding compliance to international standards that apply to certification bodies

EQUASS Core group meeting

The EQUASS Core group meeting met for a 1.5 day meeting in Eindhoven (NL) on 23 and 24 April 2012. The agenda focused on the continuous improvement of the EQUASS audit and system processes. Another prominent topic of the meeting was the self-evaluation exercise regarding compliance to international standards that apply to certification bodies. Time was also allocated to the question of quality control of the EQUASS auditors and of the relationship management with the current EQUASS Local Licence Holders. As usual, the Core Group meeting resulted in a series of recommended measures to be approved by the EQUASS Awarding Committee and the EQUASS Management Committee.



EQUASS Assurance training in Olsberg, Germany on 16, 17, 18 January 2012

11 participants were trained to obtain or maintain their EQUASS Assurance Auditor nomination. As per the new training system, they could attend the training for one day only, or three days for the new auditors, as well as experienced auditors interested in an in-depth training. The participants staying for the full duration of the training received information about the new EQUASS 2012 system and its applications; they were trained in preparing the

audit and site visit, reporting, and in the process in the audit. They followed up with some practical exercise in the form of a case study. The training received an overall satisfaction rating of 4,14 over a maximum grade of 5.

EQUASS Consultant training Vilnius, Lithuania on 1 and 2 March 2012



6 participants attended the two day training, and were trained in performing various consultancy tasks for the benefit of prospective EQUASS applicants and social services providers. The participants came from diverse backgrounds, ranging from quality and capacity building consultants, as well as service providers staff. The training received a very good reception in its evaluation, despite serving persons from different backgrounds with different expectations. The training received an overall satisfaction rating of 4,33 over a maximum grade of 5.

EQUASS Assurance Auditor training Porto, Portugal on 16-18 April 2012

As a result of the changes in the newest 2012 version of the EQUASS Assurance standard, the EQUASS unit organised a training in the Hotel Tuela in Porto, Portugal in order to give more auditors the opportunity to update their skills.

The 3-day training session was attended by 14 participants and received very positive ratings in the evaluation forms. The participants of the training were also

introduced to the new "credit" system for existing and new EQUASS Auditors. That process brings together requirements to ensure that all our EQUASS auditors have the correct combination of experience on the ground, and up-to-date training and knowledge of the EQUASS standard, in order to provide high quality auditing services to our customers. The training received an overall satisfaction rating of 4,54 over a maximum grade of 5.

Interview with EQUASS Auditor Sissel Andreassen



Sissel Andreassen has visited more than 110 rehabilitation organisations in Norway. She has performed 85 audits, 23 audit testdays and one supervision day in organisations with a staff varying from 2 persons to 1500.

professionalization of service provision in Norway.

How and when did you first get involved with EQUASS?

Accidentally on a Web-search, I found a notice that Norway was looking for EQUASS Assurance Auditors. At that time, I had been working as a nurse with Quality Improvement in Health Care service for many years. I hoped I could use my experience in another area, and followed an Assurance auditor training in Oslo in February 2007. It took some time before the organisations were ready for an audit, so my first visit to a rehabilitation organisation was in June 2008. Since then, I have been a lucky EQUASS auditor, having had the opportunity to visit 110 organisations.

Why would you recommend this system to social services providers?

The system contains agreed, necessary elements that, in my opinion, make it a good management tool to ensure development of the staff and the organisation and to achieve expected services for persons served and customers. Another benefit is the focus on results according to the organisational mission and not only on financial and production conditions. It is my opinion that the EQUASS certification results in a

Can you describe one of the best moments of your career as an EQUASS auditor?

After visiting so many organisations, sure I have a lot of good moments in my memory! And luckily I have only very few bad moments. Perhaps the best one was one person served who told me that, thanks to EQUASS, his plan now was very good with "hairy goals!" Or another one, a person with a major disability, who told me that this was like a EU-control for cars: I check up some points every second year but they are responsible for daily maintenance! Isn't it lovely? I have told this story many times.

It's never fun to say "no - you do not comply with the criteria." More than one organisation has told me that the process not being approved the first time had given them more confidence to the standard, and a necessary learning experience. This shows me the benefits of auditing, as an important tool in the improvement process, and a good moment for me.

What are some the challenges that you have faced?

Writing audit reports in English was my first challenge. Looking back, fortunately I can see a personal improvement during the past years!

It may also be a challenge during two days to get the necessary overview and understanding about the structure, system

culture and attitudes in big organisations, sometimes with several locations. But this is why auditing is so exciting and challenging! You must use all your knowledge about quality system and cooperative processes.

In some cases the organisations' motivation might be a challenge since the system is required here in Norway, and is not something they had chosen themselves. Luckily I have just experienced difficult communication and cooperation a few times only.

Based on your extensive experience, do you have some advices for EQUASS auditors? And for social service providers?

To be an EQUASS Assurance Auditor requires structured work, humility and a special interest for organisation system and culture. It takes some time to get to know the framework well - to learn the system's logic and coherence. This demands a volume of audits over a period of time. Just a few audits a year must be like starting all over again every time.

My overall advice to auditors must be: work systematic and with respect for the framework

and the social service provider.

Some service providers say that the standard EQUASS Assurance is designed for big organisations. In Norway we have a lot of small organisations. When I ask them which element is not necessary for their organisation, the question is unanswered. It may look too comprehensive with 100 questions, but when they get familiar with the content and context - they all are useful. For me, the EQUASS Assurance is two improving cycles; one on individual and one on system level. I hope everyone learns to see the benefits of having a good management system like this.

My advice to service providers is: develop a system based on KISS - keep it small and simple and measure results of efforts. Every management system should give service providers motivational feedback. It's my opinion that we are good at planning - very good at doing - not so good at studying our results of service provided - and not good at systematic, structured improvement based on facts. Learn by doing - and discover that it's useful and fun!

Quick News

Upcoming EQUASS Excellence Training in Portugal

Registration for the next EQUASS Excellence training organised on 1-2-3 October 2012 in Amadora (Lisbon), Portugal is now open. The training is open to EQUASS Excellence auditors who want to update their skills and to EQUASS Assurance auditors who want to become EQUASS Excellence auditors.

For more information and to register to the training, visit the Upcoming Events section of the EQUASS website, www.equass.be.

EQUASS Annual Report 2011

The EQUASS Annual Report 2011 summarises the main developments and activities of the EQUASS system in the past calendar year.

The report gives a comprehensive overview of the certifications awarded, of the work of the EQUASS Local Licence Holders and of the activities and events undertaken during the year, including in the framework of European projects.

The report is exclusively available online on the EQUASS website : www.equass.be.

New EQUASS Brochure 2012

EQUASS is proud to present its brand-new EQUASS Brochure, updated to reflect the changes incurred by the new EQUASS system that started out in January 2012. Hard copies has been disseminated to all key stakeholders.

If you are interested in receiving copies, please contact Marie Dubost at marie.dubost@epr.eu.

The EQUASS brochure is also available on the EQUASS website: www.equass.be (click on the image in the EQUASS box).



FEANTSA focuses on Quality in Social Services

The new issue of FEANTSA magazine *Homeless in Europe* focuses on the debate on quality in homeless services raised in the past few years within the European agenda and linked to reflections about quality criteria in other social services.

The report and more information about this important issue is available on the FEANTSA website, www.feantsa.org.

EQUASS is an initiative of the European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR). EQUASS provides a range of comprehensive services in the area of approval and certification of quality, all of which comply with European requirements for quality in the provision of social services.

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