

Conference report:

Quality initiatives for Quality of Life and Social Inclusion

(27-28 November 2018, SANA Lisboa, Av. Fontes Pereira de Melo 8, 1069-310 Lisboa, Portugal)

The key focus of the EQUASS Conference was to present a wide range of Quality Initiatives from across Europe highlighting experiences and research results from practitioners and experts. It showcased good practices and innovation and the European Commission provided their perspectives on the topic.

The Conference created a learning environment for participants from the content of the topics presented, from the sharing and exchange of ideas in the practical interactive workshops and the open forum question sessions. The aim of the conference was to support the provision of quality services for greater social and labour market inclusion and to highlight the importance of quality services in the social sector. All presentations can be found here:

<https://equass.be/index.php/activities/aractivities>



After words of welcome from AFID, the President of APQ and EPR Laura Jones introduced the European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR), a community of public and not-for-profit service providers for all types of disability, with the mission to build the capacity of their members to provide sustainable, high quality services through mutual learning and training. EQUASS was an initiative of EPR.

Day 1- 27 November 2018:

Quality in Social Services - the view of the European Commission by Monika Chaba

The European Commission (EC) ensures policy such as the Europe 2020 strategy. Peer reviews from the Social Protection Committee (SPC) at the EC shows that in the case of single mothers facing poverty, it is important to provide adequate financial, material and social support for sustainable social integration. It is equally important with prevention and early intervention services to address children at risk of poverty. The European Social Fund (ESF) gives special attention to the promotion of social innovation, stating that social innovation mandatory and spending around 25% of ESF's budget (€ 21,2 billion) on social inclusion, combating poverty and discrimination. After spending nearly one billion euros from 2014-2020, the EC could, through its Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme, make the following recommendations for high level of quality and sustainable employment in the future; to set up broad partnerships between public authorities, the private sector and civil society to deliver better results, and to set up indicators and adjust methodologies for measuring social outcomes. In 2017, the European Pillar of Social Rights was proclaimed, pointing out 20 key principles and rights to support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems.

The audience engaged with Ms Chaba. Laura Jones explained the work that EPR has done on raising awareness on the role of social service providers in implementing the EPSR as well as advocating for the future EU funding programmes to support such services, with Social Services Europe. They have also been active advocated for quality services in public procurement. See <https://www.epr.eu/what-we-do/policy-analysis/social-services-sector/>

The new EQUASS system - the added value of a sector specific quality approach The main elements of the European Quality in Social Service certification program: its key criteria and the way performance of the social service provider is assessed. by Guus van Beek

EQUASS 2018: "We emphasized putting things into practice - what you preach you must put into practice"

The European Quality in Social Services certification program is an initiative of the European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR). It aims to contribute to a European Social Service Sector where high-quality services ensure and promote inclusion and a high quality of life for the service users. The EQUASS system for quality is customised for the social sector and offers a comprehensive approach based on specific quality criteria, performance indicators and formal external assessment and audit procedures. The EQUASS system is compliant with the Voluntary Quality Framework for Social Services (EQF for SS) (Social Protection Committee, 2010) and can be considered as an instrument for implementing, assessing and promoting the EQF for SS in the social sector. The EQUASS system emphasises to have solid and clear approaches on its criteria that are put into practice with valid and relevant outcome/ results. The EQUASS system goes beyond the EQF for SS by encouraging organisational learning and development by continuous improvement, benchmarking and bench learning.



The mission of EQUASS is "to enhance the social service sector by engaging social service providers in quality, continuous improvement, learning and development, in order to guarantee service-users quality of services throughout Europe." The EQUASS system is one coherent European system with ten principles, fifty criteria and seventy-five indicators. It enhances compliance, improvement, learning and development. The system is evaluated in one assessment system with five stages of development, scoring either as EQUASS Assurance or EQUASS Excellence. Last, EQUASS focuses on how the approaches are implemented and has an emphasis on having relevant results/outcomes.



Exploring quality systems for social services by Raheem Esmail

There are various Quality Management Certification programs that encourage Social Service providers to be engaged into delivering quality and continuous improvement. There are communalities and differences between these systems. Mr. Raheem Esmail, auditor in various QM systems shared his view and experiences in assessing quality and quality management in organizations providing social services. All systems have their pro and cons. Most of the systems emphasis compliance with criteria that have been defined. In most of the cases compliance is shown by having a solid system of documentation. The EQUASS system however emphasises that compliance is put-into-practice (implementation) and with the aim of having valid and relevant outcomes / results. Another difference of the EQUASS

system compared with other systems is that the EQUASS system has included requirements for organizational learning and development. The advantage of the EQUASS certification system is that the language of the system is more connected to the language used in the social sector and that the system is in full compliance with the requirements of the European Quality Framework for Social Services.

In the afternoon various workshops took place: Outcome measurement "Are we looking for consistency? It's better to have a small focus and having clear information about what you're measuring"

The impact in different countries of implementing a quality system "Half of the respondents said that implementing EQUASS improved the professional knowledge and competence among staff" - results of the EQUASS Norwegian impact studies.

Inclusive job design *“With this method we’re meeting needs of employers instead of pushing employees into a certain job”*

VET learning experiences on quality *“We not only want to make them competent professionals but also train them to be responsible citizens”*

Day 2 – 28 November 2018:

Quality in Inclusive Education; How quality criteria can be used to fulfill key success factors for Inclusive education for persons with special needs. Experiences from an Erasmus Plus project, by Birgit Grimbergen

“Supporting means to empower them to do it themselves”

The United Nations (UN) Convention states that if you have a disability, you cannot be excluded from education because of it. That is why mainstream and special education work together to improve inclusive education. To promote and implement inclusive education one needs six components; legal framework, vision and approach, organisational issues, key delivery process, competences of teachers, and a labour market.

In the Erasmus project ‘The VET Learning Community’-project (TVLC-project) ten VET providers shared the common belief that National and European educational policy should be based on principles of inclusive education and equal opportunities, availability and access for all learners. They believe that VET institutions should provide VET programs for all learners, individual with and without special educational needs. They explored the communalities and differences in opportunities and limitations of implementing Inclusive Vocational Education and Training for all learners in their organisations / country. Many of the requirements for Inclusive education in VET can be related to requirements of a Quality Assurance System. Especially, Implementing the criteria of the EQUASS system, a sector specific quality assurance system which is fully compliant with the EQF for SS and EQAVET system at service provider level, may be helpful to guide the VET provider what to do. Mrs. Birgit Grimbergen showed by two cases which elements of the EQUASS system has supported the VET provider to become more inclusive.

To read more about the project, see: <https://www.tvlc.eu/>

Best practice in implementing Quality in the social sector – sharing learning (1) by Natalja Markovskaja (replaced by Guus van Beek) and Alexandre Rebelo

Experiences of implementing a Quality System in public social services in Lithuania (ESF-project) (by Guus van Beek)

“We don’t see these challenges as a barrier but as an opportunity to explore new possibilities.” Guus van Beek talking about challenges in implementation.

The Lithuanian authorities has taken the initiative to support the implementation of the EQUASS system in 120 organizations providing social services. The initiative is supported by ESF-funding and managed by Valikupia Rehabilitation Center in Vilnius. Experiences of implementing a Quality System in public social services in Lithuania shows some challenges and lessons learned. One needs to ensure the social service provider’s motivation to implement a new system, as well as making sure there is not a shortage of competent staff in the social services. There could be some staff resistance against the implementation such as language barriers, culture and complexity. Therefore, it is important to assure the competence of the key staff.

In a 5-years period various actions have been scheduled: training for consultants, auditors and coordinators, information events about the EQUASS system for Social Service providers, support to social Service providers in the implementation of the system and an independent research study to investigate the impact of the implementation of the system on the quality of the service and the performance of the Social Service Provider. The project runs from 2017 till 2023.

Alexandre Rebelo (PORT), *Formem-APPCDAM Coimbra*

“When I was reading about EQUASS I forgot about ISO. Why EQUASS? Because it was tailor made for the mission of Formem-APPCDAN Coimbra”

The reasons why the Portuguese Vocational Rehabilitation sector chose EQUASS as its quality system is because it is empowering organisations for implementing better practices and a more efficient support, and being a sharing platform for mutual learning to optimise management and better services.

Best practice in implementing Quality in the social sector – sharing learning

Assuring quality of services in hospitals for individuals with Mental Health problems. (by Ir. Paula Carneiro & Ana Gamelas, (Irmas Hospilateiras)

“It’s our job to have a clear quality concept for all of us in the organisation.” Talking about assuring quality of services in hospitals for individuals with mental health problems.

The Institute of the Hospitaller Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is a private Institution of Social Solidarity in health area. The implementation of the EQUASS quality system in the 18 Hospitals for individuals with a Mental Health problems in Portugal was initiated to:

- establish a uniform quality management system in all health facilities - ensuring the definition and sharing of the same quality requirements;
- implement continuous improvement strategies that are crosscutting throughout the organization and involve the active participation of the people assisted and stakeholders;
- Promote learning and innovation by comparing results and practices between health facilities and other organizations.

Mrs. Ana Gamelas shared the implementation strategy of the Quality Assurance system in the 18 Hospitals and the benefits and the challenges they faced in this process of implementation.

A Person-Centered approach to rehabilitation of people with addictions - alcohol and drugs. (by Dr. Margarida Neto)

The Instituto S. João de Deus is a private Institution of Social Solidarity in the Mental Health area in Portugal. An innovation project, “Person-Centered approach to rehabilitation of Addiction - alcohol and drugs” has been developed in partnership with the University of Lusófona, introducing the cognitive stimulation in the program and evaluating the impacts of this intervention in terms of improving abstinence. Dr. Margarida Neto, an expert in this development, presented this project and its outcomes and explained how the EQUASS Quality system has been beneficial for the project to achieve the results.

The session presented what the EQUASS system brought to alcohol dependency treatment in Portugal. Giving a concept clarification of what they are doing through identity, common language and team work helped the organisation standardise their procedures and share good practices, to see the importance of indicators and innovate, to communicate results to clients and others, and helped with the client awareness regarding the acceptance of the treatment/rights/duties/responsibility. At the same time, they portray some challenges related to using a quality system in alcohol dependency treatment such as the danger of routine processes and the risk of record priority over medical-patient relationship.

Participants had the chance to discuss learning and what they take away from the conference, then fed back to the plenary

Concluding remarks included: Gathering and sharing good practices is key, as is sharing challenges. A similar meeting could be organised just for Portuguese stakeholders, Outcome measurement should be a topic for further discussion. There is a challenge when it comes to understanding the terminology such as impact, outcomes, results etc, Benchlearning is valuable and can be done within EQUASS and as an EPR member (on quality of life), It would be helpful to simplify some of the EQUASS material to facilitate understanding, The EQUASS framework is flexible and can support tailor-made learning and improvement. The voluntary quality framework should be further promoted.



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