

EQUASS 2018 EXCELLENCE PROCEDURES

Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	2
1. REQUEST / REGISTRATION.....	5
2. APPLICATION	5
3. SELECTION OF THE AUDITORS.....	6
3. PREPARATION OF THE AUDIT	7
4. THE AUDIT	13
5. REPORTING	14
6. CERTIFICATION	15
7. PROGRESS REPORTS	16
8. ADDITIONAL AUDIT	17
9. APPEAL AND COMPLAINTS.....	18

© 2017 by European Quality for Social Services (EQUASS)

Version: October 2017

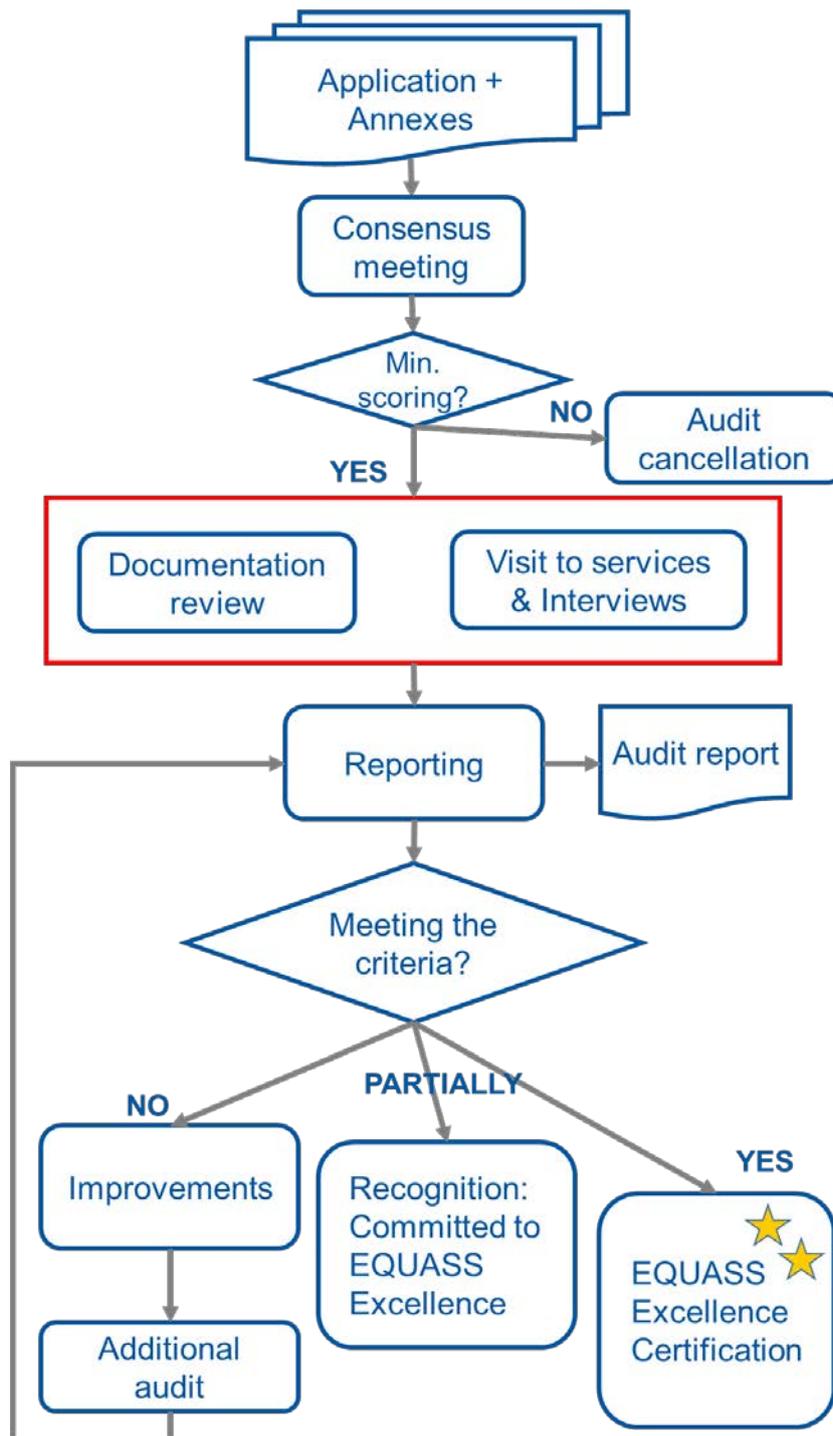
Introduction

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, learning and development in order to guarantee 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 relevant sectoral stakeholders at European level are represented. Moreover, the 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 Excellence procedures that are to be applied by the applicant, the auditors and the EQUASS Secretariat, in the process of the Excellence certification by EQUASS. The description follows the chronological steps in the EQUASS 2018 Excellence process and refers to the underlying documents for supporting this process. This EQUASS Excellence 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,
Selection of the auditor	6, 7
Consensus meeting	
Audit	8, 9
Reporting	10, 11
Certification	12, 13

1. EQUASS 2018 Application e-form (including annexes for approaches and results)
2. Guidelines for EQUASS 2018 Excellence application
3. EQUASS 2018 Excellence Administrative checklist
4. EQUASS 2018 Audit pricing document

5. Rights and Duties of EQUASS customers
6. EQUASS 2018 Auditor profile
7. Code of Ethics for auditors
8. EQUASS 2018 Excellence Site visit preparation form
9. EQUASS 2018 Excellence Scoring instrument for auditors
10. EQUASS 2018 Excellence Audit Report
11. EQUASS 2018 Excellence Progress report
12. EQUASS Graphical Charter
13. EQUASS 2018 Applicant Feedback form (online)

1. Request / Registration

The applicant will contact the EQUASS office in Brussels and inform them of their intention to have an audit, together with a proposal for weeks/days that would be convenient. For a proper planning, EQUASS recommends that Excellence applicants request an audit at least 3 months before the intended audit date, in order to secure 2 EQUASS auditors.

Once the audit has been requested, the EQUASS office in Brussels will offer a price and draft a contract with the applicant.

2. Application

2.1 Application dossier

To apply for an EQUASS Excellence audit, the organisation must be a social service provider that provides (a) social service(s) to persons. It can be a public institution, a not-for profit service provider, a charitable foundation or a commercial organisation, as long as the mission and core activities are in line with the provision of social services (or VET services) or a social purpose. An essential criterion is that the application relates to a number of services¹² directly provided to persons and contribute to their inclusion and/or an improved quality of life.

The scope for the EQUASS Excellence application can be the entire organisation as well a department or a number of social services. The scope needs to be clearly defined in the application and will also be mentioned on the certificate.

The applicant is entitled to define the scope for the EQUASS Excellence application. 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 See; Commission Communication "Services of general interest, including social services of general interest: a new European commitment", COM (2007) 725 final, 20.11.2007.

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

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

The applicant must send the following documents to the EQUASS Secretariat (equass@equass.be) at least 6 weeks (30 working days) before the intended audit date:

- Application form, filled-in and submitted
- Annexes A-B-C
- 9 Executive summaries of approaches (Annex D)
- An executive summary of the results of the internal audit(s) and/or self-evaluation
- 31 Documentation on results (n°1 → 13 + A → R)
- A high-resolution logo

2.2 Administrative check

The EQUASS office in Brussels will check the eligibility of the application 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 complete the dossier. The audit process will only continue if the dossier is completed.

✓ *Supporting document:*

3. EQUASS 2018 Excellence Administrative checklist

3. Selection of the auditors

An EQUASS auditors, selected by the EQUASS office in Brussels, will carry out the external audit. The auditors will be independent and qualified, meaning that they have successfully completed a training for EQUASS auditors and have the knowledge, skill and attitude requirements. EQUASS auditors are appointed by the EQUASS Awarding Committee.

An EQUASS Excellence audit will have no less than 2 auditors, preferably with one of the auditors who is local to the country where the audit takes place, and one international auditor who provides the European perspective to the team. A complete list of all EQUASS auditors can be found on the EQUASS website.

The auditors are trained in the EQUASS approach on quality and in how to assess the performance of the Social Service Provider on the EQUASS principles and criteria. The auditors are responsible for all phases of the audit including the process of writing the audit report.

The audit team will be organised as follows:

- Lead Auditor: He/she is an expert in audit methods and has at least 2 experiences in doing audits in the framework of the EQUASS Excellence in Social Services. The lead auditor is responsible for all phases of the audit including the process of processing the audit report.
- The co-auditor is an expert in audit methods as well. He/she is full member of the auditor team and facilitates the interfaces between the applicant and the lead auditor. The co-auditor is also trained in the EQUASS approach on quality and in how to assess the performance of the Social Service Provider on the EQUASS principles and criteria. The co-auditor will have a different nationality from the lead auditor.

The EQUASS office in Brussels supports and monitors the auditors throughout the audit process.

✓ *Supporting documents:*

EQUASS Auditor profile

Code of Ethics for auditors

4. Preparation of the Audit

4.1 Individual preparation

The EQUASS Auditors prepare the audit on individual basis. This preparation contains:

1. Formulating questions for clarification and better understanding about the presented approaches.
2. Formulating questions for clarification and better understanding of the success of implementation (reported in the executive summary of the internal audits and/or self-evaluation)
3. Individual desk scoring on the presented results. This desk scoring is based on the information provided (Annex: Documentation on results) in the EQUASS Application dossier. At the individual desk scoring phase, the auditors will each go through the annex: “Documentation for results and start scoring these results based on methodology presented in the Auditors handbook.
4. Formulating questions for clarification and better understanding about the presented results.

4.2 Consensus meeting

After the individual scoring on results, the lead auditor will contact the co-auditor to organise a so called ‘consensus meeting’. The lead auditor collects the individual desks scores on results and the identified questions for clarification and better understanding from the co-auditor. During the consensus meeting, a consensus scores on results will be drawn up. The consensus meeting is a meeting (max one-day) in which the two auditors will meet face to face or via skype.

Compensation of score is not allowed between the scores of the various EQUASS Principles for Quality. Compensation of scores is allowed between the criteria of a Principle for Quality, if the applicant meets the minimum requirements mentioned above, and never below the level 3 out of 5.

4.3 Identifying priority issues for the site visit:

The priority issues are identified on the basis of the consensus agreement on;

1. Formulating questions for clarification and better understanding about the presented approaches.
2. Formulating questions for clarification and better understanding of the success of implementation (reported in the executive summary of the internal audits and/or self-evaluation)
3. Consensus scoring on the presented results.
4. Formulating questions for clarification and better understanding about the presented results.

4.4 Preparing the site visit

A site visit will be carried out if the consensus score for the results indicates that it is expected that the organisation performs in average at the level between level 3 and 4 (Average score of 7 points) If the consensus scores on results indicates that the applicant is very likely not to meet to the requirement for results (average 7 points), the auditors will inform the applicant and the EQUASS office in Brussels who will explore if a postponement or cancellation of the audit is needed (see below).

If the consensus scores on results are sufficient and indicate that the applicant is likely to meet the requirements for results, the auditors propose and elaborate an audit plan and a site visit programme. The audit plan and the site visit program must be agreed and communicated with all actors of the process (auditor and applicant) **at least two weeks (10 working days)** before the proposed and agreed dates.

The auditors will use the 'Site visit preparation form' for communicating the planned site visit. The auditors will visit the services, meet a number of staff, service-users, members of the board, the director and other stakeholders who are relevant for the scope of the audit.

The audit plan contains following elements:

- Date and time to review documentation and other information resources.
- Time for giving the feedback on the site visit to the applicant and the staff.

- Time for auditors to complete individual scoring the approach and implementation.
- 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 EQUASS office in Brussels and to the applicant.

- ✓ Supporting document

EQUASS 2018 Excellence Site visit preparation form

4.5 Number of days for the audit

The standard number of days for a site visit (single site) is two days.

If more sites are included in the scope of the application, additional days for site visit will be added to the standard number of days for a site visit. The number of sites in a multi-site application is determined by the travel time for auditors to visit the sites. If the travel distance between sites is more than 30 minutes the site will be identified as additional site. The maximum number of sites, included in an EQUASS Excellence application, is 10 sites.

The number additional days for site visit will be determined according the following scheme.

Number of sites	Total number of audit days	Number of sites to be visited
2	3	2
3	3	3
4	4	4
5	4	4
6	4	4
7	4	4
8	4	4

9	5	5
10	5	5

Large organisations (> 250 FTE Staff) will require more days for a site visit. Therefore additional audit days will be added to the number of defined number of audit days in the scheme above.

The services included in the scope of the audit have **more than 250 staff**:

- 251 – 500 FTE³ staff → 1 extra audit day
- More than 500 FTE staff → 2 extra days

The sites to be visited will be appointed by the auditors.

The auditors will agree on a proposal for the planning and the programme of the site visit to the applicant **at least 2 weeks** (10 working days) before the proposed and agreed dates of the site visit. The planning and the programme must be agreed by the applicant and communicated to the EQUASS Excellence auditors and staff of the applicant’s organisation. A copy of the agreed programme will be sent to the EQUASS office in Brussels. The auditors will use the site visit preparation form for communicating the planned site visit.

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

4.6 Scoring system

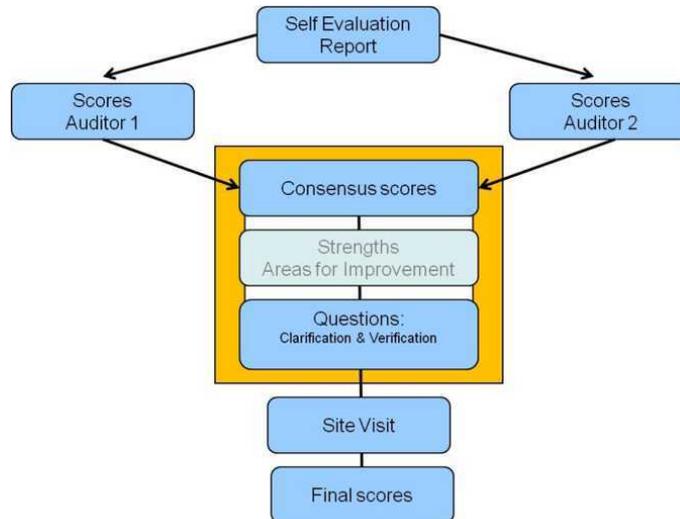
The scoring of the EQUASS Excellence refers to the performance of the applicant on the EQUASS criteria. .

The following four steps will make the scoring of the EQUASS Excellence:

- Individual desk scoring of the results by the auditors
- Individual scoring of all other criteria by the auditors during the site visit
- Consensus scoring on the results by the auditors prior to the site visit
- Consensus scoring on all criteria by the auditors after the site visit.

The process of scoring is expressed in the figure hereafter:

³ Full Time Equivalentents



4.7 Cancelled audit

In the case of a too poor performance of the scores for results with no / less perspective on successful results (Average score $+> 7.00$ points) identified at the consensus meeting stage, the applicant will be informed, and will be given the choice of cancelling or postponing the audit.

If a cancellation of the audit is decided by the applicant, a written feedback report with the results of the consensus scores for results will be given to the applicant. This feedback report will be written by the lead auditor and will contain the results of consensus scoring for all required results and recommendations to improve the performance on these results.

In that event, EQUASS will reimburse to the applicant the costs that could be saved, up to 1.500€ per audit. If the audit is rescheduled to give the applicant time to implement the necessary improvements, the new audit will be charged at the same price as the first contract.

If the applicant decides to reduce the scope of the new audit in a way that reduces the number of audit days required (see section “Standard number of days”), the price will be reduced accordingly.

5. The audit

Auditing an applicant on EQUASS 2018 Excellence criteria is based on:

1/ The information provided in the application form:

- Annexes A-B-C
- 9 Executive summaries of approaches (Annex D)
- the executive summaries of the internal audits and/or self-evaluation
- 31 Documentation on results (n°1 → 13 + A → R)

2/ The information made available during the site visit

- 24 documentations on approaches
- Additional results presented during the site visit
- Observations of the daily practice by the auditors
- Interviews during the site visit with: persons served, managers, other staff / employees, volunteers, partners and relevant external stakeholders.

Site visit

The auditor will assess the performance of the social service provider against the 5 stages of the EQUASS criteria through review of documentation and results and through interviews, observation of daily practice, situations and conditions. Site visit observations will be registered and reported. At the end of the site visit, prior to the audit report, the auditors will hold a meeting with the relevant staff of the applicant and present to them their 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 of the audit or decision for certification.

✓ *Supporting documents:*

6. Reporting

After the site visit the auditors review the outcomes of the audit (comparison of individual scores) and agree on the consensus scores and the recommendations for improvement and additional development to be formulated. The lead auditor prepares and writes comments in the audit report and is responsible for the accuracy and completeness of this report. The content of the final audit report must be agreed by both auditors. The audit report must be sent to the EQUASS office in Brussels within 10 working days after the site visit.

The EQUASS office in Brussels will compile an executive summary document that is sent to the members of the EQUASS Awarding Committee.

7. Certification

The Executive summary of the audit report will be send by email to the members of the EQUASS Awarding Committee. The EQUASS Awarding Committee certifies an applicant with EQUASS Excellence if all awarding criteria meet the minimum number of points for EQUASS Excellence certification.

The criteria for awarding the services of a service provider with EQUASS Excellence are:

1. Minimum score per EQUASS Principle: 06.0 points
2. Minimum overall score: 65.0 points
3. Maximum overall score: 100.0 points
4. The average score for the results \geq 7.0 points

The EQUASS office in Brussels will communicate the decision of the EQUASS Awarding Committee to the applicant.

In case of a successful audit, the EQUASS office in Brussels 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 website⁴ and through its social media channels⁵).

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

⁴ www.equass.be

⁵ www.facebook.com/EQUASS.Brussels and https://twitter.com/EQUASS_Europe

8. Progress reports

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

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

✓ *Supporting documents:*

EQUASS 2018 Progress report template

9. Additional audit

In case the Social Service Provider does not meet the requirements for EQUASS Excellence certification, the applicant may be entitled:

1. to go for an additional audit or
2. to submit an appeal
3. to receive the recognition “Committed to EQUASS Excellence”.

Criteria for ‘Committed to EQUASS Excellence’ are:

1. Minimum score per EQUASS Principle: 4.5 points
2. Overall score: Between 55.0 and 65.0 points
3. The average score for the results ≥ 4.0 points

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 office in Brussels. The costs for this additional site visit will be charged to the applicant

10. Appeal and complaints

4.8 Appeal⁶

In case an applicant for EQUASS Excellence certification does not agree with the decision of the EQUASS Awarding Committee not to award that organisation with EQUASS Excellence, 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 decision of the EQUASS Awarding Committee. The appeal needs to be addressed to the EQUASS office in Brussels.

The EQUASS Office in Brussels must confirm the receipt of the appeal within 10 working days, and must organise a re-audit (second opinion) by two other experienced auditors. The re-audit will follow the same process and procedures 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 result in the same decision to not award as previous audit. In case of a positive decision, the costs will be borne by the EQUASS office in Brussels.

Any interested party can dispute that a service provider deserves EQUASS Excellence certification, and this can be done as long as the EQUASS Excellence certification is valid. The EQUASS officer in Brussels will undertake an inquiry with the EQUASS Excellence certified organisation and the auditors involved. Unless there are strong indications that there is an actual and clear violation of EQUASS Excellence criteria, the EQUASS office in Brussels 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 office in Brussels will organise a re-audit and potentially withdraw the EQUASS Excellence certification. The EQUASS office in Brussels will 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.

⁶ See : Appeal Procedure

4.9 Complaints

Regardless the outcome of an application process, any applicant for EQUASS Excellence certification can submit a complaint about the auditors 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 Manager.

The EQUASS Manager will confirm receipt of the complaint within 10 working days. In cases of complaints: EQUASS will follow its complaint procedures⁷, which can be summarised as follow:

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

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

⁷ See: Complaint procedure