

## Slide 1



This presentation was prepared in March 2009 by Quality Development Officers from the South Yorkshire Quality Project, a partnership project between Voluntary Action Sheffield, Voluntary Action Rotherham and Voluntary Action Barnsley.

The intention of this presentation is to provide voluntary sector organisations with an accessible introduction to quality assurance, to help them choose a suitable quality assurance system, and to provide guidance on how to implement the system effectively.



## What is Quality?

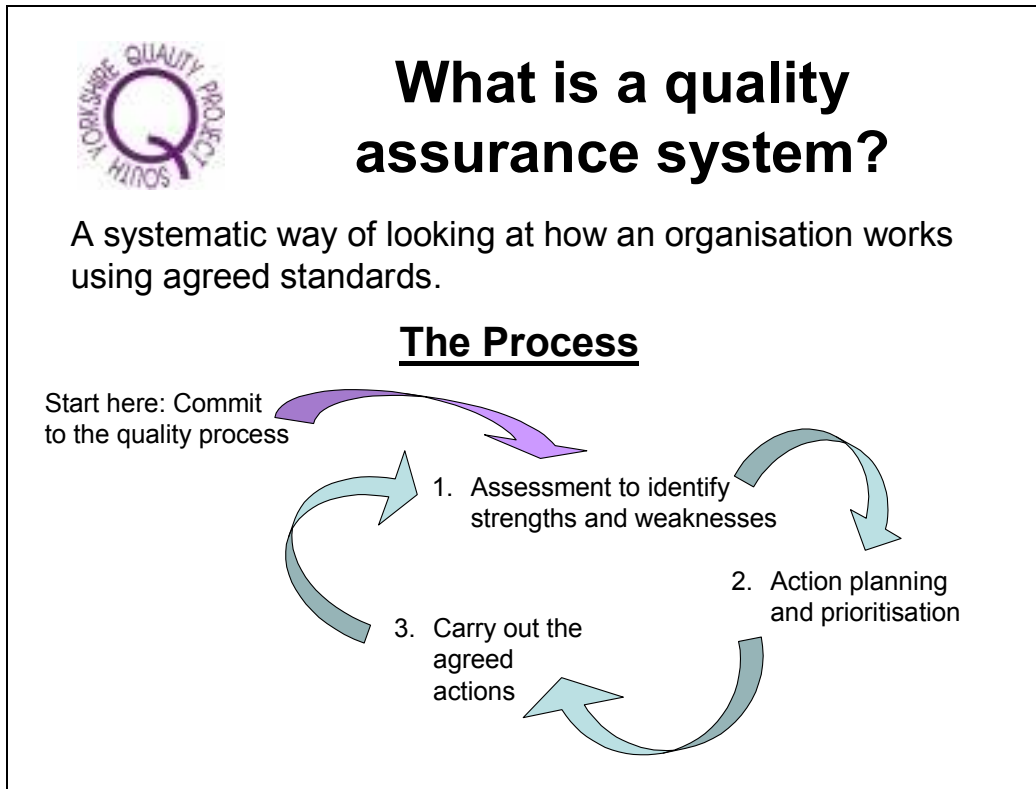
Quality means different things to different people:

- The degree to which a product, service or process meets or exceeds the requirements which have been agreed with stakeholders.
- Quality means excellence and working on quality is about seeking excellence, both in the services the organisation offers and in the way the organisation runs.
- Doing the right things, in the right way, and continuously learning and improving.
- Operating effectively and efficiently.
- Learning what you are doing well, and striving to do it better.
- Discovering what you need to change to meet your users' needs.

These different definitions of quality come from NCVO and knowledge accumulated at Voluntary Action Sheffield.

There is no single recognised definition for what quality means in the context of voluntary sector organisations. Quality means different things to different people, and this slide provides a number of alternative definitions to consider. In some people's experience, quality is about control rather than improvement.

What does quality mean to you? How do you want to benefit from quality?



The definition given on this slide was developed by a Quality Development Officer from the South Yorkshire Quality Project.

A quality assurance system, put another way, is a systematic way of ensuring that your work is of a good quality.

“Off-the-shelf” quality assurance systems have been carefully developed through wide consultation to bring together recognised good practice in a field, and this collection of good practice is the standards to which organisations benchmark themselves.

Bespoke quality assurance systems may be developed by an organisation, and the people within that organisation would agree the standards to which they wished to benchmark themselves against.

There is a particular process of using a quality assurance system that is depicted in the cycle diagram in the lower portion of this slide.

To start with, it is important to get organisational commitment to pursuing this quality process. The commitment of your trustees and senior management is very important as part of this, but so is commitment from your staff and any volunteers.

1. Assess your organisation’s current state by comparing what you do to the standards in the quality assurance system. This should highlight where you are meeting the standard, and where you need to develop.
2. Where you identify that you need to improve your practice, plan some actions to bring up the standard of your work. Prioritise this quality development work however it best suits you. For instance, an action might fit in with wider organisational work, it might help you to tackle urgent issues quickly and effectively, or you might want to get some

quick and easy actions out of the way so that you can see yourselves making progress.

3. The action plan is no good unless the actions are carried out! People do the work as agreed and the quality of your organisation improves.
4. Then it's time to start again to assess where your strengths and weaknesses now lie, and plan some more quality developments.

Quality assurance is an ongoing commitment to continuous improvement. As far as possible, try to embed the good practice that you are developing into your organisation, so that it is part of your organisational culture and passed on from person to person. Don't forget though, with personnel changes, some knowledge inevitably gets lost. Your operating environment also changes and your work needs to remain appropriate. It is always useful to go back to the quality assurance system and check that you are still performing to a high standard by reassessing yourselves. Just as on a treadmill, a voluntary sector organisation has to keep on moving forward just to stand still.



## Overall benefits of a quality assurance system

- A method of continuous improvement.
- Helps you learn what you do well and what you need to work on.
- Work more effectively.
- Be consistent.
- Plan ahead.
- Become more sustainable.
  - An external evaluation into the work of the South Yorkshire Quality Project in November 2006 stated that “groups do believe that the improvements they have made give them a better chance of survival”.

Different organisations will notice different benefits from using a quality assurance system, depending on what you want to get out of it, which system you choose and the way you implement it.

This slide lists some of the overall benefits of implementing a quality assurance system.

- A method of continuous improvement – a quality assurance system provides a framework that helps you structure your organisational development work and continually review and improve on what you do.
- Helps you learn what you do well and what you need to work on – through the assessment process as mentioned on slide 3 (number 1 in the cycle diagram).
- Work more effectively – because you will be developing good practice in the way that you operate, and preventing crises before they occur.
- Be consistent – making and communicating decisions about the best way to do things will promote consistency of the quality of your work.
- Plan ahead – the action planning as mentioned on slide 3 (number 2 in the cycle diagram) will be a quality development plan for your organisation.
- Become more sustainable – nothing can guarantee organisational sustainability, but the benefits of a quality assurance system are all indicators that your chances of sustainability will be higher than without a quality assurance system. Certainly, our external evaluation from November 2006 reported that organisations that worked with the South Yorkshire Quality Project in 2005 and 2006 felt that they were more sustainable because of quality assurance.




## **Benefits: what voluntary organisations said**

From the South Yorkshire Quality Project external evaluation report (Icarus, 2008):

- Improved customer service.
- Better supported and efficient staff.
- Improved confidence.
- Increased legal compliance.
- Easier access to information to support funding bids.

The South Yorkshire Quality Project had a second external evaluation in autumn 2008, to mark the end of our second phase of work. The evaluator, Helen Bovey of Icarus, mentions that groups implementing quality assurance systems notice the tangible benefits listed on this slide.

## Slide 6



The slide features a central image of an iceberg floating in the ocean. The tip of the iceberg, which is above the water line, is labeled "Services". The much larger part of the iceberg, which is submerged below the water line, is labeled with various quality assurance functions: "Managing people", "Working with others", "Leadership and Management", "Governance", "Planning", "Learning and Development", "Communications and Promotion", "User-centred service", "Monitoring and Evaluation", "Managing money", and "Managing resources". To the left of the iceberg, there is a text box with an upward-pointing arrow. The text in this box reads: "...and this work supports your services." followed by "Quality assurance systems often focus on improving these aspects of your organisation...". In the top left corner of the slide, there is a circular logo for the "YORKSHIRE QUALITY PROJECT" with "SOUTH MIDLANDS" written around the bottom edge.

A useful metaphor for describing how quality assurance works is to think of your organisation as an iceberg.

Your services are the tip of the iceberg. This is what people outside your organisation see of you.

However, like the iceberg, there is a lot of activity that goes on “underneath the surface”, that support your services and keeps them “afloat”. Many quality assurance systems focus on strengthening the way these aspects of your organisation work, in order to support whatever services that your organisation delivers.

The words below the surface of the water on this iceberg picture are the headings to the sections in the quality assurance system, PQASSO (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). There is more about PQASSO later in the presentation.

A few quality assurance systems may also cover best practice in delivering your specific service. If your organisation is a member of an umbrella body (e.g. National Mind, Age Concern England, NAVCA), you could try asking if they have produced their own quality assurance system for their member organisations.



## Choosing a quality assurance system

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What does “quality” mean to us, and what system might help us achieve this?
- Do we want external accreditation?
- Do our future funders / commissioners or our consortia or umbrella organisation require a specific system?
- How much time and resources can we invest in this work?
- What will it cost?
- Do we need support and is it available locally?

So how to choose between the many quality assurance systems available?

The questions on this slide should help you start thinking about what you want a quality assurance system to do for you and also about what resources, capacity and support you would have available to help you implement the system.

Slide 8



# Quality assurance systems

QAS	What is it about?	Externally accredited?	Voluntary sector specific?	External support?
PQASSO	12 sections (6-8 indicators in each section), and across 3 levels, covering all aspects of running a voluntary sector organisation.	Yes, but optional	Yes	Charities Evaluation Services can provide a list of licensed PQASSO mentors.
Visible	7 areas and 121 indicators (complete 28 for accreditation). For community associations - multi-purpose organisations, firmly rooted within their community and giving people more control over their lives.	Yes, but optional	Yes	Community Matters offers 1 half-day workshop to all organisations.
Quality First	Based on PQASSO, but for organisations without paid staff. 9 sections across 2 levels.	No	Yes	Unlikely
Customer First	3 sections (32 statements) covering: Building customer relationships, maximising market awareness, developing your people.	Yes	No	Through consultants
Investors in People	8 sections covering: People management, learning and development, leadership and business planning.	Yes	No	Through YHAL
ISO 9001	Standardising processes, recording these in a process manual, and sticking to it.	Yes	No	Through private sector organisations

This table provides a quick comparison of some of the quality assurance systems that the South Yorkshire Quality Project was most often asked about by voluntary sector organisations between 2007 and 2009. There are many more quality assurance systems available that are not listed here.

The VAS information sheet, “Quality Assurance”, provides some further details on these systems and the matrix standard. This is available to download from the “Information” section of the VAS website, <http://www.vas.org.uk/>.

Another basic quality assurance system “selector” tool is available online at <http://www.strategy-impact.org.uk/quality.asp?id=433>. This may also help you narrow down some options.

We would encourage you to get more specific information from the system providers, and to talk to organisations similar to yourself to draw on their experiences of quality assurance.



## Finding time

### Ethos:

- Value internal organisational developments, in order to support service delivery.
- A quality assurance system = a framework to organise the work that you need to do anyway.

### Practical tips:

- Get together a quality working group (QWG)
- Organise regular meetings, and don't put them off!
- Use team meetings to communicate with everyone, and delegate work from the QWG.
- Identify a quality champion (preferably a senior manager) so that enough time is given to quality work.

Implementing a quality assurance system is a long-term commitment to organisational development and improvement. When faced with short-term pressures and deadlines, many organisations will be tempted to postpone their work on quality assurance to accommodate the urgent tasks. Whilst we recognise that this sometimes needs to happen in order to balance organisational priorities, it is imperative that your quality development is not neglected and that you maintain momentum to move forward.

This slide provides some hints about creating a positive ethos around quality assurance, and practical tips about how to implement quality assurance effectively.

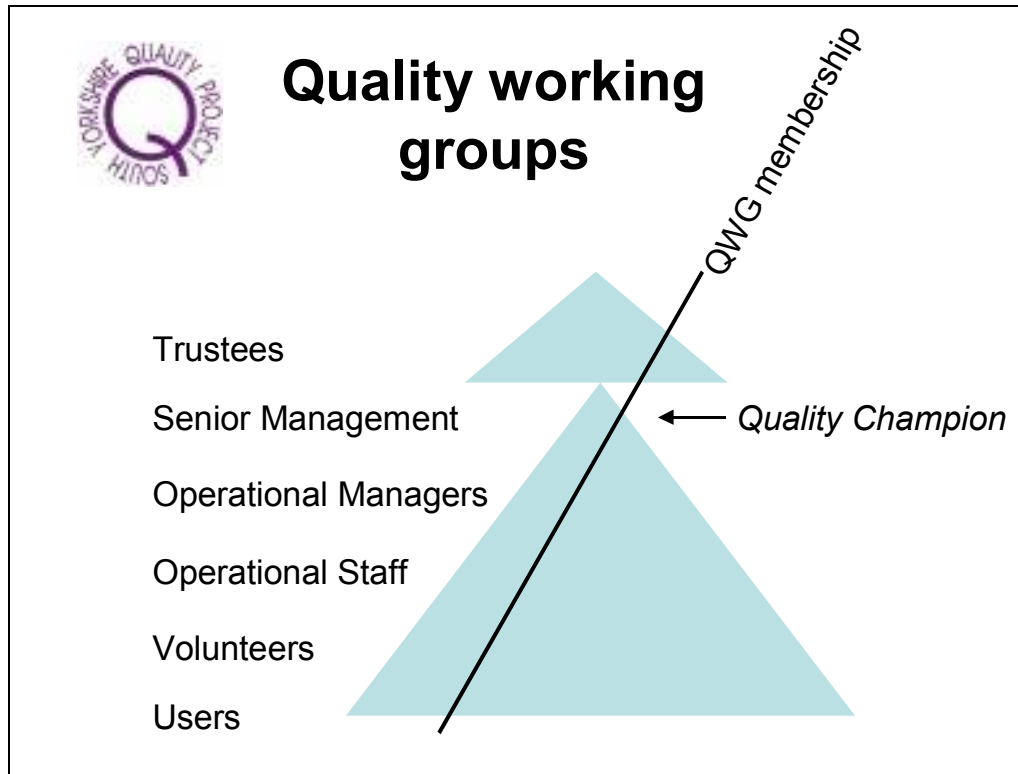
- Value internal organisational developments, in order to support service delivery. For example, a quality assurance system that prompts you to improve the way that you publicise your activities is likely to help you increase attendance.
- A quality assurance system = a framework to organise the work that you need to do anyway. The organisational improvements that the system highlights are an integral part of the development of your organisation. The only *extra* work involved is the meetings to work through the self-assessments and agree actions.
- Get together a quality working group. The following slide provides more information on what a quality working group does, why it is important and who needs to be involved.
- Organise regular meetings (of your quality working group), and don't put them off! As mentioned above, it is imperative to keep up the momentum of this work, and not to allow it to be neglected.
- Use team meetings to communicate with everyone, and delegate work from the QWG. Communicate decisions about the best ways of working, ask for input and different points of view to take back to the QWG, and ask people to take on pieces of work that

makes the most of their expertise and shares the workload fairly. Make sure that everyone knows that the quality of their work is part of the quality of the organisation, and that they have a stake in how well the organisation does.

- Identify a quality champion (preferably a senior manager) so that enough time is given to quality work. A quality champion is the key person in your organisation who will be driving forward quality improvements and making sure that quality stays on people's agendas. It works best when the quality champion is a senior manager; someone who has the authority to make sure that quality is prioritised, and who can keep an eye on staff and management committee involvement in the quality process.

In the long run, your investment in quality assurance should help to reduce the disruption of urgent situations. For example, in the case of funding deadlines, you will have easy access to the information that you need to provide, your monitoring systems will provide evidence of need, and your budgets will be already prepared. Your organisation should increase its control of the way it works, and frazzled staff and trustees should be able to improve their work-life balances.

## Slide 10



A quality working group is the small group of people that will work as a team to use the quality assurance system, collectively deciding what standards you are reaching and how to improve the quality of your work.

This slide depicts an organisational chart and the black diagonal line indicates how you might choose the membership of the quality working group. Essentially, the group should be made up of a cross-section of people from different projects or teams and working at different levels in your organisation, so that these varied perspectives come together to provide a complete and accurate picture of how well things are really working. Everyone in the quality working group should feel able to speak honestly about the organisation's strengths and weaknesses, and their views should be listened to and taken seriously. An administrator or volunteer's insights about how the organisation works are just as valuable as your chief officer's ideas.

The composition of people in the quality working group will be different for every organisation, but generally speaking, three or four people is a good number to aim for. This might typically include one management committee member, one manager and one to two members of staff, and one of these quality working group members should be your quality champion. It might also be appropriate for you to involve an interested volunteer or service user to benefit from their perspectives.

You might want to agree some ground rules or terms of reference for your quality working group, so that everyone is aware of what is and is not expected of them.



## Costs

- The manuals for PQASSO, Quality First and Visible cost between £25 and £95 (+ P&P).
- External accreditation is a major cost for all systems.
- Costs depends on the size of your organisation (number of staff, number of sites etc.) – discuss your situation and requirements with the accreditation body.
- You have to pay for the assessor’s travel and hotel costs.
- Budget for **at least £1500** for external accreditation.

A self-assessed system is much cheaper than an externally accredited system. This slide explains why, and what costs you might need to cover.

There are other costs associated with implementing quality in your organisation, relating to staff time, meeting rooms, and perhaps a “free lunch” for your quality working group. In addition, the process of working through a quality assurance system may help you to identify development needs, such as training or improved operational systems, which in turn may require further time and money to be spent on them.

It is important to be realistic about the costs that you need to cover, but to put the costs in the context of your overall organisational development needs to see how best to take this work forward.



## Resourcing quality

### Funding

- Ask funders or commissioners for a reasonable proportion of the costs.
- Ask your consortium or umbrella organisation.
- Seek funding for specific areas of work.

### Support

- Ask your local infrastructure organisation.
- Ask your consortium or umbrella organisation.

Remember: your work on quality supports your stakeholders.

Grants specifically for undertaking a quality assurance system are practically unheard of. This slide gives some ideas of where you might be able to find money and support from to help you cover the costs of implementing a quality assurance system.

- Funders and commissioners are normally willing to fund a reasonable proportion of the costs, but probably not the full costs. Think about what would be a reasonable proportion to ask for. If you piece together a number of these contributions, you will be able to make up the total costs of the work.
- Some consortia or umbrella organisations may be able to provide either funding or expertise, or possibly other resources, to help you implement quality assurance.
- You may be able to identify funding to help some specific organisational developments, such as business planning, training, ICT.
- Support may also come from your local infrastructure organisation (e.g. Voluntary Action Sheffield, Voluntary Action Rotherham, Voluntary Action Barnsley), although funding is unlikely to be available through this route.

It is in the interests of your stakeholders to help you to work on quality, so that you can demonstrate effective, good quality services and value for money on your stakeholder's grant or investment, or so that you can strengthen the partnership of organisations to which you belong.

## For more about quality assurance

### **VAS information sheet on quality assurance**

(including information on different quality assurance systems and contact details):

Download from <http://www.vas.org.uk/documents/index>

### **NCVO Strategy and Impact webpages:**

Browse around at <http://www.strategy-impact.org.uk/page.asp?id=46>

Managed by Voluntary Action Sheffield, in partnership with VAR and VAB,  
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To find out more about quality assurance, try these two links.

Your local infrastructure organisation may be able to provide further advice and support – it is always worth asking what they can help with.