

How to Apply for EQUASS Assurance

Practical questions regarding the EQUASS Assurance application process from the point of view of a service provider

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Note: This document is a summary overview, and does not supersede the full EQUASS Assurance procedures, which you can obtain upon request or after your registration.

1. Who can apply for EQUASS Assurance?

- To apply for an EQUASS Assurance audit, your organisation must be a **social service provider**. We define social services through the framework provided by the European Commission on social services of general interest (SSGI)¹, with the exclusion of social security schemes. The definition of the European Commission {(2006)516/177}² is non-exhaustive, and focuses more on the objective and outcomes of the services, rather than what the service is called, or how it is funded, which will differ from one European country to another.
- This also means that an umbrella organisation or a network of service providers, which does not itself provide services, cannot be certified. Joining forces as a consortium with a partner organisation is possible under certain circumstances. Do not hesitate to contact us if you are considering this.
- Your organisation can be a public institution, a not-for profit service provider, a charitable foundation, a commercial organisation or social enterprise, so long as the mission and core activities of your institution is in line with the provision of social services or a social purpose as explained above.

¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=794&langId=en>

² http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2006/com2006_0177en01.pdf

2. Who should I address? The local EQUASS representative in my country or the central office in Brussels?

Visit the Local Licence Holder section on our main website www.equass.be and check if there is one operating in your country. If so, you can contact them directly (Scenario 1).

If there is no Local Licence Holder operating in your country, you should get in touch with us directly at equass@equass.be (Scenario 2).

Please note that the steps below are mainly similar for both scenarios 1 and 2, the only difference is:

Scenario 1, you interact exclusively with your Local Licence Holder for the steps 2 through 7. EQUASS in Brussels is in charge of the awarding decision and the dispatch of the certificate, if the audit is successful.

Scenario 2, you interact with the Brussels team throughout the whole process.



3. How do I define the scope of my application?

The scope of your application refers to the services/departments / units that you are intending to certify.

We define the social areas in the five following categories.

- Services to the disabled and disadvantaged groups;
- Elderly care;
- Mainstream VET and training;
- Services to the homeless (and refugees);
- Childcare

If your organisation provides such varied activities such as, for example, labour training for people with disabilities, as well as emergency services to homeless people, these would have to go under two separate application forms. The reason is that the legal and operational framework between such varied services is so different, it requires double work in many steps from the auditor (document review, interviews), and cannot be covered in one single audit. That would also mean paying for the audit application fee twice, but if the auditor can do both audits in the same week, we will give you a reduction on the travel costs.

Beyond the 5 areas of social services defined above, It is a key decision for your organisation to carefully define the scope in detail (which activities/units will be put forward for an audit), If the audit fails, none of the services get certified. You therefore need to be careful in assessing the level of readiness of each department/unit presented for application.

In any case, if you have questions about the eligibility of a scope of services, or whether certain activities are considered to belong to one or two categories, please do not hesitate to contact us on equass@equass.be

4. How do I register?

The first step will be for you to *send us your registration form* to your Local Licence Holders or to EQUASS in Brussels, as applicable.

The registration form for EQUASS Assurance is available for download on the EQUASS Assurance page in our website www.equass.be

Fill in the organisation details, select the time period in which you want to have your audit performed, and have the director of your organisation sign. Do not forget to let us know if the organisation is for multiple sites or for a single site.

Once we have your registration form, we will revert to you with additional questions, if necessary, and a price. The price grid takes into account factors such as single or multiple sites, but also the number for staff working at the organisation. This is why we are interested in knowing if your full time staff is over 250, or whether the sites are far away from one another. The number of audit days, and ultimately the price we offer you, will depend on it.

Once you accept the price, *we send you your contract*, as well as a number of documents you will need to prepare for your application:

- The EQUASS Assurance application form
- The guidelines for Assurance application
- The EQUASS Assurance procedures
- The EQUASS Assurance core principle and criteria.
- The EQUASS Assurance self-evaluation form

5. How much does an EQUASS Assurance audit cost?

Prices vary depending if you have a Local Licence Holder or interact directly with EQUASS in Brussels.

Local Licence Holder prices are available upon request via e-mail. You will find their contact details under our section About EQUASS / Licence Holders on our main page www.equass.be

If you are a direct customer of EQUASS in Brussels, our basic price for a single-site audit application is 3.000€ (excl. VAT). That would include 2 working days from the auditor; local travel, international travel (if applicable) and accommodation costs; as well as our administrative work from the registration until the awarding decision.

Organisations operating on 1/ more than one location³ or with 2/ over 250 FTE⁴, or 3/ operating in more than one category of scope in the social services⁵ would have to pay for additional audit days, in the first two cases, or present an additional application form, in the third one.

Details on the number and costs of additional audit days can be found in the EQUASS Procedures.

On a strict case-per-case basis, EQUASS may offer reductions to its direct customers.

³ If several sites have a combined travelling time of less than 30 minutes from each other, they shall be considered as one site.

⁴ Full Time Equivalent

⁵ 1/ Services to the disabled and disadvantaged groups; 2/ Elderly care; 3/ Mainstream VET and training; 4/ Homeless / refugees; 5/ Childcare

6. How do I implement the standard?

At this point, you may be fully ready for an audit, or you may need a bit more time to implement our Quality Assurance standard in your organisation. *The self-evaluation tool (also known as Quick-Scan)* is there to help you assess internally how your organisation is doing in the implementation of EQUASS Assurance, and what actions remain to be taken. Ideally, you perform this assessment with a number of persons in your staff, management, service users, stakeholders, and then compile the results to see how each of these actors perceive your organisation's quality plan.

Implementing a new Quality Assurance standard is not always easy, and you may choose to bring in the help of an *external consultant*. EQUASS regularly trains EQUASS consultants in assisting organisations in that process. We will gladly provide you with a listing of quality consultants that we trained ourselves, and who operate in your area.



7. What is next? Further steps

At this stage, you have received the full ***EQUASS Assurance certification procedures***. These explain in detail what happens from the planning of the audit all the way to the awarding of the contract.

We invite you to read this document carefully, and all the other related documents, to get a full understanding of the audit takes place:

- Appeal and Complaints procedures
- Rights and duties of the EQUASS Customers

