

How to Apply for EQUASS Excellence

Practical questions regarding the EQUASS Excellence 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 Excellence procedures, which you can obtain upon request or after your registration.

1. What is EQUASS Excellence?

The EQUASS Excellence certification programme was introduced by EPR in 2002 to identify and encourage excellence and best practice in the social sector. EQUASS Excellence is the second level of the EQUASS certification in Social Services.

The EQUASS Excellence certification programme requires a social service provider to carry out a self-evaluation on the performance on the EQUASS criteria via a self-evaluation report. The self-evaluation report assesses the applicant's current compliance with the *50 criteria based on the voluntary European Quality Framework* for social services on three different perspectives: approach, deployment and results.

A team of two auditors reviews and scores the self-evaluation report. All EQUASS Excellence applicants that achieve a consensus score above an appropriate level are offered a site visit. The purpose of this site-visit is to clarify aspects of the social service provider and to ensure that the evidence presented correspond to the real on-site situation. If the site visit confirms a score of 65 points or more the applicant is nominated for the EQUASS Excellence certification.

An international Awarding Committee moderates the certification procedure and awards the EQUASS Excellence certification. Any social service provider that can demonstrate tangible achievements, three years of trends and continuous improvement on all ten principles is *awarded for a three-year period*.

By applying for the EQUASS Excellence certification, all applicants demonstrate their aspiration to a *role model status in the social sector*. The results of the certified organisations are published on the EQUASS website in order to facilitate benchmarking and bench learning.

2. Who can apply for EQUASS Excellence?

- To apply for an EQUASS Excellence 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

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 for you is to *send us your registration form*.

The registration form for EQUASS Excellence can be downloaded on the main page for EQUASS Excellence on 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 located on multiple sites or on 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 of staff working at the organisation. This is why we are interested in knowing if the number of full time staff equivalents (FTE) 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 Excellence self-evaluation report format
- The EQUASS Excellence application form
- The EQUASS Excellence procedures
- The EQUASS Excellence core principles and criteria.
- The EQUASS Excellence "Quick Scan"
- An additional information form

5. How much does an EQUASS Excellence audit cost?

Our basic price for a single-site audit application is 8.775€ (excl. VAT). That would include 8.5 working days total from two auditors; their international and local travel 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.

- Additional audit days required due to staff size:
251 – 500 FTE staff → 1 extra day (3 audit days in total)
More than 500 FTE → 2 extra days (4 audit days in total)
- Additional audit days required due to the number of additional sites:

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

Sites to be visited are picked at random by auditor. All sites included in in application fail if one visited site fails. In any case, the maximum number of days for an audit is 5. The maximum number of separate sites to be audited under one application is 10.

Extra audit days are charged at 1.600 € per day (excl. VAT). Each additional audit day includes the work of a team of 2 Excellence auditors (hence 2 work days), the local travel costs and one additional night accommodation per auditor, if applicable.

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 Equivalents

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 Excellence standard in your organisation. *The "Quick-Scan"* is there to help you assess internally how your organisation is doing in the implementation of EQUASS Excellence, 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 management 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.



What is next? Further steps

At this stage, you have received the full ***EQUASS Excellence 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

