The voluntary and community sector is complex and diverse and is affected by changing demands from funders and from those in whose interests it works. A significant amount of voluntary sector income comes either from Government sources (local and national) or charitable trusts. This funding makes organisations more formally accountable and they are more likely to have to prove that their performance is of a high quality and to adopt more ‘business like’ management. Voluntary organisations themselves also want to show that they are working to high standards and want to know how they can demonstrate the quality and consistency of the services they provide. Also the people who use voluntary organisations’ services also expect high standards and quality services.

What is a ‘quality assurance’ system?
There are many definitions of this but one of the simplest is: “A systematic approach to identifying and responding to the needs of your service users so that you can provide an appropriate service consistently and to agreed standards.” Some larger charities have developed their own internal quality systems, but smaller voluntary and community organisations are much more likely to adopt one of the ‘off the shelf’ versions which have been tried and tested, are recognised by funders and will be less time-consuming than trying to develop their own.

Why invest in quality?
- Focuses on what the organisation is doing
- Brings people together to identify areas for improvement
- Demonstrates the quality of services to funders
- Improves satisfaction of service users, staff and volunteers
- Improves effectiveness and efficiency
- Motivates people to make visible progress
- Acts as a dynamic tool for identifying where the potential problems are and empowers staff and volunteers to address them
- Sets improvement targets and priorities and monitors progress against them

Before you start
It is vital to plan very carefully before introducing a quality assurance system. It often seems like hard work but should reap many benefits for an organisation.
- Setting up a small quality working group to ensure that the process is more effective (and it shares the load!)
- Making sure everyone is involved – trustees, staff and volunteers. This is vital, even from the planning stage.
- Encourage openness and honesty in problem-solving
- Which system will best suit your needs
- Drawing up a plan and realistic timetable for working through the quality system you choose to implement
- Talk to other groups who are using quality systems
- Don’t treat it as a paper exercise – you are looking for real improvements
Which quality assurance system to choose?

There is a wide range of quality assurance systems available, from the very formal (eg Investors In People), where your organisation is usually scrutinised and assessed by an external consultant, to the more flexible ones based on self-assessment (eg PQASSO). Some organisations develop their own quality systems, either from scratch or by adapting one of the established off-the-shelf systems. The main systems are outlined below – with a brief description of each and contact details for further information.

**PQASSO (Practical Quality Assurance for Small Organisations)**
This is designed specifically for small to medium sized community and voluntary organisations. It is a self-assessment system where the organisation itself assesses its work and performance in 12 key areas. It is fairly easy to use and can be done at your own pace. The workbook costs £95 and a CD Rom to compliment the workbook costs a further £54.

*PQASSO contact:*
Charities Evaluation Services
4 Coldbath Square
London EC1R 5HL
Tel: 020 7713 5722
www.ces-vol.org.uk

**EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) Excellence Model**
This was designed specifically for the business sector but work has been undertaken to adapt it for voluntary and community sector use. It is demanding and uses external assessment which bumps up the costs.

*EFQM Excellence Model*
British Quality Foundation
32-34 Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2QX
Tel: 020 7654 5000
www.quality-foundation.co.uk

**Quality First**
This is designed specifically for small to medium sized organisations without any paid staff. It is cheap (£34 including postage and packing), easy to use and can be introduced at your own pace. Again it is self-assessment.

*Quality First*
Birmingham Voluntary Service Council
138 Digbeth
Birmingham B5 6DR
Tel: 0121 678 8888
www.bvsc.org

**ISO 9001**
This is a group of standards that aims to help organisations achieve customer satisfaction by focusing on 'how things are done'. External assessment is carried out by a certification body. Although the standard was originally oriented towards the manufacturing sector, it has been developed over time to encompass both product and service organisations across all three sectors. Currently there are few examples of usage within the voluntary and community sector. Like the Excellence model (EFQM), VCS awareness is high but take-up is low. Many VCS organisations, however, are now having to look at ISO 9001 in order to qualify for a local authority tender or to achieve preferred supplier status. ISO 9001 accreditation attracts the highest score on a PQQ (Pre-Qualification Questionnaire) or full tender submission and is the only externally verified and EU recognised quality system (Office for Government Commerce Guidance 2007)

To find out more: www.iso.org/iso/home.htm

**Customer First**
This framework is used by an increasing number of strategic and funding bodies to ensure that business support provision delivered under their programmes meets the needs of small and medium sized enterprises.

*Customer First*
Tel: 0845 226 0719
www.customerfirst.org
Investors in People
This scheme concentrates on managing and supporting staff to help achieve aims and does not look at all aspects of an organisation. Like any employer, VCS organisations rely on people to provide products and services. Therefore, the most important investment any organisation makes is in the people who work (or volunteer) for it. IiP thus focuses on key aspects of an organisation’s capabilities as a good employer. In particular it looks at:

- how an organisation develops and communicates its aims, values and goals to its staff and volunteers
- how the organisation caters for its staff and volunteers’ learning and development needs
- how staff and volunteers are valued and respected
- how well managers manage and support their staff and volunteers (including what competencies and skills managers should have according to their level of responsibility within the organisation).

The Investors in People Standard is based on three key principles:

- Plan – Developing strategies to improve the performance of the organisation
- Do – Taking action to improve the performance of the organisation
- Review – Evaluating the impact on the performance of the organisation.

Unless you can obtain funding for IiP, it can prove quite costly. Assessor costs are around £550+ per day. For a small organisation, assessment will normally require two days. For larger organisations the interviewing period may require two days or more. On the other hand most organisations report that the IiP process has been invaluable in sharpening up processes, focusing on staff and volunteer needs and creating a learning organisation.

Investors in People provides a wide range of online tools to help organisations work with the Standard. These tools are currently free to use and available for download or use online:
http://www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/standard/tools/pages/home.aspx

Investors in People UK
7-10 Chandos Street
London W1G 9DG
Tel: 020 7467 1900
www.investorsinpeople.co.uk

Investing in Volunteers
Investing in Volunteers is the UK quality standard for all organisations which involve volunteers in their work. The standard enables organisations to comprehensively review their volunteer management and also publicly demonstrates their commitment to volunteering.

The organisation managing the process in England is Volunteering England. For more information visit the Investing in Volunteers website:
www.iiv.investinginvolunteers.org.uk

Quality Mark
This is designed for organisations providing legal information and advice to the public and is free to those in receipt of public, local authority or charitable funding. There are three standards relating to information, general help and specialist help. The system is fairly easy to use but potentially time-consuming and involves external assessment.

Quality Mark
Legal Services Commission
85 Grays Inn Road
London WC1X 8TX
Tel: 020 7759 0000

Visible Communities
A set of operating standards for community associations and other charities providing space and facilities for community services and activities. The standards, which focus on both mission and quality, cover voice, independence, service delivery, innovation, partnership, local focus and volunteering.

Visible Communities
Community Matters
12-20 Baron Street
London N1 9LL
Tel: 020 7837 7887
www.visiblecommunities.org.uk

Matrix
The matrix Standard is the national quality standard for any organisation that delivers information, advice and/or guidance on learning and work.

Matrix
Tel: 01332 866902
www.matrixstandard.com

[Information based on briefing produced by Redcar and Cleveland Voluntary Development Agency]
Quality control and learning providers

Karen Rigg highlights the importance of quality control systems for providers of learning – for the learners, funders and the providers themselves

All learners have the right to receive a high quality learning experience and to be supported on their programmes in the best way possible, whatever level of learning they are undertaking and whoever their provider may be.

Funders of learning need to be able to justify the use of their money.

Equally, providers of learning owe a duty to themselves, their staff and their learners to deliver the best and highest quality services possible. This means that mechanisms to ensure high quality and continuous improvement are essential, to allow providers to develop and move on, but also to satisfy inspection regimes.

Providers need to decide which quality approach best suits their needs and those of their learners. A quality assurance policy sets out the organisation's values and intent. This can then be supported by an implementation plan that summarises their quality control and quality improvement systems and how these will be monitored and reviewed. It will also state how the chosen quality framework is managed and what contribution is expected from tutors and other staff.

Providers who receive Government-sourced funding are required to undertake a yearly self-assessment process to evidence their quality and continuous improvement strategies, and to produce a report for their local Learning and Skills Council and/or Jobcentre Plus.

The self-assessment process should evaluate provision using the five key questions of the Common Inspection Framework.

The Common Inspection Framework (CIF) is the statutory framework for inspection of education and training in England. It was developed by the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI), now superseded, and by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and is used to inspect quality of provision across the whole post-16 sector. The new Ofsted brings together the wide experience of four inspectorates to make a greater difference through its work for all young people and adult learners in the country. All education and training delivered under contract (or sub-contract) from Government sources falls under Ofsted and the CIF.

Providers should judge their performance and identify strengths and weaknesses. All judgements should be based on reliable evidence and lead to grades on a four-point scale, 1 being outstanding and 4 being unsatisfactory.

Additionally, a provider’s self-assessment report should consider the provider’s financial probity and also evaluate other, related aspects of the provision.

Providers that assure quality effectively set about the task with commitment and honesty. They aim to achieve consistently high standards in every activity in which they are engaged, and at all stages – from the learner's first contact with the provider to the completion of their learning programme.

Quality control systems and processes check and monitor the provision and its impact on learners and other stakeholders. This in turn provides the evidence that providers need in order to obtain continued funding for their provision and establish their benefit and worth in the increasingly competitive learning market.

Sources:
www.ofsted.gov.uk
www.niace.org.uk
www.qualityacl.org.uk

Karen Rigg, Training Development Manager,
GMCVO
Tel: 0161 277 1017. E-mail:
karen.rigg@gmcvo.org.uk

Demystifying Quality

GMCVO’s Health Partnership officer, Neil Walbran, prepares for a ‘quality’ conference on quality and health service provision

Things are really starting to move with the Health Partnership now and October will see its second major event within six months.

I'm organising a conference called Demystifying Quality and I am hoping that we can reach some sort of resolution across Greater Manchester about
what the acceptable quality assurance system should be for the third sector. This comes about after a circular discussion at one of the Health Partnership Advisory Group meetings where someone asked the question: “Which quality mark should we be telling our groups to go for?” Twenty minutes later we still had no answer. Some people argued that we should promote ISO9000/9001 as it is internationally recognised, others said the cost (at £1,000 a shot plus £250 pa maintenance) would out-price most smaller organisations – and then you have to think about the resources required to go through the ISO system in terms of staff hours. So what about a cheaper alternative such as PQASSO? But does PQASSO have as much weighting as ISO seeing as it’s not internationally recognised? Should we be trying to influence commissioners to change their weighting? What about if we need to form consortiums and we’ve acquired two or more different quality assurance systems? How will we bid for a tender then? Can they be aligned? So we finally agreed to hold a conference where we could try and nail this down and get some common agreement. The conference will feature speakers from Stockport PCT and acquA – a quality assurance system developed by the Herefordshire Alliance tailored to the third sector’s needs – as well as workshops on the various issues surrounding quality and health service provision. The day will end with – I hope – a heated debate on whether we should introduce our own quality assurance system for Greater Manchester and if so – what form it might take.

Demystifying Quality will be held on 23rd October at GMCVO. If you wish to book, contact Beth Sharratt at GMCVO on 0161 277 1029 or beth.sharratt@gmcvo.org.uk.

Standards for infrastructure organisations

The National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) has developed a set of Performance Standards and an assessment process that can be used to help local infrastructure organisations – such as CVSs – to review and improve the effectiveness of their core activity

Performance Standards
Following consultation with its members, NAVCA developed five Performance Standards, which cover the five core functions of local infrastructure organisations. Feedback on the Standards has been positive in terms of their content, level and the way they are presented. For each of the five Standards, there is a statement, a series of outcomes, a set of minimum outputs, and some suggested additional outputs.

NAVCA Quality Award
The NAVCA Quality Award is assessed against the NAVCA Performance Standards. It offers a rigorous, externally-audited, NAVCA-accredited award that evaluates the quality of services offered by local infrastructure organisations. A local infrastructure organisation will undergo a rigorous assessment process to test that it is indeed delivering quality services to the local third sector.

● First, there will be a self-assessment against the indicators that measure delivery of the outputs and outcomes that make up the Performance Standards
● then there will be a visit from a NAVCA-accredited auditor to check the evidence submitted
● finally, if successful, the NAVCA Quality Award is issued.

Funding bodies and peer organisations may be contacted for their opinion of the organisation as part of the audit process.

Benefits of the Quality Award?
Achieving the NAVCA Quality Award will give local infrastructure organisations a compelling means of demonstrating that they deliver high quality services to the local third sector. It will also provide evidence of the organisation’s role in helping the local authority to achieve the key performance indicators against which it is measured, eg some key Local Area Agreement indicators.

The Performance Standards, on which the NAVCA Quality Award is based, have been mapped against several quality frameworks including PQASSO, Matrix and Community Legal Services’ Quality Mark. Achieving the NAVCA Quality Award will furnish local infrastructure organisations with the evidence they need for these and other systems.
Social audit

The process of social audit and accounting can also help a voluntary organisation to prove its value and improve its performance and quality of services

Another approach that touches on quality standards is social audit and accounting. Most VCS organisations and social enterprises have social, environmental and economic objectives that they seek to fulfil while remaining financially sustainable. Social accounting and audit is a holistic and regular process of examining performance and impact, and which involves the organisation’s stakeholders. It is flexible and can be used with other tools, and has the added benefit of external verification. However, it can be quite time-consuming to plan and set up for the first time, and the cost of external audit must be considered. The social accounting and audit process, which consists of three steps preceded by a ‘getting ready’ stage, is based on six underpinning principles:

- **Multi-perspective**: it should engage with and reflect the opinions of a wide variety of people (key stakeholders) affected by – and able to affect – the organisation.
- **Comprehensive**: it should cover all the activities of the organisation.
- **Comparative**: the organisation should be able to compare its performance over time and also against similar organisations.
- **Regular**: it should be undertaken regularly rather than as a one-off exercise and become embedded in the running of the organisation.
- **Verified**: the social accounts should be checked (audited) by an independent social audit panel, chaired by an approved social auditor.
- **Disclosed**: the findings of the audited social accounts should be widely circulated and discussed.

Based on findings from the three-step process (planning, accounting and reporting/audit), the organisation can:

- Review its objectives and see if they are still appropriate.
- Consider what other things it might do.
- Set new targets for the next year.
- Review the information it is collecting to ensure it is still relevant and useful.
- See if and how the stakeholders are benefiting from it.
- Engage in dialogue with stakeholders over issues raised.
- Make sure that organisation can justify its existence.

Social accounting and audit in the third sector in the UK is overseen by the Social Audit Network, which provides assistance, quality standards and external audit/verification.

**Contact:** SAN, c/o CEU Ltd, 69a Sidwell Street, Exeter, Devon EX4 6PH.
**Tel:** 01392 666281. **E-mail:** info@socialauditnetwork.org.uk **www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk**

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Introducing a quality culture

It may be tempting to take some action to improve things in your organisation and then stop, because other things seem to be more important, or simply because day-to-day tasks take up the time.

But quality assurance means that concerns for quality should not be seen as separate to, or added to, your routine work. They should be included in everyday activities and become an integral part of your planning, your management, the way you do things, and the services you provide for your users.

To build quality into your organisation effectively, here are some things to consider:

- Build quality into the agenda of all internal meetings, including meetings of the Board.
- Make sure you address quality in all grant applications and contract bids.
- Include quality in all project proposals.
- Make sure job descriptions are clear about quality and that quality is discussed during induction for trustees, staff and volunteers.
- Discuss quality in staff and volunteer supervisions and appraisals.
- Write about quality in the annual report and put it on the AGM agenda.

Don’t be afraid to make small-scale improvements. You may find it helpful to look at the way other organisations are doing things. Benchmarking means deciding on a particular activity in your organisation that you want to improve. You then find a part of your organisation or another organisation that is very good at that activity and try to learn from them.

[from First Steps in Quality, Charities Evaluation Services, 2002]
Quality counts in Salford

A project to support local voluntary organisations in Salford achieve quality standards in the delivery of their services is described by Sarah Bawden

There has been a significant increase in the interest in quality and quality assurance systems across the voluntary and community sector. The introduction of ‘Best Value’, a questioning public and funders who request value for money have all contributed greatly to the pressure of organisations to demonstrate the quality of their work.

Salford Council for Voluntary Service has been interested in developing quality standards since 2004 because of their use in verifying and managing programmes commissioned by the statutory sector alongside the opportunity they provide for building the capacity of the sector.

The Salford CVS Quality Counts project is a five year project, which will support voluntary and community organisations to achieve measurable standards of delivery. Voluntary and community organisations will be able to apply for one-to-one consultancy support in implementing a quality assurance system through the Quality Counts Development Worker at Salford CVS.

Alongside consultancy support, the Quality Counts Development Worker will publicise and promote the use of quality systems among voluntary and community organisations in Salford and also with statutory partners. Interactive tools and learning materials will be developed to provide groups with information and resources about quality standards.

An event has been organised in October to launch the Quality Counts project and highlight the beneficial impacts this project will have for the third sector in Salford. Salford CVS Approved Providers Register, supported by the local primary care trust (PCT), will also be launched at this event. The Register will provide a list of local organisations that have demonstrated they are fit for purpose and provide commissioners with a pool of local voluntary and community organisations from which to procure services. Any health and social care organisation that meets the application requirements or completes the Quality Counts project process will be able to apply to be added to the list.

It is an opportune time to improve and embed quality systems and practice within Salford’s third sector as the sector moves away from grant-based funding towards commissioning. The Quality Counts project will provide an opportunity for organisations to evidence the quality of their service delivery and have this recognised on the Approved Providers Register.

Stephanie Mitchell, Chief Officer at Salford CVS, said: “For many voluntary and community organisations, future funding will come from contracts with our local statutory partners, Salford City Council and Salford PCT. The Quality Counts programme will help to ensure that those groups who want to provide contracted services are able to prove the quality and value of their work in order to develop and deliver services that meet the needs of Salford people.

Janice Lowndes, Assistant Director of Health Improvement at Salford PCT, added: “Salford Primary Care Trust is pleased to have been involved in the development of the SHIPP Project. The Approved Providers Register, established through the project, will be a valuable resource to support the Trust in procuring services from the third sector. This is an exciting opportunity for Salford.”

Contact: Sarah Bawden, Quality Counts Development Worker, Salford CVS. Tel: 0161 787 7795. E-mail: sarah.bawden@salfordcvs.co.uk
Quality research

A comprehensive study into the use of quality systems in the voluntary and community sector was carried out a few years ago by the Centre for Voluntary Action Research at Aston Business School. The study provided independent and reliable evidence on the use of quality systems in the sector for the first time.

The report of the study demonstrated that the introduction of a quality system can offer opportunities for organisational growth, staff development and improved effectiveness, as well as enhancing external legitimacy. Quality systems can also offer a valuable framework for addressing service improvements.

The study showed that the introduction of a quality system can have the following benefits:
- Improved efficiency
- Organisational growth
- Increased effectiveness
- Staff development
- Legitimacy with external stakeholders

The study suggested that some of the key ingredients for successful implementation of a quality system are:
- Implementation plan and structure
- Stakeholder involvement
- Leadership and a ‘quality champion’
- Integration with other processes
- Resources
- The process of introduction

The study also discusses perceptions of quality within the sector, the different models of systems used and system selection.

Four publications, based on the findings of the study were produced:

The Adoption and Use of Quality Systems in the Voluntary Sector: Research Report
This report aimed at voluntary sector leaders, quality managers, funders, purchasers and policy makers, sets out the findings of the study.
A summary of the report can be downloaded from:

The Adoption and Use of Quality Systems in the Voluntary Sector: Literature Review,
This literature review analyses the main drivers towards implementing quality, clarifies terminology and provides an overview of the main quality systems in the voluntary sector. £10

The Adoption and Use of Quality Systems in the Voluntary Sector: A Briefing for Funders
This briefing for funders highlights key issues for funders and purchasers in relation to the experience of voluntary and community organisations using quality systems. Free

Getting Ready for Quality - learning from experience
A practical tool to guide voluntary sector leaders, staff, volunteers, umbrella bodies and local development agencies through the ‘quality journey’. £15

With the exception of the first report, these publications are available from NCVO.
To order, or for further details, contact the NCVO Helpdesk, on 0800 2 798 798 or http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/publications/