



Finding the right quality system for social enterprise

One of the key aspects of demonstrating that your social enterprise is fit for purpose is to implement a quality system. Not only is having a quality system often a compulsory requirement when tendering for public sector contracts, but it is a way of improving how efficiently your social enterprise operates.

There are a range of quality systems and organisational standards that broadly look at internal processes of your organisation i.e. communications, clients, customer journeys and delivery. However, each quality standard will focus on a specific area. You may need to use a professional consultant to implement specific quality systems. However, you can start by putting into practice some of the systems to save costs and prepare you for full implementation.

Why do you need a Quality System?

A quality system provides a number of benefits.

For funding bodies:

- A means of evidencing for funding organisations
- Proving you meet the needs of beneficiaries

For commissioners:

- A means of evidencing for commissioners
- Proving you meet the needs of customers

For your enterprise:

- Increases your ability to win contracts from the public sector. The majority of public sector organisations will require a quality system or evidence that you are working towards implementing a quality system. Some may be specific about which quality system they require.
- Improves customer loyalty
- Improves systems and generates efficiencies leading to synergy in working
- Improves staff morale
- Reduces costs and increases profitability

Examples of Quality Standards

- 1) Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations (PQASSO)

When this system is usually applied: first step quality assurance system that social enterprises can use as a springboard into other higher level quality systems.

For: Small third sector organisations (community groups, social enterprises, voluntary groups and charities).

Assessment: Self-assessment or accreditation. It is a comprehensive 12 part system.

Length of process: From a minimum of two months. This is dependent on whether all 12 parts are selected to be covered. There are three levels with assessment at the end of each level.

The benefit of this system is that it is a first step simple system which can be used as a foundation for higher level systems.

2) Customer First

When this system is usually applied:

- Commissioner or contract provider requirement
- Building customer relationships
- Maximising market awareness

For: any organisation providing services. This system focuses on the customer journey and the processes a client undertakes with a comprehensive assessment of how you treat your customer.

Assessment: Externally assessed.

Length of process: Minimum of six months with reassessment every two years.

The benefit of this system is that it shows how you put the customer first which can attract more customers. The Customer First kite mark represents a high level of customer care.

3) Investors in People (IIP)

When this system is usually applied:

- Stage up from PQASSO
- Seeking a recognised accreditation system
- To improve internal processes

For: Any organisation wishing to develop its internal processes and relationships between people within the organisation.

Assessment: External assessment. This is a flexible system as you can chose the priority areas fro development.

Length of process: Minimum six months with reassessment every three years.

The benefit of this system is that it helps develop relationships between those working in the enterprise leading to improved ways of working.

4) Matrix

When this system is usually applied:

Commissioner or contract provider requirement.

For: This system is specifically for service organisations delivering information, advice and /or guidance on learning and work. It is relevant to social enterprises that provide:

- Adult and community learning
- Work-based learning
- Careers advice

Assessment: This is externally assessed focusing on the client journey during and after using your service.

Length of process: Minimum of six months

The benefit of this system is that it shows your commitment to customers after the customer has moved on.

5) Customer Service Excellence

When this system is usually applied

- Government backed initiative to improve public sector customer service
- Commissioner and contract provider requirement

For: Public service organisations and potentially sub-contractors of public service organisations.

Assessment: Self-assessment online tool leading to external assessment. There are five key areas:

- Customer insight
- Culture
- Information and access
- Delivery
- Timeliness and quality of service

Length of process: Flexible

The benefit of this system is that it is the standard system for public sector organisations.

6) International Organisational standards ISO 9000

This is a family of ISOs that range from 9001 – 2000 representing an international consensus on good quality management practices.

When this system is usually applied

- Seeking advantage through implementation of a quality system

- Improve resource management
- Improve process management
- Continuous improvement
- Commissioner and contract provider requirement

For: Any organisation

Assessment: Externally assessed

Length of process: A minimum of 12 months with reassessment every 12 months including 6 monthly sub-assessments.

The benefit of having this system is that it is internationally recognised.

7) Care Quality Commission (CQC)

This standard is a hybrid of a quality system and legislation.

When this system is usually applied:

- Mandatory legal requirement for all organisations providing health and adult social care services.
- Inspection not assessment.

For: Health and adult social care providers. The new CQC regulates health care in addition to social care.

Assessment: Initial inspection of the premises, all aspects of service delivery and the registered manager of the business. The registered manager will have health records and bank account assessed in addition to undertaking an interview.

There is one set of core standards with individual standards for different service provisions for example domiciliary care, nursing care and residential.

External assessment every 12 months.

Length of process: Must be achieved before service provision commences.

The benefit of having this standard is that it shows your enterprise is compliant with legislation and has the equivalent standard to the Primary Care Trusts and GPs.

Advantages and Disadvantages of each System

Standard	Advantages	Disadvantages
PQASSO	Cheap Self assessment	Not as recognised Third sector focus
Customer First	Customer driven External focus	Costly / time consuming Two years longevity
liP	Staff morale Recognised	Costly / time consuming Maximum three years longevity
Matrix	Well known Good focus	No costs indication Max three years longevity

Customer Service Excellence	Free on-line assessment tool Easy self assessment	No costs available Very basic system
ISO	Competitive advantage Increased profitability	Significantly expensive Significant time and administration required
CQC	Everything you need Easy to follow	Costly Time consuming

Top Tips

- Talk to other organisations
- Embed the system with new employees
- Get the support of your board and senior management team
- Look upon it as a benefit
- Create a working group
- SMART objectives (these are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound)
- Do not assume that funding organisations / commissioners are looking for the top level of any system – talk to them about their requirements.
- Consider the cost
- Look at the long term benefits to the business.

Where to go for further help

www.ces-vol.org.uk

www.customerfirst.org

www.investorsinpeople.co.uk

www.matrixstandard.com

<http://www.customerserviceexcellence.uk.com/>

www.iso.org

www.cqc.org.uk

www.gov.uk