

Procedures for nomination and involvement of EQUASS auditors

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I. Background and rationale

The current procedure for nomination and involvement of EQUASS auditors was designed in the context of the growth of EQUASS in the years 2010-2011 and in response to the issues that arose when the volume of audits reached several hundred audits in a year.

The quality and performance of auditors are the most critical success factor for any quality system. This is certainly the case for a system as EQUASS where the auditors have a major impact on the decision to award an applying organisation with EQUASS certification, and where the role of auditors is not restricted to simple 'inspectors', but also advisors for continuous improvement.

Professional behaviour, sound auditing and communication skills as well as an in-depth awareness of impartiality and confidentiality are important general assets for every auditor. A correct interpretation of the criteria and indicators, a real understanding of the sector, and a feeling for the logic of the EQUASS approach are of particular importance for EQUASS auditors.

The current process has been designed to ensure not only that new auditors coming into the system are sufficiently qualified and have practical understanding of auditing in the social sector, but also to ensure that existing EQUASS auditors have a continuous practice and up-to-date knowledge of the EQUASS system and procedures.

II. Main principles

- Only auditors that are trained and evaluated by the EQUASS Unit and nominated by the European Awarding Committee are eligible to conduct audits for EQUASS Assurance and EQUASS Excellence. Such auditors can be involved by Local License Holders or by the EQUASS Unit (for direct certifications) to conduct audits.
- Only candidates that meet the criteria of a pre-defined auditor profile are allowed to enter the process of being trained as an EQUASS auditor.
- All auditors collect a number of credits (40) before they are eligible to conduct EQUASS Assurance
- Only EQUASS Assurance auditors that collect additional credits (32) are eligible to conduct EQUASS Excellence audits. .
- The nomination of an auditor is valid for three years. During this period, they have to gain again credits via calibration training and via conducting audits in order to ensure their knowledge and skills stay up-to-date, and an intermediary check by the EQUASS Unit is possible.

III. Auditor profile

Potential EQUASS auditors that apply to participate in a training for EQUASS auditors will be screened and preselected based on their CVs. They must dispose of the skills and experiences as listed below. In addition to a screening of CVs, those skills and experiences will be assessed during the auditor training.

Interpersonal skills

Ability to:

- Understand how others think and act
- Understand group processes
- Communicate effectively in written and spoken English
- Handle conflict constructively
- Give positive feedback
- Convey integrated concepts and opinions quickly
- The auditor should be able to understand what a conflict of interest is, and act upon it.

Operational skills

Ability to:

- Make a quick overview of complex situations and determine the underlying themes and issues
- Translate management concepts into specific situation
- Think in a 'process' way
- Take a high level overview
- Assess, in a well-balanced way, the scope and outcome of situations and facts

Knowledge and experience

- Broad knowledge and experience of (quality-) management¹
- A good record of achieving against objectives

Ability to contribute to a multi-cultural environment and meet tight time deadlines

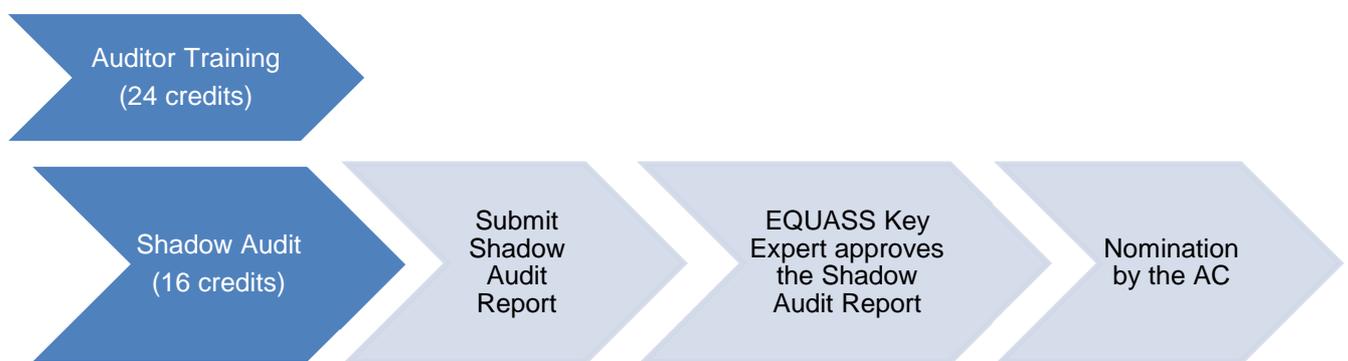
¹ **Desirable skills:**

- *Qualified for auditing organisation according to EFQM (or national equivalent) and/or ISO 9000 (or other relevant Quality Management Systems)*
- *Experience and understanding of the Social Services Sector*

IV. Training process to become EQUASS Assurance auditor

New auditors i.e. who have never practised EQUASS Assurance or Excellence audits, need to gain their 40 credits in two steps:

- 3 days auditor training (24 credits) organised by the EQUASS Unit
- 2 days shadow audit (16 credits).



- **Training programme**

The initial training lasts three days and will train the aspiring EQUASS Assurance auditors in the method of auditing to be followed through the whole EQUASS Assurance process. The training will contain: Summary of quality certifications, fundamentals of EQUASS system, case study, practical exercise of interviews, and benchmarking of the results.

- **Shadow audit**

Potential auditors will be invited to conduct a shadow audit together with an approved EQUASS auditor (Main auditor). The shadow auditor is an observer in the audit and does not intervene in the main auditor's work. The shadow audit should be arranged with the entity responsible for planning the audit (EQUASS in Brussels or the Local Licence Holder, if applicable), and the presence of an observer will be submitted for the approval of both the approval of the applicant organisation and the main auditor. The audit will be carried out in the language of the applicant.

The potential auditor should report his/her experiences of the shadow audit to the EQUASS Key-Expert. The shadow-audit report is a two-page document summarising the experiences and observations of the

shadow auditor. It should be signed by the main auditor, and constitutes the basis for an evaluation by the EQUASS Key Expert.

It is understood that both the EQUASS applicant and the main auditor should approve the presence of the shadow auditor.

Note:

Aspiring auditors who have attended the initial training(s) and do not have the opportunity to participate in a local shadow audit may contact the EQUASS Secretariat (equass@equass.be) and claim for an alternative 16-credit recognition so the shadow audit requirement be fulfilled. The EQUASS Awarding Committee, based on recommendations of the EQUASS Key Expert, can take the decision to nominate an candidate auditor without shadow audit in case of proven experience (based on CV and additional evidence, such as a report and/or references) in one of the following domains:

1. External auditing in quality management systems (e.g. ISO – EFQM and/or national equivalent) and/or
2. External EU project evaluation in the social sector
3. Academic research on performance in the social sector

V. Training process to become EQUASS Excellence auditor

EQUASS Assurance auditors can also become EQUASS Excellence auditors if they follow an additional 3 days EQUASS Excellence auditor training (32 credits) For new auditors in EQUASS Excellence, the steps to collect the additional credits are as follows:



The initial training lasts three days and will train the aspiring EQUASS Assurance auditors in the method of auditing to be followed through the whole EQUASS Excellence certification process. The training covers a summary of quality certifications, the fundamentals of the EQUASS Excellence system, a case study, calibration of performance, preparing the site visit, reporting the audit and the benchmarking of the results.

VI. Calibration of EQUASS Assurance auditors

In order to maintain the nomination as EQUASS Assurance auditor, the individual should again gain 40 credits via the following actions but at least 8 of these credits should come from calibration training during that three years period². Credits can be gained by:

- Performing an EQUASS Assurance audit (16 credits)
- Performing a shadow audit EQUASS Assurance (16 credits)
- Participating in an EQUASS Assurance auditor calibration session (8 credits)
- Take again part in an initial EQUASS Assurance auditor training (24 credits)

The one-day EQUASS Assurance auditor calibration session corresponds to the content of the first day of an EQUASS Assurance initial training. The topics covered are: Introduction to the European Quality Frameworks and various quality management concepts, the overview of the EQUASS Assurance certification programme, and a review of the EQUASS Assurance Key performance indicators, as well as major changes of the EQUASS Assurance system, if applicable.

² The Awarding Committee may decide to overrule the system in exceptional cases.

VII. Calibration of EQUASS Excellence auditors

EQUASS Excellence auditors will be appointed for a period of three years. They have to gain an additional 32 credits during those three years via the following actions but at least 8 of these credits should come from calibration training during that three years period:

- Performing an EQUASS Excellence audit (32 to 36 credits)
- Performing a shadow audit EQUASS Excellence (8 credits per audit day)
- Participating in an EQUASS Excellence auditor calibration session (8 credits)
- Take again part in an initial EQUASS Excellence auditor training (32 credits)

The one-day EQUASS Excellence auditor calibration session corresponds to the content of the first day of an EQUASS Excellence initial training. The topics covered are: Introduction to the European Quality Frameworks for SSGI, the EQUASS approach on quality, the overview of the EQUASS Excellence certification programme and system and any major changes, if applicable, and a review of the EQUASS Excellence Key performance indicators, as well as a case study.

Note:

When an auditor has successfully collected the necessary number of credits in a three year period, all the extra credits collected after that cannot be transferred to the next 3-year period. Once the nomination has been formalised the Awarding Committee, the counter is re-set to 0.

VIII. Overview of various actions to obtain credits

Action	Duration (including preparation work)	Credits
Initial Assurance auditor Training	3 days	24
Calibration Assurance auditor Training	1 day	8
Calibration Assurance auditor Training	3 days	24
Performing a shadow audit in Assurance	2 days	16
Performing an Assurance audit	2 days	16
Extra Assurance audit days (if applicable / multi-site)	Per day	8
Initial Excellence auditor Training	3+1 ³ days	32
Calibration Excellence auditor Training	1 day	8
Calibration Excellence auditor Training	3+1 days ⁴	32
Performing an Excellence audit as co-auditor	4 days	32
Performing an Excellence audit as lead auditor	4,5 days	36
Extra Excellence audit days, if applicable / multi-site)	Per day	8

Note:

The number of credits allocated to each action relates to the time spent in the learning, preparing and practicing of the EQUASS quality mark system

³ Including Preparation work assigned to the trainee

⁴ idem

IX. Introduction and implementation of the nomination procedures

The auditor nomination procedures in this document were approved by the European Awarding Committee on 20/10/2011 and 09/05/2012, and apply to all nominations and re-nomination decisions taking place from 01/01/2012 onwards.

Existing EQUASS auditors benefit from a transition period 01/01/2012 to 31/12/2012 during which they can still conduct audits even when they don't meet the requirements as set out in this paper. They will however be invited to regularise their situation as soon as possible. All auditors who do not meet the requirements as stipulated in this document by the end of 2012 must be informed and will be (temporary) excluded for future audits as of 01/01/2013 until they meet the requirements

Note:

For all potential and existing auditors, the actions performed during the period 1/1/2009 to 31/12/2011 are accounted for retro-actively, and transformed into credits.

Misconduct:

Auditors who have acquired the necessary credits may be temporarily or permanently excluded from nomination, or performing audits, by a quorum vote decision of the Awarding committee, if

- They do not abide by the Code of Ethics,
- They do not respect or follow the audit processes and procedures
- Their attitude at the audit damaged the reputation of the system

Such a decision must be made by the Awarding Committee, based on the evidence collected in the course of the investigation of a formal complaint. Hearsay and informal complaints do not apply.

Brussels, May 2012

Annex 1: Glossary

EQUASS Applicant: Organisation in the process of an EQUASS certification audit.

Potential / aspiring EQUASS Assurance auditor: Auditor in training, who had not accumulated the sufficient number of credits to be nominated as EQUASS auditor in one or both of the quality marks.

(Main) EQUASS auditor: Experienced auditor whose audit report will be the basis for the evaluation of the Applicant's compliance to the EQUASS standards for quality. In a situation of shadow audit, the main auditor refers to the experienced auditor whose work will be the basis for the decision or refusal of the award, as opposed to the shadow auditor acting as an observer. Reports to the EQUASS Key Expert.

EQUASS Unit / Secretariat: Based in Brussels; consists of the EQUASS Manager, the EQUASS Coordinator, and the EQUASS Key Expert. The EQUASS Unit represents the owner of the EQUASS system, is in charge of the EQUASS system and standards application, management, dissemination, trainings, as well as the certification process in EQUASS Assurance in countries where there are no LLH.

Local License Holder (LLH): Organisation entrusted with the organisation and planning of EQUASS Assurance audits in a specific country. The licence Holder is not responsible for the decision on the award of the EQUASS Assurance mark to the applicant. Reports to the EQUASS Unit.