

Study on Service Provider's Implementation of Quality Approaches

Executive summary

In March 2021, the European Commission adopted the European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030. The new strategy comprises ambitious actions and flagship initiatives underlining the importance of people with disabilities having a good quality of life and being able to live independently on an equal basis with others. Among these initiatives, the Strategy set out the intention to develop a European Framework for Social Services of Excellence for Persons with Disabilities by 2024. The aim of this study was to provide an overview of how service providers are monitoring and ensuring quality in their day-to-day operations and to identify the most useful and valid approaches to measure quality.

What approaches were service providing organisations using to monitor quality?

- Two main overarching approaches to quality monitoring were identified: Internal Audit or Quality Assurance (QA) and External Evaluation and Validation. In many organisations consulted both were used.
- Methods used, often in combination, included surveys and interviews, self-assessment/evaluation, visits to services by senior managers, auditors and/or external evaluators.
- The most common approach used in all countries was self-evaluation against a set of agreed standards conducted by services managers, sometimes involving staff teams and people who received services.
- In general quality monitoring and review was not part of day-to-day practice but was conducted on an annual basis. However, in some countries (e.g., Ireland and the UK) managers were required to visit and check at least compliance with standards on a monthly basis.
- Outcomes such as the quality of life of people supported were rarely assessed other than in terms of health, safety, complaints and satisfaction with services.
- In general, the approaches and methodologies used by service providers had limitations in their usefulness for a detailed monitoring of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD)¹, often focusing only on certain human rights such as freedom from harm.
- Overall, the attention of monitoring and service improvement was related to ensuring that services were not “bad” rather than on what is going well or how “good” services are.
- Responses to issues of quality or lack of compliance was usually in the form of an action plan to rectify those issues. Rarely was good practice and positive outcomes formally recognised.

¹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, December 13, 2006, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/crpd/pages/conventionrightspersonswithdisabilities.aspx>

What approaches and methods were viewed by providers and stakeholders as useful and feasible going forward.

- Using a quality-of-life framework to review outcomes using any method (e.g., as part of daily recording, surveys, or observations) was seen as useful and a potentially reliable measure of outcomes and quality. However, feasibility was rated lower due to the apparent complexity and a general lack of awareness of the Quality-of-Life Framework.
- Indicators and methods that involved observations in practice, in particular structured observations, were seen as less feasible, although recognised as useful.
- Qualitative methods of collecting information were preferred although surveys were acknowledged as easier to use to collect the views and experiences of people supported, families and staff.
- Reviewing individual person-centred, or individuals plans and reviewing staff training and the support they receive were rated as very useful and feasible.
- To use daily recording as a source of data on quality, the focus of these and the way used to record information need to be changed so that individuals supported are involved and recording does not take time away from direct support.
- Structures such as team meetings, supervision and person-centred planning meetings were seen as useful venues to review and focus on quality improvement, although were hard to organise in some settings.
 - Senior manager interest in evaluation and presence in services was noted as important to ensuring quality; visits by senior managers and/or a quality assurance team to observe practice were rated as less useful and less feasible.
 - Internal audit processes were noted as needing to be properly resourced and part of the organisational culture.
 - External evaluation was seen as useful, especially if it involved Experts by Experience. However, these were not without challenges and attention needs to be paid to ensuring that quality is not reduced to simple “ticking forms”.

Conclusions and recommendations

- The approach to monitoring quality should be a multi-element and a multi-methods approach to ensure that the experience and views of people supported are captured and a holistic view of service quality is obtained.
- Everyday practices and processes such as daily recording, team meetings, supervision and manager visits can be streamlined with audit processes. This allows services to gather data and review service quality on an ongoing basis and encourages continual improvement.
- The focus of any quality monitoring approach should be primarily on quality-of-life outcomes at both service provider and quality inspectorate levels. This will need to be supported and incentivised by the European Commission but would allow elucidation of how well the UN CRPD² is being implemented.

² United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

- Observations are recommended for a valid picture of service quality. This requires managers to be present in services and is particularly important when those receiving services are not able to respond to surveys or interviews.
- Quality monitoring should also include the availability and quality of staff training, supervision, and support.
- Time and structures for reflection and quality improvement are essential. Any information gathered must be reviewed and used to improve services.

EASPD is the European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities. We are a European not-for-profit organisation representing over 20,000 social services and disability organisations across Europe. The main objective of EASPD is to promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities through effective and high-quality service systems.