

Title: Quality Assurance in Practice – The Scottish Mentoring Network’s Quality Award System

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Number of participants: 7

Sequence of content:

After an initial introduction round, Iain presented the Scottish Mentoring Network (SMN) and their quality award system. To think deeply about quality assurance, all participants were asked to allocate different quality measures to six main indicators of quality in two groups. Subsequently, they were able to discuss the different quality measures and check whether their own projects would fulfil them. Last but not least, Iain presented the online procedure to apply for their quality award, together with some successful projects.

The Scottish Mentoring Network and its Quality Award:

The Scottish Mentoring Network is incorporated as a company and charity in Scotland and connects different regional and thematic mentoring projects. Its purpose is to share good practice and also provide guidance, training and support for projects. Furthermore, they do strategic informing and influencing of policy.

To assure quality, they have developed a quality award covering six indicators of quality and a good practice guide. Once a project successfully applied for the award it runs for 5 years.

Benefits of receiving the quality award are further project recognition, promotion and development due to reflection and improvement of the project.

Six quality practice elements:

The six quality practice elements defined by the SMN are:

- 1) Matching Purpose with Performance
- 2) Managing resource and accountability
- 3) Putting the client first
- 4) Providing committed mentors
- 5) Employing skilled staff
- 6) Active safeguarding

Presenting the six quality practice elements in more detail:

- 1) In order to meet the first element projects have to be able to clearly describe why they have been set up and what mentoring service they are providing. Furthermore, they need to present defined targets and a structured internal and external evaluation. Last but not least, projects need to ensure regular stakeholder meetings.
- 2) A project has to show that it is able to manage resources and accountability by ensuring an appropriate financial budget and a strategy to secure funding. Moreover, it needs to inform the stakeholders about relevant issues and have appropriate management information systems in place.
- 3) To put the client first, mentoring projects should assess individual client’s needs, match them with an appropriate mentor and maintain regular contact with the client throughout the mentoring relationship.
- 4) For this, committed mentors are needed. Providing these mentors means clear guidance information, structural assessment and training of potential mentors. Further, regular reviews with the mentors help to evaluate progress.
- 5) Employing skilled staff is critical for every project. This involves clear recruitment criteria, a staff induction process, individual training and development and regular project reviews.

- 6) Most importantly, active safeguarding needs to be proven. To minimise risks, screenings of mentors and clients and risk assessments of activities have to be carried out. Personal safety guidance needs to be incorporated into mentor, staff and client preparation. Similarly important is an appropriate insurance cover and procedures to deal with emergencies.

All criteria need to be fully met in order to receive the quality award. If some criteria are not or just partly met yet, a network like the SMN can help by giving advice and supporting single projects.

Results of the Workshop:

Quality indicators are necessary to assure quality in practice. The six quality practice elements that were developed by the SMN can give an orientation for projects all over Europe. The European Union recently shows more and more interest in quality assurance in mentoring projects and so do funding agencies. The latter may use quality assurance measures to decide whether a project is eligible to get funded by them or not.

Three main statements highlighting the results of the discussion:

- Safety is often ensured first.
- Potential problems frequently occur on the funding level that cannot be assured for long-term.
- Mostly, everyone knows how important quality is. However, it is quite challenging to incorporate appropriate steps at all levels. It requires a lot of work and time from the staff.

One thing that was laughed about:

“Quality is always an issue – that’s why we are here”

References:

Presentation link: <https://prezi.com/view/IZy6qtkyLgGXAYMttwdb/>

Scottish Mentoring Network: <http://scottishmentoringnetwork.co.uk/>