

A definition of excellence for regulated adult social care services in England



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A report for the Care Quality Commission by the Social Care Institute for Excellence

“We are what we repeatedly do.
Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.”
Aristotle

Introduction

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) has commissioned the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) to define what an excellent adult social care service looks like. This definition will form part of the CQC's new quality information system for regulated adult care services in England. This report proposes a definition of excellence and the key elements that define an excellent service. CQC will use this report to help develop its new quality information system.

CQC's new quality information system

CQC has stopped awarding quality ratings to care providers, and is now designing a replacement system, to fit the requirements of the Health and Social Care Act 2008. The new system will provide publicly accessible information about the quality of registered services for people who use and commission them, to help them make choices and decisions. It should also motivate providers to improve the quality of care they offer. CQC aims to introduce the new system from May 2011, subject to consultation.

CQC's future information system will only cover those services for adults providing activities that it regulates, such as residential care, nursing homes, shared lives (adult placement schemes) and home care services.

CQC is proposing to place all 24,000 registered adult care services into one of three categories. These three categories are currently being developed but they will all relate to how well a service complies with essential standards. CQC will use information gathered from registration and ongoing monitoring of compliance with standards to decide which of these categories is most appropriate for each provider.

CQC is developing a separate assessment process to show which services are doing more than meeting essential standards. If a service provider wants to be considered for this assessment, it will need to be in the top level of the three essential categories. The service provider will then need to apply to be considered as excellent, with the definition set out below as the proposed benchmark.

SCIE's work to define excellence

The definition is based on extensive work by SCIE in partnership with CQC. It draws on an overview of selected research, and examples of quality frameworks and tools in social care and beyond. The definition has been informed by visits to services currently rated as 'excellent' by CQC, and by a series of interviews and online discussions. These have been with: people who use social care services; their carers,¹ family members and supporters; academics; providers of social care, individually and through trade associations; and commissioners of services. SCIE and CQC also held four engagement events around England in September 2010 to discuss these different

¹ By carers, we mean people who provide care for a relative, friend or neighbour in need of support on an unpaid basis.

perspectives, bringing together the views of people who use services, carers, providers and commissioners on a draft definition of excellence that had been prepared specifically for the events. The discussions brought richness and clarity to the work, which has helped to shape the definition which follows.

A fuller description of the engagement activities that have informed this work, and an overview of the relevant research base and some available quality tools, can be found in SCIE's scoping and engagement report which accompanies this definition.

Essential or excellent?

Many aspects of a social care service are fundamental to providing a *good enough* service. These include such things as safeguarding, health and safety, meeting people's cultural needs, and providing good quality accommodation and food. These are essential requirements, and central to the provision of social care, but because they are so fundamental, we have not included them in the definition of an excellent service. Only services that go beyond meeting CQC's essential standards - that go beyond the necessary - will be awarded an excellent rating.

A list of **CQC's essential standards** is available on the CQC website.

A definition of excellence

Excellence in social care is rooted in a whole-hearted commitment to human rights, and a continuous practical application of that commitment in the way that people who use services are supported. People who use services are demonstrably placed at the heart of everything that an excellent service does.

An excellent service:

- is totally committed to the rights of the people using that service and has a passionate desire to enable them to maximise their quality of life. This can be demonstrated throughout the organisation
- recognises that the people using the service should be able to make choices about their lives and the services they receive. They should exercise as much control as they wish over their lives and care
- accepts the responsibility that this choice and control places on the service to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the people they serve
- treats the people who use the service with the utmost respect and dignity as individuals. It gets to know them well enough to truly personalise support
- supports people to maintain and develop relationships in ways that suit them, to belong to communities that they choose, and to engage in roles, activities and pastimes that they enjoy and that benefit them
- ensures that these challenging goals are achieved and that achievements are sustained. This means that the service will be well-led, staffed by skilful people, and well-connected to its local community
- strives to achieve excellent outcomes for everyone regardless of their disability, age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, transgender status, religion or belief.

No service can meet these standards for all people all of the time. Most people who use social care live or engage, like other people, in group settings of one sort or another, and this limits choice and control. Nearly all users of social care services experience some degree of constraint due to limitations of resources in their broadest sense – staffing, money, time and so forth - and this is a context that will obviously shape the offer that services are able to make.

If a service focuses, however, on outcomes for the individual, and attempts at all times to enable that individual to achieve the *greatest possible* control over their own life, then the service will be doing an excellent job.

Elements of excellence

SCIE has focused on the things that people using services and others involved in providing and commissioning care, consider to be the most important aspects of an excellent social care service. We have identified four essential elements of excellence. Three of these are about improvements in people's lives as a result of using the service. These outcomes are:

- having choice and control over day-to-day and significant life decisions
- maintaining good relationships with family, partners, friends, staff and others
- spending time purposefully and enjoyably doing things that bring them pleasure and meaning.

The fourth element relates to the organisational and service factors which enable these outcomes to be achieved and sustained.

Addressing all the elements of excellence

The four elements interact with each other. They do not stand alone.

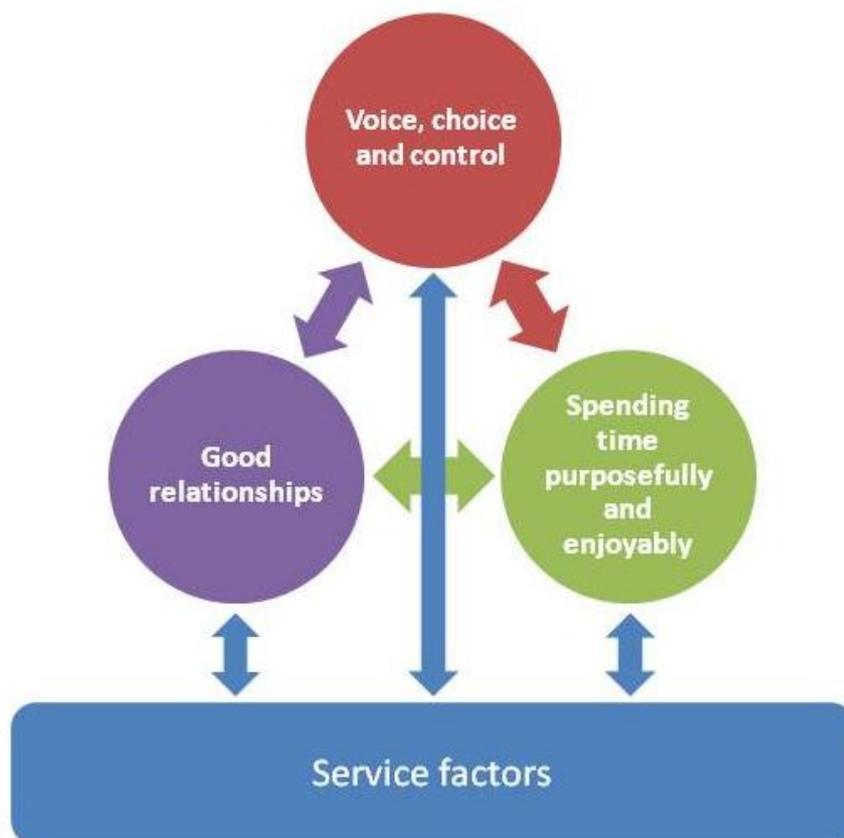
Without choice and control, a person cannot spend their time in ways they would wish. Nor can they develop relationships with people they would choose to spend time with. Without staff who really know a person, and understand their likes and dislikes, and who respect their right to make choices, that person cannot decide to see family or friends or do things of interest. For most people, at least part of what constitutes spending time agreeably is seeing people who are important to them.

It is unlikely that services will deliver excellence according to these three outcomes without being underpinned by a range of excellent organisational and service factors. An excellent service will have effective leaders and skilled staff. It will be a well-connected part of its community. It will use available evidence to ensure the effectiveness of the support it offers. It will also be able to demonstrate throughout the organisation a commitment to the rights of the people using that service, and a passionate desire to enable them to maximise their quality of life.

An excellent service, therefore, will be one that recognises the interplay between these four elements, and which addresses them simultaneously.

These four elements of an excellent service are expanded in the following sections. We have included some examples to show what excellence might look like. They are for illustrative purposes only.

Diagram 1 Inter-play between outcomes and organisational factors



Voice, choice and control

An excellent service recognises that people should be able to make choices about their lives and the services they receive, and to exercise as much control as they wish over their lives and care. An excellent service accepts the responsibility that this places on them to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the people they serve.

Choice and control is embedded in every aspect of an excellent service. The person using the service experiences the maximum possible choice and control in their relationships and the activities which the service carries out with them or on their behalf.

In an excellent service, people will have considerable control over big decisions about their life. People will have near-total control over day-to-day decisions, such as when and what to eat. They should also be able to play a key role, or simply have a say, in how services are run, especially in residential services, as that is their own home.

Control and choice over significant life decisions

In an excellent service, people are able to choose:

- with whom they live and associate
- who supports them
- when and how they are supported
- with whom they have personal relationships.

Examples of excellence

Existing residents of a service are involved in choosing a new tenant, so they can be confident they will enjoy sharing their home.

Even in the best services, however, such choices may be constrained. Many people, for example, enter a residential service in an emergency, without a chance to meet current residents first. Often, a domiciliary service will need to substitute a member of staff in a way that does not allow a person real control over who enters their home. In some services, notably units aiming to reduce drug and alcohol misuse, limiting control and choice is a valid part of the purpose of that service.

In these cases, an excellent service:

- listens to people's concerns about the constraints on their control and choice
- explains the reasons for the constraint of control and choice
- explores alternatives
- maximises areas where control and choice can be exercised by people.

It is an essential service standard that people are enabled to make decisions relating to their care. It is a mark of an excellent regulated service, however, that as many people as possible in a service have near-total control over the individual, day-to-day decisions that shape their support.

Control and choice over day-to-day decisions

In an excellent service, people have not just choice, but control over:

- who they go to see and who comes to see them
- when they go out, and what they do
- when they get up and go to bed, be they supported in an individual or group setting
- what and when they eat.

Example of excellence

A good service will give people a menu of options at meal times. In an excellent service, everyone who wishes to can choose what goes on the menu, and is involved in cooking the food. People then decide when they have their meals.

Role in how services are run

In an excellent service, people can choose to have a say about, or become involved in running of that service. If they do get involved:

- their views on designing, managing and delivering the service are sought and acted upon
- they get support to have their voices heard. This could be from family members or friends, advocacy services, or user-led or carer-led groups
- they have ready access to managers who listen to and act upon their concerns and those of their families, friends and supporters
- they are fully included and well-supported in the recruitment and training of staff
- staff give them feedback on how their input has changed things.

If people who use services are to have real control and choice, the service culture must enable staff to:

- help people to make well-informed decisions based on knowing the available options
- make every attempt to increase people's choice and control, by explaining their options and rights in any given situation
- support people to understand and make choices using the right communication skills, methods and tools for that person
- have an enabling attitude towards informed risk-taking, and confidently and appropriately make use of the Mental Capacity Act
- involve people who use services in providing information, support and assistance to others
- proactively use advocacy services to support people to have more choice and control
- consider the needs and choices of carers
- quickly resolve problems that develop if a carer and a person using the services disagree about the choices that person makes
- believe that everyone has the capacity to be consulted, and believe every aspect of a service is a fit topic for consultation.

Flexible and responsive

In order for choices to be real for people using services, an excellent service needs to be as flexible and responsive to people as it can be. For a residential setting, this may mean going out with someone when they ask to go out, supporting a resident to play cards, or doing the gardening, regardless of whether an activity timetable says it is time to do so. For a domiciliary service, it may mean adjusting rotas as promptly as possible to accommodate someone's request.

Good relationships

An excellent service proactively supports and respects the individual choices that a person makes about who they spend their time with. People decide who they see, how often they see them, and when they are alone.

In an excellent service, the staff relationships with people who use the service are based on respect and warmth. Staff and people who use the service and carers know each other well. Staff treat people with dignity. In turn, people who use services and carers trust the staff.

An excellent service treats the people who use it with the fullest respect and dignity as individuals. It gets to know them well enough to truly personalise the support that they are offered. That way, a service can support people to maintain and develop relationships in ways that suit them.

The utmost dignity and respect for the person using the service is embedded in every experience that the person has with the service, whether in the way care tasks are carried out or in the way the service is involved in any of the person's relationships.

Relationships with partners, family, friends and others

In an excellent service, people are supported to:

- develop and maintain full and meaningful relationships of their choosing with partners, friends, colleagues and family
- meet family and friends at times and places of their choosing.

Example of excellence

Residents have online access if and when they wish. They can develop and maintain relationships, for example by using webcams, Skype, or social networking.

Relationships with staff

In an excellent service, people:

- are treated with genuine dignity and respect at all times
- are supported with warmth, empathy and kindness
- are afforded their rights to make choices and have control over their own life
- have their needs and wishes as individuals respected
- are supported to manage and cope with the transitions and changes that the use of social care often signifies, such as a move to adulthood, a loss of independence or bereavement
- are supported as they near the end of life, with sensitivity to their wishes and emotions

Example of excellence

Staff take time to draw out choices on everyday matters from people with advanced dementia or severe disabilities. They use pictures, objects and the knowledge a service has about that person from working closely with them and their carers.

- trust the staff who support them. This is based on the staff's ability to manage the challenges of their job
- have every opportunity to communicate. Staff have the skills and willingness to maximise these opportunities. Staff believe that only a very small number of people cannot meaningfully communicate in any way. In such instances, people are supported to have their say by engaging people who know them best (e.g. family members, friends, advocates)
- are treated with respect. Staff get to know them well but they do not intrude on their privacy.

Carers, families and friends

In an excellent service, staff treat carers, families, friends and supporters with respect, dignity and warmth. The richness, depth and breadth of the knowledge they have about the people who use their service is recognised, valued and used by the service. The emotional and practical needs of carers, other significant people, and family members are recognised, and supported wherever possible.

Spending time purposefully and enjoyably

An excellent service supports and enables people to engage in activities, pastimes and roles which bring them pleasure and meaning and enhance their quality of life. This may include having a job, spending peaceful time alone or anything in between.

In an excellent service, people:

- are able to do things that they find enjoyable, meaningful and important. This may include employment, unpaid work, education, caring for others, caring for a pet, helping to run the service or leisure activities
- are able to take part in activities that promote physical, mental or emotional health and well-being
- can tackle new opportunities or regain skills and abilities
- can, in whatever way is suitable for them, communicate what they want to do. If someone finds it difficult to say what this is, staff will use other ways to find out what they enjoy and value
- make creative choices about the activities they want to do, and know that the service will be flexible in trying to meet their wishes
- are supported to be as independent as they wish. This may mean being helped to access an employment service or prepare a meal, or respecting someone's choice not to be active much of the time
- have online access if and when they wish, to enable them to develop and maintain their interests and social contacts
- can be involved in community life in the way that they wish. This could include going out to leisure facilities, places of worship, community organisations or having those aspects of the community brought into their home.

Example of excellence

An excellent service uses everyday activities such as preparing meals or setting the table as opportunities for people to be more engaged.

The role of domiciliary care

Domiciliary care (or home care) agencies may only see a person for one visit of an hour a week, or for a 15-minute, task-focused session every day. They may, therefore, have fewer opportunities to support people to engage in activities. An excellent domiciliary care service can, however, still achieve many of the outcomes listed above.

Example of excellence

A person who uses domiciliary care services enjoys classical music. The service changes visiting times during the Proms to allow them to watch it on television and shows them how to use the internet to listen to broadcasts they have missed.

They might also demonstrate excellence in this area by:

- learning what interests and motivates a person as they get to know them, and sharing this appropriately with people and agencies who can make use of the information, such as family members and social workers

- meeting requests to use visits differently, to enable enjoyable activities to take place. This might mean making a sandwich, and thus having the time to discuss the day's events with a person who uses the service, rather than a hot meal as specified on a care plan
- meeting occasional requests for a different visit time so people can do other things in the day.

Service and organisational factors

Service and organisational factors include the employees, values, policies, systems, and culture of an organisation and the individual services within it. All these factors affect how well the organisation runs and the service it delivers. They include how well the organisation uses its resources to sustain excellence. Every organisation and service, regardless of size, will have its own systems and culture.

These factors are key to ensuring that people who use services have positive outcomes on an ongoing basis. Elements such as good leadership and a drive for continuous improvement only contribute to excellence *if* they deliver excellent outcomes for people who use their services on a sustained basis and over a long period of time.

An excellent service is an enabling service that:

- supports people to achieve the outcomes they want by making links with other organisations. This will include other parts of health and social care, but also the wider community (e.g. faith groups, sports clubs, political organisations). The nature of the links will depend on the interests of the users of that service
- makes full use of all local resources (e.g. education and leisure services, employers or community groups)
- inspires its staff to have positive aspirations for everyone who uses their service
- supports its staff to get to know the people they work with and to develop good working relationships, by giving them the time and the skills to do so
- keeps its staff long enough to provide consistent care. Teams are sufficiently consistent to develop knowledge, trust and a rapport with the people they support
- demonstrates its passion for achieving excellent outcomes for the people who use its services. This heartfelt commitment is communicated by the leaders in an organisation, so that it becomes part of the organisation's culture and values and is not dependent on individual leaders or staff members.

Examples of excellence

An excellent service makes links with local volunteers to ensure people can take part in activities that they enjoy.

An excellent service is a responsive service that:

- works with people who use their services, carers and others, to find new ways of working and continuously improving. This may be through developing innovative ways of working, but may also include learning from other organisations, policy developments and research
- communicates effectively and honestly when problems arise, and acts upon complaints and comments promptly. It then uses those complaints and comments to improve the service
- reassures people that complaints will not have a negative effect on their reputation, relationship or service
- rigorously tests itself against quality assurance standards
- is transparent to users, carers, commissioners and others, and recognises its own mistakes as a valuable source of learning.

An excellent service is a developing service that:

- enhances the skills and knowledge of its staff, so that they remain motivated and engaged in achieving desirable outcomes for the people they support
- uses available evidence about what works in social care to improve the service it offers
- regularly reviews and develops its policies, procedures and values
- is led by people who take active responsibility for the sustained achievement of excellent outcomes for the people who use its services, by ensuring the effective interplay of the four elements defined here
- strives to achieve excellence for everyone, whatever their disability, their age, their ethnicity, gender, sexuality and transgender status, or religion or belief.

Examples of excellence

An excellent service involves people who use the service in research and evaluation. It also uses external knowledge such as the link between activity and mental wellbeing, or the role of service design in outcomes for people with autism or dementia.

Further information

See also **SCIE's scoping and engagement report**

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