

DISCUSSION PAPER
September 2010

Defining excellence in adult social care services

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social care
institute for excellence



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

Aristotle

1. Introduction

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) has commissioned the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) to define what an excellent adult social care service would look like. This definition will form part of the CQC’s new quality information system for adult care services that they regulate in England.

This document provides a draft definition of ‘excellence’ in social care services. It is not a full or final definition. SCIE is using it as a starting point for discussions at the series of engagement events that we are holding in September 2010. SCIE will update the definition based on these events and further discussions and research.

Delegates are asked to read this document **before** they come to the events.

2. CQC’s new quality information system

CQC has stopped awarding quality ratings, or star ratings, to care providers. CQC are now designing a replacement system. This will provide information about the quality of registered services for people who use and commission them, to help them make choices and decisions. CQC hope that it will also help to motivate providers to improve the quality of care. They aim to roll out of a new system from May 2011, subject to consultation.

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

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

A separate assessment is being developed to show if services are doing more than meeting essential standards. If a service provider wants to be considered for this assessment, they will need to be in the top level of the above three categories. They will then need to apply to be considered as excellent.

3. SCIE’s work to define ‘excellence’

SCIE is working with CQC to define what excellence means and what evidence a service will need to provide in order to show that they can be rated as ‘excellent’.

The definition will primarily be based on what people who use care services and carers say about excellence. We are also working with organisations that provide and commission care services to ensure that the definition of 'excellence' makes sense and can be used to support the new CQC information system.

Many aspects of a social care service are fundamental to providing a *good enough* service. These include safeguarding, health and safety, meeting people's cultural needs, and providing good quality accommodation and food. Because these are essential requirements, we have not included them in the definition of an excellent service. Only services that meeting CQC's essential standards can apply for an excellent rating.

4. Elements of an excellent service

SCIE has focused on the things that people using services consider to be the essential elements that make a service excellent. We are interested in how services can be excellent in delivering these aspects of care and support.

Our research so far indicates that there are four key elements that are essential to delivering excellent care. These are based on initial discussions and research, including the ASCOT tool developed by the Personal Social Services Research Unit.

SCIE's early research suggests that an excellent care service is one that:

- makes it possible for people to have control over big decisions about their life and the small day-to-day decisions. They should also be able to play a key role in how services are run
- supports and encourages people to have good relationships with their partners, families, friends, community and care staff
- enables people to do activities that they find important, enjoyable and meaningful
- has good systems and practices in place to ensure that people achieve the three outcomes above, on an ongoing basis.

The following section explains each of these elements in more detail and suggests how they could be demonstrated and measured.

4.1 Choice and control over decisions

Choice and control over life decisions

In an excellent service, people are able to choose:

- who they live with
- who supports them
- when and how they are supported
- what to wear, what to eat, when to get up and go to bed, and other things that affect their everyday life.

In an excellent service, staff:

- help people to make well-informed decisions
- make every attempt to increase people's choice and control
- support people to understand and make choices using adapted communication or special equipment
- support people to take risks, so long as they have the mental capacity to understand those risks
- respect and act on people's wishes and choices
- 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.

Some ways to find out how well a service is doing in these areas include:

- observation of how the service works
- surveys of people who use services and carers
- inspection by CQC
- the services' policies
- the services' complaints records
- care plans
- staff surveys
- user groups
- carer groups.

Role in how services are run

An excellent service:

- asks people who use their services and carers what they need and want
- takes these needs and wishes into consideration when designing, managing and delivering their services
- involves everyone in consultation activities and believes that everyone has the capacity to be involved
- considers everything to be a suitable topic for consultation
- supports systems that enable people to get involved (e.g. advocacy services, user-led or carer-led groups)
- ensures that managers listen and are accessible to people who use services and carers.

Some ways to find out how well a service is doing in these areas include:

- consultation activities
- evidence that changes have been made as a result of user and/or carer involvement
- involvement of people who use services
- complaints procedure

- staff surveys
- availability of managers to listen to people who use services and carers

4.2 Good relationships

Relationships with partners, family, friends and community

An excellent service enables people to:

- feel happy about their relationships and social life
- develop and keep full and meaningful relationships with partners, friends and family
- be involved in community life
- meet family and friends wherever and whenever they want to.

How well a service is doing can be shown through:

- observation of how the service works
- surveys of people who use services and carers
- inspection by CQC
- activity records that show what people did, including how they link with the community.

Relationships with staff

In an excellent service, staff:

- treat people who use services with dignity, respect and warmth
- promote the human rights of people who use services
- focus on people as individuals with different needs and wishes
- are sensitive to how people's lives might change when they use care services
- are trusted by people who use services and carers
- are positive and well-supported to manage the challenges of their job.

Some ways to find out how well a service is doing in these areas include:

- observation of how the service works
- surveys of people who use services and carers
- inspection by CQC
- complaints records.

4.3 Meaningful activity

An excellent service:

- enables people to do things that they find enjoyable, meaningful and important. This 'meaningful activity' may include formal employment, unpaid work, training, education, caring for others or leisure activities (*ASCOT, 2010*). It might involve helping to run the service, or activities that promote physical, mental or emotional health and well-being
- finds out what people want to do. If someone finds it difficult to say what they want to do, staff will use other ways to find out what they enjoy and value

- supports people to take part in activities within the services and/or in the wider community
- is creative and flexible about the kind of activities people want to do, and is led by the user's wishes and needs
- supports people to be independent and make decisions about their day to day life (eg what to eat, what to wear, when to get up etc) and the major decisions in their life (eg where they want to live, who they want to live with, what support and treatment they want, where they want to die etc).

Some ways to find out how well a service is doing in these areas include:

- activity records
- care plans
- surveys of people who use services and carers
- observation of how the service works
- inspection by CQC.

4.4 Organisational factors

Organisational factors are the policies, systems, procedures, processes and culture of an organisation. They all affect how well the organisation runs and the service it delivers. It includes how well the organisation uses its money and its staff to sustain excellence.

An excellent service:

- delivers excellent outcomes for people who use their services on an ongoing basis and over a long period of time
- works with people who use their services and carers to find new ways of working. This may be through learning from other organisations or through new, innovative ways of working
- aims to improve all the time by learning from people who use services, carers, policy developments, research and other sources
- develops the skills and knowledge of its own staff
- regularly reviews and develop its values
- demonstrates its commitment to excellent outcomes for the people who use its services. This commitment is part of the organisation's culture and values and is not dependent on individual staff members.

Some ways to find out how well a service is doing in these areas include:

- staff training records
- formal quality assurance mechanisms
- consultation activities.

5. Further information

For more information about the new information system visit the CQC website www.cqc.org.uk.

For more information on SCIE's work to define excellence please contact hugh.constant@scie.org.uk, tel 020 7089 6875.

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