

Using health checks – case examples

The eight case examples in this chapter show a range of purpose and application, and the use of different formats and structures around which capacity issues can be raised. Click on a link below to jump to a specific case example.

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Black Training and Enterprise Group – Baseline Check

Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG) is a London-based national organisation providing technical assistance and a voice to government for black and minority ethnic service providers. For the last four years the two staff working directly with organisations, the head of organisational development and the head of fundraising, have been using the BTEG *Baseline Check* in their work supporting black and minority ethnic groups.

Developing the BTEG Baseline Check

The *Baseline Check* was developed as a bespoke tool when the head of organisational development came into post with a programme of work with 50 organisations on a Big Lottery funded capacity building programme, and found that existing health check tools did not meet the needs of BTEG or the organisations it worked with. A system was required that would provide a baseline against which the progress of the organisations could be tracked. A tool was also needed to help organisations understand their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as identifying priority areas where BTEG could offer support.

Using the Baseline Check

The *Baseline Check* is used flexibly, with the questions providing prompts for conversations with the groups on particular topics:

Making the meeting interesting is vital. If it is too formal and boring you will lose them. It can't just be a tick-box exercise for your own purposes. It has to be for their benefit too and this needs to be made clear.

The tool is adapted for use with different groups, questioning focused on areas of particular need – although all the topic areas are covered. For example, if a group comes with a governance issue the discussions are likely to centre on governance questions. The check takes around an hour to complete – ideally with a chief officer (in organisations with paid staff) and one or two trustees. The BTEG development worker records responses on a hard copy and holds them on file, with a copy usually given to the group.

Question 9 provides an overview or summary, allowing a numerical rating, and is often used early in the process as a 'quick tick-box' analysis of the organisation's strengths and weaknesses. Most groups photocopy responses to Question 9 for their records.

After the check has been completed, a series of practical actions are agreed between BTEG and the group, and are set out in a follow-up email. In some cases, BTEG may refer groups to other organisations for particular types of support. The actions agreed need to be practical for both the group and for BTEG in terms of the support that can be provided and their capacity to work with groups on an ongoing basis. Currently a City Bridge Trust funded programme allows five days support to each group.

As well as the 12 organisations supported in the City Bridge Trust funded programme, BTEG has used the tool with a range of different groups since its development in 2004:

- fifty organisations in the original Lottery funded programme in London
- twenty organisations in three English regions (East Midlands, East of England and London)
- twelve Race Equality Councils around the country
- a number of employment training providers
- groups supported as part of business planning and fundraising strategy development.

Benefits of the Baseline Check

BTEG's head of organisational development emphasised that one of the benefits of using the tool for groups is that the process teases out issues that the organisation may not be aware of:

The organisations themselves may not know that they have a particular problem. It only comes out through talking...The groups have often commented themselves on how going through the process has made them think about things they may not otherwise have thought of and find out and understand things about their organisations that they probably wouldn't have considered otherwise.

The analysis of the data collected also provides useful information for reporting back to trustees and funders on BTEG's organisational development programmes. The completed check helps continuity in their work, providing a written record that can be picked up by different staff members working with groups if necessary. The head of organisational development has confidence in what she considers a straightforward system that can allow her to review her work, and which provides a way of tracking project progress, by repeating the check and comparing the data captured. The repeat is often carried out with the summary questions in Section 9 of the tool.

BTEG Baseline Check: Question 9

9. Can you rate on a scale of 1-7 whether the following areas are a concern for your organisation, with 1 being of least concern and 7 being of most concern. (please circle your position)

		No Concern				Large Concern			
1	Funding – having enough funds to survive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
2	Funding – having a strategic fundraising plan	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
3	Staffing – Recruitment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
4	Staffing – retention	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
5	Staffing – supervision, managing staff performance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
6	Staffing volunteers – managing and retention	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
7	Finance – having appropriate procedures/written policy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
8	Finance – reporting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
9	Monitoring – having techniques to measure quantitative and qualitative changes and performance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
10	Monitoring – being clear about targets	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
11	Evaluation – knowing how to use the learning and impact of your work	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
12	Performance – Meeting the requirements of funders/regulators	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
13	Performance – implementation of appropriate policies and procedures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
14	Performance – Having a clear vision	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
15	Performance – having clear strategic plans	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
16	Performance – implementation of recognised quality standards	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
17	ICT – Ability to use IT effectively	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
18	Working in Partnership	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
19	Networking	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
20	Assessing Risks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
21	Promoting Diversity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
22	Marketing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
23	Other	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

Using PQASSO as a health check tool

PQASSO is the Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations, developed by Charities Evaluation Services for the voluntary sector in 1997. It is built on 12 quality areas in which an organisation self-assesses against a series of questions, for which evidence must be provided. Each quality area has a set of indicators to help determine which level an organisation is at.

A number of health checks reviewed had been referenced to PQASSO indicators, and it was decided to take into the study examples of the use of PQASSO level 1 indicators as a quick and initial assessment. Three examples were identified; in all three cases the use of PQASSO indicators as a quick initial check took place within the context of a broader programme of introducing PQASSO as a quality system into groups.

For example, the pilot project which emerged in 2003 from the South Yorkshire Quality Consortium, led through Voluntary Action Sheffield (VAS), eventually became the South Yorkshire Quality Project, with funding from Yorkshire Forward and European Union Objective 1 funding. As part of that pilot VAS at one stage worked with about 30 PQASSO mentors in South Yorkshire, although the momentum behind this initiative was lost. The project has now wound down as funding has finished. But until the end of March 2009 a programme of work had been provided under two separate funding streams, with explicit targets under Objective 1 funding to provide a minimum of 35 hours support to each organisation. Using PQASSO level 1, the project's workers developed a quick snapshot approach for their work with frontline organisations, including support for specifically targeted BME organisations.

The study also interviewed two freelance consultants. One had used PQASSO level 1 as an initial assessment with 30 clients in west London, as part of a three-year programme delivered through the primary care trust. The second had used PQASSO level 1 indicators as an initial assessment tool with Compass Disability Services in Taunton. She had used PQASSO level 1 in this way successfully with other organisations at different stages of integrating quality and performance management into their management arrangements.

The learning points about the diagnostic process from these examples have much in common with those from other tools reviewed in the study. PQASSO level 1 appears to be effective as a quick assessment process in this context, and this report incorporates learning from this into the main findings. We have noted that the CVSR *Needs Analysis* is also drawn from PQASSO, although in this case from the evidence rather than the indicators. The South Yorkshire Quality Project has found the indicators straightforward to use, but there was some difference of opinion on this from other users. None of those using PQASSO in this way included the results quality area as part of the health check – a quick assessment – and in some cases monitoring and evaluation was also excluded because ‘monitoring and evaluation or results will just be a step too far’.

Those interviewed felt that using PQASSO as an initial diagnosis enabled them to keep the process relatively light touch, and a way of assessing where organisations felt they were. It allowed a discussion of the underlying principles and concepts of good management, as well as picking up on the issue of legal

requirements and procedures. In the case of the South Yorkshire Quality Project, this process was kept as a very quick tick-box exercise, with issues noted, but not picked up until the next stage of implementing PQASSO.

Staff and volunteers, Level 1 – PQASSO 2nd edition

Level 1

Legal requirements are met. Staff and volunteers understand their role and are supported. There is adequate communication between staff, volunteers and managers.

- The recruitment process is clear and follows all equal opportunities requirements.
- Each member of staff has a contract and written terms and conditions of employment.
- All legal requirements covering staff and volunteers are met, including employer liability insurance and equal opportunities laws.
- All staff and volunteers understand their role within the organisation and know who they are accountable to.
- Staff and volunteers get some individual support and supervision in carrying out their work.
- Regular meetings are held with staff and volunteers to discuss the organisation's activities.

PQASSO is now available in its 3rd edition.



Gloucestershire Association for Voluntary and Community Action – Outcomes Star Chart for Organisational Capacity Building



Gloucestershire Association for Voluntary and Community Action (GAVCA) is a local development agency supporting voluntary and community groups in Gloucester and Cheltenham – approximately 250 in Cheltenham and 290 in Gloucester. There are four development workers (two full-time equivalents), based across Gloucester VCA and Cheltenham VCA. The work of the team tends to focus on smaller groups, but development workers support larger groups when required. GAVCA also supports the start up of new groups. The *Outcomes Star Chart for Organisational Capacity Building*, developed in January 2007, has been used by the team as a health check tool for two years.

Developing the Outcomes Star Chart for Organisational Capacity Building

A number of factors spurred the development of the *Outcomes Star* tool. A new member of staff needed to get to know groups in her patch. At the same time the organisational team leader was looking for a more ‘user friendly’ and visual tool to replace the questionnaire-type health check they had been using. She wanted something that could visually show progress over time and that could be used as the basis for discussion about a group, its structures and its needs.

She had experience of using an outcomes star for personal goal-setting, and had seen its potential within an organisational capacity building context. The four development workers, the chief executive and members of the County Voluntary Assembly developed the star, and it was piloted with 15 groups in

Cheltenham. The tool has been revised since, with additional topics added for discussion with the groups – ‘financial security’, ‘representation in your sector’ and ‘working with others’. A second simpler version is also used in GAVCA equalities work.

It’s a two way process, the development worker is the facilitator helping groups think about their own organisation and how it works.

Using the Outcomes Star

The *Outcomes Star* has been used with 10 groups in Gloucester in the last year, about six per cent of the groups the organisation has worked with. The star has also been used by colleagues in the Cheltenham office.

The star can be used with any group, new or established, large or small. GAVCA has used it with different numbers of people, from one or two trustees, to a group of 18 people associated with one group. The development worker acts as facilitator, stimulating discussion around each of the topics represented on the prongs of the star. The representatives of the groups are asked to mark on the prongs of the star, on a scale of 1 to 10, the group’s effectiveness in different topic areas. The scoring is done quickly, with in-depth discussion developed on the initial scoring. GAVCA has designed a series of back-up questions to help development workers explain the visual representation of organisational capacity.

When using the tool with a larger number of people, it is necessary to break them into smaller groups, collating the results from

sub-groups into a single star. In GAVCA's experience there are usually only small variations in the scores.

The *Outcomes Star* is a flexible tool that can be adapted:

I recently used the star with someone who couldn't work with the circle so had to change it to a bar chart. This is another example of needing flexibility in tools and approaches and making things appropriate for use by different people.

The follow-up to a session using the *Outcomes Star* varies. For some groups that just want an exercise to reflect and explore their strengths and weaknesses, using the visual chart might be enough. Normally a short follow-up report will be prepared by the development worker highlighting how GAVCA can help.

Benefits of the Outcomes Star

For the groups, the *Outcomes Star* stimulates thinking about their organisation, but is less onerous than completing a multi-page questionnaire. The completed star provides a useful visual baseline of where an organisation is in terms of its development at a point in time. This can be reviewed at a later date with the completion of another tool. The comparison between the two shows progression.

Anything that stimulates people to think about their organisation in the round is useful. It needs to be light touch though! It needs to work with all constituent groups – staff, trustees, volunteers, something to kick start action. Nothing too onerous.

The *Outcomes Star* is shown on the next page.

Outcomes Star Chart for Organisational Capacity Building

Name of Organisation

Date of Completion

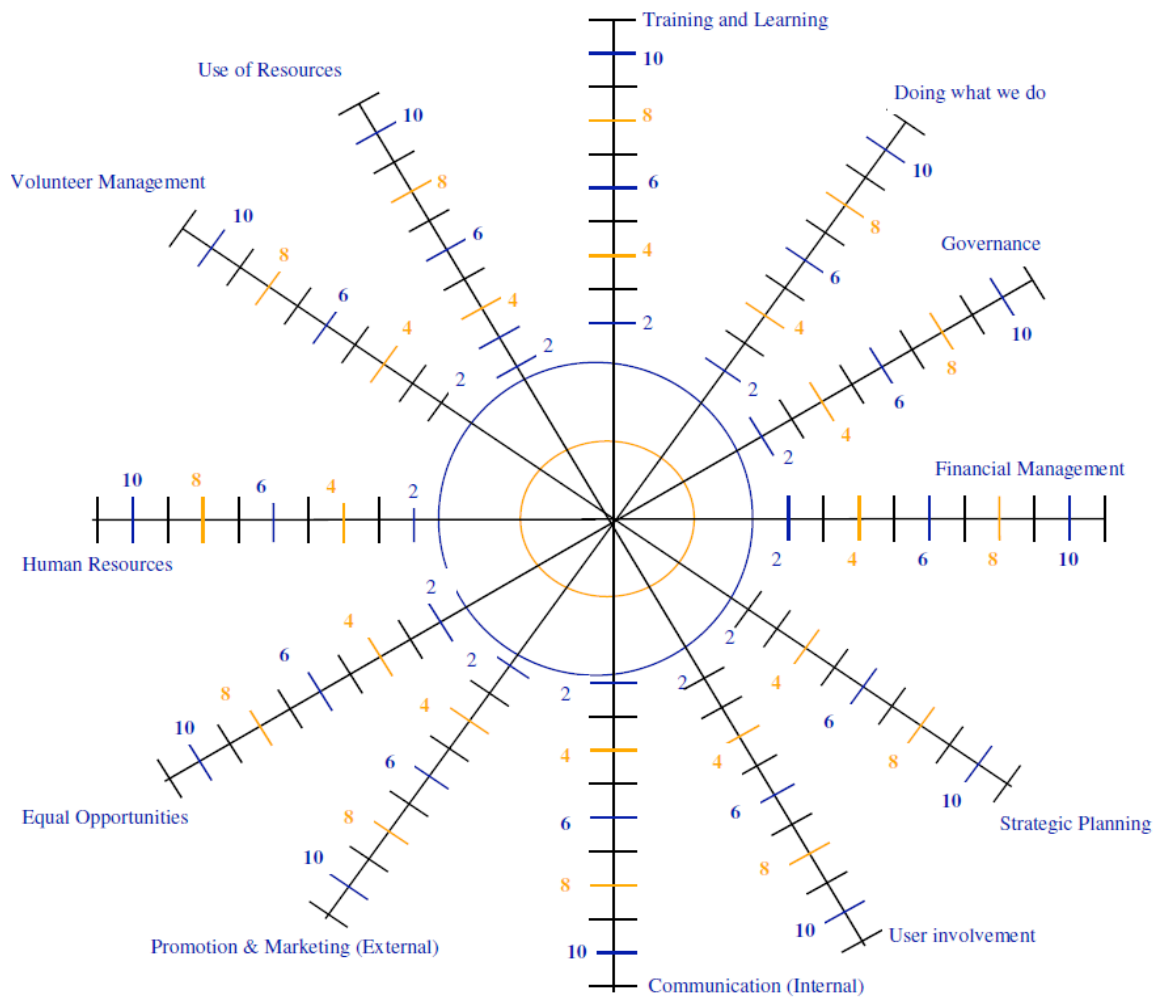
What Reading is this? 1st 2nd 3rd 4th Other

Completed by :

Name of Organisation:

Name of Gloucester VCA staff member

Name of Cheltenham VCS staff member



What else has changed in your organisation since the last Wheel was completed?



Eastbourne Association of Voluntary Services – Organisational Checklist for Voluntary and Community Groups

Eastbourne Association of Voluntary Services (EAVS) is the council for voluntary services (CVS) for Eastbourne and Wealden, with 250 members. Three of the 10 staff make up the Community Support Team, providing tailored support to local groups and sports clubs – two development workers covering Eastbourne and one working in Wealden. The team works mainly with small community groups, but occasionally with larger charities and local branches of national charities. They have been using the *Organisational Checklist for Voluntary and Community Groups* in their work since the middle of 2008.

Developing the Organisational Checklist

The community development co-ordinator, the head of the Community Support Team, came into post in December 2007 and felt there was a need to ensure consistency of service across the two areas, Eastbourne and Wealden. She felt that EAVS was not always

finding out what the issues were for groups in a coherent way, and was further prompted to develop a health check by attending a SKILD (Skills and Knowledge for Local Development Workers) training for development workers.

The Community Support Team developed the tool with reference to a number of short and long tools featured on the NAVCA SKILD website. They were keen to use some of the generic questions featured in other tools, such as those on governance, but also wanted to have questions that helped find out about the partnerships and networks the groups are a part of.

The purpose of the EAVS tool was primarily to make sure organisations had the right things in place to be able to apply for funding and needed to be relevant to rural groups as well as larger groups, and to be fairly ‘light touch’ and not too onerous for groups to go through. The simple Yes/No/Action format of the tool helps to keep it quite a short process while providing a record of what has been agreed for both parties. See the example below.

Do you keep a record of your funding applications and any correspondence (good or bad) with funders? **Yes/No**

Action:

Does your group have an independent referee? **Yes/No**

Action:

Does your group identify a named person to act as a point of contact when submitting funding bids? **Yes/No**

Action:

The *Organisational Checklist* has been in use since spring 2008, and some formatting and style changes have been made to make it clearer and easier to use.

Using the Organisational Checklist

With very small groups and new groups, completing the check may only take about 20 minutes as they are unlikely to have employment policies if there are no staff, or health and safety certificates if there are no premises. However, the development worker goes through the whole check with all the groups, as it is felt helpful to raise the questions to get groups thinking about what they might need if they grow.

The EAVS development worker completes the check list form, and both the worker and the group keep copies of the completed check list with actions noted. In subsequent meetings and follow-up both parties refer back to the form and actions to check on progress. Staff and trustees completing the check list are encouraged to share the completed document at a meeting of the trustees.

Benefits of using the Organisational Checklist

For EAVS, the *Organisational Checklist* has the potential to demonstrate that it is making a difference – moving beyond just the reporting of increased funding brought into the sector.

Staff are planning to develop how they use the tool to demonstrate progress.

The community development co-ordinator feels that groups appreciate going through a standardised check; new groups in particular feel reassured that there is a proper way of doing things. Many think they have to be a charity, but going through the check helps them realise there are different structures they can adopt. They also begin to understand that it is not necessary to have everything in place at once. Going through the check helps groups set out an action plan that can take two to three years to complete.

Recently EAVS met with two people who wanted to set up a 'friends of' organisation. Going through the check helped the pair to understand that they needed more people to form a committee and that they needed to think about how independent they wanted to be from the private organisation they were becoming friends of. The process also helped them consider whether they would have their own policies and procedures and insurance or whether they would use those of the existing organisation. The check list recorded clear actions for the pair and for the development worker. The two people that went through the check are now actively seeking potential members and committee members for their 'friends of' group.

Halton Voluntary Action – DeveloP-IT

Halton Voluntary Action (HVA), based in Halton, Cheshire, serves the towns of Runcorn and Widnes and is currently doing some joint work covering St Helens with St Helens CVS.

HVA has 17 members of staff, including those running the volunteers centre. Staff carry out classic development work with groups, although they do not call it that.

Developing the DeveloP-IT toolkit

The toolkit was developed in 2007 with funding from the Greater Merseyside ChangeUp Consortium (which also developed the *GRIPP* online tool). *DeveloP-IT* was trialled by 10 development workers and the co-ordinator of a group of development workers in Birmingham between June and October 2007.

It was intended to develop a tool that would help groups to show progress – to help groups ‘recognise where they are at in their development, what they need to do next and how to get there’. The tool contains a spider diagram, which allows a group to plot its progress over time, as shown by its responses to the questions.

The tool is user-friendly and visibly attractive, available in hard copy only. It is divided into four sections, labelled as Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. These different sections represent different stages in an organisation’s lifecycle, and allow capacity building to focus on the development stage of the organisation, and questions and action planning that would be relevant to that stage. Organisations are invited to describe their current situation in relation to three open questions grouped under each of six criteria within the ‘season’ chosen.

The simplicity of the tool means that ‘they are not going through a hundred questions. It gives them an opportunity to see quickly where they are.’ In a funding context where there was more emphasis on not duplicating services and collaboration, it was also intended that organisations should see that it might be appropriate to bring the organisation to a close.

Using DeveloP-IT

In HVA there is one capacity building specialist in post and two or three other staff members also work with the tool. The tool had been used with some 30 to 40 groups over the course of the previous year. The main target for the work is smaller groups who will not be commissioned or tendering for work and, if workers are contacting new groups, they will take the tool with them. *DeveloP-IT* is also used by other members of the Greater Merseyside ChangeUp Consortium.

The tool is used only in a face-to-face situation. Development workers will meet whoever makes contact first, and are flexible about where they meet. The first meeting is an informal one, so the group is not asked to prepare or bring documents, but in a second meeting might be asked to bring a business plan and accounts – basic information. It is only in this second meeting that they explore the questions in a chosen season of the tool, teasing out the issues:

When we looked at the tool, we knew we were not at Spring, and had to choose between Summer and Autumn, so we chose Summer. We found that even that preliminary process was really helpful in terms of thinking about how we were developing.

Widnes & Runcorn Cancer Support Group

The format of the toolkit makes it easy for development workers to adapt it to their own style. Despite its simplicity, the process can take up to two hours. The questions are open ones, which ask for discussion rather than yes/no answers, and HVA stresses the importance of the development worker in this process. The tool does not start, for example, with a question about whether a procedure exists, but will get to that point from underlying issues of practice. For example, rather than asking about whether the organisation has an operational plan, it asks: ‘Can you make sure everything happens how and when it should?’

Once the spider diagram has been completed, the next part of the process is to start on an action plan, but the capacity building officer stresses the responsiveness of the process to the organisation itself, its needs and internal politics. The group itself produces the action plan, which will serve as the reference point for the group, while HVA retains the hard copy of the toolkit.

On the whole, HVA has found that the toolkit has worked well, although some of the larger groups have found the four seasons structure

and content too basic. In this situation the groups will be encouraged to implement PQASSO and the ISO 9001 standards, with *DeveloP-IT* used for an initial meeting. HVA is exploring the potential for developing an online version of the toolkit and licensing it.

The benefits of using DeveloP-IT

Development workers in the Greater Merseyside and Greater Manchester areas who piloted the tool found the tool a good framework for their own work, particularly for new workers, and for organisations that were stagnating or in a crisis. They found it easy to dip in and out of the check list, and the spider diagram a good, quick visual aid. It also had a useful tie in with PQASSO and Quality First standards.

The spider diagram can be used with a group every quarter, providing a clear picture of development. HVA is able to identify any patterns of deficit and to target services accordingly. Evidence from the spider diagram is also being used to report to the local Council.

Questions taken from the Winter section



Greater Merseyside ChangeUp – GRIPP

The Greater Merseyside ChangeUp consortium consists of 18 infrastructure organisations. It has four members of staff, including one development worker, directing support to infrastructure organisations.

Greater Merseyside ChangeUp has invested over £2m in developing the capacity of the voluntary and community sector since it started in 2004, including the development of toolkits and the website, to provide a range of information, advice and resources to increase the effectiveness of the voluntary sector. It has produced four capacity building tools, *DeveloP-IT*, developed by Halton Voluntary Action,¹ a second development tool for development workers targeted at members of the consortium, and the third, the *GRIPP* tool, a web-based health check for frontline organisations that can be used as either a face-to-face tool or as a self-assessment. A fourth tool provides a self-assessment tool for consortium members, allowing change and development to be monitored.

Developing GRIPP

The *GRIPP* tool has its origins in discussions in early 2008 of how the ChangeUp consortium could drive a standard approach to identifying needs in frontline organisations – given the different nature of infrastructure organisations themselves, and the different needs of frontline organisations. It was seen that unless infrastructure organisations had a standardised approach, it was unlikely that frontline organisations would have equal access to support and development opportunities. The aim was to enable a more effective referral process between sources of support, and/or find a way that frontline organisations could

tap into specific areas of expertise where they existed across infrastructure.

The tool was developed through the programme management team and a focus group of development workers, and was piloted, with largely positive feedback. A consultant helped coordinate the development and the IT component required technical assistance. The main design focus was on pitching it to get the balance right in a tool that would be generic, light touch and yet meaningful. During the development, the team referred to other health checks, and some work was done to see if the tool could be aligned to the HVA *DeveloP-IT* tool. There was also mapping against quality standards, and *GRIPP*'s indicators have reference to PQASSO and volunteer standards.

The tool evolved with five prompts or positive statements in five sections: Governance, Resources, Information, Projects and People. The aim was something that would be easy and attractive to use and to encourage take up. The tool allows a scale rating against the prompts and takes ten minutes to complete; it was felt that this was an acceptable time to draw organisations to complete it, and adding questions might impact on its popularity.

Greater Merseyside ChangeUp can envisage the development of more intensive tools, which could provide an add-on, around specific topic areas, such as volunteer management. It is also pursuing the commercial potential of the tool, and there is already some interest. The cost of running the tool is minimal, and it is seen as potentially being useful for large infrastructure organisations, as well operating at a regional or sub-regional level.

¹ See Using health checks – case examples, [Halton Voluntary Action – DeveloP-IT](#), page 58.

Using GRIPP

Organisations are able to access the tool on the Greater Merseyside ChangeUp website at <http://gripp.org.uk/gripp.php>. Once they have completed the 25 questions, they receive a report which identifies:

- the things the organisation does not currently have but would like
- the things the organisation currently has but would like to improve.

The report also benchmarks their results against all the others that have completed the tool. The report provides them with details of organisations they can access, and recommends that they take the report with them.

When the tool is used by an infrastructure development worker in face-to-face work, it is also expected that the frontline worker will be referred to specialist provision as needed, for example in governance or financial management.

The Merseyside Disability Federation – one of the consortium members – is funded by the local council for a programme of intensive work with organisations working with disabled people in Liverpool. A full-time worker uses this tool at least once with those organisations to see if they have moved on at all. As a face-to-face tool, the Merseyside Disability Federation worker stresses that what is important are the further discussions and questions that spin off from the 25 lead questions in *GRIPP*. The key is the process that the tool enables, and its simplicity should not constrain the development of an effective diagnosis.






Benefits of using the GRIPP tool

As a self-assessment tool, *GRIPP* does not provide more detailed questioning in particular areas, such as finance. However, it allows a quick assessment of areas of potential weakness, encouraging the frontline organisation to follow up for further support. It is not possible to monitor the outcomes of the tool centrally as details of those completing the tool are not taken. Consortium members are uneasy about developing a centralised database of frontline organisations in this way.

The reports generated by the tool enable analysis by geographical location, size and type of organisation, to show need at that level. They have not indicated any major common gaps in provision across Merseyside, except for the area of recruitment and management of staff. However, with the current community project in Merseyside running out funding, the consortium has been able to use the reports as evidence of need for further funding; it was able to provide statistics that showed that for 30 per cent of frontline organisations financial management was a key issue.

The consortium is aiming to deliver a seamless service, and the amount of referral between them has greatly increased. At the same time a Development Exchange helps to build relationships through networking, awareness raising, and skills and knowledge sharing among members.

The first section of the GRIPP tool

				
Governance				

OK here we go, please read the statements then select the option that best describes your current situation.

Our organisation has.....

A clearly stated sense of purpose which trustees use to govern the organisation; this could include vision, mission, aims, values.

- Don't know
- No because this isn't relevant to our situation
- Not yet but this is something our organisation would like to have
- Yes although this is something our organisation could improve at
- Yes this is in place, working well in our organisation

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Social Enterprise Works – C3Perform suite of tools



Social Enterprise Works is based in Bristol, but carries out consultancy in the south west more generally and around the country. It has over 300 members, with full membership open to existing and developing social enterprises in Bristol. The organisation also has a consultancy service funded by Bristol City Council particularly for organisations wanting to set up social enterprise in Bristol. The organisation has three social enterprise advisers, who use the family of *C3Perform* tools. These are:

- *C3Perform*
- *C3Quick Perform*
- *Perform Diagnostic*
- *C3Perform Workshop*.

These were the only health check tools found by the study that are built around the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model.

Development of C3Perform

The *C3Perform* tools were developed through the C3 EQUAL Development Partnership, a West of England partnership including a range of different agencies, including Bristol City Council, the two councils for voluntary service and the Avon Co-operative Development Agency in Bristol.² The programme, which ran between 2004 and 2007, worked with 80 third sector organisations – the majority with a trading focus – in a programme of support and development. The focus was also on improving the organisation through techniques encouraging the involvement of staff and volunteers. This was a major strategic programme, which included embedding performance improvement in the West of

England social economy by developing, testing and raising awareness of Excellence Model-based diagnostic tools and impact measurement tools.

The base tool is *C3Perform*, a detailed self-assessment tool designed to involve between one and eight people in a constructive dialogue to review the organisation's strengths and areas for improvement. The workbook has 46 statements, and takes between three and six hours. As part of the development of the C3 programme, two further tools were developed, still based around the EFQM Excellence Model. *C3Quick Perform* is a shorter and quicker tool which focuses on scoring as opposed to dialogue and can be used to get information from a wider group of staff and volunteers, who could quickly respond to questions on the health of the organisation. This information could then be collated and used to identify areas of work that required more detailed work.

C3Perform Workshop was then developed to involve a greater number of participants (up to 25) in a review day and is intended to be more interactive and dynamic.

Towards the end of the EQUAL funded C3 programme, Social Enterprise Works developed a web-based tool, *Perform Diagnostic*, based on *C3Quick Perform* which could more immediately collate questionnaire responses from a large group of staff or members, or even sites of a large organisation. *Perform Diagnostic* requires the user to log in and request the number of copies required. The questionnaire takes about 15 minutes to complete by rating progress against three indicators in each of the nine areas of the Excellence Model.

² Bristol City Council, Social Enterprise Works, Avon CDA, VOSCOUR, Business West, Black Development Agency, Community Action, Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset and South Gloucester Councils.

Once all the questionnaires have been completed the tool provides an overall score, which can be benchmarked against other organisations that have completed it. The accumulated results are provided in a report format that uses a traffic light system to easily identify the organisation's perceived strengths and areas for development. The tool is freely available for use at www.socialenterpriseworks.org/benchmarking and www.c3partnership.org which is a legacy of the EQUAL programme, with acknowledgement to Bristol City Council.

About 20 of the online perform diagnostics have been completed since it was put online at the beginning of 2008. With the EQUAL partnership programme over, the tools continue to be used by the programme partners, and other tools have been developed from it, such as a *Funding Perform* by a local CVS.

Social Enterprise Works has provided training to development workers, advisers and consultants throughout the south west and beyond, the tools are freely accessible online and it is thought that the tools are widely used across the UK.

Using the C3Perform tools

Social Enterprise Works provides a range of support services around the tools. When working with organisations for the first time, support is offered to select the most appropriate tool, or combination of tools, according to the organisation's needs (who needs to be involved, time available, etc).

The paper-based *C3Quick Perform* or online *Perform Diagnostic* are often done as a preliminary part of face-to-face support. Development workers or consultants may ask the organisation to complete the tool and bring the results information to a meeting. *Perform Diagnostic* can be more efficient for collecting and collating information

– for example when employees are working remotely, when board members cannot attend meetings or the organisation wants to collect information from large teams, volunteers and other key stakeholders.

The tools are as relevant for newer organisations as for well-established ones, as they can use the framework of the tool as a structure for developing the organisation. The tools aim to help organisations to get started on a 'journey of performance improvement' through a process of self-assessment and action planning.

Benefits of using the tools

The strengths of the tools are seen in the relevance of their indicators, and their ability to raise issues that might not have been reflected on, such as effective communication with customers and stakeholders:

When it is done face to face, the dialogue that comes out of these identifiers is quite amazing.

Although the tool operates as a diagnostic, it also provides a guide to the issues of key importance.

One trigger for using the *Perform Diagnostic* is when organisations are thinking about quality assurance, but are not sure what system to use. Social Enterprise Works finds that the Excellence Model is a long-term way of developing an organisation and works well alongside systems such as PQASSO and the ISO standards, which organisations may choose to implement.

Social Enterprise Works has been able to use the results of the *C3Perform* tools to look at gaps in performance – for example around customer needs and people results and put on relevant courses. Advisers were able to respond to difficulties around collecting results and reporting by identifying a bank of indicators.

Perform Diagnostic example question

Answer the questions below by selecting a value for each question, submit the form when you have finished.

Leadership – How the organisation is steered by its decision makers and vision:

	Nothing in place	Need to make significant improvement	Need to make some improvement	A strength that could benefit from further work	A strength that we are confident to share
1 – The organisation’s mission, aims and values are clear and relevant and guide the organisations development.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2 – The organisational structure is fit for purpose? Efficient, effective and sustainable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3 – The organisation’s leaders/ decision makers work with all stakeholders to improve the organisation and encourage a culture of learning.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Congleton District Voluntary Action – Health Check

Congleton District Voluntary Action (CDVA) supports voluntary and community activity across the borough of Congleton, with offices in Sandbach and Congleton. CDVA has 12 paid staff members.

Development of the Health Check

The tool has its origins in an initiative by a subgroup of the Cheshire ChangeUp Consortium, led by Cheshire Community Action, who funded the development of the health check as a generic tool. It was originally developed as a youth organisation tool by Youth Federation, Cheshire and Youth Matter! (Warrington Council for Voluntary Youth Service) with support from Cheshire Council for Voluntary Youth Service (CCVYS) and Warrington CVS – which stills uses the tool. It took its reference from the *Validation* quality assurance system, developed by Youth Matter! together with CCVYS and the Youth Federation. The main purpose of the health check is to provide the frontline organisation with an assessment of their current situation in terms of the safe running of its group and to identify areas where it could make improvements, highlighting where support could be given. The health check particularly focuses on safety issues in terms of governance and operational activity.

CDVA staff have customised and amended the tool, particularly to reflect best practice around working with volunteers, and the focus of work with their own volunteer centre. They also developed some areas to trigger discussion, specifically health and safety in relation to ICT, again reflecting the expertise CDVA staff have developed through their ICT support programme. The tool is divided into five sections:

- Organisational Governance and Management
- Finance
- Human Resources
- Staff and Volunteers
- Equal Opportunities
- Health and Safety.

Direct questions are asked requiring a Yes/No response, with space allowed for comments and actions.

The tool has also been reformatted and now reflects CDVA's corporate branding. Staff would like to develop an online version of the tool.

Using the Health Check

The part-time funding and development adviser is the only post holder using the health check, introducing it in early 2008; there are plans that the chief officer and volunteer centre manager will also carry out health checks.

Health checks have been carried out with a diverse mix of groups from well-funded to very small volunteer organisations. With a limited capacity, to date they have worked with only eight organisations, not publicising the work beyond posting it on the website. In the future CDVA will target the work of the funding and development adviser on smaller organisations with either no paid staff or one part-time employee, which will make it more manageable.

The funding and development worker is flexible about who she meets with – 'in some senses it doesn't matter'. Practical considerations decide where the meeting will be held.

It takes about an hour to work through the health check with the group. The format is one of ticking against questions, but the development worker emphasised the need to allow a dialogue to develop, and to keep the focus positive and upbeat. Working with small organisations, such as volunteer youth groups, it was felt important not to lose them along the way by being too challenging. The emphasis was on taking them forward into best practice. Some sections may be treated lightly or missed, according to the nature of the organisation.

The funding and development worker writes up the report and the comments and the organisation receives the completed health check and a summary report. There is no formal action plan – ‘more of an aide memoire’ of perceptions and suggestions of what they might want to follow up on. The worker carries out any actions agreed such as

sending policy and procedure templates, but there is no structured follow-up.

Benefits for the organisation

CDVA has found that the health checks have focused on areas where it needs to develop training, such as monitoring and evaluation.

The tool has been designed to lead to quality standards, although CDVA has no current specific programme which allows staff to do detailed work on quality. At the same time, it is sold to groups as a quick and easy review for those who will not be taking the quality route and a process of improvement which can be used to demonstrate to funders. It is clear that the health check can prompt quite radical changes for an organisation. For an example of the experience of one organisation using the CDVA health check, see page 44 in the [Health check benefits](#) section.