



EASPD Policy Seminar 2009

Quality of Social Services: what role for Europe after the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty?

Final Report

On the 4th of December 2009 EASPD held its annual Policy Seminar in Brussels. The subject of this year's debate was 'quality of social services: what role for Europe after the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty?' Speakers and contributors were drawn from all stakeholder categories, and sought to address the questions of what quality of social services actually means, what is involved in achieving it, whose responsibility it is, and what role the EU now has to play in light of article 16 of the newly ratified Lisbon Treaty and its protocol on social services.

The seminar began with a welcome and foreword by the **President of EASPD Franz Wolfmayr**, who stressed EASPD's commitment to quality of services. He stated that quality should be identified not in terms of its outcome, but rather in terms of its **impact upon users**. He also said that the establishment of **common quality principles** at EU level would be far more effective the establishment of quality standards, seeing as different countries have very different traditions. He finished by outlining how EASPD has committed itself to these ideas in its newly approved strategy paper, which will inform the work of the organisation over the course of coming years.

Setting the Scene:

Conny Reuter, Secretary General of SOLIDAR and President of the Social Platform, outlined the work of SOLIDAR, which promotes **solidarity, cohesion and decent work for all**. Both NGOs and social services have an extremely important role to play in contributing to social cohesion he said. Despite the many achievements that they have made in this area however, much work remains to be done. Greater **recognition and institutional embedding for social services of general interest** must be secured, and a more **value-based approach** must be adopted in legislation at EU level. He emphasised that the skill-level of workers, their working conditions, and the numbers of staff available need to enter into all considerations of quality. **Quality principles** – as opposed to quality standards – should be set out at EU level, and specific **reference points for defining quality** need urgently to be developed. He pointed to the many of examples of recommendations that have already been made, including the '9 Quality Principles' produced by the Social Platform and EASPD's Memorandum on Quality, among others. A more detailed assessment of the **social impact of EU policies** on the sector (e.g. the impact of public procurement policy) is also needed.

Mr. Reuter also answered questions on the opportunities presented by **the Lisbon Treaty**. He said that the treaty represented something positive for social services, but emphasised that much work will have to be done in order to ensure that this bears itself out in reality. Social services and their representatives

must ensure that progress is consolidated by continual reference to, among other things, the **protocol on social services** included in the Lisbon Treaty, and the **Charter of Fundamental Rights**.

The Point of View of the Authorities:

Jos Theunis of the **Flemish Agency for People with Disabilities** stressed that **quality of care** must focus primarily on the **wellbeing** of users. It should not be up to governments to decide what is good for users, but rather the service providers themselves should take the lead in this. For **quality of care** to become a reality, Mr. Theunis stressed that organisations must focus on **care for quality**. This involves implementing systems of quality management, procedure registration and internal auditing in order to effectively **self-evaluate** standards of quality. He pointed to the example of Flanders, where legislation on both **quality of care** and **care for quality** is in place. He recommended that the most effective way to achieve a high quality of services is to **exchange good practice**, to impose **minimal quality standards as opposed to unrealistic ones**, and to focus above all on **care for quality**.

The Point of View of Service Users:

Klaus Candussi of **Atempo**, Austria, described how the Nueva method of quality assessment differs from that of other stakeholders. This is because it is **output oriented**, and designed from the **user's perspective**. He believes that change will never be successful until **the view of service users** is fully taken into account. Nueva is a service evaluation system **both developed with and operated by people with learning difficulties and disabilities**, which employs a questionnaire both developed and answered by service users. He stated that this model has benefits not only for the service users themselves, but for authorities, service providers and staff as a whole, for whom it provides a readymade system of quality-control, feedback and motivation. Mr. Candussi stressed that there is a **need for a common European understanding of what quality means**, and that **including users in this process** will both facilitate this, and open it up to new dimensions.

Mr. Candussi was asked if his user organisation has faced difficulties arising from conflict in stakeholder expectations. He replied that this has not been the case, and that stakeholders have more often than not tended to accept the results of the tests, and change their attitudes instead. Because the results show how users really **perceive** services, it is a useful tool for self-assessment, and for helping service providers to centre and test their own values.

The Point of View of Service Providers:

Eveline Gommers of **HKZ**, the Netherlands, and **Trudy Engering** of **NSWAC**, the Netherlands, then spoke from a service provider's perspective about the importance of harmonizing quality. In particular they stressed the importance of developing **standards for safety**. Ms. Gommers emphasised that **client safety** is one of the key indicators of quality, and suggested that it is a good starting point from which to improve quality standards in general, before attempting to establish a broader European framework. Trudy Engering then spoke of the work of NSWAC, which has implemented a three-pillared safety

management system that requires staff to learn in terms of safety. She stated that the end result has been a better quality of service for users in general.

The Point of View of Staff:

Annie Gunner Logan then spoke on behalf of **CCPS** (Community Care Providers Scotland). Although CCPS does not represent staff directly, it has been very involved in researching the link between staff costs and quality of service. According to Ms. Gunner Logan, a **common European definition of quality is very much needed**. Indeed the very meaning of quality is still unclear at present. She described the situation in Scotland, where there is a well developed **mixed economy of care**. This means that the social sector is roughly divided equally between the voluntary sector, the public sector and the private sector. She also described the work of the Care Commission, which is responsible for the inspection of care services there. In Scotland the voluntary care sector has consistently scored higher than the private or public sectors in inspections. Interestingly, the results show that **quality does not necessarily correspond to wage increase**. The question of whether or not there is a wage point below which quality begins to drop was posed, as was the question of whether or not a wage point above which quality also begins to fall off exists. If this is the case, what exactly are these points, and how can we locate them? Ms. Gunner Logan reminded that services are being affected in other ways due to the lack of a general quality framework, namely as a result of **public procurement practice**. This has triggered a 'race to the bottom' in terms of quality, in which financial costs are holding precedence, a 'casual' workforce is being created, and standards of care are suffering.

In response to the question of whether Member States should be forced to take quality into account, Ms. Gunner Logan replied that simply compelling authorities to do this is not enough. We must say what quality actually **means** in order for such measures to become effective. She also stressed that the quality of **organisational governance** – the quality of the organisation's management and leadership – is a key factor in achieving quality, and is central to explaining the differences in standard between not-for-profit and publically/privately run services.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

A number of questions emerged from the day's discussions. Chief amongst these was the question of what quality of service actually means. Does it, as Ms. Gunner Logan asked, mean that certain standards are met, and that services are effectively and efficiently delivered? Does it mean that the users themselves are satisfied? That staff members are trained to sufficient standards? That users and staff are actively involved in the organisational process? Does it in reality include all of these things? If so, what is the cost of this, and more importantly, what is it worth?

Luk Zelderloo, Secretary General of EASPD, closed the seminar with some conclusions and recommendations based on the discussions of the day. He said that EASPD wants to increase its commitment to quality in 2010 and 2011, and will try to develop a clear list of **pre-conditions for quality** to work with on a political level. It will not do this in an isolated manner however, but rather will view quality in a broad sense, taking account of the different criteria upon which it can be based. He stated that it was clear from the presentations that quality is not a state that can suddenly be 'arrived at'. Rather it is

a **journey**, and one which should be firmly built on the **values of solidarity and cohesion**. He suggested that the debates had raised the important question of whether or not shifting our focus to the most important stakeholders involved – **the service users themselves** – provides perhaps the most effective means of addressing the ambiguous question of quality, and of defining more clearly what it really means. He reiterated the general consensus of the seminar on the need for a **common understanding of quality at EU level**, not least in order to prevent a dangerous ‘**race to the bottom**’ in terms of standards. Such an understanding should be based on the principles enshrined in the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, and especially **Article 19** of this Convention on the right of persons with disabilities to **live independently and be included in the community**. Whether or not a **link between costs and quality** really exists must also be established, as must the nature and significance of this link he said. Mr. Zelderloo also stated that EASPD will work more closely with trade unions in the coming months, and on securing a greater role for not-for-profit employers in the process of Social Dialogue – an important step that would contribute towards securing a voice for those who campaign for quality at decision-making level. It will also attempt to come to grips with the challenges posed by public procurement.



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