

QUALITY ACCREDITATION - core to the development, sustainability and future-proofing our network



Jo Williams, Head of Membership and Learning,
UKCF

Quality Accreditation (QA) was introduced to the UK Community Foundations (UKCF) network in 2007. It was an initiative that was supported by members, enabling UKCF to define what a community foundation (CF) is and what it should be doing. The process of independently assessing compliance against the agreed QA standards every three years is integral to UKCFs core strategic work, as well as our developmental growth and sustainability as a network. Below Jo Williams, Head of Membership and Learning at UKCF, describes the process and how it benefits members and the network as a whole.

'I joined UKCF when our fifth round of QA was underway, and had little idea of the scope and scale of the process and the depth of self-assessment it entailed.

Within the network there are avid supporters, and those that feel it may no longer be necessary as it's achieved its core aims and should either be discontinued or reformed completely. However, I think that all CFs would agree that the introduction of QA has helped them, particularly the newer and smaller foundations, to have a framework against which to assess their progress, drive up standards and help define what a good CF should be doing. Looking at QA through this lens it has achieved what it set out to do in the beginning, the next stage will be developing it to ensure that it's fit for the future.

QA is a unique process - one that has full involvement of CFs through every element - from collaboratively revising the core standards from the previous QA cycle to the moderation committee where community foundations review the reports made by the independent evaluator.

The QA process looks at five work areas with a total of fourteen core standards, assessing the breadth of community foundations' work areas.

Area 1 - Strategy, Governance and Risk

Area 2 - Financial and Information Management

Area 3 - Philanthropy Services and Donor Management

Area 4 - Grant-Making and Donor Management

Area 5 - Organisational and Network Development

Ensuring a minimum standard across the network and encouraging improvement has been the primary driver for delivering QA. The process allows us to identify and share best practice and identify gaps in knowledge and compliance and support those with areas of weakness. The learning informs our Communities of Practice where we discuss, share and learn from peers in the network around different work areas.

QA also gives reassurance to donors, community groups and partners in the sector that community foundations are of a standard and are compliant.

The feedback on QA5 has been incredibly helpful in my newness to the role, and we will be reviewing QA in its entirety prior to the launch of QA6. Maybe the former iterations of QA (1-5) have served their purpose - they have certainly ensured compliance and a minimum expected standard for membership of UKCF. We could in the future have a separate compliance-based assessment that is done on an annual basis, and the developmental elements done on a longer cycle, allowing learning and development to take place in the interim time.

One area I'm keen to introduce to QA is a future focus. Much of the current QA process is about the here and now, and a strategy looking at the next few years. The policies and documents will need regular review, but what about looking further ahead to 2030 and beyond? What should community foundations be doing now to ensure they are a part of a community ecosystem in the future? How can they be a relevant and radical funder who pushes the boundaries with innovative ways of place-based funding and tries and tests new ways of inclusive and diverse giving? How can we be a good ancestor, recognising our role in the context of a bigger picture?

Inextricably linked with future focus has to be relationships, a move away from transactional actions to intentional connection, and more about how to convene a system in the area. Are community foundations considering what kind of leadership is needed? I think there is a need to not only look at the third horizon (the long-term successor to 'business as usual'), but adjacent possibilities of the future of communities and the role of community foundations in creating them.

Another area I'm keen to integrate into QA6 is transparency. Some community foundations already use 360Giving to publish their grants data openly. I believe we need to be more transparent across all areas of community foundation work, showing how we really do know and understand our communities and how they are involved in creating opportunities for philanthropists to fund. Stakeholder reflections would be welcome, and perception analysis. The recent launch of the Foundation Practice Rating where community foundations scored highly is also an area where we can have a more integrated approach.

What I've learned from QA is that it's not a process that is undertaken lightly, it's a collaborative and iterative process to drive the development of community foundations. All 47 community foundations passed in October 2021 and we're using the learning



through our communities of practice. We will start the process of developing QA6, its areas, core standards and processes with the network in 2023.'

Jo Williams

May 2022

UK Community Foundations (UKCF), established in 1991, supports the network of 47 community foundations in the UK providing inspirational leadership and advocacy at national level and delivering training, providing resources and raising profile. For more information on Quality Accreditations contact Jo:

membership@ukcommunityfoundations.org

or visit the UKCF website:

<https://www.ukcommunityfoundations.org/>