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## AS ISO 10002 Assurance Scheme pilot sheds light on performance

**T**he SOCAP Australia AS ISO 10002 Assurance Scheme began late last year with a working party of seven organisations participating in the development of the scheme's methodology and forming a pilot group for the first assessments. Led by consultant Susan Brooks, the initiative sought to establish a framework for the assessment of organisations' ability to meet the requirements of the new Australian Standard on complaints handling.

The methodology for the scheme, created by Brooks with the input of the working party, combines both a quantitative element in the form of a multiple choice survey, and a qualitative element – a structured interview drawing out more information. A representative of the organisation being assessed – preferably the person who manages the complaint handling function – provides the information.

While this represents one of the limitations of the methodology, Brooks said – in that in the absence of field research, the accuracy of the assessment depends on the truthfulness of responses – organisations have little to gain from misrepresenting their performance.

“It's not helpful in terms of advancing the framework you have for complaints management. The report doesn't provide a compliance assessment, it assesses the level of confidence in the organisation's ability to meet the requirements,” Brooks said.

The process includes questions on the five main elements of AS ISO 10002 – guiding principles,

framework, planning and design, operations, and maintenance and improvement – and also makes an assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation's complaints handling system. The reports for each of the organisations participating in the pilot project listed between 15 and 25 recommendations and suggestions to further build confidence in the system. A comparison between the organisation's results and those of the pilot participants as a group was also made (although individual results are kept confidential).

One of the most significant findings from the pilot study, Brooks said, was that there were some important points of difference between those who led the group in terms of performance and the other participants.

“The leaders understand how important communications with the customers are, both during and after the complaints handling process, and those leading companies also do a lot of work around understanding what the complainants' reactions are to the complaint experience, and take a lead from identifying where they can enhance their approach,” Brooks said.

One of the factors that separates this scheme from others is that it provides a benchmark on how an organisation is performing against the Standard, as well as compared with other organisations.

“They also have some assessment of how efficient or effective their system or framework is, which is a very important thing for management to understand – that investment in time and resources is leading to very efficient handling of complaints and

that customers are satisfied,” Brooks said.

Patrick Sherry, director of complaints, compliance, investigations and misconduct prevention for Disability Services Queensland (DSQ) – one of the participants in the pilot study – said DSQ's assessment results provided reassurance they were on the right track.

“I had the assumption that government departments don't do it as well as industry, but it gave us an independent view of how we were going, and we found that we had a high degree of alignment with the Standard, which was comforting,” Sherry said.

“It helps me in my business because a lot of people don't understand the importance, role and function of the Standard and they see it as something ephemeral. But once you declare that it's common practice in good business, both public and private, having that point of comparison is helpful.”

Sherry said while the process was user-friendly and straightforward, it had a degree of rigour in application which gave him confidence that the tool was fair and equitable. With DSQ also involved in the education and support of around 300 non-government organisations, “we'll be using our good practice to influence them to adopt practices which align with the international Standard”.

**For more information about the SOCAP Australia AS ISO 10002 Assurance Scheme, contact Rachel Drummond on 03 9650 6005 or email [socap@socap.org.au](mailto:socap@socap.org.au)**

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