

Volunteer Centre Quality Accreditation

Frequently Asked Questions

General

1. What is the VCQA?

The Volunteer Centre Quality Accreditation (VCQA) is the quality mark for organisations delivering Volunteer Centre functions. It provides assurance to members of the public seeking volunteering opportunities, volunteer involving organisations, partner, commissioner and funding organisations, that the holder provides a high quality and effective local service. Accreditation takes place via a peer assessment and is valid for three years. It covers the Five Functions of a Volunteer Centre's work:

- Strategic Development of Volunteering
- Good Practice Development
- Developing Volunteering Opportunities
- Voice of Volunteering
- Brokerage

Initially established in 2001, the VCQA has been delivered by several organisations. Most recently, NCVO delivered the accreditation from 2013 to 2021 when, following a strategic organisational review, it decided to cease providing quality assurance services. In 2022 NAVCA took on custodianship of the VCQA with the aim of sustaining and strengthening its purpose to support a strong local volunteering offer. As the national membership body for local VCSE sector infrastructure in England, delivery of the VCQA is aligned to NAVCA's mission and adds to the suite of quality accreditation products it is developing.

2. Why did the VCQA need to be updated and how was this done?

Throughout its 20-year history the VCQA has undergone several reviews, each informed by those working in the field of volunteering. NAVCA took the opportunity to review the content and format of the standards as part of the transfer of delivery. We wanted to make sure the VCQA remained responsive to changes in the volunteering landscape, particularly since Covid-19, and to the needs of communities and volunteer involving organisations. We wanted to ensure it reflected a greater breadth of volunteering activity, and the latest evidence and insight around volunteering, and was effective in looking at how Volunteer Centres respond to these new and emerging trends, opportunities, challenges and gaps. In addition, Covid-19 has brought a renewed focus on volunteering, and we wanted to make sure the VCQA remains a prominent and important marker of quality for local statutory partners and funders of volunteering infrastructure. Finally, we wanted to make sure the processes remained effective for those undertaking the VCQA, and the experience and resource required to attain accreditation is proportionate.

Between June 2021 and January 2022, we held several engagement sessions to hear a range of stakeholders' ambitions for the standard. We spoke with VCQA holders, other infrastructure bodies from within and outside NAVCA's membership, and we established the Quality Assurance Steering Group which comprised representation from NAVCA's Membership, current VCQA holders, NHS England, NCVO, Department of Culture Media and Sport and the Local Government Association. This group met several times and considered changes in the volunteering landscape, the relevance of the Five Functions and what makes up the markers of quality, the evidence standards and assessment criteria, the process and approach to application and

assessment. We also commissioned a review of the standard which produced recommendations on where the assessment and evidence criteria would benefit from overhaul.

We had originally intended to deliver a pilot of the revised VCQA, but we felt development with stakeholders had provided the opportunity to input to both the standards and the process needed. Importantly, given the length of time since last VCQA assessments, we wanted to open re-applications to current holders to ensure local confidence in their accreditation was maintained.

3. What is the Local Infrastructure Quality Accreditation and how does this differ from the VCQA?

NAVCA has offered a Quality Award for its members for many years. In 2021, we made the decision to stop offering the NAVCA Quality Award and redevelop the offer. We are currently piloting the Local Infrastructure Quality Accreditation (LIQA), which is designed specifically for local VCSE infrastructure provision. Based around NAVCA's [Four Functions of Local Infrastructure](#), the LIQA assesses delivery against a framework of activities, outcomes and objectives that, when combined, provide effective local VCSE infrastructure support services. It enables LIOs to benchmark their activities and outcomes against a clear set of criteria, demonstrate their strengths and impact, and identify opportunities for future development. We anticipate the LIQA launching in 2023 and will be available to NAVCA members only (but will be open to more than one holder per borough).

The VCQA and LIQA are completely standalone. If you hold the VCQA, you will still need to be assessed for all aspects of the LIQA and vice versa. Whilst there is a volunteering element to the LIQA, it focusses on creating good conditions for and promoting volunteering and does not go into the depth of the Five Functions of Volunteer Centres the VCQA requires to be evidenced. Those that decide to undertake both accreditations are likely to find some evidence will be applicable to the VCQA and the LIQA volunteering module.

4. What work is NAVCA undertaking to promote the role of quality accreditation in Volunteering and VCSE Infrastructure?

As part of its approach to refreshing the VCQA and LIQA, NAVCA is in discussion with key national stakeholders to ensure these quality accreditations are, and remain, recognised and supported by local and national partners. We are engaged with government departments including DCMS and DLUHC, the Local Government Association and NHS England to ensure there is recognition of the importance of accreditation at a national level, and that this leads to engagement and support at a local level. As we move forward with the roll out of the refreshed accreditations we intend to host workshops and events that will bring local organisations delivering volunteering and local infrastructure services together with local statutory partners and others who invest in and benefit from their services.

Costs

5. What does the VCQA cost?

The cost of the VCQA is £2,250 plus VAT for non-NAVCA members, and £2,000 plus VAT for NAVCA members.

6. What is the cost of undertaking the VCQA and LIQA together?

The Local Infrastructure Quality Award isn't available yet. When it launches, it will be available to NAVCA members only and we anticipate costs to be similar to the VCQA, with a significant saving if both are completed together. You can view NAVCA membership fee bandings on our [website](#).

Status of current VCQA accreditations (as of April 2022)

7. What's the status of existing VCQA holders' accreditation?

We have extended all existing accreditations until July 2023. Certificates have been issued to all current holders which you can display to demonstrate your accreditation. If you haven't received your certificate, please contact quality@navca.org.uk.

8. What is the process for re-accreditation for those who held the VCQA prior to its transfer to NAVCA?

We're initially opening applications for re-accreditation to existing VCQA holders only. This reflects the fact that many of you have been waiting a significant amount of time to renew your accreditation. To help us manage capacity (there are over 100 existing holders) we are taking a staggered approach and assigning several assessment places each month. Please contact us by 11 May to tell us your preferred month for submitting your Full Application. We'll assign slots on a first-come-first-served basis. If you let us know after 11 May we will do our best to meet your preferred time but be aware slots are limited. When you book your slot, you'll be asked to pay a 10% deposit of the fee and complete your Initial Assessment Checklist.

There is no requirement for existing VCQA holders to go through re-accreditation. If you choose, you can make this decision at a later stage, but it may mean your preferred month is unavailable. However, if you chose to apply later than February 2023, you may experience a break in your accreditation status when your extension ends in July 2023.

9. If I apply earlier, will my new three-year accreditation run from the date I receive the outcome, or from July 2023?

Accreditations for existing VCQA holders will run for three years from the expiry of your extension. However, to ensure we can manage capacity of re-accreditations in 2026, we will be discussing the timescales for undertaking a future re-accreditation process individually with each holder.

10. What is happening to the VCQA branding?

The VCQA logos and trademark rights are passed to NAVCA as part of the transfer from NCVO. We have updated the VCQA branding and will make this available to all organisations going through the reaccreditation process. Use of the VCQA logo and name will remain linked to achieving the VCQA and only those that have achieved accreditation will retain the right to display the logo and branding. Existing VCQA holders can choose to use the new branding or continue to use the current branding until their existing accreditation expires in July 2023 if they wish. From July 2023, all VCQA holders must begin using the new branding. We recognise that rebranding has an impact on organisations and we will work with VCQA holders to agree timescales to moving to the new branding post-July 2023.

The process

11. What information is available about the process and standards?

The Full Application Guidance document includes information on all aspects of the VCQA. It sets out the process, the Five Functions of Volunteer Centres and the types of evidence you might use to show you have achieved the standard. We encourage you to read the Full Application Guidance in full before making your Initial Application, and considering what evidence you have, any gaps, and when you might be ready to be assessed.

12. What happens if we don't meet all the standards?

You should have sufficient information to be confident you can meet the standard in each area before you begin the process. We want the process to be developmental, and you may find you need to do work in some areas to be sure you will meet the standards before you apply. NAVCA is keen to discuss requirements with those considering an application before they begin the process so, please do contact our Membership Team. In addition, NAVCA has a range of online forums that offer space to discuss all aspects of the Five Functions of Volunteer Centres and wider local VCSE infrastructure delivery which applicants can join once they have begun the process to seek peer support. We will continue to review the type of support organisations are looking for as we roll out the revised process, with a view to, for example, putting on workshops for organisations at different stages of the process if it seems that would be useful.

If you do not meet or exceed requirements of one the Five Functions, you may choose to resubmit evidence for that Function and request a reassessment. You will be required to submit this evidence within six months of the decision on your original submission. A charge will apply for this assessment. If you have not met or exceeded more than one of the Five Functions, you will be required to undertake a full re-application. Due to the work involved and the requirement to re-engage an Independent Assessor, the full fee will apply to the reassessment process.

13. Will the VCQA still be limited to one organisation per borough?

The first phase of applications will open to organisations who currently hold the VCQA only. Following this, we expect to open for applications from other VCSE organisations who can demonstrate they are delivering the Five Functions of Volunteer Centres at a local level.

The refreshed standard includes a greater focus on locally focused volunteer centre services and calls for evidence that organisations providing Volunteer Centre functions are fully embedded in their local area, connected to local stakeholders in the volunteering landscape, that they are knowledgeable about, and responsive to the local needs of these place(s) and their operations reflect this. To achieve accreditation, organisations that apply will need to demonstrate a core organisational focus on delivering volunteering infrastructure and deep connections to and across the communities they serve. As such, we do not anticipate large numbers of applications or awards from within a single local authority area.

We recognise this is a significant change for the VCQA. We believe being more inclusive in the way the VCQA is delivered is the most effective and equitable way to build and strengthen the network of high-quality Volunteer Centres in England. Our intention is to ensure all communities in England have access to high-quality infrastructure support and opening up accreditation will support this aim. Our intent is not to encourage more organisations to apply, or to foster competition, rather to respond to changes in the landscape and the need to recognise high quality, VCSE-led local volunteer centre delivery wherever it is being delivered.

The VCQA will not be available to statutory or private sector organisations as we do not believe these sectors are best placed to provide volunteer infrastructure support.

14. Can partnerships apply for the VCQA?

Separate organisations cannot come together to apply for accreditation under one submission as a partnership. Where organisations work in partnership to deliver Volunteer Centre functions across a wider area, they will need to either submit individual applications, or apply through a single organisation with a submission that evidences how the criteria are met across the whole of the geographic area it operates in.

If an organisation delivers Volunteer Centre functions in more than one place, we will review and accredit them for all their sites under one application. However, their evidence will need to demonstrate delivery at

the required standard in each area of operation. They will receive an accreditation in the name of the organisation that applied, for each borough in which they are operating and have applied for accreditation. This means that an organisation cannot apply for accreditation from one place and then use it elsewhere.

We are continuing to consult with a organisations this applies to, to ensure the process works effectively for VCQA applicants/holders with multi-site models and NAVCA.

15. Will assessments take into consideration the impact of Covid-19?

The VCQA requires evidence to be no more than 24 months old from the date of application. However, our assessment will ensure we remain responsive to future changes and take account of historical events that may impact the role volunteer centres play and the evidence that is available to applicants. Through our assessor training and moderation process, we will ensure assessments take full account of the challenges and changes organisations delivering volunteer centre functions have encountered through the pandemic.

Becoming a VCQA Assessor

16. Who can become an Assessor?

VCQA works on a peer assessment basis. Senior staff in Volunteer Centres who hold the VCQA, and those who have demonstrated senior experience in other ways, can be assessors. They will receive regular training and undergo peer review themselves to ensure a consistent approach to the standards.

17. What's involved in an assessment and what's the payment?

An assessment includes reviewing a VCQA submission and checking it for completeness, reviewing the evidence submitted against the VCQA assessment standards and making a judgement on how well the evidence meets the requirements. An assessment also includes speaking with personnel within the applicant organisation (i.e. staff, volunteers, trustees) and local stakeholders to better understand and verify the evidence provided. Engagement with the applicant and stakeholders is most likely to be via remote means such as virtual meetings or telephone calls. Finally, the assessment process involves writing a report setting out the assessment against each of the Five Functions, using a defined Assessment Report template, and discussing the same with NAVCA.

We expect it to take 3 days to complete the process and assessors are paid £900 (plus VAT where applicable) for each assessment delivered.

18. How do I register to be an Assessor and what are the next steps?

If you are interested in becoming an assessor, you will need to register your interest with us by Friday 13th May by emailing quality@navca.org.uk. Those who express an interest, be sent an Assessor Pack and invited to join training in June.

Following the training, we will then contact you to agree how many assessments you may wish to undertake, and make arrangements to book you into suitable diary slots.

We are recruiting Assessors now for ongoing assessments once the VCQA has opened up to new applicants in 2023 so please let us know as soon as you can about your intention.

19. How will you ensure that the standards of assessments are maintained?

We will hold our assessors to high standards. Assessors are provided periodic training, which takes into account the latest developments in Volunteer Centre function delivery. They are also required to sign NAVCA's Code of Conduct and complete a regular Conflict of Interest declaration.

20. Will the assessor be able to offer additional support and guidance?

The assessor cannot offer support or guidance as they need to remain impartial. You can find support through the Guidance Document, or can contact quality@navca.org.uk for limited support. We have also set up a Slack workspace to allow applicants to discuss their evidence with one another and engage in peer support. If you would like to join the VCQA Slack, please email us.

21. Will I need to travel to do the face to face assessment and will expenses be covered?

We expect that assessments will be conducted remotely. If an assessor would prefer to visit in person travel and accommodation will not be reimbursed.