



EDPQS Toolkit 1: Selecting quality drug prevention initiatives for funding and support (Funding & Decision-Making Toolkit)

**Policy Guide – Part 2:
Key issues for promoting high
quality in drug prevention**

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About the EDPQS project

The EDPQS provide a set of principles to help develop and assess the quality of drug prevention. They offer a comprehensive resource outlining all the elements of drug prevention activities. The EDPQS have been developed by the European Prevention Standards Partnership from a research project co-funded by the European Union. The Partnership undertook a review and synthesis of existing international and national standards as well as consulting with more than 400 professionals in six European countries. The EDPQS are the first European reference point on high quality drug prevention based on a consensus incorporating scientific evidence and practical experience.

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What is this document about?

The overall aim of Toolkit 1 is to provide practical guidance and support to help those involved in policy and decision-making roles to better understand the importance of quality and quality criteria with respect to prevention work, as well as how to apply this knowledge when faced with difficult choices about funding and support for prevention related initiatives or programmes. It is intended for policy-makers, decision-makers, commissioners and funders who have roles and responsibilities in drug prevention related issues at national, regional or local administrative levels.

The Policy Guide considers the different aspects of drug prevention programmes from the perspective of those who are in a policy and/or decision making position and who are expected to serve the public good and tackle a wide range of serious health and social problems, whilst having to face financial shortages and constraints. It offers key recommendations on the different aspects of drug prevention work and support that are required in order to achieve quality.

Part 1 of the Guide considers some of the major challenges related to prevention work and offers possible ways of overcoming them. It reflects on some of the misunderstandings and misbeliefs, as well as the expectations of drug prevention. It offers a reference point for how best to achieve quality through consideration of the European Drug Prevention Quality Standards (EDPQS); suggests how carefully planned policy can support quality; and considers some important related financial issues.

This is Part 2 of the Policy Guide. It highlights the necessity of needs assessment and evaluation in drug prevention planning as key aspects of the prevention cycle. In addition, sustainability and ethical considerations are considered as vital, but often neglected, aspects of prevention policy.

The final element of Toolkit 1 provides a practical **Assessment Quality Criteria Checklist** (<http://prevention-standards.eu/toolkit-1/>) that can be used to help the decision makers consider and review drug prevention programmes and initiatives in respect of their potential quality.

Use this Policy Guide to learn more about:

- The European Drug Prevention Quality Standards (EDPQS).
- Quality in drug prevention.
- Needs assessment as part of programme development.
- Evaluation of interventions.
- Sustainability and support as important components of a successful prevention programme.
- Ethical considerations from the decision-making perspective.
- Useful tips on how to address and implement these perspectives into the everyday decision making process.

Introduction

This second part of the Policy Guide is targeted at policy and decision-makers, including commissioners and funders at the national, regional and local level. The aim is to provide further practical information on how to help assure quality in the prevention programmes and initiatives that require investment, finance and support. It is suggested that both parts of the Guide are read together, as they complement each other.

As stated in Part 1 of this Policy Guide, it is clear that drug use remains a serious concern at the international, national and local level. It is an issue where the general public, professionals and policy-makers are united in the belief that *something* effective and efficient has to be done to address the potential problems that drug use can cause. Although it is clear that prevention efforts will not provide the universal solution to this multifaceted issue, it is acknowledged that it is an essential component of demand reduction strategies, and that there is a need to improve and professionalise prevention efforts. The target audiences of this Policy Guide play a crucial role in this endeavour as leading agents in creating the circumstances for efficient and effective prevention activities and interventions.

The European Drug Prevention Quality Standards (EDPQS) provide the framework for supporting high quality prevention, and significantly informs this Policy Guide. The Quality Standards provide a set of principles which aim to help to plan, achieve, deliver and assess the quality of drug prevention initiatives. Such initiatives have to be considered by policy and decision-makers with the request for them to select and/or support the most promising ones, taking into account lessons learnt from research and field experience. This Guide aims to assist policy and decision-makers to undertake these responsibilities.

This part of the Policy Guide focuses on particular issues of developing and supporting high quality prevention initiatives for consideration by policy and decision-makers who have the crucial role of making decisions about funding and support within the drug prevention field.

The key issues for consideration reviewed in this part of the Policy Guide are needs assessment, evaluation, the ethics of intervention, and funding considerations. These are considered as some of the most crucial elements of planning and programme development.

Key messages

Quality in drug prevention

- Quality in drug prevention provides an important concept for considering and reviewing drug prevention initiatives. It aims to aid the development of programmes using a structured process of review and planning in order to address the context and criteria that are likely to lead to the delivery of effective prevention actions. This process ideally proceeds through different phases and considers issues related to needs assessment in target audiences; resource assessment; programme formulation; intervention design; management and mobilisation of resources; delivery and monitoring; final evaluations; and dissemination and improvement.

The European Drug Prevention Quality Standards (EDPQS)

- EDPQS offers the first European framework on how to achieve high quality drug prevention. This framework is applicable to a wide range of drug prevention activities in various settings. The EDPQS Manual (<http://prevention-standards.eu/manual/>) offers one comprehensive resource outlining all the necessary steps in the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating drug prevention activities.
- Using the EDPQS, policy and decision-makers, including commissioners and funders, will have a better chance to identify and select, or review, those programmes that reflect high quality for their proposed target group, as well as obtain the potentially most effective outcomes from the resources invested in an initiative.

Carrying out needs assessment as part of drug prevention programme development

- A drug prevention programme should respond to the needs of the proposed target population. It must be informed by an empirical assessment of people's needs. This should be part of the key criteria when assessing a programme. There is no single prevention solution to meet all the needs of all target groups. The interventions should be tailor-made for the proposed target audience and this can be identified on the basis on assessing needs.
- Needs assessment also allows the most important target groups to be identified in local communities, both in terms of assessing where drug use occurs and the nature of the issue to be addressed.

Selecting prevention programmes for funding and support

- The method of selecting drug prevention initiatives to be funded should follow an agreed procedure. This procedure is provided through the recommendations of EDPQS to aid identification of interventions to be financed shown to meet as many quality criteria as possible with respect to an intervention being planned for development.
- Those who assess the programmes for selection should also be aware of the ineffective approaches in making their decisions. Ineffective approaches to programmes should not be funded, even if they are popular. Examples of such approaches are offered in Part 1 of the Toolkit (<http://prevention-standards.eu/toolkit-1/>). Applying Quality Standards to working practices allows a better chance of selecting up-to-date, needs-led, scientifically based, and effective programmes.

Supporting programme evaluation and follow-up

- Evaluation is a necessary part of intervention planning, programme implementation and reviewing programme effectiveness. It is important that this is understood and acknowledged by all involved in planning or supporting prevention work. Evaluation is not a discrete or separate part of the prevention action. It should be considered as something that underpins the whole process.
- In order to foster an evaluation culture, all those involved in the prevention process including policy and decision-makers, funders and commissioners have a responsibility to identify programmes where evaluation is planned and part of the initiative, or where appropriate activities being proposed are based on evaluations that have already been undertaken and reported.
- For those who are accountable for the use of resources and, to some extent, for the quality of service provision, it is crucial to understand how a programme has operated and why it has been run in that way so as to understand the process and the “active ingredients” by which it works. Evaluation helps in this respect. It is also essential to help identify and understand the outcomes from the project’s operation and to assess whether the stated objectives have been achieved.
- The Quality Standards do not provide guidelines on conducting evaluation, but they do suggest the most important considerations when seeking to understand programme effects and processes in addressing this matter. They can also help in the development of tender documents with respect to evaluation.

Sustainability of programmes

- Sustainability of prevention programmes depends mainly upon two things: the continued availability of funding and the lasting commitment of staff and other relevant stakeholders to the programme itself. Decision-makers should capitalize on the existing commitment when the programme in question is reviewed with respect to identifying the quality criteria.
- Policy-makers, decision-makers and funders have a responsibility in developing funding schemes that promote, support and ensure sustainability of quality and successful programmes. It is important to make sure that promising and beneficial interventions of quality will have long standing financial support.

Ethical considerations

- Interventions are ‘intrusions’ into the lives of the proposed target group. In order to make sure that no harm is done – and indeed that the outcome is of benefit - it is better to encourage the financing of a smaller number of well-designed, high quality and evidence informed programmes with clearly stated and theoretically supported aims and methods. This is likely to achieve greater success than a large number of low quality, ill-defined and vaguely elaborated programmes that may be lower cost, but unlikely to have a beneficial impact. Ethical considerations are an important element of the EDPQS, which require significant attention when reviewing initiatives. It is important that the work undertaken in prevention can be seen to meet the required ethical standards proposed.

1. Quality in drug prevention

1.1 What does quality mean in drug prevention?

Quality in drug prevention can be achieved when programme development is based on structured planning, and aims to ensure fulfilment of key criteria likely to lead to positive outcomes. The EDPQS state that quality relates to the following characteristics of a prevention programme:

- **Relevant** – a focus on responding to the needs of the target population whilst making reference to relevant policy.
- **Ethical** - incorporates the principles of ethical conduct.
- **Evidence-based** - makes use of the best available scientific evidence.
- **Evidence-providing** - helping to inform and develop activities.
- **(Cost) Effective** - achieving set goals and objectives without causing harm and with appropriate use of resources.
- **Feasible** - achievable with available resources and developed with an internally consistent logic.
- **Sustainable** - is sufficiently resourced to ensure it can continue as long as necessary in order to respond to the target population needs.

1.2 Why focus on quality in drug prevention?

There are many drug prevention programmes being delivered across the EU, targeting various groups, with different aims and methods (forms and intensity) within a variety of settings. As rapid changes occur in the drug phenomenon in our societies, there is the opportunity for innovation in prevention practice. However, a good idea, a brave, venturesome, or attractive programme will not necessarily be good enough, suitable or effective for a particular population.

Evidence-based knowledge is becoming an important demand among professionals and institutions in the drug prevention field, as well as among those who fund programmes. Nevertheless, the application and implementation of the lessons learnt through research is far from evident in much of the work being undertaken or funded. Several misbeliefs or misunderstandings, as well as unrealistic expectations exist in the field of drug prevention. Some people think that any prevention is better than no prevention; that prevention activities do not require special expertise; that prevention activities can be implemented based on common sense and that science does not have much to contribute to this issue. Due to these beliefs – or rather misbeliefs – much of what is offered under the name of drug prevention programmes is not based on what “works”, on evidence or on what constitutes “quality”. There is no perceived need for quality prevention work in many institutions. The EDPQS try to redress this matter by both offering a set of Quality Standards and a process for reviewing of prevention initiatives that allows quality to be assessed.

Prevention programmes may lack quality for several reasons. For instance, the real needs of the target population are not assessed in advance (e.g. young people at risk). The planning process of a programme may also overlook important steps and elements that result in unclear, unrealistic or irrelevant aims, objectives or activities unlikely to respond to the actual needs.

“Ask for results, but don’t expect miracles”¹

In recent years, there has been significant progress in understanding what works in prevention and about the quality standards that should be applied to prevention efforts. The application of the lessons learnt will produce substantial benefits for preventing substance use and for promoting health.

Finding decisive evidence regarding the effectiveness of different prevention activities/interventions is difficult, but nonetheless possible². The decision-maker, policy-maker or prevention commissioner can

encourage the dissemination of evidence based programmes from a particular country or region by supporting those that meet the Quality Standards.

1.3 Why trust and rely on the EDPQS material?

EDPQS is the result of a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral collaboration of organisations across Europe: the European Prevention Standards Partnership. The EDPQS are based on a review of 19 existing sets of quality criteria, and considering many other expert and practical experiences and recommendations. The EDPQS also take into account the different prevention cultures and contexts across Europe and propose a common set of principles that are applicable for various cultural backgrounds and socio-political circumstances.

The EDPQS outline the necessary steps and considerations in the process of planning, implementing and evaluating drug prevention activities. They help in understanding how people, interventions, organisations and (governmental) strategies can contribute to drug prevention. They encourage users to think about how existing efforts can be improved in order to obtain (even) better and more sustainable results. The EDPQS provide guidance on how to set priorities; how to conduct needs assessment; how to coordinate prevention activities; and how to ensure the sustainability of drug prevention efforts. They also help towards a better understanding of what prevention providers are aiming to achieve through their work and support the reflection on prevention strategies. The Standards can also be used to develop new programmes or review existing practices.

The EDPQS provide a unique approach to programme selection for funding and support by providing a system of review that can encourage the delivery of programmes with most potential for success for the target population and allowing the positive benefit from the available resources available.

2. The EDPQS approach: what are the key phases of thorough programme planning?

The Quality Standards show the steps to be taken to aid the development of a high quality prevention programme. They are presented within a cycle structure with four cross-cutting considerations and eight stages to complete (see Figure 1).

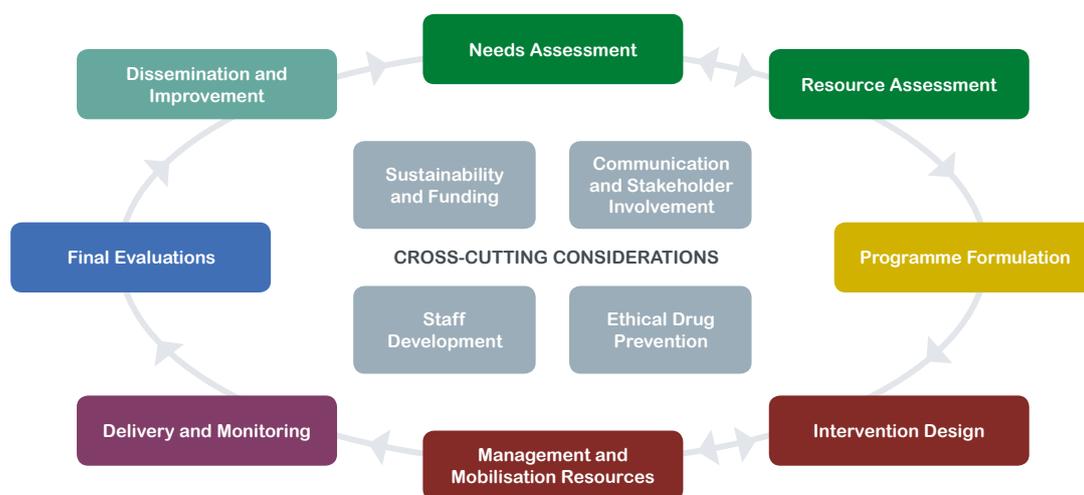


Figure 1: The Quality Standards Cycle

When selecting a programme for funding, the achievement of Basic Standards³ can be examined at all stages in order to provide a thorough picture of the planning and delivery of the action. Rather than focus on the detail of the planning process, this document considers two phases which are especially important from a decision-making point of view. These are often neglected elements in drug prevention: needs assessment and programme evaluation.

2.1 Why is needs assessment of key importance in drug prevention planning?

Implementing effective and needs-oriented prevention activities requires several key steps.

When planning a programme, planners have to take into consideration information from several sources. The programme should make reference to current drug-related policy and legislation; to the priorities of international, national or local drugs strategies. Other guidance, such as statutory standards and guidelines should also be considered where appropriate (see EDPQS Standard 1.1⁴). A drug prevention programme must also respond to the needs of the target population in order to be ethical and effective. Assessing drug use and community needs is about obtaining information concerning the extent of the drug problem and the characteristic of the target group - the beneficiary of the intervention (see EDPQS Standard 1.2). Knowledge of health and social needs also involves becoming aware of existing risks, as well as the protective factors which prevail or are required (EDPQS Standard 1.4).

The situation analysis at the local level aims at estimating the drug problem, following trends and examining public and institutional responses to drugs and drug use. A systematic observation of the local drug scene and responses to the problem helps to develop and implement needs-oriented drug prevention programmes or strategies, and then to design the evaluation that follows. The results of the needs assessment can be applied to help ensure the quality of drug prevention interventions by providing the information for those who put the policy into practice at local level.

Needs assessment allows local resources intended for drug prevention to be used more efficiently. Instead of vague opinions or subjective beliefs, programmes can be based on sound data which includes prevalence figures and other relevant epidemiological data.

2.2 Why is the evaluation of drug prevention programmes of key importance from a decision-making point of view?

The existing economic, social and political environment influences the implementation of prevention programmes. A broad range of factors can have an effect on intervention (that may either boost or, inversely, hamper their progress) and which can even lead to different results than expected. It is therefore crucial to understand how a programme has been implemented; why that choice was made; what processes have been applied; and the “active ingredients” by which it is believed to operate. These insights are important for decision-makers and managers who are responsible for the use of resources and, to some extent, for the level and quality of services provided. This also helps to meet the general demand for understanding the funds that are required and to encourage cost-effective programmes, especially in the context of economic constraints. Equally, there is an understandable request for identifying the achievements and outcomes of a particular initiative from perspectives of both economics and impact.

Decision-makers have an explicit interest in ensuring the supported projects are evaluated and share a responsibility in championing the evaluation culture, enhancing and mainstreaming it.

Evaluation covers the whole project life cycle of any prevention initiative. It must be prepared and has to be part of the selection criteria when assessing programmes for funding. It is of utmost interest and value to show other stakeholders and partners, professionals and the community, that evaluation must be and can be tackled in the general interest of all parties. With this need for focus on evaluation, the EDPQS provides useful criteria that allow evaluation to be integrated into the perspective that those accountable for important decisions about a project's quality require.

For funders and commissioners, the involvement in evaluation is likely to cover the following aspects:

- **Selecting well-designed programmes** by checking to what extent the programmes comply with the proposed steps of “programme formulation” of EDPQS. Programmes which have already been evaluated and shown to be effective, or are planning an evaluation, should be preferred. It may also be valuable to verify whether a funded initiative is being evaluated in respect to clearly described outcomes.⁵ At a minimum, programmes should be evidence-based i.e. taking into account scientific evidence on what works and what doesn't work in drug prevention.
- **Making sure that needs assessment will be an integral part of programme planning.** Outcome evaluation of a programme cannot be carried out without a well-designed and targeted needs assessment at its outset.
- **Allocating resources for evaluation research.** As in the case of financial shortages, service providers and professionals working in the field tend to concentrate their efforts on programme planning and implementation rather than on evaluation. It is the responsibility of the decision-makers, or commissioners, to ensure the financial resources for these activities, thus encouraging the researchers to become involved in any prevention related endeavour.
- **Supporting the establishment of an evaluation team** that gathers representatives of relevant decision makers, professionals working in the programme and, when possible, the representatives of the target group. They will collectively define the core questions about the programme (evaluation questions). The team can also address a variety of needs and encourage a dialogue, promoting collective learning as well as transparency.⁶
- **Follow recommendations for improvement and learning.** This is the most valuable part of the evaluation process. Evaluation should be carried out, not only to improve the programmes based on the evaluation results, but also to learn from the experiences and develop general knowledge at the field level.
- **Supporting dissemination of lessons learnt.** The dissemination of lessons learnt among relevant audiences is an essential piece towards the implementation of recommendations and initiatives. Taking the responsibility to be transparent, even if a prevention activity didn't work as intended, enhances the trust in evaluation, provided that the communication is prepared and agreed collectively. The dissemination of 'lessons learnt' should be a requirement of supported programmes.

Further guidance about evaluation for decision makers will be available in a *UNDOC guidance book on outcome evaluation of drug prevention programmes* (a link to this resource will be accessible from www.prevention-standards.eu/toolkit-1/). This will address issues such as when, and under which circumstances, impact evaluation is needed and how to support the development of an evaluation culture.

3 How to sustain prevention programmes and how to strengthen fundraising?

Quality drug prevention programmes should be embedded in a wider framework of prevention activities (e.g. within an organisation or a region). They must be designed to ensure continuity and long-term viability. Ideally, programmes shown to be effective should continue beyond their initial implementation phase or piloting. However, sustainability depends mainly upon two things: the continued availability of funding and the lasting commitment of staff and other relevant stakeholders to the programme itself.

Decision-makers have a major responsibility in developing funding schemes that promote, support and ensure sustainability of successful programmes. However, the longevity of financing of programmes requires a long term funding strategy from the position of both the funder, who might be responsible for national and local funding of prevention activities, and the programme developer or staff who need to carefully plan how to secure necessary resources for a certain programme after the main external funding has ended.

Those who are in a decision-making position with regards to funding are key players in developing funding mechanisms that support long term planning and sustainability. Funding agencies can also assist prevention organisations to develop knowledge and capacities to apply for funding successfully by providing fundraising guidelines, training for fundraising managers or training on developing funding strategies.

However, the most important thing is that funders of drug prevention work ensure sufficient funding is available to sustain promising and effective programmes. Unfortunately, in many cases this is not the case, but can be addressed by developing national and local funding strategies that support the approach of long term planning and sustainability of programmes.

4 What are the ethical considerations in a decision-making position?

Policy-makers and decision-makers are engaged in creating and ensuring the public good. This is why prevention is considered so important in their work. Two main, but occasionally conflicting policy options, can be identified in this regard: law enforcement measures and public health approaches. “*Policymakers need to find a balance between health promotion and restrictive policies.*”⁷ Policy-makers, reflecting on the needs and views of the general public, tackle serious social problems, such as (illegal) substance use. Quick, and seemingly effective and inexpensive, measures are often preferred. Drug prevention activities per se are seen as instruments contributing to the public good. In reality, it is the well-designed and evidence-based interventions that produce the most favourable outcomes. Decision-makers are under time pressures and thus in a difficult situation to make balanced decisions which are proven.

What is meant by the ethical aspects of decision-making in the context of drug prevention? Drug prevention activities and interventions are ‘intrusions’ into the lives of the target group. In order to make sure that this intrusion brings benefits rather than harm to that group, the ethical approach is to encourage and finance a smaller number of well-designed and evidence informed programmes with clearly stated and theoretically supported aims and methods with an agreeable budget, in preference to a large number of ill-defined and vaguely elaborated programmes which may have a low budget but unproven effect and which may impact negatively on the target group.

It is also important to make sure that promising and beneficial interventions have long term financial support. To put it simply: poor quality prevention is not just a waste of money, but also unethical. Drug prevention is not a one time endeavour. Policy-makers should bear in mind that adjustments and innovations will always be necessary as drug use trends and the substances used change. The need for, and the support of, evaluation activities are also unavoidable requirements for ethical prevention work as non evaluated, “gut feeling based” prevention interventions can be ineffective, costly and potentially harmful. For further information about the role of ethics in pursuit of Quality Standards in drug prevention see <http://prevention-standards.eu/position-paper/>

The final part of Toolkit 1 provides the **Assessment Quality Criteria Checklist** (<http://prevention-standards.eu/toolkit-1/>) and this allows the ethics underpinning a particular programme or initiative to be assessed. The list provides a tool that can be used by policy-makers, funders and other decision-makers to undertake a practical assessment of how a particular planned or existing prevention initiative meets the proposed Quality Standards of the EDPQS.

Other useful resources

Brotherhood A, Sumnall HR (2011) *European drug prevention quality standards*. EMCDDA, Lisbon. This Manual includes the Prevention Standards as well as further information on their development and considerations for implementation.

<http://prevention-standards.eu/manual/>

Brotherhood A, Sumnall HR (2013) *European drug prevention quality standards: a quick guide*. Ad hoc publication by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA). Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

<http://prevention-standards.eu/quick-guide/>

EMCDDA European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction "Best practice portal" to discover what works (and what doesn't work) in the areas of drug prevention, treatment, harm reduction and social reintegration.

<http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/best-practice>

EMCDDA European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2010), *Prevention and Evaluation Resources Kit (PERK). A manual for prevention professionals*. Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union. The Manual compiles basic but evidence-based prevention principles, planning rules and evaluation tips:

<http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/perk>

UNODC, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2013) *International Standards on Drug Use Prevention*. Vienna, United Nations. The standards describe interventions and policies that have been found to produce positive drug prevention outcomes in children, adolescents and adults.

<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/prevention/prevention-standards.html>

EMCDDA European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2012) *Guidelines for the evaluation of drug prevention. A manual for programme planners and evaluators. Second edition*. Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union. This manual (updated in 2012) contains helpful examples of how to plan and report the different aspects of evaluation.

http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/manuals/prevention_update

The UNODC is developing a guidance document for policy makers on the evaluation of effectiveness of drug use prevention programmes. This document will describe how to evaluate effectiveness of drug prevention programmes under different circumstances, what to evaluate and when, and how to support the dissemination of the evaluation practice (scheduled to publish in 2015).

References and Notes

- 1** Galla M (2003) A Guide for Policymakers and Funders To School-Based Drug Prevention. Utrecht: Trimbos Institute, Netherlands Institute of Mental Health and Addiction, p. 50.
- 2** EMCDDA best practice portal: <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/best-practice/prevention>
- 3** The Basic EDPQS standards should be applicable to all drug prevention work, regardless of particular circumstances. They are supposed to be met by all types of programmes to a certain extent (large or small scale, long term or short term programmes). The Expert Standards are more sophisticated, and are to be seen in addition to the basic standards representing a higher level of quality.
- 4** See the EMCDDA Manual for the referenced EDPQS Standards: Brotherhood A, Sumnall HR (2011) European drug prevention quality standards, EMCDDA, Lisbon. Available from: <http://prevention-standards.eu/manual/>
- 5** See Programme formulation phase in the EMCDDA Manual: Brotherhood A, Sumnall HR (2011) European drug prevention quality standards, EMCDDA, Lisbon. <http://prevention-standards.eu/manual/>
- 6** See Evaluation Standards in the EMCDDA Manual: Brotherhood A, Sumnall HR (2011) European drug prevention quality standards, EMCDDA, Lisbon. <http://prevention-standards.eu/manual/>
- 7** Galla M (2003) A Guide for Policymakers and Funders To School-Based Drug Prevention. Utrecht: Trimbos Institute, Netherlands Institute of Mental Health and Addiction, p. 52.

