

European Business and Innovation Centre Network

EBN

**DESCRIPTION OF THE QUALITY PROCESS OF
THE BUSINESS AND INNOVATION CENTRE NETWORK**

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I. The BIC licence

Since January 2002, EBN has been linked to the European Commission by a contract of trademark licencing with DG Enterprise and DG Regio. This contract grants EBN the licence to manage the European BIC trademark. EBN is charged with granting, renewing and withdrawing licences on behalf of the European Commission.

By delegating the management of the BIC/CEEI trademark to EBN, both DGs confirmed their confidence in and acknowledgement of the association representing the BICs. In this contract EBN was obliged to implement a certification and quality system enabling the development of a network of excellence through the integration of a quality approach.



II. The importance of the quality process

The quality process underpins the value of the trademark and of the organisations that have received the licence (professionalism, performance, consistency and positioning). This is essential notably within the context of the “ phasing-out” of the structural funds in some regions, the introduction of the new structural funds (2007-2013), the upcoming FP7 and the CIP (Competiveness and Innovation Programme). BICs are becoming more and more dependent on financing from local bodies and their own ability to generate their own resources. To adopt client oriented behaviour is becoming increasingly important.

Within the same context a large number of BICs have developed advanced skills in the engineering and management of national or European programmes. In addition to the contribution to the financing of the BICs these programmes have a strong impact on the reputation of the BIC, on its credibility with local actors and on the budgets and missions that they are allocated. This impact also contributes to the image of the network in terms of its capacity to implement national and community policies. It is in this very specific context that EBN lobbies and follows developments in the various Directorate-Generals (Research, Enterprise, Regional Policy, Education, Information Society etc.).

The information gathered in the framework of the quality initiative will lead to a better understanding of the network’s activities. It will also enable the publication of the Annual BIC Observatory, a document which explains the achievements of the network and helps to raise its profile and standing. It is obvious that this Europe-wide reputation is directly linked to the network’s positioning in terms of national, local and regional authorities as well as towards clients, partners and competitors.

The third and last pillar of the quality process is “ benchmarking”, which is achieved through the tools for analysis and comparison of results, approaches and methods.



III. The components of the “BIC Certification and Quality System”

III.1 The licence contract between EBN and the European Commission

As mentioned previously, this contract sets up the legal base and the link between the European Commission and the BICs. It defines the roles of EBN and the European Commission. It confers on EBN the status of manager of the BIC trademark for the European Commission.

III.2 The licence contract between EBN and labelled organisations

This contract grants the right to use the BIC trademark and defines the obligations and commitments of accredited organisations, namely the BICs. This contract is signed between the licensee (EBN) and the sub-licensees (the BICs).

III.3 Licence trademark criteria

These criteria are defined on the basis of the “BIC guidelines” and are defined in annex 3 to the contract between EBN and the European Commission and repeated in annex 1 of the initial contract between the Commission and the BICs or in the new contract between EBN and the BICs. These criteria enable the measurement of conformity of an organisation to the BIC model. They are described in a separate document : BIC Quality Mark Criteria.

III.4 The graphic chart of the BIC logo

This describes the rules for using the logo: graphics, colour codes, size, space positioning.

III.5 The EBN quality process

The present document describes the values, the principles, the rules and tools of the Certification and Quality System implemented by EBN at the request of the European Commission. The BICs that have been granted the BIC trademark commit themselves to respect their obligations with regard to the quality process of the network.



IV. The quality process of the network in detail

IV.1 The self-evaluation questionnaire

This is the cornerstone of the initiative, the tool that enables the collection of qualitative and quantitative data and adds credibility to the network's quality process. Each year, the BICs must submit a completed questionnaire to EBN.

This questionnaire allows EBN to:

- Assess the degree of conformity to the label criteria and implement any further necessary steps (audits, technical assistance, corrective measures etc.).
- Maintain a database for the purpose of benchmarking, allowing BICs to compare their results with those of other BICs having similar profiles – (or not).
- More effectively answer the targeted requests of members such as searches for information or for partners within the framework of technical assistance or setting-up of a consortium for a European programme.
- Publish examples of best practice across the network to members.
- Write, publish and disseminate the annual activity report of the network namely the “BIC Observatory”, for members. This report is also a useful tool for marketing and lobbying at European, national or regional levels, for the promotion of one BIC, a group of BICs or the entire network.



IV.2 The “BIC Quality Mark Committee” (BQMC)

The Committee consists of three external experts and one EC representative together with three BIC Managers, all with voting rights. There are three additional members without voting rights: one EC representative, the EBN Managing Director and the EBN Quality Manager. A list of current members of the BQMC can be obtained from the Quality Team at EBN.

IV.3 Decision making process.

From the study of individual questionnaires, one of three conclusions is reached:

Scenario 1. The organisation conforms with the label criteria and shows performance appropriate to its spatial characteristics, its age and its financial means.

Scenario 2. The organisation conforms with the label criteria but does not perform at an optimum level. In this kind of case EBN initiates a discussion, takes into account the specific circumstances of the organisation and the region, gives recommendations and suggests a period of technical assistance through a contract with EBN.

Scenario 3. The organisation does not seem to conform with the label criteria. The visit of an expert is compulsory in order to understand better the causes and the context in which the BIC is working. The expert submits a mission report to the BQMC.

In each of these three scenarios, the BQMC can ask EBN to carry out an on-site visit. This visit will be automatic in the case of the third scenario, as a result of random selection in the case of the first scenario and on a case by case basis in the second.

The role of the BQMC is to ensure good governance of the initiative, avoiding any conflict of interest. It also takes the final decisions regarding the outcome of evaluation visits. Together with EBN the BQMC selects the BICs to be audited (see chapter IV - On-site visits).

It is important to note that any organisation can evolve in such a direction that its mission no longer conforms with the EC BIC criteria. Without questioning the professionalism of the organisation as such, the BQMC then has to consider the withdrawal of the licence. The organisation can still stay in the network as EBN is allowed to transfer the organisation from the Full Member category to the Associate Member category. This revision of status enables the organisation to continue to benefit from EBN's activities and services. It can also stay in contact with the members of the network with which it wants to develop co-operation and benchmarking. The organisation is allowed to use the EBN logo, but it cannot be labelled a BIC anymore or use the corresponding logo.



IV.4 On-site visits

EBN systematically assesses on-site any new candidate for the BIC label and submits a report to the BQMC. EBN's Board of Directors fixes the cost of these audits on an annual basis for the members and non-members. These evaluation missions are carried out by selected experts trained by EBN.

Concerning the visits to existing full members of EBN (that is to say organisations that are already labelled as a BIC), at least 10 % are audited each year. The selection of the BICs to be visited is proposed by EBN with the BQMC confirming or suggesting alternative names based on information collected and analysed from the questionnaire.

For organisations which are interested in the BIC quality mark but do not want to become a member of EBN (exceptional cases), the audit visit is compulsory. EBN carries out an audit visit to these organisations every two years, but provides no other services.

IV.5 Licence renewal or withdrawal

All on-site missions are followed by a mission report that is submitted to the BQMC. No licence can be withdrawn without deliberation by the BQMC based on this mission report.

After discussing the mission report, the BQMC can decide to:

- Renew the licence for 3 years;
- Grant the licence conditionally for 1 year;
- Withdraw the licence.

In the case of a conditional granting one of the conditions could be a period of technical assistance (to be paid by the BIC Licensee).

When discussing renewal or withdrawal of existing BIC Licences two points must be taken into consideration:

- The self –evaluation questionnaire must be satisfactorily filled in;
- The EC BIC Quality System must be followed.



V. Conclusions

The quality process aims to provide the BICs with added value. It is a tool for benchmarking, marketing and networking. Thanks to the annual questionnaire, EBN can – amongst other things - publish and disseminate the annual report (BIC Observatory), identify the competencies developed within the network and be aware of European projects in which BICs are participating.

The quality process thus enables EBN to improve its services to its members: more effective lobbying, updated quality information and databases, a better knowledge of the network, improved networking and better-targeted European programmes.

Finally, it should be noted that the costs of the quality initiative are included in the annual membership fee.

However, there are some additional expenses specific to evaluation visits. For on-site visits, the expert and travel costs are charged to EBN. Hosting costs (one hotel night in general) and catering are charged to the BIC visited, as is the cost of any local transport used by the expert.

In the medium term, it is the value and the strength of the BIC label, of each BIC and of each BIC's market, which will be reinforced and boosted by a stronger European network, stemming from the EBN BIC Quality System.



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