

QOLIVET On-line Training Course

Module 1: Introduction to Quality of Life

Module Description	This module aims to introduce staff working in community care and vocational educational training to core concepts in the area of quality of life & disability.
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Introduction:

Quality of life (QoL) has become a frequently used terms in many spheres of activity ranging from environmental action and urban design, through economic and political science, to advertising and marketing¹. There are almost as many models and definitions as there are interested researchers and agencies. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that a good QoL is a very desirable aspiration for individuals and for societies. At this stage, enhanced QoL has been adopted as an important aspiration by many international and national agencies including the European Commission, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and many national governments.

There are two important reasons why people working in mainstream and disability services need to understand what the components of QoL are and how independent living and vocational services can have a positive impact on QoL outcomes for persons with disabilities.

Firstly, QoL has increasingly gained prominence in the community care (CC) and vocational education and training (VET) sectors. If you compare the intended outcomes of programmes in these sectors to the components of a good quality-of-life (QoL), you will notice that there is a significant overlap. Secondly, the EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 prioritises QoL as one of its pillars².

The QOLIVET online course is intended to provide you with an overview of the key ideas and practices that staff in CC and VET service can apply in their day-to-day interactions with service participants to enhance the likelihood that the service will have a positive impact on their QoL.

It is important to note that this is only an overview and that if you wish to delve deeper into any topic of interest, you can review the resources which can be accessed by clicking on the links included in the text or by going to the resource section of the module and browsing the documents provided there.

¹ IES Business School (2013). Quality Of Life: Everyone Wants It, But What Is It? *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/iese/2013/09/04/quality-of-life-everyone-wants-it-but-what-is-it/?sh=1fdde66c635d>

² European Commission (2021). Union of equality: Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1484>

M1LO1	Define Quality of Life and describe approaches to understanding it
1.1	Define QoL
1.2	Models of QoL
1.3	Dimensions of QoL

What is QoL?

At a general level, a good QoL can be viewed as being similar to being satisfied with your life. Consider the way you live your life right now, look at the things that surround you and the things that you own, and how you are feeling. If you are satisfied with the way things are, you probably have a decent QoL.

Below are some questions that will give you a sense of how happy you are with the quality of your life.

- How happy are you with:
 - Your physical and mental health?
 - Your relationships with family, friends and the other people with whom you interact?
 - Your living conditions?
 - Your possessions?
 - The locality where you live?
 - Your job and your career prospects?
 - Your level of income?
 - Your work-life balance?
 - Your enjoyment of your leisure time?
 - The opportunities you have for self-development?
 - Your status in society and within your local community?

It is unlikely that you would have rated the answers to all these questions as 'excellent' but many people in developed societies rate these as relatively good. Of course, there are irritations and challenges in some areas occasionally but when people in the EU were asked to rate their overall life satisfaction using similar questions in 2021, the average rating was 7.2 out of 10³.

It should be clear that this conception of QoL is very subjective. Two people in very similar life circumstances could rate their satisfaction very differently. One person might be very satisfied with their life, while the other person might feel very negatively. Subjective ratings of QoL can be influenced by a person's current state of mind, their values and beliefs, and the culture in which they live.

Consequently, it is important that more objective indicators of QoL are also taken into account in estimating QoL. These measures take a comparative view on the main areas of life that are considered to impact on its quality. Most objective measures include the following indicators.

- Living conditions
- Working conditions
- Environmental conditions

³ Eurostat (2022). *Quality of life indicators - overall experience of life*. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Quality_of_life_indicators_-_overall_experience_of_life

- Economic status
- Civic Engagement
- Personal security
- Health
- Social networks
- Social participation
- Education

The judgement of QoL is based on a comparison of a person’s current conditions in comparison to the average conditions in a society. This can also be used to compare the QoL of regions or countries⁴.

This course is focused primarily on subjective perceptions of QoL. In order to provide a basis for the rest of this course, the following definition has been adopted.

QoL is an individual’s perception of their position in life compared to their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns. It is a subjective view that is influenced by the culture and value systems in which they live⁵.

Figure 1 below illustrates the model of QoL that informs this course. It is adapted from a model which has been developed and tested over a period of 20 years⁶. QoL is considered to be about your position in life and within your own community and how you view these based on your personal beliefs, dreams and values. The quality of your life is the result of the interaction between you, your goals and your expectations and the experiences you have when you interact every day with the people, places, things, and services that you encounter.

Figure 1: The QOLIVET Model of Quality-of-Life



Explanations of each of the components of the model are presented below.

⁴ WorldData.info (2021). *Comparison of quality of life worldwide*. <https://www.worlddata.info/quality-of-life.php>

⁵ World Health Organization (2012). *The WHOQOL Guidance (normative)*. CH: Author. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-HIS-HSI-Rev.2012.03>

⁶ Schalock, R.L., Verdugo, M.A., & Lee, T. (2016). A systematic approach to an organization’s sustainability. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 2016, 56, 56-63. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2016.03.005>

Individual Empowerment: A person who is individually empowered can make choices and decisions and act on them. They set goals and engage in activities to develop their capacities. They are able to exert control over things in their environment and can deal with any challenges that stand in their way.

Personal Development: A person can become more empowered by being engaged in life-long learning activities, understanding better how to deal with challenges, becoming more competent in completing life tasks and being more able to act independently.

Self-Determination: This is an important part of being empowered. It involves setting goals and striving to achieve them, making choices and being able to act on them, having the confidence to defend beliefs and actions and being able to get assistance and advice when needed.

Social Participation & Active Inclusion: Full participation and inclusion in the community and society are important aspects of quality-of-life. Social participation includes being able to interact successfully with family, friends and strangers on an individual level and to engage in social, cultural and political activities in the local community. Engaging in society as a citizen on an equal basis with others and respect for rights and entitlements are two key aspects of participation and inclusion. Participating in work is a particularly important example of inclusion.

Interpersonal Relationships: QoL can be impacted by interactions with other people, including family and friends, strangers, people in authority, and those who are providing services. Being better able to manage relationships and making your needs clear are important aspects of positive relationships.

Rights & Citizenship: Every citizen in society has certain rights and entitlements. If these are not respected by other people or institutions, this can have a negative impact on QoL. Equally, being a citizen comes with responsibilities to contribute to society and act in a responsible manner. Acting as a good citizen can enhance inclusion.

Employability: Being able to work can make a substantial contribution to QoL. People who are working are generally more satisfied with life. Having the employability skills to seek and obtain work or employment can increase the likelihood of having a job and a better quality-of-life. Being able to keep a position once employed or to change jobs, if necessary, are also important employability skills.

Community Participation: Being a part of the local community can make a positive difference to QoL. Most communities have clubs, organisations, and associations which offer opportunities to engage in free-time activities. Participating in these activities can provide a positive and rewarding leisure time. There are also organisations that are dedicated to supporting local people spiritually or materially. Being connected to some of these can offer opportunities to help others or to get help when needed.

Wellbeing: This is about being satisfied with your life. Generally, it refers to health, happiness, and prosperity. Experiencing good mental and physical health, being able to manage stress, and being able to gain the money needed for a decent life are all factors that can enhance QoL.

Emotional Wellbeing: This involves feeling good about yourself, having confidence in your abilities and being able to deal with any life challenges that may cause you stress. Resilience or being able to bounce back after a disappointment can protect emotional wellbeing.

Physical Wellbeing: Feeling physically fit and healthy can increase the likelihood of having a better QoL. Regular exercise, a balanced diet, and having access to health care when needed can be important to achieving and maintaining physical wellbeing.

Material Wellbeing: Having all the things needed to live comfortably and being able to spend money on the necessities of life and have some over to afford leisure activities are important aspects of quality-of-life. Being able to get a paid job is one way that many people enhance their material wellbeing. Being able to access financial support when needed is also important.

M1LO2	Describe the relationship between disability and quality of life from a biopsychosocial perspective
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 Impairment vs disability 2.2 The importance of the environment

How can an impairment impact on QoL?

Anyone who has struggled through a serious viral infection, who has sprained or broken an ankle or who has experienced severe headache or back pain, will appreciate how this can impact on their QoL. In addition to the *biological* impact of the health condition, such as pain or lack of stamina, there are also *psychological* effects in terms of how you feel or think. This can also be affected by the people around you who can help you and the services that are available to you. This is the *social* aspect.

Putting these three perspectives together provides a *biopsychosocial* description of the impact of a health condition on QoL.

For example, as we get older, we develop a variety of health problems which can result in reduced functioning which impacts on our ability to carry out activities. In some cases, these can restrict our capacity to participate in valued life activities. A good illustration of this would be a person who enjoys reading but whose sight is failing. Luckily, there are a number of solutions which can assist this person to continue to enjoy their favourite past-time. Corrective lenses or laser eye surgery are the most common type of interventions to compensate for reduced visual functioning. However, even when glasses or contact lenses are not effective, the person can still enjoy literature through the medium of audio books and screen readers.

There is a significant minority of people who are born with, who develop or who acquire impairments which are not age related. We commonly refer to these people as persons with disabilities. However, it is important to be aware that just because you have an impairment of functioning, this does not inevitably mean that you have a disability. There are many examples of people experiencing reduced functioning who live fulfilling and productive lives and who participate fully in the life of the community.

The distinction between having an impairment and experiencing disability is key to understanding the role that services can play in enhancing QoL. Disability activists first drew attention to this distinction in late 1970s and it was integrated by the World Health Organisation into a biopsychosocial framework to characterise health and disability in 2001⁷.

⁷ World Health Organisation. (2001). *Towards a Common Language for Functioning, Disability and Health*. Author. ICF <https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/classification/icf/icfbeginnersguide.pdf>

The logic behind the biopsychosocial approach goes something like this.

- A health condition can result in a long-term or permanent reduction in body function.
- This can involve mental, physical or metabolic functions.
- Reduced functioning can limit the activities that a person can carry out.
- Being limited in certain activities can restrict a person's participation in life activities.
- This process is not inevitable. The environment within which the person lives can facilitate the person to continue to carry out activities or to participate more fully.
- The opposite can also be the case. The environment may contain factors that place barriers in the path of a person which reduce their capacity to act or participating in life activities.
- The process is also different for each individual depending on their personal characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, age, education or religion.

From a biopsychosocial perspective, disability is not a characteristic of a person but a process in which the interaction with environmental factors reduces the person's QoL. A disabled person is someone with an impairment who is restricted in their participation as a result of negative environmental factors.

This view of disability as a process rather than a state of being is often referred to a biopsychosocial model. This refers to the fact that disability is understood to involve biological element, has a psychological dimension and is impacted by psychosocial and physical facilitators and barriers.

It is not difficult to think of people who have an impairment who have fully participated in society and life activities. A number of these are listed below.

- Stephen Hawking
- Andrea Bocelli
- Franklyn D. Roosevelt
- Stevie Wonder
- Helen Keller
- Winston Churchill
- Ludwig van Beethoven
- Martin Luther King

The list is endless.

The main messages of the biopsychosocial perspective are:

1. Just because you have an impairment (experience reduced functioning) does not mean you will become disabled.
2. The facilitators in your environment can reduce the level of disability that you experience
3. The environment can also contain barriers that increase the extent to which you are disabled.
4. Your personal characteristics can play a role in helping you to become more able

M1LO3	Explain how Quality of Life can be enhanced through service provision
3.1	Individualised assessment
3.2	Person centred planning
3.3	Reduction in physical & psychosocial barriers through diversity of interventions & supports

What role can services play in enhancing QoL

We all rely on services to protect and enhance the quality of our lives. Imagine what it would be like if the people who dispose of our rubbish were to go on strike. This is one reason why, in many countries, police and security forces are prohibited by law from withdrawing their labour. It might be worth reflecting on the range and variety of services upon which we depend to ensure a decent QoL. These include:

- Transport
- Health
- Social Protection
- Education and Training
- Security
- Retail
- Environmental
- Hospitality
- Entertainment
- Energy
- Legal
- Information#
- Communication

When these services operate effectively and the people who provide them fulfil their roles properly, they can act as environmental facilitators of a good QoL. However, many of us have had experiences where the service did not meet our expectations or where the staff in a service did not carry out their roles in a proper manner. The impact on our mental and physical wellbeing, when we have an interaction like this, is often very negative. It can reduce our QoL significantly.

If a service does not meet the needs of any individual, it can impact negatively on their QoL. This can be particularly the case for a person who has specific individual requirements. It has been widely documented that people with specific needs arising from an impairment are often confronted by services that are not designed to meet their needs because they are not accessible, the staff have not been trained in how to respond or the eligibility criteria exclude them from participation. This can be the case even in services that are specifically tasked with providing services to persons with disabilities.

Most developed and developing societies provide services that are intended to provide interventions and supports to people with a variety of functional impairments. Equally, the right of persons with disabilities to fully participate in mainstream services is underpinned by non-discrimination legislation. There is no reason why both mainstream and specialised services are not required to meet the customer service standards that most people expect in their daily interaction with any service. In particular, we expect to receive a service that is:

- Efficient and effective (does what it says on the tin)
- Delivered by properly trained staff, who:
 - Acknowledge us as individuals
 - Try to customise the service to meet our individual needs
 - Treat us with respect and dignity, and
 - Support our efforts to gain satisfaction.

- Takes on board our comments and complaints and in order to improve the quality of what is being offered.

There are three important mechanisms that can increase the likelihood that a service, whether mainstream or specialised, will enhance the QoL of a person with a disability.

1. **Individual Assessment:** A service that takes as its starting point the needs and strengths of the person concerned is more likely to be relevant to the person.
2. **Person centred planning:** A service that involves the person concerned in setting goals and priorities and deciding the best way to achieve them has a better chance of being effective and efficient in assisting them to achieve their goals. Involving the person in evaluating the extent to which interventions and supports have achieved their intended outcomes can result in more targeted and sustainable solutions.
3. **A Biopsychosocial Approach:** A service that attempts to accommodate the functional needs of the person concerned is likely to be more accessible and inclusive for a more diverse customer base. This can be achieved by identifying potential physical or psychosocial barriers and taking steps to reduce or remove these. Where this proves to be challenging, the service can provide the person with access to additional interventions to build their capacity to act on their own behalf or to supports and assistance which allow the person to participate more easily in activities. Having a facility to listen to the text on a website is one example of making something more accessible to a wider range of customers. Offering a chat function which puts a customer in touch with a real person is an example of helping the person to negotiate the website on their own behalf.

M1LO4	Describe the role services play in fostering specific aspects of QoL
4.1 QoL as a primary outcome of CC & VET services 4.2 QoL principles underpin all interventions & approaches 4.3 Services role in fostering use of right & meaningful inclusion	

Some examples of how services can impact positively on a number of aspects of QoL

Community care (CC) and vocational education training (VET) are two sectors that have the potential to make a very significant contribution to the QoL of person who are experiencing disability as a result of reduced functioning. This is the case for both mainstream and specialised CC and VET. Some examples, based on the model described earlier, of the ways in which they can impact positively on QoL can help to make this clear.

Individual Empowerment:

- CC services can empower their participants not only by building their capacity to act on their own behalf but also by operating on the principle that the person is a proactive member of the planning team whose views are acknowledged and who is treated with a parity of esteem alongside the other team members.
- VET service can empower their participants by assisting them to learn how to learn more effectively and by acknowledging that learners understand what their needs are and working with them to identify solutions to address the challenges they are facing

Personal Development:

- CC services can build into their processes and procedures that, in addition to providing the supports a person requires, offer opportunities for them to engage in learning and in developing their capacities and interests.
- VET services can take on board that technical knowledge and skills need to be complemented by social and interpersonal skills and provide both formal and informal learning opportunities for a person to develop and practice interpersonal, communicative and cognitive skills.

Self-Determination:

- CC services can foster a sense of self-competence in the person by providing opportunities for them to make choices and take control of the activities in which they are engaged and by providing formal training in decision-making and problem-solving. They can also enhance a person's capacity to care for themselves at home and in the local community.
- VET services can engage actively with the person to allow them to contribute to the development of an individual learning plan and provide flexibility in the learning outcomes which they can select. Decision-making and problem-solving can be built into the curriculum for all participants and the effectiveness of these skills can be assessed.

Social Participation & Active Inclusion:

- One of the priority objectives of most CC services is to support the full participation of a person in the community. In this regard, CC services can take into account that a person needs to be competent in interacting not only within the confines of the service itself but also in the wider community. This can be achieved by building links to, and working in partnership with other community organisations.
- It is widely acknowledged that being successful in VET results in many downstream benefits for those with the necessary skills and qualifications. A key question for VET services is what benefit do they provide to a person who withdraws from the service or who does not obtain a qualification. By specifically addressing individual needs and social and communication skills, VET can reduce drop outs, increase qualifications and enhance the likelihood that even those who do not complete a programme have acquired skills that are useful in achieving greater social participation and inclusion.

Interpersonal Relationships:

- CC services provide services to specific individuals who are the intended direct beneficiary of the service. Nevertheless, there are often extended beneficiaries, the chief of which can often be the family members of the person concerned. The service can engage with the family to try to establish a more equal relationship in which the autonomy of the person is respected. This can be achieved by helping the person to develop a circle of support. It can also encourage the person to expand the network of people with whom they interact and help them learn better communication skills and techniques.
- VET services often focus on work-related social skills and try to instil in the learner an understanding of the appropriate ways to relate to others in the workplace. Actually, the social skills required to be successful at work are not very different from those required to develop positive and constructive relationships in the social sphere. VET services can also provide support to learners who disclose facing challenges with their networks of family and friends. This can serve as a useful basis for more fulfilling relationships more broadly.

Rights & Citizenship:

- There are many resources and supports to ensure that a person experiencing disability obtains the rights and entitlements that are guaranteed under international and national legislation. CC services can support a person in standing up for their rights through formal training in self-assertiveness and by ensuring that the person understands their rights and responsibilities as a citizen and where to go to get support. CC services can provide the person with in-house support to protect and promote their rights as a service participant.
- It has been recognised that discrimination can represent a substantial barrier to successful participation in major life activities. VET services are in an excellent position to educate learners about their rights and responsibilities as part of the complementary curriculum. They can emphasise the importance of being able to assert rights by making sure that learners are fully aware of their rights within the service and by signposting supports that can provide advice and advocacy to a person who believes that their rights have been infringed.

Employability:

- The correlation between employment and positive QoL is well documented. While CC services are generally not specifically tasked with helping a person find work, there is evidence that engaging in supported work can have a significant impact on the self-esteem and confidence of participants. This is particularly the case when they are paid the market rate for the work they do. Even where a person may not be ready to engage in work, a CC service can build into the person-centred plan goals that will impact positively on a person's awareness of the world of work and employability skills. Services that are not in a position to address employability as an objective can reach out to other organisations who do and develop collaborative initiatives.
- The proportion of participants who enter employment is usually a good indicator of the success of a VET service. Often direct placements to employment and those gaining employment within a period after graduation are counted in evaluating a VET service. Those dropping out of employment afterwards are rarely taken into account. The important outcome of effective VET services is not only about jobs. It is also about preparing a learner to be competent in a flexible labour market where they may have to change jobs frequently throughout their careers. Employability skills are essential to this and VET services can foster these through formal and informal learning opportunities.

Community Participation:

- CC services that engage with the local community and seek to create more inclusive environments and combat potential negative attitudes are more valued by their participants. CC services need to acknowledge that the capacities and competences developed within the service will not automatically transfer to the external world. They need to create opportunities for people to practice those skills in other contexts and building relationships with local businesses, associations and clubs can create these opportunities.
- VET services often develop relationships with the local business community in order to create opportunities for work experiences, in the job training and even placements. By taking a broader view, VET services can consider developing volunteering opportunities where learners can gain real life experiences that will be useful in their careers and make a genuine contribution to the local community. This can have a knock-on effect by changing attitudes in the community. It can also help the person to learn how to balance the demands of work and life.

Wellbeing:

- The effectiveness of CC services is often assessed in terms of the perceived wellbeing of participants. It can be referred to as health and social gain or health-related QoL (HRQoL). CC services can contribute to wellbeing by providing supports for independent living and by offering a person a service that can address their intimate needs with respect and dignity.
- While wellbeing can often be enhanced by obtaining gainful employment, work also has the potential to damage a person's physical or mental health. It is essential that learners are equipped with the knowledge and skills that allow them to recognise physical or psychological risks in the workplace and to negotiate with management to have these addressed. It is also important that learners are made aware of the importance of maintaining a healthy balance between the demands of work and life.

Emotional Wellbeing:

- There are a variety of factors that can impact negatively on a person's emotional wellbeing. Loneliness and isolation are two potential risks. By encouraging a person to develop their social networks and to build constructive relationships with those around them, CC services can contribute to a person's positive sense of self and connectedness. Even where the formal contract for a CC service is narrowly focused on providing physical supports for independent living, a CC service needs to be responsive to the emotional needs of the person.
- While being employed is associated with better mental health outcomes, over 40% of workers in the EU report being faced with workplace factors that place their mental health at risk⁸. There is a responsibility on VET services to properly prepare learners with the strategies and skills to cope with negative stress at work and to become more resilient in the face of workplace mental health challenges.

Physical Wellbeing:

- The role of CC services is often specified in terms of health gain or maintaining a person's physical capacity. However, in addition to providing the required supports and interventions, they can also encourage a person to develop a healthier lifestyle, to get involved in exercise and to maintain a healthy diet.
- There were 2.4 million non-fatal accidents in the workplace reported in the EU in 2018⁹. While there is a clear responsibility on employers to maintain a safe and healthy workplace, there is an onus on workers to comply with safe working practices. VET providers are required to promote and protect the health and safety of their learners, but they also need to educate learners about safe working practices and to recognise potential risks.

Material Wellbeing:

- CC services that are involved in providing residential service and accommodation have a particular responsibility to protect and promote the material wellbeing of participants. Nevertheless, all CC services need to ensure that a person has access to all the financial

⁸ Eurostat (2021). *Self-reported work-related health problems and risk factors - key statistics*. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Self-reported_work-related_health_problems_and_risk_factors_-_key_statistics

⁹ Statista (2021). *Workplace Accidents in Europe*. <https://www.statista.com/chart/24756/fatal-workplace-accidents-per-100000-workers/>

supports to which they are entitled and to assist them to manage their money carefully. It is also essential that CC services protect the safety and security of the person.

- Over their lifespan, graduates of post-secondary VET programmes earn 20% more than those who completed high school¹⁰. On this basis alone, it is clear that VET can impact on material wellbeing. However, VET providers have a responsibility to ensure that their programmes are as inclusive as possible and address a diversity of learning needs to ensure that the positive impact on material wellbeing of successful completion of a VET programme is experienced by a wider variety of learners. VET services can also enhance their impact on the material wellbeing of a person by educating them how to manage their resources and plan their spending.

¹⁰ OECD. (2019). What are the earnings advantages from education? <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/ab9c46ef-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/ab9c46ef-en>