

BIC QUALITY MARK CRITERIA

Preamble

The EC BIC Quality Mark can either be granted to an organisation as a whole or to a specific department or business unit of an existing organisation. In the latter case, the criteria apply to that specific department.

For both organisations as a whole, or departments of an existing organisation, the criteria that must be met to be awarded the BIC label are grouped under six headings: (1) Mission, (2) Organisation, (3) Services to Public Authorities, (4) Services to Innovative Entrepreneurs and SMEs, (5) Performance, (6) Quality of Services

1. Global Mission : Innovation

BICs are regional economic development tools aimed at developing innovation. Depending on the characteristics of the territory and the existing business support organisations already present, BICs may focus on fostering the creation of new innovative enterprises or developing innovation in existing enterprises.

BICs should define what “innovation” means in their catchment area: what kind of enterprise should be created to render the territory more competitive and/or what processes of change are required in existing SMEs in order to increase their competitiveness (technological, commercial, organisational, financial changes)? In the event that the territory shows R&D potential, technological innovation should be a priority.

BICs may work with non-innovative companies but only to develop them with either consultancy, SME diagnostics, training, or inclusion in a specific program (internationalisation, clustering, enterprise take-over etc.)

2. Organisation

BICs must :

- work in a specific catchment area (a region, province, city etc.)
- be acknowledged by the relevant public authorities in their catchment area
- be either public or private
- co-ordinate their activities with those of other business support organisations
- have an allocated budget
- have a clear positioning, strategic and action plan aimed at creating new jobs through the creation of innovative companies or the development of existing companies
- have identified premises (a BIC may be hosted by a bigger organisation)
- have a dedicated team of at least three full time staff.

3. Services to Public Authorities (Support for the innovation supply chain)

- 3.1. BICs must support local authorities in designing and implementing local development programmes aimed at creating new innovative SMEs and/or developing existing SMEs. These programmes may focus on spin-off engineering, clustering, internationalisation, female entrepreneurship, environmental innovation, training and coaching entrepreneurs, interregional benchmarking and access to finance. BICs must position themselves as operational tools for local authorities. They have much to offer because: they act locally and think globally.
- 3.2. BICs must act upstream of the creation of SMEs. They must develop a methodology in order to promote, support, identify and generate innovative companies.

4. Services to Innovative Entrepreneurs

BICs should be active either in terms of incubation (creation of innovative enterprises) or SME support.

4.1. Incubation

- Risk analysis pre-creation (technology, marketing, human resources etc.) and guidance and support in order to define an action plan, feasibility studies, budget forecast, and a business model.
- Financial engineering: public measures (taxation, subsidies), alternatives to bank loans (business angel networks, seed capital, venture capitalists, private initiatives [competitions etc.], EU programmes (FP6, Gate2Growth, sector-oriented programmes etc.).
- Training: analysis of entrepreneurs' needs, signposting to relevant organisations or designing and implementing specific training programmes.
- Mentoring and networking (coaching, entrepreneurs' clubs, associations).
- Helping to provide premises with appropriate services (signposting to suitable premises or hosting when managing an incubator).
- Follow-up for three to five years after creation (continued access to financing, benchmarking against business plan to ensure realisation and proposals for corrective actions if necessary. Follow-up may be partially sub-contracted but BICs should be proactive in the prevention of business failure.

4.2. For existing SMEs, BICs carry out a number of activities, tailor-made for the individual company

- General diagnosis of any innovation gaps : SWOT analysis; recommendations and action plan
- SME consultancy: support aimed at increasing the innovation profile (marketing, financing etc.)
- SME vocational training (e.g. internationalisation, management, Intellectual Property etc.)
- Inclusion of SMEs in specific projects (clustering, enterprise take over, technology transfer, women in management, renewable energy etc.)

4.3. Signposting is a Key Service of a BIC.

BICs must act as an interface between the innovative entrepreneur and local public and private bodies: BICs must identify a local "talent pool", the members of which are selected according to the needs of the innovative entrepreneur, for example: IRCs for technology transfer, EICs for EU programs, patent officers, marketing advisers, lawyers, professional organisations, clubs/associations of entrepreneurs, development agencies, Chambers of Commerce, banks, venture capitalists etc. Access to this selected talent pool provides added value to both entrepreneurs and existing SMEs. BICs comply with the B2Europe charter.

5. Activity Measurement

In order to reinforce the reputation of the network and for benchmarking purposes, EBN delivers an activity report every two years. BICs must use the common indicators to assess their activities.

6. Quality

The BIC Quality System is based on a TQM approach (EFQM model) using self assessment, benchmarking reports, and on site visits. BICs must comply with the BIC Quality System. In particular they must:

- a. Send their self-evaluation questionnaire on an annual basis
- b. Facilitate audits and provide all the information requested
- c. Implement the decisions of the BIC Quality Mark Committee.