Civil Engineering Environment Quality Assessment and Award Scheme (CEEQUAL) is a rigorous and comprehensive sustainability rating scheme, similar to the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology (BREEAM) but for civil engineering projects, requiring commitment and demonstration of high environmental and social performance. The rewards and benefits of implementing CEEQUAL on a project can help the designer and client gain recognition for project sustainability and also ensure compliance with legislation, policy and adherence to best practice.

Consultants undertaking a CEEQUAL assessment in parallel with the EIA process have increased leverage with which to encourage distinctive environmental and social performance as designers and clients are equipped with an extended checklist to explore opportunities for the inclusion of measures to ensure a project contributes to a more sustainable society.

Using CEEQUAL, the designer can proactively incorporate enhancement strategies into preliminary designs. CEEQUAL recognises mitigation as a regulatory process but merely mitigating likely negative impacts does not score the highest marks available. To score high marks on the CEEQUAL assessment the designer and client use the CEEQUAL manual to address environmental and social issues positively through 'designing out' potential negative impacts and 'designing in' improvements.

The emphasis of CEEQUAL is to encourage designers to incorporate best practice (beyond compliance) into a project with the aim of improving health and quality of life and restoring or enhancing the natural / built environment and ensuring resource efficiency. To this extent the CEEQUAL assessment is synergistic with the amended EIA Directive (2014/52/EU), which has been updated to:

- address resource efficiency, sustainability and the risks of accidents and disasters;
- ensure a high level of protection of the environment and human health; and
- ensure that all design modifications and measures to avoid, prevent, reduce or offset significant adverse effects, on the environment, identified through the design and assessment process are fully reported to ensure commitment, implementation, monitoring and management.

As an example the CEEQUAL process provides the designer the opportunity to consider the wider scope of environmental issues indicated above from the outset. With particular reference to the Project Strategy section and CEEQUAL question: ‘1.1.4 – Environmental Impacts and Benefits’, high marks will be awarded for evidence that demonstrates:

‘that the Client and/or the Designers have undertaken an environmental impacts and benefits assessment of the project on a wider scope than just the project owners’ interests and appropriate to the nature, scale, design life and location of the project, including assessments of possible enhancements to the local environment?’

And that:

‘promises of enhancements given in the Environmental Statement or other output from the environmental impact assessment have been delivered in the design alongside those for environmental mitigation and compensation?’

And further evidence that:

‘where appropriate, actions to support the results of these environmental impacts and benefits assessments have been included within relevant contract documentation?’
To this end the CEEQUAL assessment requires that mitigation, enhancement and protection are considered within the project strategy and during the conception phase of the project. The greater emphasis on monitoring and measurement in the amended EIA Directive is echoed in the CEEQUAL Project Strategy section which requires detailed commitments to monitoring during / post construction and post construction management of environmental impacts identified during planning.

The above demonstrates how CEEQUAL can complement the delivery of a project which adheres to current UK EIA Regulation (and to the amended EIA Directive). CEEQUAL sets out a practical framework, with detailed examples of potential evidence, from which the designer can understand the requirements of going beyond compliance.

The synergy between CEEQUAL and the amended EIA Directive not only benefits the client and designer by helping them to understand and implement legislative and best practice requirements but also promotes and strengthens the need to consider mitigation, improvement, enhancement, restoration and monitoring measures through all stages of EIA.

Further, the prestige and benefits of gaining a high CEEQUAL score can also provide the client increased motivation to address the mitigation and monitoring stages of the EIA process early in the CEEQUAL process. The benefits of managing client expectations through their aspirations to gain a high CEEQUAL mark can afford the consultant the opportunity to guide the client through the ‘designing in’ improvements and enhancements process whilst ‘designing out’ negative impacts and the need for subsequent mitigation.

Delivered in parallel with EIA, the CEEQUAL process can therefore benefit both the client, designer and consultant by providing an extended checklist from which to address both risk and opportunity throughout the EIA process from conception to monitoring and management during construction and operation.

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