

ASCOT in Practice:

Gesundheit Österreich GmbH (GÖG)

An interview with Christine Köberl, MBA, Health Expert and Director of 'NQZ' certification at Gesundheit Österreich GmbH (Austrian National Public Health Institute)
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How did you first hear about ASCOT? Why did you decide to use it?

The ASCOT data collection instruments SCT4 and INT4 are well known in the Austrian home care sector. As part of the further development of the National Quality Certificate for Nursing Homes (Nationales Qualitätszertifikat für Alten- und Pflegeheime, NQZ), it was important for us to focus more on residents' quality of life and to move beyond indicators of structural and process quality.

ASCOT provided a scientifically robust framework and tool for systematically assessing the quality of life of residents in nursing homes. Therefore, we decided to integrate the instrument into the NQZ certification process in collaboration with the Research Institute for Economics of Aging at WU Vienna and the University of Kent. This allows quality of life to be made visible, assessed, and compared across facilities.

Can you briefly describe how ASCOT is used?

An adapted German-language version (ASCOT-CH4X©) was developed collaboratively with researchers at WU Vienna and University of Kent. It drew on the mixed methods ASCOT-CH4 and research by University of Kent to develop a care home-level ASCOT rating. ASCOT-CH4X© is used as part of the NQZ certification (*a **voluntary opt-in quality standard** for Austrian nursing homes*). ASCOT-CH4X© is used to systematically assess the quality of life of residents in nursing homes – placing the resident at the centre.

ASCOT-CH4X© combines structured tick-box responses with open-ended questions. It also draws on structured observations of everyday situations within the nursing home, conducted by the certifiers using a guide covering the eight ASCOT domains. Individual interviews are also carried out with residents addressing all domains, and a structured reflective discussion is conducted with staff members directly involved in care and support.

The certifiers bring together the findings from these different sources of data and then rate each of the eight domains on a four-point scale at the home level. This standardized approach enables results to be presented quantitatively and compared across the sector. Facilities receive valuable insights into their strengths and potential areas for improvement, which can be used to develop targeted quality improvement measures.

What challenges did you face in implementing ASCOT-CH4X©? How did you overcome them?

The implementation of ASCOT-CH4X© involved a range of challenges. An important first step was translating and adapting the instrument to the Austrian care home context. Throughout this process, it was necessary to continually assess how the instrument could be applied in everyday practice and what adaptations were required to ensure that it met both scientific standards and practical needs.

A particular challenge for certifiers was that the process was new. The instruments were not yet widely familiar. These challenges have gradually diminished as experience with the instrument has increased. Initially, integrating the assessment into the limited timeframe of an on-site certification visit proved demanding. Certifiers must select suitable residents for interviews from a list provided by the facility. During the interview, they need to guide the conversation while maintaining a focus on the resident's quality of life, and at the same time remain responsive to the individual's needs and circumstances.

Another challenge was conducting and documenting observations in the daily environment of the nursing home. Certifiers must then reflect on and document their observations and interview findings together with staff members, while also answering the structured questions in the instrument.

Triangulating the findings from observations, resident interviews, and reflective discussions requires a careful and systematic approach. This ensures that the perspectives of the people living and working in the facility are comprehensively taken into account. Moreover, both NQZ certifiers must agree on the same rating for each of the eight ASCOT domains.

The technical implementation also presented challenges. The content and rating had to be integrated into the existing IT infrastructure. The links between the different assessment elements and the rating matrix, where all of the relevant findings are brought together, had to be established. This required intensive collaboration between subject-matter experts and technical developers to translate professional requirements into a workable digital solution.

For nursing homes, the main challenge is providing the necessary resources. Residents must be available to participate in interviews from a selection of suitable residents identified by the nursing home, and staff members need to be released from regular duties to take part in reflective discussions.

Many of these challenges were addressed through the development of a dedicated digital support system. This IT platform enables both nursing homes and NQZ certifiers to navigate the certification process efficiently and with ease.

Before the system was introduced, several documents had to be exchanged via email between nursing homes and NQZ certifiers. Today, all relevant files can be uploaded, accessed, and managed directly within the platform. In addition, all users can track the status of the NQZ certification process, access certification reports and communicate through the system.

The platform also allows NQZ certifiers to document interviews, observations, assessments, and ratings in a structured manner. Without this IT system, it would not be feasible for certifiers to complete the ASCOT-CH4X© in a timely and efficient way – just a few hours. By bringing all relevant information together in one place, the system supports the triangulation process and helps ensure consistency and reliability in the assessment of the eight ASCOT domains. As certifiers have become more familiar with both the methodology and the digital tools, the assessment process has become more efficient and easier to integrate into routine certification practice.

Beyond supporting the certification process itself, the IT platform also serves as a valuable tool for continuous quality improvement by providing the nursing home with structured data, facilitating benchmarking, and highlighting areas for further development. The nursing home is part of the process and the data they contribute towards is shared back with them for the purpose of quality improvement.

Overall, the IT system has significantly streamlined the certification process, making it both faster and more user-friendly.

Has ASCOT-CH4X© influenced any decisions or service improvements?

From our perspective, ASCOT-CH4X© has significantly enhanced the value of the NQZ certification. The central focus of any nursing home is its residents and their quality of life. The assessment makes visible how residents experience their quality of life and highlights areas of particular strength, as well as opportunities for further development.

The findings provide nursing homes with concrete guidance for improvement. This helps them direct their efforts toward developing and improving aspects of care that matter most to residents.

By embedding ASCOT-CH4X©, certification has become even more strongly focused on quality improvement that matters to residents. The insights generated by ASCOT-CH4X© help ensure that services remain closely aligned with residents' needs and preferences.

Further Information:

- <https://www.nqz.gv.at/> (NQZ certification)
- <https://short.wu.ac.at/ascot> (Austrian ASCOT website. This provides information on German language ASCOT measures, including the ASCOT-CH4X©.

The ASCOT-CH4X© was developed through a collaborative project involving Gesundheit Österreich GmbH, WU Vienna and the University of Kent part of the London and South East University Group (LASE). The instrument is © 2026 London and South East University Group (LASE) und WU Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien. All rights reserved.

References:

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