

Questioning clients and staff – the new Quality Assessment Framework

As part of the QAF refresh there is a stronger emphasis on client and staff confirmation of practice in services. The questions in the QAF provide a basis for the contract teams to assess how the service is operating. Feedback from clients and staff helps to confirm and assess the evidence which has been submitted. Questions should be asked to; clients, front line members of staff, and service managers. The following provides a guide to how to use questions to validate the QAF.

General considerations to think about when using questions to validate the QAF:

Who are you asking the questions to?

- Sitra recommend that front line staff, managers and clients are interviewed.
- How many people do you wish to interview and why?
- Interviewing people who do different roles and have been in the organisation for different lengths of time gives a cross section of views.
- What type of interview is the best format? Focus group or one to one?
- What do you want to get out of the interview and why?

How the interview is carried out

- Ensure that the language used reflects the terms that the provider uses, e.g. if they call their support plans, 'Outcomes plans', ask about 'Outcomes plans' as opposed to support plans.
- How long should be spent interviewing clients and staff?
- Give clients an opportunity to have an advocate present.
- Questions should be relevant to the person who being asked? e.g. front line members of staff will struggle to answer questions about the organisations governance.
- Think about whether the question is relevant to the service type?
- Use prompts to encourage answers, for example, 'can you tell me more.....'

Structuring questions

- Should questions be open or closed? e.g.:
 - *'Do you have a safeguarding policy and procedure'* (closed question)
 - *'Can you tell me about how you ensure that clients are safeguarded in the service.'* (open question)
- Would scenarios be useful? e.g.:
 - *'What would you do if you were concerned that a client was being financially abused by a family member?'*
- Are questions clear or unclear, leading or allow for a number of responses, or asking a number of questions in one question, e.g.:
 - *'Do you feel that the advice and support offered by this service means that it is a good service?'*
- Avoid jargon and acronyms, e.g.
 - *'Has the service advised you about how to complain to your SP team or your RSL, depending on circumstances of the complaint.'*

In order to fully assess a service, Sitra would recommend that time is spent speaking to clients and staff about their experience of the service. We would recommend that contracts teams spend time looking at the QAF and thinking about the questions they need to ask. A number of standards could

be covered by one question. For example asking a member of staff, *'Can you tell me about your induction and the training you received when you started in the job'*, could assess a number of areas, C1.1.5, C1.3.3, C1.4.1 and C1.5.5.

When assessing the question answers, the answers should be based on the organisations evidence submitted as opposed to assessment against good practice. As well as assessing the areas where the QAF explicitly states, *'staff confirm'* and *'clients confirm'* interviews can also be used to assess evidence which has been submitted where there is a need for clarification in the evidence.

There are a number of ways that teams could potentially group questions to be asked, one way to look at how to ask the questions is to think about the categories questions could fall under, e.g., delivery of service as one category and policy and procedure as another. This approach has been taken below:

Question category	What this assesses	Examples of questions
Policy and procedure	<p>Whether members of staff are following the organisations policies and procedures. Does their practice reflect policy and procedure, if it does not why not?</p> <p>E.g. if the lone working policy and procedure states that lone workers call into the office at the beginning and end of the day to say that they are safe. Do staff they confirm this?</p> <p>Do members of staff know where policies and procedures are and do they use them?</p>	<p>Can you tell me how you assess new clients?</p> <p>Can you tell me about your lone working arrangements?</p> <p>Where are your policies and procedures stored?</p> <p>Have you had a chance to contribute to policy and procedure review and if so how?</p> <p>Were the policies and procedures explained to you when you started your job?</p>
Staff management and development	<p>Are staff supported enough?</p> <p>Are training needs identified?</p> <p>Are they inducted appropriately?</p>	<p>How often do you have supervisions?</p> <p>How often do you have team meetings? What is discussed in your team meetings?</p> <p>When did you last have training? Was the training useful?</p> <p>When did you join the team?</p> <p>Can you tell me about your induction process? What training did you have? Did you have an opportunity to shadow colleagues?</p>
Delivery of services	<p>Assessing how well services are delivered.</p> <p>Do staff know what their role is.</p> <p>Are staff aware of specific duties, e.g. safeguarding and maintaining professional boundaries?</p>	<p>Tell me about how you support your clients?</p> <p>How long do you support clients for?</p> <p>Explain to me how you ensure that clients are supported to take positive risks? Can you</p>

		<p>give me an example of a positive risk?</p> <p>How do you ensure that clients understand information given to them?</p> <p>How do you ensure all vulnerable adults and all children are safeguarded in your service?</p>
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Questions for service managers fall into the following categories

Question category	What this assesses	Examples of questions
Policy and procedure	<p>How policies and procedures are developed.</p> <p>Whether staff and clients are aware of them.</p> <p>How policies and procedures are reviewed.</p>	<p>When did you last review your lone working policy and procedure? Who was involved in the review?</p> <p>How do you ensure that staff are aware of policies and procedures?</p> <p>Can you explain to me any changes which have been made to a policy and procedure? Why was the change made? How will the changes be reviewed?</p>
Staff management and development	<p>How staff are supported and supervised?</p> <p>How staff are trained and supported.</p> <p>Internal monitoring and auditing.</p>	<p>How often do you hold staff supervisions?</p> <p>How do you identify staff training needs?</p> <p>Can you give me an example of the types of training opportunities that you give staff?</p> <p>How do you check the quality of the work being delivered to clients?</p>
Partnership working	<p>Whether the organisation works in partnership with other organisations at a client, service or organisational level.</p> <p>How good relationships are with partner organisations.</p> <p>How the organisation uses partnership working to develop the service.</p>	<p>Can you explain to me how you work in partnership with other agencies to deliver outcomes for clients and the service? Are these relationships formalised through a service level agreement or equivalent?</p> <p>How do you liaise with other agencies? Do you have evidence of this liaison?</p> <p>Can you give me an example of where your organisation has</p>

		worked in partnership to achieve shared outcomes?
Client involvement and empowerment	How clients are involved in the organisation. Whether clients feed into the organisation strategically?	Can you explain to me how clients can feed into the organisation? Can you give me an example of where feedback from clients has led to changes in the organisation?

The final group of questions will be to clients, which will fall into the following areas:

Question category	What this assesses	Examples of questions
Joining the service	Whether the client had the right information when they joined the service.	How long have you been in the service? Were you referred to this service or did you apply to it? Did you know about the services on offer when you applied to the service? Is there anything you would change about the process of joining the service?
Service delivery	The clients experience of the service. Assesses whether their experience matches with the evidence. Does the service deliver what it states it will.	How often do you see your support worker? What do you cover in your support sessions? What changes has the service helped you achieve? What could be improved in the service? Do you think you need the service to support you still? Short term services – Has the service discussed moving on with you?
Empowerment	Whether clients have an opportunity to feed into the service. Whether they feel able to make complaints about the service.	How would you complain if you had a concern? If you complained do you think that your complaint would be addressed? Who would you tell if you thought that a change could be made to the service? How does the service seek feedback from you about what is good and what changes are

		needed in the service?
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A full list of validation questions has not been provided, as it is important for teams to think about what they want to ask and why. Further questions are likely to differ between types of service and client group. A useful exercise to carry out with staff and providers would be to think about how to ask and phrase questions in order to have a number of questions which could be used during validations.