
Report of the Quality Working Group

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Executive Summary and Recommendations

The Department for Social Development published 'Opening Doors: The Strategy for the Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services to the Community' in September 2007.

'Opening Doors' tasked the Advice Services Alliance (ASA) to facilitate the implementation of the Strategy by ensuring consistent quality standards are established and maintained within membership organisations. The Department's intention is that only those who meet the required standards will actually receive funding. 'Opening Doors' also asked the Advice Services Alliance to produce a standard set of quality measures to cover training, IT, reporting systems, premises and adherence to the core values of advice work.

This consultation document seeks to begin that journey.

The Background and Terms of Reference provides an overview of the Quality Working Group which was established to take forward the work on quality outlined in the Strategy. Introduction and Appendices 1 and 2 set out the progress the advice sector has made to date. In particular, Appendix 1 sets out a scoping exercise of existing arrangements for Citizens Advice, Advice NI and the Law Centre. Appendix 2 provides an overview of external frameworks for quality standards many of which are already being embraced by local advice agencies.

The Introduction also acknowledges that further work is needed to measure the quality of legal advice and casework undertaken by advice agencies. This will require developing a framework that meets the needs of advice agencies and their funders in Northern Ireland. Independent peer review is likely to be central to any new arrangements being carried forward.

Draft Standards and Guidelines form the main part of the consultation document (Section 1), alongside an indicative costing for a hub and satellite (Section 2). The Standards and Guidelines cover general principles that underpin the work of an advice agency: staffing and services; accessibility of services including premises; management and accountability; training, information and policy work, equipment and funding arrangements.

The implementation of standards and guidelines, and further development of quality measures including the quality of advice being given, will have financial and other resource implications for local advice agencies and their support organisations.

We welcome your views on how the Advice Services Alliance can carry this work forward and how this work can be resourced alongside meeting the financial needs of advice agencies in delivering their work.

A number of questions have been asked in Section 3 to assist consultees with their responses.

Recommendations

Contingent on funding being made available:

1. That all advice agencies should be able to meet the standards and guidelines contained in this document by April 2010.
2. That the standards and guidelines should be renewed every three years.
3. That all advice agencies should have an externally validated benchmark of quality in place by April 2010.
4. That a framework for measuring the quality of advice should be developed including independent peer review. A framework to be agreed by September 2010 and implemented by April 2011.
5. That an agreed financial minimum baseline should be agreed for hubs and satellites by April 2009.

Background and Terms of Reference

The Quality Working Group was established to take forward work relating to quality as outlined in the Department for Social Development's 'Opening Doors' Strategy. In line with the Strategy, the Terms of Reference for the Group were to:

- Produce a standard set of quality measures for area hubs, satellite provision and outreach to cover training, IT, reporting systems, premises and core values of advice work.
- Ensure consistent quality standards are established and maintained within membership organisations.

The Quality Working Group met five times between November 2007 and February 2008. The Group recognised that considerable progress had been made to benchmark the quality of advice organisations, both through external accreditation and through membership requirements set by the constituent members of the Advice Services Alliance. The Working Group then examined how to build on the progress made to date. The Group also recognised that further progress needed to be made on measuring the quality of advice delivered. In addition, the standards and guidelines set by the Advice Services Alliance in the early 1990s needed up-dating and could provide a framework for meeting agreed standards of quality. These standards had been drawn from the Citizen Advice Membership Scheme. The Working Group also felt it was important to provide indicative costings for a hub and satellite before taking into account the recommendations on quality, training and IT being brought forward by the Advice Services Alliance.

The report therefore covers the work already done to date on quality, up-dates standards and guidelines for advice agencies and sets out recommendations to progress external assessment of the quality of advice organisations and in particular, how the quality of legal advice delivered can be measured.

As the work progressed it was clear that the report was going to be, in effect, a consultation document and it has been drafted with this approach in mind.

Introduction

'Opening Doors: The Strategy for the Delivery of Voluntary Services to the Community' aims to put in place an integrated quality advice service across Northern Ireland. In particular, the Advice Services Alliance (ASA) is charged with ensuring consistent quality standards are established within membership organisations. In addition, 'Opening Doors' asked the ASA to produce a standard set of quality measures for area hubs and satellites covering training, premises, reporting and other key issues. The Department's intention is that only those who meet the required standards will actually receive funding.

This consultation document sets out the minimum standards of provision and service that should be provided by advice agencies, and an indicative costing of a hub and satellite. By implication this also provides a benchmark for the minimum levels of funding which a satellite and hub should receive, excluding costs for peer review and outcome measurement, and the implementation of recommendations contained in separate Training and IT papers produced by the Alliance.

We recognise that the appropriate level of funding will be determined by the catchment area of the service and whether it is serving a local neighbourhood, a town and its surrounding districts, or a large geographical rural area. In addition, many advice agencies provide outreach services to meet specific needs which also have a financial cost. Some of the standards set can only be met if sufficient funding is provided to cover staffing needs, fully accessible premises and the equipment needed in a modern voluntary sector advice agency. The Alliance is particularly cognisant of the need to ensure the right balance between the need for additional resources for local advice agencies to deliver their services alongside the additional costs associated with external accreditation of quality. With this in mind we have produced indicative minimum costings for the hub and satellite.

Enabling advice agencies to reach these standards will have financial implications for advice agencies and their support organisations and these will need to be addressed by the Department and other funding bodies.

Considerable work on quality is already being done by advice agencies. Many advice agencies already have externally accredited benchmarks of quality; for example, Investors in People, ISO quality standards and LEXCEL. In addition, the criteria set by Citizens Advice and Advice NI for members sets additional requirements.

Appendices 1 and 2 of this consultation document set out the details of how quality standards frameworks are adhered to by Advice NI, Citizens Advice and the Law Centre, including the membership criteria set by the Regional Office of Citizens Advice and Advice NI for its members. This illustrates where the sector currently is with regard to meeting quality standards.

Beyond external assessment of the quality of systems and procedures, and funding bodies' requirements of accountability, outcome measures and value for money, there is the further dimension of demonstrating that the correct legal advice is actually being provided. This immediately leads to looking at a framework for assessing the quality of advice and casework delivered, and evaluation through independent peer review. This approach will require substantial groundwork, be time-consuming and is likely to carry a significant financial cost. The Alliance will want to look at initiatives developed in Northern Ireland and elsewhere to ensure that we build on best practice. We are interested in your views on how measuring the quality of advice and casework can be carried forward. In particular, we wish to look at how the consistent failures to meet particular quality thresholds will be dealt with in practice.

We recognise the need to continue to further develop quality standards throughout the sector and are keen to discuss with the Department how the next stage of this work can be carried forward and resourced. Our aim is to review the standards every three years to ensure they remain relevant and appropriate.

We welcome your views on how to carry the work on quality forward, on the draft standards and guidelines and the indicative costings for a hub and satellite. A full list of consultation questions is contained in Section 3.

Section 1: Standards and Guidelines for Local Advice Agencies

General Principles

The advice agency should meet the following principles:

1 Independence

Be independent of political parties, statutory organisations and free from other conflicts of interest.

2 Impartiality

Provide an impartial service open to everyone regardless of race, religion, politics, age, sex, sexual orientation or disability.

3 Accessibility

Provide a free and accessible service to all members of the community which it serves.

4 Confidentiality

Provide a confidential service to all of its clients, and meet all data protection legislative requirements.

5 Effectiveness

Provide an effective service to all of its clients and the community which it serves. The advice centre should be able to show its effectiveness through demonstrable and measurable outcomes.

6 Accountability

Provide a service which is accountable to its users and others who work with the advice centre.

1 Staffing and Services

Advice services

- 1.1 An advice agency should normally be able to provide a service covering core subjects including social security, housing, debt, employment, consumer, mental health and immigration. Representation at social security appeal tribunals should also be provided. The advice agency should also be able to demonstrate to its network organisation that it has procedures in place to refer cases to specialist agencies where specialist advice and other assistance is required. Where appropriate, consideration should be given to providing outreach services and other services beyond those covered above. Organisations providing specialist advice in a specific area of law will not provide advice across the areas outlined above. Such agencies should provide advice, casework and representation in their particular area, and have appropriate referral mechanisms in place to deal with other issues.

Staffing levels

- 1.2 Staffing is the most important resource when considering overall provision of advice services. Advice work is time intensive and adequate staffing is crucial to ensure an acceptable level of service is provided.
- 1.3 The staffing level of the advice agency should be proportionate to the size of the population it serves and be sufficient to meet the needs of the area it serves.
- 1.4 A local advice agency should have a minimum of four staff (or full time equivalent) who are trained as advisers, and sufficient additional staff to provide appropriate administrative support and management arrangements.
- 1.5 An area hub which is providing a wider range of advice, casework and advocacy services will need a minimum number of advisers of at least six staff (or full time equivalent) alongside sufficient additional staff to provide appropriate support and management arrangements.
- 1.6 Employees should receive salaries in accordance with recognised public service pay scales.
- 1.7 All staff and volunteers should receive a job/task description setting out clearly the duties and responsibilities associated with their post.

- 1.8 All paid staff should receive a written statement of terms and conditions of service which covers all statutory requirements. An occupational pension scheme should be offered to staff not engaged on temporary arrangements. This should include a contribution to the pension scheme from the employer. All volunteers should receive a written task description including arrangements for payment of expenses.
- 1.9 Advice centres should have in place appropriate induction arrangements for all new staff and volunteers including, for paid staff, the need to successfully complete a probationary period.
- 1.10 A range of personnel policies should be in place including policies on:
- equal opportunities and non-discrimination;
 - freedom from bullying/harassment;
 - absence management;
 - use of internet/email;
 - grievance and disciplinary procedures;
 - flexible working arrangements;
 - health and safety;
 - payment of travel and other appropriate expenses for staff and volunteers;
 - use of volunteers.

An annual appraisal system should also be in place for all paid staff. Support can be accessed from regional network organisations to meet this requirement.

Training and Development

- 1.11 An advice agency should have a training and development policy for all staff and volunteers. For advisers, the training should ensure that the skills, and knowledge needed for the role are kept up-to-date. An allowance of at least £1000 per adviser should be allocated for training in the first year to allow for core foundation training. In subsequent years a minimum of £500 per advisor should be allocated for training. Up to seven days a year should normally be allocated for training each year. This may need to increase to meet specific organisational and individual training needs. Training plans should be developed and training records kept for all staff. Continuing training can be met in-house as well as through utilising external training

providers. Whenever possible, staff should be encouraged to obtain externally accredited qualifications and pursue continuing professional development opportunities as part of meeting training needs.

Where volunteers are utilised, there should be a budget of at least £150 per annum for each volunteer in place to meet their training and development needs.

2 Accessibility of Services

Location of advice centre

- 2.1 The location of an advice agency should be carefully chosen to best meet the needs of the population it serves. Where possible it should become a focal point of a local community and be accompanied by other community services.

The advice agency should be close to public transport and have nearby parking for private transport users. Where appropriate, outreach facilities should also be provided.

Type of premises

- 2.2 The premises should be welcoming for users and staff. There should be a proper waiting area and reception. The premises should be well signposted with an attractive window display highlighting the services on offer by the centre.
- 2.3 The premises should be fully accessible for users and comply with disability access requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act. The advice agency should also ensure that other specific needs of people with disabilities are met (for example, a text phone for people with hearing impairments).
- 2.4 The advice agency premises should be big enough to accommodate all staff comfortably and meet the needs of other users of the advice centre. Sufficient space should be available to guarantee confidentiality, with private interviewing facilities which are soundproofed and not visible to other clients. There should be enough room to meet storage needs, house equipment and provide toilet and kitchen facilities.

- 2.5 Consideration should also be given to occupying premises which are big enough to accommodate other appropriate organisations and open up the possibility of providing a 'one stop shop' for users.

Opening hours

- 2.6 Advice agencies should offer an advice and casework service five days a week. As a minimum the advice centre should be open to the public for at least 17.5 hours a week. Advice centres should offer an advice and casework service five days a week. Advice centres may also wish to provide additional times for appointments only.

Publicity

- 2.7 Advice agencies should provide adequate publicity and information about their work. Details of the advice centre, its services and how to contact the centre should be available through the local telephone directory and on-line through a web page.

Free service

- 2.8 The advice agency should provide a free service and clients should not be under pressure to make any donation to the advice agency's running costs.

3 Management and Accountability of Services

Management committee

- 3.1 Advice agencies need to be independent from political parties and public and statutory bodies in order to be free to act in the best interests of their clients. An advice centre also needs to be accountable for the work it does and the money it spends. The advice centre should therefore have an effective management committee to oversee its work.
- 3.2 The management committee should be governed by a constitution or articles and memorandum of association which meet the requirements of charity law and, if appropriate, company law requirements. Appropriate arrangements should be in place to indemnify the management committee either through an insurance policy or safeguards provided from registering as a company limited by guarantee.

3.3 The management committee should meet regularly (at least four times a year) and ensure that staff members attending committee meetings do not have voting rights on management committee decisions.

3.4 The functions of the management committee should include:

- setting the overall strategic direction of the advice centre;
- agreeing clear objectives and outcomes for the centre and that these are monitored, evaluated and reported;
- being involved in the recruitment/selection of appropriate staff;
- ensuring that all legal requirements are met by the centre and that appropriate employment and personnel policies and insurance arrangements are in place and up-dated;
- maintaining appropriate financial oversight and controls and ensuring that budgets for the centre are produced, and regularly reported on;
- setting service standards which are publicly available to users of the advice centre;
- agreeing reporting arrangements and outcome measurements with funders and ensuring that such arrangements are met;
- ensuring the publication of an annual report and financial accounts and that these are made available to funders and other appropriate stakeholders;
- promoting the service throughout the community it serves.

Guidelines contained in the National Occupational Standards for Trustees provide a helpful model for advice agencies and can be accessed at www.ukworkforcehub.org.uk

3.5 The management committee, while maintaining overall responsibility for the advice centre and its work, should also make sure that on a day to day basis the operation of the centre is undertaken through an appropriate management structure.

3.6 The management committee should receive a written statement of the roles expected of them. New members of the management committee should receive an induction covering the work of the organisation and management committee responsibilities. Management committee members should receive training to enable them to carry out their work effectively. In addition,

any management committee members, as well as staff, involved in recruitment should also receive training in this area including fair employment and other legal requirements.

Accountability to funders, users and other bodies

- 3.7 The management committee should ensure the advice centre is accountable for the work it undertakes. This should include producing an annual report, annual audited accounts and holding an Annual General Meeting.
- 3.8 The advice agency should have a written and advertised complaints procedure for clients or others who are dissatisfied with the service received. The complaints procedure should be freely available to users and not place any undue barriers to a complainant who wishes to pursue his or her complaint. In addition, other feedback mechanisms should be in place to ensure that users of the centre can provide feedback on the services received. This may include customer/user satisfaction surveys. This work should be part of a wider initiative to ensure the quality of the advice agency's work is monitored and evaluated.
- 3.9 Advice agencies should adopt IT based case recording arrangements which provide an effective overview of their work, allow for meaningful comparison with work done elsewhere and meet the requirements set by the Department for Social Development in its Advice and Information Strategy.
- 3.10 All records of clients should be secured against unauthorised access. A client should be allowed access to any file on his or her case. All confidentiality and collection of data arrangements should meet data protection legislative requirements and the agency should be registered with the Information Commissioner's Office. Appropriate arrangements should also be in place for the proper security and management of data. All these issues should be contained within a data protection/information sharing policy.

Quality standards

- 3.11 The advice agency, in developing service standards, should ensure that its work is subject to an external benchmark to provide independent verification of the quality of the organization; for example, Investors in People, ISO standards, Citizen Advice accreditation which is compliant with the requirements of the Legal Services Commission in England and Wales and Lexcel. Contingent on funding being available via the Open Doors Strategy, a scheme for independent

peer review of advice and casework should be introduced along with funding for support and training of local advice agencies.

Risk management and business continuity

- 3.12 The advice agency should have in place an appropriate risk management policy and a Business Continuity Plan to deal with any major unforeseen event or incident affecting the advice agency.

4 Information and Policy Work

Information

- 4.1 To work effectively an advice centre needs access to accurate and up-to-date information covering law, policy and practice in Northern Ireland.
- 4.2 Advice agencies should ensure all advice staff have access to appropriate legal materials in either paper form or on-line.
- 4.3 The advice agency should have a sufficient library/information budget to enable it to get access to appropriate materials. The budget should include an amount for legal books, journals, subscription to on-line information and membership of organisations producing legal information relevant to Northern Ireland.
- 4.4 Arrangements should be put into place to ensure advisers have time in their jobs to keep abreast of new legal, policy and practice developments.

Policy and lobbying work

- 4.5 Advice agencies seek to tackle individual problems and to make users aware of their legal rights. In addition, advice centres have a wider role to provide feedback to statutory authorities and any other relevant organisations on the impact of legislation, policy and practice on individuals and groups.
- 4.6 The legitimacy of this work should be recognised by the advice centre and sufficient resources should be allocated for policy and lobbying work to be carried out in the advice agency.

- 4.7 The advice agency should also ensure such work is linked to wider policy/lobbying work being done by regional advice organisations and other relevant bodies.

5 Equipment

- 5.1 Advice agencies need a variety of equipment in order to function effectively, and this will vary according to the type of agency. All advice agencies should have at least:

- one telephone line for each advice worker on duty, plus sufficient telephones for other staff;
- a telephone facility to ensure that incoming calls can be taken by advice workers who are physically separated from the reception area;
- a telephone answering machine;
- a fax;
- lockable filing cabinets for client records;
- pamphlet boxes;
- display boards, notice boards;
- leaflet racks;
- photocopier;
- computers including access to broadband internet and email facilities for advisers;
- sufficient seating for people to wait in the reception area in comfort;
- desks, chairs, waste paper baskets etc for all staff;
- stationery and storage cabinets;
- facilities for making tea/coffee;
- play equipment for children in the reception area;
- first aid materials;
- specialist equipment for staff with physical disabilities or other serious impairment;
- fire safety and other health and safety equipment.

Further, the advice centre should have appropriate facilities or equipment to allow for re-cycling of appropriate materials as part of a wider sustainability strategy.

6 Funding

6.1 To provide an effective service an advice centre needs proper levels of funding. Section 2 provides an indicative minimum costing for a hub and satellite before any additional costs for the assessment of quality of advice and outcome measurement is taken into account.

Such funding should be stable and secure so that staff can be retained, to enable effective forward planning and to ensure that the development of the centre can continue without undue difficulty.

6.2 Advice agencies should receive sufficient funds to enable them, as a minimum, to meet the requirements set out in these Standards and Guidelines. Where additional needs are registered and services are provided these should be recognised by funders.

6.3 Funding arrangements should normally be placed on a three year cycle, save for pilot projects or one-off initiatives for a specific finite purpose.

6.4 Revenue funding should at least include the following:

- salaries, national insurance and pension arrangements;
- staff and management committee training and development;
- library/information;
- travel and subsistence for staff and management committee;
- out-of-pocket expenses for unpaid staff;
- rent and service charge;
- building maintenance and cleaning;
- heating and lighting;
- equipment maintenance and rental charges where appropriate;
- insurance – including building, equipment and professional indemnity insurance;
- IT including broadband, software, maintenance and replacement/leasing costs;
- stationery;
- postage;

- telephone, including a telephone answering machine and fax;
- publicity and printing to include an annual report;
- recruitment/selection;
- audit and accountancy fees;
- external quality benchmark;
- other appropriate miscellaneous expenses.

6.5 In addition, funding should also build in the capital costs of replacing specific items of equipment or ongoing leasing arrangements.

6.6 Proportionate funding reporting requirements, outputs and outcome measures should be agreed between any funder and the advice agency. The advice agency should meet these reporting requirements and set out its outputs and outcomes for the agreed period.

Section 2: Indicative Costing for Hubs and Satellites

This section contains indicative costings for a hub and satellite. The costings represent the minimum required for hubs and satellites and do not take into account any costs that may arise from the recommendations on quality, IT and training produced by the Advice Services Alliance in response to the Opening Doors Strategy, or any outreach work associated with a hub or satellite.

Expenditure	4 Adviser model	8 Adviser Model
Staff & volunteers		
Staff Costs	98,150	189,321
Pension at 10%	8,804	17092.6
Staff expenses	750	1500
Travel Costs	2,400	4800
Staff training	4,000	8000
Volunteer costs	1,500	3000
Volunteer training	500	1000
Support Services		
Core staff & volunteers		
Advice-Manager	31,178	35679
Pension at 10%	3,118	3243.6
Finance/Admin Officer	17,169	17,169
Pension at 10%	1,717	1,717
Receptionist	13,490	14300
Pension at 10%	1,349	1300
Cleaner	3,519	5500
Travel Costs	1,500	1500
Staff expenses & training	1,000	1000
General staff recruitment	5,000	5000
Trustees & governance		
Trustees' expenses	100	100
Trustees' meetings & AGM	500	500
Trustee training & recruitment	1,000	1000

Professional fees		
Audit & accountancy	1,500	2000
Premises Costs		
Cleaning Materials	750	900
Maintenance & repairs	2,000	2000
Rent & Water Rates	15,000	23,500
Insurance	3,500	4500
Heating & electricity	5,000	7500
Security system contract	500	500
Software Licences & IT Running Costs	2,500	3750
Admin & Support Costs		
Publicity	2,000	2000
Postage	1,200	1800
Memberships & subscriptions	1,500	1500
Photocopier	1,500	2000
Library/Information/Ref Books	3,000	3000
Computer Expenses & Software	3,000	4500
Stationery	5,000	5000
Telephone	4,500	6000
Broadband	500	500
Bank charges & miscellaneous	500	500
Evaluation & Planning Costs	3,000	3000
Quality Assurance Costs (IiP, Peer Review etc)	3,000	3000
Sundry Expenses	1,000	1000
Expenditure	257,194	391,172
One off Costs	4 adviser	8 adviser
Computers X 8 (1 PC per Staff member plus Server/Back Up)	5,000	9,000
Answer Machine	150	150
Fax	250	250
Filing Cabinets X 15	2,750	4,125
Display/Notice Boards	850	850
Leaflet Racks X 6	900	900
Photocopier	5,000	5,000
Seating for Public	990	990

Desks, Chairs etc	1,800	4,950
Facilities for making tea/coffee	150	150
Play equipment for children	250	250
First Aid Materials	60	60
Specialist Equipment for Physically Disabled	5,000	5,000
Fire & Safety Equipment	350	350
Website Development & Running Costs	2,000	2,000
Signage	1,500	1,500
Total	27,000	35,525

Section 3: Consultation Questions

1. How do you think the Advice Services Alliance should carry forward work on quality standards? In particular:
 - Do you think a framework for the measurement of the quality of advice and casework should be developed and independent peer review introduced?
 - How should this work be funded and resources?
 - What arrangements should be made for those who fail to meet agreed quality thresholds?
 - Is the time frame suggested for this work sensible?

2. Do you have any comments on the draft standards and guidelines? In particular:
 - Are there any standards and guidelines which you disagree with?
 - Are there any standards which are not addressed?
 - What do you consider the resource and other implications for advice agencies of having to meet these standards and guidelines.

3. Do you agree that advice agencies should have in place an external benchmark to provide independent verification of the quality of an advice agency? If so,
 - What are the resource implications?
 - Is the time frame proposed sensible?

4. Do you agree with the indicative costings for a hub and satellite? If not please set out the basis for your disagreement.

5. Are there any other issues the Advice Services Alliance, the Department for Social Development or other relevant bodies should be taking into account in developing the Opening Doors strategy on quality.

Consultation Questions. Quality Assurance

6. How do you think the Advice Services Alliance should carry forward work on quality standards? In particular:
 - Do you think a framework for the measurement of the quality of advice and casework should be developed and independent peer review introduced?
 - How should this work be funded and resourced?
 - What arrangements should be made for those who fail to meet agreed quality thresholds?
 - Is the time frame suggested for this work sensible?

7. Do you have any comments on the draft standards and guidelines? In particular:
 - Are there any standards and guidelines which you disagree with?
 - Are there any standards which are not addressed?
 - What do you consider are the resource and other implications for advice agencies of having to meet these standards and guidelines.

8. Do you agree that advice agencies should have in place an external benchmark to provide independent verification of the quality of an advice agency? If so,
 - What are the resource implications?
 - Is the time frame proposed sensible?

9. Do you agree with the indicative costings for a hub and satellite? If not please set out the basis for your disagreement.

10. Are there any other issues the Advice Services Alliance, the Department for Social Development or other relevant bodies should be taking into account in developing the Opening Doors strategy on quality.

Appendix 1:

Scoping Exercise: Existing Arrangements for Citizens Advice, Advice NI and the Law Centre

1. Citizens Advice Membership Scheme

Citizens Advice was awarded Investors in People Status in 2005, and local CAB offices comply with the Citizens Advice Membership Scheme which is based on external audit. This includes an organisational audit and a quality of advice audit and is compliant with the requirements of the Legal Services Commission in England and Wales. This scheme is well established, and currently operates across England and Wales, and in the 24 District Councils in Northern Ireland which fund CAB offices.

The scheme is based on a model introduced by Citizens Advice in England and Wales which itself was developed from the PQASSO model, the Practical Quality Assurance Scheme for Small Organisations developed by Charities Evaluation Services in 1997. The scheme, through auditing processes, measures the quality of advice provided to the public and the quality of the local CAB organisation against a series of agreed quality standards.

Membership and Standards Committee

Audit reports are formally considered by a Membership and Standards Committee, which will note the details and timetable for any corrective action which is identified for the local management committee by the external auditor. Where these are not met then further timescales may be set. Where there is a failure or refusal to meet corrective action identified by the audit, the Membership and Standards committee, can impose sanctions and ultimately recommend removal of membership and closure of a local CAB office.

Purpose of the organisational audit

The purpose of this audit is to verify that the local organisation is providing quality advice, is undertaking social policy work, is accessible and relevant to its community and to evidence that effective governance and management supports consistent quality and constant improvement against the usual background of continual change. The Citizens Advice Membership Scheme is developed to embed PQASSO quality standards. In meeting the Citizens Advice quality assurance standard the organisation would meet the Quality Mark standard at the General Help level (at present not operative in Northern Ireland).

Audit Criteria

The audit criteria are defined by the policies of the Citizens Advice service, and the requirements of the *Citizens Advice Membership Scheme April 2005*, which is convergent with CLS Quality Mark at General Help Level only (GQM). Local Bureaux in Northern Ireland are subject to two audits, an Organisational Audit and a Quality of Advice Audit (professional practice & technical practice) undertaken on a three year cycle.

a) Organisational Audit Criteria

- Governance
- Financial Management
- Planning & Managing Resources
- Operational Management
- Employer Responsibilities
- Training and Development
- Networking and Partnership
- Client-centred service
- Case Management
- Casework
- Social Policy
- Complaints, suggestions and positive feedback

b) Quality of Advice Audit

In delivering a service that provides quality advice to clients, two aspects of advice practice need to be satisfied:

- professional practice - the process of advice giving
- technical practice - the technical content of the advice.

The CAB standard for quality of advice

A Citizens Advice Bureau ensures that the advice and information it gives to its clients complies with identified criteria, where applicable, and demonstrates this by providing sufficient information in the case record.

Quality of Advice Assessment (QAA) examines the quality of advice given by advisers on individual cases dealt with by a bureau. QAA in the Membership Review is based on the principle of peer review – quality of advice assessments made by advice practitioners with current knowledge, skills and experience. The QAA incorporates a method for assessing the quality of advice developed by Andy Benson and Penny Waterhouse within the CAB Service over the last 10 years. The Assessment is based on a check of 30 generalist casefiles. The QAA is applied to each separate enquiry topic that is dealt with within a case (benefits, housing, employment, etc.), and to the way in which the case has been handled overall. The criteria are as follows:

- Problem diagnosis
- Information and evidence
- Exploring options and consequences
- Appropriateness to person, problem and local circumstance
- Accurate and complete advice
- Case management
- Signposting and referral
- Effectiveness of the advice overall
- Outcome

2. Advice NI Membership Scheme

Advice NI has a joint Membership Scheme with Advice UK. The Scheme sets out the standards which independent advice providers are required to meet in order to be members of Advice NI. Members must submit supporting documentation with their membership form and an initial meeting is held with each new member. On membership renewal all documentation is closely scrutinized by Advice NI with follow-up with individual members when required.

Advice NI has the following membership conditions:

- The centre is striving to pursue a policy of Equal Opportunities
- Advice is part of the centre's work
- The centre operates a confidentiality policy
- The centre operates a complaints procedure
- The centre is independent of central or local government control

- The centre has a means by which it is accountable to the community. This is normally a management committee that meets regularly, and a list of management committee members is provided to Advice NI
- The centre is non profit-making and advice is free
- The centre uses the AIMS case-recording system and/or the centre operates a compatible case-recording system
- The centre has professional indemnity insurance to cover any advice it gives
- The centre provides an Annual Report and Accounts
- The centre has or is working towards an Advice Services Development Plan

Members must provide details and documentation to confirm compliance with membership conditions. Members are also asked to provide details of the level of work undertaken, information resources, and advice services staffing – titles, experience, qualifications and training and development undertaken in the last 12 months.

External Accreditation

Advice NI undertook an options appraisal in relation to Quality Assurance in 2003 with BSP funding and recommends Investors in People (IIP) accreditation to its members in respect of organisational standards. It provides a group contract support scheme for members and has developed an IIP Quality Support Resource.

Advice NI has achieved revised IIP status and 29 members either have or are working towards IIP, 4 have the Matrix standard, 2 Charter Mark, 2 ISO standard and 1 Lexcel.

Quality of Advice

(a) Some Advice NI members use the LASA peer review model (London Advice Services Alliance) written by Benson and Waterhouse of Citizens Advice to measure the accuracy and effectiveness of advice. This is not a compulsory requirement for membership of Advice NI. Advice is assessed and scored against the following quality criteria:

- Problem diagnosis
- Information and evidence
- Exploring options and consequences

- Appropriateness to person, problem and local circumstance
- Accurate and complete advice
- Case management
- Signposting and referral
- Effectiveness of the advice overall
- Outcome

The level and type of enquiry being dealt with is also considered, as is client satisfaction.

(b) Advice NI audit the quality of the advice giving process by providing the NVQs in Advice in Guidance Level 2-4 although it is not compulsory at this stage for members to undertake this qualification. The NVQ assesses and verifies the advisers competency against occupational standards contained within the NVQ framework.

Outcome Measurement

Advice NI undertakes an annual profiling exercise with its members which measures outcome statistics in relation to caseload, tribunal representation, opening hours, staffing and income generation etc.

3. Law Centre

The Law Centre applies a range of quality assurance measures to its work. In particular, the Law Centre has achieved the LEXCEL quality mark. LEXCEL is the quality mark developed by the Law Society of England and Wales for private practice solicitor firms and public and voluntary sector legal departments which have been independently assessed as having achieved the Practice Management Standards. The Law Society of Northern Ireland has a licensing agreement with its England and Wales counterpart to market and assess LEXCEL as a quality mark to solicitors and legal departments in Northern Ireland. LEXCEL is subject to annual audit and assessment of management structure, service delivery and forward planning financial management, managing people, office administration and case management. As part of LEXCEL, internal peer review of casework is conducted and reported on.

The Law Centre also has Investors in People accreditation which sets the level of good practice for the training and development of people to achieve business goals and provides the basis for continuous improvement in training and development.

Appendix 2: Overview of external frameworks for Quality Standards

1. The Investors in People Standard

The Investors in People Standard is a business improvement tool that helps employers link people management and development activity to the specific aims and objectives of the business. It provides a framework to assess the training and development needs of staff in helping them achieve the vision and a process to evaluate the extent the training actually achieves the purpose for which it is designed. At its heart the Standard has **three** principles - Plan, Do and Review - and 10 indicators of good business practice, each with a central theme:

1. Business Strategy
2. Learning & Development Strategy
3. People Management Strategy
4. Leadership & Management Strategy
5. Management Effectiveness
6. Reward & Recognition
7. Involvement & Empowerment
8. Learning & Development
9. Performance Measurement
10. Continuous Improvement

2. European Business Excellence Model

EQFM provides an assessment process to enable organisations to see what extent the commitment to meet user and stakeholder needs and expectations is being delivered, and to monitor continuous improvement.

3. PQASSO (Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations)

This framework has been developed specifically for smaller voluntary organisations. It provides suggested quality standards and types of evidence for self-assessment at three different levels of achievement, across the following 12 quality areas:

- Planning for quality
- Governance
- Management
- User-centred service
- Staff and volunteers
- Training and development
- Managing money
- Managing resources
- Managing activities
- Networking and partnership
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Results

4. Community Legal Service – General Help Quality Mark

The Quality Mark is part of the Community Legal Service (CLS), a major government initiative launched in April 2000. The aim of the CLS is to improve access, for the public, to quality information, advice and legal services through local networks of services supported by co-ordinated funding and based on an assessment of local needs. It applies to advice agencies in England and Wales and is used in Northern Ireland by Citizens Advice.

Initially it will consist of members with a Quality Mark for the level of service they provide. The Quality Mark is the quality standard that will underpin all CLS services, so that members of the public who need legal information, advice and other help can rely on receiving a quality assured service.

To be awarded the Quality Mark and be able to display the Quality Mark logo organisations will need to demonstrate that they meet the standard required for the type of service being delivered.

The three Quality Mark standards are:

- Information
- General Help
- Specialist Help

5. National Occupational Standards

National Occupational Standards (NOS) specify the standards of performance that staff are expected to achieve in their work, and the knowledge and skills they need to perform effectively. They have been agreed by all interests in the sector and approved by the education regulatory bodies of all four countries in the United Kingdom. The NOS for Legal Advice are relevant to all levels of advice provision from first line advice to representation in court. They apply to England and Wales and cover advice given in the Not for Profit, private and statutory sectors. The NOS for Advice and Guidance apply throughout the UK and have been developed into Scottish and National Vocational Qualifications.

National Occupational Standards cover mainstream advice giving operations as well as managerial, support and specialist functions. They can be used for a wide-range of purposes to support individual and organisational development and quality assurance at all levels in an organisation.

(a) The Legal Advice National Occupational Standards

There are 64 units within the Legal Advice NOS. Units LA1-LA30 describe standards of performance expected of advisers, regardless of their specialist areas of practice or the client group with which they are working. Units LA31-LA64 contain the knowledge required when practising in a particular area of law or with a particular client group.

Generic units contain -

- Unit Summary - describing the key aspects of the unit
- Outcomes and effective performance - showing what someone must be able to do, eg *'Agree with the client where a situation requires immediate action and take steps to implement this.'*
- Knowledge and understanding - required for someone to perform their jobs effectively - what someone must know, eg *'The kind of situation which may require immediate action and organisational procedures for doing so.'*
- The skills needed to enable people to deliver the service effectively, eg *'active listening, questioning, presenting information orally and in written form.'*

Knowledge units contain -

- Unit summary - describing the key aspects of the unit.

- Outcomes of effective performance - what someone must be able to do, eg '*Identify and explain the legislative framework relating to discrimination in employment or the provision of goods and services and describe how to access more detailed information when required.*'
- Knowledge and understanding - that someone must be able to show they know and understand, eg '*The grounds on which actions on the grounds of discrimination may be taken in the UK in relation to sex, race, sexual orientation, disability, religion, age (from September 2006).*'

Cross sector NOS

The Legal Advice NOS are advice specific; there may be other NOS which are relevant to some roles in the legal advice sector including:

- Business and administration
- Customer service
- Fundraising
- Health and safety
- Information technology
- Learning and development
- Management and leadership
- Managing volunteers
- Personnel
- Trustees and management committee members
- Workplace violence

(b) The Advice, Guidance and Advocacy Occupational Standards

There are 41 units within the Advice and Guidance Occupational Standards. Units AG1-AG30 describe standards of performance and knowledge required from advice and guidance workers. They cover areas such as establishing communication, assisting clients to decide on a course of action, managing a personal caseload, presenting cases in formal proceedings, operating within networks and negotiating and maintain service agreements. Eleven of the forty one units are imported from other sectors including, customer service, health and social care, health and safety and learning and development.

6. LEXCEL

LEXCEL is the quality mark developed by the Law Society of England & Wales for practices and legal departments which have been independently assessed as having achieved the Practice Management Standards. The Law Society of Northern Ireland has negotiated a licensing arrangement with LSEW to market and assess LEXCEL as a Quality Mark to solicitors in Northern Ireland. No compulsion is involved, it is a matter for the individual practice whether to undergo assessment.

7. The Matrix Standard

The Matrix Standard is the national quality standard for any organisation that delivers information, advice and/or guidance on learning and work. The Standard is useful for organisations that deliver information, advice and/or guidance to external clients as part of their business and also for employers who are committed to developing their people. It consists of eight elements, four focused on how services are delivered, and four focused on how services are managed, as follows:

- People are made aware of the service and how to engage with it
- People's use of the service is defined and understood
- People are provided with access to information and support in using it
- People are supported in exploring options and making choices
- Service delivery is planned and maintained
- Staff competence and support they are given are sufficient to deliver the service
- Feedback on the quality of the service is obtained
- Continuous quality improvement is ensured through monitoring, evaluation and action

The Standard is outcome based and does not require the organisation to produce a portfolio of evidence. An Assessor will find the evidence by a mixture of talking to people, observation and reviewing any documents that may be used. It takes an average of 6-9 months to achieve accreditation and accreditation lasts for 3 years.

EMQC Ltd is responsible for the Assessment and Accreditation of organisations to the matrix Standard and acts as the Accreditation Body. ENTO is the guardian of the Matrix Standard and acts as the Standard Setting Body.

8. BS EN ISO 9001:2000

The origins of this standard are in manufacturing process systems. This standard specifies requirements for a quality management system where an organisation is required to demonstrate its ability to consistently provide services that meet customer and regulatory requirements. The aims of this standard are to enhance customer satisfaction through the effective application of the system, including processes for continual improvement and the assurance of compliance with customer and regulatory requirements. All elements of this standard are generic and can be applied to any type of organisation. Each section of BS EN ISO 9001:2000 is based upon 8 management principles:

- Customer focus
- Leadership
- Involvement of people
- Process approach
- Systems approach to management
- Continual Improvement
- Factual approach to decision making
- Mutually beneficial supplier relationships

9. Charter Mark Scheme

The Charter Mark scheme is a tool designed to help organisations focus on, and improve, their customer service and delivery to users. The six criteria shown below make up the Charter Mark standard. By addressing the elements shown against each criterion, the organisation will be focusing on its customers and aiming to constantly improve and give value for money. By reaching the standard the organisation will show that it puts its customers first.

Criterion 1: Set standards and perform well

Criterion 2: Actively engage with your customers, partners and staff

Criterion 3: Be fair and accessible to everyone and promote choice

Criterion 4: Continuously develop and improve

Criterion 5: Use your resources effectively and imaginatively

Criterion 6: Contribute to improving opportunities and quality of life in the communities you serve

