HQAI CHS Self-Assessment Manual

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Introduction

I.   The Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative (HQAI)

HQAI's objective is to improve the Quality and Accountability of organisations working with people in need through the provision and promotion of independent quality assurance. Its services are intended to build capacity in the sector and provide consistent and measurable data in the delivery of quality action, thus supporting more principled accountable and efficient provision of aid to vulnerable and at-risk populations.

HQAI is an accountable, open, and trustworthy partner to all its stakeholders and applies the internationally recognised ground rules of auditing: impartiality, competence, responsibility, openness, confidentiality, and responsiveness to complaints. Our policies, procedures and tools for independent quality assurance follow the relevant ISO standards requirements.

HQAI has developed robust tools to efficiently measure the position of organisations in relation to the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) on Quality and Accountability. Tools related to other standards may be developed in the future.

II.   Scope

This manual is a short overview for organisations undertaking a self-assessment against the CHS, as part of a HQAI independent third-party quality assurance process; that is, benchmarking, independent verification, or certification.

It describes how to use HQAI's **STD014 – HQAI CHS Self-assessment tool** and offers guidance on how to undertake and report evidence and findings for the self-assessment; it covers the following issues:

- the scope of HQAI CHS self-assessment
- how to collect and analyse evidence
- the minimum information that needs to be presented in the self-assessment report.

III.   References

This manual should be read together with the following HQAI documents:

- GUI103 - Manual for organisations
- GUI126 - Information Management Guidelines
- STD014 – HQAI CHS self-assessment tool

1. About HQAI CHS self-assessment

1.1. Objective of the self-assessment

The self-assessment is part of the preliminary stage of an Initial Audit for any of HQAI's third party processes. The information and evidence gathered during the CHS self-assessment is used as evidence for the initial audit. It provides the auditors with an overview of how an organisation applies the CHS and supports the preparation work of the auditors.

The self-assessment is designed to support the collation of information from your Head Office and at the policy level of your organisation. The Self-Assessment includes:

- Evidence on the level of application of the 9 CHS commitments at systems and policy levels

- Evidence on internal quality assurance mechanisms, i.e., how the organisation ensures the application of its policies and procedures as relevant to the CHS

- Details on the organisation's partnership approach and its work with partners.

Information and evidence should be provided to HQAI in the **STD014 – HQAI CHS Self-assessment Tool.** Auditors will use this in conjunction with information provided as part of ADM105 - Organisational Profile in the preliminary stage of an Initial Audit.

1.2. HQAI CHS Self-assessment Tool

Some organisations may have already completed a CHS Alliance (CHSA) self-assessment as part of their membership responsibilities. The self-assessment processes for the CHSA and for HQAI are broadly similar but have somewhat different purposes. For the CHSA it is a stand-alone process, while for HQAI, the self-assessment is a specific step in the third-party auditing process.

HQAI's CHS Self-assessment Tool is an adapted and shortened version of the CHS tool, and has a few additional sections designed to ensure that the focus of the HQAI self-assessment is on information and evidence that is specifically required at this preliminary stage of the audit process.

Please note: If your organisation has conducted a CHSA self-assessment, you can submit this to HQAI in place of the HQAI self-assessment, providing it was completed **within the past 12 months.** No additional work is required.

For those organisations adopting the HQAI self-assessment process, the tools include:

1. **STD014 – HQAI CHS Self-assessment Tool.** This is composed of the following sections:

- Work with partners

- Application of the CHS per commitment.

2. **ADM143 - Audit Map of Documents.** This is an excel tool used to record the documents submitted as evidence for your self-assessment.

Please note: Only <u>ONE</u> ADM143-Audit Map of Documents should be used to build a full list of all documents you submit as evidence <u>**for the self-assessment and the whole audit,**</u> e.g., for the Organisational Profile, for programmes and projects sampled in the audit itself. The aim is to help ensure

continuity, coherence, and consistency of document management for each audit and across the whole audit cycle (see section 3.2 below).

2. Scope of the self-assessment

The HQAI CHS self-assessment is primarily a document review at Head Office and policy level of your organisation. This means there is no requirement to travel to the country programme level to collect information. Evidence and analysis are based on information that should be available at your head office level and is mainly in the form of documentation, if required it may also include evidence based on discussions with key Head Office staff.

The self-assessment enables auditors to gain a perspective on how the organisation assesses itself in terms of its application of the requirements of the CHS.

Mapping the organisation's core policies, processes, and systems through the self-assessment, at this preliminary stage also **ensures the audit itself is more efficient.** The self-assessment is both a useful organisational learning experience and can contribute to time and cost savings during the audit.

3. Summary of the self-assessment process

3.1 The team

Your organisation may decide to carry out the self-assessment internally, using your own staff, or using external support, such as a consultant. Regardless of how you choose to do the self-assessment you should be confident that the process is as objective as possible and carried out in a way that ensures good cross-organisational engagement. This will help ensure a comprehensive perspective on organisational performance against the standard.

One person should be appointed to lead the self-assessment process. They should be supported by a small team that represents different areas of the organisation's work which can help ensure information and evidence is gathered from all parts of the organisation.

3.2 Information required

Before starting the self-assessment, please refer to **HQAI GUI126 - Information Management Guidelines**, to orientate you on how to collate and record relevant information for your self-assessment and for the whole audit.

Evidence is any information that demonstrates compliance with a requirement of the standard. You are most likely to find evidence to demonstrate the degree to which your organisation reflects the CHS **Organisational Responsibilities** in your organisation's policies, strategies, manuals, guidelines, and procedures.

The focus in the self-assessment is mainly on evidence at the systems and policy levels. The self-assessment process does not review information from specific country programmes, this information will be reviewed in the next stages of the audit.

It is worth noting that one piece of evidence, e.g., a policy document, often provides evidence for multiple requirements of the CHS.

Creating the list of key documents using **ADM143 - Audit Map of Documents** is key to keep track of your evidence and of the requirements to which each document relates, it also helps to avoid unnecessary duplications. As each document is given a unique number this will facilitate cross-referencing in your report, and the audit report itself.

3.3   Work with partners to meet the CHS

The CHS makes the following statement regarding partnership: "Organisations working in partnerships should explain their commitment to the CHS, seek understanding of how their partners approach the Nine Commitments and do whatever they can to work with them to implement the CHS commitments."

CHS definition of Partners: Organisations working jointly within formal a formal arrangement to achieve a specific goal, with clear and agreed roles and responsibilities.

For this Self-assessment you should consider the following questions:

- how does your organisation share its commitment to the CHS with partners?
- how does your organisation understand how partners approach the 9 commitments and what are the mechanisms to do so?
- how does your organisation help partners correct identified weaknesses?

When collecting information for this section you should keep in mind that it is **your organisation that is being assessed, not your partners.** If your organisation is committed to the CHS, it has the responsibility to make sure it has put in place adequate mechanisms to ensure that the CHS commitments are delivered to communities by and with partners.

The mechanisms in place should allow your organisation to identify and address risks of non-compliance, or failure to deliver on the nine commitments to communities. Policies and actions designed to minimise risks or to address identified weaknesses are a good way to demonstrate that the mechanisms work.

How to complete the 'Work with Partners' section of the tool

You should describe the due diligence processes and mechanisms used by your organisation when working in partnership, for example:

- how it assesses the capacities of the partner to deliver each CHS commitment
- how it assesses the extent to which the CHS requirements are delivered to communities
- how it identifies potential gaps and what happens when weaknesses are identified.

In general, mechanisms that are used as a basis to select and work with partners, monitor the work, and have oversight of what is happening at project level, may include: partnership MOUs and agreements; capacity assessment processes; monitoring systems; joint decision-making processes; feedback systems for partners and communities; training plans for partners, etc. These are the kind of systems that should be described in the section on 'Work with partners.'

You should ensure you have submitted adequate document evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of these systems.

3.4   Scoring

For each set of requirements in the assessment you should provide a score based on your evidence in accordance with the HQAI scoring grid as follows:

i.   **Score 0**: Your organisation currently doesn't work towards applying these requirements, either formally or informally. This represents a major weakness that prevents your organisation from meeting the overall commitment.

ii.   **Score 1**: Your organisation has made some efforts towards applying these requirements, but these efforts have not been systematic.

iii.   **Score 2**: Your organisation is making systematic efforts towards applying these requirements, but certain key points are still not addressed.

iv.   **Score 3**: Your organisation conforms to these requirements, and organisational systems ensure that it is met throughout the organisation and over time – the requirement is fulfilled

v.   **Score 4**: Your organisation's work goes beyond the intent of these requirements and demonstrates innovation. It is applied in an exemplary way across the organisation and organisational systems ensure high quality is maintained across the organisation and over time.

3.5   Timeline

The CHS self-assessment must be submitted, at a minimum, one month before the start of Stage 1 of the initial audit, i.e., the desk-based document review and interviews with Head Office staff.

Stage 1 of the initial audit starts upon HQAI receiving your **CHS Self-assessment** and the accompanying documentary evidence. **The initial audit cannot begin until the self-assessment and accompanying documents are submitted.**

4. Summary of the key steps

A. Collect evidence

To collect evidence for the CHS self-assessment, you should focus on the following elements:

I.   Internal policies and procedures of the organisation relevant to the CHS 9 commitments.

II.   Internal mechanisms for compliance and quality control.

For most organisations information on internal systems can be provided by policies and procedures on governance, human resources, monitoring and evaluation, risk analysis, internal audit, programme design frameworks, etc.

B. Report

The indicators for STD014 – HQAI CHS Self-assessment Tool, are derived from the CHS, they are grouped together for HQAI's self-assessment to facilitate the reporting process.

Summarise your findings and list the evidence in STD014 and ADM143 – Audit Map of Documents. Refer to GUI126 - Information Management Guidelines for indications on how to use ADM143.

Remember to provide a score for each indicator, based on the scoring above (3.4). You should **always provide evidence to support your findings.**

C. Submit the Self-assessment

After completing your self-assessment, review the information provided and uploaded documents, and **submit to HQAI: STD014 – HQAI CHS Self-assessment tool** and **ADM143 – Audit Map of Documents.**

Please note: If the self-assessment and accompanying document map are not received within the agreed timeframe, the audit may be delayed or even cancelled, which can have cost implications for your organisation.